

Millard South High School Yearbook Theme Development **Theme: Take the RISK**

Non-traditional section organization by quarters in the school year

- Divisions R, I, S, K used in organization spinoffs
- The shapes and colors from the division pages = folios and background elements (all of them for the PEOPLE stand-alone section)
- Hand-drawn elements on every spread
- Sidebar quotebox topics reflect different types of risk-taking

TAKE THE

RF
SK

PATRIOT 2026

MILLARD SOUTH
High SCHOOL

OMAHA,
NEBRASKA

2026

PATRIOT

VOLUME

26

Jestens



MILLARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

people

faculty

page 132-137

people

freshmen

page 138-155

people

sophomores

page 156-171

people

juniors

page 172-187

people

seniors

page 188-238

quarter 1

returning to class

page 004

quarter 2

in the zone

page 076

quarter 3

set sights higher

page 240

quarter 4

kick off finals

page 289

TAKE THE RT SK

take the risk

Life is full of risks. We take risks every day in every way. Not only in the typical ways we think of risks, but also in simple, everyday decisions, like taking a different route to class, or striking up a conversation with people you've never met before. Some risks could be life-changing, though, altering our high school experiences completely. From attending the State Championships for Football or Semifinals for Volleyball to watching a friend at their very first choir concert, the choices we encounter shape the way we live. Even the risks that had a not-so-great outcome influence us for the better. Just that one bad grade, the one time you skipped that class, the time you said the wrong thing. Everything we experience is just one risk, one door opening, allowing us to grow as people and find our own paths. More importantly, the risks we take that are good can have an impact on us, from attending one basketball informational meeting or volunteering at the fall pep rally to competing in the games.

Even that one time they hung your art from painting class in the main street showcase box, or getting an award for a photo you took at a varsity softball game. Just the one time you enrolled in a class you didn't think you'd like but ended up loving. All the risks we take that possess a positive result are what make us unique. All the opportunities taken and risks we hold ourselves above are truly special. No matter who you are or what you like, show up, show out, and take the risk.

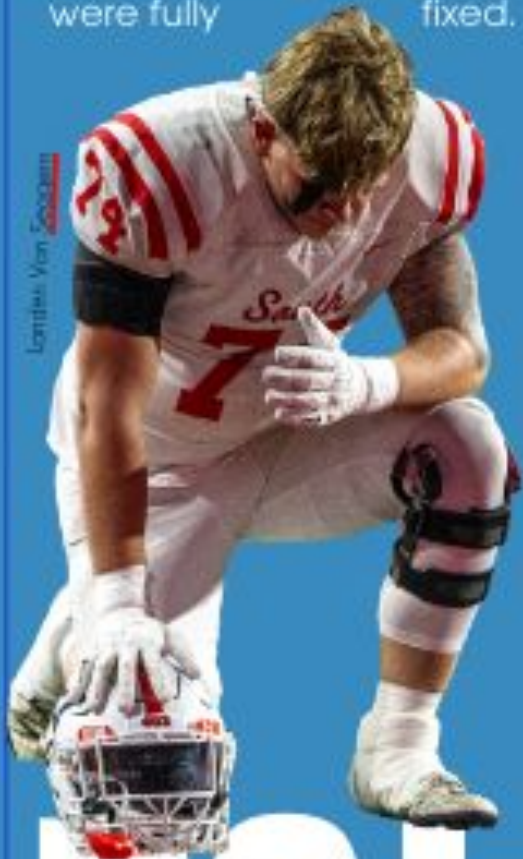
Tavis Ridd
at the football game
against Millard West



quarter one

The first quarter was defined by both the energetic return of student life and significant institutional change. The halls, once quiet, burst with the noise of friends reuniting and classrooms buzzing with fresh academic starts. Patriots even endured a challenging first week of hot, sticky classrooms before the AC units were fully fixed.

Patriot spirit shined brightly in athletics, where the Volleyball team fought its way to the Final Four of the state tournament, and the Football team continued an impressive run deep into the playoffs and another State Title, despite the early headline of a season-opening victory being forfeited due to an NSAA rule violation.



Landon Van Soest



Bailey Wyzenski, Erin Meyers, Nevada Jacobson, Scotland Erwin, Lexi Deyemond, Sophia Van and Jamie Mucak

The start of it all

Off the field, the quarter introduced practical changes for students, including heightened security measures that required scanning Student IDs for open lunch check-ins and the improved rule of not having to wait 10 minutes after class starts to use the restroom.

Plus, eyes were graced with a new mural at the school's entrance, all while Common Sense Newspaper journalists covered critical topics like new state legislation on cell phone use, setting a dynamic and evolving foundation for the year ahead.



Grace Chiswick & Paige Hamilton

returning class



FRESHMEN DAY

Follow the Signs

Led by senior Pakouma Billa, freshmen Kyran Laaman, Jace Schmidt, and Kassie Bazis learn the school layout.

"Freshman day was really helpful to get to know Millard South," Bazis said. "I learned where each section is and the general important areas in the school." Photo by Chloe Fowler

Blinded by Victory

At the freshmen's first pep rally, Palmer Grasskopf was selected for the game. "It was fun. I met a lot of new people, and liked my teachers," Grasskopf said. "It was like paper on the ground and I had to be directed by a friend like a minefield." Photo by Taylor Gaston



Patriots on Three!

Performing at the Pep Rally, seniors Emeryse Cather, Lauren Ottemann and Hannah Horant help pump up the freshman crowd. Photo by Isabella Parkins

Freshman Huddle

Patriot Pat huddles with freshmen Ryker Wright, Jacen Aguilera, Omar Rodriguez, Braison Myers-Smith and Nikolai Farley at the Activities Fair. "I felt united with some good old friends," Farley said. Photo by Chloe Fowler



First things Fresh

Ninth-graders Find Their Way on Freshmen Day

The freshmen gathered on the floor during the Activities Fair to listen and learn about the different opportunities for the upcoming school year. This was only one part of Freshman Day, which helped students adjust to the new environment.

"This is a big school, and you have to realize that in middle school, there are 900 students. In high school, there are thousands," Freshman Administrator Matt Geerts said. "Freshmen will be nervous at first. It's important to get them comfortable with high school."

With 650 incoming freshmen, a day to learn about how to

navigate a bigger campus could help acclimate the students.

"I was surprised," freshman Nevaeh Morris said, "that there are a lot of pathways to my classes."

Not only were there paths to classes but also pathways to involvement in the school community.

"Millard South is different from middle school," freshman Merina Mutunga said, "because there are more people and opportunities."

The school provided opportunities such as sports, clubs, extracurricular activities, and more for students to be

involved in. These were highlighted during the Activities Fair.

Freshmen Day involved everything from visiting classes to a closing pep rally, which Geerts liked especially because they all wore new red shirts and were excited about the upcoming school year. Getting all the elements of the day together, however, could be difficult.

"There are a lot of moving parts," Geerts said, "so there are a lot of things that need to be coordinated."

Regardless, the day of learning was worth it, and lessened the risk of fear and anxiety.

DISCOVERING THE THRILL

What Was Your Favorite Chant You Learned?



I like 'Ain't No Party Like a Patriot Party' because it has a lot of hype and energy."

Aiden Carpenter, 09



"My favorite cheer is 'Snaps' because I like the rhythm and it's easy to go with."

Kendra Dunn, 09



"I like 'Party Like a Patriot' because it has a lot of energy"

Collin Riddle, 09



Lifted Up!

Freshmen Kinsley Crosta and Emersyn Camell work to raise the level of excitement during the Freshman Day Pep Rally. This came at the end of the day, right before students got frozen treats on their way out. Photo by Isabella Parkins



Outside Voices

Freshman Piper Pinkerton protests increased presence and power of ICE during a student-led walkout on January 20, 2026. Photo by Adalyn Jensen

Omaha Legend

Omaha boxer Terence "Bud" Crawford paraded around downtown Omaha after becoming the first to achieve three unified division boxing titles. Photo by Joel Cardoza



City Mayor

Omaha mayor John Ewing walks at the Bud Crawford parade. Ewing was sworn in as mayor on June 9, 2025, becoming the city's first black mayor. "Omaha is a city of excellence," Ewing said during a visit to Millard South. "We have great sport programs... we just want people to recognize that Omaha is an amazing city, and we deliver champions." Photo by Joel Cardoza

False Alarm

Omaha Police arrive at Millard South following a swatting call for the second year on a row on February 3. Photo courtesy of Omaha Scanner



a HOUSE DiVIDED

Longest Government Shutdown Creates Lasting Impacts

Story adapted from Keegan Weilbel

A 43-day government shutdown began on October 1, 2025 and ended on November 12, 2025. Partisan disagreements over spending bills, particularly health care policies, gridlocked funding and ceased nonessential federal agencies.

According to Government and Economics teacher Nicholas Kintzle, this was only the third true government

shutdown since the '90s.

"This one's the worst one," he said. "It's very consistent with what the political climate of

America is right now.

It's very nasty, it's very partisan" Kintzle said. The affordable care act gives people tax breaks to bring the cost of

healthcare down.

Not everything stopped when the government shut down. Things such as the military, air traffic control, border security, disaster response, medicare and medicaid, and the postal service continued to operate. Organizations that were shut down included national parks, museums, monuments, and many federal agencies like the EPA, IRS, and the Department of Housing and Urban development



CURRENT EVENTS

Major Events from 2025-2026



Hawkins Grads

Neflix's "Stranger Things" concluded its fifth and final season, ending the show's nine-year run. Art by Halle Hinton



Death of the Penny

Production of the penny stopped on November 19 because the cost to produce was more than its worth. Art by Ella Iwanski



Louvre Heist

On October 19, 2025, a group of thieves broke into the Louvre Museum, escaping with approximately \$102M in valuables. Art by Cecilia Elget



Occupation

The United States bombed and invaded Venezuela on January 3, capturing the the country's president: Nicolás Maduro. Art by Cecilia Elget

quarter two

Quarter two started strong, with the excitement for Homecoming, football playoffs, and the holidays rapidly approaching. Students made preparations for the beloved dance, a night for the student body to let loose and have fun. Forget about the homework and the lectures, just look and feel good. Despite everyone

booing when the song came on, Homecoming was truly 'Golden.'

Quarter two was also full of many school-wide events, such as Rocktober, when the high school and middle school orchestras got together (largely in costume) and performed various

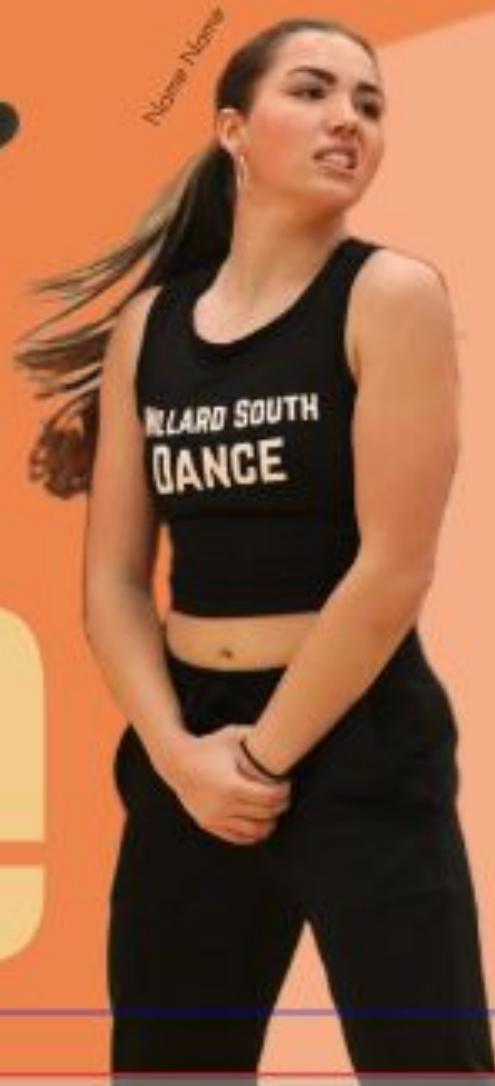
songs. Drama completed its production of *Witches?! In Salem?!*, a witty, comedic re-telling of the Salem witch trials. Along with the coming of cold weather came everyone's not-so-favorite F-word: finals. After the finals day blues

passed, the long-awaited winter break arrived. With much anticipation for the final season of *Stranger Things*, which many found underwhelming, and the holidays, finally, after all the hard work, students could stay cozied up in their homes.

Wrapping up the quarter and the year, students celebrated everything they accomplished. Another chapter closed, ready to start the next one.



Max Pica



in the zone



Noah Mullen



Ashlyn Chadwell, Amy Millerband, Alexys Porter

games make learning fun

Simulation brings struggles of Vietnam War To Life

A War Games gallery walk. An escape room challenge with walkie-talkies. Learning military terms. Three overriding missions turned the library into a Vietnam War-themed simulation as Honors English 10 students prepared to read "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien. History became more real and students worked together while experiencing the confusion and pressure soldiers once faced.

For many, the ambiance stood out right away.

"The atmosphere was loud/slightly competitive," sophomore Xander Shannon said. "It allowed me to learn a bunch of new words about war and specifically new

information about the Vietnam War."

Communication quickly became the biggest challenge.

"I would say for my group, we were a little panicked but I think the most memorable moment was using the walkie-talkies and being drafted to Vietnam," sophomore Tinashe Hamston said. "We learned how horrible and difficult it is to talk and get answers through walkie-talkies."

The hands-on element aided students in learning new military vocabulary and better understand the Vietnam War, even changing how some viewed the soldiers who served.

"It helped me to understand how hard it was

to communicate during the war," sophomore Emily Robb said. "It helped me to understand some terms and some context of the time period of the Vietnam War."

Sophomore Mirai Matsuzaki said everyone seemed to be in a great mood and having fun, especially during the section where half the class was sent to "Vietnam" while the other half stayed "at home." She said that trying to decode clues and send messages through walkie-talkies made her realize how confusing communication must have been during the war.

The learning experience was the focus.

"It was fun and I think other teachers should do this



with their classes," sophomore Claire Conboy said. "It's a learning experience that all students should have to do."

By the end of the day, students walked away with more than notes. Through teamwork, problem-solving, and a lot of radio static, the simulation offered a deeper understanding of the Vietnam War—and a new perspective on the soldiers who lived through it.



War Walk

Sophomore Lanie Tselentis completes a scavenger hunt using infographics about war to prepare for their upcoming book. Photo by Savana Cirian

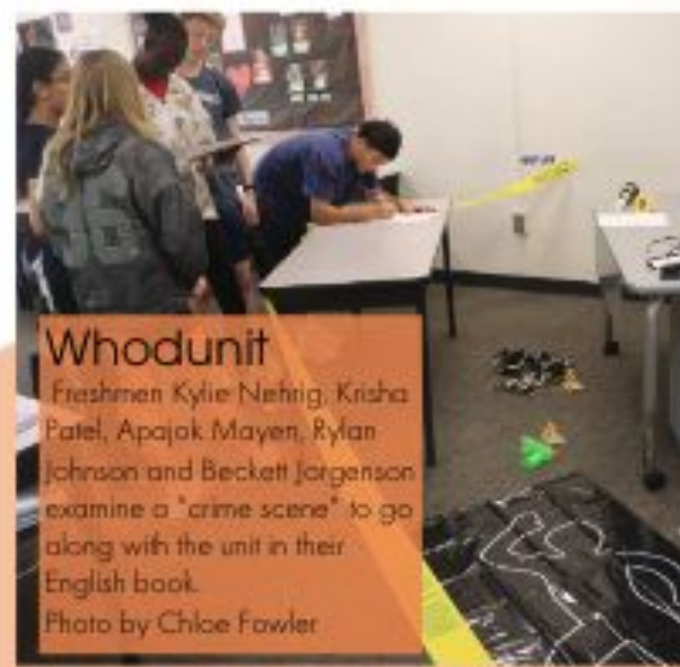
Light Up

Sophomores Micah Baker and Elijah Hendrickson search for clues with a black light. Hendrickson said it made him feel like a spy. Baker said that it was like solving a puzzle and putting the pieces together. Photo by Savana Cirian



Break Out

Juniors Lagan Johnson, Eddie Briggs and Garrett Ketterer play a lockbox game in the library to learn about dystopian literature. Briggs said he especially liked the class activity because he got to work with his friends on it. Photo by Christine Kaldahl



Whodunit

Freshmen Kylie Nehrig, Krisha Patel, Apajak Mayen, Rylan Johnson and Beckett Jorgenson examine a "crime scene" to go along with the unit in their English book. Photo by Chloe Fowler



Reach for the Stars

Junior Madalyn Kreuzberg places her star for spelling all the words correct on her pretest. "If you got 10 right on the spelling test, you got to post up a star." Photo by Christine Kaldahl

On the Edge

Describe a classroom moment when you stepped out of your comfort zone.



Noah Geerts, 11

"Freshman year I chose to speak to the class about how engines work because I find that very interesting. I was totally nerding out."



Chloe Hetrick, 12

"When I was in AP Lit and I was presenting something I had written in front of my whole class."

people

As the year continued on with new friends being made, birthdays happening, and sophomores taking the parking spots of upperclassmen; there was always that comforting connection of what was there once. School was a place where people could gather, create, and become closer as a the Patriot Nation.

People of the student body were asked, "What is a chance you've taken this year and how did it pay off?"

"Joining AFJROTC, joining improved my mental health and physical health during PT days, it taught me life skills like survival and business management," Freshman Kaedynce Lammerts said. Everyone by this time has gotten their lunch tables they're at, the group they sit

with, and rushing to beat the line to get food. Every day you see a new person in the halls, someone you haven't seen before, or possibly a new friend. The months grow colder and summer friendships come to a close. While everyone is connecting and growing something new with people you start to feel that satisfaction of making friends or learning something you never knew.

a school of risk takers...

"Going out for the wrestling team just like my sister and ending up loving it just as much, it has shown me how strong and how fast of a learner I am."

Seasons and people change yearly, but one thing that doesn't is being true to yourself. The student body will always stand with each other. Whether it's classes, clubs, or sports no one will ever be alone.

Abbi Dickinson and Joseph Antosola Franco



Face the Risk

Amy Sawyer



Quinn Peterson



WHO IS THIS?





High Risk Pet Care

Teacher Learns About Life From Disabled Dog

By Megan Kirkebak

Our pets hold a special place in our hearts. They provide us comfort, love, and companionship. All pets require time, money, and attention, but for dogs like Finn who is paraplegic, they require a little extra of those things.

"We adopted Finn from Hearts United for Animals as a puppy," English teacher Carol Merl said. "He suffered a back

injury when he jumped off a bed when he was about 2. He had surgery, but never regained use of his back legs."

According to Petsforpatriots.org, pets with special needs should not be defined by their condition.

"We were so sad and worried for him," Merl said, "but it hasn't slowed him down one bit! He's still as feisty as ever."

Pets with special needs entail more time and commitment to

caring for them than those without. Since Finn can't use his back legs, his everyday life looks a little different, but still, it doesn't slow him down.

"He wears doggy diapers that need to be changed regularly. He gets more baths," Merl said. "Having a special

needs pet is challenging. Luckily, he's so little and easy to handle. But he's so happy and loves to play and run around in the backyard with our other 2 dogs."

For people who are considering any pet with special needs, Merl had simple and sincere advice:

"Be ready," she said. "It's more time and money, but so rewarding."

Finn may be a little different from the other dogs, but that hasn't changed how much his family loves him and how strong and resilient he has been throughout his whole journey.



Carol Merl and Finn



Rachel Vogel
World Language



Allison Wagner
FCS



Aubrey Wagner
Social Studies



Kaitlyn Waneke-Lundholm
Math



Heidi Weaver
Principal



Loretta Wegener
Art



Abby Sturgeon
PE



Emma Wisner
Counseling



Tatum Wolzen
EL



Michaela Wragge
Assistant Principal



Trevor Wragge
PE



Terri Wright
World Language



Meryl Zadina
Social Studies



Tencie Tompkins
Secretary



Meredith Sonnenfelt
SPED



A Great Dog

English teacher Steve Kerkman pets his Great Dane, Oakley. "We've had the 'Feed the Dogs' softball scrimmage every year (14 years) and when my kids were younger they would beg to get a dog from the NE Humane Society (the benefactor of our food donations)," Kerkman said. "Seven years ago, I told my daughter Mikenna, 'Only if they have a purebred Great Dane.' The next week, we had her."



Field Day

Science teacher Mike Edmundson pets his dog Sammi, an English Springer Spaniel Bird Dog.



Social Studies teacher Kylie Nehls with her dogs Rusty and Doppler.



Wet Pet

Para Casey Smith's axolotl Baba enjoys playing with her kids in the tank and loves earth worms.



Pet Portrait

Spanish teacher Kesa Ludlow takes a photo with her dog, Kahlo. "I named him after Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist," she said. "I figured that since I'm a Spanish teacher, he should have a name that resembled that."



Class Pet

Biology teacher Amanda Pfeifer's classroom pet was named Gayle, an African Fat-Tailed Gecko. "I got him just over a year ago from another teacher," she said. "He has become a staple in my classroom and the kids adore him. His favorite hobbies include eating meal worms and awkwardly staring at my students."



Robin Soutas
Resource Para



Jason Stevens
Vocal Music



Deanna Stickney
Science



Erica Storms
Science



Jeffrey Story
Credit Recovery



Kortni Stracke
Language Arts



Latasha Varak
ACP Para



Jamie Svatoza
Social Studies



Amy Swartz
Vocal Music
Early College Coordinator



William Synowicki
Social Studies



Angela Thern
PE



Steve Thorne
Activities Director



Kacy Thorman
Counselor



Tait Whorlow
Math



Emily Townsend
Counseling



Kristine Townsend
Social Worker



Kara Trampo
Art



Matthew Turner
Social Studies



Rachel Vack
Social Worker



Allison VanderWal
Secretary



Kimberly Ziegler
Science