



THROUGH
IT
ALL
WE'LL
BE
HERE

BURKE
HIGH SCHOOL
THE BURKE BOOK
VOLUME
59

**OMAHA,
NEB.**



41.259695, -96.104499
OUR LOCATION. OUR HOME.



THROUGH
IT
2026
WE'LL
BE
HERE
burke
book

41.2513° N
96.0443° W
12200 Burke Street, Omaha, Neb.

AUGUST	010
SEPTEMBER	022
OCTOBER	038
NOVEMBER	052
DECEMBER	066
JANUARY	080
FEBRUARY	096
MARCH	110

IT ALL STARTS



burke book

NOV
2019

41.2612° N, 96.1040° W

BURKE STADIUM

IT'S GOOD TO BE HOME

Under home stadium lights for the first time in two years, **ALEXA NOVAK (11)** leads a cheer during the football team's game against Creighton Prep at the Burke Stadium. The team lost 42-0. As a second-year cheerleader, this was Novak's first time cheering on the Bulldogs from the home sidelines. "It's so much more fun," Novak said. "It feels way better than having to go to another stadium. It feels at home." Photo by George Whitbeck

THROUGH
IT

ALL
WE'LL
BE
HERE

2026

The Burke Book

Fifty-ninth edition

12200 Burke Street
Omaha, NE 68154
Ph. 531-299-2580

Enrollment

188 faculty and staff
1,582 students
577 freshmen
391 sophomore
409 junior
405 seniors

Principal **Darren Rasmussen**
Adviser **Michael Malcom-Bjorklund**

WE PUT A CURSE ON YOU

With his back turned to the crowd, **Landon Foster (11, center wearing red hat)** reads the crowd in anticipation of a big play during the football game on Sep. 5, 2025 vs. Oregenton Prep at Burke Stadium. Dressed in Hawaiian attire, the members of the Dawg Pound enjoy the atmosphere and the excitement of Bulldog football games. "If we're hyped up and we're hyping everybody else up, we'll have a better student section," Foster said. "We'll give our teams a better chance to win and overall, everybody will have more fun."
Photo by Mikenna Sendorf

Just ask

**LANDON
FOSTER.**

**YOU CAN
TAKE OUR**

STUDENTS

BUT YOU

CAN'T

take our

SPIRIT

YOU HEAR THAT,

Westview?



**002
003**

**OPENER
THE BURKE BOOK**

14
**WELCOME
BACK, SENIORS**
FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

It's the first week of school and the students, faculty and staff are back. Are you ready?

16
**NEW CELL
PHONE POLICY**
PUT IT AWAY OR ELSE

Nebraska state law prohibits students from using phones during instructional time.

20
FALL RALLY
A SMASH HIT
FIRST OF THE YEAR

From the athletes to the games, the first pep rally of the year lived up to the energy and hype.

41.1949° N, 96.0817° W

120TH AND BURKE BOULEVARD

SOUND THE HORNS

Leading the trumpet section, **Dayvie White (12, front)** performs during the 17th annual March-a-Thon around the Burke neighborhood. The march was intended to help band members prepare for the upcoming season and show support for the community. "We're showing off what we have learned over the summer with normal band camp," White said. "We're trying to introduce the freshman to the school." Photo by Jacqueline Juan

WE'RE ALL
IN TO START
THE YEAR

FALL

**WE'RE BACK
AT THE B,**
but this time
things are ... different.

WAIT, FOR REAL?
No way! Like what?

**WELL, SOME THINGS
HAVEN'T CHANGED.**

It's seven in the morning and
Makenna Bendorf
and the rest of the cross country
team are still breaking a sweat.

Give it a rest.

**THEY CAN'T.
THEY WON'T.**

Did you hear about the new
CELL PHONE POLICY?

New policy!?!?

**WOAH!
WOAH!
WOAH!**

Just ask **Majesty Willis**.
He's *barely* hanging on.

**HE WANTS HIS PHONE.
HE NEEDS HIS PHONE.**

Or what about
A DAYS AND B DAYS?
What are those?

Well, don't ask **Leila Callahan**.
She's still reeling from walking
into all the wrong classes.

We're keeping our mouth shut

**SO MUCH HAS CHANGED
IN JUST THREE MONTHS.**

There's still so much
**BARK IN
BURKE**
So, let's go!



Through the US

A look at **CELL PHONE** policies around the country as of June '25.

● Local limits ● Legislation pending ● None
● School day ban ● Instructional day ban
Source: AP reports, KFF

ADJUSTING TO LIFE WITHOUT PHONE IN CLASSES HARD FOR SOME, RELIEF TO OTHERS

STORY BY
LEILA CALLAHAN

The impact of the statewide phone ban on students has ranged from frustration and sadness to relief and a newfound focus on classwork.

Heading into the 2025-2026 school year, **RUBIN THORNTON (10)** was shocked when he found out about the new phone ban in Nebraska.

"It's boring without my phone," Thornton said.

On the other hand, **ADDISON CASEY (10)** felt upset and thought the rule wouldn't be enforced. Casey supports the ban because she gets more work done.

"The hardest part is finishing my work and not knowing what to do next," Casey said.

Unlike Casey, **KENNY MCMORRIS (10)** was surprised the phone ban is a real thing. McMorris doesn't agree with the LB140 because he believes teachers should trust their students to use their phone responsibly.

"Not having my phone means not being able to listen to music," McMorris said. "My cell phone helps me focus."

SAFETY MATTERS

Although the change was tough, **ARIYAH MILES (10)** was nervous about the new phone ban. She immediately wondered how she was going to contact her family in case of an emergency.

"When we were younger, we got addicted to screens and social media so fast that we didn't really learn how to socialize in person and be independent with our own work," Miles said. "So, the ban can be more like a wakeup call to people."

RING BUZZ DISTRACT

Blue light rays hitting her face, **Leila Callahan (10)** doom scrolls on her phone. With the new cell phone ban, not much has changed for her. "I never really used my phone at school anyway, so it doesn't really bother me," Callahan said. "I can see why it affects others so much though." Photo illustration by Caitlyn McNeal



Oh, no ... No phone?

How has it been to go throughout the day with **NO PHONES**?
26% I'm getting by. 74% It's the worst.
Poll conducted through Instagram post



"I think that the phone ban is nonsense. It affects me because when I have nothing to do, I have nothing to do. If I take a nap, teachers get mad even though I'm done with everything. I think not having my phone makes me feel unsafe."

MICHELLE DIEGUEZ (12)



"I don't really care for the phone ban, I guess. It affects me though because I can't be on my phone. Some teachers like to put the phones in holders, so maybe not doing that can affect them. It can also affect teachers because it may be harder for kids to focus with their phones. It probably makes a positive effect because of learning."

WYATT BRITTON (10)



"I think that the phone ban can be beneficial in a way because it helps us focus in class but also negatively because when you finish your work, you will have nothing to do. It affects me because I can't have my phone."

JAI-LANI FAGNON (12)

Don't be corn-fused

What we learned about Nebraska's **CELL PHONE BAN** and LB 140 in today's classroom.

Nebraska enacted LB 140 in May 2025, requiring public K-12 schools to ban student cell phone use during school hours and functions by the 2025-2026 school year to reduce distractions and promote focus. While a statewide ban is in effect, schools must allow exceptions for educational purposes, emergencies, perceived threats, health management, and students with special needs or who require phones as part of an IEP or 504 plan.

Exceptions:

- A student's special education plan (IEP or 504 plan) requires device use.
- The school district authorizes use for educational purposes during instructional time.
- There is an emergency or a perceived threat of danger.
- The device is necessary for monitoring or managing a student's health care.
- A school board or administrator approves the use.



QUIET ON THE SET

Assisting the WOWT-TV cameraman, **Principal Darren Rasmussen (left)**, aides in the production of the television segment on the school's cell phone policy. Rasmussen doesn't believe the new state law changes how things have been done at school. "Our students are doing a nice job understanding the expectations and are more engaged in our classrooms," Rasmussen said.

Photo by George Whitbeck

MARCH-A-THON WALKING & FAMILY

MOVING TO THE BEAT, BAND AND COLOR GUARD STUDENTS USHER IN NEW YEAR

STORY BY
KAIDEN OLDENKAMP

There's commitment and then there's four-mile commitment.

The marching band's 17th Annual March-a-Thon brought the community together for a day filled with music and fun. Both the band and color guard performed and marched along the neighborhood.

Then, there's the walking.

This year's event stretched four miles throughout the Burke neighborhood, including a spot at Columbian Elementary.

"Marching four miles uphill was the hardest part for me," **Cason Kempter (09)** said.

Despite the long walk, the band members saw a real benefit to performing for the community at the beginning of the year.

"It feels good to perform for the community like this," **Josue Padilla (10)** said. "Hearing people clap for us really encourages us."

COLOR MATTERS

The band was not the only one having fun.

Joining in were the members of the color guard.

"I liked seeing the people come out of their houses and smile when they were watching us," **Keely McNabb-Harbert (11)** said.

Overall, it was a long day for not just for the performers, but for the audience that got to see the show.

"It motivates us to see that there is a crowd that wants to watch us perform," **Katelyn Phipps (11)** said.



STANDING AT ATTENTION

Ready to strike their next notes, flutists **Fatima Estrada-Parra (10, left)**, **Darlah Johnson (11)**, **Easton Lester (09)**, and **Warren Hang (09)** perform at the 17th annual March-a-Thon on Aug. 23, 2025. "This year was cooler than the other years," Estrada-Parra said. "We walked a lot, but it gets easier the more you do it." Photo by Callie Huffman

WHAT'S THE ONE SWAG
WORD YOU WOULD PUT
IN THE DICTIONARY?

HELLO,
WEBSTER



"Tung Tung Tung
Satur, because it is
so unfunny."
Driven
Combslecer (10)

"Rizz because
everyone thinks
they have it, so
they need the
definition."
Conner
Johnson (09)

"Freakbot because I
love him and he
needs to be more
known."
Asher O'Brien
(11)

"Skibidi toilet,
because my little
sister says it all the
time."
Kaytlynn
Johnson (12)

% of people
who have a
suggested word

91
It's voted via 84 block
study hall classroom

NOT BEING ABLE TO STOP THE HANDS OF TIME, STUDENTS NAVIGATE THE TICKING CLOCK

STORY BY
BAN PUOCH

LIKE many of her peers, time's not always on **Lillian Pettus (10)** side — whether at school or her Orchard Hill home.

With a 30-minute commute to the school each morning, Pettus doesn't have the luxury of sleeping in as long as she wants each morning.

"I'm always missing my alarms," Pettus said. "I can never hear them."

While that might be a common occurrence for high schoolers around the Omaha Metro, for Pettus, it can mentally throw off her day.

"I wake up around five in the morning and then I get on the bus around 6:50," Pettus said. "I get home around four, and I take a walk right after school. I walk an hour every day just to like clear my head."

TO BUS OR NOT TO BUS

Owen Benes (10) faces the challenge of waking up and getting to school without the assistance of a bus driver for his second year of school. Having the new responsibility of driving himself most mornings, Benes has had trouble adjusting to the change.

"It's only a 15-minute drive, but I still find it difficult," Benes said.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FRIENDS?

While not at school, **Kalea Lewis (10)** loves to spend time with her besties.

"Me and my friends love to go downtown," Lewis said. "We usually walk around the Gene Leahy Mall or the Old Market."



EVERY NOTE COUNTS

Singing with his peers, **Angel Yanez Sanchez (09, second from right)** revs up his high notes in the show choir room during rehearsal. "Show choir literally helped me find my voice by allowing me to be able to speak up about the things I want to change," Yanez Sanchez said. Photo by Caitlyn McNeal



STITCHING TIME

It's 12 p.m. and **Azimi Navruz (11)** may not be sewing up a storm, but he's adding his own creative touch. While sewing is not his favorite, he's pretty good at it. He may prefer to sketch DC characters, but in this moment he's embracing a new creative challenge. Photo by Callie Huffman

SPIN THE WHEEL

Preparing her clay for her double pinch pot, **Dallas Fender (12)** can't get enough of pottery. "I love getting to play with clay and making cool sculptures," Fender said. Photo by Ban Puoch



"The hardest part of my day would be going to the gym after school, [I go] every day for about like three hours. In the morning, I wake up two hours before I need to go to school, so I have enough time to get ready. I feel most productive after I wake up, because I have this exclusive energy."

OGHENEKEVWE OMADEVUA (12)

"I carry the basic necessities for school and also a bottle of perfume and a hair brush."

MELODY RAMM (11)

"I carry all of my school supplies with me which are a couple notebooks, pens, folders, and pencils."

LEANNA FITCH (11)

"I carry mainly my wallet, my keys, my phone and the school supplies I need for those classes for that day."

ANA GIGITASHVILI (11)



"I'm most productive at midnight because that's when I get all my energy. I'll paint my nails, sew something, do homework — anything. Lunch is my favorite time of day because I get to eat."

WAHIDAH HASAN (09)



"I feel most productive around four when I lock in. My favorite time of day is 3:06 p.m. because I have the most time to myself. I get to leave the school and I go to my house and it's a really nice environment there."

NORAH HOUFEK (09)



"My favorite time of day is the evening because it's a time when I can wind down and sleep at night."

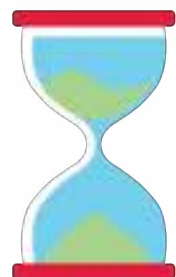
MYLES MULLIN (09)



"My favorite place to spend time when I'm not at home is definitely the dance studio or church. I feel most productive when I'm doing my homework, because it's just me getting work done, like a good Chloe."

CHLOE BENTLEY (10)

AUGUST
THE BURKE BOOK
018
019
TIME
DESIGN BY BAN PUOCH



Here and There

We're **ALL** a cruel victim to Father Time. So, what's your favorite time of the day?

24% Morning is my jam.
10% I'm more of a p.m. person.
67% Night time is the best time.

IT'S ABOUT *time*

MY BIGGEST CHEERLEADER

Through it all, who's been there for you?



Who: My mother.
Why: **She's** always there for me and every single tennis match I've had she's been to. She keeps my head up when I'm low and calms me down easily."
TYLER CAVANAUGH (10)



Who: My mother.
Why: **She's** always there to support me at all my dance performances. One time she brought me a bouquet of flowers for my recital."
EVANELINE SWANSON (09)



Who: My boyfriend Wyatt.
Why: **He** supports and helps me to be a better person and see things in a different way."
JUSTINA ROTH (12)



Who: My brother.
Why: **We** used to play football together, and now he cheers for me in the stands."
JOSHUA HUMMEL (10)

STANDING TALL

Hitting the final pose, **Saniya Merritt (11)** concludes the halftime performance at the football game on Oct. 3, 2025. This was the first time back on the field for the cheerleaders, marking the start of many halftime performances to come. "It was terrifying to perform," Merritt said. "Hitting the final pose was exciting because I finally got it over with." Photo by Makenna Bendorf.

LEARNING IN REAL TIME, CHEERLEADERS PERFORM DURING HALFTIME OF GAME

STORY BY
CALLIE HUFFMAN

With a few seconds left on the clock, the cheerleading team had to adapt in real time.

Performing during halftime for the first time in over 30 years, the cheerleaders had to overcome key differences in timing between stadium speakers and those in the cafeteria.

"The music sounded different coming from the stadium speakers compared to ours at practice," **Layla Lewis (12)** said. "So, it threw me off, but I remembered my counts and moved on."

Stunting was the most nerve-racking part of the performance for **Kira Mundell (11)**. From countless tiring practices, Mundell and her stunt group put the work in to perfect the pyramid.

"I was so nervous and excited," Mundell said. "I was really worried about how the pyramid would go, but I knew we

would get it in the end, and I loved how it turned out."

Throughout the nerves, the cheerleaders never lost focus.

"It felt really nice to represent Burke Cheer," **Laylah Prusla (12)** said. "It definitely added motivation for me because I wanted to show what we could do."

When the final stunt hit, the payoff of the performance made all the troubles worth it for Lewis and the rest of the cheerleaders.

"The most meaningful moment was hitting that last pose in our pyramid and screaming 'Dawgs!' with my teammates," Lewis said.

Getting back on the field after a long hiatus set the tone for the growth and development of the team.

"It made me realize that, to a degree, we are the backbone of school spirit at Burke," **Irene Jones (11)** said.



BLAKE ON THE *spot*

AS THE ONLY MALE CHEERLEADER, WORTMAN BRINGS SPIRIT TO TEAM

Contrary to the misconception, male cheerleaders have existed for decades bringing strength and energy to the sidelines.

What started as a fun activity quickly turned into a newfound passion for **Blake Wortman (11)**.

"I wanted to join cheer because my friends were in it, and I did some research on the positivity behind it and fell in love with it," Wortman said.

Wortman admits that being the only guy on the team can come with pressure, but he is not completely alone. Alongside **Coach Joshua Stevens**, the two understand what it is like to stand out in a female-dominated sport.

"Besides his strength and athleticism, I enjoy having another boy on the team due to the connection," Stevens said. "He adds all around depth to our team by bringing different opinions and perspective."

Teammate **Mariah Stein (09)** acknowledges Wortman's drive regardless of the challenge behind being the only male on the team.

"I think having Blake on the team shows that anyone can cheer if you put your mind to it, you can achieve your goals," Stein said. "Blake brings so much fun and laughter to the team, he always comes to practice with a positive attitude and can bring a smile to anyone's face," Stein said.



Here for it

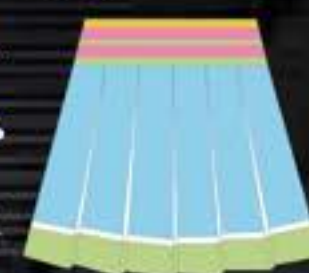
What's your favorite part of being on the cheerleading team?

52%
Stunting

05%
Performing

33%
Football cheer

10%
Basketball cheer



Poll conducted through Instagram

41.2259° N, 95.9271° W

OMAHA'S HENRY DOORLY
ZOO & AQUARIUM

Down under the sea

As the climate continues to change, what do you think is the biggest **marine** issue in the world?



App conducted through Instagram @theburkebookomaha



zootopia



PROTECTING OUR FUTURE

What is your dream job in conservation?

"I don't know my dream job for sure yet, but it is definitely something that is with conservation and animals. The zoo has a lot of classes that will definitely help me find my path."
WISSE C. (11, MARIAN)

"My dream job is to work at the hospital in Omaha. The classes I've taken here help me reach that goal by teaching me what conservation looks like from different perspectives."
WISSE ROTH (12)

"My dream job is a veterinarian, specifically an equine vet. My anatomy and physiology class and my behavioral science class help to get me up for that career."
LEANNA FITCH (11)

FIGHTING THE ODDS

STUDENT SHOWS MAJOR INTEREST IN MARINE BIOLOGY AS A CAREER

Living in a landlocked state, **Rigley Renbarger (11)** knows that his dream of being a marine biologist isn't the most attainable goal.

However, that doesn't stop him from making this dream his reality.

"[A challenge that makes studying marine biology in Nebraska hard] is not being able to see animals in person, besides at the zoo, but you can't be in the water with them," Renbarger said.

Although working with sharks is the most appealing aspect of marine biology for him, Renbarger understands that there are issues with marine conservation that need to be better prioritized.

"I think people need to know that coral reefs are dying," Renbarger said. "Pollution of the ocean is a big issue because it is killing a lot of animals."

As he approaches the end of his high school education, Renbarger has researched schools and programs that align with his dream job.

"I'm looking at University of North Florida because they are on a coast and have one of the best programs in the country for marine biology."



FIND ME IN THE FOREST

Examining a plant found in the tropical rainforest of the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo's Jungle exhibit, **Carl Matthews (11)** looks at how some plant species use trees to climb to the canopy layer of the exhibit. "There's hearing that a plant has little roots that dig into trees and stuff, and then there's seeing the little roots and how they use the bark to climb. [Seeing it in the exhibit] allows for a better visual and to see how [that behavior] actually happens in nature," Matthews said.

Photos by Irene Jones

ROOTS TO REALITY

Learning about the adaptations of jungle plants and their structures that allow them to outlast the levels of sunlight and precipitation the jungle provides them with, **Isabella Behne (11)** listens to her Zoo Academy teacher, **Amy Leising** as she explains how aerial roots connect to other plants and the walls of the exhibit. "Being in person and experiencing rather than learning concepts helps me better understand what we're talking about to a really large degree, because you are able to form real life connections," Behne said.

STUDENTS REFLECT ON THE HENRY DOORLY ZOO'S ZOO ACADEMY PROGRAM

STORY BY
IRENE JONES

Focusing at Henry Doorly Zoo is a lot easier for **Isabella Behne (11)**.

Taking part in the Zoo Academy program, Behne, among others, learn about wildlife conservation, veterinary science and care opportunities, and environmental sciences while blending multiple school districts throughout the Metro area together.

"[The Zoo Academy] is really such a unique opportunity," Behne said. "There's not really anything else like it at Burke High School or at other schools around the city. It's such a unique program and I feel like it's really helped me be focused on topics that I'm really interested in working with."

Like Behne, **Carl Matthews (11)** also feels that the Zoo Academy's concentration on topics specific to his dream career are unique to the program.

"My current plan for my future goal is I'm looking into becoming an environmental lawyer, and in order to do that, I need to know a lot more about the environment than the normal science courses can teach

me," Matthews said. "So, Zoo Academy having an advanced course for environmental studies seems the ideal place."

Along with the science focused classes and knowledge taught within the program, students are also able to gain experience and opportunities through hands-on activities and lessons.

"I enjoy being able to go outside around the zoo and [being able to gain] experiences in our classes like going to exhibits, learning from the zookeepers, and getting to go on field trips," **Ella Nelson (11)** said.

This different environment that the Zoo Academy provides for students has helped them to better appreciate their education.

"At the zoo, there's way more freedom and a lot more trust placed on students," **Leanna Fitch (11)** said. "Unlike Burke, there are more opportunities within environmental sciences and animal science. The courses are a little bit more rigorous, but that just gives me a challenge," Fitch said.

41.2612° N, 96.1040° W
BURKE STADIUM

We're more
THAN A
BLIP ON YOUR
RADAR
AND A PLACE
TO

VISIT

**BAN
PUOCH**

knows that.

**AND
THROUGH
IT**

ALL

**WE'LL
BE
HERE**

**RAISE YOUR ARM IF
YOU'RE SURE**

Raising her arm during a home football game vs. Omaha Westview, junior **Ban Puoch** cheers on the Bulldogs Dec. 12, 2025 at Burke Stadium. Although this is her third year as a cheerleader, it was the first time she had the opportunity to serve as a flyer. "I had such a blast at this game," Puoch said. "Not only was it my first time flying at a game, it was also against our rivalry school which made it 10 times better. I love getting to cheer and interact with the crowd, I love being a Bulldog." Photo by Malena Binstorf

IT ALL
ENDED



burke book

OLD
CITY