

# FESoT Teacher Advances For Colorado's Top Educator Award

By Dustin Senger

Digital Communications Specialist

When Melanie Holts enters her classroom each day in rural Peyton, Colorado, she finds herself where she always envisioned: Preparing children for their next phase in life.

Holts is a second grade teacher at Falcon Elementary School of Technology in District 49, a school district in the rapidly developing northeastern corner of Colorado Springs and the Falcon area of El Paso County. She is now one of six finalists for Colorado's teacher of the year.

Surrounded by notebooks, highlighters, pencils and children — a Denver Broncos thermos proudly placed on her desk — she isn't all that nervous about the upcoming news of a winner, now just 5 weeks away. She feels rewarded every day by simply being a teacher.

Holts has taught for 20 years now, from preschool to eighth grade. She

has given 10 years of her career to students in District 49. She spent 2 years teaching missionary students in Brazil.

"I'm just doing what I love," said Holts, finishing small group writing circles Sept. 23, and considering the possibility of becoming Colorado's top educator. The day's lessons included individual and small group storytelling efforts.

While gathering with the groups, she helped students carefully consider word choices.

When she asked why LEGO bricks are "creative," a student suggested they were "fun." She guided everyone to explain why they're fun, like the ability to build and play with friends. Other than descriptive vocabularies, Holts paid attention to pronouns, like the difference between "my" and "our" classroom — "that way, it's about us, not just

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Melanie Holts, second grade teacher, works with a small group of students during writing exercises Sept. 23 at Falcon Elementary School of Technology in District 49. Holts is one of six finalists for Colorado's 2017 teacher of the year. While her favorite recognition comes from students and parents, Holts is no stranger to the national stage. In 2012, she became a finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in teaching math and science. She was nominated for a science, technology, engineering and math teacher of the year award by the U.S. Air Force Lance P. Sijan Chapter in 2013, and then again became a finalist for the Presidential Award in 2014. "I'm just doing what I love, and I'm trying to do it well," says Holts. (District 49/Dustin Senger)

## Unanimous Approval of Resolution Supporting Ballot Issue 3B

By Kayla Maldonado

Marketing and Communications Specialist

The District 49 Board of Education unanimously approved a resolution of support for El Paso County ballot issue 3B in a 5-0 vote during its monthly meeting Oct. 13.

"I'm proud of all the work that has gone into this," said Marie LaVere-Wright, board president, prior to the vote. "I believe this will do a great deal of good in our community, furthering our investment, taking care of what we have without raising taxes."

With voter approval, the proposal would repurpose funding toward the mill levy as the district pays off its bond debt, keeping it within its existing budget.

"I think everyone benefits from this, and I'm thrilled we can vote on this resolution of support," said LaVere-Wright.

During her board update, LaVere-Wright thanked Rocky Mountain Classical Academy board of directors, who passed a similar resolution of support for ballot issue 3B in October.

"I appreciate the charter schools recognizing the partnership we have with them," said Kevin Butcher, District 49 board treasurer, prior to casting his vote.

The board directors approved the resolution as follows:

### A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF EL PASO COUNTY BALLOT ISSUE 3B

WHEREAS, 3B will support taxpayers by not raising the overall tax rate; and

WHEREAS, 3B will support teachers by providing \$1 million dollars annually to attract and retain highly effective teachers by offering salaries and benefits that are competitive with other districts in El Paso County; and

WHEREAS, 3B will support students by providing every District 49 school, including charter schools and the Falcon Homeschool Program, capital investment each decade to improve their learning facility; and

WHEREAS, 3B will support students by investing in the traditional high schools to ensure buildings provide equitable opportunities for students and safe and effective environments for student achievement; and

WHEREAS, 3B will support students by building two new K-5 elementary schools to serve current and growing demand in the central and northern parts of the district; and

WHEREAS, a citizen's oversight committee will provide accountability by monitoring how the funds generated by 3B are spent and will provide an annual audit on the district website; and

WHEREAS, all funds will directly benefit our students and teachers, with no funds being spent on administration; and

WHEREAS, a strong school district decreases crime rates and retains property and home values for residents;

**Now Therefore Be It Resolved** that the Board of Directors of School District 49 support ballot issue 3B and strongly encourage the residents of District 49 to vote yes for the measure in November.

**Adopted and Approved this 13th day of October 2016 by School District 49**

## Wolves Take Down Indians With '12th player'

By Dustin Senger

Digital Communications Specialist

When the Wolves won their homecoming football game after a strong second half comeback, it was perhaps their "12th player" who was most excited.

The District 49 team took down the Indians of Montrose High School in Montrose and Olathe School District, 35-21, during a homecoming football game Oct. 7 at Vista Ridge High School.

As the team first entered the field, surrounded by cheerleaders and the howl of hundreds of fans, their 12th player carried the school colors. For the third consecutive year, 11th-grader Grayson Moyer was selected to join the Wolves, recognizing his contagious pride.

Grayson, 16, was wearing a jersey with the number 12, along with a football helmet. The helmet belonged to teammate Nathan Hutfilz. He removed it after called by the referees to flip a coin, which would determine which team took initial possession of the ball.

"He's our hardest worker, best spirited and our biggest fan," said 12th-grader Nathan, 18. The two students first met when Grayson was a freshman. They started sitting together at lunch.

Grayson has watched football since he was a baby, according to father Kris Moyer. However, due to developmental delays, eventually explained as a missing chromosome, it's tough for him to muster a player's intensity. He's afflicted by low muscle tone and slow reflexes.

But Nathan and his teammates stopped that from keeping him completely off the field at Vista Ridge High School.

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# Excitement, Energy Displayed During Celebration of Achievement



Horizon Middle School students cheer during Olympic themed events as part of the first Renaissance assembly of the school year Aug. 5. The program recognizes and rewards whole classes or groups of students when they meet one of three achievement levels. Pep rallies and special events increase overall school spirit and individuals can earn free admission to games and dances through the program.(District 49/Matt Meister)

**By Matt Meister**  
Director of Communications

“It’s been a great week,” said Horizon Middle School sixth-grader Brian King, 11. “This is an awesome start to school.”

“Our goal is to boost academics, participation and engagement within our students,” said Lori Maher, instructional coach. “The Renaissance program brings excitement, appreciation and energy in celebrating the achievements of our students.”

The first Renaissance assembly of the year, held Aug. 5, featured students and staff participating in several Olympic themed events. Throughout the school year, staff recognize and reward whole classes or groups of students when they meet one of three achievement levels. Pep rallies and special events increase overall

school spirit, and individuals can earn free admission to games and dances through the program.

“Recognizing and awarding academic success is an important aspect of creating school spirit at Horizon Middle School,” said Maher. “Through the Renaissance program, we will celebrate student achievement and school pride.”

The program featured students and staff participating in simulated synchronized swimming, equestrian, table tennis, and other events. Maher acted as one of the emcees of the assembly as “Ms. Skip to my Lou.” Dustin Horras, principal, rode into the event on a motorcycle as “Kanye East,” the other emcee.

“Renaissance Man,” played by eighth grade math teacher David Jung, purposefully interrupted events

during the assembly.

“Kanye, are we seeing what I think I’m seeing?” said Maher. “He obviously doesn’t realize there is a serious Olympic event going on here.”

“The point is to be a little bit silly,” said Liz Dalzell-Wagers, assistant principal. “It is middle school.”

Students were randomly chosen by “Renaissance Man” to spin the money wheel, where they could win up to eight one-dollar bills. Other students were chosen to participate in the Olympic torch eating contest.

“The Renaissance program celebrates student achievement throughout the school year and gives staff the power to change our school environment,” said Dalzell-Wagers. “We reward, recognize, respect and reinforce excellence and improvements in our students and teachers.”

## DISPATCH

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# ‘So, What Do You Think?’

## PPSEL Students Explore Matter, Make Strong Learning Connections

By Matt Meister  
Director of Communications

“It seems like it has some properties of a liquid and some properties of a solid,” said Syndi Ellis, sixth grade student at Pikes Peak School of Expeditionary Learning, as she investigated gelatin Aug. 24.

“Right now we are exploring the phases of matter,” said Samantha Trail, sixth grade instructor, as she was observing Syndi’s group. “We are rotating stations between solid, liquid and gas. We are learning about their properties, as our introduction to matter.”

Expeditionary learning emphasizes high achievement through active learning, character growth and teamwork. Learning expeditions are units of in-depth study that are designed specifically for each class to maximize content understandings and academic growth.

Sixth-graders Clayton McArthur, Ashlynn Keizer, Taniyah Hicks and Cooper Lark were pouring a colored liquid into a clear liquid, as part of an expeditionary learning opportunity.

“There is one liquid going into another,” said Trail. “What do we observe?”

“I think the atoms are becoming evenly spaced out as they mix,” said Taniyah.

Expeditionary learning works to make strong connections through unique, hands-on experiences.

“I like to put the learning in their hands,” said Trail. “They are familiar with water, putty and Jell-O. Even though they’ve probably seen these materials before, they are looking



“It seems like it has some properties of a liquid and a solid,” said Syndi Ellis, sixth grade student at Pikes Peak School of Expeditionary Learning, during an exploration of matter Aug. 24. “I like to put the learning in their hands,” said Samantha Trail, PPSEL teacher. “Even though they’ve probably seen these materials before, they are looking at it through a different lens. When we formally introduce the properties of solids, liquids, and gases, they’ll have already had this unique experience with it and make strong learning connections.” (District 49/Matt Meister)

at them through a different lens today.”

Sixth-grader Hailey Knutson, investigating Play-Doh with classmate Emry Caraway, described it as “stretchy and squishy.”

“So, what do you think?” said Trail.

The students recorded their observations and questions on sheets of paper that will be investigated in the formal introduction of matter.

“Because we’re doing this expeditionary learning today, formally introducing the properties of solids, liquids and gases later this week will have a greater impact,” said Trail.



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- Jack Bay, District 49,  
Chief Operations Officer





From page 1

"I want him to experience a day as a Wolf," said Nathan, awaiting his next play, as Grayson watched nearby. "Everyone in our school loves him. He's always putting a smile on our faces — he's always saying, 'go Wolves, go Wolves.'"

"He's a huge sports fan," said Moyer, while sitting with son Grayson, whose eyes remained on the field. "He's just naturally attracted to the excitement of it."

"He's getting a lot of opportunity here," said Moyer about Vista Ridge High School. "The students are going out of their way to acknowledge him. It touches my heart, and I know it touches his."

Moyer says his son likes being with other people and making friends, just like his typical peers.

"If you approach (students with special needs) as a person first, I think you're doing the right thing. Connect with the person. Not only will it help their life, it'll help their own, too."



The Wolves rush the Indians of Montrose High School in Montrose and Olathe School District during a homecoming football game Oct. 7 at Vista Ridge High School. After trailing in the first half, the Wolves eventually took down the Indians of Montrose High School in Montrose and Olathe School District, 35-21. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Twelfth-graders Allison Gadia, 17, and Noah Beatty, 17, pose for photos after getting crowned homecoming queen and king during a football game halftime show Oct. 7 at Vista Ridge High School. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Cheerleaders perform during a homecoming football game halftime show Oct. 7 at Vista Ridge High School. Homecoming court was announced after the cheer team's performance. Twelfth-graders Noah Beatty, 17, and Allison Gadia, 17, were crowned homecoming king and queen. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Sand Creek High School senior wide receiver Anthony Colby catches a third quarter pass for a touchdown during the homecoming game against Air Academy High School Sept. 30. The Scorpions won their first contest in 20 games, stinging the Kadets 14-8 with two second half scores. (District 49/Matt Meister)



The Sand Creek High School Junior ROTC color guard marches in the rain prior to the singing of "The Star-Spangled Banner" prior to the homecoming game Sept. 30 at Sand Creek High School. (District 49/Matt Meister)



Students perform in the marching band, directed by Ray Bell, during halftime of the annual homecoming game Sept. 30 at Sand Creek High School. Students in the homecoming court were introduced after the performance. (District 49/Matt Meister)



Students and cheerleaders ride the rollercoaster after a third quarter touchdown during the homecoming game Sept. 30 at Sand Creek High School. The Scorpions beat Air Academy High School of Academy District 20, 14-8. (District 49/Matt Meister)





Students perform a rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” ahead of a homecoming football game Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Falcons rush the Cougars of Evergreen High School in Jefferson County Public Schools during a homecoming football game Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. Despite a strong fourth quarter soar, the Falcons fell against the Cougars, 12-27. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Twelfth-graders Hunter Conway, 17, and Katie Kroeker, 17, smile for photos after getting crowned homecoming king and queen during a football game halftime show Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Homecoming court is escorted on Corvettes, covering more than 50 years of production history, during a football game halftime show Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



The Cougars of Evergreen High School in Jefferson County Public Schools rush the Falcons during a homecoming football game Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



Student band members perform ahead of a homecoming football game Sept. 30 at Falcon High School. Despite a strong fourth quarter soar, the Falcons fell against the Cougars of Evergreen High School in Jefferson County Public Schools, 12-27. (District 49/Dustin Senger)



# Odyssey Elementary School Honors Heroes

By Matt Meister  
Communications Director

In advance of the 15th anniversary of 9/11, students and teachers at Odyssey Elementary School welcomed veterans and first responders Sept. 9 for Hero Day.

“Taking time out of our busy schedule to honor the people in our community who have different roles and are here to help us is important,” said Kimberly Watkins, second grade teacher.

“It’s also about awareness,” said Watkins. “To have all of these people here helps with familiarity, so the kids know about police, firefighters and our military if they ever need to come and help.”

Students approached booths to learn first hand from representatives of the Colorado Springs Fire Department, Colorado Springs Police Department, El Paso County Sheriff’s Office, American Medical Response and Memorial Star Emergency Medical Transport, as well as service members from the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Parker Hale of North American Aerospace Defense Command, U.S. Northern Command, a parent of Odyssey Elementary School students, like many of the veterans and first responders, said, “This is more for (the students) -- I don’t consider myself a hero. I’m just a dad.”

“My dad is a hero,” said Hale’s 7-year-old daughter, Kase, a second-grader. “He helps our country. I like that he does that and then comes home.”

A parade of heroes concluded the Hero Day festivities. Students lined the hallways of the school and cheered as their honored guest passed. Students also gave handshakes and personally thanked the members of the military and local emer-



Odyssey Elementary School students thank veterans and first responders during the parade of heroes Sep. 9 as part of Hero Day. Students thanked veterans and first responders for their dedication and service with cheers, handshakes and notes of thanks. Earlier in the day, students had the opportunity to learn about the jobs the heroes do. A military Humvee, a fire truck, and the Memorial Star helicopter were on site as part of the festivities. (District 49/Matt Meister)

gency response groups for their service. Students also handed out handmade cards and notes of thanks to the heroes.

“It’s awesome,” said Matt Bergland, flight paramedic with Memorial Star. “Some of the cards and letters that the kids handed to me during the parade have choked me up.”

“I think it’s great Odyssey (Elementary School) even thought to do a thing like this,” said Bergland, whose wife teaches second grade at the elementary school. “To be able to connect together in this way, community and first responders, and not around a tragedy is really touching.”

Second-grader Caleb Yazzie, 7, waved a flag for the heroes as a classmate stood next to him with tears in his eye.

“All the heroes came,” said Caleb. “They save and rescue people. When there is something bad happening, they help.”

## Award:

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mine,” she said.

Holts says successful classrooms require trusting relationships and mutual respect. To build a culture of empathy, she believes in validating everyone’s feelings, even the teacher’s.

“She’s one of the best teachers I’ve ever had — she’s nice to everyone,” said second-grader Albino Fletes Soto, 7, suggesting Holts provides the right balance of structure and autonomy. “If you’re too strict, that’s bad. If you’re just the right amount of strict, that’s good.”

Holts encourages students to question her lessons whenever they perceive an error, or something otherwise confusing.

“My kids know they can correct me, and they do it so politely,” she said. “And I say ‘thanks’ for helping me with a mistake. We’re a family and it’s about helping each other.”

### ‘Just doing what I love’

“I love being in the classroom, and working in a Title I school,” said Holts, referring to how the school’s high poverty index qualifies it for additional state resources, those determined to help all of its students meet Colorado’s academic standards.

“I feel like I can make a greater impact here,” said Holts, knowing she’s qualified to administer private schools. She earned a bachelor’s degree in early childhood and elementary education from Baylor University, a private Baptist school in Waco, Texas, and then a master’s in Christian school administration from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

Holts admittedly holds no reservations

about working in public education, nor any ambitions to administer any school. She’s most confident as a teacher in a public school classroom, a role she started to refine as a child who frequently lined up her dolls for a lesson plan.

The daughter of Christian missionaries, Holts grew up in East Africa. She attended a British school in Tanzania, and then an American school in Kenya, where she completed her secondary education. Her closest childhood friends were from the United States, United Kingdom, Kenya and New Zealand.

Believing classrooms should encourage engagement and interest from both students and teachers, she sometimes asks which English accent her students would like her to read with.

While her favorite recognition comes from students and parents, Holts is no stranger to the national stage. In 2012, she became a finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in teaching math and science. She was nominated for a science, technology, engineering and math teacher of the year award by the U.S. Air Force Lance P. Sijan Chapter in 2013, and then again became a finalist for the Presidential Award in 2014.

Holts is known to leverage advances in instructional technology, and to help other educators do the same, but she’s always critical of every tool added to her belt.

In her classroom, she set up an Apple iPad to stream an app called “Too Noisy.” Students monitor and adjust their sound level using an overhead television, hoping to fill stars and earn rewards by staying within an acceptable range for their current activity. Holts says it leads to math lessons and group goal-setting, as students



Second-grader Albino Fletes Soto, 7, listens to Melanie Holts, second grade teacher, during writing exercises Sept. 23 at Falcon Elementary School of Technology in District 49. “She’s one of the best teachers I’ve ever had — she’s nice to everyone,” said Albino, suggesting Holts provides the right balance of structure and autonomy. “If you’re too strict, that’s bad. If you’re just the right amount of strict, that’s good.” Holts is one of six finalists for Colorado’s 2017 teacher of the year. While her favorite recognition comes from students and parents, Holts is no stranger to the national stage. In 2012, she became a finalist for the Presidential Award for Excellence in teaching math and science. She was nominated for a science, technology, engineering and math teacher of the year award by the U.S. Air Force Lance P. Sijan chapter in 2013, and then again became a finalist for the Presidential Award in 2014. “I’m just doing what I love, and I’m trying to do it well,” says Holts. (District 49/Dustin Senger)

tally stars and celebrate productivity. “I think it’s very important for educators to consider quality, not quantity,” said Holts, discussing instructional technology during a video interview for Colorado teacher of the year, “and really look at how it’s going to benefit students, as well as looking at fiscal responsibility in the products that we purchase and use.”

The Colorado Department of Education is scheduled the first week of November to announce the state’s 2017 teacher of the year. If Holts shows any anxiety about the news, it’s how winning might take her away from the classroom, knowing

winners are often tapped for think tanks and speeches.

Preparing for a lunch break, smiling toward a student who willingly gave up 5 minutes of recess to better understand a lesson, she underlined how important it is in her life to remain with her students as much as possible.

“I’m just doing what I love, and I’m trying to do it well,” said Holts.

*Editor’s Note: Sean Wybrant of Colorado Springs District 11 was named the 2017 Colorado Teacher of the Year by Interim Education Commissioner Katy Anthes during an assembly Oct. 11.*



# District 49 and Peak Vista Say ‘Boo! To The Flu’

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# Local Military Leaders Honored During ‘Fantastic 49’

By Dustin Senger

Digital Communications Specialist

Dr. Louis Fletcher, culture and services director, explained a 5-year, \$1.5-million grant to implement restorative practices during “Fantastic 49” recognition Sept. 8, ahead of a Board of Education meeting. The grant was supported by area military leaders.

Fletcher paid tribute to letters of support from the garrison commander at Fort Carson, and the 21st Force Support Squadron at Peterson Air Force Base, which were part of the district’s application for the Department of Defense Education Activity partnership grant.

Air Force Lt. Col. David Wilson, 21st Force Support Squadron commander at Peterson Air Force Base, and Command Sgt. Maj. David Burton, senior enlisted leader at Fort Carson’s garrison command, explained their appreciation for the support the district has shown their military families, suggesting it keeps servicemembers focused on their most critical duties.

Fletcher said the district’s implementation of restorative practices will endure as a long-term change in school culture, one that puts a focus on building, maintaining and, when necessary, repairing relationships among all members of a school community.

Restorative, rather than punitive approaches to discipline, deal more effectively with student misbehavior by encouraging students to be accountable for their actions and finding ways to “make things right,” he said, while addressing the BOE directors.

“This is something that’ll be enduring,” said Fletcher, thanking the military leaders. “But it’s not something that could have been done without their support.”



Air Force Lt. Col. David Wilson, 21st Force Support Squadron commander at Peterson Air Force Base, tells Brett Ridgway, chief business officer, about his unit’s appreciation for school communications and collaboration after “Fantastic 49” recognition Sept. 8, ahead of a Board of Education meeting in District 49. Louis Fletcher, culture and services director, announced a 5-year, \$1.5 million grant to implement restorative practices. Fletcher paid tribute to letters of support from the garrison commander at Fort Carson, and the 21st Force Support Squadron at Peterson Air Force Base, which were part of the district’s application for the Department of Defense Education Activity partnership grant. Wilson and Command Sgt. Maj. David Burton, senior enlisted leader at Fort Carson’s garrison command, explained their appreciation for the support the district has shown their military families, suggesting it keeps servicemembers focused on their most critical duties. Fletcher said the district’s implementation of restorative practices will endure as a longterm change in school culture, one that puts a focus on building, maintaining and, when necessary, repairing relationships among all members of a school community. Restorative, rather than punitive approaches to discipline, deal more effectively with student misbehavior by encouraging students to be accountable for their actions and finding ways to “make things right,” he said. (District 49/Dustin Senger)

## Student Board Forms For Second Year

By Dustin Senger

Digital Communications Specialist

High school students volunteering for a student board of representatives gathered with district leaders Aug. 11, ahead of a Board of Education meeting.

A group of 17 students, several from each district high school, volunteered to participate in the 2016-2017 student board of representatives. They are chosen by their peers or nominated by faculty to bring a student voice to the district’s governing processes.

“We really do feel your opinion is as valid as our elected directors,” said Peter Hilts, chief education officer, explaining how the student board would collect information from BOE work sessions, collaborate with their peers, and then participate in monthly meetings.

Hilts said they’d provide important feedback that would be used to help improve processes. They’d make sure a student perspective is presented and heard.

“Ultimately, we’re looking to have a student voice represented – that’s why we’re doing this,” said Hilts.

The BOE directors approved last November the addition of student representatives in their meetings, as non-voting members. With the board of representatives forming for a second school year, students

will continue to take turns attending BOE work sessions and monthly meetings.

“We’re a governing body, so every decision has to be made through a consensus – no single one of us can make a final decision,” said Marie LaVere-Wright, BOE president, encouraging the student representatives to contact any BOE director about any issue of concern.

“It’s a positive experience,” said Sydney Schroeder, 17. Now a 12th-grader at Sand Creek High School, she participated last school year in the pilot program. She volunteered to remain on the student board of representatives during its second year.

“I know a lot of students at Sand Creek High School felt like their voice wasn’t being heard – even when they’re asked for their input, we weren’t always sure they were using it,” she said.

Sydney says, as a board representative, she is actively asked to speak during monthly BOE meetings, and feels the input she provides is used in district policy.

“They’ve encouraged me to speak, not just be there,” said Sydney.

“This gives me a platform to not only do something for my school, but also myself,” she said. “It’s a learning experience. It’s building me as a leader and a community member.”



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