

# PENINSULA SCHOOL DISTRICT

## *Compass*



**Dreaming Together for PSD's Future**

*Spring 2022*

# Dreaming Together for the Future of Peninsula School District

By Lori Glover, President of the Peninsula School District Board of Directors



Lori Glover, President; Superintendent Krestin Bahr; Director David Olson; Director Jennifer Butler; Director Chuck West; Natalie Wimberley, Vice President

**W**e are excited to share that we have launched a community-wide, inclusive engagement process for all residents in the district to participate in our strategic planning. With community input, the strategic plan will provide a road map for all of our decisions and actions in the next five years as we work together to educate all students at high levels in the Peninsula School District.

As your school board, we have set the foundation of the new strategic plan, including a vision, mission, values, and goals. The district's Learning Support team, composed of district administrators, staff, and principals, then took the framework and added some

specific language around the goals and potential outcomes for the goals.

The next step in the process is sharing this work with PSD staff, students, families, and the community to seek input and to gain insight from all stakeholders. Feedback collected from these groups will go directly to us for consideration as members of the district's leadership begin drafting action steps to achieve our goals. The final version of the strategic plan will incorporate this feedback and be shared with the public in June 2022.

Creating a strategic plan was our first assignment for Superintendent Bahr

when we hired her last year. As president of the school board, I have been working closely with Superintendent Bahr and my fellow directors to make sure the strategic plan reflects the diverse perspectives of our community.

I invite you to view more information about the strategic plan and community engagement process on our website at [psd401.net](http://psd401.net).

On behalf of the board of directors, thank you for taking the time to engage in this process. Your feedback is vital to ensure we aim to provide what our children need most.

## What is a strategic plan?

A strategic plan sets the direction for the district that informs priorities and positively impacts student learning for years to come. By setting the direction for the next five years, work can be prioritized and funding allocated in alignment with the plan.



*“The strategic planning process will define the decisions and actions that shape and guide the future direction for the school district over the next five years. By carefully aligning our values and goals within a strategic plan, we will ensure the district is moving in the right direction to achieve our mission and vision.”*

- Krestin Bahr, Superintendent

*Pictured on Cover (L to R): Harbor Ridge Middle School students Miles E., Frances B., Mirinda N., Fisher H., Audrey M., and Marcus K.*

# Transitional Kindergarten Helps Young Students Succeed



Transitional kindergarten students have fun learning together at Discovery Elementary.

**K**indergarten can be a big change for young children. For many, it may be the first time they spend the entire day away from their caregivers. For a large number of preschool-age children coming out of the pandemic, kindergarten can be the most social interaction with other children and adults outside of their home in months, or maybe years.

Lisa Reaugh, Director of Special Programs at Peninsula School District (PSD), focuses her work on making the beginning of a student's public education not only easy, but successful for the long-term. She oversees PSD's preschool programs, which provides families in need of preschool care with the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). ECEAP is a comprehensive preschool program that provides free services and support to eligible children and their families. This program provides preschool care to children between the ages of 3-5 at Artondale, Evergreen, and Vaughn elementary schools.

While the ECEAP program helps many families who struggle with learning disabilities, income issues, or other challenges, it doesn't provide help to children entering kindergarten within the next school year who simply had no preschool experience.

"There's a need for kids who don't have access to early learning anywhere else, and still need some additional support. The state redefined kindergarten enrollment to include students who will be five going into kindergarten the following year. So we created this layer of support that is transitional kindergarten," Reaugh said.

Transitional kindergarten began at PSD in December, but planning started nearly a year ago for Reaugh and her team. Transitional kindergarten provides six-months of kindergarten readiness learning to future PSD students. Currently, there are 40 students enrolled in three classes at Harbor Heights, Evergreen, and Discovery elementary schools.

Transitional kindergarten is free for eligible families. The program is all-day, five days a week, and includes school lunch and classes like music and gym. The program focuses on social-emotional development, basic academic skills, routines, and how to build learning habits. For students, this looks like learning how to listen and focus on directions from the teacher, getting used to a school schedule, making new friends, and getting comfortable with being away from home most of the day.

For one student, Evie, transitional kindergarten made a large impact on her growth.

"My daughter was in daycare before this, so we were trying to get her prepared for kindergarten as best we could," Evie's mom, Ashley, said. "She had some social-emotional issues we were trying to solve, but it wasn't quite enough. The daycare didn't have the support we now get with transitional kindergarten."

Ashley said her child is now flourishing in some areas, and it's even changed her behavior at home. Ashley recently attended school conferences with Evie and was excited about what her teacher and daughter had to say.

"The chance to be able to take advantage of that opportunity, to have that for her, when she really, absolutely needed it, is just immensely great," Ashley said. "I'm so grateful you made that happen."

This is the type of support Reaugh and the early learning staff at PSD were hoping to see. Reaugh's goal is to one day have preschool and transitional kindergarten programs available at all the district's elementary schools.



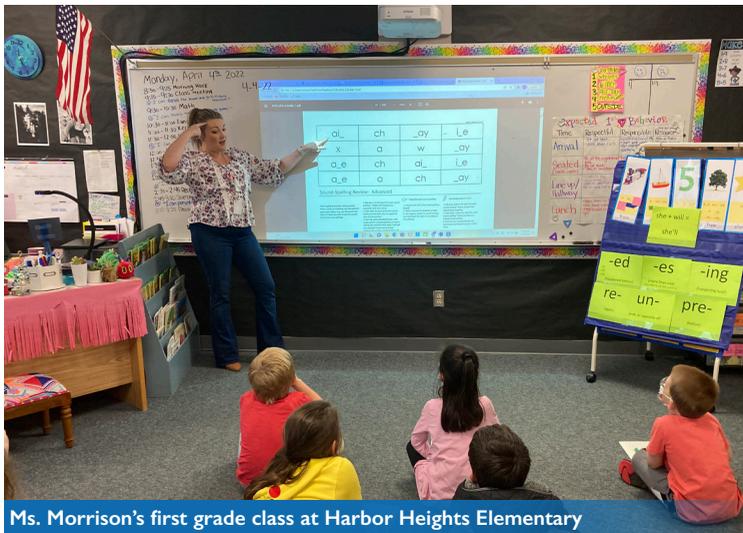
***Interested in ECEAP?***

Learn more online at  
<https://bit.ly/3xg3SEj>.



***Interested in Transitional Kindergarten?***

Learn more and register online at  
<https://bit.ly/377fqPs>.



Ms. Morrison's first grade class at Harbor Heights Elementary



Ms. Mitchell's kindergarten class at Artondale Elementary

## Teacher Training Leads to Higher Reading Levels

*K-2 teachers watch students progress quickly thanks to new classroom routines*

First grade teacher Tracy Morrison had a challenge before her at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. A group of her new first graders at Harbor Heights Elementary weren't at the reading level they needed to be because of the impact COVID-19. Then in December, a new student came into the classroom, Giulia. Giulia's family moved to Washington from Brazil, and English was her second language.

Morrison was ready to tackle reading comprehension with her students, and help Giulia become more fluent in English as well, because she knew being able to read at level by third grade can impact a student's entire future at school.

Morrison isn't the only K-2 teacher at Peninsula School District who had this challenge, which is one reason PSD implemented a new teaching strategy called Enhancing Core Reading Instruction, or ECRI.

"We know if kids can't read, they're not set up for success in any other academic area," Director of Innovative Learning Natalie Boyle said. "So we have to have that grounded, purposeful, evidence-based instruction in our primary grades to help them set up for success from third grade forward."

In August 2021, K-2 teachers began ECRI training. ECRI only takes 30 minutes of instruction time a day, and may seem like a basic back-and-forth between teachers

and students to classroom visitors, but is actually an evidence-based method developed by researchers at Oregon State University.

"It's reading instruction strategies that we use with our current Reading Wonders district adopted program," Instructional Facilitator Kelly Pruitt said. "So it's not a whole new set of books; it's not a whole new curriculum. It's teachers using what we have now, but with enhanced routines based on the science of reading. It makes it more explicit, more systematic, and kids have more opportunities to respond."

Step into Tatem Mitchell's kindergarten classroom at Artondale Elementary and you'll see a group of kids excited to try their hand at spelling. Mitchell uses dictation to help students sound out and spell new words. Then they are challenged to write the word on their whiteboards. Once they finish their challenge word, they get a chance to see what other words they can make by changing just one or two letters. Box becomes Bob or fox, jug becomes tug.

"I like it because it makes me know more words," one of Mitchell's students said during class.

"Our whole kindergarten team loves ECRI," Mitchell said. "Especially the sound blending and the letter sound cards for learning letter names and letter sounds. It really has helped us see

a lot more growth this year with some of those district benchmarks related to phonemic awareness."

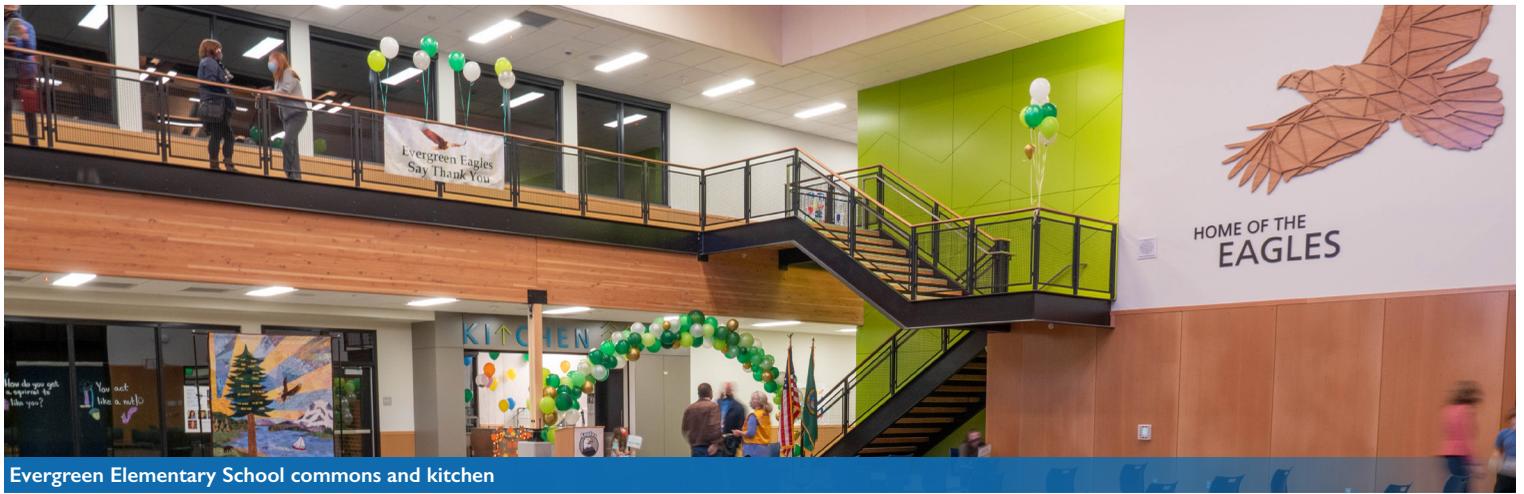
Back in Morrison's classroom, ECRI has helped her students make impressive progress. One example was a student who came in reading at a kindergarten level. Morrison measures her students on an A through Z scale, A being the lowest level of reading and Z being the highest. Her goal is to have students at a J reading level by the end of the year. This student was at an A level.

"Students should be coming into first grade reading at a D," Morrison said. "And she was kind of stuck. And then we have been working on that ECRI routine and now she's at an F. Between December and now, I think that's a huge jump."

As for Giulia? She is speaking, spelling and writing in English much more than she was four months prior. Morrison said she's engaged in class more too.

"[ECRI] is good for my English language learners. It's good for my low kids. It's good for my high kids who are learning all of those tricky spelling patterns. I really like it for its accessibility," Morrison said.

Pruitt is continuing to train and support teachers in implementing ECRI and can see a future where students have exposure to ECRI routines throughout the whole school year and not only meet their reading levels, but exceed them.



Evergreen Elementary School commons and kitchen

## The Future of Facilities in PSD

We are grateful to the community for supporting the 2019 capital bond that resulted in Pioneer Elementary, Swift Water Elementary, and the Evergreen and Artondale school replacements.

We have also used bond funds for emerging infrastructure needs, addressing middle school overcrowding with the modernizations at Kopachuck and Key Peninsula middle schools. Please follow our progress on these projects at [www.psd401.net/capitalprojects](http://www.psd401.net/capitalprojects).

“Giving attention to two of our oldest middle schools has allowed more funds from the 2020 levy to support infrastructure needs at our other aging facilities,” said Director of Capital Projects, Patrick Gillespie. Levy funds are currently being used for maintenance projects such as roof replacements, new flooring, painting, LED light upgrades, and HVAC maintenance.

What comes next for facilities planning in the Peninsula School District will be driven by the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. Throughout March and April, district staff, students, and community members have shared their hopes and dreams for the future of our district, including support for quality, flexible spaces for learning and future growth. The plan is scheduled to be approved by the school board in June.

“All of our schools should be a source of pride for students, teachers, and community members,” said Superintendent Krestin Bahr. “We are proud of the capital facilities work that has been done so far and are committed to practicing careful stewardship of the public’s investment in our schools.”

## Artondale Celebrates Grand Opening

On Tuesday, March 22, 2022, the Peninsula School District Board of Directors, Superintendent Krestin Bahr, Artondale Elementary staff, and community members celebrated the official ribbon cutting of Artondale Elementary School followed by an open house.

Artondale Elementary is the final school out of four elementary school construction projects funded by the 2019 capital projects bond to be officially completed. The bond was passed by voters, approving school construction to address extreme elementary school overcrowding and other emergency infrastructure needs.

Artondale opened to students in late November 2021, less than three years after the bond passage. The new facility totals 77,155 square feet and was built with durable, efficient materials for easy maintenance and long-term low costs.

For more information about the Artondale Elementary construction and to view photos of the event, please visit online at [www.psd401.net/AESBuild](http://www.psd401.net/AESBuild).



# School Counselors Build Mental Health Safety Net

Students have faced a number of challenges in the last few years, between a world-wide pandemic shutting down schools, a constantly changing economy affecting their families, and being more connected to major events around the world because of social media. While students are resilient and able to meet many challenges, these obstacles can become overwhelming, which is reflected in the number of students suffering from anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues.

According to the Washington State Healthcare Authority 2021 Healthy Youth Survey, 7 out of 10 tenth graders reported feeling “nervous, anxious, on edge, or not being able to stop worrying.” Nearly 40 percent of surveyed students reported feeling sad or hopeless in the past year, and 20 percent reported considering, planning, or even attempting suicide.

These numbers represent all middle school and high school students in Washington State, but counselors at Peninsula School District say their students are no exception.



Kopachuck Middle School Counselor Andrea Grafmiller checks in with a student.

“Everyone’s still experiencing a lot of stress and stress is cumulative, and that’s something that I think people need to be aware of,” said Becky Maffei, Peninsula School District’s Lead Counselor.

Maffei and her team have seen the effects of stress and anxiety in students at PSD and are working on ways to mitigate that stress, provide information and resources to families, and strategize future plans to help ease social and emotional stress among students.

“We have done a lot to increase a focus in our buildings on social-emotional awareness and learning, and the importance of connections with other people,” Maffei said. “We’ve also been trying to really increase support for staff in terms of their own wellness and self-care. We know that if staff are stressed, it’s more difficult for them to support kids.”

Gig Harbor High School Counselor Stephanie Glenisky has seen first-hand the rise in mental health issues with high school students, but says there is list of resources at her disposal to help students manage these feelings, including social-emotional counseling, an on-campus mental health counselor, a substance-abuse counselor from Crossroads Treatment Center, student groups, and more. One of the best resources students have is the adults in their lives.

“I think that parents and caregivers have the best lens for checking how their own student is doing,” Glenisky said. “So if a student’s grades seem to take a turn, if they are withdrawing from activities or friends that they previously enjoyed hanging out with, or just wanting to spend a lot of time alone . . . Some of these things can be typical teenage behaviors, but it could also be a good time to ask your child how they are doing. The school counselor can also be a good resource for support if needed. I think that being a really good listener to our kids is always important.”

Andrea Grafmiller, a School Counselor at Kopachuck Middle School, is also seeing a rise in anxiety and depression among middle school students. She agrees that the adults in a student’s life should look out for changes in behavior as clues to a student’s stress levels, but should also feel free to ask the district for help and resources when needed.

“I think one of the first great lines of defense is to call the school counselors and let them know ‘my student is struggling with this thing,’” Grafmiller said. “We’re great resources. We have referrals for outside therapists. We run small groups at school. We can check in with a student if we know that there’s something going on.”

Families interested in finding resources for their students can visit [www.psd401.net/learning/counseling-program](http://www.psd401.net/learning/counseling-program).

#HealthyMindsMatterPSD



**May is Mental Health Awareness Month.**

Be on the lookout for future wellness and health tips and resources from Peninsula School District with our #HealthyMindsMatterPSD campaign on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

# Teachers Supporting Teachers

One thing that makes the Peninsula School District a special place to work and learn is the dedication our teachers bring to the classroom and the support they provide to each other.

"I found that the people I work with here in PSD are supportive. Really, they want to help you. They want to build you up and make sure that you are successful," said Daniel Aliment, Music Specialist at Minter Creek Elementary.

Aliment is a first-year teacher at Minter Creek Elementary and a graduate of the Peninsula School District. He came to Minter Creek as a substitute teacher and quickly became a beloved member of the team.

"I was a student [at Minter Creek Elementary] actually, and some of the teachers were former teachers of mine, so I got a lot of help from them," said Aliment.

Supporting partnerships between veteran PSD teachers and new teachers is ingrained in the culture of the district. PSD pairs new teachers with long-time educators in a mentorship program called Teacher Companions.

Aliment's teacher companion is Kari Gulbranson, a kindergarten teacher at Minter Creek Elementary. Gulbranson started her career a decade ago at Peninsula School District and has taught grades K-5 at Minter Creek. Like Aliment, Gulbranson is also a graduate of PSD

and chose to spend her career teaching new generations on the Key Peninsula.

"A lot of teachers who are in PSD stay because they like their families, and are connected to the community in that area," said Gulbranson.

Gulbranson and Aliment talk every day about how classes are going, what challenges they are facing, what plans they have for their students, and check in on how the other is feeling. Gulbranson said having this companion system in place for teachers has helped while educators navigate the recent turbulence caused by COVID-19.

"When [teaching] is hard, it's hard," Gulbranson said. "So I think it's really just being that sounding board and talking through it and trying to find what your partner needs. Where in your day are you struggling? What parts are really difficult, and how do we help support you in that time?"

Aliment said he now mentors friends who are graduating with their teaching degrees and looking for teaching positions. He shares his experience as a PSD employee and what they should be looking for in other districts, too. One thing he emphasizes is finding a culture of teamwork and support.

"You want to feel like you belong in their school as a teacher. I think that's one of PSD's strong suits," Aliment said.



Daniel Aliment, Music Specialist



Kari Gulbranson, Kindergarten Teacher



May 2-6, 2022

National Teacher  
Appreciation Week

Purdy Elementary Students

## Inspiring Excellence in Every Student

Our more than 1,600 staff work tirelessly with almost 9,000 students to ensure all children receive a high-quality education that is personalized to meet their learning needs, so that they are fully prepared for their next step in life.

The Peninsula School District is a special place to learn and grow. We are proud that our students academically outperform the state average each year. And, thanks to our hardworking educators, success is within reach for all of our students with an increased emphasis on reading at early levels and strong collaboration. Across the district, our staff prioritize making meaningful connections with students to help them feel valued, safe, and experience a true sense of belonging.

Below are some of the educational programs that help our students achieve success no matter where they are in their educational journey.



*Fall 2022 is right around the corner and we are planning now to make sure every child has the resources they need to be a successful student in the Peninsula School District. New and returning students can help us with our planning by registering today at [psd401.net/registration](http://psd401.net/registration).*

*The Compass is produced by the Peninsula School District Communications Department.*

Peninsula School District Board of Directors: Lori Glover, Natalie Wimberley, Jennifer Butler, David Olson, Chuck West | Superintendent: Krestin Bahr

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