

ESD 123 chooses Lightner to fill seat on Richland school board



COURTESY ESD 123

Candidates to fill the Richland School Board's Director No. 3 position interview Tuesday evening in front of the Educational Service District 123 board of directors. They are, from left, Scott Butner, Jeffrey Estes and Lindsay Lightner.

BY ERIC ROSANE
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The Educational Service District 123 board of directors chose Lindsay Lightner to fill one of three seats recently vacated by a successful recall in the Richland School District.

Lightner will begin her service and take the oath of office at the Richland School Board's next meeting on Thursday. Her term in the Director No. 3 seat will run until voters elect someone for the position in the November general election.

"This was one of the more difficult decisions we've had to make," said ESD 123 board chair Terry Brandon. "We toyed with putting names in hats and pulling one out."

ESD 123 was tasked by law to appoint one school board member after voters decided in the Aug. 1 primary to remove board members Semi Bird, Audra Byrd and Kari Williams over an illegal vote to make COVID masks optional.

Once Lightner takes her place on the board, the Richland School Board will have the quorum it needs by law to hold public meetings and conduct business.

In coming weeks, Lightner and her fellow school board members — Rick Jansons and Jill Oldson — will interview and appoint two more candidates from the Richland community to serve in seats vacated by Byrd and Williams.

The candidate chosen to fill Williams' seat will serve until after the November election, and the candidate chosen to fill Byrd's seat will serve for the next two years.

Lightner works as career-track assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University Tri-Cities, where she teaches courses in elementary science methods and preservice teacher preparation.

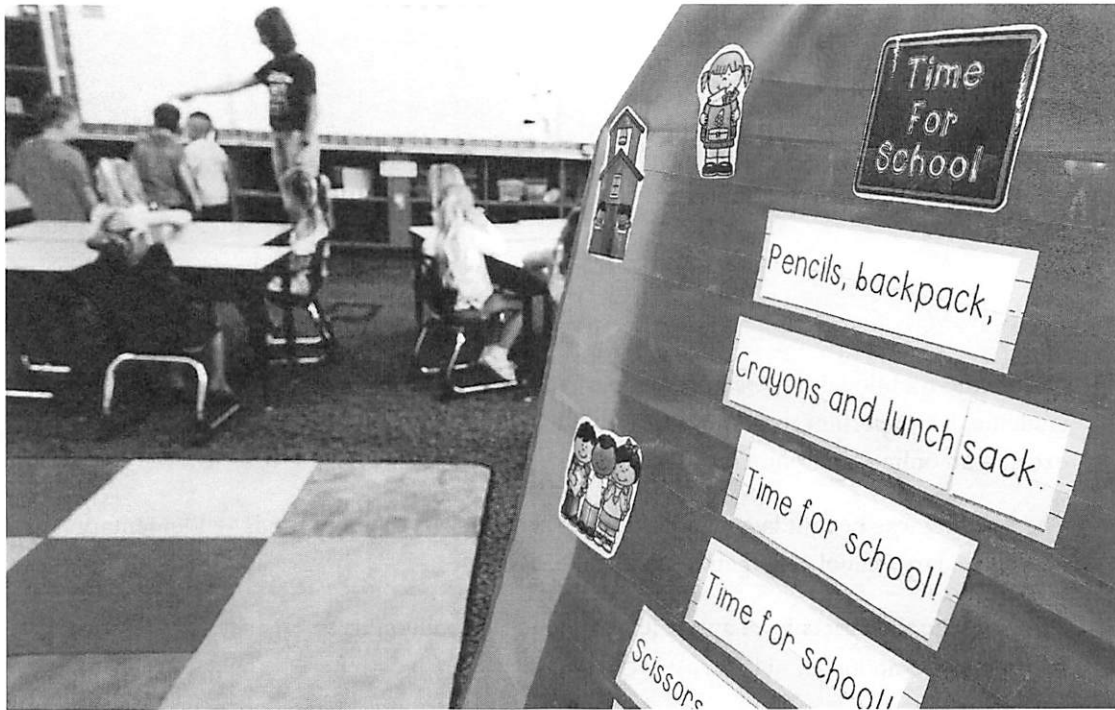
She has worked as a New York City middle school teacher, an English instructor and advisor at Pennsylvania State University and as a lecturer and student teacher supervisor at Canterbury Christ Church University in London.

During Tuesday's interviews, she highlighted her extensive background in education and her work teaching the next generation of educators.

The ESD 123 board also interviewed Scott Butner, a former Richland School Board member and professional photographer, as well as Jeffrey Estes, a retired Pacific Northwest National Laboratory director.

It's THE end of COVID money

What Tri-Cities schools are spending their final dollars on



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As students, teachers and parents prepare to return to the classroom for a new school year, school districts must soon decide how to best to spend their final COVID relief dollars.

BY ERIC ROSANE

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After several months of work, Pasco School District staff and officials finally cut the ribbon this week and opened the doors to their new Digital Learning Center.

The refurbished 10,000-square-foot facility at the corner of Court Street and Road 44 will serve as the new home of the Digital Learning Academy, a consortium of four online schools remotely serving 600 students from kindergarten through high school.

“The expansion is a response to an increased demand for digital learning programs for students who thrive in a virtual or online educational setting,” said Superintendent Michelle Whitney.

“While the traditional in-person classroom continues to meet the needs of most of our students, it’s important to acknowledge that a substantial number of our students truly excel in an online environment,” she said.

The building was bought last year partly with federal COVID relief funds — Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER).

Tri-City school districts have a year left to spend \$43 million in emergency COVID money before they’re no longer able to.

But as school districts begin spending their final pennies, researchers are warning schools to be cautious.

They argue districts should focus more spending on programs that address pandemic-caused learning loss and education gaps instead of buying buildings.

“I think student outcomes come first and facility projects second,” Margeurite Roza, director of [Edunomics Lab](#) and research professor at Georgetown University’s McCourt School of Public Policy, told the Tri-City Herald.

When comparing 2022 scores with the national average, Pasco students are more than two grade levels behind in math and reading. Roza said that puts Pasco among the lowest achieving districts in the state.

Her organization also has raised a red flag over fears of an impending “bloodletting” — a mass nationwide layoff of school employees because districts are using COVID relief money to cover the recurring salaries of teachers and classified workers.

Tri-City education leaders say they haven’t seen any evidence to suggest such sweeping layoffs here but the Kennewick district’s expected revenue loss of about \$3 million annually has it using ESSER money and reserves to plug financial holes.

Spending priorities for ESSER money have shifted over the last three years.

In the early pandemic days, the funds were used to respond to the spread of COVID, pay for personal protective equipment and buttress online learning support for millions of students.

In recent months, spending has shifted to include investments in school facilities, mental health services and to combat pandemic-caused learning loss.

Pasco, for one, has invested millions in tutoring, summer school, mental health support, one-on-one counseling, as well as targeted strong, rigorous instruction and intervention programs for students needing specific assistance.

COVID, ESSER AND LEARNING LOSS

Since March 2020, more than \$190 billion in ESSER funds have trickled into public schools across the country through the federal CARES Act, CRRSA Act and the American Rescue Plan.

Districts can only access the money on a reimbursement basis.

The Kennewick, Pasco and Richland school districts combined were eligible to spend \$137 million in ESSER. So far, they've spent \$94.5 million, or about 70% of their total allocation.

Most of that covered the salaries of existing staff, summer school teaching and tutoring opportunities, and small building improvements such as heating and air conditioning unit upgrades.

A stipulation in the third and final installment known as ESSER 3 requires districts to use at least 20% for educational programs to address learning loss as a result of students spending several months away from in-person classes.

From 2019 to 2022, Pasco students on average fell a half-grade behind on reading and math test scores, according to the Education Recovery Scorecard. Kennewick test scores also fell a half-grade behind while Richland's were near national averages.

"(Construction) is great for next decade's kids, but what about today's kids?" Roza argued. "Does it do much if they can't read or do math?"

COVID-related lockdowns — which lasted, on and off, for several months in Washington state — are still impacting student learning to this day, especially the country's youngest learners.

One estimate from Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab estimates it would take more than \$52.5 million in math tutoring and \$25.2 million in literature tutoring for

Kennewick, Richland and Pasco to collectively rectify an average learning loss of three months of math instruction and two months for reading instruction.

Roza worries that a whole generation may miss out on the ability to accumulate wealth or to pursue certain career opportunities if districts aren't more aware of the intent behind some of their ESSER spending.

"Their life values will be permanently impacted," she said. "Being behind 2.5 years on math and reading outcomes means they're closed off to many, many values of life."

Nationwide, education leaders made similar regrets with funds that trickled down under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which Congress passed during the Great Recession.

Spending appropriations in that law helped supplement state budget shortfalls, as well as retain and create 325,000 education jobs, but Roza said leaders were regretful about not making larger local investments to increase learning outcomes.

NATIONWIDE LAYOFF CONCERN

With the final round of COVID dollars ending next year and as schools continue to struggle to return their enrollments back to pre-pandemic levels, researchers at Georgetown University are projecting layoffs beginning in the 2024-25 school year.

Enrollment is important because it's the driver for how much money a school receives.

The number of students dictates how much money the state contributes to local school districts.

Nationally, school districts are spending about \$24 billion of ESSER money annually on labor costs. That money is covering about a quarter of a million education jobs, Roza says.

Tri-City school officials aren't expecting that to happen here. For the past decade, the number of employees in each district has mostly risen and fallen in conjunction with enrollment trends.

But Edunomics Lab researchers say higher hiring rates compared with plateauing student enrollment rates should be concerning to all school districts.

Enrollment at Richland — the smallest of the "big 3" Tri-City school districts, serving 14,000 students — has largely returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Pasco and Kennewick are still working to rebound from enrollment losses. Each district is down by about 300 full-time students.

Vic Roberts, Kennewick's executive director of business operations, said that difference pencils out to a loss in revenue of about \$3 million annually for them.

Kennewick's budgetary future is the most uncertain. Not only has enrollment failed to rebound, but the district is using millions of dollars in ESSER annually to plug a \$34 million hole that was made after local voters decided twice last year to not renew the district's educational programs and operations levy.

The district also is tapping into its reserves to fill the gap, but will still bleed about \$5 million to \$10 million annually over the next four years due to the levy failure of last year.

The district has not had to make cuts to staff yet, but has reduced program spending on things such as new curricula.

"Riding it out until the next levy in 2026 is going to be a challenge. But, you see, districts all throughout the state are really in that same boat. So we're really trying to do all we can to get through the next couple years," Roberts said.

Layoffs could come during the 2024-25 school year, but those would be less a result of ESSER money expiring and more because of lost levy funds and recent hiring to keep class sizes smaller.

"With the passage of the 2023 levy, we will again be collecting levy dollars in the 2024 calendar year," said Superintendent Traci Pierce in a written statement. "Over the next year we will need to manage the budget carefully, monitor enrollment, and continue to advocate for additional state funding in areas that the state underfunds."

RICHLAND'S ESSER 3 SPENDING

Richland has spent nearly all of the \$13.6 million in ESSER 3 that it's eligible to receive. The third installment made up more than half of the total \$21.2 million it has been eligible to spend.

Here's how the district is spending that money this year:

- \$5.7 million to retain teachers and staff members, and keep class sizes small.
- \$2.75 million is going to the district's Mental Health Assistance Team, which was established in 2020 to do threat assessment, suicide prevention, mental health and social-emotional learning strategies and training.
- \$811,000 for special education learning loss measures and progress monitoring.
- \$700,000 has been used to fund summer school from 2022-24.
- \$575,000 to upgrade and replace HVAC systems.
- \$270,000 for special education support at Pacific Crest Online Academy. About 30 students at the school need special education services, and the number

continues to rise. These funds would go toward Presence Learning, a contractor that provides online staff to address special education needs.

- \$150,000 to address building-level learning loss. These funds will act as a pool for individual building requests to support “outside-the-box” efforts to support student learning. This could include extended day or extended year programs.

KENNEWICK'S ESSER 3 SPENDING

Kennewick is eligible to spend \$37.6 million in ESSER 3. Most of that will be used to cover staffing that would otherwise be funded with levy dollars.

Here's how the district is spending ESSER 3 this year:

- \$24 million will be used to maintain staffing needs.
- \$2.8 million will be used to cover indirect costs.
- \$1 million purchase sanitation and cleaning supplies for school buildings.
- \$1 million for summer school, as well as to provide training for teachers to address learning loss where needed.
- \$500,000 to buy Chromebooks and for other supplies to help with distanced learning.
- \$500,000 for student mental health services.
- \$250,000 for student data system collections to address learning loss impacts and staff time to review relevant data.

The school district has about \$7.5 million in learning loss specific funds it plans to use for tutoring, mental health programs and mathematics curriculum adoption, among other things, Roberts said. Roughly \$6.8 million will go directly to student programs and \$701,000 will be used to cover indirect costs.

PASCO'S ESSER 3 SPENDING

Pasco has spent \$30 million of its \$36.7 million in ESSER 3 allocations.

The district hasn't updated the spending amounts on its website in a while, but what's available paints a picture of what the district is prioritizing in its final months with the federal funds. Here's how the district is spending ESSER 3 this year:

- \$8.2 million to cover existing staff, including health aides, summer school teachers, additional work, and for staff at the Digital Learning Academy.
- \$1.1 million to buy educational technology supplies.
- \$1 million to cover indirect costs brought on by ESSER spending, operational costs for school, communications support, and rental costs for storage facilities.
- \$300,000 to expand AVID, a college readiness support system for students to increase their awareness of, and access to, college and career success.
- \$70,000 for supplies.
- \$50,000 for virtual instructional software.
- \$47,000 to mount projectors to ceilings in portable buildings.

Of the \$36.7 million, \$7.3 million has to be spent on learning loss. And Pasco has used only \$3.6 million of that so far.

Learning loss funds will cover:

- \$2.5 million for additional staff costs to address learning loss.
- \$490,000 for supplemental tutoring services for students.
- \$289,000 to cover indirect costs.
- \$255,000 for the Hazel Health one-on-one student counseling services.
- \$100,000 for staff training for AVID and professional development.

2 civil rights icons to beloved Pasco teacher. What will Pasco name its new high school?

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Pasco, WA

From Arthur Fletcher and Cesar Chavez to the beloved Pasco health care worker Martha Galvez, more than 300 names were suggested for two new Pasco schools already under construction.

In all, some 600 Pasco community members sent in their favorite choices.

Two naming committees will now meet over the next month to recommend up to five suggestions that will be forwarded to the Pasco School Board.

The board will review the finalists at its Oct. 10 meeting and then pick the names for the two schools at an Oct. 24 meeting.

The district hopes to have the details wrapped up by Nov. 1 to incorporate the names into the design of the schools.

Mascots and school colors will be picked later. The district also has started the process of redrawing its boundaries to incorporate the new schools.

Voters earlier this year approved a 21-year, \$195.5 million bond measure to build a third comprehensive high school at 6091 Burns Road and a 600-student technical high school in east Pasco.

District policy says the names must be meaningful to residents.

Chiawana High School, for example, which opened in 2009, was named for the Native American word for “big river” or “father of water,” referring to the Columbia River.

Names of living people will be avoided and cannot conflict with the names of other schools in the district or surrounding districts, says the policy.

Several surveyed community members suggested names based around the region’s unique geographical features. Those included:

- Desert Sky or Desert Vista High School
- Sage or Sageview High School
- West Pasco High School
- Palouse High School
- Great Forks High School
- Snake River High School
- Juniper Dunes High School
- Basin or Columbia Basin High School
- Dust Devils High School

A full list of the names can be read on the district’s website at psd1.org.

PATRICIA SULLIVAN ROACH

One name stood out as a favorite among hundreds of suggestions.

About 20 proposed naming the new high school after Patricia Sullivan Roach, a 12-year Mark Twain Elementary librarian who died in 2012.

She is well-known for her tireless work in the Tri-City community, as well as her involvement with Lourdes Medical Center, the Pasco Library board, the Franklin County Historical Society and Museum, and St. Patrick's Parish.

She was one of the first babies to be born at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in 1921 and graduated from Pasco High School in 1939.

Roach also served as the first "Miss Pasco" in 1941, according to survey responses. She was inducted into Pasco High School's Hall of Fame in 2004.

ARTHUR FLETCHER

Arthur Fletcher — known as the "Father of Affirmative Action" — was the first Black person elected to the Pasco City Council and stood as a national figure in the march for civil rights.

He was an adviser to several Republican presidents and was the first Black candidate to run for statewide office.

Fletcher served in the U.S. Army starting in 1943 until he was injured while fighting in Europe in World War II. He went on to get involved in government contracting and organizing the Black vote.

In 1964, he moved out to Eastern Washington to work at the Hanford nuclear site. After serving the city of Pasco and a failed run for Washington lieutenant governor, Fletcher went on to serve as Nixon's assistant secretary of labor and later as executive director of the United Negro College Fund.

MARTHA A. GALVEZ

Martha Galvez was a beloved Pasco health care worker who served thousands during her 27-year career as a nurse.

She grew up the fourth in a household of nine siblings. At age 10, her parents uprooted their lives in Guadalajara, Mexico, to move to Pasco and give their kids a better life.

She graduated from Pasco High School in 1989 and from Columbia Basin College's nursing school in 1994, according to the Washington State Nurses Association.

During her tenure as a birth center nurse at Kadlec Regional Medical Center, Galvez brought more than 3,000 lives into the world. She said her job was more of a calling than a career.

SACAJAWEA

The famous Shoshone translator with the Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery.

The expedition camped two nights in October 1805 with other Native Americans at the site of modern-day Pasco at the confluence of the Snake and Columbia Rivers.

Sacajawea Historical State Park now commemorates the historic site.

JAMES PRUITT

James Pruitt was a longtime Tri-City resident, youth counselor and civil rights leader who was the first Black employee to work for the city of Pasco. He worked in the police and community relations department.

He arrived in the Tri-Cities from Mississippi in 1948, moving here to work at the Hanford nuclear site. He described his new home as “very, very prejudiced” and very racist.

He became a leading Black voice for the east Pasco community during its days of heavy racial segregation.

GLADYS SUTTON COLEMAN

The first Black female student to attend and graduate Pasco High School in the 1920s, Gladys Sutton Coleman was a beloved trailblazer in the Pasco community.

She served as a missionary and as well as an accomplished pianist. She also worked for the president of Whitman College in Walla Walla at one point.

She is widely known for her devotion to the service of others.

CESAR CHAVEZ

Cesar Chavez was the well-known California civil rights leader, community organizer, environmentalist and farm labor activist. He founded the organization that would later go on to become the United Farm Workers labor union.

He was a 1994 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Shortly after graduating from the eighth grade, Chavez was forced to work the fields to help his family following an accident involving his father. He went on to serve in the U.S. Navy.

He went on to get involved in union organizing, advocating for better pay and safer working conditions, and fighting for the recognized dignity of all farm workers. He succeeded through non-violent boycotts, pickets, fasts and strikes.

JEFFREY DONG

A 40-year Pasco educator known for turning his students into history buffs, Jeffrey Dong touched the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of students.

He also served as a Pasco School Board member.

Dong originally grew up in Seattle, where he received his teaching degree at the University of Washington. He moved to Pasco in 1967 for his first teaching job at Pasco High School and made the area his home.

He was awarded the Crystal Apple Award in 2002 for his dedication to teaching. He died in 2013.

These are the 3 finalists to fill the seat of an ousted Richland school official

BY ERIC ROSANE
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Pasco, WA

Educational Service District 123's board of directors announced Thursday a list of finalists they will interview next week to fill Semi Bird's seat on the Richland School Board.

Bird and two other school board members — Audra Byrd and Kari Williams — were recalled and removed from office earlier this month over a surprise vote they made last year to make COVID face masks optional.

The decision to recall three of the board's five members left the governing body without the majority quorum it needs to hold meetings.

Because of that, ESD 123 is tasked by law to appoint one person so that it can function again.

"This situation where the board does not have a quorum because of a certain situation is extremely rare," said ESD 123 Superintendent Steve McCullough. "In order for the Richland School Board to approve payroll, to approve a budget or budget extension — to make any action that is legal, they have to have a quorum."

Once ESD 123 appoints a new board member, the Richland School Board will begin soliciting applications to fill the seats vacated by Byrd and Williams.

Eleven Richland community members submitted applications for the seat. The ESD 123 board unanimously voted at its regular meeting Thursday to narrow that number down to three.

These three finalists will be interviewed by the ESD board at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 29:

- Scott Butner
- Jeffrey Estes
- Lindsay Lightner

Following a closed-door executive session to discuss their qualifications, the ESD board will then appoint one to the board.

That appointee will take the oath of office at the Richland School Board's next meeting, Aug. 31.

But Bird's seat is subject to reelection this fall. The top two vote-getters from the Aug. 1 primary — Chelsie Beck and Nino Kapitula — will face off in the Nov. 7 general election to replace him and earn a four-year term. They will take the seat after the election is certified.

This is the first time in perhaps several decades that a school board in Washington state has had a majority of its members recalled by a public vote.

WHO ARE THEY INTERVIEWING?

Scott Butner is a local photographer and small business owner who spent nearly 30 years as a research scientist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

Jeffrey Estes also worked at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. His career spanned 28 years, and he retired in 2016 as director of the STEM Education and Outreach program for PNNL.

Lindsay Lightner is a career-track assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University Tri-Cities, where she coordinates multiple education programs.

The Tri-City Herald has filed a public records request for the names of the eight other applicants for the position.