

Richland Schools

Office of the Superintendent

Memorandum

Date: 10/6/23
To: School Board
From: Shelley Redinger
Subject: Friday Packet

Enclosed please find the following documents:

- Board Dates to Remember
- Community Events/Activities
- Special Education Family Resources Fair Flyer
- Media



TO: Board of Directors
RE: Event Dates
DATE: 10/6/23

October:

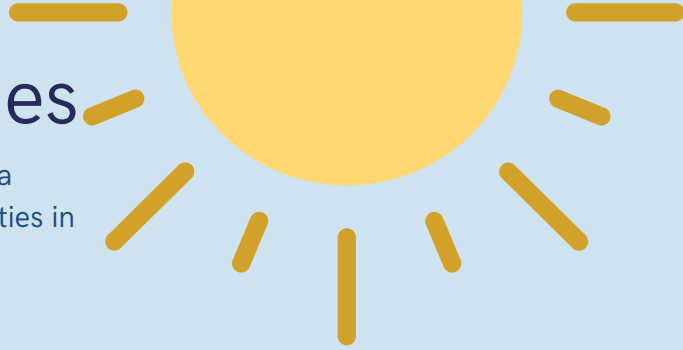
- 10/17...Board Meeting-Board Room-6:30
 - **6:00-6:30-Ex Session**
- 10/31...Board Meeting-Board Room-6:30
 - 5:30-6:30-Ex Session-(only if needed)

November:

- 11/14...Board Meeting-Board Room-6:30
 - 5:30-6:30-Ex Session-(only if needed)
- 11/28...Board Meeting-Board Room-6:30
 - 5:30-6:30-Ex Session-(only if needed)

Upcoming Events/Activities

This list is suggestions of RSD and community events to attend as a Board Member. By no means is it a comprehensive list of all activities in the District. Future events will be added weekly.



October

Wednesday 4 PTO Fun Run
2:00 - 3:30 PM
Homelink Main Campus

Saturday 7 Cavalclade of Bands
Time: To Be Announced
Lampson Stadium, Kennewick
www.cavalcadeofbandswa.org

Thursday 12 Family Resources Fair-
Special Education Dept.
6:00 - 7:30 PM
TLAC

Tuesday 17 College and Career Expo
5:00 - 7:00 PM
Hanford High School

Tuesday 24 RHS Fall Choir Concert
7:00 - 8:30 PM
RHS Auditorium

Friday 6 Cane Quest Northwest
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM
Leona Libby Middle School

Thursday 12 RSD Facilities
Community Update
12:00 PM
Zoom

**Thursday 12 -
Saturday 14** One Acts Festival
7:30 - 10:00 PM
Hanford High School
www.hanforddrama.org/

Wednesday 18 College and Career Expo
5:00 - 7:00 PM
Richland High School

Thursday 26 Fall Red Cross Blood Drive
8:00 AM - 2:30 PM
Hanford High School
(Small Eyrie Gym)

November

Thursday 2 RSD Facilities
Community Update
12:00 PM
Zoom

**Hanford + Richland High
Athletic Events Calendars**

www.hanfordathletics.com/events

www.bomberathletics.com/events



RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT PRESENT

FAMILY RESOURCES FAIR

MAKING CONNECTIONS

THURSDAY, OCT. 12 • 6-7:30 P.M.

RSD Teaching, Learning & Administration Center
6972 Keene Road, West Richland, WA

Join RSD's Special Education Department for the first annual Family Resources Fair! **Make connections** and discover new resources from more than 30 local and state organizations. All ages are welcome at this free event. A light dinner will be available for attendees. Childcare will be provided by the Richland High School Key Club.



Better way to teach reading?

One Tri-Cities school district believes science is key



BOB BRAWDY BBRAWDY@TRICITYHERALD.COM

Kindergarten teacher Toni Cuello works with a group of her Desert Sky Elementary students to sound out letters of the alphabet recently in her classroom of the West Richland school.

BY ERIC ROSANE

EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM

West Richland, WA

Toni Cuello meets with a small group of her kindergarten students to study in her classroom one afternoon.

It's the first full week of class at Desert Sky Elementary in West Richland, and these students are learning their ABCs.

With each letter, Cuello raises a laminated sheet showing an image reference and a mouth shape. She works with them to sound the letter out.

Students then take little sticks and form the shape of each letter. How might they write it on paper? How might they see it in a book or a sentence?

“We still have a lot of kids that aren’t reading on level in the upper grades, and I teach kindergarten because I know that the foundation for literacy is so important,” said Cuello, who is in her 20th year teaching. “That’s why I love kinder. It’s important to me that these kids leave prepared.”

This method of reading instruction isn’t just new to her students — it’s also new to Cuello.

For two years, she and more than 100 of her peers in the Richland School District have spent hundreds of hours in a new literacy training called [LETRS, or Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling](#), to relearn how to teach students reading.

The district is also field testing two new K-5 curricula — [Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts](#), and [HMH Into Reading](#) — with nearly 600 students in all 11 elementary schools participating.

One will be chosen and implemented in time for the 2024-25 school year.

Both efforts are based in the “science of reading” — a broad term describing a comprehensive body of empirical research spanning several decades detailing what matters and what works in the field of literacy

instruction.

Within that science, Richland teachers are shifting to a “structured literacy” model where students are explicitly taught word identification and decoding strategies to support reading instruction.

This isn’t something new — educators have been debating the best ways to increase literacy rates for decades, and the science of reading has been at the center of many of those discussions.

But it’s taken off in popularity since the COVID pandemic. And now the Richland School District is placing its bets on a nationwide trend that aims to back up early childhood literacy instruction with some science.

“We have too many students who aren’t reading,” said Derek O’Konek, the school district’s executive director of elementary teaching and learning. “If we can’t get them a solid foundation by third-grade, it’s very challenging to catch them back up.”

Richland Superintendent Shelly Redinger said her goal is to increase the percentage of K-3 students meeting grade-level reading standards by 3 points by the end of this school year.

BUILDING READING CONFIDENCE

Cuello began implementing Language Essentials and structured literacy methods last year in her lessons.

As summer approached, she saw more students gain confidence in reading, spelling and writing.

“I really felt like last year, the students that I had left much more confident and able to tackle something without prompting or asking for help right away, which is pretty common for that age group,” she said. “I think that there was a lot of, ‘Aha’s!’ and things that I saw over the years that were challenging for kids, and it really gave me the research to understand why and the understanding.”

Structured literacy focuses on five pillars of reading instruction:

- Phonics
- Phonemic awareness
- Vocabulary
- Fluency
- Comprehension

Writing and oral language development have also been recent additions to this model.

Students come into kindergarten knowing very little about reading and writing. Many may know just a few letters — perhaps their ABCs — while others have a basic foundation of how to string words together.

As those students leave for 1st grade, Cuello says, those students should have a solid foundation in the alphabet, and should begin reading and writing some. She said most do learn with those skills, but there are many who struggle.

Having that foundation is important because students begin to use reading and writing as a primary medium to learn other concepts by the time they're in the third-grade, she said. This is also the time when students begin to foster a love and desire for learning.

“I really came into teaching during balanced literacy — a reader’s and writer’s workshop model, where kids were exposed to literacy in a variety of ways, and we hoped that they would kind of hook to one of the ways that we were teaching,” Cuello said.

But many students — especially those with reading disabilities, like dyslexia — never did catch on.

Under structured literacy, Cuello said she's teaching students to decode language and break it down to its basics. Gone are the days of "guessing" at a word.

"They'll look at letters and come to a word that they don't know, and instead of looking at the picture or guessing — which is really what they did often in reading in the past — they're looking at sounds that they know and putting things together," Cuello said.

April Mitchell teaches third-grade at Tapteal Elementary in Richland, where one in five students are English language learners. She's also begun implementing Language Essentials and structured literacy into her classroom.

Before the pandemic, less than half of new students would come into her classroom at the beginning of the year reading at grade level.

That struggle was exacerbated after the pandemic.

Just one in four students in her third-grade class last year were meeting reading grade-level standards. These were the students who were in kindergarten when the pandemic forced schools to close for several months.

It was a Herculean task, but by the end of last year about 43% of students were reading on grade level — about what they would normally see at the beginning of the school year.

"LETRS (training) helped us tremendously to know how to help these kids who are not coming in to class at a third-grade reading level," she said.

Most students struggle with phonics, which is the science of sound and pronunciation. That can be explained because English for some is not their primary language spoken at home.

She also sees students struggle to read and build a vocabulary, which can be a sign that some students just aren't reading enough at home.

The wholesale instruction of all these skills are important because they're intertwined, Mitchell says.

“Sometimes just getting a book in a child’s hand is incredibly powerful... but sometimes there are skills that need to be taught before you can put a book in a kid’s hand,” she said.

LETRS AND THE SCIENCE OF READING

There’s something of a reading revolution happening in America today as educators and academics discuss how best to crack the code of literacy instruction.

This revolution was sparked by setbacks seen after the pandemic-era remote learning, as well as decades of subpar national reading scores.

“There is a literacy crisis across our country,” Redinger said.

More than half — nearly 60% — of Tri-City third-grade students [did not meet grade-level reading standards last year](#). In Richland, that number is at 43%.

While Pasco and Kennewick both provide structured literacy training for teachers to use in small groups and one-on-one intervention, Richland is the first school district in the Tri-Cities to go all-in on this reading science.

Nationwide, 37% of fourth-graders performed “below basic” on a reading assessment, [according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#).

LETRS has spread in popularity among teachers for many years, with many citing the “Mississippi model” as evidence of its effectiveness.

The Southern State saw big reading gains on the NAEP exam in 2019 after implementing training for K-3rd grade teachers in 2014, [according to Education Week](#), although those gains haven’t been solely attributed to the training.

Regardless, that excitement has spread to the Richland School District, where more than 120 teachers, principals and educators have so far taken the course, which totals upwards of 160 hours of professional development time.

“It’s picking up speed. It’s like wildfire,” said Kristina Tucker, Richland’s English-Language Arts program coordinator. “Educators are very excited to get in.”

LETRS takes a “speech to print” approach to teaching foundational skills, beginning first with [phoneme awareness](#), which is the ability to hear, identify, move or change sounds in spoken word.

Once kids have that skill, they can connect sounds to letters and letters to words (phonics), and then begin to read words, according to Education Week.

It also goes over how and why to teach word parts, also known as morphology.

In the second part, LETRS goes over how to develop student vocabulary knowledge, how to create a language-rich classroom, and how teachers can build connections between reading and writing.

It's different from the balanced literacy approach of throwing kids head-first into reading and expecting them to understand key concepts by osmosis. The concept of LETRS is based on decades of research and is a core tenet of the science of reading approach.

Simply put, LETRS is popular because it equips teachers with more tools to holistically instruct their curriculum, evaluate student progress, diagnose deficiencies and make timely interventions.

Mitchell says the training has staying power and goes beyond the “trendy things” teachers see in education. It goes back to the basics of spelling, phonics and word comprehension.

“It just leads to students becoming better readers, better writers and, ultimately, better communicators,” she said. “It's all interlinked.”

A SILVER BULLET FOR READING?

Teaching early literacy is neither wholly a science or an art — it's a little bit of both.

And as science of reading concepts continue their momentum into the mainstream, some researchers caution against searching for a “silver bullet” approach.

Margaret Vaughn, a tenured professor in Washington State University's College of Education, argues there's no “perfect recipe” for teaching kids how to read.

“What we need to have is an adaptive approach that's really looking at student interests, motivations, their background knowledge and how that all fits together to meet the needs of students,” she said.

Vaughn's perspective was informed by nine years of teaching elementary education in Philadelphia and the Raleigh-Durham area, as well as several years researching what drives student motives and engagement in the classroom.

Vaughn believes it's important to use teaching methods based in the science of reading, but focusing on the instruction of discrete skills without awareness of a student's interests, backgrounds and cultures can be detrimental to their education.

She argues building administrators should encourage teachers to feel free to be adaptive in the classroom and to help students find an “authentic purpose” for their education. It can also have a bottom-line benefit on state test scores, she argues.

“The important thing is that (teachers) see students as collaborators in the learning process and that they value student agency,” Vaughn said.

While 30 states in the U.S. have passed legislation supporting evidence-based reading and writing, Washington is not one of them.

Science of reading advocates, [including Sara Buetow of Decoding Dyslexia Washington](#), feel that the state is falling behind on this front and is allowing its under-served students to fall through the cracks.

And only in recent years has Washington state begun mandating school districts to [screen students in grades K-2 for dyslexia](#) in order to provide evidenced-based multi-sensory structured literacy interventions.

https://www.applevalleynewsnow.com/news/education/back-to-school/asl-classes-introduced-into-rsd-high-schools-the-only-thing-we-cant-do-is-hear/article_35259186-5e12-11ee-ac46-570dbc3d7c07.html

ASL classes introduced into RSD high schools: 'The only thing we can't do is 'hear'

By Rylee Fitzgerald

Sep 28, 2023



RICHLAND, Wash. — A new program introduced this year into the Richland School District is American Sign Language. Both Hanford and Richland high schools are offering ASL 1 this year for its students, with more levels to come.

According to Maria Lascaster, Hanford's new ASL teacher, there was an initial reaction from students who maybe weren't expecting their ASL teacher to be completely deaf.

"I wish I had a camera to see their faces on that first day and document that. Their faces were a bit shocked. They were a bit shocked and they felt a little awkward maybe," said HHS ASL teacher, Maria Lascaster.

But as skills grow, so have the students' confidence in class.

"So far, for the past month or so, they're just more comfortable now with me that we've been here at school, they come up and chat with me. They feel comfortable emailing me, and really they're just so motivated to learn," Lascaster said.

This enthusiasm isn't just at Hanford, but in Stacey Bright's classroom at Richland High School as well.

"Honestly, they're all motivated. It's a, 'I sign, you sign,' and their hands are up, they're ready to go and it's really phenomenal to see," said RHS ASL teacher, Stacey Bright.

For hearing people, it may be strange to walk into a class seeing a completely silent classroom of students engaged and watching their teacher, but that appears to be the situation in both of the high schools.

These teachers are hoping their students come away from the class understanding deaf culture a little bit more, having deaf awareness and cherishing the language, that way they can communicate effectively and see the world in a different way.

"A lot of them are going to work and they may have deaf people come through their line or at the restaurants and they can build that structure and that connection between communication," said Bright.

There was a lot of interest from students in both schools for taking these ASL courses, and both instructors are hoping for more sign language teachers to come aboard when the schools expand into ASL 2, and maybe even ASL 3. Both instructors teach five full classes of ASL 1 this year.

"I just feel that this, teaching them this, is such a benefit for them. They're going to learn not only the words and the signs, but then they'll build that relationship between the hearing world and the deaf world, and that's so important that we connect those two," Lascaster said.

The goal is to break down the barrier of communication; for students to gain insight on a community they are only beginning to understand.

"There's so many things people think we can't do, but the only thing we can't do is 'hear.' Mentally, physically, visually, we're so capable, we're so capable, and so we really want to expose that to people and show people, 'look what we can do. Look at all these deaf people in the world doing these great things.' We can do this and so it's good that we expose this to the hearing world and show them," said Lascaster.

According to Lascaster and Bright, they want to see their students continue on with ASL after they're out of school, and to keep signing.

If you're interested in learning more about the local deaf community, you can find more information on the Washington Advocates of Deaf & Hard of Hearing for the Tri-Cities [here](#).

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Gator, pork chop lollipops & more at the Central Washington State Fair
By Emily Goodell



Woody's in Kennewick Owner dies after Pitbull attack
Morgan Huff, Anna Trejo - Apple Valley News Now



Pasco City Council interviewing six applicants for the District 6 Seat
Morgan Huff - Apple Valley News Now



Gusty Winds Tonight, Cool Overnight...Slight Chance of Showers Tomorrow
Stacy Lee, Weather Anchor

Chief finance officer praised for taking school district ‘in crisis’ from balance of \$5M to \$50M



BRIAN HAYES • BHAYES@THENEWSTRIBUNE.COM

Sumner-Bonney Lake School District Chief Financial and Operations Officer Bang Parkinson greets students at Daffodil Valley Elementary on Sept. 6 in Sumner.

BY ANGELICA RELENTE
ARELENTE@THENEWSTRIBUNE.COM

A large calculator sits on top of Bang Parkinson's desk.

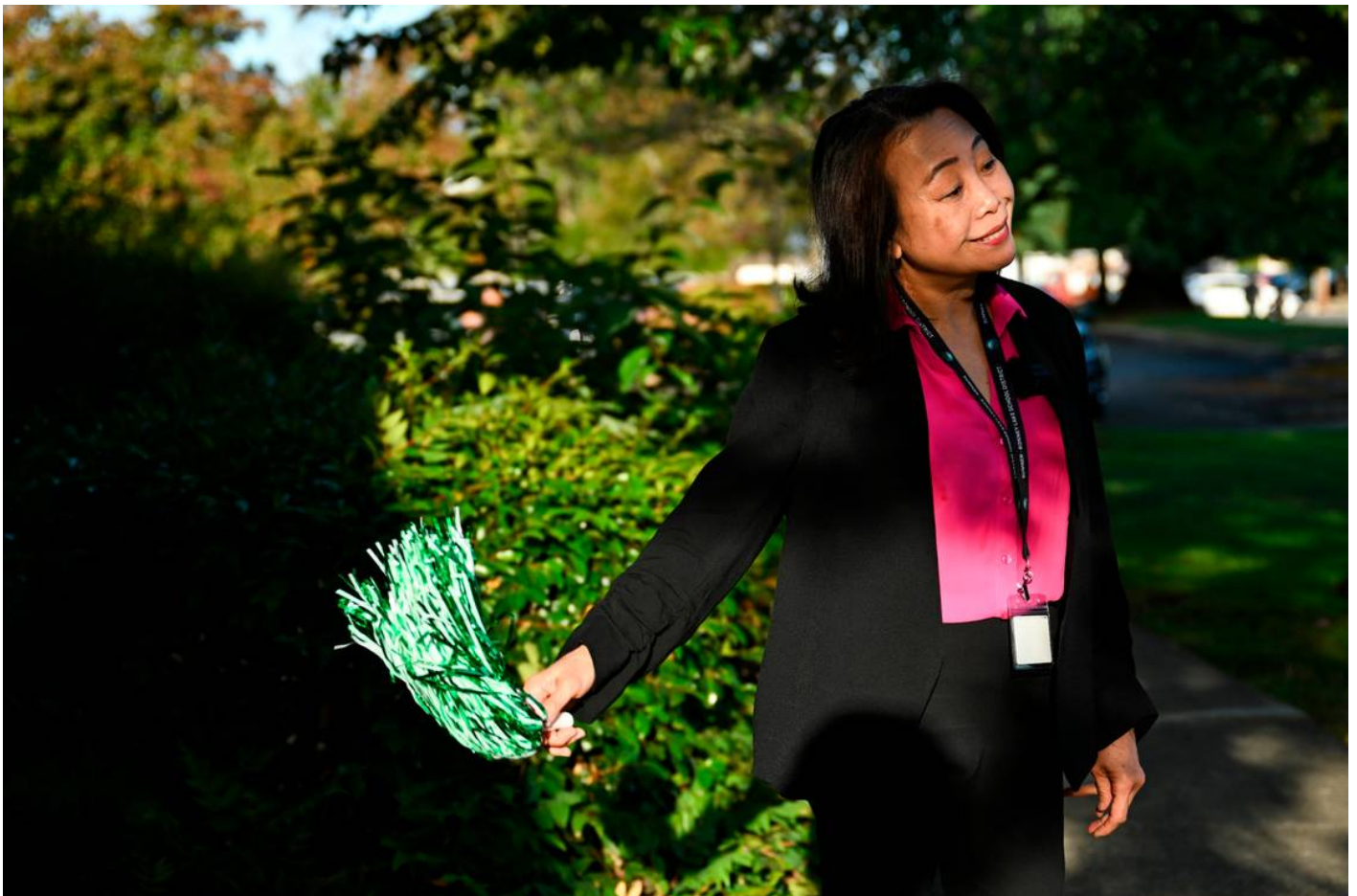
In her office there is a sign that reads: "I'M NOT HERE TO BE AVERAGE I'M HERE TO BE AWESOME."

To the left of her desk is a board hanging on the wall, adorned with photos, maps and other paperwork. Four photos show her nieces and nephews — two were taken in 2007 during Chinese Lunar New Year.

“I love them,” she said about her nieces and nephews. “Children can produce a lot for the future ... our responsibility is to [help them] grow and make them smarter than us.”

Parkinson is the chief finance and operations officer for the Sumner-Bonney Lake School District. Her job is to monitor the district’s finances with a team of 13.

She received the distinguished school business official award this year from the [Washington Association of School Business Officials \(WASBO\)](#).



BRIAN HAYES • BHAYES@THENEWSTRIBUNE.COM

Sumner-Bonney Lake School District Chief Financial and Operations Officer Bang Parkinson greets student at Daffodil Valley Elementary, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2023, Sumner, Wash.

The school board celebrated her accomplishment during the [May 17 board meeting](#).

“[Parkinson] brought our district from being in crisis to now being in a very great position,” Sherrie Wilcox, the school district’s payroll and benefits manager, said. Wilcox nominated Parkinson for the WASBO award.

Parkinson joined the school district in late 2018. At the time, the district’s fund balance was about \$4.9 million. This year, the balance is about \$49.8 million.

Superintendent Laurie Dent said she hired Parkinson because her reputation is “stellar.” Parkinson has the ability to take a school district’s resources, create a plan and produce results, Dent said.

The school district’s budget in 2018 was tight, Dent said. Parkinson rolled up her sleeves, got to work, and was intentional with the changes she made to the budget, Dent said.

Parkinson cut \$4 million from the budget that year. The cut included positions such as a floater — an employee who fills in when someone is out.



BRIAN HAYES • BHAYES@THENEWSTRIBUNE.COM

Sumner-Bonney Lake School District Chief Financial and Operations Officer Bang Parkinson greets student at Daffodil Valley Elementary, Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2023, Sumner, Wash.

About 85 percent of the budget supports personnel pay, Parkinson said. Hiring more than what is needed can create “a lot of problems,” she said.

There are many ways Parkinson replenished the school district’s balance. One way was ensuring the number of staff kept up with the number of students enrolled in the district. This helped prevent overstaffing, she said.

She also said she avoided hiring people who would need to be let go later. It’s not her philosophy, she said. It was important to her to hire and retain qualified staff.

Wilcox said she nominated Parkinson for the WASBO award because she takes the school district's budget seriously. Parkinson won't spend the district's money on things that won't benefit students, Wilcox said.

She started overseeing finances for her family's business

Parkinson, 62, lives in Kent. She was born and raised in South Vietnam. She has five siblings — three brothers and two sisters. All but one sibling lives in Kent.

Parkinson's brother, Steven Tran, said her nurturing qualities were apparent starting when they were young. She would often take care of him when he got hurt playing or wandering around the neighborhood.

Parkinson said she wasn't able to finish high school in South Vietnam. The curriculum changed drastically, and her classroom size dwindled as people fled the country during the Vietnam War around 1955.

"It was tough," she said about her time living in South Vietnam.

Her father used to have a manufacturing company at the time. The company produced laundry brushes. The company needed someone to handle the finances, so she decided to study accounting a few years after she left high school.

She realized she was good at it, and felt motivated to continue doing it for the long run.

Parkinson moved to the United States in 1992 when she was in her 30s. She has lived in Los Angeles, Seattle and Renton.

She wanted to continue pursuing accounting in the U.S., so she took English language classes upon moving to Washington state. Later, she got her master's degree in business administration from the University of Washington, and she became a certified public accountant.

Parkinson has worked in finance since 1998. She used to work at the Renton School District, city of Renton, Highline School District and Bethel School District.

Asked if she ever imagined herself as a chief finance and operations officer, Parkinson said it was her goal to become one.

"It's a dream come true," she said.

Dent said Parkinson is a compassionate person. Parkinson knows the value of education and what it can provide to students, the superintendent said.

"When you see her with kids, you see her heart," Dent said.

Help us choose our next East Pierce County Trailblazers

Representation is crucial in news coverage.

There are BIPOC leaders in East Pierce County, and we're telling their stories.

The Puyallup Herald is launching BIPOC Trailblazers of East Pierce County, a website to showcase agents of change.

Trailblazers aren't afraid to make waves. They make it a priority to positively impact those around them. They transform their community for the better. East Pierce County area is growing, quickly. We want to make sure the stories we're telling are the ones that matter to the people who live here, our neighbors.

We need your help to do that.

Please tell us which local trailblazers we should be talking to.

kelsey.greenough@rsd.edu [Switch account](#)



 Not shared

* Indicates required question

Who should our next East Pierce County Trailblazer be?

Your answer

What makes them a Trailblazer?

Your answer

How can we reach them?

Your answer

Your name* *

Your answer

Email address *

Your answer

City/Town

Your answer

Would you like to sign up for our weekly East Pierce Pulse newsletter?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Questions, comments or suggestions

Your answer

Enrollment 'blitz' at private schools drives spending spree



BOB BRAWDY BBRAWDY@TRICITYHERALD.COM

Jim Cochran, superintendent at Liberty Christian School in Richland, stands in the crowded hallway for the middle and high school students during a recent class change at the private, non-denominational Christian school in Richland.

BY ERIC ROSANE
EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM

Richland, WA

It's a busy and bustling time to be at [Liberty Christian School](#).

In the midst of expansions, renovations and more classes, teachers and students are scurrying for classroom space at the drop of a pencil.

It's kind of like a game of musical chairs.

The room that housed the library last year now plays host to a class of 6th graders. And an old cafeteria currently under renovation is temporarily housing the library, high school media productions class and a 2nd grade Spanish-language arts class.

“Every year, it’s a lot of movement and squeezing every inch that we can get out of instruction spaces,” said Superintendent Jim Cochran. “We are blitzed.”

It’s no secret that the Richland-based school is seeing a modern day enrollment boom.

Attendance has soared 54% since the 2018-19 school year, and now nearly 590 K-12 students are enrolled for classes this fall. They could open another 7th grade class today, if only they had the space and time.

As interest in public education alternatives see a revival, schools like Liberty Christian are pushing the envelope to expand to fill the need.



Ads by Google

Liberty Christian has committed to a number of projects — including heating and cooling system upgrades and roof repairs — to extend the life of their building.

The school also is funding a \$2.2 million renovation for the seven-decade-old multi-purpose room and cafeteria, which used to be part of the old Spalding School building.

For years it was used for storage, but will soon be transformed into a new “fine arts” wing. They’re funding it with a community campaign and hope to not take on debt.

“The goal with this is that music, drama and arts would use this wing as they see fit,” Cochran said.

Liberty Christian also installed its third modular portable classroom on campus this year to serve 5th grade students.



Ads by Google

Unless the school can find suitable off-campus space for its existing high school programs, three more portables may have to be installed on the 19-acre campus in the next three years.

“We need partners,” Cochran said.

Liberty Christian isn’t the only private school in the Tri-Cities that’s expanding to meet demand.

The 500-student Calvary Christian School is adding junior and senior grade levels, and building a sports field off West 10th Avenue, [according to the Tri-Cities Area Journal of Business](#).

And Tri-Cities Prep Catholic High School has begun filing permits to [add 83,000 square feet of classroom space and facilities](#) to its Pasco campus over the coming years.



Ads by Google

PRIVATE SCHOOL, HOMESCHOOLING

The boom in alternative learning has been in part to blame for an ongoing enrollment crisis and public school budgeting shortfalls seen nationwide, after swarms of parents pulled students out of public schools during the COVID pandemic in favor of alternative in-person learning opportunities.

Private school enrollment locally rose at least 17% between 2018 and 2022, according to [public data from the Washington State Board of Education](#).

And home-based instruction saw a 33% bump between 2019 and 2022, per data from [the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#). Three-fourths of that growth were students who left the Kennewick School District.

Today, 2,500 Tri-City students attend private school and 1,000 are home schooled.

Educators say parents and legal guardians are making the shift for a variety of reasons, including politics, religious beliefs and program offerings.



Ads by Google

Many private schools also were able to accommodate an earlier return to in-person learning during the pandemic.

Jen Garrison Stuber, advocacy chair for the [Washington Homeschool Organization](#), said the number of students receiving home-based instruction nearly doubled between 2019 and 2020, although that number fell sharply in the following years.

Parents choose to home school for multiple reasons, including vaccine choice, assistance with mental health, social reasons, to give specified instruction or special education, or other reasons, she said.

Meanwhile, Tri-City public school administrators still don't know where hundreds of students went during the pandemic. While [Richland School District enrollment has returned to pre-pandemic levels](#), Kennewick and Pasco haven't fully bounced back yet.

But alternatives are only partly to blame for public school enrollment woes — changes in demographics, declining fertility rates and chronic truancy problems also play a part.



Ads by Google

It's also possible parents are turning their students away from kindergarten since school is optional for students until they turn 8.

Public school remains the most popular and affordable option for most Tri-City parents, with nearly 53,000 kids enrolled this year. The state on average spends [about \\$17,000 annually](#) to educate public school students.

Garrison Stuber said public schools are placing road blocks in front of home schooled students — including holding them behind in grades and not accepting outside credits — that make returning difficult.

“I don't understand why schools aren't bending over backwards to allow any student who wants to come back to do so,” she said. “If they want the students back, they sure aren't acting like it.”

DIVERSITY INITIATIVES

Liberty Christian School is entering its 44th year of ministry.

Its mission — to provide “biblically-based education, marked by academic excellence in a nurturing environment” — has largely gone unchanged in that time, Cochran said.

“There’s been wave after wave of variables that have brought people to us,” Cochran said, and it wasn’t just controversy around COVID, critical race theory or [comprehensive sex education](#).

In 2017, Liberty Christian implemented an initiative to make school more accessible and to diversify the student body.

They dropped annual re-enrollment requirements and implemented a continuous enrollment model, assuming most students and families would decide to continue their education there.

Liberty Christian also started a variable tuition plan where families can get a discount matching the amount they’re able to pay. So far, the school has given out about \$1 million in discounts.

Cochran has been in Christian education for about 40 years, and has led the school for about a decade.

He said he sees similarities today with paradigm shifts at the height of the Christian school trend in the early 2000s.

Culture, politics and technology are all changing at breakneck speeds, while Christian-based private school instruction is slower to the catch.

“I think people are looking around and saying, ‘What do we want for our kids,’” he said.