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Community has first tours of Atfalati Ridge Elementary School

👤 Max Egner 📅 September 03 2021

Families, district officials and local leaders toured the Hillsboro School District's new school in North Plains.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Families toured the Hillsboro School District's newest school, Atfalati Ridge Elementary School, for the first time Thursday, Sept. 2.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713521573-0969.jpg>) A week before students enter the building for their first day of class, the Hillsboro School District on Thursday, Sept. 2, unveiled its newest school: Atfalati Ridge Elementary School.

Finishing touches to the nearly 74,000-square-foot school that will serve up to 600 students in the rapidly growing city of North Plains were completed last month.

Located in the Sunset Ridge housing development, it's the first new school established by the district since 2009, and the first school built in North Plains since 1954.

The \$37 million project was part of the district's \$407 million bond, which voters passed in 2017.

For the first time, families, school district officials and local elected leaders on Thursday toured the building, which includes four open spaces that will serve as common learning areas, a glass-enclosed "think tank," a media center and a STEAM lab. Tours were conducted in limited-capacity groups due to surging COVID-19 cases in the Pacific Northwest.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Atfalati Ridge Elementary School is the Hillsboro School District's new 74,000-square-foot school in North Plains.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713522203-0969.jpg>)The campus features a lighted turf field, an ADA-accessible playground, a covered play area with basketball hoops, and an indoor gymnasium.

During their remarks at a ribbon-cutting ceremony and dedication of the school ahead of tours, officials acknowledged that the school represents new opportunities for students, the community and the district.

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"We have an opportunity to build a new culture, and that's incredibly important to us," said Superintendent Mike Scott.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the school, besides its state-of-the-art amenities, is its name.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Community members tour the gymnasium of the Hillsboro School District's recently constructed school in North Plains, Atfalati Ridge Elementary School, on Thursday, Sept. 2.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713522129-0969.jpg>) Last year, the district's board approved (<https://pamplinmedia.com/ht/117-hillsboro-tribune-news/483111-389617-hillsboro-school-district-set-to-name-new-school-atfalati-ridge>) the name after a community outreach and selection process that garnered nearly 900 responses.

The name recognizes the Atfalati people, a Native American tribe also known as the Tualatin or Wapato Lake Indians, who inhabited the plains surrounding the Tualatin River and the hills near what is now Forest Grove for thousands of years before European American settlers arrived.

Advocates of the name say it will prompt students and the wider community to ask questions, learn, and remember people whose history has largely been erased after disease brought by white settlers nearly wiped out the tribe.

Surviving members of the Atfalati people were forced to leave their historic land and live on the Grand Ronde Reservation in 1856. People who trace their heritage to the Atfalati are members of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde today.

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School and district officials collaborated with members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to incorporate elements of tribal history and culture into the building.

Before entering the building, Dani Johnson, principal of the school, read from a plaque near the entrance containing a land acknowledgment — a statement recognizing the Atfalati people as the historic stewards of the land where the school was constructed.

On the walls inside the building near the main entrance, central hallway and common areas are four quotations significant to the Atfalati people.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Quotations significant to the Atfalati people, a Native American tribe also known as the Tualatin or Wapato Lake Indians, decorate the walls of Atfalati Ridge Elementary School in North Plains.

(https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713521913-0969.jpg)"Long ago the people observed everything with care," reads one quote marked as a Kalapuyan saying.

The school's learning areas contain paintings of different natural ecosystems, including a lake, river, mountain and oak savanna.

A "seasonal round" — a diagram showing native plants and animals according to traditional annual harvest and gathering patterns — is painted on the wall in the cafeteria. The seasonal round was created by artist Steph Littlebird, a prominent local artist and member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde. One animal that appears in the diagram is a Blue Jay, the school's mascot.

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Johnson, who grew up in Hillsboro and previously served as principal of Butternut Creek Elementary School, says Native American education will be a part of the school's curriculum, adding that she plans to regularly invite tribal members to the school for projects.

She said she's currently working on plans for Indigenous artists to come to the school as resident artists. The artists would teach students about their artistic techniques and then lead students through using them, Johnson said.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - Left to right, Mark Watson, Hillsboro School District board chair, former board member Jaci Spross and Dani Johnson, principal of Atfalati Ridge Elementary School, dedicate a plaque with a land acknowledgement to the new school.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713521752-0969.jpg>) Johnson acknowledged the start of the school year will be abnormal due to state and district requirements to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. She said the school is taking the district's layered mitigation approach, with masking, social distancing, testing and health screenings, very seriously.

"Not only is it important for our students to be on campus for face-to-face learning, it's really important for the adults as well," Johnson said, adding that students learn better and teachers teach better when they're in person.

Zurich Powell, a fourth-grader at the new school, said the thing he's most excited about for the new school year is playing with his friends.

Asked what he thought of the school, he said, "Big. Cool. Awesome."

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Brian and Warittha Powell, Zurich's parents, said they're excited for Zurich and his brother Aurelien, a third-grader, to attend the school.

Brian Powell said the main thing that stands out about the building is all the common learning areas. He said he doesn't imagine they'll be fully used during the pandemic, but he looks forward to seeing how the kids use them in the future.



PMG PHOTO: JAIME VALDEZ - North Plains City Councilor Trista Papen, her husband, Alex Ugarte, and their two children, Emerson, 3, and Ethan, 5, in front of a seasonal round in the cafeteria of Atfalati Ridge Elementary School. Ethan will start at the new school as a kindergartener.

(<https://pamplinmedia.com/images/artimg/00003713522037-0969.jpg>) The family has lived in North Plains for six years. The kids previously attended North Plains Elementary School but were moved to the new school during the boundary readjustment process earlier this year.

The kids were disappointed that some of their friends didn't get transferred as well, Brian Powell said.

Warittha Powell said she's happy the kids will have Native American education as a part of their curriculum.

"I like it," she said. "It's nice to be able to go back to the roots of the area."



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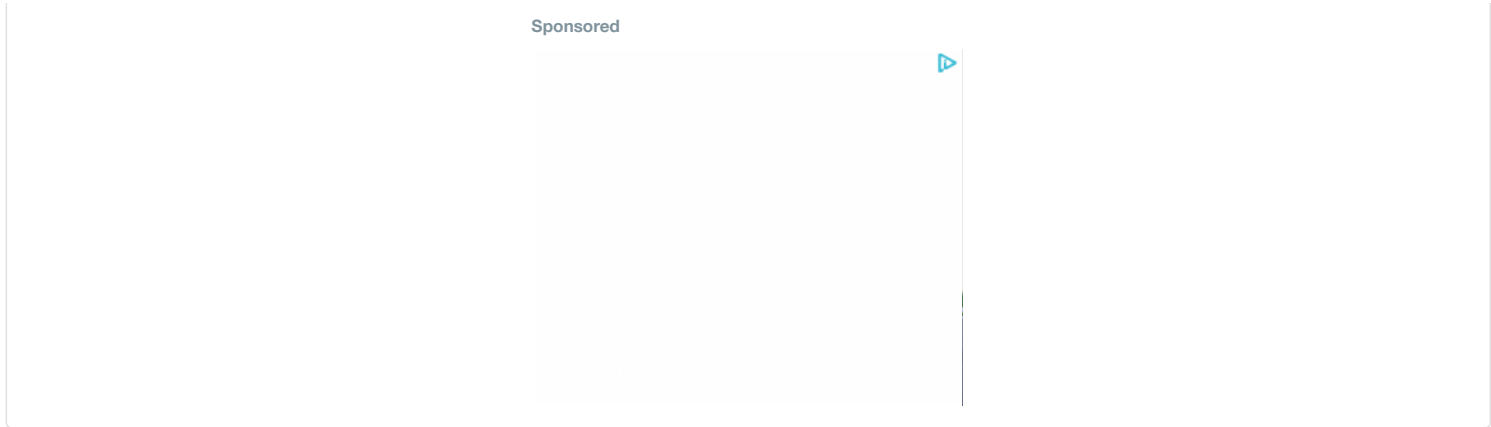
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