

# Richland Schools

## Office of the Superintendent

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### Memorandum

**Date:** 4/5/24  
**To:** School Board  
**From:** Shelley Redinger  
**Subject:** Friday Packet

Enclosed please find the following documents:

- Board Dates to Remember
- Community Events/Activities
- Autism Walk Flyer
- Media



**TO: Board of Directors**  
**RE: Event Dates**  
**DATE: 4/5/24**

**April:**

- **4/9/24...Board Meeting-Board Room – 6:30 PM**
  - **Ex. Session – 5:30 PM**
- **4/23/24...Board Meeting-Board Room**
  - **Ex. Session-(only if needed)**

**May:**

- **5/14/24...Board Meeting-Board Room – 6:30 PM**
  - **Ex. Session-(only if needed)**
- **5/28/24...Board Meeting-Board Room – 6:30 PM**
  - **Ex. Session-(only if needed)**

**June:**

- **6/11/24...Board Meeting-Board Room – 6:30 PM**
  - **Ex. Session-(only if needed)**
- **6/12/24...LAST DAY OF SCHOOL**
- **6/25/24...Board Meeting-Board Room – 6:30 PM**
  - **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.

## April

### Monday 15<sup>th</sup>:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Salmon Summit  
Columbia Park

### Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup>:

- World Culture Day  
3 – 4 PM  
HomeLink Main Campus

### Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup>:

- STEM Night  
  
Tapteal Elementary

### Friday 19<sup>th</sup>:

- Hanford Music Benefit Auction  
5:30 PM  
40504 Demoss Rd., Benton City  
<https://www.hanfordmusic.org/benefit-auction>
- Secondary Marimba Concert (Homelink)  
6 – 7:30 PM  
Richland High Auditorium
- *The Night Witches*  
7:30 PM  
HHS Black Box Theatre  
<https://www.hanforddrama.org/>

### Saturday 20<sup>th</sup>:

- Hanford Spring Bazaar  
9 AM – 2 PM  
Hanford High School
- *The Night Witches*  
7:30 PM  
HHS Black Box Theatre  
<https://www.hanforddrama.org/>

### Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup>:

- AAC Community Night  
5:30 – 7 PM  
TLAC Board Room
- *The Night Witches*  
6 PM  
HHS Black Box Theatre  
<https://www.hanforddrama.org/>

### Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>:

- Desert Sky Talent Show  
6 PM  
Desert Sky Cafeteria

### Friday 26<sup>th</sup>:

- Spring Fundraising Social (Leona Libby)  
6 – 9 PM  
Taverna Tagaris  
<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/1af6582d-4db9-4f81-b99d-28e147a9bee4>
- *The Night Witches*  
7:30 PM  
HHS Black Box Theatre  
<https://www.hanforddrama.org/>

### Saturday 27<sup>th</sup>:

- *The Night Witches*  
2 PM + 7:30 PM  
HHS Black Box Theatre  
<https://www.hanforddrama.org/>

## May

### Friday 3<sup>rd</sup>:

- *Legally Blonde the Musical*  
7:30 PM  
Hanford High Auditorium  
<https://hanford.booktix.net/seating.php>

### Saturday 4<sup>th</sup>:

- *Legally Blonde the Musical*  
7:30 PM  
Hanford High Auditorium  
<https://hanford.booktix.net/seating.php>

### Thursday 9<sup>th</sup>:

- The Hampton Experience (Marimba Concert)  
6 PM  
John Dam Plaza

**Hanford + Richland High School  
Athletics Calendars**

<https://hanfordathletics.com/events>  
<https://bomberathletics.com/events>



**Gather With Us - April 13, 2024 for our first annual  
*OUR AUTISM JOURNEY - BETTER TOGETHER*  
Event and Ceremonial Walk at the Benton County Fairgrounds -  
Open to the Public!**

**This walk and event aims to raise awareness about Autism in our community and encourage inclusivity, support, and involvement of individuals and families with Autism.**

**This community event is for everyone. It will include sensory friendly activities for all ages. This is an educational and interactive journey. The Better Together Autism Journey event runs from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm with the ceremonial walk beginning at 12:30 pm.**

**This event is being hosted by the Tri-Cities Autism Coalition, a local organization made up of parents, professionals and non-profit organizations. Our directors include representatives from The Arc of Tri-Cities, Spectrum Studios, United Family Center, The Kennewick School District, Columbia Industries, Caravel Autism Health, and Apollo Mechanical Contractors.**

*Scan for more info and to join!*



**Our Website**



# Our Autism Journey

....Better Together

**Reúnanse con nosotros: 13 de abril de 2024 para nuestra primera reunión anual NUESTRO VIAJE AL AUTISMO - MEJOR JUNTOS**  
**Evento y caminata ceremonial en los terrenos de la feria de Kennewick**  
**¡abierto al público!**

**Este Evento de La Caminata Del Autismo tiene como objetivo despertar la concientización de la comunidad acerca del Autismo. Así como alentar la inclusividad, el apoyo, y el involucramiento de los individuos y las familias de individuos con Autismo a la comunidad. Este evento de la comunidad es para todos; incluya actividades sensoriales para todas las edades.**

**Este es Un Viaje Interactivo e Educativo. El Evento del Viaje Con El Autismo Unidos Mejor, sera desde las 9:00 a.m. a las 2:00 p.m. y la Caminata Ceremonial empezara a las 12:30 del medio día.**

**Este evento es organizado por The-Tri-Cities Autism Coalition, una organización local creada por padres, profesionistas, y organizaciones no lucrativas. Nuestros directivos incluyen representantes de el Arc of Tri-Cities, Spectrum Studios, United Family Center, The Kennewick School District (El Distrito Escolar de Kennewick), Columbia Industries, Caravel Autism Health, y Apollo Mechanical Contractors.**

*Escanea aquí para más información y para unirse*



Our Website



# Kennewick should come clean on why it canceled school superintendent search



TRI-CITY HERALD FILE

The Kennewick School District headquarters building on West Fourth Avenue.

**BY THE TRI-CITY HERALD EDITORIAL BOARD**

Kennewick, WA

“Forward Together: Progress, Partnership, and Promise” declared a Kennewick School District flyer that landed in residents’ mailboxes this week.

It’s hard to work together when the school board keeps the public in the dark. Parents and taxpayers deserve a full explanation of what’s going on with hiring a new superintendent.

The school board recently [scrapped plans to hire a replacement for Superintendent Traci Pierce](#). Pierce announced more than a year ahead that she would retire in June 2025.

The board decided to use that time to find her successor and install that person as a deputy superintendent for the coming school year. That way the heir apparent could learn the ropes under Pierce before taking over.

That’s no longer the plan. The school board recently met in an executive session and decided to postpone the search. Because the meeting took place behind closed doors, the public can only speculate about what went

wrong. Did school board members have a change of heart? Were the applicants that bad? What?

Elected boards and other governing bodies may meet in executive session to discuss certain sensitive topics described in Washington state law. Whether this meeting met the legal standards is debatable.

It would be one thing if school board members met in private to keep applicants' names confidential during the initial review. But they appear to have discussed far more, coming out of the session ready to call off the search. That discussion about the hiring process should have taken place in the open.

Even if the meeting were permissible under state law, executive sessions are never mandatory. The school board made a choice to have a private conversation without public oversight. The meeting becomes an information black hole, and such secrecy breeds public distrust.

Kennewick schools can hardly afford to erode public confidence right now. [District voters twice declined to pass a school levy before finally doing so in 2023.](#)

The new property tax rates took effect this year to some taxpayer grumbling, but strong financial headwinds remain. The district expects to run deficits of millions of dollars for the next several years. It's a time to rally the community, not keep people out of the loop.

Maybe that fiscal challenge scared off potential superintendent applicants. Turning around a financially struggling school district is a tall order, especially if you have to wait a year playing second-fiddle. Candidates of the caliber that Kennewick deserves are ready to sit in the big chair.

There's something to be said for taking some time to get the new superintendent up to speed. There's also something to be said for bringing someone in with a fresh vision, ready to make changes without inculcating them with the baggage of the previous administration.

Neither approach is inherently better than the other. Which one a board pursues is a strategic choice that reflects whether its members want to stay the course or shake things up.

As of the end of February, the district's headhunter had received only one completed application. There are a lot of vacancies these days, and therefore a lot of competition for talent. [Nearly one-third of districts nationwide](#) lost their superintendent in the past five years, and nearly half of current superintendents are considering leaving their job. Many of them cite politicization of schools as a reason. So perhaps the Kennewick School Board's turn to the right after recent elections tamped down interest.

Or maybe it was the district's low educational attainment scores on the [state report card](#) or the fact that three top administrators are leaving around the same time, creating a leadership vacuum. At least on that last point, the school board has plans to roll two jobs into one and hire someone soon, but that's independent of the superintendent search.

Maybe it was none of that or all of it. The district is otherwise faring well on staff retention with 91% of employees sticking around in 2023, says the recent flier.

Only the few people in the room know the truth, but school board members are using an executive session to shield themselves from public scrutiny and engagement. That's no way to move forward together.



# After two student deaths upended life, families want them to be acknowledged during graduation



ERIC ROSANE • [EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM](mailto:EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM)

Gabriel Moreno and Angelica Reyes of Kennewick hold a photo of their daughter Maria, 17, who died in a car crash in November 2023 and would have graduated from Richland High in June. Their other kids are, from left, Gabey Jr., 6; Cheyanne, 1; and Cherylnn, 4.

BY ERIC ROSANE  
[EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM](mailto:EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM)

After a year of skipping out on classes, Maria Moreno-Reyes was finally ready to get things straight. She wanted to graduate high school.

In the final months of her junior year, the 17 year old crammed online classes to make up for lost credits. She quit her two part-time jobs at McDonald's and Journeys, to focus on her studies.

Maria was looking forward to being a senior at Richland High School, and was even more excited to see what life had in store for her and her long-term boyfriend after graduation.



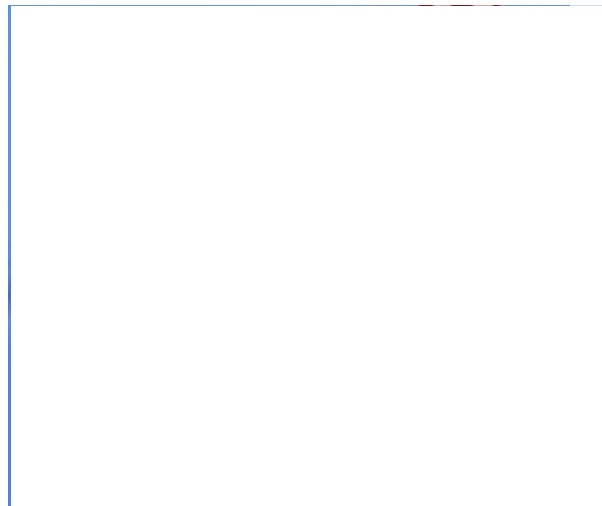
She was all in.

As she pulled out of the WinCo Foods in Richland one summer day, Maria spotted a homeless woman with her child panhandling near Columbia Point Drive. Without hesitation, she handed them the last \$20 she had earned from her jobs.

“I thought, man, I raised a good girl here,” said her father, Gabriel Moreno, 44, of Kennewick. “Ever since she was little, you could see a halo on her. She was just a bright star everywhere she went.”

Maria went back to school — but she didn’t finish.

[Her Nov. 21 death instead rocked the Tri-Cities](#), sending her family and classmates into mourning just two days before Thanksgiving.



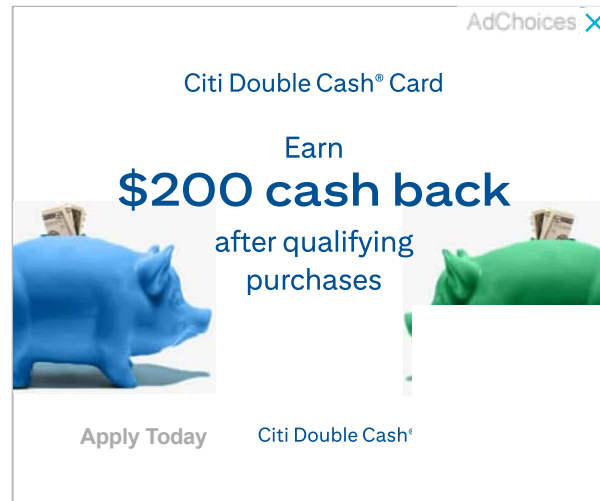
She was riding home as a passenger in her cousin’s car when they spun out, left the roadway and rolled near the Highway 240 bypass on-ramp to Interstate 182.

Now, as the date of her would-be graduation approaches, her family is speaking out about the importance of remembering seniors who aren’t here to don a cap and gown.

“If she was here, she would have done it. She would have graduated,” said her mom, Angelica Reyes, 38.

The family says their daughter was on track to graduate and should be awarded a posthumous diploma to “finish her Bomber years.”

While it's unlikely they'll get their wish, the parents hope at the very least that the high school shows some sort of acknowledgment at the June 7 commencement.



And it's likely that they will. The [Richland School Board](#) voted unanimously last week to [create policy allowing the names of students who have died to be read](#) aloud before commencement and included in the graduation program.

Richland students who have satisfied all requirements for a high school diploma before their death will have their names announced alongside other graduates, and families will be offered a private presentation of the diploma.

High schools have always struggled with how to best acknowledge deceased students at graduation. Lingering too long on the subject could risk the emotional safety of attendees, staff fear, but no acknowledgment at all risks a callous perception to families.

Most school districts in Washington state do not have set policy on the books because of the nuanced nature of death and grief. Some districts have long-held, unwritten policies either acknowledging or not the lives of dead students.

The Richland school board says it tried to find a healthy balance to acknowledge loss while protecting attendees.



For most families, graduation day will signify new beginnings. But for others, including Moreno-Reyes' family, the day will hopefully bring closure.





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Gabriel Moreno and Angelica Reyes of Kennewick hold a photo of their daughter, Maria, 17, who died in a car crash in November 2023 and would have graduated from Richland High in June. Their other kids are, from left, Gabey Jr., 6, Cheyanne, 1, and CherylInn, 4.

## **‘Always chose good’**

Maria’s memory still lingers on in the family’s Kennewick home.

One wall in the entryway is adorned with photos, candles, trinkets and memorabilia of her life. Her siblings put on T-shirts with a design commemorating their eldest sibling. And outside, artificial roses lie neatly on the dashboard of a used 2012 Mercedes E350.

“That was her 18th birthday present we didn’t get to give her,” Reyes said.

Maria Moreno-Reyes was raised in the Tri-Cities, a relatively reserved child who enjoyed riding bikes with her dad. She wasn’t into sports, but picked up softball to spend time with her friends. She brought the best out of everyone, her parents said.





She was tirelessly dedicated to her family and knew she served as a role model for her four younger siblings. That drove her to turn her academic career around.



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Roses lie on the dash of a 2012 Mercedes E350 parked at a home in Kennewick, Wash. The car was supposed to be a birthday present for Maria Moreno-Reyes. She died one month before her 18th birthday.

“She was always very big on taking care of the kids. When she got paychecks, she was always buying the kids clothes, shoes. We never really made it her responsibility, it was something she wanted to do,” Reyes said. “She wanted to work, she wanted to take care of the kids... She wanted independence.”

Maria “always chose good,” too, and never seemed to be stressed about the challenges of life, Reyes said. Friends she made in high school also helped her get in touch with the Hispanic culture and music that her parents never introduced her to.

Her plans after high school were to attend Columbia Basin College and the University of Washington, with hopes of becoming a special education teacher. She also had dreams of being a mother.

### ‘We said our goodbyes there’

Reyes said the morning of Maria’s death was “out of the ordinary” for the family.

The high schooler normally drove herself to school, but one of the family cars was in the shop getting fixed. Maria had an important test that day, so Reyes offered to drive her. After grabbing donuts, Reyes dropped her “Conchita” off at Richland High School with plans to pick her up that afternoon.

Maria’s cousin, 18-year-old Celcilo Romero, was in town that day with his new car. Reyes asked if he could pick her up and take her home since she was running errands.

But at 2:39 p.m., Reyes, Moreno and Maria’s boyfriend received a notification on their phones saying she was likely in an accident.

“My first reaction was to run,” Reyes said.

She met Moreno at Kadlec Regional Medical Center after getting a tip from a family member that Romero had been transported there. Hospital staff told them they had Romero, but not Maria.



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One of Romero’s friends confirmed to Reyes his fears.

The parents drove to the McDonald's near Fred Meyers, hopped the fence near BMW of Tri-Cities, ran across Interstate 182 and came upon the accident about 30 minutes after it had happened.



*ERIC ROSANE • EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM*

A commemorative display in the Reyes family's Kennewick home includes the tiara Maria Moreno-Reyes wore during her sweet 16 birthday party. "She was just a bright star everywhere she went," her father said.

The scene remains burned in their memories: Romero's flipped 2005 Infinite G35, Maria's scattered backpack and homework thrown about, and the scent from her perfume bottle lying on the roadway.

First responders reportedly told Reyes they couldn't remove Maria's body because the car was unstable and had to be flipped, plus they were waiting for the coroner.

"They were nice enough to let me be with her. I was holding her hand," Reyes said.

Later, the family was only able to recover the contents of Maria's pocket: A dime, a sticker and a stick of lip gloss. Even today, the family hasn't been able to get her other items because the incident was considered a crime scene.

"We said our goodbyes there," Moreno said, fighting back tears. "That was the hardest day of my life. I still can't recuperate, even now."

Romero is [facing vehicular homicide charges](#) in the death of his cousin.

Court documents allege Romero was speeding 75 to 80 mph as he entered the on ramp and was weaving between the left and right lane. He was reportedly trying to get into a gap in the right lane to pass another car while on a curve in the road when he lost control. Another passenger in the backseat survived.

Romero's trial is tentatively set for May 28.







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A T-shirt worn by one of Maria Moreno-Reyes' siblings commemorates her passion and love of life.

## **'It's still unbearable'**

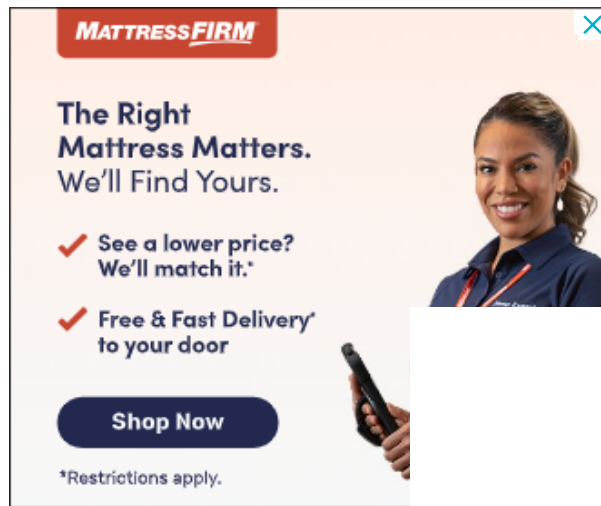
December brought about more tears for the family.

Twenty days after Maria's death, her boyfriend, 16-year-old Nathaniel Garcia, died by suicide.

Garcia was a student at Chiawana High School, whose "enthusiasm for life, bright smile, laughter and photography skills endeared him to friends and family alike," [his family writes in his obituary](#).

"We tell the kids it was a broken heart," Moreno said.

"(Maria and Nathaniel) already knew what they wanted to name their kid and what kind of life they wanted to live," Reyes said.



Reyes pointed out a hand-sewn police teddy bear on the wall that Garcia's mother made for her. The badge was made out of a costume Maria wore during Halloween, in remembrance of their child.

Her 18th birthday on Dec. 16 also unearthed a flurry of emotions.

The family had reserved a DJ and space for a party at a music venue at Uptown Shopping Center. Instead, they drove up to Pioneer Memorial Services in Moses Lake to spend time at her grave. She's buried next to her grandmother and grandfather.

"That's probably what we'll do for every birthday at this point, is spend it out there with her," Reyes said.

There's very little comfort for their family these days. But what has helped them grieve has been "trying to live life the way she would have lived it," Reyes said.

"That's what's kept us going. It's her," she said.

"It still hurts," Moreno said. "It's still unbearable."

# Shadow looms over local school districts as others struggle with 'financial crisis'



BOB BRAWDY • [BBRAWDY@TRICITYHERALD.COM](mailto:BBRAWDY@TRICITYHERALD.COM)

AUG. 2023 FILE PHOTO — Second grade teacher Anali Garibay organizes and prepares her classroom at Mark Twain Elementary School in Pasco for the upcoming start of the 2023-24 school year.

BY ERIC ROSANE  
[EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM](mailto:EROSANE@TRICITYHERALD.COM)

It's been a treacherous budgeting season so far for many Washington school districts.

Across the state, schools that banked on student enrollment rebounding after COVID are now making sweeping cuts to staff as they spend the last of the federal cash they received during the pandemic.

It's a shadow that's sure to loom over local Tri-City school districts, most of which have only just begun to draft budget documents and understand the fiscal impacts of the last legislative session.

This past week, the Yakima School Board approved a plan [to trim more than 100 positions](#) — mostly paraeducators, academic specialists and counselors — from their payroll in an effort to save \$19 million in next school year's budget. Yakima's enrollment has dropped 9% over the last five years.

Up north, the Wenatchee School District is considering [cutting 63 jobs in an effort to save nearly \\$9 million next year](#). With enrollment expected to continue declining there, the district might also close an elementary school.

And further down the Columbia River, the Vancouver Public Schools board this month approved [\\$35 million in budget cuts for next school year](#) that will see 262 jobs — including 113 classroom teaching positions — vanish.

"The financial crisis facing our schools is entirely avoidable," said Larry Delaney, president of the Washington Education Association teacher's union, in a statement to the Tri-City Herald. He also called on the Legislature to "step up and fully fund public education" for the benefit of its students.

School enrollment is important because it dictates how much funding the state allocates to each school district. Local levy funds and other federal programs help fill in the gap.

Several variables — including families switching to home school or private school programs during the pandemic, as well as demographic shifts and rising chronic absenteeism — are to blame for declining enrollment in public schools.

But even as attendance began to plateau before the pandemic, many school districts have continued to hire more staff and accrue more expenses.

## **Kennewick staff reductions**

Districts in the Tri-Cities have already begun drafting their budgets and are beginning to hold workshop meetings with their local school boards. As legislative revenues and classroom expenses become finalized in the coming weeks, a clearer picture of the fiscal health of local schools will begin to emerge.

Many local school boards will pass their 2024-25 budgets before the end of summer.

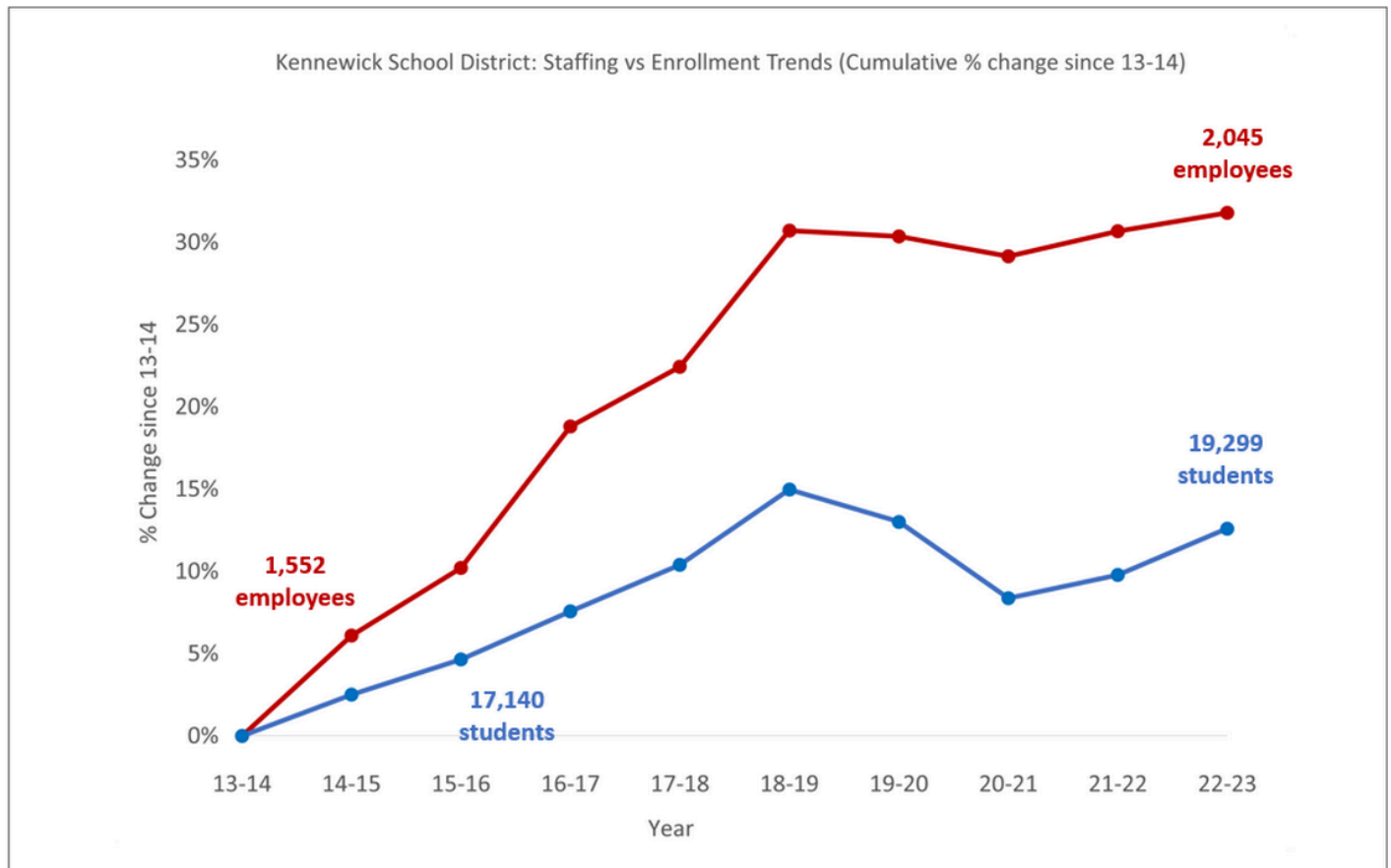
The Kennewick School District administration [is already working through staff reductions](#) for the next school year, but it's currently unclear which positions, and how many, will be impacted. Additional staff reductions are expected for the 2025-26 school year, too.

These layoffs likely include staff who were hired to keep classroom sizes small during the pandemic and whose salaries were funded with one-time COVID dollars, known specifically as the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, [as previously reported](#).

The Tri-City's largest school district has been under severe financial stress lately. It started with enrollment decreases during the COVID pandemic and was exacerbated greatly after voters rejected two levy initiatives in 2022.



As a result, the district didn't collect a local tax at all during 2023 and it now plans to operate on [an annual budget deficit of about \\$5 million to \\$10 million](#) over the coming years.



Data provided by Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction/Courtesy Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University

The district used about one-third of its ESSER — roughly \$20 million of its total \$59 million allocation — covering programs, teacher salaries and other expenses that should have been covered by levy dollars.

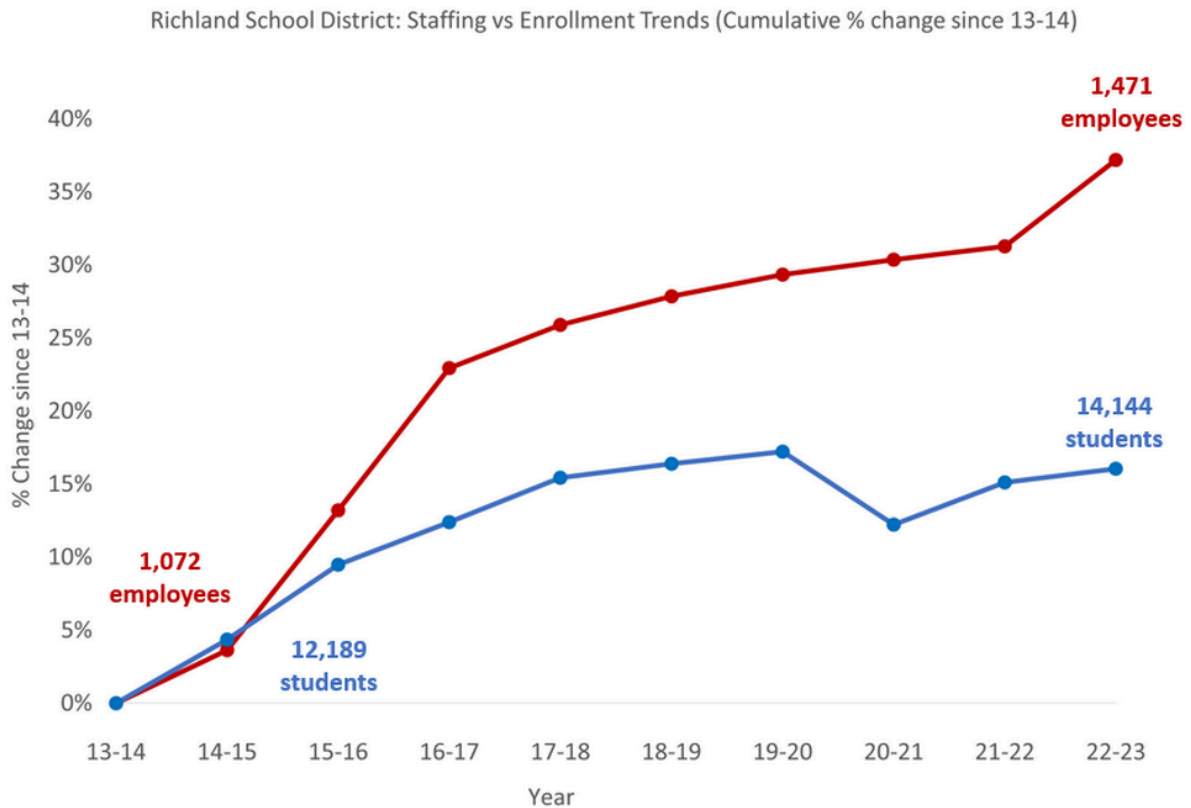
Voters eventually passed an operations levy in February 2023, which went into effect this year.

Kennewick operates on a \$320 million general fund budget. It's one of the largest employers in the Tri-Cities, with more than 3,500 employees in more than 30 schools. More than 18,000 students attend Kennewick schools.

## Tremors in Richland, Pasco

Krista Calvin, president of Richland Education Association teachers union, told the Tri-City Herald that she met with school district administrators and has been told there will be no teacher layoffs this year.

But that doesn't mean the district will be without any shakeups in the new school year.



Data provided by Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction/Courtesy Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University

“In Richland, there are a number of teachers who will be displaced from their current teaching assignments and will need to be administratively reassigned or transferred to a different position within their school or the district,” Calvin said in an email.

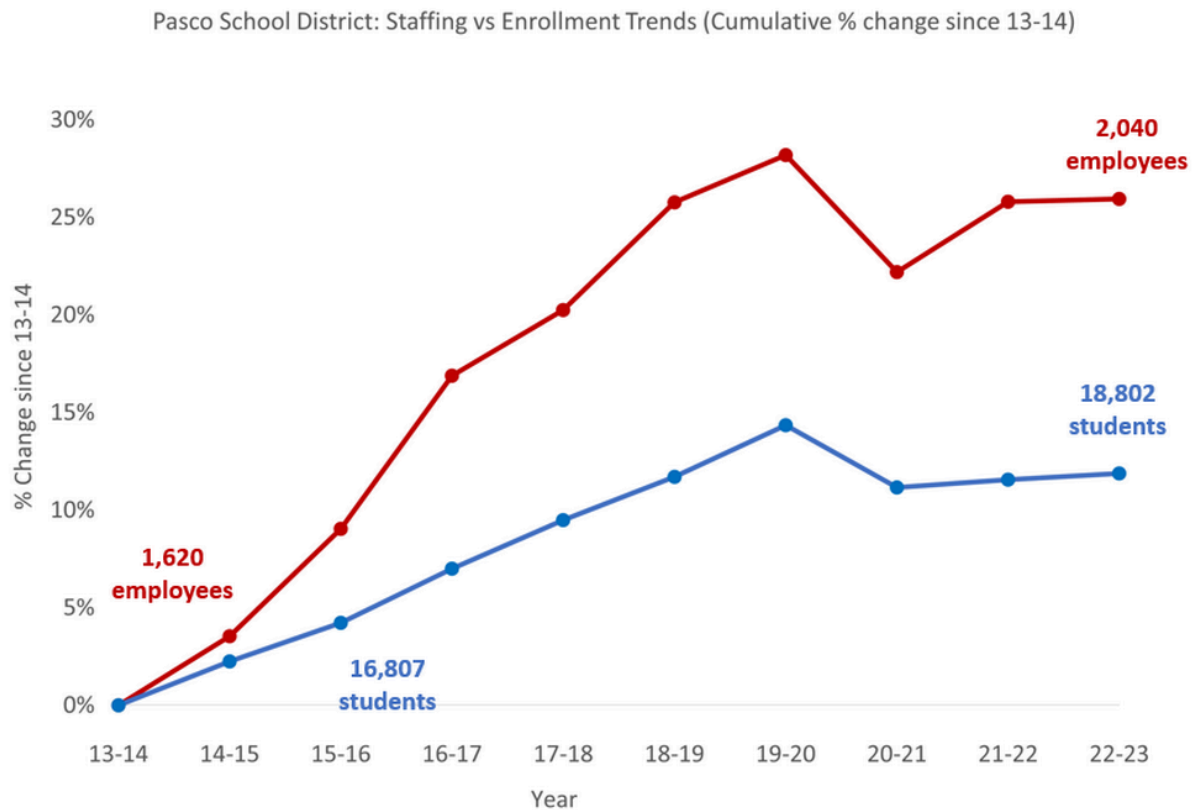
“REA and RSD are working together to make sure that displaced teachers are placed into positions they are qualified for to ensure that students get the education and support they need,” she continued.

The Richland School District operates on a \$215 million budget that pays the salaries of more than 1,400 employees working in 12 elementary schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools and a number of other choice schools.

More than 14,000 students attend class in Richland schools. It’s the only Tri-Cities school district that has fully recovered the enrollment it lost during the pandemic.

Kevin Hebdon, Pasco School District’s executive director of fiscal services, said he plans to present a budget overview at the school board’s April 23 meeting. A draft budget, including revenues and expenses, will be available closer to the May 28 meeting.

“I don’t see anything that would give us concern,” Hebdon said.



Data provided by Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction/Courtesy Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University

He notes that their district trimmed expenses last year by not rehiring for certain staff positions and by not renewing some COVID-related positions that were contracted, such as additional school nurses.

Pasco operates on a \$313 million general budget that supports about 2,400 staff and teachers working in 17 elementary schools, four middle schools, two comprehensive high schools, two alternative high schools and the district's online learning alternatives. More than 18,000 students attend Pasco schools.