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WIDEFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT 3

THE WIDEFIELD WAY

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Promises Made, Promises Kept

BY SAM BRIGGS
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION

A promise is a pledge to do, bring about, or provide, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

During the 2017 election for Widefield School District 3's (WSD3) Bond and Mill Levy Override (MLO), we made a promise to voters to use their tax dollars wisely and to continue to be fiscally responsible. More specifically, we projected that the cost to homeowners would be approximately $9.25/month for each $100,000 of the value of the taxpayer's home. The below image shows the history of the effects of passing the bond and mill levy override. The cost to homeowners has dropped from $9.25 in 2018 to $3.32 in 2023.

PROMISES MADE, PROMISES KEPT

2017 Bond & Mill Levy Override (MLO)

During the election for Widefield School District 3's Bond and Mill Levy Override, district leaders projected that the cost to homeowners would be approximately $9.25/month for each $100,000 of the value of the taxpayer's home.

Tax Year	2017 Bond/MLO Tax Cost per $100,000 of home value
2018	$9.25
2019	$8.67
2020	$6.46
2021	$6.34
2022	$4.66
2023	$3.32

The bond built Grand Mountain School, remodeled both high school auditoriums, and gave each school funds for needs in their building. The MLO helped attract and retain staff and support educational programs. Prior to 2017, the last MLO was in 2001 and the last bond was in 1996 to build Mesa Ridge High School.

"We respect and value our community members. We only go to voters when we have exhausted all other funding options and we absolutely have no other choice," said Terry Kimber, WSD3 Chief Financial Officer.

In addition to refinancing, the District takes advantage of grants to support capital improvements projects, educational programs, and safety and security. In 2022, we received $1.1 million from School Access for Emergency Response (SAFER) grant funding. This grant provided two-way radios and training at all schools that allows us to communicate directly with first responders in emergency situations. In the past five years, we've also secured Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) grants to be used towards renovating existing school facilities. The BEST grant is a competitive, matching grant which requires the school district to match a percentage of the funds. For WSD3, it's currently about 50 percent. With the grants, we've been able to upgrade fire alarm systems, security cameras, ceilings, LED lighting, and electrical devices. We've also removed asbestos from classrooms and replaced boiler systems at several schools.

We have also reallocated funds based on the priorities of our community. In recent school district surveys, safety and security has been the most important to students, staff, and families. We now have 19 armed security personnel in our schools along with our three patrolling units, and three School Resource Officers from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office.

Despite our best efforts, we still face significant financial challenges. WSD3 was established in 1874, that's 150 years ago. Most of our buildings were built in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Sustainability and maintenance of these aging buildings is becoming impossible. Equipment is no longer serviceable, repeated repairs are no longer efficient, and grants will not cover all of our needs. We know great schools equal great neighborhoods, and together, we want to improve the learning environment for our students.

We invite you to get involved and learn more about how we can continue to grow and improve our community. Visit the "Our Story- Our Future" webpage on wsd3.org and join the Widefield Information Network (WIN). Questions? Call 719-391-3000.

Tuesday's with Terry Kimber

"Tuesday's with Terry" is a weekly video update from our Chief Financial Officer, Terry Kimber, about School District finances. We post this out on the District Facebook, Instagram, and website. We believe it's important to keep our community informed whether or not you have children in the District. If there is a topic you want covered or you have questions, please email kimbert@wsd3.org or call 719-391-3026.

Widefield Welcomes New Superintendent

Aaron Hoffman

The Widefield School Board is pleased to announce and welcome Aaron Hoffman as the finalist to become Widefield School District 3's (WSD3) new superintendent.

The decision was announced at the evening Board of Education meeting on Thursday, March 21, 2024.

"We are beyond excited to announce our new superintendent, a dedicated educator who has been part of our community for decades. Mr. Hoffman's deep understanding of our unique culture and commitment to our values makes him the perfect leader to guide our schools into the future," said Greg Fisher, president of the WSD3 Board of Education.

Hoffman has been an educator in the District for 31 years. He was raised in the Widefield Community and attended South Elementary (now Venetucci Elementary), Watson Junior High, and Widefield High School. After graduation in 1988, Aaron went to Colorado State University on a music scholarship and received his bachelor's degree in Mathematics with a concentration in Education.

Hoffman has taught math, coached junior high and high school basketball, served as assistant principal and principal, and most recently has been the Executive Director of Secondary Education.

"It's an honor to step into this role in the very community that raised me. I've spent most of my life here, learning and growing alongside you all. Now, I'm thrilled to give back in a new capacity, leading our schools toward even greater success," said Mr. Hoffman.

Hoffman was one of two candidates for the position along with long-time Widefield educator Kirk Vsetecka. The current superintendent, Kevin Duren, announced his retirement in January 2024 with plans to stay in his position through the end of the academic school year. Hoffman will take over effective June 1, 2024.

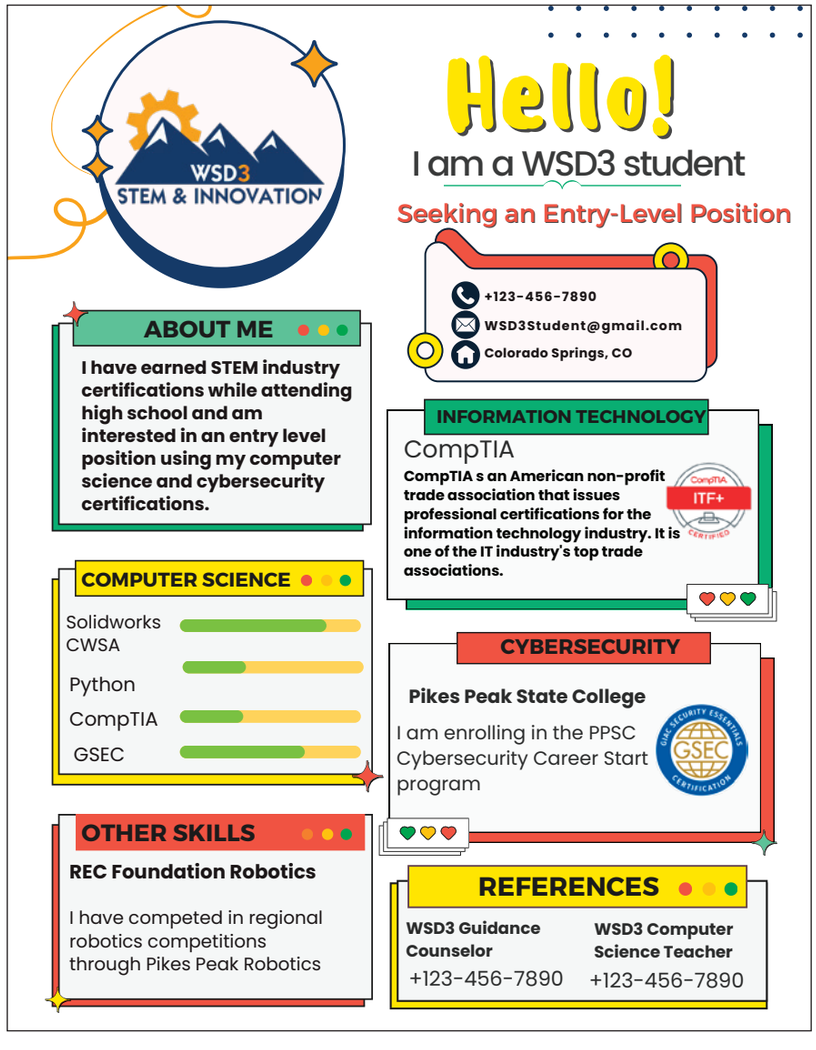
Preparing for jobs,

WSD3 students can earn industry certifications

BY CHRISTI POWERS
STEM & INNOVATION

In today's job market, there is a growing demand for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills. As students prepare to enter the workforce, STEM disciplines can pave the way for careers in a diverse range of industries.

"Some employers today value technical knowledge and problem-solving skills as much as academic qualifications," said Shane Skalla, Director of Innovation and Alternative Education. "Students who obtain industry certifications prior to high school graduation can transfer those skills onto a résumé that can open doors to future employment," he said.



Why is it important?

District STEM programming is a gateway into computer science, engineering, healthcare and medicine, science and research, architecture and design, education, mathematics and statistics. Those fields offer quality-paying jobs. In middle school, Widefield School District 3 (WSD3) students can begin learning three-dimensional (3D) design, robotics, coding and flight simulation. WSD3 offers more than 70 STEM courses to middle and high school students.

"Through Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) grants, we are furnishing our teachers, librarians, and instructors with equipment, training and resources to teach interdisciplinary STEM skills," said Dr. Nat Sobin, Coordinator of Grants and STEM Programming. "Whether it's coding, cybersecurity, biomedical sciences, engineering or aviation and aerospace, students can get acquainted with these disciplines and even earn certifications before leaving high school."

Which certifications?

The WSD3 STEM & Innovation website (www.wsd3.org/about-widefield/stem-innovation) has visual "pathways" explaining course sequence and available certifications. It lists Project Lead the Way (PLTW) classes and the industry certifications that high schoolers can take.

"The coursework is project-based STEM learning and the industry certifications provide tangible benefits," said Sobin. "It's a cost-effective way to acquire valuable skills and credentials compared to post-secondary education or training."

Building foundations early

In January, Grand Mountain School offered a day-long STEM seminar to more than 160 eighth graders. Four stations were set up with 3D printers, a coding class, flight simulators and robotic arms. Learners rotated through the stations and 33 students earned their 'STEMologist' certifications. The middle school seminars are designed so that when students enter high school they are earning real-world industry certifications recognized by employers and colleges. In February, Mesa Ridge High School held seven 3D design classes for certification.

"About 85 percent of my students passed the CSWA SOLIDWORKS Additive Manufacturing exam," said MRHS Librarian Lauren Chartier. Then "I ran a special class for a week during Academic Labs, which was open to the entire school."

Ziggy Joseph, a teacher at Widefield High School, instructs Cybersecurity and AP Computer Science courses. For fun, students are tested on their cybersecurity skills in a national Cyber-Cup competition. Her advanced students are creating digital portfolios that can accompany résumés at job interviews.

"There are six students who are certified in PCEP. They are creating programs in both Python and scratch for this course," said Joseph, referring to a Certified Entry-Level Python Programmer certification.

Bret Murray, a Science teacher at Sproul Junior High School also has four students who have been busy learning the basics of Python coding.

"Four students have worked hard for two weeks to learn the basics of Python, a computer language used by companies like Google, Amazon, and Netflix. They will take an exam to earn the industry certification that is recognized by employers or as a credential in college applications for computer science," Murray said. "These types of certifications are a stepping stone toward job prospects, career advancement or advanced certifications."

Pointers for parents

If your student is interested in STEM courses and certifications, it's a good idea to contact their school counselor for guidance. They can make qualified recommendations for the best course of action, or streamline the sequences of classes to take, to maximize student achievement and progress.

"WSD3 is committed to providing students the opportunity to obtain relevant credentials through rigorous courses that prepare them for the workforce or post-secondary learning," Skalla said.

Important Dates

Kindergarten Roundup
May 10, 2024
All Elementary Schools

Retirement Recognition
May 14, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.
Bowers Gym - Widefield High School

Fountain Valley Scholars Golf Tournament
July 8, 2024 at 8:00 a.m.
Cheyenne Shadows Golf Course
Contact: fountainvalleyscholars@gmail.com

Widefield Backpack Bash
August 3, 2024, 9-12 p.m.
Grand Mountain School

Graduation Dates

Discovery High School
May 17, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.
Widefield High School Auditorium

The Haven School
May 17, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.
Widefield High School Auditorium

Widefield High School
May 18. 2024 at 10:00 a.m.
Widefield High School - C.A. Foster Stadium

Mesa Ridge High School
May 20, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.
World Arena

**Please check your child's school calendar, the District calendar, and the District Music Calendar for upcoming activities and events.

WIDEFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT 3