

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Ben Ferney, Ed.D.
Superintendent
bferney@cheneysd.org

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On the Cover:
Cheney Middle School students perform in the Winter Band Concert.

Dear Community Members,

One of my favorite parts of the New Year is two-fold: Reflection and Projection. I enjoy taking time to reflect on the past year as it relates to myself, my personal life, and my work life. I focus on things that went well and things I want to continue, as well as areas for improvement and new opportunities for growth. Years ago, when I was a principal assistant, my principal and I were having a discussion, and she described the importance of reflection in our lives. It is funny because, although I do not remember the whole conversation, I can still hear the words as if she said them yesterday, "If you can reflect, you can do anything."

I think those words still ring true.

As it relates to our district, I am most excited about the progress that continues into 2024. I want to thank our district community for your input on the district's Strategic Plan; your attention to detail and ample feedback have identified four top priorities that will help the district craft our Strategic Plan: Safety & Security, Increased Staffing for Student Support, High-Quality Learning Resources for Students, and High-Quality Learning Experiences for Teachers. These priorities will guide our strategic planning moving forward.

I'm also excited about all of the hard work completed by our staff and students through the first semester of the 2023-24 year. From the classroom to the stage and onto the court, our students are thriving. I'm so proud of what they have accomplished, and I am thankful for such dedicated staff who are invested in the success of our students.

2024 also brings an opportunity for our community to have a direct impact on our district through the February 13th Special Election. There are three propositions on the ballot for our district: Proposition 1, Proposition 2, and Proposition 3. Proposition 1 is a replacement Educational Programs & Operations (EP&O) Levy. This measure replaces the district's expiring three-year levy, and it makes up about 13 percent of the district's operating budget. Proposition 2, Bonds to Construct and Improve Schools and Acquire Land, will provide funding to address the district's highest-priority facility needs. Proposition 3 is a replacement Capital Levy for Technology, Security, and Infrastructure Improvements. This replacement levy will continue to provide funding for updates to our technology devices and infrastructure, as well as our safety and security systems that are not funded by the state. For more information on any of these ballot measures, scan the QR code below or visit cheneysd.org. There is also additional information regarding the Bond and Levies throughout this newsletter.

Your vote matters, and it is so important for our community members to get out and vote for this Special Election! Remember to turn in your ballots on or before February 13, 2024.

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy 2024. We are Cheney Public Schools!

Take care,

Ben Ferney, Ed.D.
Superintendent | Cheney Public Schools



Mark Scott
School Board Vice President
District 1



Liz Winer
School Board Member
District 2



Henry Browne
School Board President
District 3



Bill Hanson
School Board Member
District 4



Mitch Swenson
School Board Member
District 5

Property Values & School Taxes Explained

What is the **estimated** cost to the taxpayer?

WHAT AM I, AS A PROPERTY OWNER, CURRENTLY PAYING THROUGH 2024?



WHAT WILL I PAY IN 2025 IF ALL THREE MEASURES ARE APPROVED?



WHAT CHANGES IF THE MEASURES ARE APPROVED?

Replacement EP&O & Capital Levies will replace expiring levies, and the new bond will address growth projects, safety and security, and district-wide student health and facility improvements. With the approved measures along with the existing bonds, the estimated new tax rate --beginning in 2025 -- will be \$3.94 per \$1,000 of assessed home value.

*Source: Spokane County Assessor

Tax rates in the above example reflect voter approval of all three ballot measures.

The Feb. 13, 2024 Special Election is quickly approaching, and Cheney Public Schools is proposing three measures on the upcoming ballot: two replacement levies and one bond.

Proposition 1 is a replacement Educational Programs and Operations (EP&O) Levy. This measure replaces the district's expiring three-year levy, and it makes up about 13 percent of the district's operating budget. Proposition 2, Bonds to Construct and Improve Schools and Acquire Land, will provide funding to address the district's highest priority facility needs. Proposition 3 is a replacement Capital Levy for Technology, Security and Infrastructure Improvements. This replacement levy will continue to provide funding for updates to our technology devices and infrastructure, as well as our safety and securities systems that are not funded by the state.



For more information on each of these propositions, scan the QR code to the left or visit cheneydsd.org.

Cheney's levies are on a three-year cycle, while bonds are paid over a much longer term, usually 20 years. Upon voter approval of these three measures, total school taxes may increase from \$2.74 per \$1,000 of assessed home value in 2024 to an estimated \$3.94 per \$1,000 from 2025 through 2027.

Upon voter approval, how will the increase in school taxes influence the total amount homeowners pay? The figure above illustrates how the amount of school taxes may fluctuate with voter approval of all three measures.

The tax landscape has changed dramatically over the last few years as property values have increased within the Cheney Public Schools district. In the last five years, the district's tax base has grown to over \$1.1 billion due to new construction. This new construction has brought new taxpayers, who have built homes or businesses, and are now district taxpayers. The tax base is expected to grow an additional four percent in 2024 due to new development.

But what happens if property values increase? The homeowner will not owe additional school taxes; they will continue to pay the original amount toward the levies and bonds. **If home values increase, the amount paid toward approved levies and bonds annually will not.** Total bond and levy amounts can only be adjusted by voter approval. So, the amount collected will not increase, even if home prices increase.

What about when there is new construction with new homes and new businesses moving into the district? It is hard to estimate the true impact on each homeowner, but new construction helps offset taxes paid by existing homeowners and business owners when tax amounts remain level.

To help better illustrate these examples, let's revisit the voter-approved levies in 2021 for Cheney Public Schools. In 2021, voters

Story continued on page 4

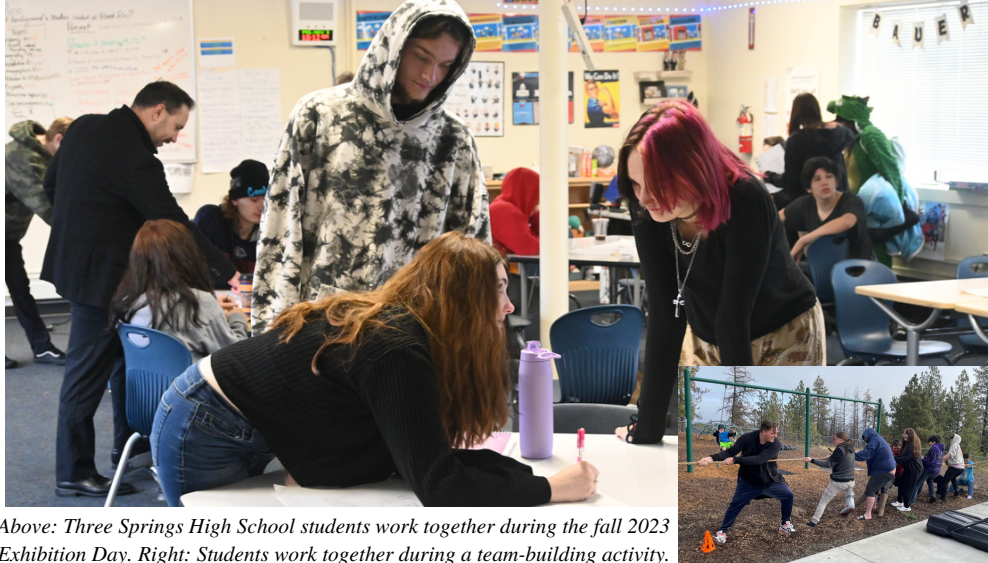
Bond/Levy continued

approved an EP&O Levy with an estimated rate of \$1.65 per \$1,000 of assessed value, but due to increased assessed value and new construction, the actual tax rate for 2023 for the voter-approved EP&O Levy was \$1.31 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

For a more in-depth explanation on how property values impact school taxes, please scan the QR code to watch a short video, or visit cheneysd.org.



Alternate Learning Options For 2024-25 Freshmen



Above: Three Springs High School students work together during the fall 2023 Exhibition Day. Right: Students work together during a team-building activity.

For Cheney Public Schools eighth graders, it's time to start thinking about what high school they'd like to attend. Within the district, there are three options for area students to consider for high school: Cheney High School, Three Springs High School, and WIN Academy.

Cheney High School is the largest of the learning options, with over 1,400 students. It is a comprehensive high school learning environment that offers a robust list of electives and extracurricular activities. This is a great option for students who are hoping to continue their education in a comprehensive learning environment.

Three Springs High School is a much smaller learning option with around 100 students spanning grades 9-12. It was founded on the principle that not all students thrive in a large, comprehensive high school environment. An innovative high school option for students, TSHS empowers students to have more control over their educational experience. Classes are project-based, and they facilitate a block schedule with interdisciplinary classes. This allows more time with teachers, time to work on projects in class, and a deeper understanding of the material. Students attend on-site three days a week and have options for work or internships two days a week. Students are able to prioritize their learning based on

their individual goals and real-world application.

WIN Academy is a relatively new high school option that is a blended learning model that provides flexible courses for students, small classroom sizes, and continued 1-on-1 support with a teacher and school counselor. At WIN Academy, students' needs are prioritized so they can graduate high school and be better prepared for life after graduation. It's a great option for students who are credit-deficient, self-motivated, need schedule flexibility, and/or need more frequent check-ins with adults. Students receive support in all domains including academic, college/career plans, and social/emotional support and well-being.

Visit our Learning Options page on the district website for more information on each high school option! Three Springs and WIN Academy will also be offering Open House dates next month, both in person and online.

In-Person (at TSHS)

Tuesday, Feb. 6th: 10-11:30 am & 5:30-7 pm
 Wednesday, Feb. 7th: 5:30-7 p.m.

In-Person (at WIN)

Wednesday, Feb. 21st: 6-7 p.m.
 Wednesday, May 1st: 6-7 p.m.

Online/Zoom

Monday, Feb. 12th: 6-7 p.m.
 Wednesday, Feb. 21st: 6-7 p.m.

Be the One at Snowdon Elementary

When Shawna Fraser was first hired as the principal of Snowdon Elementary over a decade ago, she was ready to make a positive impact on her staff, her students, and the entire school community. It began with the staff working collectively at the start of each school year to create a guiding theme to help foster community and inclusivity. About five years ago, Fraser thought of the idea of Be the One.

"The theme was centered and focused around everyone, creating a sense of connection for every student," Fraser said. It took lots of work, she continued, but the staff loved it. Soon after it was introduced, they all agreed: Be the One needed to be their theme moving forward.

What is Be the One? It's an idea Fraser crafted that morphed into a school-wide practice to help facilitate connections between staff and students that may not otherwise naturally arise. For example, students most often form a natural connection with their teacher given that they interact with them every day, but Be the One pairs a student with a staff member outside of their classroom, such as an administrator, a teacher from another grade level, or a paraeducator from a different classroom.

"If [we] never did anything like this, a child might know their one teacher over the course of six years, plus our three specialists, but there is potential for some kids to never really ever connect with anybody else if you're not intentionally designing that," Fraser said.

"I've noticed just a general ripple effect that it has," Assistant Principal Katie Scott said. "It's not just the activity; it's the whole idea of getting to know students and prioritizing their sense of belonging."

The practice is based on intentionally designed opportunities to connect staff and students outside of the classroom setting.

These opportunities take the form of activities that they can complete together, such as talking about their favorite things, their hobbies, or watching things grow—a particular favorite of Fraser’s—that provides a packet of flower seeds to each student.

Among students, the consistent and resounding feelings about Be the One include respect, safe spaces, and inclusivity. The practice not only offers students a way to cultivate a secure connection with a trusted adult, but it has helped several Snowdon students feel seen, heard, safe, and comfortable in their school.

“It feels nice having someone know you better,” fourth-grader McKinley Webley said. “It’s nice to see a familiar face.”

“I like it a lot,” fifth-grader Mia Ellis said. “I know what it’s like to not have it. When we lived in Seattle—Bremerton—and I was going to school, I didn’t have anyone to talk to... besides my mom. And she wasn’t there with me all the time because she was working. Now that I’m here, I can talk about my problems.”

“It feels nice having somebody here that just knows stuff about me,” added fifth-grader Teagan Kennedy.

Be the One spans the entirety of a student’s time at Snowdon, and the goal is for each student to be paired with the same staff member for the duration of the program. Students in fourth and fifth grade are in their fourth year of the program, and they have been able to forge a strong relationship with their paired adult.

“You get to build a relationship with them,” Ellis said. “I’ve been here for four years, so I’ve had the same person for Be the One.”

“It makes me feel more likely to come and talk to my person,” added third-grader Christian Ciais. “[I think Snowdon does this] so we can get to know them better, and love them.”

Be the One includes an activity every two months throughout the school year for staff and students to work on together. The task of choosing the activity rotates to different staff members, as well as the task of ordering a small prize for every student who completes the

activity. Fraser has found that participation among students is consistent, especially with the small prize students receive following completion.

“My favorite part is when you come in and get a prize,” Ciais said. “You get to know your Be the One person better. My person is Ms. Fraser, and I’ve had her for four years.”

In addition to facilitating a sense of belonging and community among students and staff, Fraser acknowledged that Be the One has also helped to fight the stigma often associated with the principal’s office and administrative staff.

“I don’t know how to describe it except you can feel the sense of community with kids,” Fraser said. “I think they understand this is a place to come sometimes to problem solve, sometimes to celebrate, and sometimes just to share something. It’s not just a place you get sent if you’re in trouble or hurt.”

“When we started, we had the fifth graders, and I told one of them, ‘Welcome to my office, you’ve never been here before.’” Scott added. “And I said, ‘You’re always welcome to come back if you have questions or need something or if you have a good joke. I love good jokes!’”



Principal Shawna Fraser (center) with students (from left to right): Teagan Kennedy, Mia Ellis, Christian Ciais, and McKinley Webley.

A few weeks later, one of them stopped me in the hallway and said, ‘I have a good joke for you. What do you call a cow with no legs? Ground beef.’ It was just so funny to have a small exchange with that student. She would have never known [otherwise] that I love jokes. That ripple effect of creating belonging. Just seeing students is really important because every student, every grown-up, everybody wants to be seen and heard and valued and feel like they’re important.”

Both Fraser and Scott noted that they have seen other staff members touching base personally with kids outside of the classroom setting.

“It’s helped the staff [feel] that they are also valued,” said Scott. “Sometimes in schools, it’s the teachers and the non-teachers. It also helps the non-teaching staff feel like they are important; we need them to also need the kids.”

Be the One is here to stay at Snowdon, and the inclusive community it is creating becomes stronger every year.

“I think we do [Be the One] because they want us to think we belong here,” Webley said.



Above: Assistant Principal Katie Scott with McKinley Webley



Above: Principal Shawna Fraser with Christian Ciais



Above: Kindergarten Teacher Rachel Amann with Mia Ellis



Above: Third Grade Teacher Amanda Thompson with Teagan Kennedy

Cheney Public Schools' ECEAP Preschool Program

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is Washington State's pre-kindergarten program serving qualifying 3- to 4-year-old children. It is a comprehensive program that, together with families, ECEAP providers, and local communities, ensures the growth of healthy, resilient children.

Cheney Public Schools has been offering ECEAP preschool to qualifying families since 2018, and at this time, the district holds 120 slots for ECEAP-qualifying children in the program. Currently, there are multiple openings for ECEAP preschoolers across the district; the program is free for qualifying families.

"So much happens in preschool," said Sunset ECEAP preschool teacher Carolyn Belarde. "I would say the big benefit is social-emotional development that happens in early childhood that is so impactful moving on through the K-12 system. The early interventions you can provide in the classroom, like working through challenging behaviors, how to dysregulate stress, how to build a friendship, how to make trusted adult interactions and learn that it is OK to detach from a parent with a trusted adult.

The other benefits, I would say, are the peer interactions that happen in preschool that are so valuable with what we can do," Belarde continued. "The conversations, the language development, the learning to solve problems...so much is happening."

Within the program, children learn early developmental skills across six domains: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics. The program utilizes Creative Curriculum as well as Conscious Discipline and monitors student progress through Teaching Strategies Gold. Each of these programs have a strong foundation of research on improving outcomes for early learners.

"I have seen my 3-year-old become more independent outside of the home and willing to try new things when I'm not around," said Jordan Mitchell, the parent of a first-year ECEAP preschooler. "I can't wait to see how the rest of the year goes and see how much more he will grow."



Above: Mrs. Belarde's ECEAP preschool classroom at Sunset Elementary.

"Having structure and consistency has allowed my son to adjust to a classroom setting, learn how to regulate emotions, and adapt to essential norms within the classroom that are expected in a full-time class," said Olivia Atkins, the parent of a second-year preschooler. "He would, without a doubt, be completely overwhelmed next year [in kindergarten] without preschool."

Upon kindergarten entry, children are assessed using WaKIDS—the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills—a transition process that helps to ensure a successful start to the K-12 experience. Per the Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), WaKIDS results show ECEAP children are more likely to be ready for kindergarten than children from low-income households in general.

"It depends on the child and the family, but what I would say and what the kindergarten teachers would say is that you can tell a difference between a child who has had an early childhood program compared with a child who has been at home," Belarde said. "The knowledge and the ability to build a relationship with a trusted adult is different, and the transition is much less stressful for young children."

"I think having the opportunity to have two days a week of full-day school and being away from home helped with the transition [to kindergarten]," said Mitchell, who also has a second grader who completed the preschool program. "I feel like not having the chance to go to school before kinder would have been a hard adjustment for him. [He] is doing amazing in school and enjoys his class, his teachers, and his best friend he made his first



Above: Mrs. Belarde interacts with preschoolers.

Not only does attending preschool help to ease the transition into kindergarten, but it also offers educators access to children who may need early interventions to help them thrive in the learning environment. Early childhood intervention provides services and support to children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Intervention helps children develop positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships), acquire and use of knowledge and skills, and the use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

"Before the child gets to third grade, you have this window of opportunity to really make education a lifelong journey," Belarde said. "As soon as we can identify that and work toward closing that gap, the better the chance the child has for a successful education career. [The longer that intervention goes], the more it continues on into adulthood and it's a lifelong skill."

Belarde has been a preschool teacher at Sunset Elementary for the last five years, and she's been able to watch a multitude of children move on to kindergarten following

Story continued on Page 7

ECEAP continued

time in her preschool classroom. Belarde and parents agree, there is so much to love about preschool and its benefits.

“[Mrs. Belarde] is undeniably the most patient and consistent woman I’ve met,” Atkins said. “Her attention to detail with each kid, continually customizing the experience according to each child’s needs is invaluable.”

“I love the children so much; I love that you can visibly see them growing every day and the light bulb moments that happen with them, the AHA! that you get to see in early childhood,” Belarde said. “Plus, the relationships. I can go into the upper grades and I have children that I taught my first year here, and they are running through the hall to find Mrs. Belarde. The relationships that we build in preschool just set the stage for what can happen throughout their lifelong journey...Preschool is magical; we do magic here.”

The ECEAP program provides structures and support that are of benefit to all preschool students within the inclusionary preschool programs. Over the last five years, over 500 students have benefitted from this holistic approach to preschool education. The program receives the majority of its funding from the state of Washington as well as local levies. It is free for qualifying families. Interested families are able to register for open positions throughout the school year.

To see if you qualify or to register for ECEAP, please visit cheneysd.org or bit.ly/3NQTpWS.

CHS FBLA Chapter Sponsors Second Annual Santa’s Trailer Community Gift Drive & Shopping Day

During the month of December, Cheney High School’s Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) chapter organized the second annual Santa’s Trailer Christmas Gift Drive. The FBLA collected gifts from Nov. 27 through Dec. 15 and hosted a final shopping day event Dec. 19 at CHS.

Students collaborated with six local businesses in Cheney and Airway Heights, as well as every school within the Cheney Public Schools district, to collect gifts during the three-week drive. Community members were encouraged to drop off new, unwrapped gifts to donate to the cause. Following the drive, the CHS FBLA hosted a shopping day event at Cheney High School to assist families in need.

“My favorite part about Santa’s Trailer is the shopping day,” said senior Emme Murray, one of three student leaders for the event. “The joy on all the families’ faces makes the whole planning process worth it.”

The community shopping day event served over 100 local families who came to pick out gifts for their children. Over 800 gifts and 270 food items were donated to the cause. Free gift wrapping, hot chocolate, and pictures with Santa were available for those in attendance.

“Some families mentioned that Santa’s Trailer was their only source of gifts for the holiday,” said junior Rylan Rajewski, another student leader for the event. “Our shopping day has



Above: Sophomore Isaac Bishop directs community members for Santa’s Trailer
Right: Volunteers wrap gifts for patrons.



become an important part of the Cheney community because it has allowed so many families a Christmas they wouldn’t have had otherwise.”



Feb. 13, 2024 Special Election Ballot Measures *Submit Your Questions and Feedback*

As a Cheney Public Schools district community member, you’ve been receiving information regarding the upcoming Special Election on Feb. 13, 2024. The district has distributed information through newsletters, social media, in person at district events, and on our website. Our goal is to increase the level of understanding among district voters about each of the proposed propositions so voters feel confident in their decisions come election day.

Do you have any lingering questions regarding the proposed ballot measures? Let us know! Submit feedback or questions anonymously through the QR to the right, or email Communications Coordinator Jenna Larson at jl Larson@cheneysd.org. We will be updating our FAQs on our website at cheneysd.org from the feedback we receive, and we will directly answer any questions submitted via email.

Don’t forget to vote on or before Feb. 13!





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..... *Important Dates*

Feb. 9

Professional Learning Day - No School

Feb. 13

Special Election - Remember to Vote!

Feb. 14

School Board Meeting - 6 p.m.
Westwood Middle School

Feb. 16

Emergency Make-up Day

Feb. 19

Presidents' Day - No School

Feb. 28

School Board Meeting - 6 p.m.
Windsor Elementary



Election Day: Feb. 13, 2024



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Cheney Public Schools does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, economic status, pregnancy, familial status, marital status, disability, or the use of a trained guide dog or service animal, and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

The following employees have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination.

Title IX/Chapter 28A.640 Officer/
Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator/ADA
Coordinator/Gender Inclusive Schools Coordinator
Tom Arlt, Assistant Superintendent
Cheney Public Schools
12414 S. Andrus Rd. Cheney, WA 99004
Phone: (509) 559-4550
Email: tarlt@cheneysd.org

Section 504 Coordinator
Franklin Day, Director, Student Support Services
Cheney Public Schools
12414 S. Andrus Rd. Cheney, WA 99004
Phone: (509) 559-4507
Email: fday@cheneysd.org

Requests for Disclosure of Public Records
Helen Page, Public Records Officer
Cheney Public Schools
12414 S. Andrus Rd., Cheney, WA 99004
Phone: (509) 559-4502
Email: hpage@cheneysd.org

Are you a member of a military family?
Please visit bit.ly/cheneymilitary for
more information.