

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future



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Superintendent
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On the Cover:

A Snowdon student poses as Leonardo da Vinci, part of the 5th grade wax museum on March 27.

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

The month of April started off with a bang! The first of two sales of the voter-approved \$72 million bond was completed on April 1, and myself, Director of Finance Jamie Reed, and board members Mitch Swenson and Bill Hanson were in attendance to witness the 90-minute sales window. District-selected underwriter D.A. Davidson & Co. led the sale, and during this time, 24 unique institutional investors across the nation, as well as three local bond retail orders, were submitted. The \$36 million in proceeds from this first sale will be deposited with the Spokane County Treasurer on April 17 and will be available for the voter-approved projects across the District. The second bond sale is projected to take place in June 2026; by splitting the authorization into two sales, the District anticipates saving taxpayers money by timing the bond sales to align with capital project needs instead of issuing the full bond amount upfront.

Prior to the sale, the District's Bond Program Managers from Turner & Townsend, Heery, began pricing and scheduling projects to be completed this summer, including the bus loops at both Salnave and Windsor elementary schools and new chiller installations at Betz, Salnave, and Windsor elementary schools. The stadium upgrades at Cheney High School are also scheduled to be completed this summer, in addition to some interior upgrades to tie in the old to new at Sunset Elementary. All of these necessary projects are funded by the voter-approved \$72 million bond. We cannot thank you enough for your support of our school district!

The Bond Advisory Team (BAT), which was formed in early January to support transparency, accountability, and the effective use of bond funds to meet the District's capital improvement needs, has met three times and is already making an impact. In the first meeting on February 10, BAT members discussed what was working well, concerns that needed to be addressed, ideas for improvement, and any specific questions they had. The ideas they presented and questions they asked created a new robust FAQ section for the District's November 2024 Bond webpage. Click the QR code below to view! If you have questions that are not answered in the FAQs, please submit them to Jenna Larson, Communications Coordinator, at jl Larson@cheneysd.org.

I am excited to share that the components of our District's Profile of a Graduate/Portrait of a Learner (POG/POL) are complete! Our POG/POL Committee, along with Director of Teaching and Learning Dr. Kelly Niccolls, analyzed data collected from a district-wide survey distributed in mid-March via ParentSquare and social media to parents, guardians, students, staff, and community members. A big thank you to the work of our POG/POL Committee and Dr. Niccolls for working together to finalize the requirements of each. The work will continue with the Measurement Team. This team will evaluate how portfolio components impact student preparation for life after graduation. Watch for an invitation to join this team later this month on ParentSquare and social media.

There continue to be changes nationally that could affect Cheney Public Schools. As federal policies shift, we will continue to follow Washington state law while meeting federal requirements. When these laws do not fully align, we work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and legal counsel to follow policies in a responsible and lawful way. We will keep you informed if and how any of these changes impact our district.

I am grateful for the dedication and effort across our district to create better experiences for our students. Thank you for your support and for being part of this important work! We are Cheney Public Schools!

Take care,

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



Mark Scott
School Board President
District 1



Liz Winer
School Board Member
District 2



Henry Browne
School Board Vice President
District 3



Bill Hanson
School Board Member
District 4



Mitch Swenson
School Board Member
District 5

MISSION STATEMENT:

Cheney Public Schools exists to guarantee a safe and caring environment where ALL students learn at high levels and graduate with options for post-secondary education, careers, and civic engagement.



Cheney Public Schools Bond Updates



There have been a few major updates in the last month regarding Cheney Public Schools' \$72 million voter-approved bond. The District received strong financial ratings from Moody's, completed the first of two bond sales, and selected a progressive design-build team to lead the new Craig Road Elementary School design and construction project.

On March 20, Moody's Ratings (Moody's) affirmed Cheney Public Schools' Aa3 rating for its 2025 Unlimited Tax General Obligation Bonds, citing strong financial management and projected growth in the district.

Moody's ratings rationale reflects continued enrollment growth along with Cheney Public Schools' location within the growing regional economy, including unprecedented growth in the community of Airway Heights. The rating further takes into account the district's stable financial position, conservative budgeting, and voter approved EP&O and Capital Projects levies. The district's financial health is further supported by the Washington State School Bond Guarantee Program, rated Aaa by Moody's, which provides additional security for voter-approved bonds.

On April 1, D.A. Davidson & Co, the underwriter selected by the District, opened the bond order period and received orders from 24 unique institutional investors across the nation in addition to three local bond retail orders. After all allocations were complete—and due to the strong rating assessed by Moody's—the District was able to secure

financing at a True Interest Cost of 4.254 percent. The \$36 million in proceeds from the sale will be deposited with the Spokane County Treasurer on April 17 and will be available for voter-approved projects across the district.

This was the first bond issue of the voter-approved authorization of \$72 million. By splitting the authorization into two sales, the District anticipates saving taxpayers' dollars by timing the bond sales to align with capital project needs, instead of issuing the full bond amount up front.

Earlier in March, Cheney Public Schools selected Garco Construction/Integrus Architecture to lead the progressive design-build project for the new Craig Road Elementary School. The selection committee, which includes four voting members from Cheney Public Schools and three non-voting members from Turner & Townsend, Heery (the District's bond program managers), selected the team following an extensive selection and award process that spanned over two months. The Garco Construction/Integrus Architecture progressive design-build team emerged as the highest-scoring finalist.

Following the progressive design-build team selection, District partner Teater Crocker, along with members of Integrus Architecture, visited district elementary schools to collect educational specifications, or ed specs. These outline educational requirements for facilities, design features, program requirements, and environmental needs to ensure school buildings can support educational goals. Staff across the district provided valuable insight that will help guide the design and build of the new elementary school. Teachers from every elementary grade level, music, and P.E., as well as custodial and maintenance, office staff, special services, special education, occupational therapy, physical therapy, library, technology, and transportation contributed to ed specs. That process concludes on April 15. Thank you to all our staff members who

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Cheney Middle School Student Honored in National Writing Competition



Ella Lynch poses with her award certificate.

For Cheney Middle School 8th grader Ella Lynch, writing takes effort; most days, it does not come naturally. However, when she feels particularly moved by a topic, the words flow in a different way.

"It doesn't always come easy to me," Lynch said. "It's hard to take all the thoughts out of my brain sometimes. But, I think when I feel inspired about a prompt, then I write better."

Lynch is part of Sarah Davies' 8th grade Advanced Language Arts class at Cheney Middle School, and in January, Davies challenged her class with entering a national writing contest: the 2025 Elie Wiesel Writing Competition, presented by the Holocaust Commission of the United Jewish Federation of Tidewater. The competition—named for Holocaust survivor and author Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel—offered four prompts with accompanying quotes to choose from.

The essay was part of a greater section of content surrounding responses to injustice. Davies' students learned about the Holocaust and read two different first-person accounts, including *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night*, the first-hand account of Wiesel.

Continued on Page 6

Making a Difference: The Powerful Impact of School Volunteers

It is hard to put into words the true impact of volunteers in schools. Schools rely on volunteers to help support teachers and administrators in a multitude of ways, whether it be one-on-one specialty assistance for students, office tasks like photocopying or laminating, or simply being a constant figure in students' lives. Even the smallest of tasks performed by volunteers can have a huge impact on a classroom.

Take Whitney Kolterman for example, a first-year volunteer at Snowdon Elementary. Her son's first-grade teacher Heather Piddington reached out to families asking for help in the classroom, and Kolterman responded to the call by helping in the classroom one day a week for 45 minutes.



First-year volunteer Whitney Kolterman (top) works with first grade students at Snowdon Elementary.

"I'm fortunately able [to come in to volunteer], so I filled out the appropriate forms and began coming in one day a week," Kolterman said. "I walk around the classroom while students are doing their work, and I am there if they have any questions or need help with their work."

Some days, Kolterman might spend some one-on-one time with a student who may need a little extra attention, or she may listen to students read a book and help them answer questions. "Whatever the teacher needs from me that day, I'm there to help her out!"

Kolterman, along with other volunteers who have spent time in Piddington's first-grade classroom, are more than just helpful. Volunteering has a positive snowball effect across the classroom.

"Parents that help with office tasks help to free up my time for more important things, like grading and lesson planning," Piddington said. "When they come to work with students in the classroom, it helps me with classroom management, and students are given more opportunities to learn standards. [Students] also get to hear it taught differently from another adult. It helps me to meet the needs of more students."

Piddington continued that volunteers are especially helpful when a student may need more attention or assistance on a particular section. For example, if the class has

completed a section on letter sounds, but one student really needs more time with letter sounds, Piddington will task her parent volunteers with one-on-one intervention, providing uninterrupted attention to assist that specific student.

For Renee Collins, a second-grade teacher at Windsor Elementary, one-on-one reading is the main task of veteran volunteer and former Cheney Public Schools music teacher Dotty Thomas. Thomas spends two hours each week in Collins' classroom, reading with students, working on vocabulary development, making sure students' book boxes are filled with books at an appropriate reading level, and writing projects on occasion.

"Dotty goes through book boxes, reads for about 8-10 minutes, and talks with students about their fluency and vocabulary," Collins said. "She gives them that personal attention, which absolutely is great for their confidence. It gives them a chance to shine; kids look forward to seeing her."

The joy of Thomas' presence in Collins' classroom is a two-way street. Thomas, who began her teaching career with Cheney Public Schools in 1970, wanted to keep her professional connections as well as continue to be well-informed about education. Thomas says volunteering her time in Collins' class at Windsor provides her with many personal benefits.

"I just love being with the kids," Thomas said.

"I think for me, to be in touch with youth keeps me young. Maybe that's a little selfish, but it's a two-way street. I just admire [Renee's] teaching, and so for me, it's a privilege to just be a small part of that... There are a lot of reasons why I do it, but my favorite is listening to the kids. We have our giggles. Little things come up, and it's just really enjoyable to be there."

"I also think it's really important for a person my age to have something that really means something, something they are passionate about," Thomas continued. "I am passionate about education. It's good for the kids, it's good for me, and it's good for Renee."

For Kim Cunningham, a district parent who has been volunteering her time at Betz Elementary since 2008, her route to volunteering began more as a support system for her daughter's teachers.

"My eldest daughter is deaf and has cochlear implants," Cunningham said. "She was the first student at Betz and just the second in the district [with cochlear implants]. They were a little anxious about it, so I offered to come in a couple days a week."

When her second child, a son who is severely handicapped, began at Betz, she increased her hours so she would be available if he needed assistance. "It was easier for everyone if I was local and could go down and check on

him,” Cunningham said. “I just fell in love with what I was doing.”

In the years since, Cunningham has increased her hours and is now volunteering full time at Betz. She has a teaching degree with a special education endorsement that she never used professionally, but it has been a great resource during her time in the school. She said volunteering gives her the freedom to be a full-time mom, but also the freedom to have space to do what she loves. Given the nature of her son’s special needs, she has to be able to have the flexibility to tend to him whenever necessary.

“My son has a seizure disorder, so volunteering at Betz allows me to be right there,” Cunningham said. “I can get to the middle or high school in moments.”

Her home base is the library, and she is available to assist wherever she is needed. In the past, she has spent long stretches with math in kindergarten, supervising recess, or laminating items for the school. But for Cunningham, her favorite thing about volunteering is making connections with students.

“You just know it’s making their life a little bit better that day,” she said. “It’s just easier to sit next to you and spend that time with you. I can do that...It is just so amazing. That is what I enjoy most about it, that when I have those kiddos who just need to sit next to a big

person, relax for a little bit, and they can help me stay on task.”

“Mrs. Cunningham makes a profound difference in the lives of both students and teachers at Betz every day,” said Erin Williams, a Betz kindergarten teacher. “Her impact is immeasurable, with no limits to the positive influence she has on everyone around her. Above all, she builds meaningful connections with students, touching their lives on a daily basis.”

From these accounts, it is clear the impact that volunteers have on students, and teachers, across Cheney Public Schools. No matter if it is a first-year volunteer or a seasoned veteran, the time spent in classrooms and in schools

makes a difference.

“Every school can use more volunteers,” Cunningham said. “There is not a lack of space, and if you’re not interested in volunteering in a classroom with students, that’s ok. There is so much you can do behind the scenes, like photocopying or cutting things. There are also ways to volunteer without leaving your house.”

There are currently 716 active volunteers across Cheney Public Schools’ 11 buildings. Do you want to become a volunteer? Reach out directly to the school you are interested in volunteering at to learn more about specific opportunities.



Full-time Betz volunteer Kim Cunningham searches for appropriate-level books for first grade students in the library.

Bond Updates cont'd.

voluntarily participated in this important step.

Bond program managers from Turner & Townsend, Heery have started pricing out and scheduling projects funded by the \$72 million bond to be completed this summer, including bus loops at both Salnave and Windsor Elementary schools and new chiller installations at Betz, Salnave, and Windsor.

Click the QR code for more information about the voter-approved \$72 million bond projects.



Information System Upgrade: District Moving From Skyward SMS 2.0 to Qmlativ

Our district has been preparing for a major information system upgrade as we transition from Skyward SMS 2.0 to Skyward Qmlativ in July 2025.

Skyward SMS—the current information system—is becoming outdated and impossible to upgrade. Qmlativ is the next generation of Skyward SMS, offering a user-friendly design and easy-to-navigate interface. This move will provide enhanced functionality across all areas of our data management. For most users, the only noticeable difference will be a slight change in the look and feel of the application.

It is important to note, in order to complete

this migration, our district will be unable to access Skyward and Qmlativ from July 16 through July 31, 2025.

We appreciate your patience as we make this necessary transition. Our team is committed to a smooth migration with minimal disruption, and we will provide updates and resources to support you along the way.

If you have any questions regarding the information system transition, please email Jenna Larson, Communications Coordinator at jl Larson@cheneysd.org.

"They took all of that knowledge to write about different responses to viewing the suffering, and what our individual role is," Davies said. "When we see it, how do we respond?"

Davies' students chose one of four possible prompts from the writing competition, with Lynch particularly drawn to the third prompt: *How do art and personal diaries tell the reader/viewer a story? Have you found specific art pieces or personal stories evocative of certain emotions within yourself?*

"I think reading *Night* was really inspiring because it is such a piece of art about a real thing that happened," Lynch said. "So, I think that inspired the prompt that I chose...I learned a lot about how powerful the first-hand account is, as like a survivor of the Holocaust and how interesting that was to

read."

The competition provided recommended sources for supporting students' writing, as well as various stories related to the Holocaust. Davies' students worked on their papers for about a week-and-a-half, helping each other brainstorm ideas and find related sources.

"I think it's a very communal effort of people giving ideas to other students," Davies said. "Then, we get to a spot where we start revising, editing, and looking at each other's work. Since it's Advanced Language Arts, it's way more student-driven. They are helping each other write their essays. Ella had more than a couple people read hers and help her edit it, and she also helped edit multiple people's too. They're all part of the win."

Lynch's paper was selected as a winner in the junior essay division of the Holocaust Commission's Elie Wiesel Writing Competition; the award is officially titled Special Commendation in the Junior Essay Division. With the award, Lynch has been invited to be honored at the Holocaust Commission's annual Yom Hashoah Commemoration, April 23 at the Ohel Sholom Temple in Norfolk, Va.

Lynch's essay will also be featured on The Holocaust Commission's website. (At the time of publication in early April, the 2025 winning essays were not yet available online).

"I felt very surprised," Lynch said. "I'm proud of myself because I worked hard on my essay. It's sort of gratifying to know that it was chosen."

CHS Worksite Learning: Turning Classroom Skills Into Career Opportunities

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Worksite Learning program at Cheney High School offers a great opportunity for high school students to learn and grow in real-world professional settings. It is an opportunity to take the skills and knowledge they have acquired in the classroom and apply it in legitimate work environments.

"Worksite learning is a multilayered system," said CHS Worksite Learning Coordinator Dorian Byrd. "Ideally, kids take—for example—Intro to Business. Then, they are going to take Advanced Marketing. Then, they take those skills that they've learned in classes and go apply it."

Those skills can range from being a punctual employee to troubleshooting networking issues. Byrd refers to them as 21st-century skills, and includes competencies like financial literacy, media literacy, creative thinking, innovation, and problem solving. So, instead of 180 hours in a classroom setting, students can practice and apply skills at their place of employment for a semester. That could be a part-time job at McDonalds, or time spent at

a family business. One worksite learning student gained valuable experience as a veterinary intern, while another interned at a local gym.

"Sometimes we have to adapt it, so it's simpler employability skills, and sometimes it's more focused on their career," Byrd said.

One blossoming career field is Information Technology, and CHS has created a program for training students for a career in IT with a combination of summer

internships and worksite learning experiences.

Former CTE Director Adam Smith worked closely with the District's IT Department to identify students in his CTE courses who might be interested.

Joaquin Mendoza, who graduated in 2022, was one of those students.

"I had a little knowledge on the basics [of IT] from self-study and from taking the CTE classes offered such as IT Essentials and Cisco Networking," Mendoza said. "However, being in the worksite learning program gave me the chance to put my knowledge to the test in a real-world scenario rather than a controlled lab, or test."

Continued on Page 7



Senior Holland Hurd works on a Chromebook during his worksite learning period at CHS.

Mendoza first interned with the IT Department in the summer of 2021, heading into his senior year. Then, with the assistance of Smith and the IT Department, Mendoza was able to kickstart the worksite learning program for IT at the high school.

“[Joaquin] had interned in the summer for us for some summer work,” said Neil Kerr, the IT Support Specialist that oversees the worksite learning students for IT. “He asked about [worksite learning], and they said sure. He signed up and we just kind of set a little program for him.”

Mendoza’s request for the IT worksite learning program almost four years ago paved the way for other students interested in pursuing a career in IT, like Holland Hurd. Hurd, who was a freshman during Mendoza’s senior year, was inspired to follow the same path after a chance encounter with Mendoza.

“I had an issue with my computer and [Joaquin] fixed it,” Hurd said. “I thought, ‘That’s really cool. I want to do that in the future.’”

Hurd has been part of the worksite learning program since the spring of his junior year, applying skills from courses he has taken at CHS while also learning invaluable skills on

the job. He spent last summer interning for the IT Department, helping to install interactive whiteboards at Cheney Middle School, and he has continued in the worksite learning program this year.

Students in the program complete tasks like repairing Chromebooks and diagnosing IT issues for staff and other students at the high school. This includes scheduling, troubleshooting issues, fixing problems and/or ordering necessary equipment.

“[Holland] became the go-to IT person, which is great because then that frees me up to work on the harder things that are like project-style stuff,” Kerr said. “I also have to take care of two other schools [in the district], so I’m not parked here for half the day or three-quarters of the day every day of the week. I can come in and check with them and say, ‘Hey, where are you at?’ or ‘What do you need?’ and go from there.”

“It provides a lot of hands-on experience,” said Assistant Director of Technology Jonathan Skaggs. “Holland is a great example. He’s looking to go into the field. So, he gets hands-on experience so he can realize if this is actually where he wants to go, or if there’s a more specific area.”

The experience has helped Hurd hone in on the path he would like to pursue after graduation. After considering computer science and cybersecurity, the worksite learning experience confirmed IT is the right field.

“Worksite learning is just like, a step above,” Hurd said. “Just not sitting in a class and actually being able to go out and do this stuff...This has really moved me forward and motivated me to keep pushing forward because it’s just a great opportunity.”

For Mendoza, who is now working as an Information Systems Technical Specialist for the City of Moscow in Moscow, Idaho, the worksite learning program helped catapult his career in IT.

“Worksite learning allowed for me to enter the professional world already having some experience and confidence, which I think helped me land my next job,” Mendoza said.

“Reading books and taking tests and exams will only go so far,” he continued. “Nothing beats real, hands-on experience.”

Horsin’ Around: Cheney FFA Visits District Elementary Schools

Members of the Cheney Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter presented to kindergarten, first, and second graders at both Betz and Salnave elementary schools as part of the F.A.R.M. to Kids program. The Forestry Agriculture and Resource Management (F.A.R.M.) for Kids program is an FFA career development event that

challenges chapters to educate elementary students on the importance of agriculture.

The Cheney FFA chapter presented Horsin’ Around at both elementary schools, offering students a hands-on experience about horses, agriculture, and the important roles animals play in farming.

Cheney FFA members were responsible for creating the lesson from start to finish, including brainstorming the subject matter and creating age-appropriate activities for students. This lesson will be used for a competition in early May, and participants will deliver a presentation about the subject matter, activities, and other topics.





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..... *Important Dates*

April 21
Emergency Make-Up Day

April 30
School Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
Cheney High School

May 14
School Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
Cheney High School

May 23
Emergency Make-Up Day

May 26
Memorial Day - No School

May 28
School Board Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
Cheney High School

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TOGETHER, WE ARE CHENEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Cheney Public Schools @cheneyschools



@CheneySchools

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

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for more information.