



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Board of Directors

**From:** Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

**Date:** February 13, 2025

**Subject:** **Monitoring Report for EL-4, Staff Treatment, Compensation and Evaluation**

I certify that the following is accurate as of February 13, 2025. The reporting period is from February 23, 2024 through February 13, 2025.

**Policy type:** Executive Limitation (EL)

**Policy:** [EL-4 Staff Treatment, Compensation and Evaluation](#)

“The superintendent shall not fail to ensure that staff is treated with respect and dignity and that the district’s public image or credibility does not fall into disrespect or ill repute due to imprudent employment decisions.”

**Adopted:** September 10, 2009

**Revised:** April 18, 2013, June 26, 2014, March 9, 2017, April 17, 2019

**Interpretation of items:** None in question

**Background information:** This report is about Executive Limitation 4 – Staff Treatment, Compensation, and Evaluation (EL-4). It was created in April 2013 by combining three prior Els: Staff Treatment EL-4, Staff Compensation EL-5 and Staff Evaluation EL-6. The board adopted the revised/combined edition of this EL in April 2013.

*Some of the information in this report has not changed from previous reports but provides needed context for each area. **Bolded words** or phrases within the text of this report have been used to signal new initiatives, strategies and work. EL-4 has five major areas and a response to each of them follows.*

**1. The superintendent shall not fail to take all reasonable and prudent actions with respect to the hiring and continued employment of district employees that are typical for similar and highly effective school districts.**

Each year the district reviews its hiring practices, processes and timelines, making necessary adjustments to recruit the most qualified candidates for each position. While specific requirements vary by position, we generally require an application form, a letter of application, reference letters, confidential reference forms, disclosures, applicable licenses/certificates, and a written response to "The Bellingham Promise." Applicants submit their materials through our web-based application system (HRM+). Annually, the human resources staff provide training on sound and legal hiring practices, particularly for new administrators in the district.

Once a position is posted and advertised, principals or program administrators screen applications electronically to identify the most qualified candidates. These candidates then undergo various processes, including interviews, testing, reference checks, and certification checks, before being recommended for hire. The district also conducts background checks, including fingerprinting and State Patrol/FBI checks, in accordance with the law.

We continue our outreach through job fairs and advertising on various platforms, such as the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), Washington School Personnel Association (WSPA), Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS), National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), Diversitywashington.com, Washington Association of School Business Officials (WSBO), Government Finance Officers Association, NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement, The National Association of Educational Procurement (NAEP), Washington State Paralegal Association (WSPA), LinkedIn, Craigslist, Indeed, WorkSource, and other relevant online sites. We also maintain partnerships with universities for student teaching to attract high-quality staff and increase the diversity of our candidates.

**We have taken significant steps to enhance our recruitment efforts this year.** Our team attended several local job fairs, including Western Washington University's Spring Education Career Fair, where we connected with promising candidates for hard-to-fill certificated positions. Additionally, we participated in the local Sikh Temple's Fall Job Fair, which allowed us to meet many potential applicants.

**A highlight of our recruitment efforts was the return of the BIPOC Job Fair in March.**

This well-attended event was hosted at Bellingham High School, with food provided by our Sehome High School culinary students. Over 100 job seekers attended to learn about the variety of openings in the district and receive support with the application process and materials. Our human resources team followed up with each attendee after the event, resulting in many interviews and subsequent hires.



*Photos above: BIPOC job fair on Saturday, March 9, 2024 at Bellingham High School.*

To further improve our recruitment process, we **enhanced our [jobs webpage](#)** by making important information more accessible and clearly outlining the hiring process. This transparency aims to make the application process easier to navigate, thereby attracting more qualified applicants to our hiring pools.

## Join Us! Applications And Hiring Process Overview

Human Resources

[Human Resources](#)

[Apply Online](#)

[Affirmative Action Plan](#)  
[Affirmative Action Plan Update June 2024](#)

[Bellingham Public Schools BIPOC Job Fair](#)

[Current Openings](#)

[Collective Bargaining Agreements and Salary Schedules](#)

[Employee Assistance Program](#)

[Employee Benefits](#)



We are thrilled that you are considering joining our community of educators, team members, and friends. At Bellingham Public Schools, we believe in fostering an environment where talent flourishes, ideas thrive, and individuals grow professionally and personally.

We also focused on supporting our hiring administrators by **providing training on best hiring practices**. This past year, we collaborated with a team of principals to revise and update teacher interview materials to better align with current teaching best practices and The Bellingham Promise. Additionally, the human resources department, along with Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Dr. Janis Farmer, provided training for all hiring administrators. This training focused on reviewing applicant packets with the goals of identifying implicit bias and calibrating applicant reviews.

## Substitutes

Supporting the daily substitute needs of our district is a monumental task that requires continuous coordination and dedication. The human resources department collaborates closely with each school to ensure that vacant positions are filled with qualified substitutes. During the 2024-25 school year, we observed a slight increase in staff

absences. The chart below highlights the total number of vacancies for the first semester of each year and the corresponding percentage of these vacancies that were successfully filled with substitutes. **Notably, our fill rate percentage saw an improvement, increasing by 4%.**

| Substitute Rates for Semester 1<br>2019-2025 |                                 |                                                |                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| School Year<br>(Semester 1 only)             | Total<br>Absences/<br>Vacancies | Percent of<br>Absences/<br>Vacancies<br>Filled | Notes                                                   |
| 2019-2020                                    | 13,394                          | 98.49%                                         | <i>Pre-pandemic,<br/>closed March 2020</i>              |
| 2020-2021                                    |                                 |                                                | <i>Staggered return, no sub<br/>data for comparison</i> |
| 2021-2022                                    | 17,601                          | 90.63%                                         | <i>All students and staff<br/>returned in August</i>    |
| 2022-2023                                    | 15,998                          | 86.55%                                         |                                                         |
| 2023-2024                                    | 14,508                          | 89.89%                                         |                                                         |
| 2024-2025                                    | 16,955                          | 93.83%                                         |                                                         |

Our goal continues to focus on the fill rate percentage. We have yet to achieve pre-pandemic fill percentage rates, but the steady increase the past three years is encouraging.

When we further examine this year's data, there is a significant difference in the percentage of certificated positions as compared to classified positions that are filled each day, as illustrated in the chart on the next page (97% as compared to 92%). Also demonstrated in the chart is the significant difference in vacancies, with **classified vacancies exceeding certificated by more than 1,100**. This is certainly an outcome of the increased number of student support classified positions over recent years.

| <b>Substitute Fill Rate</b><br>August 29, 2024 – January 31, 2025 |                                      |                                                             |                                                                     |                 |               |                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                   | <i>Total Absences/<br/>Vacancies</i> | <i>Absences/<br/>Vacancies<br/>Needing a<br/>Substitute</i> | <i>Absences/<br/>Vacancies<br/>Not<br/>Needing a<br/>Substitute</i> | <i>Unfilled</i> | <i>Filled</i> | <i>Percent of<br/>Absences/<br/>Vacancies<br/>Filled</i> |
| <b>Classified</b>                                                 | <b>9,050</b>                         | <b>8,484</b>                                                | <b>566</b>                                                          | <b>719</b>      | <b>7,765</b>  | <b>92%</b>                                               |
| <b>Certificated</b>                                               | <b>7,905</b>                         | <b>6,298</b>                                                | <b>1,607</b>                                                        | <b>193</b>      | <b>6,105</b>  | <b>97%</b>                                               |

Overall, we are making significant progress in ensuring our schools are adequately staffed with the necessary substitutes each day. This year, we have implemented several systems to enhance the efficiency of our recruitment, interviewing, onboarding and support processes:

- **Monthly Job Postings:** For both classified and certificated substitute pools, we have continued the practice of monthly postings. Monthly postings allow us to connect with candidates more promptly and provide our schools with new substitutes on a more regular basis.
- **Weekly Onboarding Schedule:** Our HR team has developed a reliable and efficient system for screening and onboarding new substitutes. By streamlining the interview process, we fill onboarding sessions more effectively and have more substitutes ready to work each week.
- **Partnership with Western Washington University’s Elementary Education Department:** We continue to grow our partnership with WWU to welcome new interns to Bellingham Public Schools. Substituting in our schools provides pre-service teachers with valuable experience while completing their internships. Through this partnership, WWU adjusted class schedules so that interns have one to two days per week without classes or internship responsibilities, allowing them to substitute in our schools. This initiative has increased the number of paraeducator substitutes and strengthened our relationship with university partners.
- **Enhanced Training Opportunities for Paraeducator Substitutes:** This year, we have started offering more training opportunities for our paraeducator substitutes. We have several online modules available to all staff, addressing strategies to support students successfully. Additionally, we introduced an in-person training session focused on supporting students who are dysregulated. This session was well attended and will help substitutes feel more confident in accepting a wider variety of positions.

## Employee Recognition

Recognition is an important aspect of recruiting, hiring and retaining qualified staff. The Department of Communications and Community Relations coordinates staff recognition by providing an avenue for staff to celebrate one another; developing criteria and a process for selection of districtwide staff and community partners in our annual awards; planning and implementing events; and offering a variety of ways to recognize staff in social media and storytelling.

### Here are examples of this work during this reporting period:

**Good Apples:** Two to three times per school year, communications staff asks employees for submissions to recognize staff accomplishments, shine a spotlight on the work of a colleague, and extend special thanks and appreciation in a positive way.

We collect and edit submissions, producing slide presentations in both video and PDF versions. These are generally shared in a message of gratitude from the superintendent. In this reporting period, Good Apples recognition occurred three times: [February 2024](#), [May 2024](#) and again during American Education Week in [November 2024](#).

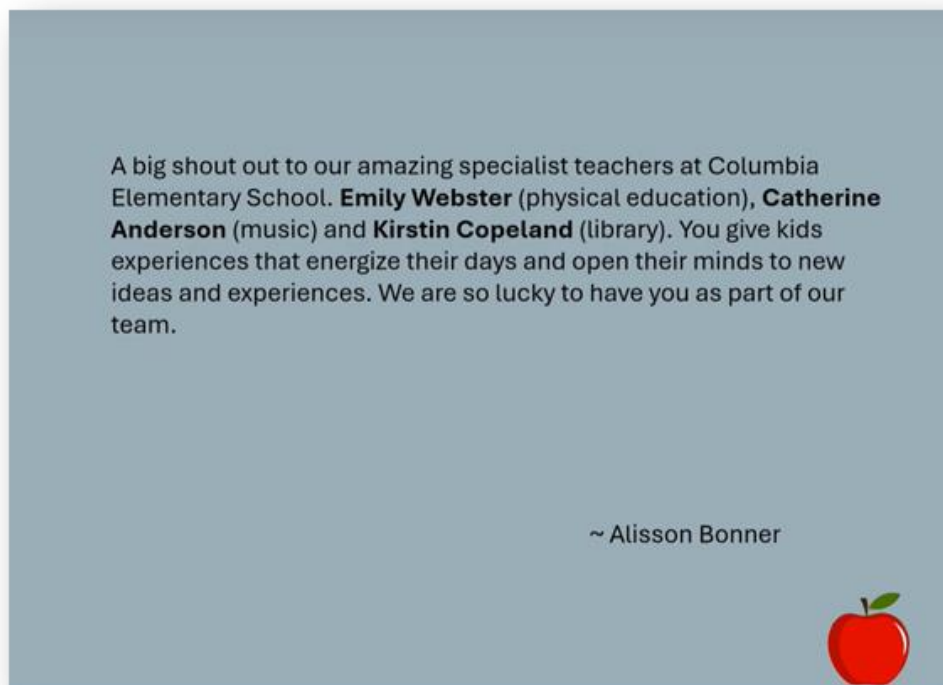


*Photo above: A sample slide from the November edition of Good Apples.*

**Promise Awards:** We are committed to recognizing the special achievements and outstanding contributions of staff, volunteers and community partners. The annual [Promise Awards](#) provide an opportunity to highlight the exceptional work of select honorees who make a significant difference in our schools and community. These award recipients represent our school system and help increase awareness of the important contributions of our staff. The 2024 Promise Awards included surprise visits and award recipients received engraved trophies. [Read full release here.](#)

**Above and Beyond Service Award:** Kelly Balzer, paraeducator and PTA co-president at Northern Heights Elementary School

**Above and Beyond Service Award:** Dionte Thomas, campus monitor at Squalicum High School

**Collaboration Award:** Anna Burns and Alexa Tucker, sixth grade teaching team at Shuksan Middle School

**Compassion and Service Award:** Joe Wooding, social studies and AVID teacher and instructional coach at Options High School

**Great Teaching Award:** Ruwani Brohier, fifth grade teacher at Cordata Elementary School

**One Schoolhouse Award:** Russ Robinson, safety and security supervisor for Bellingham Public Schools and high school athletics coach

**Outstanding Leadership Award:** Teri Herda, principal at Silver Beach Elementary School



[Additional photos from the surprise visits are found in a Flickr album.](#)

A [compilation video of the 2024 Promise Awards](#) was shared in spring 2024.



There were also multiple posts, reels and short videos about the Promise Awards shared on social media throughout 2024.

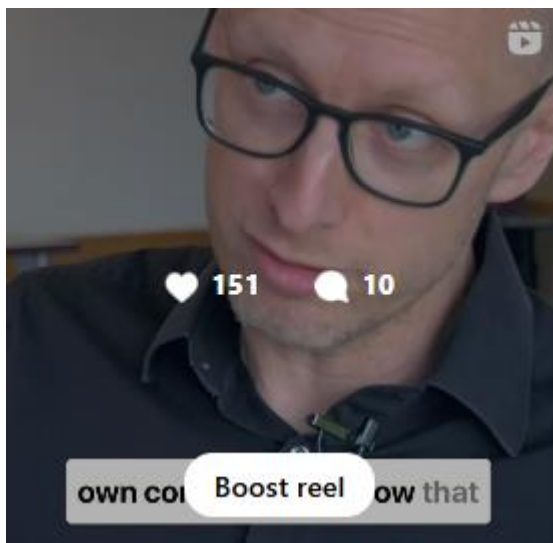


Photo above: A sample [Instagram reel](#) about Joe Wooding, recipient of the Compassion and Service Promise Award in 2024. Staff Promise award winners were highlighted on social media in 2024.

**Retirements:** The Department of Communications and Community Relations hosts an annual dinner to honor retirees in the district. In spring 2024, over 30 invitations were sent out and 18 retirees (including teachers, classified staff, bus drivers and food services staff) chose to attend the dinner at the Hotel Bellwether on May 30, 2024.

To show appreciation for their years of service, every retiree who attended the dinner received a tribute read aloud during the program, a sit-down dinner and an engraved vase with flowers. The Bellingham Public Schools Foundation supports the event. [A full album of retirement dinner photos is on Flickr.](#)



**Staff Kick Off 2024:** The All Staff Kick-Off Celebration was held on Aug. 28 at Bellingham High School. Emceed in 2024 by Shuksan Middle School Principal Alli Chryst and Birchwood Elementary School Dean of Students Rodolfo Riviere Vazquez, with special performances by high school bands, cheer/dance teams and singers, the event brings together all staff the day before students return as a fun and inspirational way to start the school year.

The social media post for this year's staff kickoff event garnered 467 likes on Instagram and 82 likes on Facebook. [Photos from the 2024 Kick Off are available on Flickr.](#)

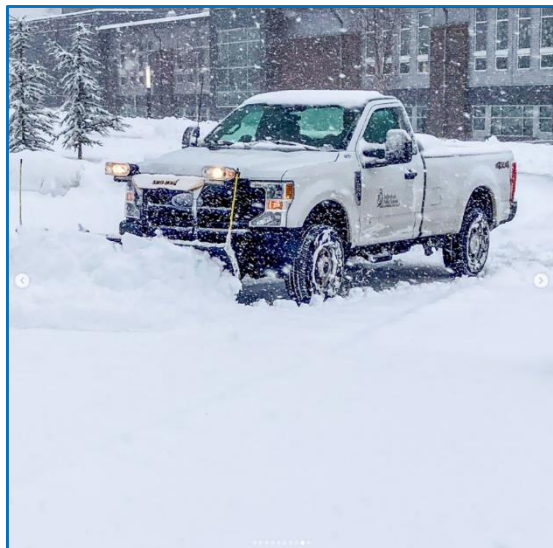


**Social media posts highlighting staff:** Between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2024, staff members were highlighted regularly in district social media on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn. Here is a sampling of these posts, captions and photos:

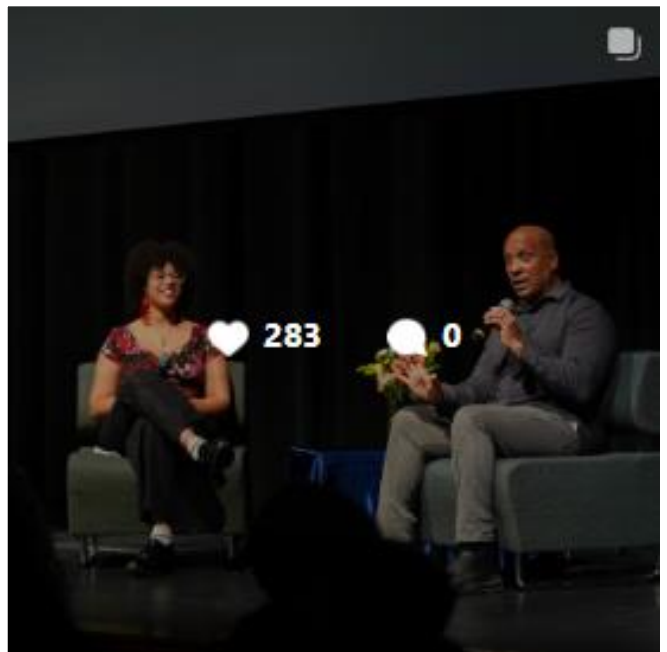
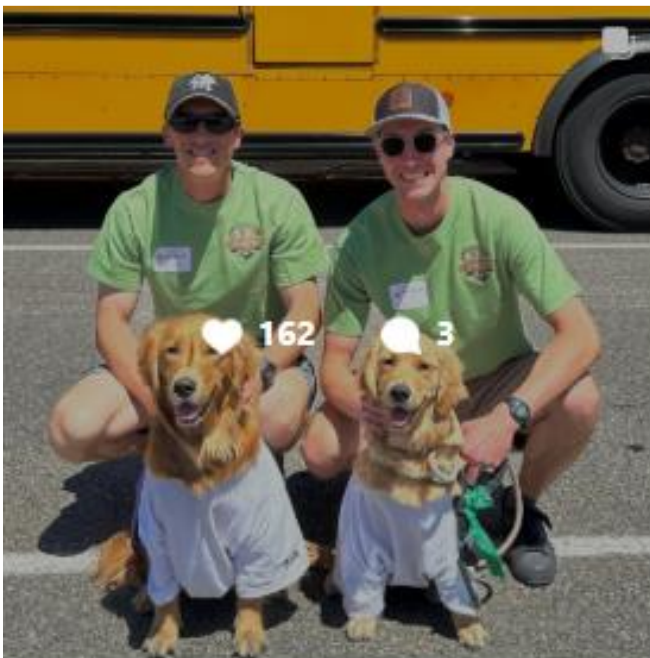
[A post on Oct. 8](#) highlighted the important work of our career centers and their staff, especially in coordinating college and career events like College Fair and Teen Employment Fair.



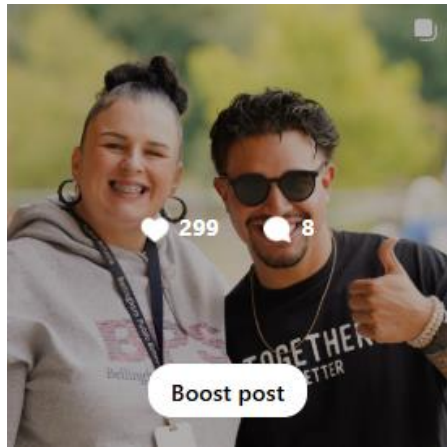
[A post on Jan. 19, 2024](#) highlighted the important work of facilities and educational technology staff during extreme weather events.



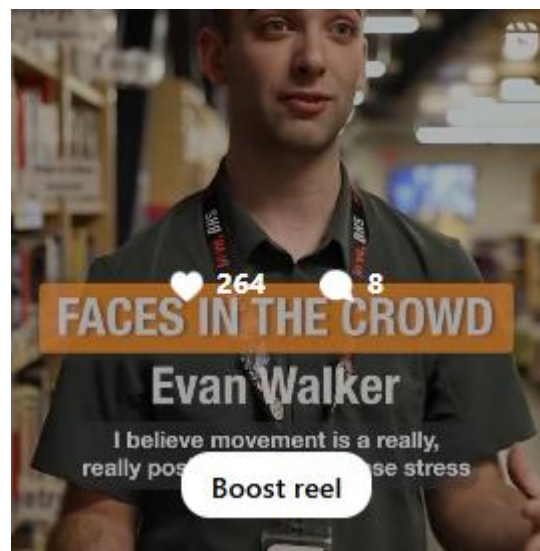
Individual staff members were also highlighted on social media. In this reporting window, these spotlights included:



[One social media post, in particular](#), highlighted recent awards and recognition of district staff members: Jami Pitman, Josh Triplett, Kathe Koruga, Katie Own and Jen Reidel.



**In this reporting period**, local media stories about district staff were also amplified on district social media, including these stories by Cascadia Daily News on [Birchwood staff member Nelly Reyes de Schonborn](#) in May and [BHS staff member Evan Walker](#) in December:



Promise stories with staff focus (Educators in Action) are published online and are often included in our InsideSchools community newsletter three times per year, shared on district social media platforms and emailed in Promise highlights several times a year.

Understanding work-based and worksite learning opportunities for high schoolers:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/01/02/understanding-work-based-and-worksite-learning-opportunities-for-high-schoolers/>

Computer science teacher Jenny Styer goes to the White House:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/01/29/289893/>

What makes Options High School different?

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/03/07/what-makes-options-high-school-different/>

BHS bridge builders are champions at international contest; 16 district students in top 25 at Regionals: <https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/05/02/bhs-bridge-builders-are-champions/>

Latinos in Action (LIA) class wins Gold Award:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/05/16/latinos-in-action-class-wins-gold-award/>

BPS school bus driver wins first place in international bus safety competition:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/07/31/bps-school-bus-driver-wins-first-place-in-international-bus-safety-competition/>

The butterflies of Geneva Room 10:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/06/12/the-butterflies-of-room-10/>

BPS staff prepare for 2024-25 with annual kick-off and celebration:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/08/29/bps-staff-prepare-for-2024-25-school-year-with-annual-kick-off-and-celebration/>

Collective commitment showcased during fourth annual Back-to-School Block Party:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/08/29/collective-commitment-showcased-during-fourth-annual-back-to-school-block-party/>

Bike Program Wheels into elementary PE classrooms:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/09/20/bike-program-wheels-into-elementary-pe-classrooms/>

Spotlight on early childhood staff member Stephanie Schroeder:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/09/27/spotlight-on-early-childhood-staff-member-stephanie-schroeder/>

Career Center staff support students in exploring their futures:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/02/career-center-staff-support-students-in-exploring-their-future/>

School Board visits Happy Valley for academic and social emotional learning connection

highlights: <https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/04/school-board-visits-happy-valley-elementary-for-academic-and-social-emotional-learning-connection-highlights/>

Hundreds of nonfiction titles added to Alderwood and Cordata libraries thanks to Laura

Bush Foundation: <https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/16/hundreds-of-nonfiction-titles-added-to-alderwood-and-cordata-libraries-thanks-to-laura-bush-foundation/>

Bellingham's 'Coach Chron' collects historic 1,000<sup>th</sup> all-time victory:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/04/bellinghams-coach-chron-collects-historic-1000th-all-time-victory/>

BPS joins community celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/17/bps-joins-community-celebration-of-indigenous-peoples-day/>

Middle school STEM class builds cardboard prosthetic hands:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/17/eighth-grade-stem-class/>

Driving Safely into the Future- 2024 National Bus Safety Week:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/10/25/driving-safely-into-the-future-2024-national-school-bus-safety-week/>

Joyful and messy cafeteria chaos put into words by BPS paraeducator:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/11/06/joyful-and-messy-cafeteria-chaos-put-into-words-by-bps-paraeducator/>

Translation devices assist and welcome newly arrived families:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/11/08/translation-devices-assist-and-welcome-newly-arrived-families/>

BPS executive director of communications and community relations Jackie Brawley honored with statewide school communications award:

<https://promise.bellinghamschools.org/2024/12/17/bps-jackie-brawley-honored-with-state-award-in-recognition-of-school-communications/>

Sustainability initiatives thrive thanks to BPS grant writer Gretchen Pflueger (write up included in the Fall 2024 Sustainability Update)

<https://bellingshamschools.org/news/sustainability-update-fall-2024/>

The ‘positive and lasting legacy’ of BHS custodian Dave Robinson:

<https://promise.bellingshamschools.org/2024/12/19/the-positive-and-lasting-legacy-of-custodian-dave-robinson/>

Roosevelt staff send students to winter break with 11<sup>th</sup> annual play production:

<https://promise.bellingshamschools.org/2024/12/20/roosevelt-elementary-staff-send-students-to-winter-break-with-11th-annual-play-production/>

## Volunteers

**For the second consecutive year post COVID-19, the district continues to host nearly 5,000 approved volunteers serving in our schools.** More than half of these volunteers are comprised of parents and guardians of BPS students with community members and WWU students providing additional support in our schools. Volunteers are serving our students and teachers in the capacities:

- AVID and after-school tutors
- supporting classroom teachers
- lunch and recess duty
- reading pals
- bilingual tutors for newcomers
- after-school enrichment
- athletic support for coaches
- field trip chaperones
- bulletin board builders, materials preparation and a plethora of additional roles as needed

**The volunteer program emails electronic newsletters three times per year and schedules trainings specifically for volunteers and community partners.** Topics this year included equity, diversity and inclusion and school safety. The volunteer program has also begun a partnership with Western Washington University and Seattle University to develop a volunteer toolkit and readiness training to help improve the outcomes for the students with whom they work. This training will be completed and offered to all volunteers beginning in Fall 2025.

## Block Party

**In partnership with the Bellingham Schools Foundation and several community sponsorships, the district held its 4th annual Block Party/school readiness event in 2024.** Unfortunately, the rainy weather impacted attendance and approximately 1,200 students and families attended – half the attendance of last year. Over 150 BPS staff and community volunteers and partners supported the event including thirteen student interpreters (see photo below). Here is a snapshot of the event's impact:

- 71 onsite sports physicals provided by four PeaceHealth doctors
- 15 childhood vaccines dispensed by the Whatcom County Health Department
- More than 1,000 free books distributed by the Lion's Club
- Several hundred backpacks distributed by Blue Skies for Children
- 60 haircuts completed by the Evergreen Beauty College and 40 haircut coupons distributed
- 540 slices of pizza, 580 tacos and 350 hot dogs served

In addition to the providers above, twenty-five community partners provided additional resources on early childhood education, after-school care and enrichment, utility bill assistance and multiple health care options. A new partner tabling this year was the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) who provided information on the migrant education program.





## Community Partners

The volunteer coordinator supports over 20 community partners and meets quarterly alongside the Executive Director of Family Engagement, Isabel Meaker, to discuss district updates, share resources and ideas on how to support our students and families. In addition, this program is collaborating with the finance team to centralize all community partner contracts into one database and create a pathway to partner with the district. This initiative is in the beginning stages and estimated delivery date is Fall 2025.

### 2. The superintendent shall not fail to:

#### a. Ensure all staff are qualified and effective.

Ensuring we have qualified and effective staff members is a fundamental task for our district. The human resources processes outlined earlier in this report help us to continue hiring capable and efficient staff. We often begin this relationship with teachers-in-training and are fortunate to host practica and student teaching placements, which help us maintain a pipeline of high-quality candidates. For instance, in 2023-24, our Bellingham teachers hosted 182 student teaching interns from 84 different higher education institutions across our district. This year, 2024-25, we have already placed another group of interns, with more likely to come. Many of these students attend Western Washington University and complete their pre-student-teaching practicum requirements by participating in classrooms within our district. We end up hiring many of these candidates.

Once hired, we are committed to ongoing training, professional development, supervision, and evaluation to ensure staff continue to grow professionally, use research-based best practices, and develop effective teaching and learning strategies. Our district's Department of Teaching and Learning, in collaboration with school leaders and labor group leaders, continuously plans and develops professional learning opportunities for staff.

Professional learning occurs throughout the entire district, within each school, and in the daily practices of our 1600+ professionals, whether they are classroom teachers, paraeducators, bus drivers, cafeteria or maintenance workers, or in school or district leadership roles. In October 2024 and again in March 2025, we will convene each grade level and specialist group of elementary staff in professional learning communities. This year, we have continued to focus on the firm goals established in the summer of 2023 and are engaged in efforts to ensure all elementary schools use the district-adopted SEL curriculum and improve our approach to teaching reading. Our human resources department is intensifying efforts to support [employee resource groups](#) to foster collaboration and connection.

**Professional learning efforts include districtwide initiatives, school or department-specific efforts, and individual opportunities, all requiring time and intentionality.** Our professional learning calendar allocates time for districtwide work, often led by Department of Teaching and Learning directors or teachers-on-special-assignment (TOSAs), as well as for building-based work where principals and school leadership teams direct specific, school-based learning. We continue to support collaboration time built into the annual calendar for each grade band – elementary, middle school and high school. This time prioritizes collaborative work done in grade-level teams, job-alike groups or between general education and Special Education teachers. The calendar also designates specific time and space for professional learning at each school site, as well as for cross-district professional learning.

**We have convened a new districtwide standing committee focused on supporting the further development of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for all students, that focuses on strong Tier 1 instructional practices, and interventions at Tier 2 and Tier 3 for students who need more support for learning.** Our districtwide efforts to support ongoing learning and practices with the inclusion of all students, and the brain science undergirding student behavior are part of this overarching MTSS effort. Once again this year, each school identified a group of staff to take on the leadership of planning for professional learning at the school level. These teams from across all 23 school sites gathered in retreat on August 10, 2024 to develop school-based plans that are used to guide professional learning at each site. The retreat work focused on specific goals in professional learning identified by the school district dealing with issues of student conduct and inclusive instructional practices. Plans that schools developed during this year's August retreat carried forward from and built upon the prior year's work.

To support the work in MTSS examples of cross district learning have included a new video series that we filmed during the summer of 2024 feature our own Laura Burke, a district mental health specialist. Laura's video series built on the training provided to all staff last year on regulation strategies for students who are dysregulated. Laura's training specifically addresses the needs of the adults who work with these students and focus on how our behavior as adults influences the responses and reactions we see manifest in students' behaviors. Departmental training opportunities focused on these same sets of issues were provided across the organization including with the maintenance and food services teams.

We have engaged a first, small cohort group of elementary teachers, led by Director Tom Gresham and utilizing the expertise of Math TOSA Rey Ramos, in the development of teaching skills and overall instructional approach using the work of Simon Fraser University professor Peter Liljedahl. Liljedahl's book "Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics" is the core text of this effort, which aims to help teacher to help student to make their mathematical thinking transparent, through the use of vertical whiteboards in classrooms. A group of eight elementary classroom teachers are in the first cohort of what will be at least a seven-year project to build demonstration classrooms where the pedagogical approaches will be on display for other cohorts of teachers to be trained in subsequent years. This work also connects to our overarching emphasis on strong Tier 1 in MTSS.

We have instituted a new, focused professional development series for our Special Education teachers. Special educators often play a significant role in supporting students at Tier 3 in MTSS, those who need a lot of additional support for learning. Under the leadership of Director Analisa Ficklin of the Special Education team, an initial round of training on support for inclusive practices was held in the summer of 2024. A second training in this sequence is planned for the summer of 2025. In addition, we've instituted a professional learning community structure in the elementary schools for grade level teams across the whole system. These training opportunities happened in October 2024 and will convene again in March 2025, with an emphasis on reading instruction and social-emotional learning in the elementary grades. This work includes an opportunity to revisit and cement teachers' understanding of what constitutes strong Tier 1 instruction in these two key areas.

**The Teacher Principal Evaluation Process (TPEP) continued with a focus on inquiry cycles.** Our approach to teacher evaluation remains committed to fostering continuous improvement based on teacher-established goals. School administrators have once again guided their staff through reflection and goal setting using the 5 Dimensions of Teaching

and Learning (5D). District trainers keep our school administrators' training up-to-date and provide ongoing professional development opportunities for using the 5D Tools in the TPEP process. Teachers identified areas of focus, often aligning with the schoolwide professional development goals, and set student growth targets to strive for. Throughout the school year, ongoing dialogue between administrators and certificated staff around these goals has supported continuous refinements in teaching and learning.

### **Paraeducator Training and Professional Development**

As reported previously, the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) requires all Bellingham Public Schools paraeducators and substitute paraeducators to meet minimum employee requirements and provide training on the Fundamental Course of Study. The human resources department monitors and ensures that all employed paraeducators required the ESSA standards are met. Those minimum standards are:

- Be at least eighteen years of age and hold a high school diploma or its equivalent.

In addition, a paraeducator must meet **one** of the following:

- Have received a qualifying score on the Education Testing Service (ETS) paraeducator assessment. The ETS ParaPro test assesses knowledge and skills in reading, writing, math and assisting classroom instruction. Test takers have two and a half hours to finish the assessment, and they must meet or exceed Washington's qualifying score of 455.
- Hold an associate degree or higher from an accredited college or university.
- Have earned 72 quarter credits or 48 semester credits at the 100 level or higher at an accredited college or university.

Once a paraeducator meets the minimum requirements for employment, the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) requires the completion of the Fundamental Course of Study (FCS) Program for all K-12 instructional paraeducators. Our district offers these FCS courses and also invites non-instructional paraeducators who provide student supervision to participate in these learning opportunities.

### **The training includes professional development in the following areas:**

- Introduction to cultural identity and diversity
- Methods of educational and instructional support
- Technology basics
- Using and collecting data

- District orientation of roles and responsibilities
- Inclusive and equitable practices
- Behavior management strategies including de-escalation techniques
- Child and adolescent development
- Emergency and health safety
- Positive and safe learning environment
- Communication basics
- Communication challenges

This course work is typically completed during the workday and the paraeducator is released from their daily duties in order to complete the required learning.

The district has a grant through PESB that provides funding toward 28 hours of paraeducator training toward completion of FCS units. Once a paraeducator completes the required 28 FCS hours, the PESB grant provides funding for 14 hours of training towards their General Paraeducator Certificate (GPC), which requires a total of 70 course hours. In many cases, course work through college classes count towards the GPC credits.

The district has developed a [webpage](#) regarding all the necessary information regarding the paraeducator certification program. Our webpage also links to the [Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board](#) for additional information.

### **Beginning Educator Support**

**2024-25 is our tenth year as a Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) grant-funded district.** A requirement of the BEST grant is that a representative team guide the work, using the [State Standards for Beginning Educator Induction](#) which includes hiring, orientation, mentoring and professional learning standards.

The BEST grant team continues to study the [State Standards for Beginning Educator Induction](#) as well as use the feedback from new teachers to set focused and specific goals for action.

### **Current goals include:**

- Adapting our whole group monthly novice teacher meetings into small group, job-alike sessions based on our smaller than typical numbers of new teachers.
- Increase feedback from stakeholders to revise our induction series (orientation and content training).
- Developing mentors in our ESA groups (counselors, nurses, SLP, OT, PT, etc.) through Mentoring Academy 101.
- Provide differentiated mentoring for beginning Special Education teachers.

- Continue developing intentional partnership with WWU to increase the effectiveness of our student-teacher placements, which has a significant impact on the effectiveness of beginning educators.
- Building supports for our beginning educators of color through recruiting mentors of color.

**Using a blend of BEST grant and Title IIA funding, we have a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) leading the mentoring of new teachers,** alongside other duties. The TOSA coordinates the assignment and support for mentors needed to support our novices. They also provide ongoing professional development for our mentors and communicates with district and building administrators to coordinate support for our novice educators. All new teachers receive support from mentors that can include classroom setup, co-planning, regular classroom observations with feedback, learning focused conversations and guided observations in veteran teachers' classrooms.

The BEST grant has allowed us to build a comprehensive system for new teacher induction that includes ongoing reflection, evaluation and improvement. **We are hopeful to be able to apply and qualify for BEST grant funding for the 2025-26 school year.**

|            | Fall<br>17-18 | Fall<br>18-19 | Fall<br>19-20 | Fall<br>20-21 | Fall<br>21-22 | Fall<br>22-23 | Fall<br>23-24 | Fall<br>24-25 |
|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Elementary | 7             | 14            | 9             | 11            | 17            | 26            | 6             | 13            |
| Middle     | 11            | 8             | 3             | 8             | 9             | 4             | 4             | 5             |
| High       | 9             | 7             | 7             | 4             | 5             | 7             | 5             | 6             |
| Total      | 27            | 29            | 19            | 23            | 33            | 37            | 15            | 24            |

- b. Provide appropriate training for all employee classifications required by law.**

### **Vector Training**

We offer trainings in our district to approximately 2,400 staff. In order to effectively train all staff during each school year, as well as minimize the need for substitutes, we use a combination of both in-person and online trainings. Both training methods have inherent benefits.

The district is continuing our **online training program through Vector Training** for all employees. All new employees are assigned Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Prevention (full course) as well as the following mandated trainings assigned to all staff annually: Child Abuse: Mandatory Reporting, Bullying: Recognition and Response, Health Emergencies: Overview, and Bellingham Public Schools Title IX Training for All District Employees. **The Title IX training was added this year to meet updated employee training requirements for all employees under the 2024 Title IX Final Rules which went into effect August 1, 2024. Although the new rules have since been vacated, we are continuing to provide Title IX training for our staff.** In addition, a refresher course of the Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Prevention training is assigned each year to all returning staff.

All employees receive the annual mandated training required by law or best practice through Vector Training or staff in-service sessions. These trainings provide legally sound instruction for all employees and many of the online trainings require successful completion of required testing prior to completion of the training. In some cases, such as with our transportation staff, training is conducted as a presentation from staff. Although this is not possible or even preferable for all employees based on time constraints, it does allow for additional discussion and individual questions.

Our online training ensures all employees receive the same consistent training information and employees may access the training content throughout the year. Online training is highly cost-effective and allows us to track compliance and ensure our staff are trained within the required timelines. If staff have additional questions after viewing online trainings, they may consult with their supervisor or a department director to receive further information.

**This year, we assigned mandatory trainings on September 19 and provided a window of time for completions through October 31. The chart below shows the number of online training completions on an annual basis and year-to-date for 2024-25.** Some years may be higher due to the requirement of non-annual required trainings. For example, in 2021-22 all employees needed to complete the Child Abuse - Mandatory Reporting training which is required every three years. Beginning with the 2022-23 school year, we elected to assign the Child Abuse – Mandatory Reporting training on an annual basis to ensure consistent training for all employees. This school year, completions are higher due to the addition of the Title IX training and the decision to assign the Bloodborne Pathogens refresher course to all returning staff to ensure we are meeting the requirement to train all staff in an at risk for bloodborne pathogen position and to provide consistent training districtwide.

**Bellingham Public Schools  
Employee Vector Training  
Course Completions by School Year  
(Through January 31 for 2024-25)**

| 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1664    | 3704    | 2872    | 3423    | 7376    | 5892    | 5129    | 6942    | 7,482   | 8,843   | 11,231  |

- i. **Maintain salary schedules for all employee classifications comparing district salary and benefits relative to appropriate comparable districts.**

**For the 2024-25 school year, the district adjusted compensation for all our employees.**

The adjustments for our employees covered by bargaining agreements were based on previously agreed upon contracts with the Bellingham Education Association (BEA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Bellingham Association of School Employees (BASE), Teamsters and Bellingham Administrators' Organization (BAO) also received an adjustment to salary through a newly agreed upon collective bargaining agreement. Salaries for other non-represented employees such as many district office staff, executives and coaches were also adjusted.

**The district continues to examine the compensation data with our comparator districts to guide our work in negotiations. After completing our agreements, the district believes we will continue to remain competitive by remaining in the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of our comparisons.**

**The chart on the following page shows our bargaining groups, members and current duration of contracts.**

| Bargaining Group                                  | Positions                                                                                       | Term of Agreement |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Teamsters (Local Union 231)                       | Bus driver, warehouse delivery driver, utility driver, mechanic, dispatcher                     | 2024-2026         |
| SEIU (Service Employees' International Union 925) | Custodial, maintenance, grounds, food services, educational technology                          | 2023-2025         |
| BASE (Bellingham Association of School Employees) | Administrative assistants, paraeducators, business/accounting, educational support, specialists | 2024-2026         |
| BAO (Bellingham Administrators' Organization)     | Principals, assistant principals, directors                                                     | 2024-2026         |
| BEA (Bellingham Education Association)            | Certificated instructional staff                                                                | 2023-2026         |

**This spring we will be working with SEIU to negotiate a new contract.** The current SEIU contract expires August 31, 2025.

**ii. Maintain a system to evaluate all employees, provide written improvement plans and monitor employee improvement.**

The human resources department continues, in coordination with the Department of Teaching and Learning, building principals and clerical staff, to maintain a system to track evaluations for all employees. Supervisors receive notification of timelines, forms and requirements for new employee and annual evaluations. The human resources staff track and file all completed evaluations in employee personnel files. Administrators, directors and managers receive ongoing coaching and support from the human resources team when working with employees on written plans of improvement. Employees with performance concerns are provided opportunities for support, training, mentoring and assistance. Supervisors work closely with the assistant superintendent of human resources to monitor improvement and determine if continued support is necessary, or if improvement goals are met. Union and employee association representatives also provide support to employees experiencing performance difficulties.

For certificated teaching staff, the district has adopted the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership's Instructional Framework, [5-Dimensions of Teaching & Learning](#) (CEL 5D). This state framework provides a common language for discussing effective teaching, along with a process that uses cycles of inquiry and growth focused conversations. The evaluation cycle for teaching staff is focused on this framework where staff, working with their supervisor, select areas of focus for continuous improvement. The framework is aligned to the state evaluation criteria, and final evaluations reflect both the 5D and the state criteria, commonly referred to as "the state eight". Employees rotate between comprehensive (all areas) and focused (one-two areas) evaluations, having a comprehensive evaluation a minimum of every six years. Executive team members in teaching and learning and human resources supervise principals and directors following a parallel process using the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSPP) Leadership Framework to guide cycles of inquiry and growth focused conversations. This framework focuses on improvement of principals and leaders in areas that are most likely to result in increased student achievement and is directly aligned with state evaluation criteria, rules and regulation.

In the instructional evaluation model, we also provide continuous training for our teachers and principals/evaluators. Training is provided for all new teachers on the instructional framework and cycle of inquiry process. This takes place in a full day Teacher Principal Evaluation Program (TPEP) 5-D Training taught by a State Instructional Framework Specialist. For administrators there are stages of training required, Stage 1 (two days), Stage 2 (four days), as well as Rater Reliability and ongoing training in calibration of the evaluation model. The district provides these training opportunities, taught by a State Instructional Framework Specialist, to all administrators and tracks completion for Stage 1 and Stage 2 training requirements. Administrators track their completion of Rater Reliability and ongoing training, referred to as Stage 3 trainings. The number of teachers and administrators requiring and receiving training is reported to OSPI annually, and the state grants TPEP funds to support the required trainings for new teachers and for Stage 1 and 2 administrator training. Ongoing training provided by the district includes Instructional Rounds for teachers and administrators. Administrator supervisors meet regularly for ongoing collaboration and support around principal supervision.

Human resources continually works with employee groups and associations to review and update evaluation tools as needed. Current evaluation forms are accessible on the intranet for easy access.

**iii. Make continuous improvement towards hiring and retention of under-represented minority teachers and support personnel in classrooms and supervisory/administrative positions, to better reflect the ethnic makeup of our district's students.**

The human resources department develops and maintains an [Affirmative Action Plan](#) and provides an annual report on progress towards our goals. The district's most recent five-year plan, covering 2019-2024, was approved by the board. **A new five-year plan has been submitted for board consideration and approval at the February 2025 meeting.** This new plan includes updated affirmative action reporting. Our overall percentage of ethnic minority staff increased to 14.73%, continuing a trend of modest growth. Each spring, a progress report is provided to district staff and the board.

Affirmative action applicant information is tracked and maintained separately from other job application materials, based on information voluntarily provided by each applicant. Over the past six years, we have seen steady growth in attracting applicants of color to Bellingham Public Schools. In 2018, 12.3% of total applicants identified as applicants of color, compared to 22.1% in 2024.

Annually, we review applicant data and identify applicant hiring trends. This data suggests that our recruitment efforts continue to yield positive results, even in years with limited overall hiring. While the applicant data shows a slight increase in diverse candidates, those selected for open certificated positions increased from 14.29% in 2023 to 26.32% in 2024. Although our ability to hire new certificated staff in the fall of 2023 was limited by budgetary constraints, the data highlights our continued efforts to diversify our teachers and administrators. For classified staff, 21.32% of new hires identified as ethnic minorities, which is a decrease from 2023 but remains above 2022 percentages.

In addition, and as reported in EL-10:

- **The district has implemented training for the leadership team on identifying and rooting out bias in applicant file screening and candidate hiring processes.** Training included case examples designed to surface individual screeners' biases and to prompt discussion about ways to ensure that unexamined bias is identified and minimized in hiring processes.
- **The district's human resources team conducted a second Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Job Fair on March 9, 2024.** The BIPOC Job Fair is intended to create a safe space where community members who value diversity and equity can come together and explore career opportunities in a casual setting. One hundred people registered for the fair. Of the 100, 59 identified as BIPOC. Ten

people had confirmed interviews and nine of those ten accepted positions with the district.

- Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) human resources leaders and team members again staffed a table at our opening of school “Block Party” this year, aimed at attracting and recruiting diverse candidates for job openings. This yielded a list of potential applicants who each received a personal contact from our human resources team in follow-up to the event.
- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in Bellingham Public Schools (BPS)** **continue to grow**, fostering social and professional connections based on shared identities. These voluntary, employee-led groups enhance community within the district by improving work relationships and conditions through advocacy, support and professional development aligned with The Bellingham Promise. Key outcomes include:
  - Increased sense of belonging among staff.
  - Strengthened support systems for emotional, cultural and leadership needs.
  - Advocacy and mentorship for scholars with similar identities.
- Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Janis Velasquez Farmer, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Matt Whitten and members of the district human resources department collaborate by **regularly reviewing and discussing hiring processes and retention of systemically marginalized people**. Current work includes the examination of the district’s online application system and website to ensure a more inclusive design, identifying and removing barriers such as job descriptions and interview questions for the purpose of eliminating barriers and unintentional bias.
- For the 2023-24 school year, twenty-two BASE employees' multilingual skills were assessed through a skills assessment, qualifying them for an increased per hour wage premium for all hours worked for the school year as a result of the contractual agreement.
- **We are actively increasing the number of multilingual front office and staff members** to better reflect our student population's diversity. Out of 23 sites, including the Bellingham Family Partnership (BFPP), 10 now have bilingual front office assistants, including Alderwood, BFPP, Birchwood, Carl Cozier, Cordata, Fairhaven, Options, Roosevelt, Sehome and Shuksan. Additionally, we have added multilingual office staff support at the district office.
- The district has added multiple staff members who grow our diversity as a direct result of job fairs conducted within the Russian and Punjabi communities, as well as our BIPOC job fair. Our human resources department’s continual work is to recruit and retain a more diverse workforce.

- Now in its sixth year, our high school Teacher Academy program continues to prepare future teachers. The team, led by Lori French at Bellingham High School, Mary Hooker at Sehome High School and Angelica Garcia at Squalicum High School, is expanding recruitment efforts to provide students with valuable classroom experience. This past spring, the first group of Academy students completed their university teaching programs. **All Academy students are guaranteed an interview with our district, and our first student was interviewed last spring.**

Other specific strategies used to recruit and hire a diverse workforce include:

- Target web-based posting options in venues connected with ethnically diverse candidates, and district and community-based job fairs. Collaboration and participation with other public and community agencies on diversity and affirmative action matters to increase the diversity of the applicant pool.
- Family and community engagement strategies to connect with employable adults in the ethnic minority community.
- Host job fairs that target diverse candidates as well as attending community events to attract diverse candidates. Human resources staff plan and coordinate with other district staff and community partners to provide technical supports, share information about job opportunities, how to apply for positions, and other supports available for interested community members who are pursuing job opportunities with the district.
- Increase collaboration with WorkSource, Goodwill and DSHS to advertise openings and provide support for applicants to access and complete online applications.
- Banners outside schools and other facilities such as the transportation department, with high community traffic.
- Distribute job recruitment information in schools and the family resource centers.
- Enhance partnership with WWU Woodring interns by hosting orientation, learning sessions, and creating applications.

**Statement of Compliance:** The superintendent is **in compliance** with EL-4.