



## WA-HI SPROUTS NEW RECYCLING PROGRAM

A group of dedicated students from Walla Walla High School's Green Club has taken a significant step toward environmental responsibility by implementing a new paper recycling program on campus. Instead of purchasing traditional recycling bins, they opted for an innovative and cost-effective solution—repurposing cardboard boxes from the school's copy center. These boxes were labeled "PAPER ONLY" and reinforced with duct tape for durability before being distributed to willing teachers across campus.

A major consideration for the project was ensuring the custodial staff would not be overburdened with additional responsibilities, according to Junior Ari Kim-Leavitt who helped spearhead the program started. The solution was to get students involved.

"Fortunately, Mr. Patterson, the Life Skills class teacher, offered his students' assistance with collecting and transporting recyclables to larger bins near the dumpster, said Kim-Leavitt. "This collaboration not only supports sustainability efforts but also provides hands-on learning opportunities for the Life Skills students."

Looking ahead, the recycling team has ambitious goals for expanding the initiative. They hope to broaden the range of recyclable materials accepted beyond paper, and extend the program to other Walla Walla Public Schools buildings that currently lack recycling options, such as the middle schools. Their commitment to sustainability is paving the way for a greener future at Wa-Hi and beyond.



April was National Volunteer Appreciation Month, a time to recognize and celebrate the incredible contributions of our Volunteer in Person (VIP) volunteers. Their generosity and commitment help create enriching experiences that contribute to the success of our students and schools.



### Salute to VIP Coordinator Beth Swanson

A special thank you to Volunteer Coordinator Beth Swanson, who is also receiving a Community Leadership Award from the Southeast Washington School Administrators Association this spring, for her dedication to making the VIP program a success



### 2024-2025 "100 HOUR CLUB" VOLUNTEERS

|                  |                    |                         |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| • Sharon Carter  | • Melissa Gardner  | • Janet Wallace-Wheaton |
| • Jennifer Stone | • Sara Gabriel     | • Yan Diego Wilson      |
| • Marianne Smith | • Heidi Brigham    | • Cheri Ruzicka         |
| • Kevin Armenta  | • Katherine Nordal | • Karen Telstad         |
| • Patrice Moore  | • Jane Medina      |                         |
| • Candy Anderson | • Geneva Arevalo   |                         |



### GO TEAM THERAPY DOG PARTNERSHIP

Thanks to Lucinda Bersano and Tish Watts, from the Go Team Therapy Dog program, for volunteering to bring therapy dogs into schools, creating a warm and welcoming environment for students. In addition to visiting classrooms, the Go Team has also joined the district's Crisis Recovery Team, offering their calming presence during times of need.



### Salute to the Big Blue Boosters

Big Blue Boosters volunteers have made a tremendous impact on Wa-Hi Athletics. Their two major fundraisers this school year — Fair Parking and the Auction — raised over \$200,000. The Boosters' board members alone clock hundreds of volunteer hours each year to fulfill their mission of enhancing athletic opportunities for all Wa-Hi students.

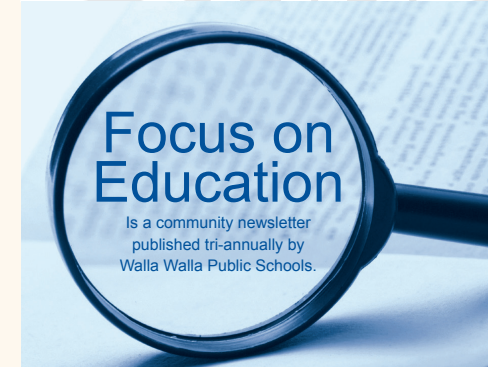
We appreciate all our volunteers for their time, effort, and passion

— **YOUR IMPACT IS TRULY INVALUABLE!** —

### Board of Directors:

Alayna Brinton  
Ruth Ladderud  
Kathy Mulkerin  
Derek Sarley  
Terri Trick  
Ari Kim-Leavitt, Student Rep.  
Eva Maxwell, Student Rep.

## BOARD



### Walla Walla Public Schools

364 S. Park Street  
Walla Walla, WA 99362  
(509) 527-3000  
[www.wwps.org](http://www.wwps.org)

#### COMPREHENSIVE NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Walla Walla 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, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide 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 Coordinator & Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator  
DR. MINDY MEYER, Dir of Human Resources  
364 S. Park Street  
Walla Walla, WA 99362  
(509) 527-3000  
[mmeyer@wwps.org](mailto:mmeyer@wwps.org)
- Section 504/ADA Coordinator  
BARB CASEY, Director of Special Education  
364 S. Park Street  
Walla Walla, WA 99362  
(509) 527-3000  
[bcasey@wwps.org](mailto:bcasey@wwps.org)

Walla Walla Public Schools is an Equal Opportunity Employer and complies with all requirements of the ADA.

## Where Are They Now?

### Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates

Andrea "Jones" Unck, A fourth-generation farmer and lifelong educator, is a proud alumna of Walla Walla Public Schools. Andrea attended Sharpstein and Berney Elementary Schools, Pioneer MS, and graduated from Walla Walla High School in 1996. As a student, she thrived in extracurricular activities, playing volleyball and tennis while actively participating in Key Club.

She fondly remembers teachers like Bill McCorkle, Ron Higgins, Mary Jo Geidl, and Al Sievertsen, who played pivotal roles in her education. "They had high expectations, but always paired them with kindness and encouragement," Andrea recalls.

Her professional career began in education, teaching bilingual PreK and Kindergarten at Davis Elementary School from 2003-2005 and another 16 years at the Walla Walla Community College Early Childhood Education Program.

In 2017, Andrea made a significant career shift, stepping in, as the fourth generation, of her family's farm business. She now co-manages Good Stalk Farms, LLC, and The Dwellie Vineyard, LLC, alongside her father, David F. Jones (Wa-Hi Class of 1972). Their 2,500-acre farm produces wheat, garbanzos, dry peas, and alfalfa, while their vineyard, established in 2001, cultivates nine different varieties of wine grapes for wineries throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Living on the family homestead east of Walla Walla at the base of the Blue Mountains, Andrea and her family are deeply tied to the land. Her two sons, Jackson (Wa-Hi Class of 2024) and Simon (future Class of 2027), represent the fifth generation to call this farm home.

Beyond her work in education and farming, Andrea is an avid outdoors enthusiast. She enjoys skiing, hiking, traveling, and tending to her vegetable and flower gardens. She also dedicates time to volunteering in the community and at her church, reinforcing her commitment to service and connection. From the classroom to the fields, Andrea's life embodies resilience, passion, and a deep respect for tradition.



ANDREA "JONES" UNCK



Your School District Newsletter | Spring 2025 | Volume 27 | Issue 3



# Thank You!

A GRATEFUL FAREWELL

As the final weeks of my time as Superintendent of Walla Walla Public Schools comes to an end, I've found myself reflecting deeply on the journey we've taken together over the last decade. It's difficult to capture in a single message the depth of appreciation I feel for our remarkable community — but I'd like to give it a try.

More than anything, I want to say thank you.

**THANK YOU TO OUR FAMILIES** who have entrusted us with the education and well-being of your children. Your partnership has been essential — from the kitchen tables where homework is supported, to the spirited crowds at school events, to the parent volunteers who provide invaluable support across our classrooms. Thank you for your care and commitment to the children of Walla Walla Schools.

**THANK YOU TO OUR STAFF** — the heart of our district. You have navigated unprecedented challenges with resilience, compassion and dedication. Whether in the classroom, on our buses, or on our fields and stages, you have embodied the values of inclusivity, excellence, and opportunity that define Walla Walla's 165-year legacy. Your service continues to leave a lasting impact on the lives of countless children and families.

**THANK YOU TO OUR STUDENTS** — the true inspiration behind

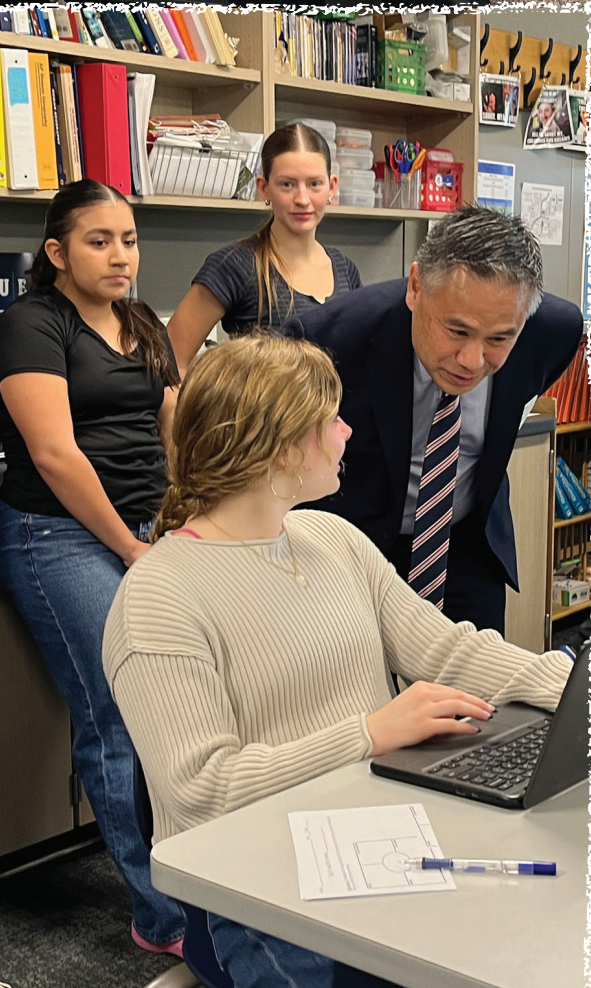
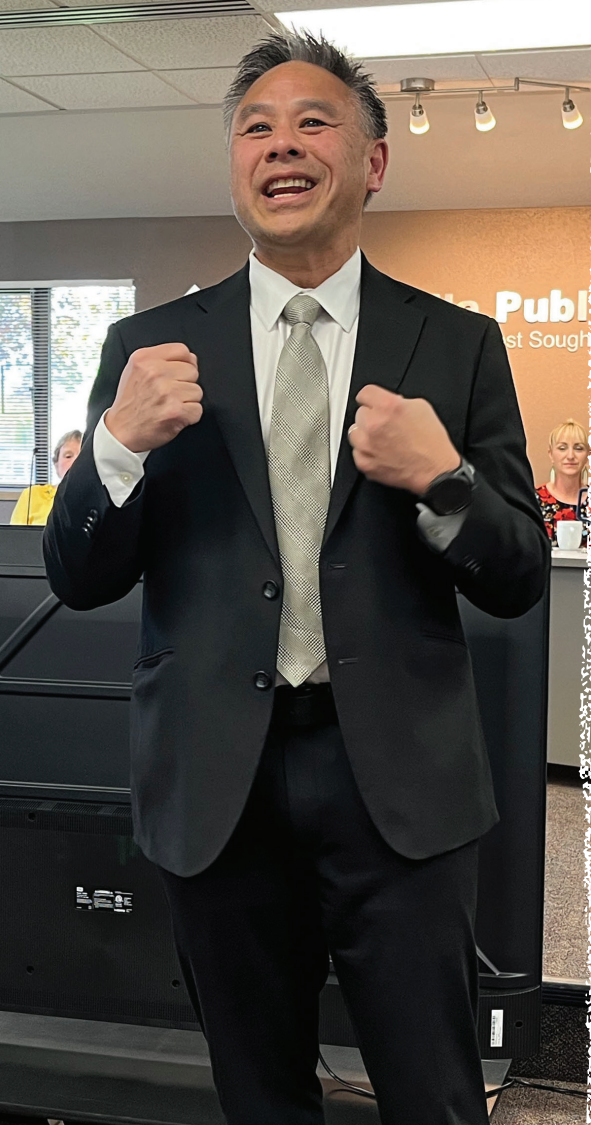
everything we do. You have shown us time and again the power of curiosity, courage, and hope. Watching you progress through our schools, graduate, and thrive as young adults has been the greatest reward of my role.

**THANK YOU TO OUR SCHOOL BOARD** — for your thoughtful leadership, governance, and tireless commitment to public education. Your vision has helped guide Walla Walla Schools through change, challenge, and opportunity. Your work often goes unseen but is always deeply felt.

**AND THANK YOU TO THE WALLA WALLA COMMUNITY** — for your faithful support and unwavering investment in our students and schools. Together, we have passed historic bond and levy measures that built and modernized facilities, expanded programs, and ensured that every student — regardless of background or circumstance — has access to a world-class educational experience. We've developed amazing partnerships with local organizations and businesses, advanced early learning access, and established robust college and career opportunities to ensure Walla Walla students flourish regardless if they are college, military or career bound.

PHOTO: Dr. Wade Smith with his family following his official hiring in Spring of 2016.

CONT.



# GETTING TO KNOW DR. BEN GAUYAN

## A New Chapter in Walla Walla Public Schools

Dr. Ben Gauyan will take the position as the district's 17th Superintendent on July 1, 2025. He is currently the Assistant Superintendent of the Stanwood-Camano School District.

Born in Staten Island, New York, Dr. Gauyan grew up moving across the country as part of a proud military family. His childhood journey took him to Alameda, California; Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; and San Diego, California, following the naval assignments of his father, who served as a Senior Chief Disbursing Clerk aboard ships like the USS Prairie, USS San Jose and USS Saratoga.

From a young age, Dr. Gauyan developed a love for sports, both as a participant and an avid fan. Growing up in a military family taught him invaluable life lessons — the importance of connecting with new people, staying nimble through change, and persevering no matter the circumstances. His mother's strength and unwavering support, particularly during times when his father was deployed overseas, had a profound impact on him.

"My mother kept the most important things front and center," he shares. "She reminds me of what so many of our educators do every day — wearing many hats and providing endless support to children."

Today, Dr. Gauyan strives to live by the value of balance, likening life to a four-legged stool: if one leg is out of sync, the whole structure wobbles. It's this sense of balance that he brings into his new role in Walla Walla Public Schools, along with a vision for student success.

*When asked what skills and attributes graduates must possess, he speaks thoughtfully:*

### ACADEMICALLY:

Students must be critical thinkers, strong communicators, and digitally proficient, with the ability to apply math concepts to real-world challenges.

### SOCIALLY:

Collaboration, empathy and conflict resolution are key.

### PERSONALLY:

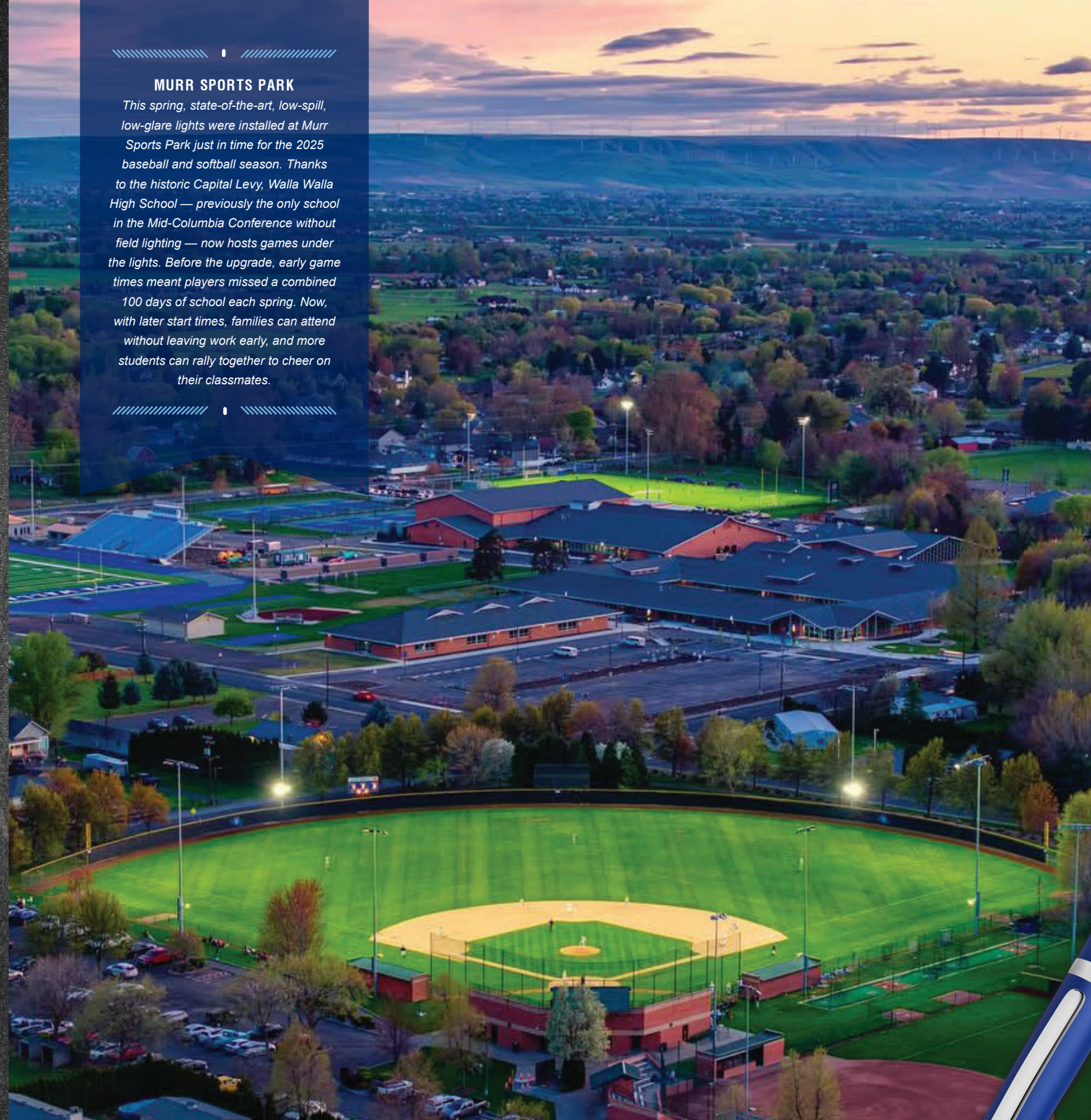
He hopes to see graduates who are resilient, curious and live with a high level of integrity.

Outside of his professional life, family remains his core. Dr. Gauyan and his wife, Jennifer, have been married for 26 years and are proud parents to two sons: Iz, a recent graduate of Gonzaga University, and Noah, who is completing his freshman year at the University of San Diego. The family cherishes time together playing board games, especially Rummikub, alongside their beloved dachshund, Tula. Dr. Gauyan is also an avid musician, and cherishes his guitar and ukulele collection. Looking ahead, Dr. Gauyan is energized by the district's Vision 2030 Strategic Plan.

*"My greatest hope in this new role is to help fulfill the promise of Vision 2030 and to be part of Developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates."*

### MURR SPORTS PARK

This spring, state-of-the-art, low-spill, low-glare lights were installed at Murr Sports Park just in time for the 2025 baseball and softball season. Thanks to the historic Capital Levy, Walla Walla High School — previously the only school in the Mid-Columbia Conference without field lighting — now hosts games under the lights. Before the upgrade, early game times meant players missed a combined 100 days of school each spring. Now, with later start times, families can attend without leaving work early, and more students can rally together to cheer on their classmates.



### BLUE DEVIL STADIUM

Track and Field athletes from 26 high schools gathered at the new Blue Devil Stadium for the Legends Track Meet in April. Athletes, coaches, families, and fans were among the first to experience the upgraded facility, which features grandstands seating approximately 2,300 home fans and 800 visitors. The stadium includes a dedicated area for throwing events and creates a vibrant, welcoming space for the entire community.



### PIONEER MIDDLE SCHOOL TRACK

Freshly striped this spring, Pioneer Middle School's new all-weather track replaces the original 1950s-era cinder surface, enhancing physical education classes and enabling the school to host track meets on campus.



## CAPITAL LEVY REPORT

### PROMISES MADE

### PROMISES KEPT

|                                                                    | Delivered | In Progress |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <b>MURR SPORTS PARK</b>                                            |           |             |
| Install Baseball and Softball Field Lights                         | ✓         |             |
| <b>PIONEER MIDDLE SCHOOL</b>                                       |           |             |
| All-Weather Track                                                  | ✓         |             |
| Baseball/Softball Improvements                                     | ✓         |             |
| <b>GARRISON MIDDLE SCHOOL</b>                                      |           |             |
| Track Repair and Resurfacing                                       |           | ✓           |
| Tennis Court Improvements                                          | ✓         |             |
| <b>WALLA WALLA HIGH SCHOOL</b>                                     |           |             |
| 8 New Tennis Courts                                                |           | ✓           |
| JROTC "Raider" Obstacle Course                                     | ✓         |             |
| <b>BLUE DEVIL STADIUM</b>                                          |           |             |
| Artificial Turf, New Track Throwing Area, Resurface Existing Track | ✓         |             |
| Install Field Lights                                               | ✓         |             |
| Bleachers, Outbuildings and Final Site Amenities                   | ✓         |             |
| <b>TRIDENT FIELD</b>                                               |           |             |
| Artificial Turf and Install Field Lights                           | ✓         | ✓           |
| Field House Outbuilding                                            |           | ✓           |

Walla Walla voters showed their strong support for Walla Walla Public Schools on February 13, 2024, when 58 percent voted YES on the Outdoor Athletic and Activity Facilities Capital Levy. This measure funded essential improvements at Walla Walla High School, Pioneer Middle School and Garrison Middle

School. Many of the Capital Levy improvements have been completed, with the remaining slated for completion by Fall 2025. The Capital Levy will be paid in full in less than five years. Walla Walla Public Schools thanks the community for creating a brighter future for local students and families.



### A GRATEFUL FAREWELL - CONT.

None of these accomplishments belong to any single group or person. They are the result of what we did together.

Over the years, we've faced challenges that tested us — from the uncertainties of a global pandemic, to the shifting educational landscape, to our strategic imperative to meet the diverse needs of all learners. But through it all, as a school community we chose to prioritize collaboration over division, innovation over complacency, and hope over hesitation. That is the Walla Walla way — and it's something I will always carry with me.

As I prepare to hand the reins over to my successor, my heart is full of gratitude and optimism for the district's future. It has been the greatest professional honor of my life to serve our community and to walk alongside you as we strive to fulfill our vision of Developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to serve. Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your unwavering commitment to our kids. With deep appreciation and respect,

Dr. Wade Smith  
Superintendent,  
Walla Walla Public Schools

