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THE WIDEFIELD WAY

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Librarian Stephanie Smith teaches students about the four forces of flight using flight simulators at Grand Mountain School.



The physics wall at Pinello Elementary School gives students hands-on learning using magnetic parts to create runways with ramps and tunnels for wooden balls.

Shaping Tomorrow's Innovators: WSD3's Vertical and Horizontal Makerspace Design

BY THE STEM AND INNOVATION
DEPARTMENT, WSD3

Makerspaces are more than just rooms with tools; they are dynamic hubs where creativity and invention come to life. In Widefield School District 3 (WSD3), our makerspaces are specifically designed to equip students with the skills for tomorrow's careers.

With generous funding from the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), we have built a robust network of makerspaces across our district—from preschool all the way through high school. These spaces are home to cutting-edge equipment like 3D printers, laser cutters, flight simulators, and robotics. This isn't just about tinkering; it's about providing students with the foundational skills in next-generation technologies.

A Vertical Approach: From Preschool to Professional

In our makerspaces, we have a special plan for how students learn. It's like a ladder, where each step builds

on the last one. This way, whether you're a four-year-old or a high school senior, you are on a smooth, organized path that helps you grow your skills.

Students start with the fundamentals of additive and subtractive manufacturing, learning how to design and create custom parts. As they move into junior high and high school, they gain access to more advanced equipment and specialized programs, including aerospace-related simulators.

Colorado is a top place for jobs in the aerospace industry, which is why we focus on it. According to the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, there are over 2,000 aerospace companies here with more than 55,000 employees. People in Colorado who work in this field make more money, on average, than people in other states.

By integrating these programs, we are intentionally preparing our students for high-paying, high-demand careers right here in our state. Our goal is to create a "K-NASA" pipeline, ensuring our students and community members have the skills needed to thrive.

In fact, these same resources are also available to the public at the Security Public Library, extending the opportunity to everyone.

A Horizontal Strategy: Equity in Access

In addition to our vertical strategy, we've also implemented horizontal alignment to ensure equity across the district. This means that every elementary school, junior high, and high school has the same access to equipment and opportunities. This approach ensures that every student has the same foundation, creating a truly balanced learning environment for all.

Our commitment to both vertical and horizontal design ensures that we are providing a comprehensive, equitable, and forward-thinking experience that prepares every student to be a successful innovator.

For more information on our STEM programs and makerspaces, please visit our website at <http://stem.wsd3.org/>.

District Identifies Critical Needs, From HVAC to Termite Removal



Heating systems, like the boiler at Venetucci Elementary, are approaching 50 years old and need to be replaced.



The WSD3 Safety and Security department has 20 armed safety and security, a campus supervisor, an educational assistant, and centralized communication.

BY SAM BRIGGS
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION

Widefield School District 3 has many aging facilities, with many schools requiring significant repairs and system replacements. Half of the district's school buildings are more than 50 years old, with most of the rest over 30. Similar to any aging home, these buildings need extensive maintenance and the replacement of outdated and failing systems.

Critical System Failures and Delayed Repairs

One of the most pressing issues is the state of the schools' mechanical systems. Some heating systems are over 50 years old and have become extremely outdated. For some of these heating and cooling units, repairs are no longer possible as manufacturers have discontinued replacement parts. This has led to inconsistent classroom temperatures, making teaching and learning difficult. We have seven school buildings that lack effective air conditioning, and some rooms are uncomfortably hot for students and staff. Replacing these failing systems with modern, energy-efficient units is a common-sense measure that would also save on future operating costs.

Many of these necessary repairs have been delayed for several years due to budget limitations.

Our dedicated facilities department works tirelessly every day to address these issues and keep our schools beautiful and inviting, but they are limited by the resources and budget available to them. This has resulted in ongoing issues such as leaking roofs, outdated electrical wiring, and failing heating systems. While the facilities team does everything they can to handle daily maintenance and repairs, major projects have been delayed due to these escalating costs. Addressing these problems now is critical to prevent further damage that could lead to even more expensive repairs in the future.

Student Safety and Learning Environments

Some of the district's oldest schools contain asbestos. While the material is currently contained and not an immediate health risk, it must be safely removed during any future renovations.

Additionally, the district has been managing a persistent termite infestation at North Preschool. While the building itself is structurally sound and safe for staff and students, the termites have caused holes in some walls and doors. To address these maintenance concerns, the district has been awarded a \$5.7 million BEST grant to help cover the costs of renovation. However, this grant is contingent on a bond passing in November because the district must provide a matching portion of the project's cost. The bond would cover the

matching portion so we could improve the learning environment.

In addition to building safety, we want to continue to provide safety and security coverage in the district. In 2019, we prioritized the safety of our students and staff by adding armed personnel coverage to every school. This is in addition to the three School Resource Officers we have through our partnership with the El Paso County Sheriff's Office. We want to ensure these essential safety measures remain robust and effective.

Investing in Career Technical Skills Training

Beyond facility repairs, the district is also focused on maintaining current educational opportunities for students. There is an increasing demand for career technical skills and training programs that prepare high school students for in-demand, high-paying local jobs. We want to continue to support programs like Project Lead The Way (PLTW), Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM), and other Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities for students. The district is looking for ways to continue funding these programs as a valuable alternative or addition to a college degree.

We encourage you to visit the Believe in Widefield webpage on wsd3.org or call (719) 391-3000 for more information.

Fiscal Responsibility:

Making Taxpayer Dollars Go Further

BY SAM BRIGGS
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION

Widefield School District 3 (WSD3) has a history of being a good steward of taxpayer money, consistently seeking out additional funding to maximize our resources. A key part of this strategy is applying for Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) grants every year.

These grants, funded by a portion of Colorado's marijuana tax revenue, help school districts pay for major construction and renovation projects. While the statewide tax contributes to a special fund, it's a competitive process.

To secure a BEST grant, the district must provide a matching portion of the project's cost. For 2025, the district's share is 65%, with the grant covering the remaining 35%. By successfully obtaining these grants, the district can address critical health, life, and safety issues while saving bond money for other much-needed projects.

WSD3 has a strong track record of receiving BEST grants for various projects:

- **2019:** Fire alarm and camera upgrades at multiple schools.
- **2020:** Extensive health and safety upgrades at Widefield High School, including asbestos removal and boiler replacement.
- **2021:** Asbestos removal and renovations at Watson Junior High, and boiler replacements at Widefield Elementary, Talbott STEAM Innovation School, and Sproul Junior High.
- **2022:** Boiler replacement at Watson Junior High.
- **2024:** Roof replacement and HVAC improvements at Janitell Junior High, which included adding air conditioning.
- **2025:** Renovation at North Preschool (contingent on the bond election passing in November 2025)

This fiscal responsibility is also reflected in the district's previously passed bond. In 2017-2018, taxpayers were asked to contribute \$9.25 per month (for every \$100,000 of home value) to fund a \$49.5 million bond. Through careful financial management, the district has been able to steadily decrease this cost over time. The monthly cost per \$100,000 of home value has dropped significantly, from \$9.25 in 2017 to \$3.32 in 2023. A key piece to this was refinancing a portion of these bonds in 2021 to save taxpayers over \$2 million.

"Tuesdays with Terry" is a video series created by Chief Financial Officer, Terry Kimber, as a way to explain complex financial topics, clear up any misinformation, and engage our community on school funding. You can find episodes on the "Believe in Widefield" webpage on wsd3.org.

MARIJUANA TAXES

AND WHAT THEY DO FOR OUR SCHOOLS

BY SAM BRIGGS
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION

People have been asking about how money from marijuana taxes affects our schools in Widefield School District 3. We want to clear things up about these funds.

When people in Colorado voted to make marijuana legal in 2012, they were told the money would help fund public schools. New money did start coming in, but there was a catch. The law said that only the first \$40 million each year from a special marijuana tax would go into a fund for schools.

This fund, called the BEST (Building Excellent Schools Today) Fund, is for building and repairing schools. It's a special program where schools have to apply for money, and they have to pay for a part of the project themselves.

Even today, very little of the marijuana tax money is used for the daily needs of schools, like paying teachers or buying books. The money hasn't solved the big funding problems many school districts face.

How the BEST Fund Works (For School Buildings)

- From 2015 to 2021, Colorado gave about \$40 million each year to the BEST Fund.
- This money is only for things like new buildings, repairs, and safety upgrades. It doesn't pay for teachers' salaries or school supplies.
- To get a grant, our school district has to pay a part of the cost. For us, that means the district pays for 65% of the project, and the state's grant covers the other 35%.
- \$40 million is a lot of money, but it's only enough to build one new school for the whole state. Most grants are for things like new roofs or heating and cooling systems.

How WSD3 Has Benefited

Our district has received some BEST grants over the years, which helped with:

- Major fixes at Widefield High School.
- A new roof at Janitell Junior High.
- New heating and cooling systems at Watson Junior High.
- Smaller projects like replacing boilers at other schools.

Other Marijuana Tax Money (For Special Programs)

There is also another fund called the Marijuana Tax Cash Fund (MTCF). This money is used for specific programs like:

- Grants to hire health professionals in schools.
- Grants to help students learn to read.
- Grants to prevent bullying and help with mental health.

About 12.6% of the state's marijuana sales tax also goes into the main fund for all public schools. For example, in 2020, this was about \$32.9 million.

How Does This Compare to All School Money?

Marijuana tax money is a very small part of what schools get in Colorado.

- In 2017, it made up only about 1.6% of the total K-12 school budget.
- Today, it's still only about 1% to 2% of all school funding.

Most of the money for schools still comes from the state's main budget and local taxes. This money is what pays for teachers' salaries and day-to-day school operations.

In Short:

Marijuana taxes have brought some extra money for education, but it's mostly for specific projects like new roofs and special programs. It has not been a complete fix for the big funding challenges facing our schools.



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Winter Registration Opens October 1

SCAN TO
VIEW OUR
PROGRAMS



REGISTER ONLINE, IN PERSON, BY PHONE

Widefield Parks & Recreation
755 Aspen Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80911
ParksAndRec.wsd3.org - (719) 391-3515



- October 18 - Fall Fun Day Picnic
- October 24 - Trunk or Treat & Movie in the Park
- October 27 - 31 Monster Smash Workout Week
- December 9 - Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration

SAVE THE DATE

Your Vote Matters!

GET OUT AND VOTE!

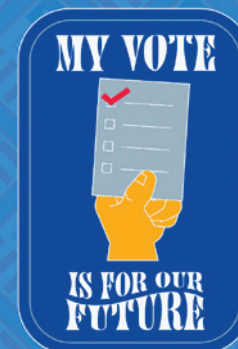
VOTE EDUCATED. VOTE SMART. VOTE FOR YOUR FUTURE!

The 2025 Coordinated Election is on November 4, 2025, here's how to vote:

1. Register to vote online or in-person to receive your ballot in the mail
2. Cast your ballot by mail, a 24/7 secure drop-off box, or in person at a Voter Service and Polling Center
3. For more information go to: govotecolorado.gov

Ballot Drop Box Locations in WSD3

- Widefield Water and Sanitation District: 8495 Fontaine Blvd.



- School District 3 Federal Credit Union: 1180 Crawford Ave.

For additional drop box locations and for a complete list of Voter Service and Polling Centers, go to: clerkandrecorder.elpasoco.com.