

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Ben Ferney, Ed.D.
Superintendent
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On the Cover:
Students from Sunset Elementary enjoy pizza, served fresh by Head Chef Rita Whittaker and her team, on Friday, Oct. 31.

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

We are already a year out from the passage of our November 2024 bond package, and how quickly that time has gone! I am so excited about the projects that have been completed and those yet to come. So far, the November 2024 bond has funded new bus loops at both Salnave and Windsor elementary schools, interior updates at Sunset and Windsor elementary schools, new chillers at three of our elementary schools, and a brand new track surface and renovated stadium at Cheney High School, just to name a few. A huge thank you to our community for your support of the November 2024 bond. Without it, we would not be able to continually improve the facilities across our district! For a full list of projects and details about the November 2024 bond package, please visit our website.

Included in the November 2024 bond is a new elementary school in Airway Heights, set to open in the fall of 2027. This exciting addition means our district must adjust the attendance boundaries for several elementary schools to support balanced enrollment and equitable access for all families. In October, we opened applications for the Boundary Review Community Partners Team, which will guide this process using current data and community feedback. This team will meet four times between December and March before presenting its recommendation to the Cheney Public Schools Board of Directors in June 2026. We aim to share new boundaries a full year before they take effect so students and families have plenty of time to adjust and plan ahead. This is an important process, and we deeply appreciate our community members who have volunteered their time to support it.

Our Strategic Plan serves as the foundation for everything we do in Cheney Public Schools. With six goals—along with our Profile of a Learner and Portrait of a Graduate—it acts as a roadmap for student success. This living document is reviewed multiple times each year, and each school's improvement plan aligns directly with it. We have started to identify aspects of our Strategic Plan on photos across our social media pages, which you may have noticed with new icons appearing on our posts this year. Each icon represents one of the six goals in action, giving our community a better idea of how our Strategic Plan comes to life every day.

At the time of this publication, our Cheney High School Blackhawk football team was preparing for the state playoffs, hosting their first-round game against the Ferndale Golden Eagles. Swim and dive, and cross country, were also preparing for state, with multiple student-athletes competing. Marching band finished second in the region, and girls' soccer battled in districts before falling by penalty kicks after a double-overtime thriller. I am so proud of the work our students have put in to reach state competition, and I am thankful for a staff, as well as a district community, that is ready and willing to support the successes of our students and their extracurricular endeavors.

We are Cheney Public Schools!

Onward,

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.



Policy & Procedure 3245 Update

Conversations surrounding an updated cell phone policy and a new procedure for Cheney Public Schools began back in May 2024. It started with public screenings of *Screenagers: Growing Up in the Digital Age*, followed by community-led and school-led book studies on *The Anxious Generation*, along with ongoing dialogue with students, families, and staff.

In June 2025, the Cheney Public School Board of Directors voted unanimously to update the revised Policy 3245: Students & Telecommunication Devices and adopted the accompanying Procedure 3245 shortly thereafter. The updated policy and adopted procedure were implemented at the start of the 2025-26 school year. With cell phone usage restricted to passing periods and meal times, district high schools saw the biggest change.

In the nearly three months since Cheney Public Schools implemented the updated policy and procedure, the impact has been felt across the district. In interviews with students, staff, and administrators, the most common feedback is that it has been a positive change.

“The teachers absolutely love it,” CHS Principal Brett Hale said. “And they’re not just passively enjoying it in their classrooms. They’re coming out and speaking out about the difference it’s making in their classroom around engagement, around student discourse, students talking to each other and engaging with each other, group work, lab work, all of those kinds of things have just changed in their classes because kids aren’t distracted by these devices anymore.”

“It’s been a benefit for me too because I just feel more engaged in the classroom, and my teachers are even doing more to engage the students,” Cheney High School sophomore Leah Vibbert said. “It’s not just the students. I’ve just been learning more, having less screens.”

For Sasha Buckley, a world languages teacher



Freshmen Harper Hair (left) and Kaitlyn Smith (right) in Sasha Buckley’s third period Spanish class engage in conversation in class on Nov. 5

in her seventh year at CHS, the policy update and adopted procedure have changed the way she thinks about and approaches teaching. Previously, she implemented a strict ‘No Phones Allowed’ rule in her classroom, and she recalls asking students upwards of 100 times per day to put their phones away. It took time away from her instruction, time away from her students’ learning, and had her questioning whether she wanted to stay in the profession.

“Now I’m like, if this is what teaching is, without phones, this is great; this is sustainable,” Buckley said.

[Students] actually talk to each other [now],” she continued. “They ask more questions, because they are actually listening, and they are trying to learn. The grades are way higher than they normally are for me at this point, because that constant distraction isn’t there. We usually have a ton of absences in the fall because everyone is getting sick again. I still see that, but I don’t see the same discrepancy because when they’re here, they’re actually engaged. It’s really nice.”

At CHS, the shift took months of planning, communicating, and strategizing, especially

regarding classroom free time, which is typically at the end of periods. In years past, students would often turn to their phones during free time; this year, that is no longer an option.

“I think we prepared our teachers well for that,” said Hale. “We told them that cell phones are a behavior, and we’re taking that behavior away, and so now that behavior needs to be replaced. We can let the kids replace it, or we can replace it ourselves in the classroom.”

The team at Cheney High School worked with teachers to have a collection of engagement strategies for students during classroom free time. Now, instead of resorting to cell phones, students have a variety of options like reading, playing games, or just simply talking with their friends.

“I feel like in class, like if I have free time because I normally work ahead...and then the next couple of days I just sit and read,” said CHS freshman Harper Broemmeling. “Normally, I would just sit on my phone.”

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Cell Phones

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“Our teachers have done a great job of that,” Hale said. “They really have. They were excited about it. I think they just felt like they got to get back to doing what they went into this profession for. Just interacting with the kids and allowing them and creating space for them to have opportunities to interact with each other. And they’ve done a great job of that.”

For CHS junior Bethany Bleam, the policy and procedure changes were a bit of an adjustment, reversing several years of cell phone accessibility in the classroom. But, once the initial shock wore off, she was happy with the change.

“It was a lot to take in, let’s just say that,” Bleam said. “I’m now a junior, so I had two years with no policy or anything where I could just freely be on my phone, and now, it’s like lockdown. You can’t be on your phone, don’t pull it out because I’m going to send you to the office. All these rules. But, like so far, it’s actually been a benefit. It’s been a good thing.”

“What I’m going to say from a district-wide perspective was that, the way the cell phone policy is for each level of education, like [elementary], middle school, high school; I feel like it’s appropriately placed,” added CHS freshman Henry Alvarado. “Being able to have your phone on you but not out, I feel like is the perfect spot for high school.”

“I didn’t think [students] would be happy about this,” Buckley said. “I was shocked. It was like, three of four different kids in different class periods were like, ‘I like this.’”

With the initial shock of the shift wearing off, and with students and staff alike settling into the new routine, engaging in real life is becoming part of the norm.

“[There’s] more socializing for sure,” Vibbert said. “During lunch, I don’t really have my phone out. It’s not where I like, just scroll for the next 30 minutes. I’m engaging more, outside of class too, which is like, really good.”

“Yeah, I agree,” Bleam said. “The social life is a big thing because it used to be like, ‘Oh, look at this video, let’s talk about this.’ But now, it’s like, ‘Oh, this is what happened in my day yesterday.’ So, we talk more about life, and it’s like, it’s helped.”

For some students, like Broemmeling, less time spent on the phone in class means catching up during passing periods and lunch.

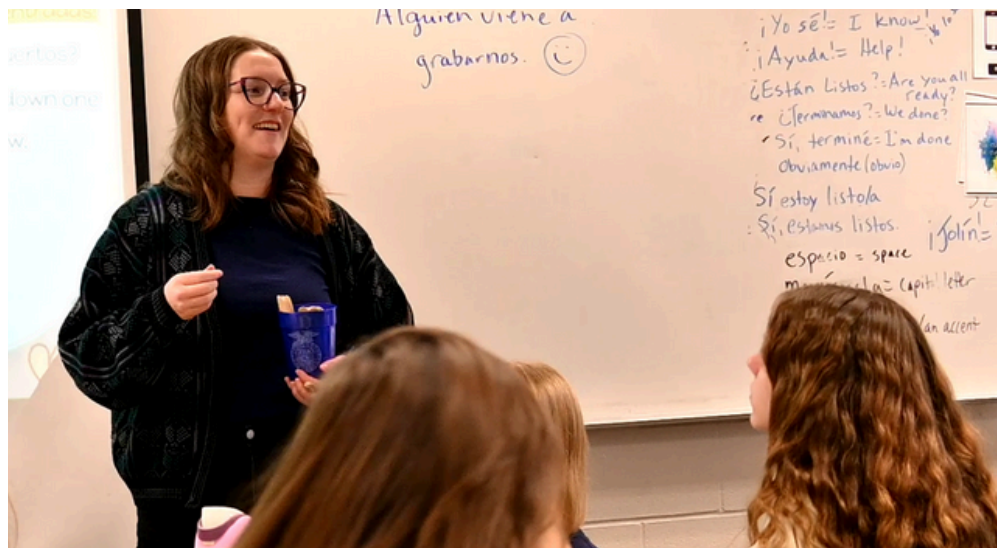
“...I feel like, I normally am almost like, disconnected from the lunch table because I’m

on my phone, because I’m not on my phone in class,” Broemmeling said.

With the distraction of cell phones eliminated from the classroom experience, Hale says the narrative has completely changed at CHS.

“All you have to do is walk down our hallways and just look in the classrooms,” Hale said. “I’ve been doing this for 18 years as an administrator, and I’m sure there was a time when I saw it, but it’s been so long that cell phones have been a problem that I don’t remember a time where I was walking down the hallways and looking in and just seeing everybody engaged in the majority of the classrooms that I walked by. It’s just awesome to see now.”

To view Policy 3245 and Procedure 3245 in their entirety, please visit www.cheneysd.org, navigate to Our District > Board of Directors > Policies and Procedures > Policy & Procedure 3245.



Sasha Buckley addresses her class during third period Spanish on Nov. 7

November 2024 Bond Update

In the year since our community passed the November 2024 bond package, several major projects have been completed. Over the summer, new bus loops at both Salnave and Windsor elementary schools were completed, stadium upgrades to Cheney High School, new chillers at Betz, Salnave, and Windsor, a new boiler at Salnave, and interior updates at Sunset and Windsor. These projects would not have been possible without the support of our community.

There are several additional projects on the horizon, including a new elementary school in Airway Heights, updated kitchens at Salnave and Windsor elementary schools, and interior upgrades to both Betz Elementary and Cheney High School, just to name a few.

For more information on the projects, budget, and communications surrounding the November 2024 bond package, scan the QR code to the right.



Sunset Park Mural: A Community Effort

Shawn Bro, the Parks Maintenance Coordinator for Airway Heights Parks and Recreation, has been working to beautify the area's parks and buildings since he was hired in 2019. The beige-brown exterior of the Airway Heights Parks and Recreation maintenance office at Sunset Park was a bit of an eyesore, and Bro began brainstorming ways to make it more inviting.

"I was planning on painting the building, and I was standing there looking at it, and I thought, well, it's a giant billboard," Bro said. "To try to keep vandalization down and make things look better, I thought, well maybe we could try to put some art on the side of it."

Bro reached out to Cheney High School art teacher Becki Dempsey to pitch the idea of a mural; he had a previous connection with Dempsey as she taught both of his children in her art classes.

"At first I was like, well, I'll take it to the team because I just have never done a mural," Dempsey recalled. "So, I took it to PLC, and then Katherine [Potter], and Sherry [Syrie] and Hannah [Brown] were all very receptive, like, let's do this."

All the secondary art teachers across the district are part of the art Professional Learning Community (PLC), with Potter representing Westwood Middle School, Syrie representing Cheney Middle School, and Dempsey and Brown at CHS. The team spearheaded the project, with planning beginning in the spring of 2025.

"We had to pause it because of summer break," Syrie said. "We were still getting it organized and buying paint, and then this fall

we ran the contest with all the secondary schools."

Bro set the parameters and expectations of the mural to guide the competition. It needed to be colorful, tie in aviation, green spaces, the water tower, and of course, a sunset. "I just sat there and thought about all these things that could possibly represent what Airway Heights

"We were like, can we actually paint this or is it too highly detailed or too complicated?" Potter said. "Some things were off topic, so we screened those out. We looked through them and sent on what we thought were 15 really good options."

The 15 contenders were sent on to Bro and his department for the final decision on the



Nearly all of the volunteer group of students pose with the District Art PLC Team in front of the nearly completed Sunset Park mural on Oct. 18. Corporal Dennis Bachman (back row, center) of the Airway Heights Police Department stopped by to admire their work and say hello.

is," Bro said.

The district art PLC team introduced the competition to their students last spring, but without dedicated classroom time to work on the project, there was not a lot of follow through or interest from students.

"So we're like, we need to give them time to work on it," Potter said. "And that worked a lot better. We gave it to all of our students, but not all of them wanted to continue to really polish the piece and turn it in for the competition. I would say we had over 100 that did, and they took it home and got their parents to sign off on it, then brought it back and submitted it for the competition."

In addition to Bro's parameters, the art PLC team also had to consider if the submissions could be recreated on a larger scale.

artwork. The selection? A uniquely colorful design from CMS eighth grader Mira Perret. The district art PLC team agreed that although there were several spectacular submissions, Perret incorporated all of Bro's parameters.

"I feel like hers was the only one that really covered everything that Shawn wanted," Brown said. "The sunset, the water tower, the airplanes, the nature. She was

able to fit all of that because of the way she did the design."

"Her design was remarkable; it stood out," Potter concluded.

Perret, who is a second-year art student in Syrie's class, says she has always been drawn to murals, so when the opportunity to create her own mural presented itself, she was excited to enter.

"I grew up in Moscow, Idaho, which is a small college town, and because of that there were a lot of murals in the area, and they've always drawn my attention," Perret said. "Not only do they convey a message or meaning about the place they're located, but it can really brighten up areas and spark interest for other people

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Mural

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that wouldn't necessarily go out of their way to see art daily. So when I heard about the Sunset mural contest, I thought it would be fun to enter and possibly get a chance to put my ideas on a wall to impact people even in a small way."

Once the design was selected, the planning began. Since this was the first mural design and application for the entire district art PLC team, it was a learning experience. Dempsey reached out to former student and Seattle muralist, Kendra Wells, for some advice.

"I texted her and asked some questions, you know, what do I need to do?" Dempsey said. "How do I get started? And she really helped out and sent me a long email of things to think about."

Things like temperature, weather, the building texture, and surface materials. All of these elements have an impact on a mural. The team prepped the site during the district-wide Professional Learning Day on Oct. 10, painting the letters so it was ready to go for student volunteers to paint the design. Then, on a blustery Saturday a week later, they got to work.

"It was probably 34 degrees that first day with the wind chill," Syrie said. "The metal building was freezing, and then the paint was freezing, and so everything started gelling like jam on bread...We made it work and

threw on a second layer when it was warmer later in the day."

Each teacher credits another for their work on the mural, from Potter's preparation grid work to Syrie's freehand painting of some of the curves.

"It took all of our eyes and areas of expertise to try to get it ready for the kids, then try to keep the kids on track as they were haphazardly doing all the things they do," Syrie said with a laugh.

"Every single person in that PLC did their part for sure, just helping each other, talking it through," Dempsey added. "Our team has always been a pretty strong team."

Nearly 20 students participated in painting the mural, coming in shifts throughout the day on Oct. 18. They assisted with various tasks, and from Potter's perspective, they were incredibly selfless.

"All the kids were so open-minded and would just be like, 'I'm here to help. What do you need me to do?'" Potter said. "Even if it was a small thing like touching up edges with brown paint, you know, there was never like, 'I want to do something different!' They were just really, really giving of themselves to the project."

"There was an element of, it's going to be here for decades, potentially, so this is

important, and we need to help each other out, hold ladders, endure the elements because this is important," Syrie added. "Slow down and have fun. Hannah brought music and Katherine and Becki brought food and hot cocoa. So, of course, there's that kid element where it's festive. We want it to be enjoyable so we get help again in the future potentially, or just so they have a great experience with this thing that they did that was really special."

With so many people involved with the execution of the project, Perret learned a lot about working together with her peers and shared experiences.

"I learned a lot about collaboration," she said. "I didn't get to paint the whole thing myself, and that part was actually really hard for me. I don't feel like it's mine anymore. But, this is also exciting since it is supposed to represent the community. It is made by a lot of people for a lot of people, not just me. It's a community project."

The hours spent creating, planning, preparing, and executing resulted in a beautiful addition to Sunset Park, encompassing all that is Airway Heights. A real community effort, for a special community mural.

"I love it," Bro said. "It does everything that I thought it would, and it stands out."



Mira Perret poses in front of the mural at Sunset Park on Oct. 18.



Emma Ayers, a 2025 graduate of Cheney High School, uses chalk to sketch out an airplane as part of the Sunset Mural painting on Oct. 18.

NOTICES

Santa's Trailer

The fourth annual Santa's Trailer Gift Drive and Gift Giving Day, organized by the Cheney High School Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), is spreading holiday cheer once again—this year with a new partnership to make an even greater impact in our community.

FBLA is partnering with the Cheney Community Outreach Center (CCOC) to help holiday gifts reach the families who need them most. Families interested in participating in the gift giving day are encouraged to visit or call the CCOC office to activate their file—or create a new one—and sign up for Santa's Trailer. Once registration is complete, CCOC will provide a coupon to be redeemed on the gift giving day.



The 2025 Santa's Trailer Gift Giving Day is Thursday, Dec. 11 from 3:30-6:30 p.m. at Cheney High School. For questions or assistance, please contact the Cheney Community Outreach Center at (509) 235-8900.

We're Hiring Substitutes!

Join Our Team



Reminder! Complete Your Benefits Application Today!

Cheney Public Schools operates under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) for meal services, which means that all students in the district are eligible to receive one free breakfast and one lunch at school every day, regardless of their family's income.

Although meals are free for all students, families who believe they qualify for additional reduced fees are encouraged to complete the Benefit Application. Completing this important application helps our district keep important funding for educational programs. Additionally, students who qualify can receive more benefits like

Sun Bucks Summer EBT, waived extracurricular fees, community discounts, and many other benefits.

To qualify, families must complete both the Benefit Application AND a Parental Consent Survey.

The 2025-2026 Benefit Application and Parental Consent Survey are available on the district website at www.cheneysd.org > Our District > Department Directory > Nutrition Services > Benefit Application & Consent to Share.

We're Hiring!

Interested in becoming a substitute for Cheney Public Schools? Apply today! We are seeking qualified substitutes for all positions.

Additionally, the \$52 fingerprinting fee will be waived for all substitute applicants during the months of November and December.

To apply for any of our substitute positions, please visit cheneysd.schoolspring.com, navigate to the 'Search Jobs' bar on the left side of the screen and type in 'Substitute'.

LaunchNW Promise Scholarship Now Open!

The LaunchNW Promise Scholarship is now open! The scholarship provides funding to qualifying students pursuing 2- and 4-year degrees, apprenticeships, and certifications in Eastern Washington. So, who is eligible?

This year's scholarships are available to CHS seniors whose annual household income is at or below 150% of the Washington State median family income

levels. Students must also be participating in the Mpower Mentoring Program during their senior year. To apply for the LaunchNW Promise Scholarship, students are required to complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) or WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid).

The application is due on June 1, 2026. For

more information and to apply for the scholarship visit:
<https://launchnw.org/scholarships/>.





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Important Dates

November 24 & 25

Conferences - No School for Students

November 26-28

Autumn Break - No School

December 10

Westwood School Improvement Plan
5 p.m. | Westwood Middle School
School Board Meeting
6 p.m. | Westwood Middle School

December 22 - January 2

Winter Break - No School

January 14

Three Springs School Improvement Plan
5 p.m. | Three Springs High School
School Board Meeting
6 p.m. | Three Springs High School



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 Officer/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

Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator/Section 504
Coordinator/ADA 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
Megan Kensok, Public Records Officer
Cheney Public Schools
12414 S. Andrus Rd., Cheney, WA 99004
Phone: (509) 559-4502
Email: mkensok@cheneysd.org

Are you a member of a military family?
Please visit <https://www.cheneysd.org/community/military>
for more information.