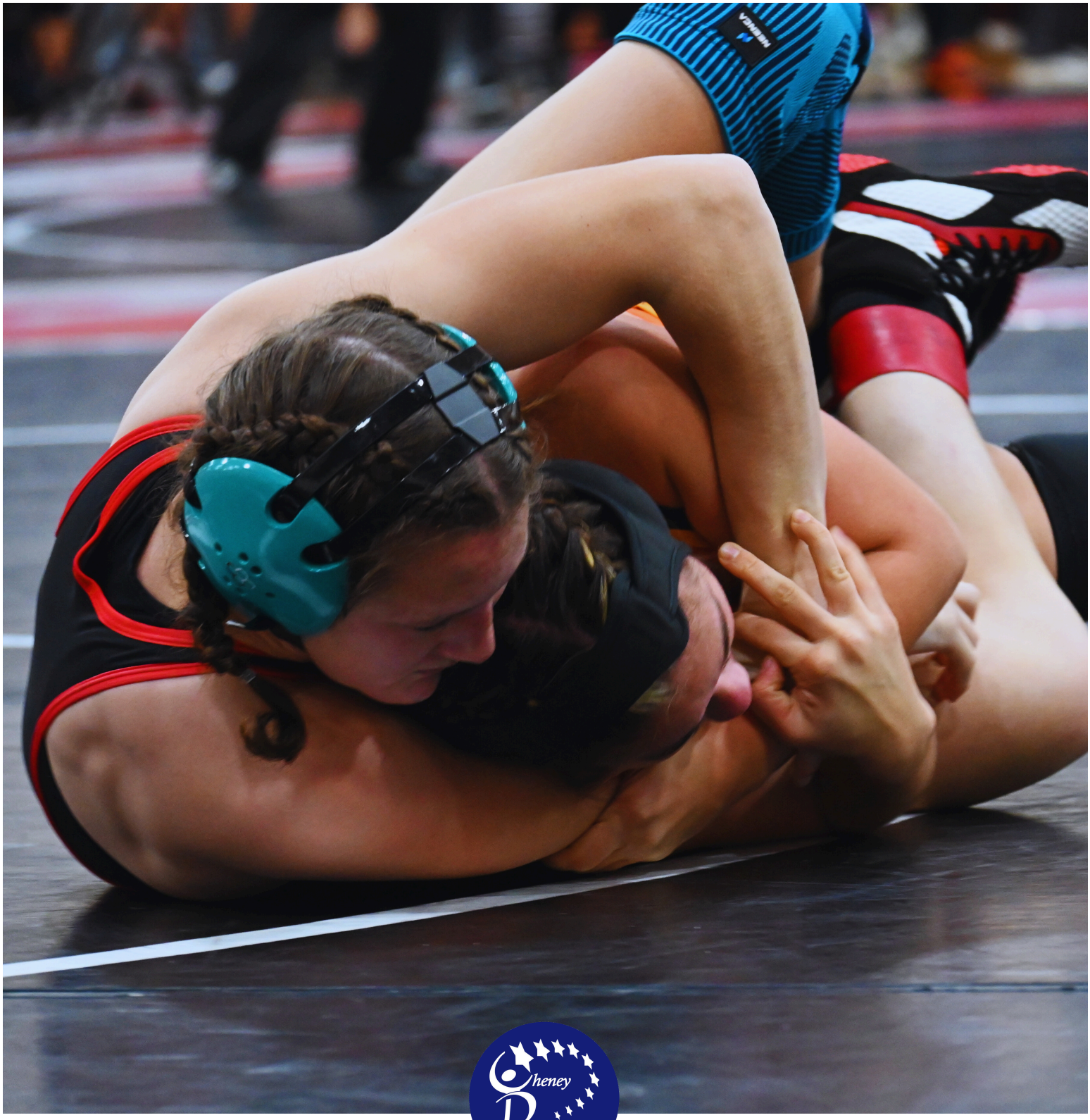
December 2025

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future



Ben Ferney, Ed.D.
Superintendent
bferney@cheneysd.org

IMPORTANT DATES

December 22 - January 2
Winter Break - No School

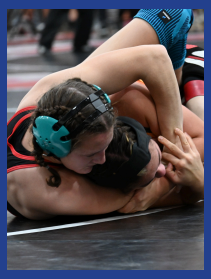
January 14
School Improvement Plan - 5 p.m.
Three Springs High School

January 14
School Board Meeting - 6 p.m.
Three Springs High School

January 16
Emergency Make-Up Day

January 19
Martin Luther King Jr. Day - No School

January 23
End of First Semester/Second Quarter



On the Cover: Cheney High School senior Jalisca Holmgren wrestles during the 2nd Annual Tie Dyes & Takedowns Girls Wrestling Tournament on Dec. 13.

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

I always love this time of year because it is jam-packed with all of the amazing things our district has to offer. In the weeks between Autumn Break and Winter Break, there is no shortage of events! It is wonderful to see so many of our families attending events across our buildings. From winter concerts to spirit games to community service projects, our students and staff are doing amazing things.

I especially enjoyed the community service projects across our district, specifically the Generation Alive Food Packing event at Betz Elementary. It reminded me of the generosity of our community, and the commitment of our staff and students to help those in need. The joy I felt at that event from students and staff alike reminded me of how special our community is. You can read more about Generation Alive and the Betz Elementary community service project on page 3!

As part of the November 2024 bond package, our district will be opening a new elementary school off of Craig Road in Airway Heights in the fall of 2027. This exciting change means that our district must adjust attendance boundaries for several elementary schools to provide balanced enrollment and equitable access for all families. In October, we called on our greater district community to help us with these adjustments and requested applications for the Boundary Review Community Partners Team (BRCPT).

The BRCPT will work together with district staff and consultants from Teater Crocker, Inc.,–an educational consulting firm–to prepare a recommendation for boundary adjustments to the School Board of Directors. Community input is a vital part of the boundary adjustment process, and we are so grateful to this group for participating actively in this process. Our first BRCPT meeting was on Dec. 9, and I am so excited to see the hard work of this team shape our new boundaries. Our goal is to present updated boundaries to our School Board of Directors by June for approval. Click here to learn more about the team and the boundary review process!

I look forward to 2026 and the amazing things to come for our district! Wishing you and your family a restful, safe, and happy Winter Break.

We are Cheney Public Schools!

Onward,

Ben Ferney, Ed.D | Superintendent



Mark Scott
School Board President
District 1



Elizabeth 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

DISTRICT NEWS

Generation Alive: Activating Youth to Lead with Compassion

Leadership comes in all different forms, and in kids, leadership helps to build essential life skills like confidence, problem-solving, and empathy. At Betz Elementary, anyone can be a leader, and fifth grade students are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and embrace leadership through Generation Alive.

Per their website, Generation Alive (GA) is "a nonprofit organization in Spokane, Wash., that is activating youth to lead with compassion." Betz has been partnering with GA since 2023, and it is becoming a routine part of the fall semester. Any interested fifth graders complete an application process, including a form and a short essay on why they want to be part of the program. Once they have parental consent to participate, GA advisor and Betz fifth grade teacher, Nicole Williams, accepts them for the Action Team on a first-come, first-serve basis.

"This year was really great because they've seen this, and they've gotten to participate," Williams said. "They were really excited, and they came in with ideas already for the skits for the assembly, game show ideas they wanted to do, and how they could do announcements differently."

The 2025 Betz Action Team had 22 students, and they began weekly meetings in late September to map out their fall assembly and December food-packing event. This group of students learned about community needs, the meaning of compassion, how to inspire their peers to serve the community with them, how to fundraise and advocate for causes they care about, and ultimately how to lead their Generation Alive community service project.

This year's group of students even created a rap song, complete with lyrics highlighting food insecurity, leading with compassion, and leadership. Click here to view the video.

"It surprised me how well they did with it because they were really like, we decided to throw together this rap," Williams said. "When you listen to it, they had all the food insecurity things, all the strong messaging that needs to come with Generation Alive, and so then you're like, wow. This is something they're truly interested in because you can tell they put all their energy into it."

Students participating in Generation Alive also learned about their leadership style, including their personality types and preferred working style. GA breaks it down into four easily digestible groups: lions, bumble bees, otters, and golden retrievers. Students learned more about themselves, how they operate, and their strengths.

"It's really fun when they start using the language," Williams said. "They know who they are, and 'I'm going to go find an otter because an otter is going to help me have these skills.'

So, when you're building your team, you want to have all those personality leadership traits, because if you're all lions, are you going to get something done?" Williams continued. "The kids grab on to this, the student-friendly terminology."

Williams saw the growth throughout her class, and she saw peer understanding and acceptance flourish. One fifth grader in



GA team membes smile during the assembly on Oct. 24.



An Action Team member holds the microphone for this Betz student on Oct. 24.


GA advisor, Glo Cheevers, addresses the Action Team on Dec. 4.



An Action Team member assists a Betz student during the food packing event on Dec. 4.

particular who made big strides with Generation Alive is Calen Angeles. Oftentimes viewed as more playful and goofy by his peers, Calen learned more about his own personality and leadership style through GA. Over the course of the fall, he blossomed into an unexpected but powerful leader.

"Seeing him go from someone that I think a lot of students view as just silly to like, oh, he's very serious, he has a great work ethic," Williams said. "Just kind of changing the perspective of his peers toward him was huge…In this arena, they realized he has a valuable skillset, and they asked, 'Can he be at my table?! He knows what's going on!'"

Calen's leadership was especially important during the GA food-packing event. He is organized and has an attention to detail that is unmatched. Where some of his classmates struggled to remember the table setup, he was able to replicate it with ease.

"He looked at the display table when we were setting up, and he set up his table no problem," Williams recounted. "That's how he processes. [Students] were like, wait, I'm missing this? And he was like, yeah, you're missing the green scoop. You're missing the red scoop. He could just look at their table and know."

"I feel so much like a leader and everything, for my group," Calen said. "Packing up the food and everything, it was just the best."

This year, Betz raised $2,008.83 during a six-week coin drive, providing over 8,000 meals for the community. On Dec. 4, the GA leadership team led Betz students through the food packing event, measuring and packing apple and cinnamon sugar oatmeal for the local food bank.

"The community service project is invaluable," Williams said. "I think the whole school, raising [money] to pack the food and seeing the Cheney food bank here to get the food, knew they were helping to feed our community. That was really special to them. Both components are just really huge, so I cannot promote the program enough.

…When students are passionate about something, it's amazing the product they produce."



A closeup of a meal being weighed on Dec. 4.



Students packing meals on Dec. 4.



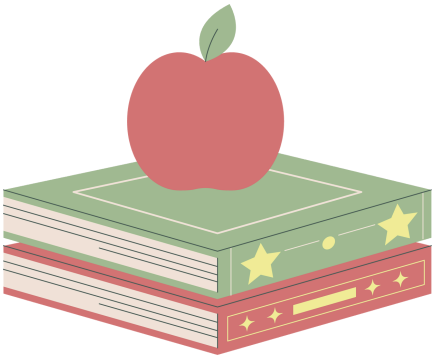
Food packing table setup.

Connecting Standards to Grading: District Transition to Standards-Based Grading

Cheney Public Schools is a proud PLC (Professional Learning Community) district, rooted in a guaranteed and viable curriculum where all students learn at high levels and reach grade-level standards. Over the last 10 years, district teachers and PLC teams have collaborated to create standards-based grade-level and content scope and sequences. This work has resulted in a roadmap that outlines what students are expected to learn by subject and by grade.

The district has reached a point in the PLC districtwide process where grading practices reflect standards-based instruction, and students receive fair and balanced feedback on coursework and assessments aligned to standards. Cheney Public Schools is formally transitioning to standards-based grading, with a pilot of standards-based elements beginning in ELA classrooms across secondary schools during the second semester of the 2025–26 school year. Students and families participating in the pilot will receive communications prior to the second semester and throughout the term outlining processes, criteria, and progress toward standards.

Feedback from teachers, students, and families will be gathered to inform the finalization of a districtwide rollout of standards-based grading.



CHS Future Business Leaders of America Lead Fourth Annual Santa's Trailer Project

Students at Cheney High School once again demonstrated the power of service and community collaboration through the 4th Annual Santa's Trailer Gift Drive, a Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)–led community service project held from November 17 through December 5. The project culminated with a community gift-giving day, which was held on December 11 at Cheney High School.



A student volunteer displaying a toy.

This year's event was made possible through the combined efforts of 54 student volunteers from FBLA, Key Club, and National Honor Society. Together, students organized, promoted, collected, and distributed gifts to local families in need during the holiday season.



A closeup of one of the shopping tables.

Community support played a vital role in the success of Santa's Trailer. Nine local businesses and schools within Cheney Public Schools partnered with the students by hosting gift donation boxes and helping spread the word throughout the community. As a result of these collective efforts, an impressive 550 gifts were donated.



Student volunteers wrapping gifts.

"Last year, we ran out of gifts quickly," said CHS teacher and FBLA advisor Amelia Gubler. "So the kids started collaborating and planning on how we could do things better and differently. This year, we implemented those ideas."

Families registered for the event through the program's business partner, Cheney Community Outreach Center (CCOC). While 42 families initially signed up, the generosity of donors allowed the event to ultimately serve 62 families on gift-giving day. Additional gifts remaining after the event were delivered to the CCOC, where they will continue to support families in Cheney and Airway Heights throughout the season.

"A lot of the families, whenever they get their gifts, the kids always seem so happy, and so do the parents because they get to see the joy on their kids' faces," said sophomore Isabella Murray. "It just feels really good to know that you're actually making a difference, especially in your community."

Santa's Trailer has become a meaningful annual event at Cheney High School—one that highlights the importance of service learning and community partnerships in creating positive change. Cheney FBLA would like to thank our community partners and members for their continued support.

For more information about Santa's Trailer or Cheney FBLA, please contact Cheney High School.

From One to Many: The Rise of Cheney High School's Girls Wrestling Program

Girls wrestling is having a major moment. It is the fastest growing sport among high school girls in the country, with participation more than quadrupling since the 2017-18 school year. Cheney High School senior Jalisca Holmgren has experienced that growth first-hand. She was the only girl to compete during her freshman season in 2022-23, and today, the Blackhawks have 30 student-athletes as part of the girls wrestling program.



CHS senior Jalisca Holmgren (left) controls her opponent during Tie Dyes & Takedowns on Dec. 13.

"I started recruiting," Holmgren recounted. "Mostly talking to my friends and people that I thought looked tough."

Holmgren knows a thing or two about toughness, and it is clear that both her mental

and physical toughness have grown through her relationship with wrestling. The Cheney native only began wrestling in eighth grade, and in her first year on the mat, she did not win a single match. Undeterred, Holmgren signed up to wrestle her freshman year at CHS. When it came time to report to the mat, she was the only girl to show up.

"Every day I would go home and be like, man, I don't know if I can do this anymore because it's just the most brutal sport," Holmgren said. "I knew I'd just get beat up a lot. But I'm so grateful that I took that step to be in the place where I am now."

Now, she's a three-time state competitor with an undefeated record to start her senior season, a far cry from where she was just four years ago. However, her growth did not come without resilience and countless hours on the mat, wrestling most often against boys.



Senior Jalisca Holmgren eyes her opponent as the whistle blows on Dec. 13.

"I think even the basics were new to her," said Head Coach Jeremy McGee. "She's developed mentally and physically a lot over the last couple of years to be able to wrestle at a different level, and it all didn't happen at once. Every match, every week, every season, every year, she got better and she got stronger."

Once official competitions started her freshman year and she had an opportunity to wrestle against other girls, Holmgren gained an entirely new perspective. She soon realized wrestling could be something she really excelled at.

"I think [the turning point was] when competitions started," she said. "I didn't know what that would look like at all; I didn't even know if there would be girls that I could compete with. Once I started competing and there were girls, I realized like, oh, I'm kind of good at this. It's hard to compare yourself to a guy and know where you stand when you're wrestling them, but once I started competing with girls I felt like I got a sense of accomplishment. I was like, I can make big things happen for myself and this sport. That made practice easier because I knew, in the back of my mind, practicing with only boys was making me mentally stronger than the girls I was competing against."

From Holmgren's perspective, without the support of McGee and the CHS boys' wrestling coaching staff, she may not have made it through her freshman season as the lone girls wrestler.

"I thought going in, since there weren't any other girls that they didn't really like girls' wrestling at Cheney, but when I came in, it was the exact opposite," Holmgren said. "Every single coach came and talked to me, asked me a bunch of questions, and just made me feel so welcome."

"It was hard and scary for me, but it was just amazing how the boys team just embraced her," said M'Linda Holmgren, Jalisca's mother. "If you look at the pictures from that first year, she's just one of them. They would cheer her on."

Coach McGee provided the support Holmgren needed, guiding her through every move and encouraging her. His daughter Paige was in eighth grade during Holmgren's freshman season, and once Paige's own season ended, she joined Holmgren in practice. Her presence gave Holmgren a companion: someone to practice with, someone to warm up with, someone to travel with. It made a big difference during her first high school season.

"I think that really helped, just having like, one other person, one other girl that could be with me," Holmgren recalled. "It was really nice."

Today, Holmgren has 29 other girls joining her on the mat in practice and matches. Cheney's astronomical program growth aligns with trends across the Greater Spokane League where the majority of schools will field complete girls wrestling teams this season. As a result, GSL girls wrestling will have a dual meet schedule for the first time ever.

"Looking back every year, I just wanted that to be me, watching the boys duals," Holmgren said. "I'm so excited for this year.

We've just got a team full of hammers. We're going to have a really good year, try to be GSL champs, and just dominate our way through."

And dominate they have. The Blackhawks are undefeated this season so far, including a commanding victory at the Second Annual Tie Dyes & Takedowns tournament on December 13. Cheney took first place with a total of 238.5 points and four first-place finishers, including Holmgren, Tessy Almond, Jennifer Tian, and Skylar Buckner. The Blackhawks were nearly 50 points ahead of the next closest team, with Post Falls coming in second with 192.5 total points. Simply put, the future is bright for CHS girls wrestling.

"It's been super awesome," McGee said. "To grow a staff around me, to have coaches that are experienced, that are excited to build a girls' team, and to coach them, has been great. And the girls have been amazing back to us. So, that's really helped form a bond, but also, an expectation of what's to come at Cheney."

Check out the Cheney girls wrestling schedule by clicking here, or catch them in their next home match against Lewis and Clark on Jan. 14 at 6 p.m. at Cheney High School.



Head Coach Jeremy McGee shouts from the corner of the mat during a match on Dec. 13.



Senior Sierra Kalaaukahi engages with her opponent.



Junior Paige McGee wins her match at the Tie Dyes & Takedowns tournament on Dec. 13.



Sophomore Juel Turner listens to feedback from Head Coach Jason Williams.

District Snapshots



Mr. Alexander assists a student during his sixth period eighth grade math class at Cheney Middle School on December 4.



These students are deep in character during a showing of Witness to the Prosecution, on December 11 at Cheney High School.



This kindergartener in Ms. Palmer's class at Sunset Elementary shows off the spaceship he bulit during morning free play on December 10.



Fifth graders in Mr. Dryden's class at Snowdon Elementary share a laugh during Place Value U-Know, a fun twist on the better-known UNO game, on December 11.



This preschooler in Mrs. Canton's class at Windsor Elementary engages with Superintendent Ben Ferney during breakfast on December 2.



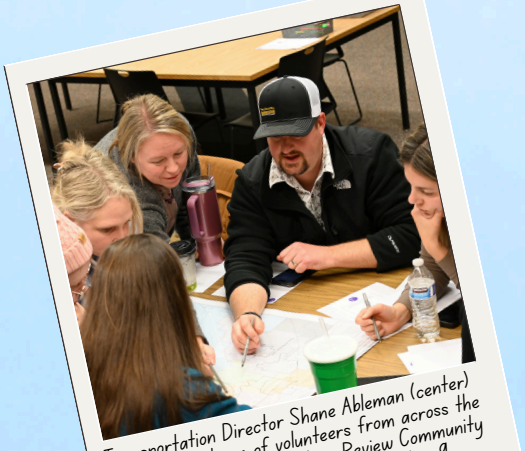
Sixth graders in Mr. Wagner's science class at Westwood Middle School engage in a 3D printing project using a CAD program on December 2.



This first grader in Mrs. Pruett's class at Salnave Elementary shades in the correct moon phase during a Mystery Science Moon Phase lesson.



Third graders in Ms. Triplett's class at Betz Elementary engaged with their pen pals from EWU's Asia University American Program (AUAP) on Dec. 16.



Transportation Director Shane Ableman (center) works with a team of volunteers from across the district at the first Boundary Review Community Partners Team meeting on December 9.

NOTICES

Emergency Make-Up Day Scheduled for January 16, 2026

Thank you to our entire district community as Cheney Public Schools navigated its first inclement weather-related school cancellation of the year on Wednesday, Dec. 17. The decision to cancel school is never simple and is based on careful consideration of student and staff safety.

Whenever a school day is canceled, it must be made up on a later date. To accommodate this, our district has four designated Emergency Make-Up Days built into the school calendar.

The first available Emergency Make-Up Day is Friday, January 16, 2026. School will be in session on this day with the regular Friday one-hour late start, and attendance will be taken as usual. Any absences must be excused through your student(s) school office.

Thank you for your continued understanding and support!



Cheney Public Schools Seeking Qualified Applicants!



Cheney Public Schools is seeking qualified individuals for all positions. Additionally, the $52 OSPI fingerprinting fee will be waived for all substitute applicants hired during now through Dec. 31, 2025! Click here for more details and to apply.



Cheney Public Schools @cheneyschools @CheneySchools

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

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: ⟶

Questions or Feedback?

Do you have questions or feedback?
We're here to help! If you have any questions, concerns, or if there is something you would like to know more about, please reach out to Jenna Larson, Communications Coordinator at jlarson@cheneysd.org.

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