

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



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

IMPORTANT DATES

May 13

Board Meeting – 6 p.m.
Cheney High School

May 22

Non-School Day

May 25

Memorial Day Holiday – No School

May 27

Board Meeting
Cheney High School

June 10

Board Meeting – 6 p.m.
Cheney High School

June 11

Graduations – [Click here](#) for times and locations for WIN Academy, TSHS and CHS



On the Cover:
A representative from Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories engages with a student during Betz's S.T.E.A.M. night on April 15.

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

There are some really great things happening across our district, and I am thankful for the people who step up, pitch in, and lead by serving others. From the strong volunteer turnout at the 2026 Van Kuren Invitational to the work of the Boundary Review Community Partners Team (BRCPT), we see people showing up for our students every day. It is no surprise that National Volunteer Week lands in April. It fits us well. Thank you for giving your time and energy to support our students, staff, and schools.

The BRCPT is made up of volunteers from each of our three distinct communities, along with staff and administrators, who have spent hours reviewing data, listening to community perspectives, and mapping out possible boundary options. Since December 2025, this group has worked together to find the best path forward for all students, and they are nearing the finish line. In late March, we shared the proposed boundaries. In mid-April, we welcomed the community to two feedback nights at Cheney Middle School and Westwood Middle School to ask questions, share ideas, and talk through concerns. Next, the proposed boundaries will go to the School Board, with a goal for approval in June. Check out the proposed boundaries [on our website](#), and stay tuned for updates on our social media channels.

The month of April is also the Month of the Military Child, and at Cheney Public Schools, we deeply value our military families and their significant contributions and sacrifices. About seven percent of our students are military-connected, including active-duty personnel stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base. This month, our district was recognized by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) as a 2026 Purple Star Award winner. The Purple Star Award program recognizes school districts that demonstrate a strong commitment to military-connected families by implementing military-friendly policies and practices. The award is a two-year designation, and I am incredibly proud that our district has now been recognized for this award in both 2024 and 2026, marking back-to-back honors in the program's first three years.

It is hard to believe we are about seven weeks from the last day of school! There are so many fun, exciting, and important events coming up in this final stretch of the school year, including graduation. We look forward to celebrating our seniors and all they have accomplished. At the same time, we are excited to welcome our newest learners next fall, the kindergarten class of 2039! If your family has a student starting kindergarten in the coming 2026-2027 school year, registration is now open. Signing up as soon as possible helps us best prepare for next year with staffing, budgeting, and class sizes. For more information and to register your student, please [click here](#). We are Cheney Public Schools!

Onward,

Ben Ferney, Ed.D | Superintendent



Mark Scott
School Board Member
District 1



Elizabeth Winer
School Board Legislative Rep
District 2



Henry Browne
School Board Member
District 3



Bill Hanson
School Board Vice President
District 4



Mitch Swenson
School Board President
District 5

DISTRICT NEWS

Cheney High School's Hayden Bowdish Crowned 'Embrace' Lilac Festival Queen

For Hayden Bowdish, the Spokane Lilac Festival has always been a fond childhood memory from her hometown of Spokane. From the Royal Court to the parade, it was an annual highlight that signaled the start of Spring.

"I grew up in Spokane, so the Lilac Festival was always a fun thing that I've loved to go to with my mom," the Cheney High School senior recalled.

When her family relocated roughly 16 miles west to Cheney, she felt that connection with her hometown fade. So when she saw a flyer at the start of the school year seeking candidates for the Spokane Lilac Royal Court, she was intrigued—but also intimidated. Having grown up attending parades and admiring the royalty of past courts, the idea of stepping into that role herself felt out of reach. With the support of a friend, Bowdish attended the informational meeting, setting into motion a series of events that would shift the trajectory of her senior year and beyond.

"They ended up showing a video of the past Royal Court," Bowdish recounted. "They shared their personal experiences, and they talked about how much they grew through the program. After seeing that, it was definitely something that I knew I wanted to be a part of."

As it turns out, Bowdish was precisely the type of person the Spokane Lilac Festival was in search of for the Royalty Scholarship and Development Program. According to Jill Ham, Co-Vice President of Royalty with the Spokane Lilac Festival, above anything else they are looking for young women rooted in servant leadership.

"When we go to schools and we talk to the school coordinators, we emphasize that we're looking for somebody that has a heart to serve, and that kind of shocks them when



CHS senior Hayden Bowdish smiles as she is presented as the 2026 'Embrace' Queen of the Spokane Lilac Festival. Photo courtesy of the Spokane Lilac Festival Association.

they find out that's what we're looking for," Ham said. "So, someone that just has a heart for others. That's kind of our baseline that we ask for."

Bowdish's extracurricular resume more than fits the bill. She's active in the Key Club, a community-service focused organization, along with Executive Leadership at Cheney High School, Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), in addition to serving as a mentor through Mpower Mentoring, where she helps low-income students optimize their futures. Bowdish also serves on CHS's ASB as the social media manager, in addition to running the school coffee shop as a barista. Regardless of her long list of service-focused extracurriculars, Bowdish never considered herself to fit the mold of Lilac Royalty.

"Initially, I'll be honest, I didn't think it was something they'd select me for, just because I'm not great at public speaking, and it's never been something that I put myself out there to do," Bowdish said.

But, it is not about fitting a specific mold—it is about finding young women with a desire to lead and serve. The Royalty Scholarship and Development Program helps shape that passion into confident, capable leadership.

The program includes nearly 16 weeks of personal and leadership development that precedes the coronation of the Queen and the announcement of the Royal Court. Known as the Ambassadorship, Bowdish joined 16 other seniors from across Spokane County in the rigorous program that included in-depth interviews, panel discussions, question and answer sections, volunteering, and public speaking. For Bowdish, who describes herself as shy and reserved, a quieter type of leader that served by example, the program presented quite the personal challenge.

"Lilac was intimidating because it's more about public speaking and being in the spotlight, showcasing yourself, which isn't something that I love to do," Bowdish said. "It was nerve wracking. But, one of the biggest parts of this program is youth



Queen Hayden (center) reacts to being named the 'Embrace' Festival Queen by the Spokane Lilac Festival Association. Photo courtesy of the Spokane Lilac Festival Association.



Queen Hayden (center) poses with the 2026 'Embrace' Royal Court. Photo courtesy of the Spokane Lilac Festival Association.

empowerment. After being a part of this program for so long, I feel so confident in my skills, and I feel set up for success with my future.”

On March 28 after months of learning, preparation, and a grueling process of interviews, panels, and speeches, Bowdish was selected as Queen of the Royal Court. She became the second Queen in CHS history, and the ninth Blackhawk to be part of the Royal Court.

“It was definitely a rush of emotions,” Bowdish said of the moment she was named Queen. “I was overwhelmed at first because

often throughout my life I’ve struggled to see myself as a leader. And then hearing them say my name really brought me back into reality about how far I’ve come personally.”

As Queen, Bowdish will lead the Royal Court for the next year as they travel throughout the Pacific Northwest, serving as ambassadors for the Spokane community. The next year will include multiple appearances at community events across the region, engaging with the public, giving speeches, and showcasing the members of the Royal Court.

“She’s our vocal one, so she’s out giving speeches and representing, trying to give opportunities to girls who are standing alongside her to showcase them also,” Ham said. “That’s one reason why Hayden is perfect for this; she’s always watching and observing others, she gives others a moment to talk, she’s very analytical and knows their strengths. As one of the girls said, ‘She has a piece of all of them in her.’ So, she has a piece of all their strengths within her. She’s perfect for it.”

That ability to lead while lifting others up is part of what made Bowdish stand out throughout the process.

In addition to being named Queen, Bowdish was also awarded a scholarship that will help fund her freshman year at Washington State University next year. She has been accepted into the Honors College and plans to study Accounting and Management Information Systems. The scholarship, she says, will help to cover the gap that her other financial aid does not—including housing, additional fees, and books—easing the stress and uncertainty that often comes with funding college.

“I have grown so much throughout this process,” Bowdish said. “I’ve gained connections with powerful young women across my community that I wouldn’t have been able to meet otherwise. I am so grateful for those connections and bonds. It’s a unique experience, and we go through it together. We grow as people, and seeing that growth in each other is incredibly empowering. And then also being able to be so involved in my hometown again with these events that I used to love as a kid, it’s been like a full-circle moment, and I’m so happy to be a part of it.”



DISTRICT NEWS

Brett Hale Named Assistant Superintendent for Cheney Public Schools



Brett Hale

After an extensive interview process, Cheney Public Schools is pleased to announce that Brett Hale has been selected as Assistant Superintendent, pending Board approval. The

multi-day interview process included representatives from several key stakeholder groups across the district.

Hale will step into the role July 1, 2026 following the retirement of long-time Assistant Superintendent Tom Arlt.

Candidates participated in a five-part comprehensive interview process that included teams made up of district leadership, school leaders, classified

directors, staff, and association representatives. Following evaluation of feedback from those five stakeholder groups, two finalists were selected to return for a final day of interviews. Feedback from key stakeholders helped to inform the District's decision to move forward with Hale.

"Brett stood out in a highly competitive process, rising to the top after two days of interviews," said Superintendent Ben Ferney. "It is clear that his heart and passion are with Cheney Public Schools. I am excited for the leadership he will bring as our next Assistant Superintendent!"

An experienced leader, Hale has spent nearly 15 years in administration, most recently as principal at Cheney High School. In his four years at CHS, Hale's leadership has been instrumental in guiding the high school's two site-based decision-making bodies—the Department Coordinators and Guiding Coalition—while also supervising and evaluating a wide range of staff.

During his time at CHS, he guided the building through the adoption of a new bell schedule and a district-wide cell phone policy, as well as an intense examination of Tier I Instruction across classrooms. Before his time as principal at Cheney High School, Hale spent 10 years as an assistant principal with stops at Mt. Spokane and Rogers high schools, with experience rooted in both Student Services and Teaching and Learning.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the students, staff, and families of Cheney Public Schools as Assistant Superintendent," Hale said. "I have absolutely loved my time serving the Cheney High School community, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside my colleagues, albeit in a different role, but with the same goal of supporting all students. I believe in this district, and I am excited for the next chapter."

District Recognized with Purple Star Award



For the second time in three years, Cheney Public Schools has been recognized with the Purple Star Award. The Purple Star Award program recognizes school districts that demonstrate a strong commitment to military-connected students and families through the implementation of military-friendly policies and practices. Districts that meet the program requirements earn a two-year Purple Star designation. The full release is available on cheneysd.org.

Inclusionary Preschool Registration Opens May 8

Cheney Public Schools' Inclusionary Preschool registration opens Friday, May 8. Families interested in enrolling are encouraged to first complete the ECEAP 2026-27 Pre-Screen & Application Form before registering students.

ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) is a free, Washington State-funded preschool program for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds from low income families. For families who do not qualify for ECEAP, tuition-based preschool options are also available.

More information is available on our website, or families can begin the registration process here.



CHS Spring Drama Dates

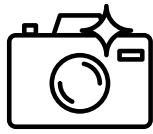
The Addams Family is coming to a stage near you! The Cheney High School Drama program is set to perform seven shows of the well-known gothic comedy:

April 30: 7 p.m.
May 1: 7 p.m.
May 2: 1 p.m.
May 2: 7 p.m.
May 7: 7 p.m.
May 8: 7 p.m.
May 9: 7 p.m.

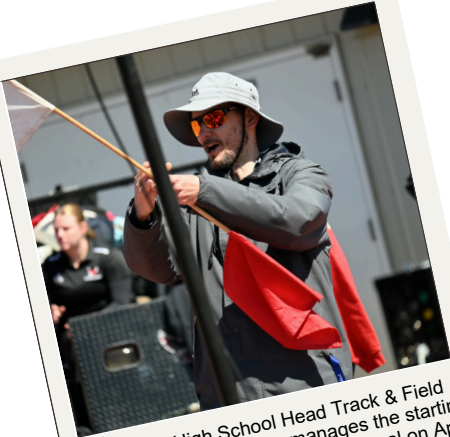


CHS Drama is excited to offer free admission to all Cheney Public Schools elementary students for the 1 p.m. show on Saturday, May 2! Students must be accompanied by an adult, and free admission is limited to District elementary students.

To purchase tickets, click here. All ticket sales benefit CHS Drama. All performances will take place in the CHS Auditorium.



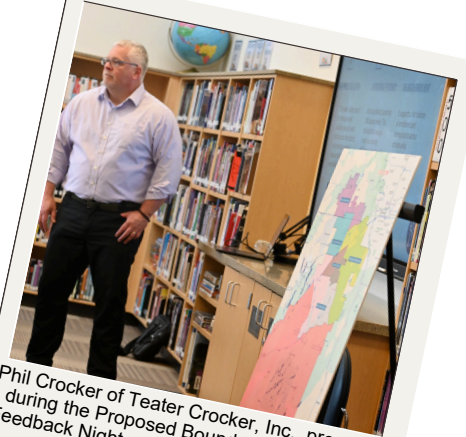
District Snapshots



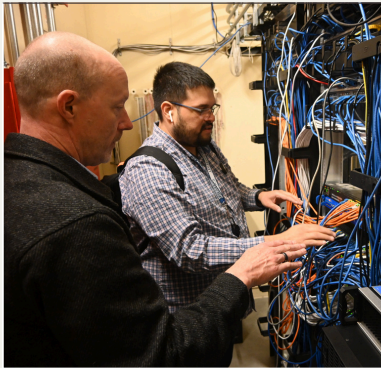
Cheney High School Head Track & Field Coach Derek Slaughter manages the starting line during the Van Kuren Invitational on April 18 at CHS.



Westwood Middle School students pose with MESA Advisor Michelle Clayton (far left) after finishing first and second in the Spokane MESA Day competition at EWU on April 24. Photo credit: Michelle Clayton.



Phil Crocker of Teater Crocker, Inc., presents during the Proposed Boundary Community Feedback Night on April 21 at Cheney Middle School.



Superintendent Ben Ferney spent a morning with District IT Support Specialist Julian Raya, learning more about the day in the life of an IT specialist. Lots of learning!



CHS's Future Business Leaders of America (FLBA) chapter poses in downtown Spokane following the State Business Leadership Conference (SBLC) April 21-24.



Three Springs High School students put their designs to the test on April 3, racing their specifically-designed boats against other student 'crews'. Photo credit: Heather Remacle.



Jaxon Palmer, a seventh grader at Cheney Middle School, makes some final adjustments to his team's robot before the robotics competition at the STEM Superstars event at Spokane Community College on April 22.



Betz Elementary fourth grader Harrison Aramburu performs during the fourth grade program *At the Bandstand!*, a musical set in 1958 and inspired by the television show *American Bandstand*.



At the School Board meeting on April 15, Rick Mount presents Cheney School Board President Mitch Swenson with a \$4,500 check, donated on behalf of the CHS Class of 1975.

NOTICES

Public Notice of Destruction of Records

Notice is hereby given that the Cheney Public Schools (the "District") intends to destroy the special education records of students who were born on or before December 31, 1997 and have separated from all special education programs in the District.

In accordance with WAC 392-172A-05235 and the Washington State Public Schools (K-12) Records Retention Schedule (December 2025), the maintaining of records relating to an individual student's eligibility and enrollment in a special education program is only required for six (6) years after the student's separation from the program, and thereafter will be destroyed. These records include, but are not limited to, psychological and IQ test results, eligibility decision documentation, evaluation and other reports, Individualized Education Programs, and related correspondence/communications. After six years, these records are no longer useful to the District, but they may be needed by students or parents/guardians to establish eligibility for certain adult benefits, e.g., social security, and parents/guardians or adult students should ensure that they possess the necessary documentation, or request copies of certain records from the District before they are destroyed.

These records will be destroyed unless the adult student (18 years old) or legal guardian notifies the District otherwise on or before July 1, 2026. Appropriate requestors may obtain a copy of these records, with proof of identification, in writing or in person at the following address:

Cheney Public Schools
Attn: Student Support Services
12414 S. Andrus Road
Cheney, WA 99004
Phone: 509-559-4526 or 509-559-4507

If no student or legal guardian responds to this public notice, the District will assume consent to destroy these records after July 1, 2026. For more information about this process, [click here](#) or scan the QR code below.



Cheney Public Schools @cheneyschools



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

Kindergarten Registration is Now Open!

Will your child be five (5) by August 31, 2026? If so, it's time to register for kindergarten! Kindergarten registration, as well as registration for all new students for the 2026-2027 school year, is now open. [Click here](#) or visit cheneysd.org for more information and to register.

Families are encouraged to register as early as possible as early enrollment numbers help to provide more accurate student predictions for the upcoming school year. This information plays a critical role in planning district-wide, including budgeting for the next fiscal year, predicting staffing, and managing enrollment numbers.



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 jl Larson@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