

COMMUNITY *Connections*

News of Cheney Public Schools



For our children, our world, our future



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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Superintendent	2
Feature Stories	3-6
District News	5-7
Notices	7



On the Cover:
Sixth graders from Cheney Middle School and Westwood Middle School settle on the starting line during their first-ever competitive track meet on May 1.

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community Members,

Time seems to speed up in K-12 education once Spring Break ends, and I cannot believe that we are only a few short weeks away from graduation and the end of the 2025-2026 school year! There is so much great learning taking place in classrooms, and students are showcasing their skills in end-of-the-year performances, competitions, events, and presentations. I enjoy seeing our students in their element, participating in activities that bring them so much joy.

At the time of publication, our students were also gearing up for annual testing across our district. It can be a stressful and tiring time for students and staff alike, and their well-being is top of mind. The results from these tests, among other indicators, help to guide our district practices and learning strategies; it is part of our process of continual improvement, with student learning at the center.

Projects connected to the November 2024 bond continue to move forward, and I am excited to share that we have officially received the building permit from the City of Airway Heights for our new elementary school! Construction can now begin. Our progressive design-build team, Garco Construction and Integrus Architecture, has been working diligently behind the scenes to prepare for this milestone, and I look forward to watching the building take shape in the months ahead. I want to thank our greater community for the tremendous partnership and engagement throughout the bond implementation process. We have had outstanding participation on our Bond Advisory Team, Design Advisory Team, Boundary Review Community Partners Team (BRCPT), and New Elementary School Naming Team. Their collaboration reflects the strong community commitment we have to serving students and families well into the future.

Our district has also finalized updated elementary school boundaries in preparation for the opening of the new elementary school in Airway Heights. At the time of publication, the final proposed boundaries were scheduled to be presented to the School Board of Directors at the May 13, 2026, board meeting for approval.

I would like to sincerely thank the BRCPT for their months-long work during this process. Updating school boundaries is never easy, and I am incredibly proud of the thoughtful conversations, collaboration, and community input that helped guide this work. Because of this proactive planning, families will now have more than a year to prepare for the updated boundaries before the new school opens. We will continue sharing updates and information on our district website and social media channels as we move forward together.

With the end of another school year in sight, I look forward to celebrating our seniors at graduation, honoring their accomplishments that have shaped their journey in our district. At the same time, I am excited to welcome our newest learners next fall, the kindergarten class of 2039! If your family has a student starting kindergarten in the upcoming 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. Visit cheneysd.org to register your student today! We are Cheney Public Schools!

Onward,

Ben Ferney, Ed.D. | Superintendent



Mark Scott
School Board Member
District 1



Liz Winer
School Board Member
District 2



Henry Browne
School Board Member
District 3



Bill Hanson
School Board Vice President
District 4



Mitch Swenson
School Board President
District 5

Purposeful Partners Fosters Engagement at Snowdon Elementary

In Erin Ray's first grade classroom at Snowdon Elementary, there is a lot of talking. Not by Ray herself, but by her students. It is an intentional, structured learning strategy that the veteran elementary school teacher has fine-tuned over years of implementation.

"You will see all the students talking with each other, and it really builds off that concept that whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning," said Assistant Principal Katie Scott. "And in Mrs. Ray's classroom, that is definitely the students."

Starting with the foundation provided by a Kagan teaching strategy, Ray has created a system that has proven successful in her classrooms year after year: Purposeful Partners. It is a multi-faceted turn-and-talk strategy that engages all students in every part of a lesson. Using data collected from her class's iReady diagnostics, she intentionally groups students based on learning levels and personality traits, among other things. Each student has a shoulder partner, face partner, and carpet partner. It takes the guesswork out of classroom engagement.

"It's always the same person," first grader Emily Clendenning said. "Like, every day, I do [shoulder partners] with Jacob H. He's my shoulder partner."

In Ray's classroom, there are five tables grouped with four students, each with an assigned number. Students numbered One and Two are seated next to each other, and students numbered Three and Four also sit side-by-side. Ray then has organized tables so that students numbered One and Three are face partners, and students numbered Two and Four are also face partners. The purpose is to group students based on their learning level and encourage open communication.

"When they're talking to their shoulder partner, they're talking to someone that's pretty much on their same level," Ray said.



First graders in Erin Ray's classroom at Snowdon Elementary wait to address the class following a 'Shoulder Partner' discussion on April 30.

"When they're talking to their face partners, noticeable impact on learning in her classroom, then that's going to be somebody that provides a different level of support for them."

Lessons will open with some 'Right There' questions between shoulder partners, helping to essentially warm students up for deeper thinking. 'Right There' questions allow students of similar learning levels to bounce ideas off each other and open their minds to learning. Deeper-thinking questions come later in the lesson and are targeted toward face partners; these questions tend to be more open-ended, like, How did the characters change? or What was the moral of the story?

"So, those types of questions are going to be face partners so that they can really scaffold for each other and support each other," Ray said. "Then the bigger thinking questions where I want everyone contributing is what we call 'Heads Together'. So, they all have to huddle in and everybody has to share something."

As a result, there is a respectable volume of tiny voices heard across Ray's classroom during the bulk of her lessons. Students are engaging with their shoulder partner, face partner, or table group, and it is having a

"The thing about the magic that you see happening in Mrs. Ray's classroom is that it is not on accident," Scott said. "There's a lot of time and energy she puts into partnering students both at the carpet and at their seats. The benefit of that is that it really maximizes the student learning, and it maximizes the student engagement."

"It takes time," Ray said. "You really have to lay the groundwork a lot in the beginning of the year and get them comfortable with just talking to each other...Really just getting them over the hurdle of being scared to stand up and share a thought, and then share a complete thought, and complete sentence. I really see a lot of gains with writing and reading when they can speak in complete sentences and share their thoughts with their class."

There are a collection of hand signals that students use to communicate their ideas, including I Agree, I Respectfully Disagree, I Want To Add On, I Have One Answer, and I Have More Than One Answer. Another facet

See Purposeful Partners, Page 6

Finding His Niche: CTE Courses Led Cunningham to Welding



Thomas Cunningham works on a vertical uphill with a dual shield flux core during a welding session at NEWTech Prep on May 1.

“Have you ever thought about welding?”

This question was asked of Thomas Cunningham probably a hundred times before his 13th birthday. But, as the Cheney High School junior recounted, the idea never really stuck. By the time he reached middle school, he had experienced his fair share of hands-on activities like woodworking and blacksmithing, but welding was in a world all its own. There was some trepidation from Cunningham’s parents about him entering the world of welding as a seventh grader, given the more dangerous nature of the trade, but when Cunningham’s seventh grade shop teacher asked him about welding and encouraged him to give it a shot, he jumped in.

Cunningham was a natural, and welding just clicked for him. Even at 13 years old, he had an innate ability in the field, and he continued to hone his skills after he purchased his own personal welding machine. By his eighth grade year, Cunningham was perfecting different welding processes, like Tungsten Inert Gas (TIG) welding and Shielded Metal Arc welding (commonly known as stick welding). His eighth-grade CTE teacher encouraged him to think about his future and consider a career in the field. When he arrived at Cheney High School, he continued learning under the tutelage of veteran CTE teacher Allen Skoog.

“Skoog taught me the intricacies of TIG welding, MIG [Metal Inert Gas] welding, and stick welding, and from then on, just carried over,” Cunningham said. “My freshman year, I just went through class and tried my best. I ended up being pretty dang good at it.”

Cunningham’s teachers again recognized his talent, and during his sophomore year he was encouraged by his advisor to join SkillsUSA. SkillsUSA is a workforce development program grounded in academics and focused on the development of personal, workplace, and technical skills. The program has competitions across the nation, including a state competition in Washington state; events offer a blend of leadership and technical skills challenges, as well as networking opportunities. Eventually convinced by the encouragement of his advisor, Cunningham joined SkillsUSA and submitted a sculpture to the state competition.

And he won.

“We started amping up my whole shop setup at home, and I got a bunch of tools at home that I never would have imagined having before the age of 18,” Cunningham said. “This year, I went to state again, won again, and now I’m a two-time champ at state.”

His state-winning sculpture was inspired by

two great horned owls that nest in his family’s tree each year. Until recently, Cunningham was unable to photograph the elusive birds, but one of their hatchlings was more agreeable to the attention. Once he was able to capture the image, Cunningham used 3D technology to help bring his design to life.

“So, I took a picture of the owl, and I put it into a 3D rendering software, which then gave me a 3D file of the head,” Cunningham said. “Then, I casted it out of copper, and the entire project was built on that.”

Using nearly 100 percent of recycled materials, he designed, built, and welded together the state-winning sculpture. The owl features a solid copper head with brass inlaid eyes, a body made of horseshoes, and wings that can actually move. Cunningham designed a sort of ‘train-track’ system on the inside of the owl’s body to account for wing rotation. It is a detail that he believes secured his second state title.

“That is probably the thing that set me apart from everybody because movement is always one of those touch and go things,” Cunningham said. “When people saw the movement, they were like, that is an ingenious way to fix it in.”

Welding

Continued from Page 4

“Not only are his skills top-notch, but his artistic mind and what he’s thinking about is way past what I—I’m not that artistic,” said Skoog. “But he is very creative. And then he makes it happen, and he thinks about how to make it happen. He’s proficient in all the tools, in all three or four processes of welding. But also working on computer drafting, computer machining, and he has even got into AI to design some things.”

Welding is now integrated into nearly every aspect of Cunningham’s life. He spends his mornings at NEWTech Prep, an alternative learning program that is housed under the umbrella of Spokane Public Schools and partners with area high schools to offer advanced technical and professional training. He then returns to Cheney High School for an afternoon of core classes and CTE pathways. When he’s away from school, he is cultivating his own welding business, TC Creations. Some days, he says, he logs about four or five hours of welding.

That level of dedication did not happen by accident. For Cunningham, the encouragement of his seventh grade CTE teacher had a pretty big impact on the trajectory of his education, and perhaps his future career. He knew there were a multitude of career options when it came to welding, but until he dove into the courses and competitions, metal sculpting was not on his radar.

“...When teachers were like, ‘You should get into this,’ I thought about, well yeah, I could

go work in a fab shop and do all this stuff, but I had never thought about doing sculpture work,” Cunningham said. “I’d always just thought, oh, making horseshoe art is a side project. I always liked it, but I [never thought], this is my life. Then, last year, when I did my first sculpture, I was like, this is actually really fun...It showed that is actually what I want to do. The dedication and the time that I put into it showed more than just the outcome of the project.”

At the SkillsUSA Nationals competition in 2025, Cunningham was asked, “Did the artist come first or did the welder come first?”

“I think I can confidently say that the artist came to me because of the welding,” Cunningham said. “I can confidently say that I was a welder, and the artist just came along with it; the figuring things out just came along with it which just sparked everything to work out.”

Cunningham is poised for a return to the SkillsUSA Nationals competition next month, June 1-5, in Atlanta, Georgia.

For a closer look at Cunningham’s experience welding, check out youtube.com/@cheneypublicschools, and click



A photo of Cunningham’s state-winning sculpture of a great horned owl. Photo courtesy: Thomas Cunningham

on the Finding His Niche video, or scan the QR code below!



Kindergarten Registration is Now Open!



Snowdon Elementary kindergarten teacher Rachel Amann engages with a student during Welcome to Kindergarten on Aug. 18, 2025.

Will your child be five (5) by August 31, 2026? If so, it is time to register for kindergarten! Families are encouraged to register as soon 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.

Kindergarten registration, as well as registration for all new students for the 2026-2027 school year, is now open. Visit cheneysd.org for more information.



Sunset Elementary K-1 FAC teacher Lyndsey Evertz works with a student during Welcome to Kindergarten.

Purposeful Partners

Continued from Page 3

of Ray's classroom engagement is the culture of encouragement she has built. To make participation feel accessible and low-pressure, Ray uses a spinner to randomly select students to share their ideas, further reducing the guesswork of engagement. Whenever a student stands up to share a thought, a chorus of 'You've got this!' echoes throughout the room.

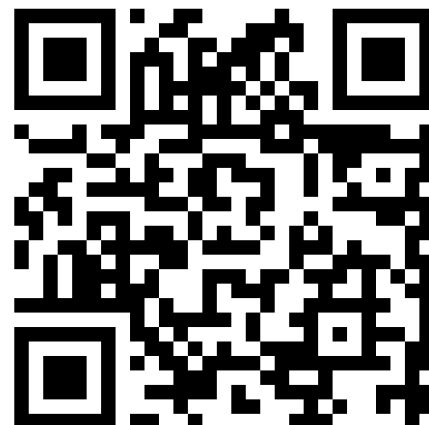
"I think it really helps just make it a safe space for learning, and everybody feels comfortable," Ray said. "If they are perhaps the more introverted that don't like to share, students pick up on it right away and they really are the first to step in and say, 'I'm proud of you! You've got this!' So they really encourage each other, because

everybody knows. Once everybody has had a chance to do it, they all know how nervous it can make them. They're really empathetic with each other, and they really support each other. They're very sweet."

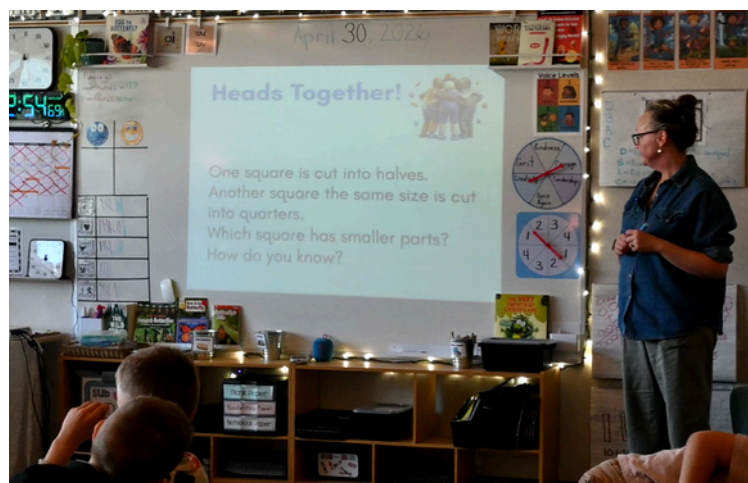
Throughout her classroom lessons, Ray has found students enjoy being encouraged by their peers, enjoy encouraging their peers, and really enjoy offering support to each other.

"They really look for opportunities to try to be helpful and encourage each other," Ray said. "And they like talking [laughs]. We all know first graders love to talk, so if I can leverage that to work in my favor, I'm all about it."

To see Ray's strategy in action, please visit youtube.com/@cheneypublicschools, and click on the Purposeful Partners video, or scan the QR code below!



A closer look at 'Shoulder Partner' and 'Face Partner' assignments and their specific roles.



Snowdon Elementary first grade teacher Erin Ray waits for the spinners to select a student during a 'Heads Together' exercise on April 30.

Naming the New Elementary School in Airway Heights

As part of the November 2024 bond package, our district is set to open a new elementary school in Airway Heights in the fall of 2027. This exciting new addition to our district also means choosing a name that reflects the community it will serve.

Naming an elementary school is a community-led process, and the district's process began in early March, when community members were invited to submit school name suggestions through a Google Form. In total, the district received about 180 responses, representing 118 unique nominations.

In mid-April, the district invited volunteers

to serve on the New Elementary School Naming Team. Volunteers were selected through a standardized scoring process that considered multiple factors, resulting in a group of 17 individuals chosen to participate. Earlier this month, the team met for the first time to begin reviewing submissions and moving the naming process forward.

During the meeting, team members worked in small groups to review suggested names, discuss the reasoning behind each submission, consider its connection to the community, and evaluate additional context. Through that process, the team began narrowing the list of 118 nominations to the strongest options, with the goal of presenting

five potential school names to the Board of Directors in June for consideration.

The Naming Team is scheduled to meet again later this month to identify a final shortlist of names to recommend for board review.



New Elementary School Naming Team members review submissions during the first meeting on May 6.

Annual WASA Awards Recognize Contributions to Cheney Public Schools

The annual Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) awards ceremony recognized students, administrators, and community members from across the region for their contributions to public education. Cheney High School freshman Henry Alvarado, along with district community members Charma Belle and John Boerger were among those honored at the annual ceremony.

Student Support Services Assistant Director Emma Noble was honored for 20 years of service to public education, and preceding his retirement this June, Assistant

Superintendent Tom Arlt was recognized for his career of service in public education.

Alvarado was selected for the WASA Student Leadership Award for his service and involvement across the district. He is part of multiple district teams—including the Superintendent Student Advisory Team, Bond Advisory Team, and Portrait of a Graduate Measurement Team. He is also extensively involved in student activities, including DECA, FBLA, and band. His perspectives have helped shape districtwide initiatives, the District Strategic Plan, legislative priorities, and the implementation

of the November 2024 bond package.

Both Belle and Boerger were selected as representatives of the Bond Advisory Team, a 17-member volunteer group serving the district's three communities. The team supports transparency, accountability, and the effective use of bond funds for capital improvements. Members collaborate with district leaders and Bond Project Manager Turner & Townsend Heery, and through their service, the team builds partnerships while supporting safe, effective learning environments for students.



Student Henry Alvarado (left), and community member John Boerger (center) with Superintendent Ben Ferney.



Emma Noble (center), was honored for 20 years in public education.

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

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, please visit

cheneysd.org and scroll down to News & Events, or scan the QR code below.





509-559-4599
www.cheneysd.org
12414 S Andrus Rd
Cheney, WA 99004

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Spokane, WA
Permit #4

Important Dates

May 27

School Board Meeting
6 p.m. | Cheney High School | Library

June 10

School Board Meeting
6 p.m. | Cheney High School | Library

June 11

WIN Academy Commencement
4:15 p.m. | Eastern Washington University,
Showalter Hall

Three Springs High School Commencement
5 p.m. | Eastern Washington University,
Showalter Hall

Cheney High School Commencement
6:30 p.m. | Eastern Washington University,
Reese Court

June 17

Last Day of School



**TOGETHER, WE ARE
CHENEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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) 559-4502
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



Cheney Public Schools @cheneyschools

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