PUSD PAGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



Monthly Newsletter August 2025

Message From the Superintendent 1
Gardening & Nutrition Club Comes to Page Elementary 2
PHS Music Student Tours Europe 3
2 PHS Culinary Students Get Silver at Nationals 4
Symond Martin Leads Talented Runnin' Devils 6
Photos from 1st Day of School at Page Elementary 8
PUSD Welcomes New Teachers, Counselors, Psychologists 10

Vision

A community of learners who direct our collective actions and resources toward the unique learning needs of every child in order for all students to become college and career ready and successful in a global society.

Motto

Collectively Committed to Every Student, Every Day, Every Minute.



Mission

Our schools are passionate about the learning-for-all mission and understand that every student matters. We are responsible and accountable for the education of every student that walks through our doors every day.

Message From the Superintendent

PAGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT #8
500 South Navajo Drive
P.O. Box 1927
Page, AZ 86040

July 21, 2025

Dear Students, Families, Staff, and Community Members,

I hope this message finds you refreshed, renewed, and ready for the exciting journey that lies ahead. As we begin a brand-new school year, I am filled with enthusiasm and optimism about what we will accomplish together as we begin the 2025-2026 school year.

Our theme this year centers on *unlocking potential through student achievement and literacy.* These are more than just goals—they are the foundation of a successful future for every student in our district. We believe that with strong literacy skills, our students will not only succeed academically, but they will also thrive in a rapidly changing world.

This year, we are sharpening our focus on high-impact teaching and learning strategies, deeper family and community engagement, and targeted support systems that meet students where they are and help propel them forward. From early readers to graduating seniors, every student deserves access to the tools, guidance, and encouragement they need to reach their highest potential.

We know that literacy is a gateway to opportunity. Whether it's reading with fluency, writing with purpose, or thinking critically, literacy empowers students to own their learning and shape their futures. Our commitment this year is to ensure that every student builds a strong foundation in literacy that will support achievement across all subjects and in life beyond the classroom.

To our parents and families: your partnership is invaluable. Together, we can create an environment where students feel supported, challenged, and inspired. To our staff: thank you for your tireless dedication to our students' growth. And to our students: this is your time to shine. We believe in you and are here to support you every step of the way.

Let's make this school year one of progress, pride, and powerful learning. Welcome back!

With warmest regards,

Bryce Anderson, Ed.D.
Superintendent

DESIREE FOWLER
BOARD PRESIDENT

DR. BRYCE ANDERSON
SUPERINTENDENT

MIKE MANGUM
BOARD CLERK

CHRIS BENALLY
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Gardening and Nutrition Club Comes to Lake View











Hattie Williams' second grade students added gardening and nutrition to its specials curriculum last year. The program started with humble roots but sprouted into something much larger by the end of the school year.

The program started at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year when Mrs. Williams second grade class received a grow tower for their classroom. The tower came with grow lights, soil pods, seeds and nutrient-enhanced water. Mrs. Williams' class participated in assembling the tower, installing the grow pods and planting the seeds, which were vegetables and garden herbs.

Also last fall, PUSD ground crews put in three grow beds outside Lake View. Being autumn, it was too late to plant anything, but when spring arrived the grows beds were filled with garden soil, ready for planting. In mid-April, students from Mrs. Williams class gathered seeds, watering cans and garden trowels and spent the morning planting. They planted tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, jalapenos, garlic, corn, Swiss chard, carrots, cucumbers and strawberries. During the six weeks before school let out for the summer, the second graders watered and cared for the plants. During the summer, the plants have been taken care of by Ashley Bennett, who oversees Lake View's gardening program. Ms. Bennett also teaches Investigative Science at Page High School.

The gardening program also included a nutrition and healthy eating component called My Plate, and Growing Healthy Kids. Ms. Bennett taught the kids about nutrition plans, what foods to include for a healthy meal: a protein, a grain or starch, a dairy item and a serving of fruit or vegetable; as well as what a healthy portion size looks like.

"We talked about what plants grow well in our area and that growing a garden doesn't need to be expensive," said Ms. Bennett. "One of the favorite parts was getting to try

See GARDEN pg. 11

“Con Brio”

PHS music student explores Europe.







“It was one of the greatest experiences of my life,” said Page High School music student, David Dawavendewa, who recently returned home to Page after two weeks touring Europe as part of Musician’s Abroad. Dawavendewa will be a senior this school year.

Musician’s Abroad is an organization that takes high school-aged American musicians on a two-week tour of European countries. Dawavendewa was one of 150 Arizona students, and an additional 150 adult teachers and chaperones, in his tour group.

Dawavendewa and his group visited London England, Paris France, Munich Germany, Salzburg Austria, and Andermatt Switzerland. When visiting the cities, Dawavendewa and his group of musicians would give performances at various venues. The events were well attended.

The tour visited some specific sites in each city. In London the group visited the Tower of London, in Switzerland they visited Mount Pilatus, in Austria they toured Salzburg, in Germany they visited the Dachau Concentration Camp, and in Paris they visited the Palace of Versailles

One of the goals of Musician’s Abroad is to expose American students to the culture, foods, art and people of countries they were visiting. With those goals in mind, free time is specifically scheduled in to give the students time to do just that. When sightseeing, the traveling musicians would break into group of five or six students and visit famous sites, shops, restaurants, museums and any other place that caught their interest.

Dawavendewa plays the Euphonium – picture a smallish Tuba – for the Page High School Band and Marching Band. He just started playing it last October after playing the trumpet since he was in sixth grade.

Musicians Abroad is only open to exceptional music students and they have to be nominated by their band director. Dawavendewa heard about Musicians Abroad a year ago from his band director, Alex Moore, who told Dawavendewa he wanted to nominate him for the program.

Though Dawavendewa spends most of his summers in Jalisco, Mexico helping his father on his agave farm, this was Dawavendewa’s first time traveling abroad, and he loved everything about it. His favorite destination was The Palace of Versailles.

“France, in general, was the best experience,” he said. “The atmosphere, and just the people in general, were great. They made it easy to really enjoy my time there. The architecture was really beautiful. At meal times they incorporated local foods. They’re known for that. That was my first trying a French crepe. The difference between an American crepe and a French crepe was how natural it was, and organic. It tasted way better. I was always in high spirits in France.”

See DAVID pg. 10

2 PHS Culinary Students Receive Silver Medals at National Conference





Page High School students, Miriam Lassen and Isaac Nelson, competed in the Family, Careers and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) National Conference in early July and both students brought home silver medals. Both are students of Culinary Arts teacher, Chef Wyatt Swinton.

Lassen and Nelson were seniors last year and graduated in May, but FCCLA allows any student who qualified for nationals during their senior year to compete at the national conference, even after they've graduated.

This year's National Leadership Conference was held in Orlando, Florida from July 5 to 8. Swinton and his students left Page at 3:30 a.m. July 4. The conference began on July 5. Lassen and Nelson were in the second heat, which took place July 6.

During his portion of the competition, Nelson – who competed in Baking – made lemon-poppyseed muffins, sugar cookies, Paris brest cream puffs, and decorated a cake. He had two hours and 45 minutes to do it. He placed sixth out of 80 people competing in his category, and also receive a silver medal. In this competition, receiving a silver doesn't mean the student came in second place. All students who achieved a score of 75 to 90 on the rubric received a silver medal.

Nelson loved his time at the national conference.

"Earning a spot to compete at the National Convention has been a goal of mine for two years. Ever since my first time going to the state competition," he said. "It was really cool being part of a big conference and being part of a national-level team."

Nelson felt like he did a great job during the competition.

"I actually thought I was going to place higher, but I think I did the best I could with the tools I was given. Overall, it was an overall really good experience."

In the coming days, Nelson will move to Spanish Fork, Utah where he'll work at a sourdough bread bakery for a few months until he leaves on an LDS mission.

Lassen competed in Culinary. This was her second year in a row competing at the FCCLA National competition. She took first place at Nationals last year, and received a silver rating at this year's conference. She placed thirteenth overall.

This year she made Chicken Piccata, with a lemon dill

orzo pilaf.

"I had so much fun!" She said. "I really enjoy traveling."

Lassen's mother, Jennie, was one of the trip's chaperones. She joined the group on trips to Gatorland and the other outings, and they also had time to go birthday shopping for Miriam's sister.

"I am just so grateful," Lassen said. "I found this talent by accident, and in three years it's done far more for me than I could ever put into words, and that's a fact. Without it, I wouldn't have gotten the chance to travel the country in high school, or find the incredible people who are now a part of my life. It's taught me so much about hard work and accountability, I'm so proud of the high school students this journey has inspired; they have all come so far. My little sister Hannah, and our baker Isaac Nelson, they've accomplished things I couldn't have imagined, and the way one victory can be a gift to others, and spread, making a difference for their lives, that's what is most important to me."

Since returning from the competition, Lassen has moved to Flagstaff where she'll attend NAU to study Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.

She says cooking will always be a big part of her life.

"It's one of my favorite hobbies and interests. It's one of the main ways I connect with people. I engage with them through food. It's a big part of who I am now."

Both Lassen and Nelson knew a month ahead of time the dishes they would be preparing at the national competition, and both students spent several days ahead of time practicing and perfecting their recipes. Not only did they practice cooking and baking, they also took measures to adjust their biological clocks to Eastern Daylight Time.

"We knew the competition started at 8 a.m. Florida time, which is 5 a.m. our time, so we met at the kitchen at the high school at 4:30 so they could somewhat get used to the time difference before we got there so it wouldn't be such a shock," said Chef Swinton.

Lassen and Nelson finished their competition on Tuesday, but the closing ceremony was still a few days away. This gave the group some free days. They used that time to visit Universal Studios, Gator World, Aquatica (a water park).

Another Page High School student, Ny'Asia Walsh, was also in attendance at the Florida conference in her new role as State President for the FCCLA for the state of Arizona. Walsh remained busy attending leadership meetings, but was able to meet with the rest of her PHS comrades during a Chapter Night for dinner, duckpin bowling and go-kart racing.

With recent successes at the state and national level, Chef Swinton feels like the Culinary Program has entered a new era of increased confidence and loftier goals.

"It's not my expectation to have every kid go to nationals, but every kid in the culinary program has seen it and knows





it can happen," said Chef Swinton. "And so they believe that it's possible. It's no longer this unattainable goal that little old Page will never make it to Nationals. We've been two years in a row now, we've had a national winner and the rest want to achieve that as well. For me the expectation isn't about going to Nationals, it's about doing your best. It's always about doing your best."

To help pay for the expenses to attend the National Conference, Chef Wyatt and a few members of the Culinary Club – including Miriam and Jennie Lassen – sold Chicken Piccata meals, with the assistance from the Elks Lodge Kitchen. They raised $2,400.

The Culinary Club also received financial support from several area businesses and non-profits. PUSD wants to give a giant THANK YOU to the Chamber Page/Lake Powell, The Canyon Club of Page, Big Ass Equipment Rentals, RD's, Jennie and Erick Lassen, Page Eye Center, Page Elks Lodge, Lake Powell Furniture for giving financial support the PHS Culinary Club to help our amazing students take advantage of this enormous opportunity!

Symond Martin Leads Talented Runnin' Devils

For the last four years, Symond Martin has had his eyes on this cross-country season, and this season all eyes are on Symond Martin.

As Martin enters his senior year, he has one goal: be the fastest high school runner in Arizona. Anyone who has been following the sport knows he has a great chance to do it. Last year, Martin had a stunning season in both cross-country and track racking up multiple first-place finishes, and breaking several long-standing records.

In cross-country he took first place at the Peaks Invitational, the Canyon De Chelly Invitational, the Lake Powell Invitational, the Ojo Rojo Invitational and the AIA State Sectional. He was runner-up at state, finishing just two seconds behind the winner. Martin led the cross-country team to its third straight state championship and the program's 20th in history, making Page the third-winningest cross-country team in state history. Along the way, he was named to the First Team All-State and the 3A North Male Runner of the Year.

He followed up his sensational cross-country season with an equally great track season. At the Division IV State Championship (more than 40 schools competing) he took first in both the 3200m and 1600M. At the same Div. IV State Championship, Martin was part of the 4x800 relay team (along with Jaiden Jordan, Nyall Prather and Desmond Goldtooth) that broke the Page High School Record with a time of 7:58.81, smashing the old school record (set in 2018) by six seconds.

At the Open State Championship (comprised of the top 18 runners in every event regardless of school size) Martin placed 2nd in the 3200M, and 5th in the 1600M. In the 3200M Martin finished just half a second behind the winner. It was a very exciting race. Martin pushed himself hard the entire race, leading the pack. The runner who ended up taking first, stayed right behind Martin drafting off him, then outkicked in the final stretch.

"Symond took it out and tried to break everybody," said head track coach Tim Martin. "He had a couple guys tuck in on him and ride his tail. It's hard to win when someone's drafting off you the entire race. The guy in front's doing five to 10 percent more work. The person drafting conserves energy, while the guy in front is pressing."

Martin and the first-place finisher crossed the finish line with a 30 to 40 meter lead in front of the rest of the pack.

During the 2025 track season Martin also broke the Page High School record for the 3200M record with a time of 8:57.44.

One of Martin's biggest accomplishments from last season was qualifying to compete in the Arcadia Invitational, the most prestigious track event for high school runners in the United States. Runnin' Devils teammate Nyall Prather also qualified for Arcadia.



Other highlights from the 2025 season included head coach Tim Martin being named 3A Coach of the Year, and Symond Martin was named 3A Male Runner of the Year. In addition, Symond received the 2025 3A North Track & Field Male Athlete of the Year, and Coach Martin received the 2025 3A North Coach of the Year!

Symond is considered one of the state's top contenders for a state championship, but it's not a given. He'll face several other elite runners this year.

"The state has a lot of good runners," said Coach Martin. "

During the summer, Martin could be found running the streets and trails of Page, sometimes alone, but oftentimes with his teammates. Over the summer the Runnin' Devils also held their annual week-long summer camp at Navajo Lake. Coach Martin says it was their largest summer camp ever, with runners from Page, Chinle and even some from Phoenix and New Mexico. Most of the runners from Phoenix schools are the children of Page High Schools alums. Kids as young as fifth grade attended with camp. Twenty-five Page runners attended this year's camp.

At the camp, the participants run twice a day, and learn

basic strengthening methods. Campers also competed in a 10K time trial race.

The camp included two college-aged former Runnin' Devils. Jade Reid, Bowen Martin and Tanner Dugi helped facilitate the runs and other camp activities, and had opportunities to mentor the next group coming up behind them.

One of the most important goals of the camp is to build team bonding.

"It's all about team bonding," said Coach Martin. "It's really not about the running. It's all about the team getting together and just hanging out. There were lots of fireside talks about mental edge and what it takes to be successful.

Official team practice begins August 4, the first day of the new school year. The runners will take a break from summer training for a week before that.

The Runnin' Devils are expected to have another big, record-breaking season. The entire varsity team is returning from last year, and they are adding to their ranks Max Martin (Symond's younger brother) who was the number one ranked runner in Arizona last year.

When Coach Martin looks at the running times of his athletes he sees improvement over last year's times, which is, of course, exactly what he wants to see.

Martin will be joined by several elite Runnin' Devils. All of last year's championship boys varsity team are returning this year: Nyall Prather, Jaiden Jordan, Desmond Goldtooth, Bryden Bennett and Maximus Reid. The high school team will also be adding Max Martin, who will be a freshman this year.

Prather, who will be a junior this year, also had a great running season in both cross-country and track last year and is expected to be right on Martin's heels this year. He finished in the top 20 last year and his goal this year is to finish in the top ten.

In track he placed 4th in the 3200M and 3rd in the 1600M at the state championships. He also competed in the Arcadia Invitational, the most prestigious race for high school runners where only the elite of the elite are invited to compete. He also won the morning session at the Chandler Invitational he won the mile, setting a monster PR in the process. At the Open State Championship he finished in the top ten, and PRd once again, in the mile.

Packed with talent, this year's boys cross-country team has made a goal of winning the Runnin's Devils 21st state championship; but they want to do more than that. They want to go down as one of the fastest group of Runnin' Devils in the history of the school.

"We are the favorites going into state, but our goal is a little bit higher this year," said cross country coach Jonathon Prather. "We have an incredibly powerful team coming in this season. Just to make the top eight or ten for our team is going to be difficult."

If the Runnin' Devils stay healthy and do what they need to do they will dominate, said Coach Prather.



"The next question for us and for legacy is where are we going to be on the All-Time list," said Coach Prather. "And you determine that by the total time – at state – run by all five of your scoring runners and that's how they determine the best teams in state history."

Page's cross-country team has lofty goals this season, but two other talent-packed schools will be gunning for them this year:

Hamilton, a 6A school, set the state record last year with a monster team filled with seniors. Flagstaff High also has a packed roster of elite runners.

"Hamilton was great last year. They were the best and they got it done," said Coach Prather. "Hamilton and Flagstaff are going to be very tough. It seem to be a three-horse race for state supremacy: Hamilton, Flagstaff and Page."

Photos from the First Day of School at Page Elementary














DIEZ
Miss Wright
5th Grade
MR. LAUGHTER
Room 90
5th Grade

PUSD Welcomes New Teachers, Counselors, Psychologists



Page Unified School District added ten new for the upcoming school year. From left: Livia Haas, PHS band teacher; Ashlyn Benally, Kindergarten teacher; Rochelle Curley, 2nd grade teacher, Brianna Red Pipe, 4th grade teacher; Harrison Gal, music teacher; Mexicano Mooney, psychologist: Courtney Brown, 6th grader teacher, Kaylene Barnes, 2nd grade teacher; Brandon Hanks, couselor; Tiffany Haynie, preschool teacher.

DAVID from pg. 3

Dawavendewa has always liked traveling, and wants to do more of it as an adult.

"I can't wait to go back to Switzerland and Paris," he said.

As much as Dawavendewa enjoys visiting big metropolitan centers, he's happy he lives in Page.

"It's not too crazy here. It's not too busy. It's a good-sized town."

Dawavendewa is the son of Rachel Dawavendewa and Fabian Garcia.

Dawavendewa is also very active in AVID and serves as an AVID Ambassador. He's been in AVID since seventh grade. He is carrying a 3.9 GPA and plans to attend the University of Arizona after he graduates. He will begin applying for scholarships this year.



GARDEN from pg. 2

different fruits and vegetables. We tried blueberries, dragonfruit, green beans, peas, and jicama.

Due to the high number of Navajo students in PUSD schools, Ms. Bennett spent extra time teaching the students about native plants and what plants Arizona's indigenous ancestors ate, particularly squash, corn and beans – often referred to as The Three Sisters – and how they are culturally significant to many Native American groups.

During Garden Club, Ms. Bennett also got to connect some of the dots relating to food, such as ketchup and marinara sauce are made from tomatoes, and that bees pollinate cucumbers, tomatoes and fruit trees.

The students loved it. They liked planting the seeds and the vegetable starts. They liked watering the soil, they liked watching the first tiny green sprouts push out of the ground, and most of all, they liked trying new foods. Because the garden was planted in mid-April and school ended for the summer just five weeks later, none of the food the students had planted in the grow beds had matured enough to eat, but the kids still had a chance to try them. Ms. Bennett bought at the grocery store the same vegetables and herbs they had planted. Trying new vegetables was one of the highlights for the kids.

"They were super-excited to talk to me every week about what new foods they had tried and how they got their families to try new foods too," said Ms. Bennett. "One of my gardening students told me that he got his mom to plant zucchini this summer.

When the 2025-266 school year began August 4, a new group of Page Elementary students will become stewards of the garden. This group will have the privilege of harvesting what last year's students started, and next spring they'll plant a new garden.

The Gardening and Nutrition Program got started when Gayle Gratop, Assistant Agent with the Coconino Cooperative Extension, contacted Lake View Principal, Brian Henderson and asked him if the school would be interested in hosting a gardening program. Mr. Henderson thought it sounded like a great opportunity for his students, and signed off on it. Gratop is thrilled to see the fledgling program take off.

"In a town like Page where there are only two grocery stores and much of the surrounding area is a food desert, it's important to connect youth with where their food comes from," said Gratop. "Across the nation that's a big disconnect. And hopefully it will inspire the kids to go home and share what they're learning with their families."

Programs such as these can be expensive, especially in the beginning with the initial material costs. Lake View didn't have funds allocated for it. Gratop was able to obtain grants through the Coconino County Extension Office, the University of Arizona, and AmeriCorps.

But, even with the contributions from those organizations, Page Elementary's Gardening and Nutrition program was going to fall short of the necessary monies. Fortunately, Gratop knew a donor, John Torgenson, who was looking for ways to give back to the community. Torgenson is a former river guide with Wilderness River Adventures, and Gratop's boyfriend is a river guide for Wilderness River Adventures. Gratop and Torgenson have known each other a long time. Torgenson is now a successful attorney with his own practice – Torgenson Law – with offices in Phoenix and Page.

"It all started when I was talking to JT (John Torgenson) about the work I do through Coconino County and ASU, which involves programs about nutrition, gardening and horticulture therapy," said Gratop. "He told me his firm was looking for a place to donate money. I knew he had close ties to Page, and I asked if he'd want to help fund Lake View's Garden and Nutrition Program."

Torgenson liked what he learned about the gardening program and Torgenson Law gave $50,000 to the University of Arizona's Master Wellness Volunteer Program, a volunteer training program that pairs experts and faculty from the University of Arizona with new volunteers, who then go out and provide health and wellness programs throughout the county.

Twenty thousand dollars of that money went to support Page Elementary's Gardening and Nutrition program for two years, which includes funds for garden supplies, and payment to the instructors.

John Torgenson, and Torgenson Law, have been supporting programs, clubs, organizations and individuals in Page for years. Torgenson's commitment to Page goes back to a deep connection he made with the town while he was attending college. He spent his summer breaks in Page working as a Grand Canyon river guide.

"Page became a second home to me," he said. "A place where I formed lifelong friendships and lasting memories. I recognize the needs of the community and I feel a strong sense of responsibility to give back."

After the success of his law practice in Phoenix, Torgenson expanded his practice, opening an office in Page.

"I opened a Torgenson Law office in Page, not only to provide trusted legal support for personal injury cases, but also to establish a meaningful presence there and show the community that we are here for them," said Torgenson.

The Torgenson Law motto is, `It's Personal' and they carry that conviction beyond the courtroom and into the community.

"For us, supporting the community isn't about checking a box – it's about showing up, being present and investing in the people and places that have shaped who we are," said Torgenson.