QUINCY SCHOOL DISTRICT | SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS TODAY, BRIGHT FUTURES TOMORROW

COMMUNICATOR

NEWSLETTER | FALL 2026-2027

Superintendent's Message:

Helping Students Thrive, Together

Dear Quincy Valley Community,

Every story in this fall edition of The Communicator reminds me that opportunity grows when students have people who believe in them.



Superintendent, Dr. Nik Bergman

You'll meet QHS senior Gerardo Guerrero, whose summer studying at Harvard opened new possibilities, and graduates Andrea Cortes and Guadalupe Henne, sisters who returned to serve our community.

That same commitment guides our work today. English Language Arts (ELA) outcomes are back to pre-pandemic levels, and our science results are the highest we have ever recorded. However, math results have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, and our staff is deeply committed to improving outcomes for all students. Inside, you'll learn how our

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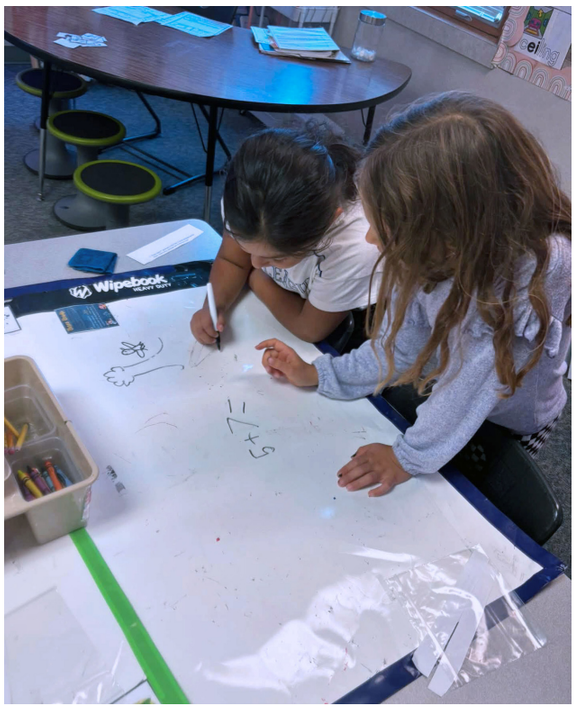
Looking ahead: Improving math outcomes

Changes are coming to math classes in Quincy schools. Schools across Washington are updating their English Language Arts (ELA) and math curriculum to reflect new priority learning standards created by the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

Math teachers and school principals in Quincy School District (QSD) are working together to update and improve math instruction for students in kindergarten through high school. The work includes math concepts that connect early multiplication and fractions to readiness for Algebra I, with the goal of meeting updated statewide learning standards and strengthening students' math skills and achievement.

"In ELA, we're showing consistently that our students are growing from one year to the next, and this last year, we had our highest data that we've ever had in science. In math, however, we are not showing consistent growth," said Alicen Gaytley, Director of Teaching and Learning. "But we haven't done a math curriculum study for many years, and it's definitely time."



Two students work through math problems as Quincy schools strengthen math instruction and support student learning.

Gaytley said the district is using the most recent state standards to review its math curriculum. This year, 74 teachers (including elementary classroom teachers, and middle and high school math teachers), will begin implementing curriculum updates aligned to the new state standards with the goal of helping students better understand and use math in their daily lives.

One way the district is helping support teachers is through participation in the Math Breakthrough Network. The Math Breakthrough Network is a regional collaborative professional learning opportunity through the North Central Educational School District (NCESD) with Cashmere, Chelan, Ephrata, and Quincy School Districts, starting with 3rd through 5th grade teachers and administrators this year.

As part of the learning, teachers help prepare a lesson together and watch it delivered live to a class of students. The fellow instructors in the room are able to see how students are responding to the lesson. Teachers can "huddle" during the lesson to get help from colleagues. Afterward, the group discusses what students understood and where they needed more support.

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teachers are working together to strengthen math instruction and build student confidence.

We also share what Quincy Middle School has learned from two years of Yondr pouches and introduce Keith Siebert, our new safety and security officer at Quincy High School.

These stories share our mission: Successful students today, bright futures tomorrow.

Thank you to our families, staff, and community members for your belief in our students and for making this work possible.

Go Jacks!

Nik Bergman
QSD Superintendent
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"We're really centering on the student experience. After the lesson is finished, there's a group of volunteer students that come into the space where the teachers are co-learning together and we have a trained facilitator who is asking the students how their experience was," Gaytley said, "it's really powerful for the teachers to hear directly from the students and how they're feeling about math and their lesson and the instruction and what's important to them."

Kimberly Bunch, the elementary math coach, has helped develop new assessments and prioritize lessons with math grade level leads. She has been an important part of facilitating math learning in the Math Breakthrough Network as well, said Gaytley.

"Teachers have felt the planning they have done with the facilitators and the planning team has helped them think about the lessons differently," said Bunch. "Because these conversations are happening with teachers across the district, they are trying out new ideas, like models, strategies, [or] questions, that they had not thought of before."

New math support classes have also been introduced at the middle school and high school, Gaytley said. These hands-on classes are designed to help students strengthen their understanding of math concepts they find challenging.

In addition to teacher training like the breakthrough network, the new support courses, and assessment updates, Gaytley said another important part of this "refresh" of math instruction in Quincy is challenging the idea that math isn't for everyone.

"It has been kind of common or acceptable in our society to say, 'Well, I'm not really a math person,' but I really want to encourage our community and everyone as a whole to lean into math and support our students in learning it, because we're all math people. Math is all around us every day. And even though it can be scary, getting the support and digging in and trying the math is really important," Gaytley said. "We just want to say thank you to the community for supporting us. We're really working with intention to get better at math and I'm excited. I really feel like what we're doing is going to make a difference."

Meet Keith Siebert, Quincy's newest safety and security officer

Keith Siebert, Quincy School District's new full-time Safety and Security Officer, started this fall. Based at Quincy High School, Siebert will work with staff and students to keep students safe.



SSO Keith Siebert

"We saw strong success with our School Security Officer at the middle school and wanted to extend that same support to the high school," said DJ Garza, QSD assistant superintendent. "Voter-approved levy funding made that expansion possible. It allowed us to build on what was working at the middle school and bring those benefits to more students. We are grateful for our community's investment in safe, welcoming schools."

Siebert is a QHS graduate who spent nearly 30 years with the Quincy Police Department, serving five years as the police chief. Get to know Officer Siebert in his own words:

As a Quincy schools alum, how does it feel to be working at the school you once attended?

It's a surreal feeling to be working at Quincy High School. Having graduated from here, I suspect I have a different perspective than most. I have a personal connection to this school and this community, and I want to see both our students and staff succeed. I want to do my part to help make this community an even better place to live. Being able to give back to a place that helped shape who I am is something I take seriously.

You've worked in Quincy for most of your life—what has kept you here? What do you like most about this community?

I believe Quincy is a good place to live, work, and raise a family. It is one of those places you can go a year without seeing someone and pick up right where you left off and it's like you've been talking every day. That is the kind of community Quincy is.

How has your experience in law enforcement prepared you for this new role? How do you interact with students, staff and the community?

After over 29 years of law enforcement, I learned the importance of building relationships, communicating effectively, listening to people, and treating everyone with respect. The biggest difference is that my focus now is on being part of the school community every day. Rather than responding to situations after something has happened, I can build relationships with students and staff, identify concerns early, and help prevent problems before they occur. I want students to know that I'm approachable, that I care about them, and that I'm here to help. My goal is to work alongside students, staff, families, and community partners to help create a safe and welcoming environment where students can focus on learning and succeeding.

What makes this role important for Quincy students and families?

At its core, this role is about making sure students have a safe environment where they can learn, grow, and reach their potential. Parents send their children to school trusting that we will do everything reasonably possible to keep them safe. That is a responsibility I take very seriously.

What do you wish people knew about you and your work?

I am blessed to have spent much of my career serving this community. Having grown up here makes this role especially meaningful. These aren't just students in a school I happen to work at; they are young people growing up in my hometown. I believe we all have a responsibility to invest in the next generation. If I can make a difference in even one student's life, then I'm doing something worthwhile. My commitment is to keep showing up, building relationships, and doing my part to make Quincy a better place for the next generation.

Two years later: The impact of Yondr pouches



Two years ago, Quincy Middle School (QMS) became the first school in the district to adopt Yondr pouches, joining schools around the state and country. The pouches lock magnetically and require a special device to unlock, helping keep students' phones and other devices inaccessible during the school day. At first, staff, students and families were unsure what to expect. Now, school records show fewer cell phone disciplinary referrals, and a staff survey points to positive changes in classrooms and school culture.

"We're doing well with it," said Scott Ramsey, QMS principal. "Phones are becoming a minor issue now, as opposed to being a major disruption prior to this program."

In 2024, there were 136 cell phone referrals reported at QMS. Last year, after the implementation of the Yondr pouches, that number has gone down to 13 referrals. There have also been reductions in suspensions due to cell phone use and fight suspensions, said Greg Martinez, QMS vice principal.

A QMS staff survey completed by 39 instructors last year found that instructors overwhelmingly agreed that the use of Yondr pouches had a positive impact on classrooms, the time between classes and school culture as a whole. They reported more students talking face-to-face and fewer disciplinary issues. Even students acknowledge that the pouches have improved their focus, Martinez said.

"At a school board meeting, we had some students come up and talk about it and [they said] 'I'd rather have my cell phone, but I can see how it helps me,'" Martinez said.

The way the pouches are used and monitored has changed since the program began, said Ramsey. Students can still go to the office to use their phones for emergencies, but enforcement has gotten stricter. Last year, staff began checking pouches during student advisory periods after it became clear that some students were avoiding using the pouches. The school began this year with daily pouch checks, he said.

"We had another school district come to visit us a few weeks ago and they asked about how Yondr pouches were working… and they asked, "Well, would you do it again if you had the opportunity?' And I said, 'Yes, absolutely,'" Ramsey said. "I would have changed our implementation and we would have had pouch checks right off the bat. But, I think the Yondr pouches give our middle school kids a tool to be able to keep their phones off and away throughout the day."

From Quincy to Harvard: Meet QHS senior Gerardo Guerrero

Quincy High School senior Gerardo Guerrero spent seven weeks in Cambridge, Massachusetts this summer, attending Harvard University's Summer School program. He took two courses: public speaking and "data structures," an advanced computer science course.

"I was staying on campus doing my classes, getting to work with high schoolers, college students, and adults, all trying to further our education," Guerrero said. "Classes were difficult as they were an accelerated semester, as opposed to the usual 14 weeks. It meant everything was about twice as fast, and it meant twice as much homework."

The Harvard Summer School Secondary School Program allows high school and college students to earn college credit. With the support from the Quincy WA Rotary Club and community donations through GoFundMe, Guerrero took two four-credit classes during his seven weeks there. He estimated he spent around 30 hours a week studying and completing homework in addition to 12 hours of lecture each week.

"That does not mean I did not have some fun over there. I still had quite a bit of time to myself," Guerrero said.

Students had the opportunity to visit museums, the local aquarium, and attend a Broadway Musical in Boston. Guerrero stayed on Harvard's campus, along with students from around the world.

"One of my roommates was from Spain, I talked to people who were from Russia, China, the UK, and a bunch of other countries from around the world. It was really interesting getting to talk with people who have a different school system, different life experiences," he said. "My public speaking course ranged from other high schoolers like myself to 30-plus-year-old men with their own businesses, so there's a lot of range there, a lot of different life experiences."

Guerrero is now applying to colleges and plans to major in computer science with the goal of becoming a game developer. He applied for early admission to Harvard and plans to apply to other universities he visited over the summer, including Yale University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in winter.

Last year, he received the K-12 Future Technology Leader of the Year award from NCW Tech Alliance for a video game he created. He was nominated for the award by QHS computer science teacher Chris Quintero.

"When I first met him in my AP computer science class, he was probably one of the most well-prepared kids in my classroom," Quintero said. "It was nice to see and refreshing to see that there were still students who were very interested in programming, and not just interested, but very knowledgeable."

It was in that class that Guerrero programmed his own four-level video game. He has also taken computer hardware and technology project management with Quintero and served as an officer for the SkillsUSA technology club.

"I would describe him as very hard working. He's the type of person that if he doesn't know what it is, he'd come back the next day and he'd know it and he'd probably be able to teach it to you perfectly," Quintero said. "When I first met him, it's not that he was shy and timid, but he wasn't the Gerardo we know now. He was still developing himself as a person, and then I feel like over the years, I've seen him grow … this [program] kind of just elevated that and it proved to him that really anything is possible."

Guerrero said he felt prepared to succeed alongside his classmates at Harvard, and encouraged other students not to limit themselves.

"This is a very common phrase, but you miss 100% of the shots you don't take. I know that when I was submitting my application for this program, I didn't go in thinking 'Oh, I'm totally going to get it.' I obviously doubted myself. But I wouldn't have gotten in if I didn't apply," he said. "If you see an opportunity that sounds cool, then try out for it. If you don't get accepted, then, oh well. But if you do, then that could be a very valuable experience. It's just to show that just because we're in a small town doesn't mean you can't go out and do bigger things."



Quincy Grad Profile: **Sisters Called to Care**

When sisters Andrea Cortes and Guadalupe Henne talk about what made them successful, it always comes back to their mom.

Both were first-generation college students. Today, Cortes is a social worker for the Quincy School District and Henne is a wound care nurse at Quincy Valley Medical Center. Their family immigrated from Mexico in 1996, and their mother raised them and their two brothers as a single parent.

"Our mom always said that education is so important. She always pushed for us to do good in school and go to school because she knew that was our way of breaking the cycle of poverty, of abuse. It was just a way for us to get a better life," Henne said.

Cortes, who graduated from Quincy High School (QHS) in 2007, became pregnant during her senior year. Her graduation was delayed but she went back to school with the help of her family and received her diploma.

Henne, who graduated from QHS in 2009, wanted to become a doctor. She cared for their grandfather when he was diagnosed with cancer and was called to healthcare.

"I took care of my grandpa when he had cancer and early on I knew I wanted to be a doctor. I would just see the disparities that my family would go through and it's totally different when you're in an uninsured, underserved population," Henne said. Henne attended Big Bend Community College to study nursing, and later earned her Bachelors of Science in Nursing from Chamberlain University. She is currently pursuing a master's degree at Gonzaga University while working full-time as a wound care nurse.

For Cortes, who was born in Mexico, immigration status created a barrier to continuing her education after high school.

After Cortes received legal residency in 2013 and she and her husband had their third child, she decided it was time to return to school. At first, she planned to go into nursing like Henne, but after completing part of a certified nursing assistant (CNA) program, she realized it wasn't the right fit.

"I remember going to my academic counselor at Big Bend, and I said, 'I'm done. I'm not going to be a nurse. I just can't do this," Cortes said. "He told me, 'If you've made it this far, this long, you can do it.' So, I finished Big Bend and then I went to Central Washington University online for social services and that's when I got my bachelor's."



Sisters Guadalupe "Lupe" Henne and Andrea Cortes with their mother, siblings, partners and children, the family at the heart of their journeys in education and service to the Quincy community.

Cortes was working at the Community Health Center in Quincy when a position with the school district opened up.

"I was interviewed for a social worker position not knowing that I was going to need my masters. So, I went in with the idea I was going to get my masters," Cortes said. "I knew I was going to have to do it. I was working full-time, I was a full-time mom, and I was going to school full-time through Walden University, and that's where I got my master's degree in 2021."

Both sisters look back on their time as students in Quincy and have stories about the many teachers and role models who helped them. For Cortes, one was Kelly Wallace.

"Ms. Kelly Wallace. She is one who never gave up believing in me. Like I said, I was one more statistic, one more teen pregnancy," Cortes said. "She knew I had a child and she helped me get my senior project done…and she never gave up, you know. She is the one who was there and she would always ask me, 'What do you need help with?'"

Now, as a social worker, Cortes gets to offer that same support to students.

"I work a lot with the homeless population and people in foster care and I know it's hard, life is hard and unfortunately some of us have to go through different roads, different paths," she said. "It's not always a straightforward road to graduation, but it's also a path of learning and becoming stronger, you know. So, don't give up and rely on the people that want to help you, that want to be there for you."

For Henne, one educator who made a difference was Dr. Nik Bergman, now QSD superintendent, who showed compassion for her and her siblings.

"If I look at myself back then, I can see how broken we were," Henne said, "and maybe he saw that and he said, 'You know what, this student probably needs a little bit more of my time,' and obviously that made the biggest difference for me."

Henne said that the same compassion has helped her succeed in health care. She encourages students to volunteer and give back to their community when they can.

"Even if you don't have the best grades, it's always good to dream and dream high, because the sky's the limit. Just keep trying," Henne said. "Just like my sister, I have volunteered at the community health center since I was a sophomore in high school. We would go to health fairs and we would educate the farm workers about things like heat stroke, blood pressure concerns, and diabetes, and I think that made me stand out … because of my community service hours, I was able to get more scholarships which essentially helped me pay for some of my education. So, just help your community, give back, and it's essentially going to pay off."

"I would say the same thing," said Cortes. "Never stop dreaming because once you stop dreaming, it's like you give up hope. And so hope is the last thing that should die. We should always have that hope that it will get better. And I know things are hard right now, but like my mom says, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel."

Both sisters see their work in social work and health care as a way to give back to Quincy and support others facing challenges similar to their own.

"My mom was our biggest cheerleader," Henne said, "but I know that there's students out there that unfortunately don't have that. But if they look around there are loving people, and in the district, there are many amazing people who will go the extra mile to help a student."