



Inside Schools

YOUR BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER FALL 2021

JOIN OUR TEAM!



Join our team in Bellingham Public Schools! Be a part of The Bellingham Promise in a new way...as a staff member! Bellingham Public Schools is hiring now for regular and substitute positions.

Current vacancies include paraeducators, food services staff and bus drivers. Most positions are on a school year schedule making this a perfect fit for a busy family.

Learn more about working with us at bellingshamschools.org/jobs.

Grateful to be in person

Dear community,

It's exciting to be back in person this fall. I am amazed and gratified by the incredible work students and staff are doing every day to keep each other engaged and safe. I have always loved going into our schools, and it has been especially enjoyable this fall after the ever-changing remote/hybrid schedule of last year. While we still face challenges, we are getting through this together.

We know our students and families are best served when our schools are open. Our students are also busy after school, participating in a variety of activities from sports to music, theatre and clubs, which is a big change from most of last year.

Younger children will soon be eligible for the vaccine, and our vaccination rates for staff are solid. Over 96 percent of all staff are vaccinated, and everyone continues to follow our COVID protocols of masking and social distancing.

As we move through and eventually past COVID, we can start to plan for the future. Our Facilities Planning Task Force is meeting and beginning to think about next steps with the district's most urgent needs. You can read their current thinking on page 5.

We have had a great fall and it has a lot to do with the Bellingham community and our collective commitment to kids.

Thank you.

GREG BAKER
Superintendent of Schools



■ *Sehome High School chamber orchestra students in class on Oct. 18. In-person music classes are a relief to both students and teachers. Read more inside on page 6.*

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the Bellingham Promise

vision

We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham's children. We will empower every child to discover and develop their passions, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life.

mission

We collectively commit that our students are cared for and respected, and that they will graduate from our schools prepared for success. All students will be exceptional in their own way, with strong character, a passion for learning, and ready for the widest range of educational and vocational options to support a diversity of life choices.

core beliefs

We believe:

- all children should be loved,
- the whole child is important,
- every child can learn at high levels,
- early learning and development are critical,
- learning is lifelong and essential to a high quality of life,
- compassion and service build community,
- teaching children to do their best involves self-reflection and reaching higher,
- diversity enhances a strong and healthy community, and
- together we achieve more than alone.

outcomes

We develop students and graduates who are...

KNOWLEDGE

- readers and writers,
- scientists and mathematicians,
- historians and global thinkers,
- artists and performers,
- artisans and technicians,
- multilingual readers and speakers,
- skilled users of technology and information,

CHARACTER

- leaders, collaborators and team players,
- dependable and responsible people,
- confident individuals who continuously challenge themselves,
- respectful and compassionate humans,
- honest and ethical individuals who act with integrity,

ACTION

- healthy, active individuals,
- critical thinkers and problem solvers,
- effective communicators,
- innovators and creators, and
- well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.

key strategies

We will accomplish this by focusing on...

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

We envision and strive for a more diverse, inclusive and equitable organization. Focus areas include, but are not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language and culture.

Innovation and Flexibility

We support the diverse needs and learning styles of our students by being innovative and flexible. We embrace change and creative thinking and know that this requires a high level of trust and engagement with our community.

Great Teaching with Strong Support

High quality instruction occurs every day in every classroom, where we establish a safe and engaging learning environment. We support culturally-responsive instruction through effective leadership, ongoing staff learning, and a diverse staff reflective of our students.

Early Childhood Education

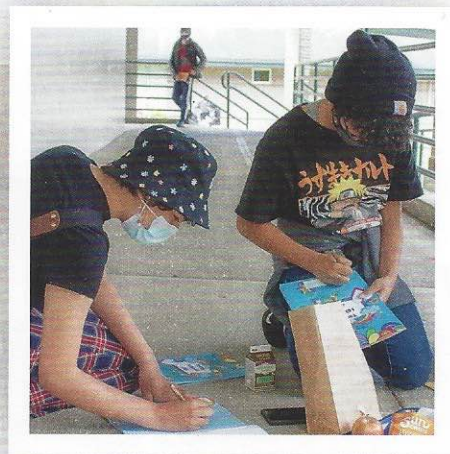
We support students and families from prenatal through graduation. We invest in a strong early childhood program because of its powerful long-term return for our students and community.

A One Schoolhouse Approach

Our schools are part of a larger One Schoolhouse, and we focus on taking care of each other. We provide an equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all students.

Student, Family, and Community Engagement

We develop partnerships and engage with a wide variety of stakeholders, including families and community partners, to support the success of all students.



■ Middle and high school students received yearbooks in spring 2021 at no cost

The 10th year of Project Free Education brings steady progress and significant wins

Equity work takes many forms in Bellingham Public Schools, but there is no clearer manifestation of it than in the Project Free Education (PFE) initiative over the past decade.

Spearheaded by Superintendent Greg Baker when he first arrived in the district in 2010-11, the purpose of this initiative is to reduce the financial burden of a public school education on families. One of the first major changes was a pivot to full-day kindergarten from a half-time schedule. This was accomplished before the state of Washington provided funds for it.

Also in Baker's first year, a districtwide audit revealed that school supplies cost families substantial amounts of money per student. To offset these costs, the district started reprioritizing budgets to provide all school supplies that families had been asked to buy, as well as other costs associated with attending school and participating in sports and other activities, such as Mountain School and the Snow Goose field trips.

As a starting point in that first year, the district began buying school supplies for all elementary students at every

elementary school. By 2015, all supplies were covered at all schools. Since then, Project Free Education has expanded yearly.

Assistant Superintendent Jay Jordan was in the district as the principal at Shuksan Middle School when the initiative first launched. He remembers when the district began working on and adjusting the cost of middle school sports (2013) and how the district literally leveled the playing field for some families and students. Jordan also expressed how progressive and proactive our district and superintendent has been in this equity work.

"Perhaps one of the biggest signs at how forward-thinking Dr. Baker has been supporting families with the true cost of a child's education," Jordan said, "is that Washington state recently passed House Bill 1660 in June 2020. This house bill now directs all school districts in the state to adopt a policy waiving fees and costs for students who are low income. This work has been a part of our culture in Bellingham for a decade."

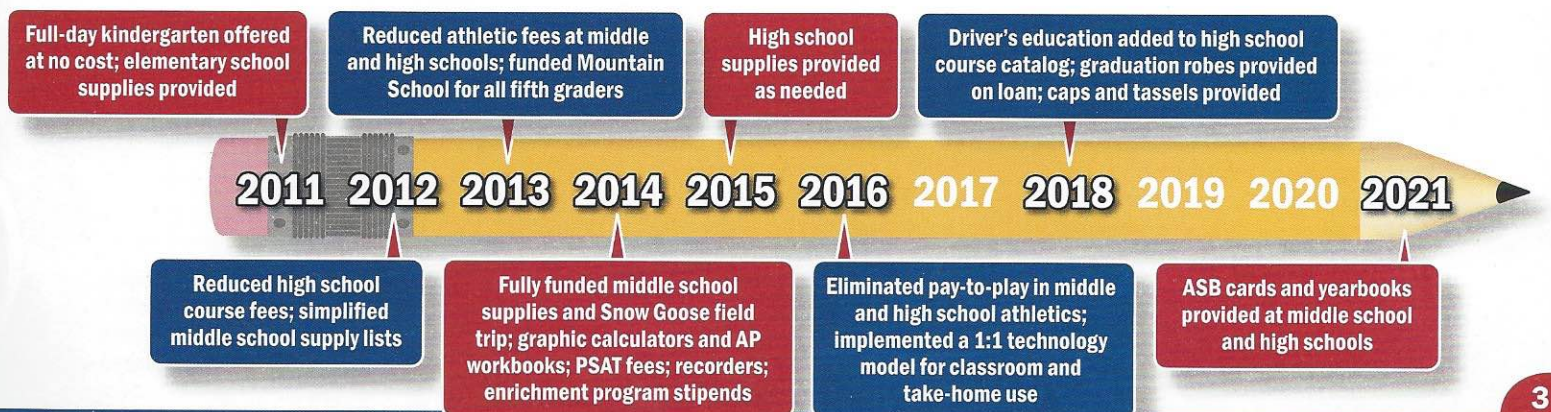
In 2018-19, two exciting developments were implemented through the program.

In that school year, driver's education was included back into high school course offerings at no cost, and additionally, graduating seniors did not need to buy their own cap and gown. And in one of the latest expansions of the initiative, in spring 2021, all student yearbook costs at middle and high school were covered.

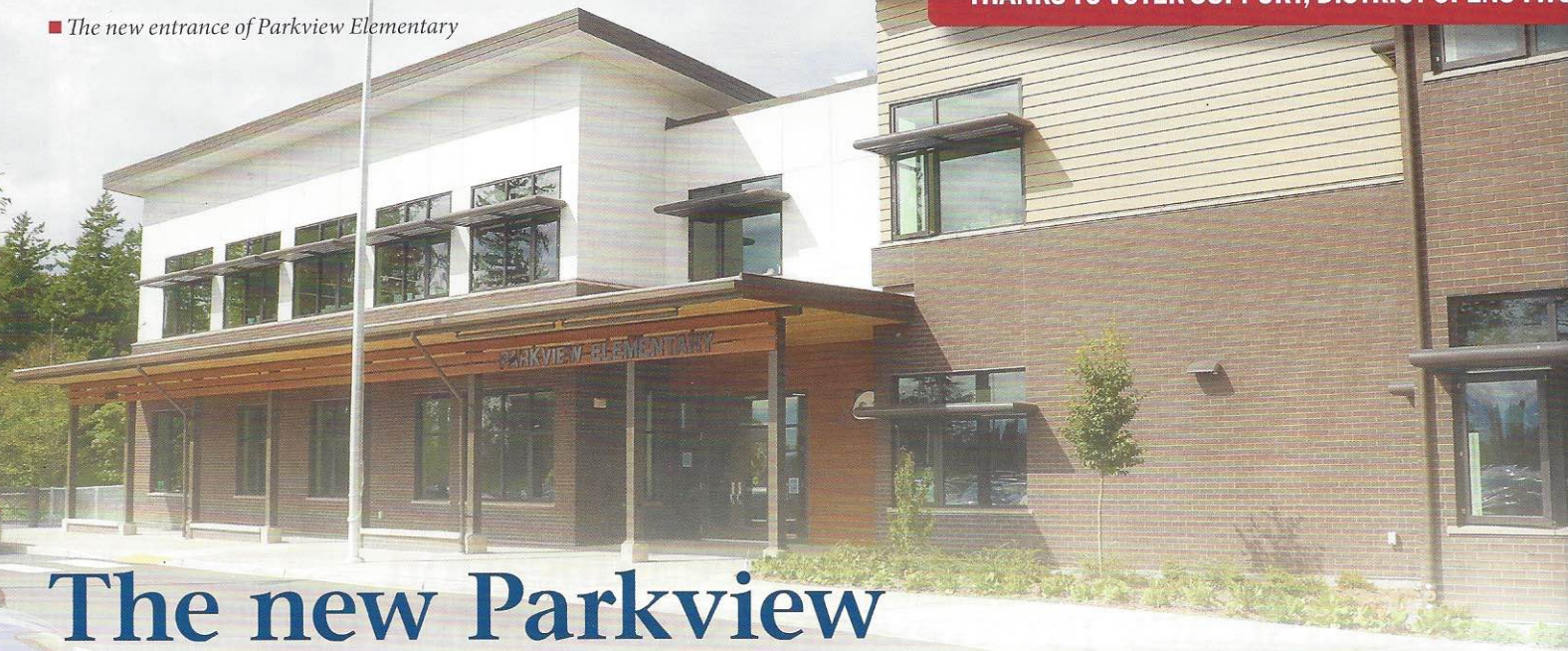
Staff member Erin Voiss shared how this recent expansion of Project Free Education will have a positive effect on kids based on her own childhood experience. Voiss wrote in a June email to Superintendent Baker that "truly free education is close to my heart and the fact that ASB cards and yearbooks are now being included in that makes me so happy!"

"I was one of those low-income kids who couldn't get a yearbook every year due to cost," she continued, "and not only did it make me feel super self-conscious and out of place during yearbook signing, but it was sad for me because I wanted to remember and be able to look back at pictures just like any kid that age."

Find out more about the history of PFE at bellingshamschools.org/project-free-education



■ The new entrance of Parkview Elementary



The new Parkview

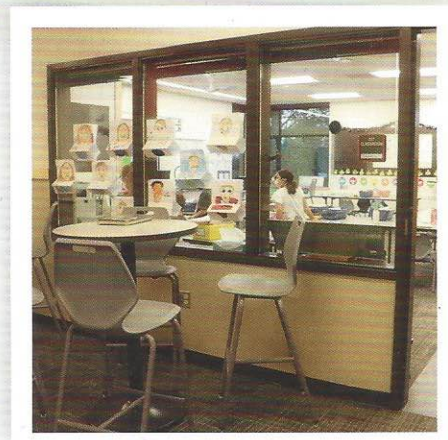
Keeping the neighborhood in mind, the new Parkview was designed to keep roof points low, creating the illusion of making the building look smaller and nestled in along Cornwall Park. The new school building, replacing one built in 1957, is situated along a natural hillside and incorporates ramps and grade changes. The grounds are designed to preserve the existing topography.

built solar-ready; the new gym roof faces south and has an excellent orientation to get maximum benefit from solar energy. The robust building envelope helps keep even temperatures throughout the building. Ceiling fans and operable windows were installed to help during shoulder seasons as an efficient way to create a comfortable space.

“The kids love it, the parents love it, we love it.”

Principal Mylo Allen

The new Parkview also takes advantage of all the latest in design and technology: the HVAC system brings up to 100 percent of the air in from the outside, all materials used in the build are low VOC, and increased daylight throughout the building means less of a reliance on artificial lighting.

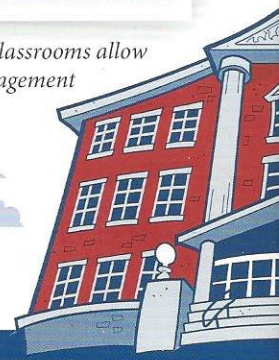


■ Learning spaces outside classrooms allow for small group or 1:1 engagement



SCAN HERE to watch a video of all that the new Parkview offers.

As in all new buildings in Bellingham Public Schools, Parkview follows district priorities for sustainability and energy efficiency and has several elements in the design to promote this. Parkview was



Current Thinking for a Proposed 2022

Thanks to past community support, Bellingham Public Schools has many outstanding school facilities, including our newest rebuilds of Alderwood and Parkview elementary schools (see above and next page) and of Sehome High School in 2019. However, some of our schools and facilities still need attention. A Facilities Planning Task Force has been meeting regularly in fall 2021 to continue the important work of identifying buildings with the highest need, as well as reviewing projected growth in our district boundaries.

While the task force work continues, the current thinking is laid out in five proposed areas of investment. The task force is working to make an official bond recommendation to the superintendent by Dec. 2021. If approved, then a resolution goes to the school board for consideration to be added to the Feb. 2022 ballot. You can follow the work of the committee at bellingshamschools.org/facilities-taskforce



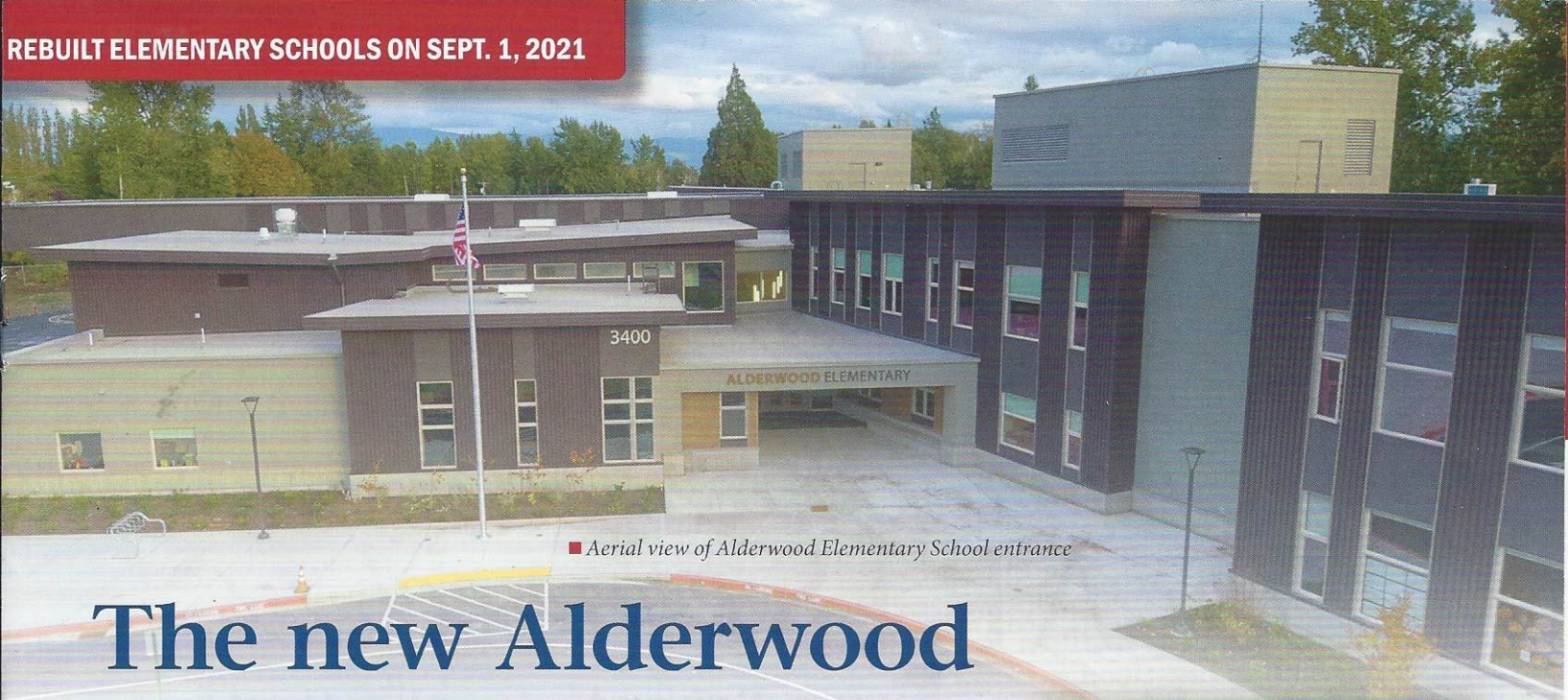
1. COMMUNITY TRANSITIONS

Buy property, design and build a new facility for Community Transitions (CT) and maximize flexibility/opportunity for possible use by other district programs. CT is a program for students receiving Special Education services through the age of 21.



2. NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Build a 15th elementary school on the district-owned King Mountain property on the northside of town where growth is occurring, using it initially as a swing space for students as other schools are rebuilt. (See next area of investment.)



■ Aerial view of Alderwood Elementary School entrance

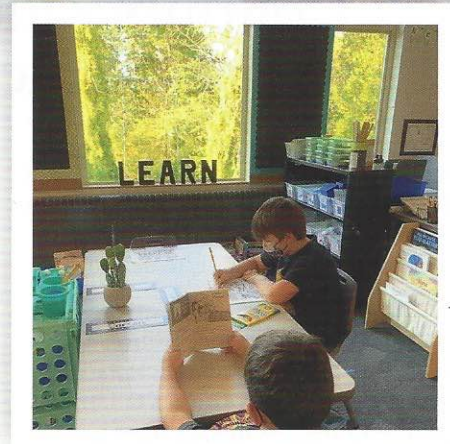
The new Alderwood

The newly constructed Alderwood Elementary School includes thematic nods to the surrounding environment, from the siding, to the windows, to the library book drop. Vertical lines on the exterior of the school mirror the surrounding trees including those in the abutting wetland. The hallways are designed to meander like a river in homage to the nearby Nooksack and many of the interior details and trim were crafted from alder wood.

The natural world is also reflected in the different wings of the building, which are represented thematically by the four seasons of the year.

The modern, two-story building replaces a one-story building from 1956. The difference is striking. While the original building's library was windowless, the new library has floor-to-ceiling windows showcasing the evergreen and deciduous trees of the wetland below. At least one student has admitted they were mesmerized by "all the trees!".

Construction continues with the outdoor areas, especially the playground and field, scheduled to be installed later this year.



■ Classroom windows bring in lots of natural light

"Seeing students explore their new building has been incredibly fulfilling. Its thoughtful connection to the green world around us and the positive, light feel of the instructional spaces create an exceptional environment for learning."

Principal Micah Smith

Bond: Areas of Investment

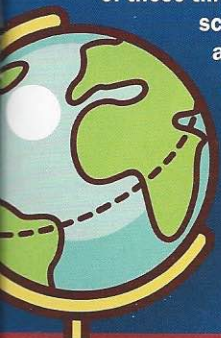
3. CARL COZIER, COLUMBIA, ROOSEVELT DESIGNS
Begin the design for the replacement of these three current elementary schools and set the stage for a future bond to fund their construction.

4. CURRENT PROJECTS
Support completion of previously-approved bond projects in response to refinements and increased construction costs.

- Sunnyland Elementary School
- Gordon Carter environmental education site
- District Office
- Bellingham and Squalicum High fields

5. SAFETY, SUSTAINABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY
Invest in improvements at numerous schools, including:

- Inclusive playgrounds and play fields
- Extend Kulshan Middle School by four additional classroom
- Cordata Elementary School traffic and parking
- HVAC replacements, exterior painting, and additional sustainability initiatives





More than ever, the ARTS connect us

Columbia Elementary School mural reflects on pandemic school year and deep questions

Columbia teacher Ashley Welch (pictured above with some of her students from 2020-21) shared her thoughts on the in-depth process she went through with her fourth grade students to develop a school mural. She writes:

“It all started at the beginning of February when I read an article in Education Week about adults talking about learning loss in kids. After reading it, I took some questions back to my class for our morning meeting. These questions included: During the pandemic, what are some things you feel like you’ve lost?

What are ways you’ve seen yourself grow? Some people are focused on the idea of learning loss. What do you want those adults to know about you and your experiences during the pandemic?

Students gave thoughtful and deep answers, far beyond what I was expecting. They spoke of losing loved ones, not seeing friends, having parents lose jobs, lack of access to food. They told me about how they learned that they loved writing, bonded with siblings, discovered how to slow down, that they appreciate the little things more. They talked about new skills they learned like baking, drawing dragons and how to be more independent.

At the end of this conversation, I was so moved that I followed up with a question about what we could do to make the most of our year, to bring joy to our learning. This is how our classroom joy project, the mural project, began.

My class needed to find joy in the simple things during the pandemic year. This amazing group of fourth graders not only learned deeply but came together, persevered, and overcame challenges that no one thought a nine or ten-year-old would be able to do. They supported each other, grew their patience, and became a family of sorts. We are all grateful for our pandemic classmates as they are the classmates we will never forget.”

The joy of being together in person making music

The 2021-22 school year began in-person, a big relief to all classrooms but especially to our band, orchestra and choir classrooms across Bellingham Public Schools. Teaching music remotely had its challenges since most sound is delayed in virtual settings and the ability to play together was lost.

According to orchestra teacher Kirstin Doud at Sehome High School, many of the music teachers in the district used the platform called Flipgrid “to check in with students on their playing and singing” and also used Zoom breakout rooms for individual feedback, but the ability to connect and listen to each other as they played was not possible.

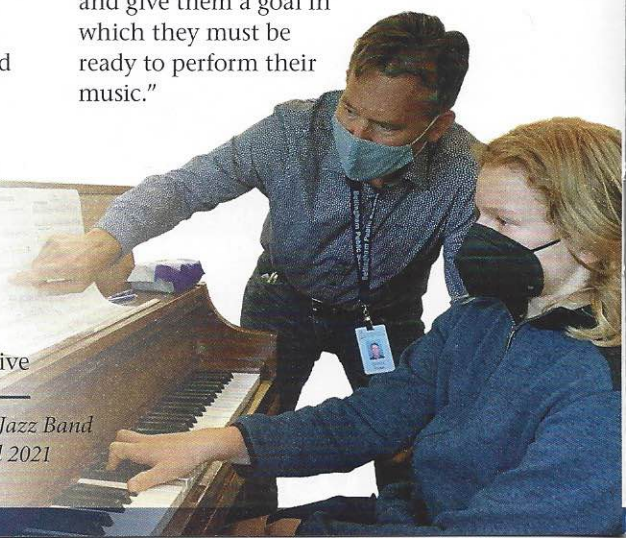
Eventually last school year, small groups at the high school level were allowed to meet. At that point, quartet groups came to school and played and sang together. “Students were so excited to hear other parts and be able to play together as a group,” Doud said.

Many school music groups have also returned to in-person concerts this fall following COVID protocols with the audience wearing masks and sitting in family groups at least three feet apart.

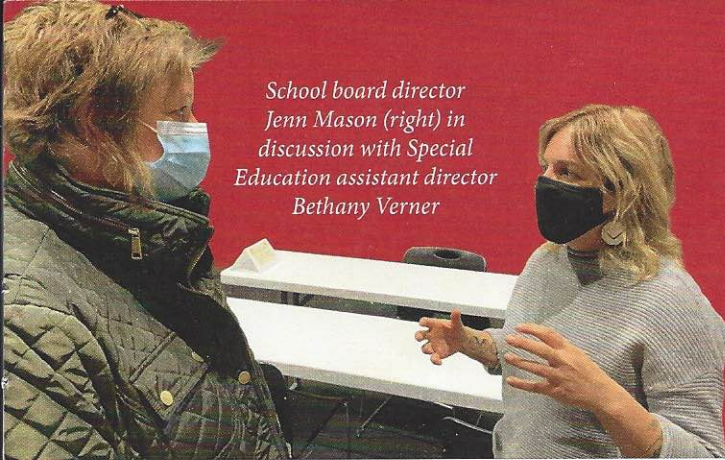
“Concerts are so important to our instruction,” Doud continued. “They give

students an opportunity to show what they have learned over the past weeks and give them a goal in which they must be ready to perform their music.”

■ Sehome music teacher Donny Rose during Jazz Band in September. Rose joined the district in fall 2021



School board director
Jenn Mason (right) in
discussion with Special
Education assistant director
Bethany Verner



School Board update

School board directors Jenn Mason and Kelly Bashaw share their perspectives on reopening schools, remote board meetings and why place matters for teaching and learning.

When you think back to where we were a year ago, with few students back in our schools and almost all engaged in remote learning, what reflections do you have?

JENN: It's almost unimaginable to think about. I'm so grateful we are able to do in-person learning safely and for all of the work that was done to get us to where we are today. I think our educators did a spectacular job pivoting last year and working with what they had.

KELLY: Our district is full of incredible professionals. I think the transition has been seamless. Things are going very well and I think families are so appreciative of all the work our district is doing to keep kids in school and still keep them safe. It's so important for our students to be able to resume some normalcy and routines.



■ School board director Kelly Bashaw (right) with executive director of family engagement Isabel Meaker at the Sehome High School visit in early October.

Is the school board going to continue to hold its meetings on Zoom?

JENN: For now yes. We have heard from some folks that having school board meetings on Zoom has, in some cases, expanded access. Some parents and guardians were not able to attend the meetings in the past because they had to leave their families to attend, but now can watch it live from home. There are some benefits to having our meetings remote.

We also have been reminding our community members they can communicate with us in a variety of ways in their own time. Between the online Listening Post, emails and phone calls, we have really tried to let people know they can communicate with us at any time of the day.

KELLY: We love to engage with the community and hear their feedback. While we do look forward to in-person meetings at some point, virtual meetings allow you to attend meetings you may not normally get to attend.

I would also add that I'm very appreciative of our community that they allow staff, especially teachers, and our district to do their jobs. It's so important that we enforce COVID measures in our schools, and it's unfortunate what's happening in other cities across the state and country with mask and vaccine protests. We live in a great community and the support they've offered during this difficult time is incredible.

The district is strongly considering putting forward a bond measure in early 2022. Why do you think it's important to invest in new schools and buildings for students and staff?

KELLY: We see the difference a new school makes, especially when we are replacing a very old school. One of the most significant differences for me is Options High School. We see the difference in what Options used to be and what Options is now. Our most vulnerable students used to be in portables, then thanks to the strong support of our community to build a new school, a state-of-the-art facility is used and enjoyed by hundreds of students, young children of our teen GRADS students and also many community partners. Our schools are our community, and our bond measures to build new schools reflect that sentiment.

JENN: As a parent of a child who uses a wheelchair, accessibility is a huge priority for me and for other students and families and educators who have different access needs. Many of our older schools were built before we had regulations in place requiring accessibility. Times have changed. Our values have changed. And that means our buildings have to change.

I also think aesthetics matter. The way our buildings look sends a message to our students. I think it's incredibly important to provide a space for all students that feels welcoming and that we've put the care into their learning.

August back-to-school event symbolized commitment to students and families

Bellingham Public Schools hosted the first annual Back-to-School Family Block Party and Resource Fair on Saturday, Aug. 21 at Bellingham High School. A committed group of community partners, volunteers and staff came together to support the hundreds of families in attendance, welcoming them to the new school year.

Dr. Kristi Dominguez, assistant superintendent in the Department of Teaching and Learning, was impressed by both the turnout and the larger Bellingham community coming together for this event.

“The vision of our strategic plan The Bellingham Promise states that we, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children,” Dr. Dominguez said, “and this was evident throughout the entire day. Organizations attended alongside one another in support of our students and families.”

Tables were tended by staff and volunteers alike, and included information about YMCA activities, college and career planning with Futures NW, bus ridership on the Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) and on our school buses, as well as a myriad of other clubs and district support. Onsite services included free haircuts, childhood and COVID-19 immunizations and necessary sports physicals for student athletes from PeaceHealth physicians. There were also tables giving out backpacks and books, and signups for school clothes through Operation School Bell of the Assistance League of Bellingham.

\$10,000 in co-funding for this event was provided by Bellingham Public Schools Foundation and Whatcom Community Foundation through a Project Neighborly grant.

■ **RIGHT:** Families across the district attended the event. A registration table welcomed attendees in multiple languages.



Foundation grants support big ideas and student learning

This fall, the Foundation is offering up to \$25,000 in grant funding. These grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and fund the resources, experiences and opportunities for students to meet their full potential and enhance learning in classrooms. This program was paused last year due to the pandemic, and we are thrilled to bring it back.

Our grant allocation is half of what it was pre-COVID, so if you would like to make a donation directed towards grant funding, we can raise that number and make an even bigger impact in schools this year. These grants make a huge difference and your gift can transform a classroom.

Call for 2021-22 business partners

Our business and community partners are essential members of the Foundation team. Organizations can donate at any level from \$500 to \$10,000+ and will be recognized publicly by the Foundation. Do you know a business who would like to join our team of community members committed to supporting our schools? We would love to talk to you! Please reach out or visit www.bellinghamschoolsfoundation.org/business

Thank you for your support

A huge thank you to all who supported, attended and donated to our Sips and Nibbles event in September, which included a Q and A with Supt. Greg Baker. Your support makes our work possible.



SCAN HERE to view the event.



BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION
imagine the possibilities...