

REGISTER for Kindergarten



Inside Schools

BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2026

Kindergarten registration begins

National Award for Green Schools

National Award for Green Schools

Bellinghame game
a long tradition

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Planning for the year ahead

Dear community,

School districts and communities across the country are facing incredible challenges, whether that be school finance, lower birth rates and enrollments or the ever-changing political landscape.

Here in Bellingham, we continuously show a strong commitment to education. The Bellingham Promise calls out 'the collective commitment' it takes to deliver for our kids. We want to assure you that our schools will always provide safe, loving spaces for our students to learn, and that will not change, regardless of any challenges.

We hope you take time to read the many positive stories of our students and staff inside this edition of our community newsletter.

Thank you for your continual support of public education, one of the pillars of a healthy community and democracy.

GREG BAKER
Superintendent of Schools

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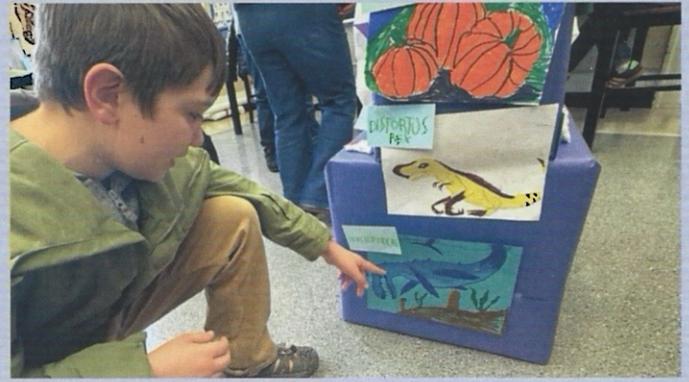


Options civics class demonstrates how “together we achieve more than alone”

For the fourth time in just under two years, the Options High School civics class taught by Joe Wooding has invited in the Community Engagement Fellows (CEF), a program nestled within the Center for Community Learning at Western Washington University.

The goals of the CEF cohorts are simple and clear: to learn together, to build relationships and to serve in some way the public, our region and the planet. Topics have included health care, teen court, neurodivergence advocacy and a campaign for SmartTrips, to name a few.

The cohorts at Options High School create an intergenerational approach. While CE Fellows started as a program for adult professionals, in recent years it has expanded to include middle and high schoolers learning alongside adults. Approximately 10 to 15 community members attend each cohort.



“Creativity and community” on display during BFPP art exhibition

To end their session in Explorations in Art in fall 2025, 20 students in grades 3 to 6 in the Bellingham Family Partnership Program (BFPP) invited their families and friends to an exhibition of their creations.

Ahead of the exhibition hour, a flurry of activity took over the space as the students put finishing touches on their art, continued to hang pieces on stacked boxes innovatively used as a multi-sided display, and finished the Explorations in Art collaborative sign.

BFPP principal Kate Baehr taught the 12-week art class and said that the class included an overview of many different art concepts and techniques. She shared these included “line art, patterns, single point perspective, foreground and background, 3D, dot art, and layering.”

“The students created a lovely environment where creativity and community could thrive,” Baehr said.



Scratch-made sausages in the Central Kitchen a hit in school cafeterias

BPS Central Kitchen was busy with all stages of sausage-making on a recent morning. The sausage process started with blending locally sourced ground pork with a mix of spices in the mixer machine, then moved to the “pucking” machine, before being cooked in the ovens and chill-blasted. Once chilled, the sausages are bagged, frozen and shipped out to school cafeterias.

This batch of sausages was heated up for the popular breakfast-for-lunch entrée of French toast and sausages served with scratch-made berry sauce; it was served alongside the always present fresh salad bar. This is just one of the many scratch-made recipes produced out of the district’s kitchen on a regular basis.

Feeding approximately 5,700 students every day, the Food Services program has 79 staff members working in the Central Kitchen and 22 school cafeterias.



Sehome teacher earns 2025 State Language Teacher of the Year Award

Sehome High School teacher Mary Hooker has been awarded the 2025 State Language Teacher of the Year by the Washington Association for Language Teaching (WFLT.) The award was formalized at the organization’s fall conference in October.

Mary teaches Spanish and Teacher Academy at Sehome, and has taught in Bellingham Public Schools since 2004, teaching at Whatcom Middle School, Bellingham High School and Sehome High School.

“Mary is an incredible collaborator, innovator, leader and nationally-board-certified colleague,” colleague Ashleigh Bobovski said in her nomination for Ms. Hooker.

“WFLT certainly got it right!” Sonia Cole, Sehome principal, said. “Ms. Hooker is always looking to improve her practice. She thinks deeply about instruction and the student experience. She is leading work here at Sehome and across the state of Washington.”





Bellinghome: more than a game

The annual Bellinghome Battle between Bellingham High and Sehome High took place on Thursday, Jan. 29 with a varsity basketball doubleheader at Sehome. A full house of fans packed the gym with energy and school spirit to witness the friendly competition.

For nearly thirty years, 1967 to 1998, there were only two high schools in Bellingham Public Schools (Bellingham and Sehome) so the cross-town, local games between the two were an instant rivalry whenever they played. In the 2016-17 season, the name "Bellinghome" took root, and was modeled after the Tiger/Hawk (Burlington/Anacortes) event, according to Sehome's activities/athletics coordinator Colin Cushman.

"We wanted a way to encourage positive sportsmanship, crowd engagement and a greater sense of community," Cushman shared. "It has taken a life of its own and kids and parents love it. The positive comments I get from parents and kids are amazing."



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Transporting students across generations

Our transportation staff in Bellingham Public Schools does amazing work every single school day to drive our students to and from school safely and efficiently. They are the first staff that students see in the morning and the last staff they see at the end of the school day. It's no surprise then that bus drivers are much loved and appreciated by students and families alike.

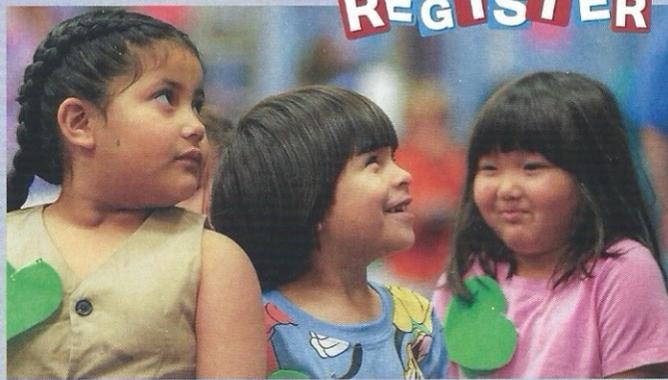
Appreciation came in recently from Wade King parent Hilary Vaughn for long-time bus driver Stacie Michaelson. Hilary shared the following in an email to her principal:

"It feels like pure serendipity that my childhood bus driver Stacie Michaelson is now my son's bus driver. I first heard from a neighbor that my son would be riding Bus 31 and how much he'd love it because the driver was so wonderful. When I heard the driver's name was Stacie, I couldn't help but think, what are the chances it's the same Stacie who drove me to school all those years ago? Sure enough, it was!"



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REGISTER



Kindergarten Registration

Registration for fall kindergarten has begun in Bellingham Public Schools, and we are so excited to welcome all young learners! All children who will be 5 before Sept. 1, 2026 can be registered for kindergarten. Families can register their child online by following the instructions online at bellingshamschools.org/registration or scan QR code below.

Registering kindergartners as early as possible helps us hire staff, balance classes, connect with families and get schools ready to welcome our youngest learners. Let a friend or neighbor with a future kindergartner know the registration window is open and ready for them! To find out more about attendance areas, registration and childhood immunization requirements, please visit our enrollment webpage or contact our elementary schools directly.

We invite all families within Bellingham Public Schools with a child who will be 4 before Sept. 1, 2026, to consider our transition to kindergarten program, Promise K.



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BPS earns 2026 Best of Green Schools Award

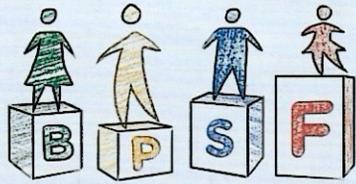
Bellingham Public Schools received the **2026 Best of Green Schools Award** in mid-February from the Green Schools National Network. BPS director of Teaching and Learning Heather Steele accepted the award on the district's behalf. BPS was recognized for being a "school system that has created long-term partnerships and demonstrated commitment to systemic change and shared best practices."

BPS has taken steps to reduce our environmental impact for more than two decades, adopting its Climate Action Plan in fall 2023. This award honors leadership in sustainability by embedding climate action into all layers of operations, education, and culture. BPS progress is made possible through partnerships with state and federal agencies, local levy funding and private donors.

Recent district projects include solar panels at six schools, LED lighting, an electric vehicle fleet, energy audits, air quality monitors, three propane buses, and compost and recycling systems across schools.



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BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

Foundation Update

The Bellingham Public Schools Foundation (BPSF) gives immediate assistance to district families in need.

Working in close partnership with the the Family Engagement team in Bellingham Public Schools, the foundation is a front line resource for staff to provide responsive, efficient aid in emergency situations.

BSPF donations go straight to those who are facing urgent obstacles that affect their housing and food stability. As challenges in our most vulnerable communities mount, the demand for basic needs and assistance has skyrocketed.

If you are interested in supporting our families in crisis, a donation to the BPSF can put money and resources directly in their hands to cover rent, food, access to services and more.



MAKE A GIFT TO SUPPORT FAMILIES

www.bellinghamschoolsfoundation.org
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SCHOOL BOARD UPDATE

The board of directors of Bellingham Public Schools visits schools regularly to learn about areas of focus and classroom activities. Here are three visits that highlight inclusion work and social emotional learning.

Inclusion at Columbia: the power of belonging

Columbia Elementary School's staff and students met with school board members and district leadership to showcase the school's inclusion journey and the power of belonging. Principal Minh Nguyen talked about the staff's intentional work over the last five years to understand and implement inclusionary practices. Inclusion, in this context, means integrating students served in Special Education into the least restrictive environment with age alike peers, as opposed to supporting students in separate classrooms.

This shared practice is seen across all district schools, with more students working with typically developing peers in K-12 classes.



■ School board director Camille Diaz Hackler with Columbia student



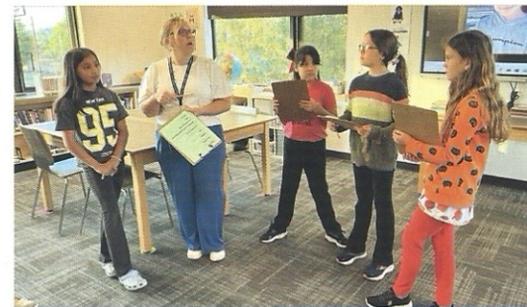
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Our words matter: care and respect at Parkview

The school board recently visited Parkview Elementary School where students shared key takeaways from social emotional learning with the theme "our words matter." Principal Stephanie Johnson and assistant principal Erica Rasmussen shared ways students and staff feel and show care and respect, an exercise where students and staff wrote handwritten notes on paper hearts how they express care and respect at school and what makes them feel cared for and respected. At a Parkview PTO meeting, the administrators led a similar exercise with parents asking what words and actions have made their family feel cared for and respected.

During the board visit, Johnson and Rasmussen also talked about the benefits they see in the school with inclusionary practices – i.e. including students who are served in Special Education within general

education classrooms to the greatest extent possible. Johnson shared that by working closely as a staff, they are dismantling silos within the school to a create more intentional, collaborative approach.



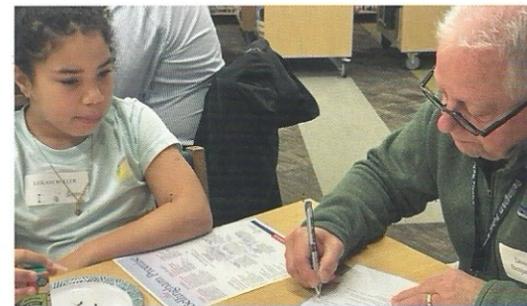
■ Parkview assistant principal Erica Rasmussen presents with students



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Birchwood roundtable: students feel safe, heard and cared for

The school board met with a group of students from Birchwood Elementary School earlier this school year. Birchwood students said school feels like a "ginormous playdate" and a place where friends, teachers and staff make them feel safe, heard and truly cared for. They shared that they are proud of their learning, love seeing their friends every day, and appreciate how everyone looks out for one another. From favorite teachers to friends across all grades, Birchwood feels like home. The board generally holds two to three student roundtables per school year.



■ School board director Doug Benjamin and a Birchwood student



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