Bellingham Public Schools offers a full-time kindergarten program at all elementary schools at no cost to district families. All children who are five before Sept. 1 are ready for kindergarten! Kindergarten open houses and tours begin in May.

**Open House and Tours**

Contact your neighborhood school to register. For your attendance area school and what to bring, visit bellinghamschools.org/kindergarten or call 360-676-6400.

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Dear Community,

Happy Spring! We’re proud to share some updates with you about our district.

Over the last few years, while we’ve opened a number of new schools thanks to voter support of our facility bonds, this was the first time we did it mid-year! It was quite a big transition, but well worth it. The new Sehome High has been well-received by the community. We opened the new Central Kitchen this winter and we continue to ramp up operations at the site to provide healthy food to all school cafeterias. We also have plans for a new administration building, approved on recent bonds. The current 1908 brick building, which served as the former Roeder Elementary School, has outlived its viability.

Inside this issue, we have highlighted some of our work in social-emotional learning, which are important lessons for the safety and emotional wellness of all students.

And a final note: Bellingham continues to grow, especially in the north part of the city and some of our schools are over-enrolled, particularly Shuksan and Silver Beach. Our attendance areas committee that consists of staff, parents and principals are working on potential adjustments to school boundaries at the elementary and middle schools.

Thank you for your continuing support.

GREG BAKER
Superintendent of Schools

**Social-emotional learning and building safe schools**

**Above:** The rebuilt Sehome High School opened in late January and was celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Feb. 1. See page 3 for more on our building projects.
We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children. We will empower every child to discover and develop a passion, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life.

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.

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.

We develop students and graduates who are:
• 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,
• leaders, collaborators and team players,
• dependable and responsible people,
• confident individuals who continuously challenge themselves,
• respectful and compassionate humans,
• honest and ethical citizens who act with integrity,
• healthy, active individuals,
• critical thinkers and problem solvers,
• effective communicators,
• innovators and creators, and
• well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.

We will accomplish this through:

**Key Strategies**

**Innovation and Flexibility**
We are innovative and flexible in how we support the diverse needs and learning styles of our students. We embrace change and outside-of-the-box thinking and know that this requires a high level of trust and engagement with our community.

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**
We commit to facilitating change that will lead to 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, disability, language and culture.

**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.

**Great Teaching with Strong Support**
Culturally-responsive instruction occurs in every classroom, every day, resulting in high levels of learning. We support instruction through effective leadership, ongoing staff learning, and a diverse staff reflective of our students, who establish safe and engaging learning environments where all students feel a sense of belonging.

**A One Schoolhouse Approach**
All our schools are part of a larger One Schoolhouse. We provide an equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all students.

**Student, Family, and Community Engagement**
We develop partnerships and authentically engage with a wide variety of stakeholders, including families and community partners. We acknowledge barriers and work to minimize them, in order to support the success of all students.

RIGHT: Sehome students walk through the doors of the newly rebuilt Sehome High on Jan. 30 for their first day of school in the new building.
District Office

After engaging with the public via email, phone and in-person meetings, including a community forum in February, the District Office will move to the Barkley district. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. While some neighbors are curious about the future of the building on Dupont Street once sold, many community members say they prefer the plan to relocate to Barkley for the financial savings and the better accommodation of future growth. Planning and building will take approximately two years.

New Sehome High School opens!

Sehome High School staff and students started the second semester in the new building at the end of January. The remainder of the project includes taking down and salvaging the old building, putting in fields and new parking, and adding landscaping. The project will be finished in August 2019. For a photographic review of the Sehome project and a look at fun facts of the construction in the ribbon-cutting program, go to https://www.flickr.com/gp/bellinghamschools. For example, did you know, 88,000 bricks were used?

Transportation garage

Voters approved the 2013 and 2018 bonds, which included funding to renovate an existing building at 1801 James Street where we maintain and repair our school buses. Interior renovations will include improved service bays, vehicle hoists, fluid and air distribution, parts and tool storage, heating and ventilation systems, electrical systems, windows and roof. We will go out to bid for this project soon. Frequently asked questions and details about the project can be found online at bellinghamschools.org/facilities-project.

Central Kitchen now operational

The Central Kitchen staff has been ramping up production. For a video tour, go to: https://bellingham.wistia.com/medias/e1iw9akdx_c. Or scan this QR code.
In Bellingham Public Schools, our schools and classrooms implement social and emotional learning (SEL) in a variety of ways. With the adoption of SEL curriculum last spring, practices have taken hold across the district. These practices enhance and develop the character-based outcomes in The Bellingham Promise (see page 2), those that are not taught in a standard textbook or on a worksheet. Social-emotional learning develops leaders and team players, and fosters confidence, respect and compassion, to name only a few outcomes. This learning also underscores the core beliefs in The Promise that all children should be loved and that the whole child is important.

Like most elementary schools this school year, principal Mylo Allen and his staff at Parkview Elementary School have worked diligently on the implementation of social-emotional learning. Allen says that the morning circle his school’s area of focus with a goal of every child in the school participating. “At its core,” he says, “the use of this morning meeting is an intentional strategy to develop and strengthen the relationships within each classroom.” All classrooms at Parkview use the morning circle structure. In addition, staff across the district have implemented other components of SEL curriculum this year. These include cross-grade “buddy” classroom activities that strengthen student relationships schoolwide, and activities that highlight positive character traits such as cooperation. Elementary staff have also attended SEL professional development that helps them create a classroom environment that supports all students.

Two Parkview classroom teachers share SEL reflections below.

**MICHELLE JACOBS**
**KINDERGARTEN TEACHER**

Morning circles are a wonderful way to set the tone for the day and the SEL curriculum has provided new creative ideas, routines and ways to connect with each other. In kindergarten, we learn to take care of ourselves, take care of each other, and take care of our school. We practice these guiding concepts through our daily interactions, stories, and activities, as well as during morning meetings.

Having a daily morning meeting provides opportunities for us to show loving-kindness, share experiences, talk about our day, problem solve, and model positive social interactions.

**MORGAN MASSEY**
**FIRST GRADE TEACHER**

In first grade, morning circle begins with a greeting. This can be a handshake, high-fives, songs, and more. Greeting each student every day lets them know it is important they are here. In my classroom, we reveal a “secret student” every week. I provide clues about the student, then students get to interview and ask the student questions about themselves. This is one way we are getting to know each other.

Using the SEL curriculum has had many positive impacts on our classroom. From day one, students develop an understanding that this classroom is a place where they are cared for and that their presence is important. Students are given structured opportunities to develop social skills that they will carry with them throughout their lives. Implementing the SEL curriculum provides me as a teacher with the tools and the time to teach and develop social-emotional skills which are critical to learning and to life in general. I am so appreciative of Bellingham Public Schools for investing in this important work and in supporting the whole child.
The transition from elementary to middle school can be challenging. Finding even one friend can make the transition easier. And being part of a network—or web—of support within the school can help even more.

This philosophy drives the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) mentorship program in our middle schools. A middle school version of the LINK mentorship program at our high schools, it is designed to empower students to be leaders and community builders, Shuksan Middle School WEB coordinator and language arts teacher Erin Meese said.

“The point is to deputize your students to build the kind of culture you want to see,” she said.

Younger students receive mentoring and build connections, while older students gain leadership experience.

WEB focuses its efforts on empowering older students to connect with and mentor incoming sixth graders. Last spring, Shuksan staff identified around 40 student mentors. These eighth-grade students, along with a few seventh graders, participated in ten hours of training over the summer.

Then, in August, all sixth graders were personally invited to a day-long orientation that included teambuilders, small group activities and tours. Meese said the three hopes for sixth graders after orientation were that they would feel safe, informed, and connected at school.

“I don’t think WEB is a cure-all, but it’s a really great step in the right direction,” Meese said. “The fact it is student-led makes me love it even more.”

Each mentor has a group of students they keep in touch with socially and academically.

Administrators, teachers, and students report that the year started off more smoothly and community built more quickly than in years past. “Teachers resoundingly reported it was the calmest first day of school ever,” Meese said.

Kulshan administrators reported a similar result in their school, which began WEB as well this fall. Counselor Aaron Tiger called WEB “a game-changer.”

Kulshan assistant principal Kevin Terpstra shared that he believes interpersonal conflicts resulting in need for adult intervention were down across the school, and attributed this to the increase in connection and community among students through WEB.

Social activities have continued through the year, with mentors visiting classes for academic support and organizing lunchtime interest tables and trivia contests. Mentors spend time greeting students, touching base, and asking them how school is going.

**SEL staff training is key to success**

A critical component of any curriculum adoption is staff professional development. For the SEL curriculum at the elementary level, this has been provided by Sound Discipline, a program that introduces practices that level the playing field, get to the root of behavior issues, and cultivate skills in social-emotional teaching and learning. Through two specific trainings, Building Resiliency and Positive Discipline in the Classroom, our elementary staff have been given some foundational tools to begin.

After a recent staff learning day, principal Arionda Feeney at Carl Cozier Elementary School reflected on her school’s SEL professional development.

“I have been thinking about the power of this training. The day was truly inspiring. Thank you for believing in our school and prioritizing the resources to make this happen.”

Feeney also jotted down a few quotes from her Cozier staff following the first day of their SEL training. These reflections go to the core of social-emotional work in schools:

“All children want to feel a sense of belonging and significance.”

“Children do not make a conscious choice to misbehave.”

“Positive classroom environments support all learners.”

**Above:** Shuksan Middle School WEB mentors with incoming sixth grades in August 2018.
Retired teachers who never retire

Volunteer coordinator Jennifer Gaer in Bellingham Public Schools noticed that many of her volunteers were retired teachers and joked that thankfully retired teachers never really retire.

Harriet Arkley is one of the retired educators who continues to help students learn and grow.

Harriet has volunteered with Bellingham Public Schools for eight years. She was an elementary school teacher who taught in Washington and Michigan and later became an elementary school principal in Illinois. After retirement, she moved to Bellingham and authored a book called “The Good News Chair” based on her time as an educator.

Harriet began volunteering with teacher Jennifer Pittis at Larrabee and then moved to Columbia when Pittis began teaching there.

“Harriet is creative and hardworking as well as a gifted educator,” Pittis said. “She helps kids read, write and do academics, but enjoys going out to recess with them, sharing a book with the class or helping me clean up.”

One popular activity Harriet does with the second graders at Columbia is knitting, noting that knitting supports fine-motor skills, concentration and reading skills.

“Volunteering in a primary classroom keeps me connected to my deeply rewarding career as an educator,” Harriet said.

Volunteer Jeff Eastman has been helping at Happy Valley since last year. Before retiring, Jeff taught for 44 years in the Department of Defense Dependent Schools, in the Philippines, in Japan and in England at both the elementary and middle school levels.

At Happy Valley, Jeff has volunteered in Tara Vodopich’s third grade class.

“Working with Mr. Eastman for the past two school years has been fantastic,” said Vodopich. “From identifying rocks to completing engineering challenges to designing sets for our school musical, Mr. Eastman’s creativity and expertise have been such a gift to me and my students.”

Jeff said he loves volunteering at Happy Valley and looks forward to continuing to do so.

“Volunteering in the Bellingham schools has been so much fun due to the enthusiasm, creativity and talent the students have shown in their work, whether it be in creative problem solving activities, dramatic endeavors or Lego robotics,” Jeff said. “Volunteering with the youth helps one to maintain a youthful outlook on life and confidence in the future of our world as a whole.”

Another volunteer, Tara Reynolds, was an educator for more than 30 years as a classroom teacher and administrator. She retired as the assistant superintendent for the Office of Special Education and Psychological Services in Miami, Florida. Tara then moved to Bellingham to be closer to family.

Also a volunteer in Vodopich’s class, she helps with a variety of projects including teaching cursive. Vodopich noticed her cursive handwriting and asked if she would like to teach it as time allowed.

If you are interested in volunteering, visit our Volunteer Program online to learn more, or call 360-647-6848.

Sustainable Sehome cafeteria, first in district

The rebuilt Sehome High opened with not only new classroom spaces, but to a bright cafeteria with new practices in sustainability. For the first time in the recent history of Bellingham Public Schools, students are using real utensils, plates and bowls, replacing the single use plastic, disposable milk cartons and old dishware or paper products. Milk is now dispensed into reusable cups. A well-balanced, healthy lunch with ZERO WASTE is now the standard in the new Sehome cafeteria and a model for all lunchrooms in Bellingham Public Schools.

SHOWN HERE: The first lunch served at Sehome included French toast served with homemade berry sauce (instead of sugar-laden syrup), sausages, and a brand new salad bar with vegetable and fruit options. No landfill waste in sight.
Does place matter for learning?

QUENBY PETERSON: Yes, place matters. The physical quality of our schools sends a message to our families and children that they are valued. A high-quality, clean, safe environment is important; it trickles down to the learning and signals to our students that they matter.

Are there school projects or rebuilds that you feel have really made a difference?

JENN MASON: As a board member, the new Sehome truly accommodates our students in the way it’s designed. It’s an intentional design to help students connect with each other and to the environment. As the parent of a child who uses a wheelchair, I see the benefits of having new schools, including Happy Valley, that are designed to be more cognizant of students who have disabilities.

QUENBY PETERSON: I hear about Sehome every day, and the district has done a great job expanding spaces and bringing all the students together. The principal reported that on the first day of being in the new school, kids were saying they had no idea so many other students attended Sehome.

I see how the Central Kitchen has such great potential to impact the health of our kids. Bellingham High School and Whatcom Middle School were old but have been made new again. We haven’t even talked about Options! It’s a great space that is safe and a place for kids to grow and feel welcome.

JENN MASON: Options went from portables in the back side of a building into a space that is a capital project pinnacle. It’s so stunning. It sends a strong message to our students and their families. I like that our new schools are designed to have our preschool and GRADS parents more front and center.

We’re in the beginning stages of determining next steps for our district office. Is it a “place that matters?”

JENN MASON: To me, the current district office doesn’t feel like a space that is inviting to the community. We should have a space that feels like everyone is welcome any time. From parking to the building layout, the accessibility insufficiencies send a message, an unintentional message, that this space isn’t for everyone. We want people to be engaged to the district and in order to be more engaged, we need them to feel more comfortable.

QUENBY PETERSON: The district office needs a more modern facility with greater efficiencies. It’s a necessity to have ample space for people to gather and park. If you can’t find a parking spot or if you can’t access the building, it isn’t a place that is available to everyone.

JENN MASON: Aesthetics are a visual cue of how we’re valued. If we provide comfortable, beautiful spaces, it tells staff and our community that we value all of them.

ABOVE: Directors Jenn Mason (left) and Quenby Peterson visited the Bellingham Family Partnership Program in March.
Kulshan student refurbishes antique desk

According to Kulshan Middle School career and technical education (CTE) teacher Rob Hendricks, Jaxson Hall was the perfect student to assist in bringing back to life an antique student desk. Hendricks and his wife Katherine found the old desk in the corner of a Lynden antique store. They purchased it with the purpose to bring it into his school’s workshop as part of his program’s emphasis on recycling, reducing and re-using.

Jaxson, currently an eighth grader at Kulshan, methodically took apart the 1920’s desk, sandblasting and painting the iron piece by piece, and fixing and seamlessly gluing the broken wooden back. After re-staining the wood, he then put everything back together to its refurbished condition. Except for a little help with the staining from his grandfather Mike Hall, who happens to be a retired shop teacher from Fairhaven Middle School (see photo below), Jaxson took on this project solo and used his growing skills with shop machines and tools to make it beautiful again.

When we asked Jaxson if he had a favorite tool or machine in the shop, he had the answer of a craftsman. “It’s hard to pick which tool is my favorite because each tool has its own use,” he said.

Jaxson is excited to expand his technical skills next year in high school with equipment he hasn’t used yet.

Jaxson’s desk project, and many others like it, are part of the Kulshan CTE program where Hendricks introduces the concept of “Reduce, Recycle, and Reuse” to his students, making connections between how their new skills can improve their lives and the larger world. With hands-on experience in the shop, he wants his students to become “renaissance individuals,” discovering how things work and how to fix them.

“Each year, many appliances, bikes, toys, furniture, etc. end up in our landfills,” Hendricks says. “Many of these items could easily have been repaired or re-purposed.”

The refurbished 1920’s desk was recently on display in the district office, the former Roeder Elementary School that was built in 1908 (photo below).