

# What's news in Tahoma schools?

Presented as a community service by the VOICE of the Valley and Tahoma School District

## School District highlights

### Community invited to watershed event

The annual community screening of the Watershed Report will be held on Friday, Jan. 13 at 7 p.m. in the Tahoma Middle School Theatre, 24425 SE 216th Way.

The community screening is presented by Tahoma School District, the City of Maple Valley, and the Friends of the Cedar River Watershed. The presentation is centered on a video that is researched and assembled by students in school districts throughout the Cedar River watershed. Updated every year, these professionally produced, student narrated short movies report on positive sustainability trends in the 13 school districts and 28 cities of the greater Cedar River - Lake Washington Watershed.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the public is invited.

### School resumes Wednesday

Classes resume on Wednesday, Jan. 4 in Tahoma schools. Teachers will be at work on Jan. 3 but will be involved in professional staff development activities.

Students will be on early release schedules on Friday, Jan. 13, which is a professional staff development day. Students and staff will observe the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday on Jan. 16. Students will not attend school on Jan. 27, which is semester break day.

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## Year's big story continues: Overcrowded schools

Late December and early January traditionally spawn many news stories that review the big events of the old year and predictions or projections of what is to come in the new year. Without a doubt, the biggest story for the Tahoma School District in 2011 and for many years to come is how to deal with overcrowded schools and future enrollment growth.

Following the failure of the \$125 million bond measure last April, the school district commissioned a citizen committee to look at short- and long-term solutions to school overcrowding. The committee worked for five months and created a report to the school board that outlined an array of potential solutions. The school board has begun its review of the report and already has asked for additional information regarding several proposals. Work will continue over the next few months toward identifying potential solutions.

This newsletter will run a series of stories and charts over the next few weeks to illustrate the enrollment issues that exist in the school district and to outline efforts by the school board, staff and a group of community members to find solutions.

This week, the focus is on enrollment capacity, which has created a need for additional classroom and support spaces. Schools are designed with a peak capacity in mind. Facilities at each school are in place to accommodate that peak capacity, which is defined as 85 percent occupancy. In Tahoma, all buildings have exceeded peak capacity except at Tahoma Middle School and Cedar River Middle School.

When schools see their enrollment rise beyond peak capacity, compromises must be made in order to provide enough seats for students. What that usually means is adding portable classrooms to a school campus. Tahoma has portable classrooms on every school campus. Tahoma High

### Portable classrooms: How does Tahoma compare?

School District	Number of Portables	Total district enrollment
Tahoma	84	7,400
Auburn	66	14,275
Enumclaw	30	4,230
Federal Way	106	21,149
Issaquah	163	16,627
Kent	139	25,929
Lake Washington	146	23,812
Mercer Island	25	3,870
Northshore	135	19,672
Riverview	27	3,100
Seattle	170	45,944

School, Lake Wilderness Elementary and Cedar River Middle School have entire villages of portable classrooms. Portable classrooms are intended to be temporary solutions but many of Tahoma's portable classrooms have been in use for decades.

The chart on this page provides a comparison of portable classrooms in Tahoma to those in neighboring districts. The chart indicates that Tahoma has a much higher proportion of its students in portable classrooms (about 25 percent of its students) than neighboring districts.

When no more portables can be added to school campuses, due to lack of space or local zoning ordinances, then other solutions must be tried. On most campuses, Tahoma has reached its maximum usable

space for portables. The school board is now looking at suggestions to use computer labs, music rooms and even gymnasium spaces as regular education classrooms.

When all usable classroom spaces have been taken and enrollment continues to increase, the district is left with two basic choices: Ask the community for a bond measure to build more classrooms or change the way students are educated. The latter option could involve year-round, multi-track schedules or having students go to school in two shifts a day, with half of students going in the morning and the other half in the late afternoon and evening.

These and other questions will be the focus of the school board's efforts in the coming months.