

# Tahoma Community News

October 2020

Tahoma School District

Maple Valley, WA 98038

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# Schools cope with COVID-19

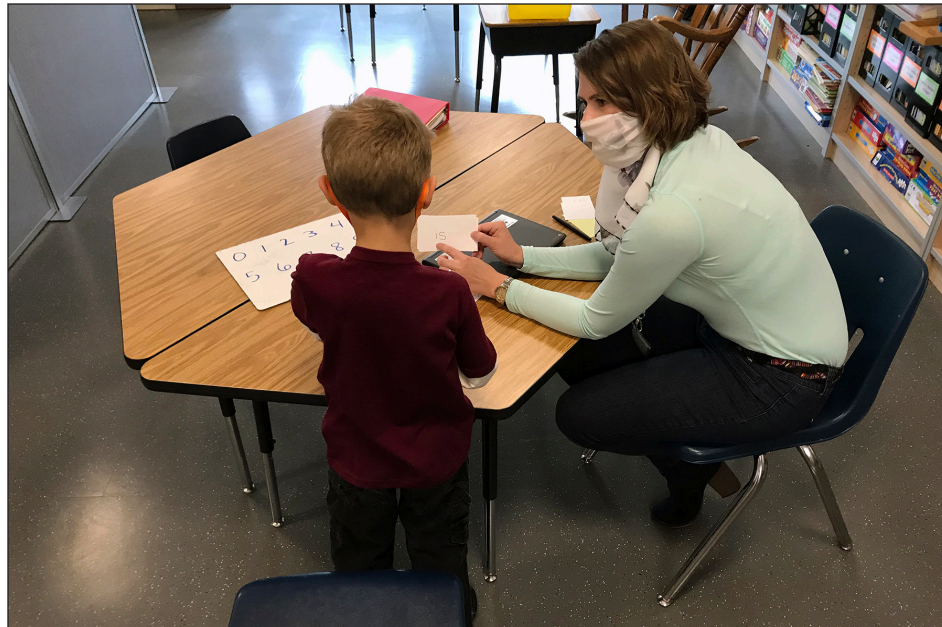
## Families, staff adapt to pandemic through remote learning

On Sept. 1, Tahoma students began the 2020-2021 school year as remote learners in front of computer screens instead of in their classrooms, as the global coronavirus pandemic continued. Student and staff safety is paramount, which means the school district is using data and guidance from county and state public health authorities as reopening decisions are made.

Tahoma is using the Washington State Department of Health Decision Tree to determine when and how it is safest to return to buildings. Health officials say that when King County is in the "moderate" risk level (between 25 and 75 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people over a 14-day period), that it's safe to bring back elementary students while also following protocols such as face coverings, social distancing and good hand washing and hygiene.

With Tahoma's class sizes, we will likely be able to bring back all students in kindergarten through grade 2 and still meet social distancing guidelines. At grades 3-5, we need to use an A/B schedule to reduce the number of students in the classroom at one time -- which is why students in those grades whose families want them to return to the building will be in a hybrid learning model. Preschool students are also able to come back to school, and we'll be communicating what that looks like in our Lake Wilderness Elementary program directly with those families.

When hybrid students are not in school buildings, they'll be learning asynchronously -- or independently, via videos,



Though most students continue to attend school through remote learning, Tahoma is working with a handful of special needs students in person.

hands-on learning and assignments completed at home.

The timing of the return will depend on the COVID-19 numbers for King County, but if all goes well we anticipate welcoming pre-kindergarten through Grade 2 students back to the buildings Oct. 19.

"Our COVID activity rates across the county have to stay where they're at or keep going down," Superintendent Mike Hanson said.

We understand that not all families are

comfortable or able to send their students back yet, for a variety of health and personal reasons. We're pleased to be able to offer a 100% remote learning model for those students.

To ensure every student has access to remote learning, the school district distributed nearly 6,000 Chromebook computers and hundreds of wifi hotspots to families of students.

Bus transportation will be available for students whose families selected the hy-

brid learning model, grades pre-kindergarten-5, who live outside safe-walking areas. Bus times and stops will be shared with families as soon as they are ready.

For middle and high school students, health officials recommend beginning hybrid learning after cases dip below 25 per 100,000 people over a 14-day period. The district is closely monitoring transmission rates as it makes plans to welcome more students back to classrooms.



A student in the Extended Enrichment childcare program focuses on remote learning while being socially distanced.

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## New tool aids infection control



A Tahoma School District custodian practices using a new tool as part of training to keep buildings clean and sanitary for students and staff. Electrostatic sprayers were purchased for each school, which allows custodians to spray surfaces such as desks and countertops each day with a disinfectant that is lethal to coronavirus. Keeping schools sanitary is essential to making it possible to return students to their classrooms this year.

## School Board hosts meetings on Zoom

The Tahoma School Board is meeting via Zoom videoconferencing during the pandemic. Community members are invited to attend.

The next meeting of the School Board is for its annual planning meetings. The full-day planning sessions will be from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 16 and Saturday, Oct. 17. To attend virtually, send an email to [TSDMessages@tahomasd.us](mailto:TSDMessages@tahomasd.us) requesting the links.

The topics that will be discussed include work to create a shared vision that will guide the next five years of focus and targets, the annual board reorganization, a discussion of the budget and district finances.

## Tahoma is hiring!

The Tahoma School District is hiring for substitute bus drivers, substitute custodians, substitute school nurses, paraeducators, Extended Enrichment Program assistants, playground assistants and more. If you are interested in joining our team and helping provide Tahoma students with an excellent education, please visit the Tahoma website and click on the Employment tab.

Or, for more information or answers to questions, call our Human Resources Department at 425-413-3444.

## County officials predict record turnout for Nov. 3 general election

### By King County Elections

King County Elections anticipates a record-setting 90% voter turnout for the Nov. 3 election. Here is useful information for voters, including significant dates and contact information:

#### Key Dates:

- October 14 – Ballots mailed.
- October 15 – Drop boxes open.
- October 19 – Voters should have their ballot in hand by the 10/19 mail delivery.
- October 26 – Deadline for online and mail voter registration.
- November 3 – Election Day! Drop boxes close at 8 p.m. sharp or ballots must be postmarked by today.
- November 23 – Final day to return the form to cure a challenge/fix a signature issue.
- November 24 – Certification Day, marks the official end of vote counting.

#### Register to Vote:

- Register to vote! The simplest way to



register to vote is to go online to [VoteWA.gov](http://VoteWA.gov). The deadline to register to vote online or return a paper registration form by mail is Monday, October 26.

- To be eligible to register to vote, you must be a US citizen, a Washington State resident, and not under Department of Corrections supervision for a Washington felony conviction. To cast a ballot, you must also be 18 by Election Day.

#### Make a Plan:

- Life is busy and creating a vote plan can help make sure you get your ballot in on

time. Make a vote plan today so that you know when you'll vote, who you'll vote for, and how you'll return your ballot. You can use the template available on the web: [www.kingcounty.gov/depts/elections.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/elections.aspx)

- King County Elections strongly recommends voting early in this election. Voting early means that you can rest easy on Election Day knowing that you did your part and it means that we are able to provide a more meaningful set of initial results on Election Night.

#### Drop Boxes:

- If you don't send back your ballot in the mail, return your ballot to a nearby Drop Box. Your ballot must be returned to a ballot drop box by 8 p.m. on Election Day.
- Ballot drop boxes are a secure and convenient way for voters to return their ballot. Constructed of half-inch thick steel, the boxes are bolted to concrete with steel bolts, with multiple locking mechanisms, no pry points, and equipped with tamper evident seals drop boxes.

- Just this month, King County Elections installed its newest drop boxes at the Black Diamond and Carnation libraries. There are 73 across the county, including one at Rock Creek Elementary School, 25700 Maple Valley-Black Diamond Road SE., and at the Hobart Store.

#### Voting during COVID-19:

- Given the pandemic, King County Elections encourages those who don't require assistance to vote from home to keep lines and crowds down and voters and staff safe.
- There are Vote Centers in seven locations: Elections HQ in Renton, CenturyLink Field Event Center and the Dempsey Indoor Center on the UW Campus in Seattle, Bellevue College, Accesso Showare Center in Kent, the Federal Way Performing Arts Center, and Kenmore City Hall.
- The Renton Vote Center—at King County Elections' headquarters—will be open throughout the voting period and all other locations will be open on Saturday 10/31, Monday 11/2, and Tuesday 11/3.

# Thibert to coordinate expanded wellness program

As one piece of Tahoma's emphasis on supports and services in the areas of mental health and wellness, the district hired a wellness coordinator to ensure that counseling staff have the resources they need to best support students, staff and families. Liz Thibert, formerly a counselor at Maple View Middle School, said she is excited about the opportunity for this new challenge.

"It was perfect timing for where my heart was, to lead partnerships and programs for our students and families. ... I love that our district is really putting an emphasis on wellness and social emotional health," Thibert said. She has loved being a school counselor, and helping not just students but also staff and families. After originally graduating from Western Washington University with a marketing degree and working in radio advertising, Thibert began volunteering with youth at her church.

"As I worked with youth, and remembered what it was like to be back in middle school and high school, I thought about the fact that I didn't have a champion on campus, and I needed one," Thibert recalled. "I thought about the things that I could have accomplished if I had that voice cheering me on at school."

So, she decided to study school counseling and earned her master's degree at Seattle Pacific University. After an internship in Lynnwood, Thibert accepted a counseling position at Cedar River Middle School, and has been with Tahoma ever since. While completing her National Board Certification, she began thinking about ideas that could help the district in a larger way.



Liz Thibert

"Tahoma counseling staff is phenomenal," Thibert said. However, the number of students that each counselor assists is high, and the challenges that Tahoma students and families face are growing each year. "We added more counseling staff to middle and high school, and also social emotional paras at the elementary school level. The fact that the district has such a dedicated focus on student and staff wellness and increasing our school counseling professionals is critical right now. I know we will see a big difference in the way that we're able to serve students."

In her new position, Thibert will help facilitate the district school counseling team and look at programs to make sure that Tahoma has the resources it needs. She won't work directly with students, but rather will

help acquire programs, curricula and other resources, and assist, when needed, in implementing them effectively.

"Our school counseling staff is a well-oiled machine. Sometimes when you're really rolling, it can be hard to see where you can add or shift something to be more effective in serving our students," she said. "I think everyone is working very hard for our families and students. My hope is to serve the counselors with resources and programs to reach even more students"

For example, at Maple View last year, the staff piloted a program to use the Second Step social emotional curriculum during health and fitness, working with students on goal setting and how to overcome obstacles. This year, during Future Ready and homeroom time at the middle school, some of those lessons will be incorporated at the middle school level. "It's a half an hour two or three days a week. ... it will have to be abbreviated, but we can still teach critical skills."

Also as part of the new position, Thibert will work with Community Resource Coordinator Stephanie Williams, who was hired to fill the new mental health position that the school district and the City of Maple Valley are partnering to fund. She sees this as an opportunity for the city and school district to collaborate on community wellness and achieve positive changes. "We're both brand new in our positions, so we can be creative. We're excited to pair together."

District Health and Fitness Content Specialist Tracy Krause, who works with

the counseling teams, said "Our school district, our families, and especially our young people are fortunate to have Liz Thibert, a long-time Tahoma school counselor and advocate for mental health supports for students, leading our wellness work at the district level. Her commitment to providing meaningful resources and services, along with her skilled leadership and vision, will help to create a system that truly meets our students' needs."

Outside of work, Thibert said she loves being a wife and the mom of an "energetic and super precocious" 5-year-old. Their favorite book to read together is "Blue Hat, Green Hat," by Sandra Boynton. She also loves eating pizza and Thai food; being outside, skiing, kayaking, and doing anything near the water or in nature; spending time with family and friends; her faith; and "any sport with a ball."

Asked what else she would like students, staff and families to know as she steps into this new role, Thibert said: "Self-care is not selfish. Have a self-care plan -- what do you really need when you know you're depleted, what can you do that fills your cup? So, whether that's connecting with friends, going on a walk, petting your dog, or going on a bike ride, find things that fill your cup and do them whether or not you want to -- we're going to need that with all the new things that we are going to be doing."

"There's also this idea of 'terrible first times,' and the fact that it's going to be a little uncomfortable and a little messy (this year)," she continued. "Reach out and ask if you need help."

## Unusual start does not diminish our educational mission and passion

In all of my years in education, first as a student and later as a teacher and principal and now as a superintendent, the start of the school year was a time of great excitement and wonder that set the tone for the rest of the year. Oddly enough, I feel the same way this fall, despite the many changes and challenges we face with COVID-19.

Our students, teachers and support staff are experiencing a most unusual start to the school year. The first day of school happened online, instead of in person. Despite that, it is fair to say that students were excited to be together again and to meet their new teachers, even if it happened on a computer instead of in person.

As we face the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic, I want our community to know that we are doing everything we can to ensure that our students will receive an education that will continue to serve them long beyond their school days.



Superintendent  
Mike Hanson

I love this quote, from Theodore Roosevelt: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." That is the Tahoma Way.

I am so proud to lead this school district. Our students, teachers, support staff and administrators have worked

tirelessly to design and carry out new ways to go to school. Last spring, when schools were ordered to close, we created an emergency remote learning program that kept students engaged in learning. It was not ideal and a far cry from the usual comprehensive education that our students were

accustomed to prior to the pandemic but it gave us time to find better solutions. Since then, we have improved and expanded remote learning. Still, it's just not the same as being in the classroom with a teacher.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that none of this would have been possible without our resilient students and the support of their families.

We are eager to return students to their classrooms. When that happens, we will follow health protocols that include face coverings for all students and staff, social distancing, hand washing, cleaning and disinfecting classrooms and common areas. We are in close communication with county and state health authorities, the state Superintendent of Public Instruction, and surrounding school districts to help us gauge how and when we can bring students back to school buildings safely.

We are following guidelines for school

districts that were created by the state Department of Health, known as the Decision Tree. This document is a key part of our decision-making process. As I write this in the first week of October, we are on track to bring our youngest students, in preschool through Grade 2, back into classrooms on Oct. 19. Other grades will follow in a hybrid learning model that has them in classrooms two days a week. However, we could also decide to postpone our students' return to classrooms if the community's COVID-19 transmission rate rises to unsafe levels.

So, as always, the beginning of a new school year is a mixture of excitement, surprises, inspiration and lots of hard work. We look forward to a time when all of our students and staff are together again in classrooms. Until then, we will continue to find new ways to serve our students and our community in these unusual times.

## Veteran educator takes on leadership role

From the time she was a young girl, Maret Unruh knew that she wanted to be a teacher. Inspired by teachers who helped shape Unruh into the person she is today, she said she wanted to help impact young people in a similar way.

"I felt nurtured, cared for, and stretched to take risks and become an even better version of myself," said Unruh, the new Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning for the district. "I felt that by serving in education I could make a difference in the lives of the students in my care."

The position that Unruh filled beginning July 1 has been unfilled since the former assistant director of Teaching and Learning, Amy Torrens-Harry, took a job with another school district in 2018.

Unruh started her teaching career in the Snohomish School District in 1997 after graduating from the University of Washington. She taught third, fourth and fifth grades, and later became an instructional coach. She most recently served as an



Maret Unruh

assistant principal at Tahoma High School.

"I love the relationships I get to build across the system and the interconnect- edness I experi- ence on a daily basis. Supporting teachers and principals in best practices in service of our kids fills my cup. I love partnering alongside other leaders in our system as we learn and grow together," Unruh said. "I count it as a privilege to help provide leadership in our system where kids are at the center of our decisions. I feel lucky to have a part in ensuring that our student experience is the best it can be."

Learning her new job in the midst of the pandemic is a challenge, and working to

respond to urgent needs and determining what to prioritize is difficult, she said. The team in the Teaching and Learning Department, as well as the support of other leaders throughout the system make it somewhat less overwhelming, though.

"I have had the privilege to learn alongside some amazing leaders in our system who invested their time and energy in helping me to grow. It is through this that I realized that I wanted to continue on in my journey to hone my skills and earn my administra- tive credential so that I could help provide leadership in our system," Unruh said.

When she isn't working, Unruh loves spending time with her family hiking local trails or walking their two labradors, Griffey and Bentley. Her son attends UW Foster School of Business, and her daughter, a senior at THS, hopes to become a Husky as well. Unruh says she's a daily visitor at Starbucks, and loves seeing former students and community members there.

## New principals eager to start, despite pandemic's challenges

Lake Wilderness Elementary School's new principal hasn't yet had a chance to see many of her students in person, but she is working hard to ensure they are getting a great education through remote learning until they can return to school.

After spending a good portion of her educational career in a large school district, Melanie Ready (pronounced "Reedy") said she is interest-



Melanie Ready

ed in working for Tahoma because of its foundational beliefs and its smaller feel.

"Tahoma is family oriented. It's definitely a community, and I value that so much," Ready said in a phone interview.

Growing up in a small town in Colorado, playing school was a favorite pastime that soon cemented into a plan for her some- day-profession.

"I knew from an early age that I wanted to be a teacher," Ready said.

Ready comes to Tahoma from the Mercer Island School District, where she was an associate principal at Northwood and West Mercer Elementary schools; before that, she was an administrative intern at Sawyer

Woods Elementary and previously worked as a mentor program specialist and a math instructional support specialist in the Kent School District.

She taught a variety of elementary school grades from 2000-2010, and earned her principal certification and master's degree in education from the University of Wash- ington.

### Carrie Burr, Tahoma High School Assistant Principal:

For all of her career in education, Carrie Burr has focused on advocating for stu- dents and building relationships -- first as a coach and P.E. teacher, then as athletics director and activities director and, now as an assistant principal at Tahoma High School.

Burr grew up in Seattle, and started coaching at age 19. In the years since, she has coached softball, basketball and soccer.

"What I loved about both athletics and working as an activities director was being involved in the culture of the school," said Burr, who started her career at West Seattle High School, then most recently worked at Ballard High School in Seattle.

She and her family recently moved to Maple Valley.



Carrie Burr

## 61 teachers, specialists join Tahoma for new school year

Tahoma School District hired 61 new certificated staff this year.

This number includes Equity Director & Special Projects Coordinator Emilie Hard; Maple View Principal Bill Weis; Lake Wilderness Principal Melanie Ready; and LWES Dean of Students Amanda Blashaw.

Some of the certificated staff members listed below are returning to Tahoma after time away:

- **Cedar River Elementary:** Isabella Isgrig, Erin Kalb, Tiffany Kalash.
- **Central Services Center:** Susan Ford, Lindsay Henry, Ian Maver, Kinsi Gregson, Emily Coleman.
- **Glacier Park Elementary:** Cynthia Walczuk, Jennifer Maver.
- **Lake Wilderness Elementary:** Lauren Kearney, Billiejo Wilson.
- **Maple View Middle School:** Rondelle Jeffery, Megan Corbett, Jarin Harada, Theodore Dodge, Delainey Boyes, Hillary Nadell.
- **Rock Creek Elementary:** Kylie Rademacher, Diana Johns, Daniel Schreiner.
- **Shadow Lake Elementary:** William Smith.
- **Special Services:** Carolyn Workman, Jenny Ritchey, Jennifer Chandler, Rebeka Angelino, Nicole Sasuga, Emily Broom.
- **Summit Trail Middle School:** Brianne LaVerdiere, Stephanie Bolinger, Ryan Pachciarz, Deborah Ohland.
- **Tahoma Elementary:** Sara VanderWel, Christine Bilka, Darcy Liechty, Amber Sermeno, Bailey Sandvold, Jack Lee.
- **Tahoma High School:** Carrie Burr, Kale Rasmussen, Jeniah Jackson, Timothy Stedman, Keith Jackson, Riley Germanis, Amanda Duarte, Joseph Palmer, Megan Walsh, Douglas Burnham, Alyna Morvice, George Roth, Jason Johnson, Andrew Romine, William Wheeler, Kate Barry, Rawna Hamann, John Hawley.



Tahoma Community Report is produced by the Tahoma School District Communication Office and mailed to all school district residents four times a year. Contact the Communication Office by calling 425-413-3409 or by email to Kevin Patterson, communication director, at: kpatters@tahomasd.us

The Tahoma School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.

The following employees are designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination:

#### Title IX Officer

Director of Human Resources  
25720 Maple Valley Highway  
Maple Valley, WA 98038  
425-413-3400  
TitleIX@tahomasd.us

#### ADA Coordinator

Director of Human Resources  
25720 Maple Valley Highway  
Maple Valley, WA 98038  
425-413-3400  
ADA@tahomasd.us

#### Section 504 Coordinator

Director of Special Services  
25720 Maple Valley Highway  
Maple Valley, WA 98038  
425-413-3400  
Section504@tahomasd.us