

Tahoma Community News

November 2018

Tahoma School District

Maple Valley, WA 98038

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New superintendent lends an ear

Listening sessions gather feedback from staff, students, community

When new Tahoma School District Superintendent Tony Giurado accepted the position last June, one of his immediate goals was to reach out to the community and school district staff to get an assessment of how the district is performing. After four months on the job, Giurado is winding up a listening tour that is helping him meet that communication goal.

Giurado has conducted listening sessions at each school, every school district department, in two community meetings, and with PTA/PTO members, unions, and students.

Giurado asked each group to prioritize feedback for the School Board in three main categories: What is working well, what needs improvement, and what isn't working well. He said he plans to compile all the feedback and present it to the board at the Nov. 20 work-study meeting.

In recent remarks to the Tahoma School Board, Giurado said the listening sessions have helped him gain a better understanding of the school district and community.

"I have been learning a lot about the district and seeing some patterns emerge" in comments from participants, he said.

In all of the meetings, participants worked in table groups to discuss and identify issues that were then shared and recorded.

Giurado began working in July, moving to Tahoma from Colorado, where he was Chief Academic Officer of the Mesa County Valley School District in Grand Junction, Colo.



Parents and community members attend a recent meeting with Superintendent Tony Giurado to share their impressions of how the school district is performing and how it can continue to improve.

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Technology review aims to identify best uses for electronic learning tools

A review of Tahoma School District's use of educational technology is underway, following the first meeting of the Technology Model Review Committee on Oct. 4 at Tahoma High School.

The volunteer committee is made up of teachers, technical support staff, School Board members, students, parents and other community members. Its task is to review how Tahoma uses educational technology, identify foundational beliefs and aspirations for technology use, conduct research and finally make recommendations to the School Board about the direction the district should pursue for classroom technology.

Dawn Wakeley, director of Teaching and Learning, told committee members that it is essential to put students at the "center of our process" and to focus on how technology can help students achieve academic progress. "Technology is a tool for us, connected to the outcomes we want," she said.

The School Board, last spring, called for creation of the committee after voters re-

jected a four-year technology levy renewal. With expiration of the old technology levy happening this year, the school district has reduced spending for classroom technology and suspended the proposed technology plan that was the basis for the levy request. The committee's work will be reviewed by the School Board before decisions are made about future technology funding in the district.

Three more meetings of the full model review committee are planned, on Nov. 1, Nov. 29, and Jan. 10. There also will be subcommittee meetings to work on specific issues, the results of which will be brought back to the full committee. A recommendation will be brought to the School Board on Feb. 12.

Once the committee has completed its work and it has been reviewed by the School Board, a new district technology plan can be crafted. The plan, created by the existing Technology Advisory Committee, also must be approved by the School Board and would form the basis for



Committee members got right to work at the Technology Model Review Committee's first meeting on Oct. 4.

future technology levy requests.

Committee members were provided with background documents focused on classroom technology, including student technology standards published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). They also read articles dealing with how technology is being applied in

classrooms and what skills will be in demand as students move into jobs and careers, including digital literacy.

The next committee meeting will focus on research, gaps in the district's current reality and its aspirations for classroom technology, and the start of constructing a model technology plan.

State funding plan's impact seen in school budget

The Tahoma School Board completed its annual budget process on Aug. 28 when it approved a budget for the 2018-19 school year. The board will revisit the budget process soon to make adjustments for the recently approved labor contract for the district's teachers.

This year's budget was the first to fall within new state funding and budgeting procedures that are part of the McCleary school funding decision approved by the state Legislature. One element of the new budget rules from the state is a requirement that school districts make four-year budget projections in addition to the annual budget. Another big change is that there is no longer a state salary scale for teachers, which means each school district must create its own salary structure as part of contract negotiations.

The 2018-2019 budget has sufficient revenue to pay for operating costs and leave the district with a healthy fund balance reserve. Unfortunately, the next three years look much different and will force the district to tighten spending and use about half of its reserve funds to balance the budget.

"We continue to strive to be below budget," Lori Cloud, assistant superintendent and director of finance, told the School Board during the budget presentation.

Revenue for the 2018-2019 school year is projected to be \$118,779,855, which is about \$19 million more than 2017-2018, due mainly to increased state education funding. Spending is projected to be \$112,241,746, which means about \$5.3 million will be added to the district's reserves for a total fund balance of \$23.3 million.

Expenditures include a pay increase in the 2018-2019

year for non-teaching staff, which is part of the current contract and is designed to bring their compensation up to the average of surrounding school districts. Because the new TEA-TSD agreement was not reached before the School Board had to approve the budget, a placeholder of a 3.1 percent increase was included. Now that the new contract has been approved, related budget details are being determined and a budget "extension" (addendum) will be filed with the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. It is a normal process for many districts, and especially so this year, Cloud told the board.

School Board President Mary Jane Glaser said it is very difficult to compare finances with other districts now, due to the elimination of the state salary schedule for teachers. However, because Tahoma's per-pupil funding is lower than most other districts in the Puget Sound area, Glaser said she is "fired up," and pledged to advocate on behalf of Tahoma to area legislators for a fix.

The budget forecast beyond next school year is not rosy, despite improved state funding. The district will have to use its reserve fund to balance the budget, beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, and is projected to cut its reserve in half by 2022.

Cloud said her projections are based on conservative revenue and spending assumptions, which include the reduced level of local levy funding (part of the McCleary funding plan that cuts Tahoma's local levy by 50 percent) and annual state revenue increases of 1.9 percent. The projections also include an annual reduction in state revenue of \$3 million because

the district's exemption from complying with lower average class size in grades kindergarten-Grade 3 expires after the 2018-2019 school year. Additional classrooms and teachers would be needed to meet the state's target class size.

The budget calls for spending reserve funds to maintain classroom technology, which will not be supported by technology levy funds beyond 2018; a technology renewal levy failed last February.

Also included in the budget are funds to purchase additional school buses, using an unexpected allocation of state transportation dollars. A two-year bus levy that would have added buses to the fleet failed last February.

Cloud told the school board that the district recently received \$750,000 from the state Superintendent of Public Instruction's transportation office in recognition of the district's excellent transportation efficiency rating. The money came after the levy elections and the district was not notified in advance that it would receive funding, she said.

The School Board approved spending \$500,000 of the state money to purchase three additional buses. That purchase, along with buying six more buses paid for by reserve and state depreciation funding, could be sufficient to meet the district's immediate needs, Cloud said.

The annual budget process started in the spring after voters approved the Educational Programs and Operations Levy. In early July, the board members met for a lengthy work-study session. Later that month, the board held a public hearing about the budget. Three community members attended and spoke about the budget.

Tahoma Schools Foundation seeks support to do more

Before last June's Brandi Carlile concert to benefit the Tahoma Schools Foundation, many local residents may not have heard of the foundation. And even though the group's name recognition has increased, some parents and community members may still be wondering exactly what the nonprofit does.

One of the top priorities of the group is to fund Kindergarten Camp, which is held just before school begins each fall. The idea behind the camp is to increase kindergarten readiness. Kindergarten Camp brings in children from across the district to learn from Tahoma kindergarten teachers before school begins each fall. This year's camp was the third one that the foundation has helped fund; they donated \$15,000.



Want to contribute?

Visit the TSF web page:
<https://tahomaschools-foundation.org/>

"Kindergarten Camp is an extra boost for those students who need it either academically or socially. This extra four days allows these children to gain confidence, experience expectations, and set them on the right path on the first day of kindergarten and beyond," said Krissy Riggs, who teaches kindergarten at Rock Creek and during Kindergarten Camp. "For those students who might have otherwise begun kindergarten unsure, a bit behind and nervous, instead this extra small-class time, scaffolded to support their needs, gives them a lift that lasts throughout kindergarten. Without this extra time, students who are struggling take much more time to catch up, and feel less confident as learners."

The foundation was created more than a quarter century ago, but was reorganized about four years ago with a review of the mission and vision, new board members and added objectives such as increasing kindergarten readiness. The Maple Valley Chamber of Commerce helped create the foundation in order to meet some unfunded needs of the school district. In 2009, the group was formally separated from the chamber and became its own independent group.



Harlem Wizards basketball games are a fun way to raise funds for the TSF.

Foundation board members emphasize that there is a difference between programs the PTA/PTO groups already provide for the schools and what the TSF works to accomplish. The two groups have partnered on some events, such as the popular Harlem Wizards basketball game they have hosted the past few years. The annual game brings in a touring team of comedic basketball players to challenge a team of teachers and staff members from across the district dubbed the "Tahoma Teaching Jedi."

The foundation partners with the PTA/PTO groups for souvenir sales, concessions and last year's pre-game carnival. In return, the groups receive a share of the profits. This year's game is scheduled for May 3 at the high school.

In addition to the Wizards game and Brandi Carlile concert, a major source of revenue for the foundation is monthly donations from district teachers and staff members, who contribute via automatic paycheck deductions.

School district reduces energy use, saves \$1.5 million

Since the fall of 2014, Tahoma has reduced its energy use 17 percent with the help of its consultant firm, McKinstry. That equates to about 930 metric tons of carbon. The district has been partnering with the company for nine years, employing energy-saving techniques that have added up to about \$1.5 million, McKinstry officials said.

The efforts started in 2009; between the start date and 2013, the district racked up a 27 percent energy savings. In that year, the "baseline" of energy consumption was reset. Similarly, McKinstry and the district decided to do another reset last year because of the transition and changes districtwide. Last year's energy usage will be

the new standard to measure against, but because the buildings are already operating at very high efficiency, experts don't expect to see much additional measurable change from this point out.

"We actually continued to save energy as we built that new baseline," said Lauren Frugé, operations manager for Energy Management with McKinstry. "The schools did really well. ... As we start tracking energy performance this year, we do not expect to see a lot of savings because we've already captured that."

On the list of things that Tahoma is doing correctly and well:

- Buildings are efficiently heated during the winter

- Lights are only on when in use, whenever possible. Lights needed for safety are the exception.

- Facilities staff are careful to make certain that systems are turned off during hours buildings are closed.

- Clear energy guidelines have been adopted across the district that define appropriate schedules and set points for temperatures.

- Green teams have been helpful in having students and staff take a pledge to raise awareness and doing student energy audits. They also help identify things that teachers can do, such as when to turn off lights. "Green teams are really instrumental in sharing the message, doing those

student energy audits and keeping up the enthusiasm," Frugé said.

Dawn Wakeley, executive director of Teaching & Learning and a member of the district Sustainability Committee, agreed that the Green Team contributions have been key. District and building leaders would like to have additional students join the Green Team at their respective buildings. It's a challenging task to try to affect the ingrained behaviors of others, Wakeley noted.

"It's not always the most glamorous club that's out there, but we are so appreciative to the students and staff for their enthusiasm and passion in helping do good work for our environment," she said.

Extensive research leads to new reading curriculum

Next school year, all third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students in the district will use a new reading curriculum called "Schoolwide Reading Fundamentals," which the School Board approved at its July 24 meeting. A few teachers at each elementary building are implementing the curriculum this year as early adopters, to help pave the way for a smooth transition for all teachers and students next year.

"We're very excited," said Shelley Huyler, who is the K-5 literacy specialist for the district. "We think this curriculum will be wonderful for fostering a love for reading and preparing our students for the best future possible as readers and thinkers."

A committee researched what other districts were using, evaluated potential new curriculum choices, narrowed the list and finally recommended that the board select Schoolwide. Tahoma Elementary Principal Jerry Gaston and Huyler co-chaired the committee; it also included one teacher per building in grades 3-5 (18 teachers total), three reading specialists and an instructional coach.

Gaston said the research the group completed was extensive, and was designed to determine what could be done to best meet the needs of students in their literacy growth and achievement, as well as maintain the district's long-standing reputation for being leaders in early literacy.

"There are two things, in the end, that really feel good," Gaston said. "One of them is that we have an adopted curriculum that will help to build on our successes and create even greater consistency across all campuses in the experiences

each student will have. Another is that it became the choice based on the thoughtful and diligent work of a team of teachers. It was such a spectacularly collaborative effort filled with deep questioning, and careful evaluating of each possibility -- the best adoption work I have ever been involved with to date."

The other two curriculum choices that were evaluated but not selected were Mondo Bookshop and Lucy Calkins Reading Units of Study. Lucy Calkins came in as a close second choice; Mondo was the most expensive of those that were in the running. Each program was evaluated in areas including content and organization, text format, Tahoma reading area criteria, teacher's guide and more.

Schoolwide has two components that many of the committee members were excited about: equal emphasis on non-fiction and fiction; and, an assessment component that is provided within each lesson. The new curriculum is organized around a genre, rather than a theme, and allows students to self-select books from a much broader range of choices.

The estimated cost approved was \$3,500 per teacher; the total for 85 teachers with tax and shipping was estimated at \$357,000. The new program is replacing materials that are more than 15 years old. That curriculum, "Reader's Workshop," was created by then-director of Teaching and Learning Nancy Skeritt and former Glacier Park principal Emilie Hard, who is now Issaquah School District's assistant superintendent of Teaching and Learning.

City Council, School Board meet



Tahoma School Board and the Maple Valley City Council met in a joint work-study session on October 8 to talk about common issues, including efforts to raise awareness about suicide prevention and mental health needs in the community. The city and district also are revising joint-use agreements for facilities. In this photo, from left, are School Board Member Tami Henkel and City Councilors Syd Dawson and Erin Weaver.

Teachers, district agree to new contract

After several months of bargaining, the Tahoma Education Association and the Tahoma School District signed a new, three-year bargaining agreement. The contract was approved by 98 percent of TEA members, and with a 5-0 vote from the School Board.

"The representatives on the bargaining committee exemplified the spirit of collaboration that the Tahoma School District holds dear," School Board President Mary Jane Glaser said. "The school board was honored to approve the contract and to begin the new school year on a positive note."

The contract provides for an average of a 14.5 percent salary increase for certificated staff in the first year. The starting salary for a first-year teacher with a bachelor's degree

will be \$54,929. The salary schedule tops out at \$107,001 for a teacher with a master's degree, 90 credits, and 15 years' experience. Cost of living increases are provided in the second and third year of the contract.

"We believe this negotiated agreement will allow us to retain and attract high-quality educators that will continue our rich tradition of providing a world-class education for our 8,400 students," TEA President David Aaby and TSD Human Resources Director Mark Koch wrote in a joint announcement.

Classified staff members who belong to the Public School Employees of Washington are in year 4 of a 5-year contract designed to bring employee salaries more in line with surrounding districts.

New group serves highly capable students

Families of highly capable students are invited to learn more about a new nonprofit support group called PATH, an acronym for Parent Advocates for Tahoma's Highly Capable. The group was formed to create a "voice and support network" within Tahoma School District to help support highly capable students.

"Most people have the idea that gifted kids have it easy in school, but we find that's not the case," said Michelle Smart, PATH founder and president. "They struggle to find their

place both socially and academically."

PATH focuses on educating parents about different aspects of giftedness, organizing events to help gifted students connect with one another, and facilitating dialogue with the school district.

The group also invites families to visit their website at <http://www.TahomaPATH.org> and join their Facebook group PATH: Parent Advocates for Tahoma's Highly-capable. Questions can be sent to Michelle Smart at michelle@tahomapath.org.



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

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