



Great place to **LIVE, WORK, LEARN**

*Washoe County School District
makes a difference in Northern Nevada*



PHOTOS BY ERIC MARKS

Tackling challenges with eyes ON THE FUTURE

Washoe County School District helps students thrive during difficult time

BY DEBBIE ARRINGTON

From a population boom to a pandemic, Washoe County School District has faced its share of challenges. But through it all, students in the sprawling district have thrived.

Dr. Kristen McNeill takes great pride in the accomplishments of the district's students, teachers and staff.

"We're one of the largest districts in the country and one of the fastest to get back to in-person (instruction)," says the WCSD superintendent. "We opened a new elementary school during a pandemic."

Serving more than 62,000 students in 103 schools, WCSD missed about four months of in-person instruction, March-June 2020, due to COVID-19 restrictions. But as soon as possible, kids were back in their classrooms. All of the 2020-21 school year, the district's elementary schools held in-person classes. Middle- and high schools hosted hybrid learning as students gradually returned to campus.

As a community leader, WCSD impacts many more people than just families with school-age kids. With 8,000-plus employees, it also is the largest employer in Northern Nevada.

"We can't do it without them," says McNeill, who plans to retire at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. "Washoe County School District is a family; I truly, truly believe it. Our whole organization; we're all in this together. We could not do what we did without such a strong team."

Known for innovation, WCSD continues to make great strides. "I'm very proud of our work around inclusion, equity and diversity, social and emotional learning," McNeill notes.

Thanks to Washoe County voters for approving the 2016 capital funding ballot initiative, the district has aggressively built and opened new schools to

ease overcrowding due to Nevada's population surge. Washoe County grew by more than 13.5% since 2010. The building program represents an \$800 million investment in local schools.

Among the current projects is the new Procter R.

Hug High School, the first new high school built by the district in nearly two decades. With room for 2,200 students, the state-of-the-art, 295,000-square-foot facility will open in Fall 2022 and will replace the old Hug High School.

Schools are an investment in Washoe County's future. In addition to basic education, career technical training and other specialized programs will help

prepare the county's needed workforce. Coming soon is the district's new Debbie Smith Career and Technical Education Academy, slated to open in Fall 2024 on the old site of Procter R. Hug High School.

"Our students are college- and career ready when they graduate," McNeill says. "They're set up for success."

WCSD educators and students have earned national acclaim for their achievements in such areas as music education, STEM, and social-emotional learning. Educators, many of whom are board-certified, offer quality to their students and create a nurturing, caring, and safe environment at WCSD schools.

"What I'll remember most is working with some of the most dedicated people, educators and professionals in all areas," says McNeill, a former teacher. "And obviously, the time with students is very special."

WCSD continues to meet its challenges head on. McNeill notes the district is in a strong position to thrive along with its students, adding, "Challenges open doors for opportunity."

"Our students are college and career ready when they graduate. They're set up for success."

Dr. Kristen McNeill
Superintendent, Washoe County
School District



BY THE NUMBERS

Washoe County School District is one of the largest in the nation. How big is it?



62,166
students



103
schools



370
school buses
TRANSPORT
18,000
students daily



5 Million
meals served in
2020-21 school year



#8 in
Nation
for Advanced
Placement
Performance in 2020

TEACHER SNAPSHOT

4,630
instructional staff

408
nationally board
certified teachers

70%
teachers with a
Master's Degree or higher

99%
teaching within license area



These students lead by **EXAMPLE**

Success started in high school with inspiration, dedication & vision

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

What special characteristics do the outstanding students in the Washoe County School District share?

Judging by the accomplishments of recent high school graduates Alyssa Fromelius and Dawson Deal, both 18, they include inspiration to get on the academic track, dedication to stay there, and vision to fuel the consistency needed for the long term.

That's a demanding order, but both students show all those values.

Fromelius recently graduated with an associate in science degree and high school diploma from Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) High School. It allows students to earn a transferrable associate's degree and high school diploma simultaneously.

Now she's enrolled at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, the first in her family to attend college.

"I attended TMCC High School because I thought it was smart to experience some college before going off to a four-year university," says Fromelius.

During her three years there, she served in numerous leadership roles including president of the student government. "The environment helped me mature," she says. "I learned to work with people of all ages and backgrounds, together as one team."

At Johns Hopkins, she is on a path to graduate in 2025, with a bachelor's degree, majoring in public health with a minor in philosophy, "which should be an interesting course set," she says. Later, she'll consider a master's degree but "I'm definitely applying to medical school. I would like to do either trauma or emergency medicine, then disaster management."

Dawson Deal's path of passion has followed public service. During his career at Reed High School in Sparks, "Being involved in student leadership helped me find myself and what I wanted to do," he says.

So far, Deal has served as student body president three years running, and Western Region Representative for the Nevada Association of Student Councils.

Deal just entered the University of Nevada, Reno as a political science major, where "I want to be involved in similar capacities as at Reed. I just learned that the Associated Students of UNR accepted me into their program as a legislative intern. I'm excited to continue my passion: public service and serving the student body."

What does the future look like? "Graduate school or law school are options," he says. "Then I want to start in the realm of public service running for office; that's the goal and dream."

Deal credits his teachers at Reed High for his successes. "It was definitely the connections with the teachers and leadership advisors that really got me going."

Two model students, two different paths. What counsel do they have for their peers?

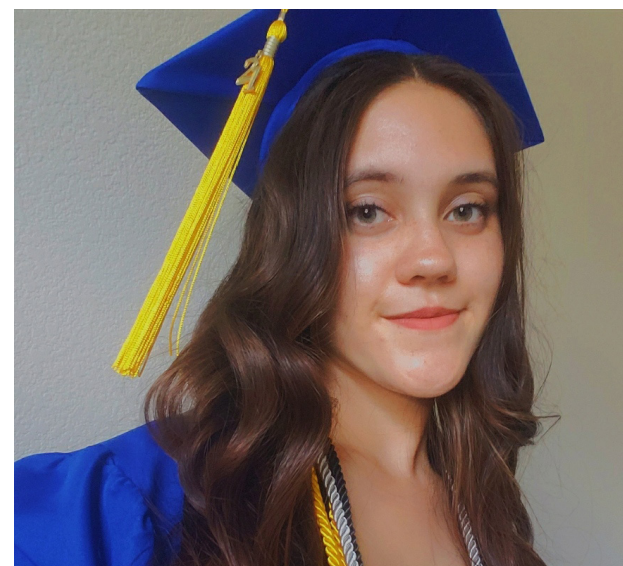
Says Fromelius: "Believe in yourself and push harder."

Adds Deal: "Positions of

leadership are about going outside of yourself to achieve greater goals."

Dawson Deal
Reed High School graduate

Dawson Deal hopes to continue to be a student leader at University of Nevada.
PHOTO COURTESY OF DAWSON DEAL



Alyssa Fromelius became the first in her family to attend college. She's now enrolled at Johns Hopkins University.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALYSSA FROMELIUS



Signature effort to prepare tomorrow's WORKFORCE

Career and technical education programs give high schools unique appeal

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

Washoe County schools prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs. But to do that effectively takes career training. Josh Hartzog serves as director of Signature Academies and Career Technical Education (CTE) for the Washoe County School District. He discussed the philosophy behind the academies and why CTE is so important.

Q: How do Signature Academies work? What do they do?

Hartzog: We have 12 comprehensive (traditionally structured) high schools across our district. Across those 12, we offer a range of CTE programs at each of them. Across the whole district, we offer about 36 CTE programs, but the intent of Signature Academies is to cluster or unite some of those CTE programs at 11 of the 12 schools into a more focused theme or specific concept.

The exception is Incline High School, which has CTE programs but not a signature program or academy.

At the remaining 11 high schools, we've worked to cluster some of the programs at each high school and turn them into themes. For example, at Hug High School, the theme is the Health and Human Services Academy, which is comprised of their Sports Medicine CTE program, their Culinary program and Human Development program.

At Galena High School, their signature program is the STEM Academy, comprised of their engineering program. And at Spanish Springs High School, its two signature academies are sports medicine and multimedia communications.

When we talk about the 11 signature-based programs-academies, the intent is to bestow upon each school a unique identity in the CTE space and to provide students the abilities to access high schools outside of their respective school zones.

(The district also has the Academy of Arts, Careers and Technology, which focuses on advanced career and technical education.)

Q: Can you tell me about your outreach to business and industry partners, securing a variety of opportunities for your students who wish to explore their options in the business/tech world while still in school (via internships) and after graduation?

H: We meet weekly with the Economic Development Authority of Western Nevada to exchange information about opportunities in our community — from apprenticeships to full-time careers. It is extremely important that we stay in real-time touch with potential employers and other partners. The lifeblood of that is a free-flowing exchange of information, coming from local businesses and companies.

When we talk about positioning a pipeline between high school and college, we also collaborate regularly with the Nevada System of Higher Education; here we see a lot of in-demand jobs and opportunities in the local regions.

"In any given year, we have about 38% of our high schoolers enrolled in at least one CTE course."

Josh Hartzog
Director, Signature Academies and Career and Technical Education (CTE), Washoe County School District



Q: What are the most popular CTE programs?

H: Medical programs, computer sciences and military programs are especially popular. In any given year, we have about 38% of our high schoolers enrolled in at least one CTE course.

Q: Doesn't Washoe County School District have a state-of-the-art facility coming soon?

H: Yes, we're super excited about the Debbie Smith Career and Technical Education Academy. It will be built on the campus of the current Procter R. Hug High School.

Construction will begin after the current Procter Hug (High) closes and moves to its new campus in the fall of 2022. Debbie Smith CTE Academy is scheduled to open in 2024-25. It will dramatically scale up our ability to provide schools that are all CTE all the time, and other opportunities to students across our district. We're looking forward to a state-of-the-art facility that will include engineering, medicine, and a robotics elective program.

BY THE NUMBERS



38%
high schoolers took a CTE course in 2020-21

READY FOR CAREERS

Since 2017, WCSD has increased its percentage of students accessing Career and Technical Education courses every year. Nearly one-fourth of 12th graders in 2020 were considered "CTE Completers," successfully completing three years of rigorous curriculum specific to a career or technical field.

With courses varied by high school, WCSD offers dozens of programs, divided into six areas of study:

Agriculture & Natural Resources

- Agriculture Business Systems
- Ag Mechanics Technology
- Ornamental Horticulture & Greenhouse Management
- Landscape Design & Management
- Veterinary Science

Business and Marketing

- Business Management
- Marketing

Education, Hospitality & Human Services

- Baking & Pastry
- Culinary Arts
- Foods & Nutrition
- Human Development
- Teaching & Training

Health Science & Public Safety

- Biomedical
- Community Health Science
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Military Science
- Sports Medicine

Information Technology & Media

- Animation
- Computer Science
- Cybersecurity
- Graphic Design
- Theater Technology
- Video Production
- Web Design & Development

Skilled & Technical Sciences

- Aerospace Engineering
- Automotive Technology
- Automation Technology
- Architectural & Civil Engineering
- Construction Technology
- Diesel Technology
- Drafting & Design
- Energy Technologies
- Environmental Engineering
- Manufacturing Technology
- Metalworking
- Welding Technology

For more information, visit
www.washoeschools.net/sacte

Making learning FUN

Pre-K gives early learners a head start

BY ANNE STOKES

Early childhood education is more than daycare. It builds a solid foundation for lifelong learning, setting the stage for elementary school, high school and beyond.

“What we do in early childhood is so critical to help support children as they move towards more formal education,” says Tina Springmeyer, director of Washoe County School District’s Child and Family Services Department. “We have a formalized curriculum and we focus on content standards in language and literacy, creative arts, math, science, physical development, social-emotional learning, all of those elements. We use state standards to support our work in addition to a research-based curriculum that supports young learning as well.”

Washoe County School District (WCSD) has close to 100 early childhood classrooms that serve young learners from infancy to age 5. Most of the programs offered are pre-K, designed for 4-year-olds just before they enter kindergarten. Special education programs also serve students from ages 3 to 5 and the district’s infant/toddler program for parenting teens serves students at Wooster and Hug high schools.

Pre-K programs use Frog Street curriculum, a research-based program that not only teaches reading, writing and arithmetic, but helps develop students’ social and emotional skills.

“We use conscious discipline, which supports our youngest learners in learning how to self-regulate, how to work through their emotions, and how to deal with conflict in a classroom setting,” Springmeyer says. “We really help our youngest learners learn how to navigate the day without mom and dad and learn how to work together with other children. They learn a host of emotions that help support them as young learners moving into higher-level grades.”

WCSD supports early learners’ families as well. Family advocates at schools provide parent education on transitioning from pre-K to kindergarten, pre-K standards as well as any aspect of the curriculum, depending on their student’s needs.

“We think it’s really important to have quality early childhood programming that really serves our families in our district and more importantly helps build that strong home-school connection,” Springmeyer says. “All of our programs I’d like to think are high quality.

We provide an environment where children can come and explore, experiment and learn through play-based activities. More importantly, it’s a great introduction for them before they go into formal education, so when they leave pre-K, they are ready and eager to learn and they’re excited about what’s coming for kindergarten.”

“We provide an environment where children can come and explore, experiment and learn through play-based activities.”

Tina Springmeyer

Director, WCSD Child and Family Services Department



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Washoe County School District offers a host of programs to help prepare students for kindergarten and elementary school:

Pre-K

The district’s general education early childhood programs offer full-day schedules, four days a week for 4-year-old students prior to entering kindergarten. Most of the programs are grant-funded and families must meet income requirements.

Special education

Early childhood education programs are federally mandated to serve students who qualify for special education. Programs serve students from ages 3 to 5 and have no income requirements to attend.

Infant/toddler program for parenting teens

At Earl Wooster and Procter R. Hug high schools, teen parents can use this on-site program for their infants and toddlers aged 6 weeks to 36 months. This full-day program is designed to give students the support they need to graduate high school and continue on to higher education.

To find out if your child is eligible for early childhood education programs through Washoe County School District, call the enrollment office at 775-321-3225, extension 2.

It's ELEMENTARY!

Early grades provide students with a solid foundation in academic and social skills

BY ANNE STOKES

While high school is oftentimes considered the foundation for success in adulthood, elementary school plays a critical role in students' future success. According to a National Research Council study, students who fall behind in reading by the third grade are less likely to graduate high school.

"In order for students to access curricula in upper education, they have to be able to be reading at their grade level," says Amy Hicks, principal of Hidden Valley Elementary School. "Our goal is to make sure that our students ... are well-rounded individuals ready for middle school!"

The Washoe County School District's elementary school curriculum supports a spectrum of student abilities. The district has several intervention programs for students performing below grade level as well as Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) for those who exceed standards. Certain reading comprehension and math curriculum are also available online for students. Just as important, however, are the soft skills that help them navigate everyday life.

"Social-emotional learning and a positive behavior support system are embedded in everything that we do," Hicks says. "In order for students to come to school and to be able to learn, they have to have all their primary needs met and we need to make sure that we are providing those opportunities and teaching them social skills to be able to

navigate the world because this is just a smaller scale of the world once they leave us."

And in elementary grades, students are able to learn those social skills, which become vital in adulthood, in a close cohort of peers before branching off into multiple classrooms a day in middle and high school.

"The relationship that the students have, particularly with their classroom teachers, it's like a family. It's a little community within those four walls," Hicks explains. "Sometimes there are disagreements, sometimes there are hard feelings, sometimes things happen, but it's how we work together within that community for a positive outcome."

Even though WCSD provides students with comprehensive curriculum and professional educators, Hicks notes that parents still play a vital early role in preparing their children for success in school.

"Reading is one of the most important things parents can do with their students," Hick says. "It builds a child's knowledge of print, it increases their vocabulary, and it builds all that background in language so by the time they come to school, they're ready to learn."

BLUE RIBBON STATUS

Five WCSD schools were named National Blue Ribbon Schools:

- **Lenz Elementary**
- **Hunsberger Elementary**
- **Caughlin Ranch Elementary**
- **Hunter Lake Elementary**
- **Depoali Middle School**

Gomm Elementary and **Mt Rose** have received nominations.

Kate Smith Elementary is designated a "Governor's STEM School," excelling in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

Dedicated Office of Family School Partnerships offers programs that help families such as Academic Parent Teacher Teams, Family Graduation Advocates, Parent University, and Parent Teacher Home Visits.



"The relationship that the students have, particularly with their classroom teachers, it's like a family."

Amy Hicks
Principal, Hidden Valley Elementary School



PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

Finding the RIGHT NOTES for success

Music, theater and arts programs help make middle school exciting

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

Amy Barthel understands the delicate transition students face in leaving elementary school and transitioning to middle school.

As the fine arts coordinator for the Washoe County School District (WCSD), she directs the music, art and theater programs for the district's 13,310 students who attend its 17 middle schools. It's a responsibility that shapes minds and hearts through high school and beyond.

"Middle school is where they start figuring out who they are and where they fit into the world," says Barthel, a musician herself. "Elementary school was fun, but middle school students naturally lose some engagement. Which is why music, art, theater and athletics are so important. Those programs give them a hook. Reading, writing and math are the reasons why we go to school, but everything else is what keeps the kids engaged."

"Fortunately, all sixth-graders are expected to choose a band, a choir or an orchestra course," Barthel says. "That's the key to our musical success — the opportunity for them to engage with one of the musical contents."

Tellingly, about a third of seventh and eighth graders continue on with music as an elective, she

says. "Music is exciting and rewarding, but can be very challenging," she says. "What's really exciting about it is it's a team effort. A music student's job as an individual is important, but the job of teammate is even more important."

Typically at the start, sixth graders get to choose between band (wind and percussion instrument), orchestra (stringed instruments) and choir (singing), she explains.

Next, the music teachers give an overview of all the instruments, structuring the introduction to encourage the students to make a connection with the instruments. "As in, 'Wow, that's the sound I want to learn how to make,'" Barthel says.

What about child prodigies? "It's very rare that a student with no experience will walk in and excel with their natural

abilities," she says. "Usually it's a case of them taking piano or violin lessons since they were (age) three. It's a myth that music is a talent, it's not. It is a skill that is learned with practice and hard work."

Barthel is an enthusiastic advocate of music students "finding like-minded people," she says. "When they do that, music creates a place where students feel like they have a home at school, a home away from home. They have family."

Amy Barthel
Fine arts coordinator, WCSD



DID YOU KNOW?

- Washoe County School District has been recognized among the Best Communities for Music Education by the National Association for Music Merchants. This award acknowledges "outstanding efforts by teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders who have made music education part of a well-rounded education."
- WCSD schools also offer fine arts courses in instrumental and vocal music, theater and performance arts, as well as visual arts.
- Most middle schools at WCSD operated on a sixth through eighth grade model, allowing students to be in middle school for three years and providing a stronger connection and engagement with the school.

Reaching higher, ACHIEVING MORE

High school success starts with supportive staff and teachers

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

With 103 schools attended by 62,166 students, the Washoe County School District is among the nation's largest and most innovative.

It enjoys a reputation as a community leader, and is known for its creative curricula, dedication of its staffs, and accomplishments of its student bodies.

Two examples are Procter R. Hug High School, with 1,700 students and a staff of 100, and Reno High School, with 1,960 students and 130 staff.

At Hug High School, fifth-year principal Cristina Oronoz and her staff emphasize equity as a guiding philosophy.

"We have a student population of 85 percent minorities, so we keep equity in the forefront," she says. "We have high expectations of our students because we believe that all students can learn, regardless of their backgrounds and ethnicities."

At Reno High School, Christy Briggs has taught English, newspaper, speech and leadership for 13 years.

"Our administration maintains the philosophy that teacher autonomy is a good thing, and our kids can see the results," she says. "Because of that, there is a lot of communication between the staff and the students."

Both schools offer lengthy menus of special programs to their students, which, say both educators, add to the academic and social successes of their schools.

For instance, at Hug High School — where several students have won National Merit Scholarships — students can participate in the Dual Credit Program of special classes. In this program, students can simultaneously earn both college credits and credits toward their high school diplomas. The program makes it possible for seniors to graduate with up to 12 transferable college credits.

Part of the district's GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program, Hug's Health Science Academy offers dual enrollment in partnership with the School of Medicine at University of Nevada, Reno.

Also, Hug High School offers a menu of themed Career Technical Education (CTE) courses, which foster leadership and social skills and are designed to prepare students for specialized careers after graduation. Its Health Science and Military Science academies are popular, Oronoz says.

When the new Procter R. Hug High School opens in August 2022, the state-of-the-art facility will further enhance learning, particularly CTE programs. The new campus also will allow more CTE programs to be offered.

One addition to Reno High's CTE program is its Engineering Track Program, in which students can sign up for a three-year series of engineering courses.

Also, its We the People chapter of the national



civic-education organization has won several state competitions and has competed in the national finals. Incredibly, Reno High's speech and debate program has joined the national competition for the last 40 years in a row, Briggs says.

Given that success is earned and not given, the question becomes: What is at the heart of these two schools' reputations and records of achievements?

"Our staff is here because they want to be here, which is one reason our graduation rate has increased to 86 percent pre-COVID," says Procter R. Hug's Oronoz. "We are a community that collaborates."

Briggs of Reno High explains, "We have a very cohesive, open staff that shares ideas and plans together, and students look at us as their second family. As teachers, we're growing our programs and getting out of the box, changing up lessons and curricula, within the standards."

HIGH SCHOOL **SNAPSHOT** ...AMONG NEVADA'S BEST!

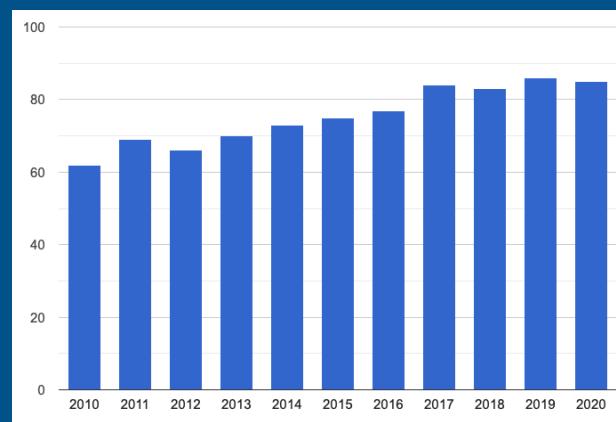
Washoe County School District is home to 19 high schools. Of those, seven are ranked among the Top 25 best public high schools in Nevada by Niche.com:

- #5 TMCC
- #6 Reno
- #7 Incline
- #10 AACT
- #12 Galena
- #23 McQueen
- #25 North Star



**Washoe County
School District**

GRADUATION RATES



2020 GRADUATES



4,131 Record number received diplomas



47% Earned College or Career Ready endorsement



50% Earned Advanced, Honors or CCR diploma

48% Qualified for Millennium scholarships

Inclusive path to SUCCESS

Students with special needs get the support they need

BY ANNE STOKES

As any educator can tell you, no two students are the same. Some need a little extra help to thrive. In the Washoe County School District, all students are given the support they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond.

"Many students just need the correct level of support in order to achieve their dreams. All children can succeed," says Jennifer Van Tress, Area Superintendent for Area 5, special education and early childhood. "We offer the full continuum of programs and services for students with special needs in WCSD. This can range from just accommodations and supports in a general education classroom to speech and language therapy services to more specialized programs depending on the needs of the student."

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that all students have access to a free and appropriate public education. Nevada recognizes 13 special education eligibility categories. Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are created by a team made up of the student, parents, teachers, administrators and service providers such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists or nurses. Together, they identify a student's strengths, areas of need, measurable goals and specially designed instruction to support those goals. While early intervention is ideal, the district is responsible for identifying students from age 3 up to 22.

Recent studies have found that students see academic and social-emotional benefits from learning in integrated classes. In WCSD, the goal is to enable

special education students to participate in general classrooms to their fullest ability.

"If special education students aren't provided access to general education curriculum, it will be a challenge to graduate with a standard diploma, which is the ultimate goal for any and all students," Van Tress explains. "Students with special education services ... need to have the skills to be successful in all school environments. Whether it's the general education classroom (or) it's a job site, students should have the opportunity to work with their peers to have academic and social success."

And the perks of integration go both ways: Studies have shown general education students also benefit academically and socially from having differently able students in the classroom.

"Working with students with special needs gives all students and staff the perspective of how people learn differently," Van Tress says. "Knowing how to work with others is a skill required in any workforce and building this understanding of how others learn will help lead to success."

To see if your Washoe County School District student is eligible for special education services, talk to their teacher or your school principal about an assessment. Families who are not already enrolled in the district can have their child assessed through the district's Child Find team.

For more information, visit online at www.washoeschools.net/specialeducation or call 775-327-0685.



"Many students just need the correct level of support in order to achieve their dreams. All children can succeed."

Jennifer Van Tress, Area Superintendent for Area 5, special education and early childhood

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

Washoe County School District works with county agencies and community organizations to ensure foster children get the unique support they need.

"In general, students in foster care have experienced trauma," says Rechelle Murillo, Intervention Department Director. "We work really closely with the social workers so that we're all on the same page in terms of how to support students behaviorally, socially, emotionally (and) academically."

- The district's foster liaison collaborates with the county's Human Services Agency to create **individualized educational** and **graduation plans** for students. The district's student services agency also provides tutoring, mentoring and case management.
- Because school and classmates are often the only constants in foster children's lives, the district provides **transportation to and from home** to ensure they can attend their home school.

- The district collaborates with local community colleges to **connect graduating seniors with tuition-free programs** and other resources.
- Both the district and county social services agencies can provide **financial assistance** to help students with school supplies and extra curricular activities such as field trips and athletic programs.

For more information, visit the district's website at www.washoeschools.net.

WAKING UP math skills

*Innovative instruction connects adult students
with numbers know-how*

BY ALLEN PIERLEONI

Michelle Berry wants to make a point: “Many people say they can’t do math. My job is to make them not feel that way anymore and to make them stop saying that. Everybody is capable of math.”

Berry describes herself as “an instructor who wears many hats” at the RISE Academy for Adult Achievement in Reno, a case of understatement. Specifically, she originates all the adult education school’s math curriculum and specializes in High School Equivalency Preparation both in the classroom and via an online program.

“The curriculum is student-centered; they work on accessible math problems using mathematical reasoning skills to figure them out,” she says. “It’s not me lecturing at them. That’s an outdated model.”

Berry incorporates proven learning techniques into her curriculum, including Growth Mind Set (the belief that skills will improve with work), Social-Emotional Learning (setting and achieving positive goals while managing emotions) and Mindfulness (focusing on the moment, not the past).

“We do a lot of that for the first 15 minutes of class, to create a classroom community where people feel comfortable talking with each other and us,” Berry says. “Most students have severe math anxiety because they didn’t get it right the first time, but now they can share their stresses. They’re very motivated.”

RISE Academy specializes in three programs –

high school equivalency certification, high school diplomas and English as a Second Language, says principal Steve Constantino.

“Everything we do is through the lens of helping busy adults who are juggling family and work responsibilities and the craziness of the pandemic,” he says.

In addition, these skills are vital for employ-

“Most students have severe math anxiety because they didn’t get it right the first time.”

Michelle Berry

RISE Academy instructor

ment in a region that needs workers. A diploma or improved language skills can be the key to success for adult learners, who can advance their careers or find better jobs.

One of Berry’s learning techniques is connecting math situations with her students’ daily lives. “When I convince them they actually do complex math already, but they don’t think of it as math, it really helps.”

One of her favorite math lessons is what to do when the alarm clock goes off in the morning. Hit the snooze button or not? “You must calculate whether



you’ll be late if you hit snooze,” she says. “There are a million factors to take into account. How long will it take you to do the list of things you need to do before you must be somewhere else? Will the traffic pattern change? What about family members’ schedules? And you’re doing all that when you’re not fully awake.”

Berry also teaches math to inmates at the Washoe County Jail twice a week. “They’re motivated and there to learn, just like my students at RISE,” she says.

And the most rewarding part of all this? “When my students get that look in their eyes that they finally understand,” she says. “They realize that math was created to use for seeing the world.”

Anything else? Well, yes: “Aside from trying to tell everybody to stop saying they can’t do math, a lot of people could use some mathematical reasoning skills.”

STUDENT ACADEMIC GROWTH

Washoe County School District continues to see growth in student academic performance and achievement:

- A 2018 Stanford study showed that WCSD outgrew 82% of all districts nationally. The district had positive

growth each of the past three years, and students in elementary school outgrew 55% of their academic peers throughout the state in 2019.

- Students are showing progress in the classroom, too. WCSD uses the Smarter Balanced assessment system to evaluate student progress in grades 3-8.

- If WCSD were a state, it would rank second in fifth and sixth grade math performance compared to six other Smarter Balanced consortium states. In addition, it would rank third in eighth grade performance in English/Language Arts skills compared to six other Smarter Balanced consortium states.



Navigating crisis and BEYOND

School counseling coordinator helps those who support students, families and staff

BY ANNE STOKES

Over the past two years, Washoe County students, families and staff have faced immense stress, trauma and change. In the midst of the pandemic's challenges, the district's counseling team has had a tall order to fill: Addressing students' and staff's social, emotional and mental health needs while still ensuring students get the academic support they need to succeed.

"Every school in Washoe County School District has at least one full-time school counselor, but many schools also have a school social worker or a safe school professional, and high schools have career center facilitators. We want the community to know that students, staff and families have access to some wonderful resources and professionals," explains Washoe County School District School Counseling Coordinator Katherine Loudon.

As counseling coordinator, Loudon supports the district's 371 mental health and wellness professionals — school counselors, social workers, Safe School professionals, and career center facilitators — through problem-solving and professional development as well as direct service in schools.

Her department has oversight over several vital programs including: suicide prevention and intervention, child abuse reporting and protocol, and 504 Home Hospital (planning and access for students with health needs or disabilities). Loudon and her department also serve as the district's Safe Voice program liaison and manage law enforcement Handle With Care tips. The district's counseling department serves students

outside of the classroom as well as within it.

The counseling office responds to crises such as accidents, deaths of students and staff, and fires, but is also focused on promoting overall student and educator resilience. The Department provides education, programming and support to improve students' overall mental health and even help them with their future career readiness.

"We want the community to know that students, staff and families have access to some wonderful resources and professionals."

Katherine Loudon
School counseling coordinator,
Washoe County School District

work on addressing the needs of staff or families, we are helping kids because kids are part of the system and the system includes all of those individuals," Loudon explains.

Washoe County School District is committed to creating safe and supportive environments for learning. Loudon says, "We're in the business of looking at and removing barriers, as well as creating pathways for students to succeed. That's what we do."

If you want to learn more about Washoe County School District's programs and resources, reach out to your student's school counselor or visit www.washoeschools.net. If you need support, consider the resources listed on this page.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHERINE LOUDON

WHERE TO FIND HELP

- **SafeVoice:** Report threats and safety concerns anonymously — including bullying, cyberbullying, crimes, and suicidal thoughts or behaviors — online at SafeVoiceNV.org, by phone 1-833-216-7233, or via the free SafeVoice app 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Behavioral Health & Management Team hotline:** Parents and educators who need behavior support for their child or students can call 775-337-7566 or email MTSS@washoeschools.net for guidance.
- **Family Resource Centers:** With locations in Central Reno, Sparks and Sun Valley/Desert Skies, Family Resource Centers can connect and refer families to resources and community support systems. For help, call 775-204-1408.
- **Nevada 2-1-1:** Call 2-1-1 or visit www.nevada211.org for referrals to community resources. Free to download, the Nevada 211 Youth app can help connect users with counseling, education and emergency resources.
- **Department of Family-School Partnership:** Find help with tech support and distance learning, learning resources for students, monitoring grades, college opportunities, career readiness and other resources. For more information, call 775-789-4680 or visit online at www.washoeschools.net.

GROW with us!

Washoe County School District meets the needs of northern Nevada — now and tomorrow

Since 2017, Washoe County School District has committed more than \$800 million in school construction, thanks to a capital funding ballot initiative approved by voters in 2016.

So far, six new schools have opened: Sky Ranch Middle School and John Bohach Elementary School in Spanish Springs; and Marce Herz Middle School and Nick Poulakidas Elementary School in south Reno; Desert Skies Middle School in Sun Valley; and Michael Inskeep Elementary School in the north Cold Springs area. In addition, 22 new classrooms were added to Damonte Ranch High School, easing overcrowding while also providing more room for continued growth.

Representing an investment of more than \$200 million, the new Procter R. Hug High School is the first WCSD high school to be built in nearly two decades and will provide a state-of-the-art education space to our students when it opens in Fall 2022.

The new 295,000-square-foot, three-story building will include: 40 general learning rooms; 11 science labs; 15 shared group rooms; 17 specialized labs for art, media and career tech; a student commons; a 425-seat performing arts center; music suites; two gymnasiums; and a JROTC room.

The new facility will replace the current, aging Procter R. Hug High School and all students currently zoned for Procter Hug will attend the new school. With a capacity for 2,200 students, the new high school will also help to relieve overcrowding at Spanish Springs High School, the District's most



Among Washoe County School District's new schools is Michael Inskeep Elementary School in the north Cold Springs area. It opened in August 2021. PHOTO COURTESY OF WCSD

overcrowded facility, and North Valleys High School.

After the new Hug High is completed, the old Hug High will be replaced by the Debbie Smith Career and Technical Education Academy, slated to open in Fall 2024. At an estimated cost of \$125 million, the new career-oriented high school is named for the former Nevada state senator and will be the first WCSD high school named for a woman.

Also currently under construction are the new O'Brien Middle School and new buildings at Swope Middle School.

In addition to constructing new schools, the district has spent millions on upgrading existing facilities and renovating its older buildings.

Learn more at www.washoeschools.net/building.

JOIN THE WCSD TEAM

We're hiring! Washoe County schools have a variety of employment opportunities:

- Principals, Assistant Principals, Deans
- General and Special Education Teachers
- Bus Drivers, Custodians, Nutrition Service Workers, School Police Officers, Teacher Assistants and Teacher Aides
- Human Resources Technicians, Finance and IT Technicians

**For more information, call 775-325-TEAM
or visit www.washoeschools.net/employment**



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