



Community Connections

NORTH THURSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Superintendent's Message: Student support to build relationships

When NTPS students graduate, they are ready to contribute to the world around them. They have the skills to build positive relationships and engage in collaborative problem-solving—necessary in whatever path they choose!

One way we support this growth is through what we call restorative practices. Restorative practices encourage behavior that is supportive, respectful, and inclusive. They also build community and help students learn to resolve conflict, make sound decisions, set boundaries, and take responsibility for their actions.

We have spent several years training staff and implementing restorative practices in our schools. Next fall, we will open restorative centers at each high school to offer spaces for students to repair harm and build relationships. This unique model empowers trained student advocates—with teacher guidance—to support their peers.

Our efforts are paying off! In one recent situation, district social worker Lindsey Canley facilitated a restorative circle between a staff member and a student and family. There had been mutual harm for the staff member and student, and the student was avoiding class. In the circle, participants listened and worked through their feelings. After engaging in this process, the student felt comfortable returning to class.

As Lindsay said, “We can either spend time reactively managing the emotional, educational, and relational disruptions of unresolved conflicts, or we can proactively repair, restore, and engage in creative problem-solving.” The skills our students learn help them develop and maintain healthy relationships in school and life!

Dr. Debra Clemens
NTPS Superintendent

growing
RELATIONSHIPS





spotlights

ON SUCCESS

Ensuring student voices in district decisions

Student leaders from all 24 schools meet quarterly to discuss topics such as leadership, school climate, and district priorities. During a discussion this year on the district's social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, students discussed how SEL supports student success and practiced some tools to help have compassionate conversations. The Student Advisory Council is part of our strategic plan focus on increased opportunities for student voice. We also survey students each year to help ensure their voices are heard!



Celebrating the legacy of Billy Frank Jr.

The Nisqually Tribe and North Thurston Public Schools celebrated the life and legacy of Billy Frank Jr. at our annual celebration of the tribal leader. More than 400 attendees enjoyed displays created by students, such as a beautiful display of salmon-inspired artwork from **Seven Oaks Elementary** and Nisqually River landscapes from **Ignite Family Academy!** After a performance by the Nisqually Canoe Family, the audience heard from artist Haiying Wu, who is designing a statue of Billy Frank Jr. for the National Statuary Hall in Washington, D.C.



Building military and school partnerships

Soldiers from Joint Base Lewis-McChord are volunteering their time with students at **Meadows Elementary School** during their 30-minute outdoor time as part of our new Helping Hands partnership.

The volunteers are a positive presence for students, participating in activities such as four-square and tag. Some soldiers chatted individually and in small groups with the kids.





Social-Emotional Learning at HeartStrides Therapeutic Horsemanship



A new partnership with HeartStrides Therapeutic Horsemanship is giving NTPS middle and high school students a unique hands-on approach to social-emotional learning. Thanks to the NTPS POWER-UP! program, several students recently attended a three-hour session at the local Healing Hearts Ranch.

“Calm brains make good decisions,” said Kristy Dees, the founder of HeartStrides. This message, along with the notion that “we are all responsible for our own use of self,” is the core of what she hopes students take away from their experience at HeartStrides. Through time with Kristy, her staff, and the horses, students learn about concepts like hope, trust, self-reflection, and perseverance.

Kristy and her team brought six horses into the arena and students observed the social dynamics of the horses as they spontaneously interacted. This led to a conversation about the traits of a good leader and how healthy group dynamics can shift in terms of leaders and followers. It also brought up the topics of personal space, rushing, physical safety, and how those

physical and environmental factors relate to our mental well-being at any given time.

Students were then invited to walk with the horses, which led to reflection about trust, confidence, and staying calm. After a short time at the ranch, one student already knew she wanted to spend more time in the program. Samantha, a 9th grader, shared that this is only her second time being physically near a horse. After her turn leading one of the horses, she was beaming.

“I liked how calm I was and how calm I needed to be,” Samantha said.

Another 11th-grade student spent 30 minutes grooming and feeding a pony that had come from an abusive home. Although he’s never felt a strong connection to animals, the student plans to return to the ranch to continue learning and growing through the HeartStrides program.

Learn more about how POWER-UP! is helping students succeed at www.ntps.news/powerup.

upcoming
IMPORTANT DATES

May 23

English Language Learners
Community Café, 5:30 pm
Envision Career Academy

June 22

Last Day of School
Half day (3.5 hours early dismissal)

upcoming
THEATER EVENTS

May 17-20

The Play That Goes Wrong
7:00 pm, Koval Center for the Performing Arts

May 25-27

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
6:00 pm, River Ridge High School Theatre

Spring Arts Calendar:

www.ntps.news/arts

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Construction & Design Update

We have many active projects around the district thanks to voter support!

The **River Ridge High School** modernization continues this summer. During this first phase, we are placing portable classrooms on the site, constructing new tennis courts, upgrading the pool, and improving the main and auxiliary gyms. The River Ridge campus will be closed to the public this summer.

Nisqually Middle School parking lot improvements will enhance safety and traffic flow.

We are finishing work on the **Komachin Middle School** gym, commons, kitchen, and exterior spaces, and beginning to add new classroom space. The newly renovated athletic field will open in fall 2023 - a request from community groups as part of our construction bond.

We are installing secure entrances at several sites, allowing staff additional control over visitors' entry to school buildings.

Heating, cooling, and ventilation improvements continue at **Horizons, Seven Oaks, and Meadows Elementary Schools**. Learn more: www.ntps.news/buildingourfuture

