



SchoolTalk

Celebrating everyday successes

Alex Lagasa has a gift. Not only does she harvest sparkly gems of inspiration from the world around her, but she also creatively combines lines and color, shading and perspective to form striking and thought-provoking pieces.

"I love to find things that are beautiful to me and put them down on paper in my own view," said Alex, a junior at Shadle Park High School.

To learn new techniques, Alex said she tries to take at least one art class a year.

Last year, for a creative drawing class at Shadle Park, she completed a drawing of a sneaker without ever looking at the page. It was an interesting exercise, Alex said, in the hemispheres of the brain and how it sees things.

"I had to spend lots of time memorizing the contours of the shoe," she said, "and had to try it a few times before it came out just right."

Her current art class, with teacher Kathy Pattee, introduced her to the works of Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who painted portraits of people with their image made entirely of objects like fruits, vegetables and leaves. One of the pieces she is most proud of was done in a similar style, with her own profile created from flower petals, leaves and rocks. Alex said she appreciates the instruction she has received this year.

"Mrs. Pattee has taught me so much about shading, horizon lines, and where pieces in a picture should go," said Alex, who plans to major in nursing and minor in art. "It helps my art look a lot better."



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There was probably no way to keep Justin Sherfey from becoming a musician. After all, his grandpa plays the fiddle, his mom plays the fiddle and guitar and his sister plays the bass and sings like an angel.

A trip to the national fiddle contest in Weiser, Idaho, at age 8 infected Justin with fiddle fever, and he just hasn't been able to stop playing since. Now 13, Justin has already wowed thousands with the magic of his musical destiny. He has ranked in the top three in the nation for the past two years and won dozens of fiddle contests. But more important than any accolade is the joy that Justin gets from playing, and that he brings to his audience.

"I like playing for a crowd, and seeing them having fun and clapping," said Justin, a seventh grader at Chase Middle School.

Part of the fun of fiddling, Justin said, is getting to travel to contests and meeting people from all over the United States. But it takes a lot of time and hard work. If a contest is coming up, Justin practices for 2-3 hours a day – after finishing his homework.

Besides the fiddle, Justin plays the tenor guitar, six-string guitar, mandolin and bass, and has "messed around" with the banjo and piano. And, as part of the Chase band, Justin is currently learning percussion and how to read music – something he's never had to do since he learned to play the stringed instruments by ear.

"This challenge has been the best thing for him," said Justin's mom, Lori. "He continues to be inspired, and we are delighted with the opportunities he's been given."



Throughout Spokane Public Schools, we are proud to celebrate everyday successes like Alex and Justin. Thanks to the support of you, the Spokane community, our students continue to have dozens of diverse options for learning.



Levy questions? We have the answers.

What is a levy?

The levy is a way for the community to provide the dollars necessary to offer Spokane Public Schools students a well-rounded education. When combined with state Levy Equalization Assistance (LEA), the local tax levy represents almost one quarter of the school district budget. The remainder of the school district's funding comes from state, federal and private sources. The levy is not a new tax. It simply replaces the expiring 2009 levy.

What does the levy support?

Levy dollars support students! Specifically, the levy pays for teachers for providing reasonable class sizes, counselors, nurses, library positions, gifted and talented programs, high school/middle school electives, high school Advanced Placement classes, elementary band and strings program, elementary art program, online learning, drop-out prevention programs like On Track Academy, special education and English Language Learner programs, student transportation, sports, clubs and intramural programs, security officers, and support staff such as custodians, maintenance workers, administrators and clerical staff.

How much of the district's budget comes from the levy?

Nearly 24% of the district's budget comes from the local levy and state LEA, which the state provides to "property poor" districts like Spokane whose voters have approved an educational program levy. As the state Legislature considers ways to close the current state budget gap, Spokane Public Schools could lose all or a portion of state LEA funding beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

When will we know if LEA will continue?

The Legislature is scheduled to meet through early March. However, faced with the significant budget gap of \$2 billion, the Legislature may not agree on final budget decisions for several months. That's why the SPS board of directors felt they had no choice but to assume a reduction in LEA and thus put higher levy amounts on the ballot to account for the potential loss of this critical funding source. However, if the state Legislature continues LEA, the taxes collected for the levy amount in 2013, 2014, and 2015 will be about the same as or lower than the taxes the school district will collect from local citizens in 2012 (\$64 million). If the Legislature discontinues some or all of LEA, between \$7.5 and \$9.5 million more will be collected each of the three years.

How is SPS doing its part to cut expenses?

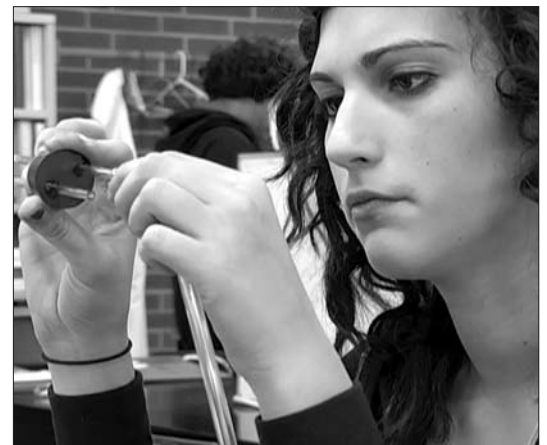
Expenditures have been reduced through elimination of central administrative and instructional support positions and administrative salary reductions; travel has been restricted to only the most necessary meetings such as those required for grants; and we've reduced allocations for materials, supplies, etc. In order to reduce utility expenses, the central administration building was closed and staff were required to take vacation the last week of winter break. The same will apply the week of July 4th.

Are administrators paid out of the levy?

Yes – as are teachers and other support staff, since the state does not fully fund teacher, administrative or support staff positions and salaries. Nearly 50 percent of the levy pays for teacher salaries and positions to keep class sizes reasonable and to provide well-rounded program offerings; nearly 30 percent pays for coaches, secretaries and other "classified" staff such as instructional assistants; and less than 10 percent pays for administrative salaries and positions, from principals at all schools to assistant principals at secondary schools and central office administrators who serve all schools.

Will passing the levy guarantee no more cuts?

No. Unfortunately, due to the state's budget situation, we expect our non-levy funds to be cut by the state just as they have been for the last 10 years, resulting in local cuts totaling over \$45 million during that time. So, regardless of whether the levy passes, there will likely be cuts in future years. The local levy is a critical source of stable funding for schools.



Scan to learn more or visit
www.spokaneschools.org/levy2012

Remember to vote by February 14



The educational program levy helps provide a well-rounded, quality education for all Spokane children.

Kindergarten registration starts March 5

Will your student be 5 on or before Aug. 31? If so, it's time to start thinking about registering for kindergarten! We are eager to welcome you to the Spokane Public Schools family.

From March 5 through the end of the school year, please register at your neighborhood elementary school. Not sure which one is your school? Call 354-5900 and we can help. To register, you'll need to bring a birth certificate, or other verification of age, and immunization records. Find more information at www.spokaneschools.org.

Bemiss achievements earn state awards

The State Superintendent's Office named Bemiss Elementary a 2011 Title I Washington State Distinguished School for exceptional student achievement in math. Only four schools in the state are chosen to be distinguished schools each year.

In addition, Bemiss was one of six Washington schools to receive a Title I Academic Achievement Award for significantly raising student achievement in math and reading.

Superintendent's Message

Have you visited a school in our district lately? If you haven't, I invite you to stop by and take a look at the incredible work that's happening in classrooms throughout our city each day. Our commitment is to keep students engaged in school, on track for graduation, and prepared for college and career. To do that, we have boosted graduation requirements, started offering Spanish in eighth grade, created an Algebra option for seventh graders, and increased the rigor of language arts classes for all middle schoolers. We are assessing all eighth graders for college readiness and giving all 10th and 11th graders the opportunity to take the Preliminary SAT. These opportunities provide students and their families valuable information about academic strengths and weaknesses. In addition, we are working with all our teachers to be very clear about what powerful teaching looks like and giving them a framework against which they can measure themselves.

Thanks to these efforts, we have more students taking more challenging courses. We have more students graduating. And we have more students going to college than ever before.

Still, we have much work to do – important work that cannot be done without the support of the Spokane community. Thank you for taking the time to volunteer in our schools, to take part in fundraisers, to attend games and matches, productions and concerts, meets and events. Thank you for learning about Spokane Public Schools and the essential role that you play in our success.



Nancy J. Stowell, Ph.D.

SPS schools rate high on state index

Results from the 2011 Washington State Achievement Index show that nearly 75 percent of SPS schools are categorized as “good,” “very good” or “exemplary.”

Five schools earned the rating of exemplary; 10 schools rated very good; and 22 schools good.

The State Board of Education created the index as an alternative to the federal measure of Adequate Yearly Progress for looking at school effectiveness on state tests, with poverty, improvement from the previous year, and graduation rate among the indicators.

The achievement index provides an easy way to identify a school's strengths and weaknesses. It can give parents a communication point for talking with teachers or the principal about a school's improvement plan and how they are making sure students are getting the support they need.

For more information go to www.sbe.wa.gov/default.html.

Honors and accolades:

- ▶ Spokane Public Schools is one of 367 public school districts out of the roughly 14,000 in the nation honored by the College Board with a place on the 2nd Annual AP® Honor Roll. The honor roll highlights districts for simultaneously increasing access to Advanced Placement coursework while maintaining or increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP exams.
- ▶ Spokane Public Schools received a six-year grant from the Higher Education Coordinating Board and the state GEAR UP organization to help increase the number of students who graduate from high school and enroll in, and find success in, postsecondary education. The GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) money – about \$2.6 million over the life of the grant – will start with the seventh graders at Garry, Shaw and Glover middle schools and will follow these students to Rogers and North Central high schools.
- ▶ The City of Spokane honored Shadle Park High School with a 2011 Mayor's Urban Design Award, which recognizes “excellent design that contributes to the City of Spokane's quality of life and is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.”
- ▶ For the eighth year in a row, Spokane Public Schools has earned one of the highest achievements in school finances and financial reporting.

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Spokane Public Schools complies with all federal and state rules and regulations and does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, marital status, race, color, creed, national origin, the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, sexual orientation including gender expression or gender identity, or honorably discharged veteran or military status.

Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to the school district's Title IX officer and/or Section 504/ADA coordinator. Title IX Officer, Jon Swett, (509) 354-7399 * Section 504 Coordinator, Wendy Bleecker, (509) 354-7248 * ADA Officer, Mark Anderson, (509) 354-7272 * Affirmative Action Officer, Ivan Bush, (509) 354-7344 * 200 N. Bernard Street, Spokane, WA 99201

A new online resource for families: Curriculum Connection

Spokane Public Schools is all about learning. To support the work we do with students, we want parents and guardians to be able to help their children at home. A new online resource, Curriculum Connection, was designed to do just that.

The site provides a one-stop shop for information about what students are learning at each grade level, in each subject area. In addition, videos and others resources are included to give parents and students an easy way to better understand what's being taught in the classroom.

The Curriculum Connection site also explains standards-based grading and why it's important, lists power standards so families know what is most important for students to learn each year, and shares information about many of the educators in SPS. The "Seven Steps for College Readiness" will help families keep their student on track for graduation and ready for success in any path they choose to follow. Check it out at spokaneschools.org/curriculum.



SPS provides students rich and rewarding educational experiences, such as authentic lab research at North Central High School's Institute of Science and Technology, that give them the tools necessary for success.

Whether they are preparing for a program that ends with a certificate, license, Associate's or Bachelor's degree; or planning to start down a career path by jumping into job training or education, SPS students' schedules are packed with the classes and activities that will unlock the greatest number of options to them after graduation.

A message from the president



Robert Douthitt
Board of Directors

It is an honor to serve you as board president for 2011-12. Our initial major responsibility will be finding a replacement for our retiring superintendent, Dr. Nancy Stowell, whose contributions to our district have been far-reaching. As we continue to work toward every student being "College and Career Ready," we will be actively soliciting input from our community on the characteristics the new superintendent will need to lead that work.

A few comments regarding Dr. Stowell's contributions are in order. First, the on-time graduation rate increased an impressive 17% during her first four years as superintendent. Second, nearly 75% of our schools are rated "good," "very good," or "exemplary" on the Washington State Achievement Index. Third, a higher percentage of our students go to college directly after high school than in the state (64.2% vs 59.4%), despite our average income being lower than the state's. Fourth, thanks to our focus on math improvement, we outpaced the state on End of Course Assessments for both Algebra and Geometry. Fifth, the College Board named us to its AP Honor Roll – which includes fewer than 3% of the districts in the nation – for the amount by which we simultaneously increased both participation in AP and the average scores. Sixth, we have done more to close the Achievement Gap than most districts.

These results derive largely from Dr. Stowell's career-long focus on systematically improving instruction by working together, watching ourselves, and learning cooperatively from what we observe. We have worked hard to align the curriculum – both with state standards and among buildings; to emphasize collaboration among teachers; and create instructional leaders, through principals and instructional coaches.

We still have a long way to go to make every student College and Career Ready. So, as we begin the search for our new superintendent, we will need your input. We will be publicizing avenues through which you can give it. We hope you will participate.

Finally, please remember to vote in the Feb. 14 educational program replacement levy election. It provides nearly 25 percent of the district's revenue.

We want to hear from you!

Community members are invited to text or email their questions about Spokane Public Schools to es@kspss.org before or during the district's live call-in show, "Educating Spokane," which next airs Thursday, Feb. 9, at 7:30 p.m. on KSPS channel 7.

School board members join Superintendent Nancy Stowell to answer questions from the public.

For those who would like to call in their question, the 354-7711 hotline number will still be available during the show.