

YOUR BATTLE GROUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FALL 2026



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OF LEARNING**

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Founded following the consolidation of the Maple Grove and Dublin school districts, Battle Ground Public Schools has grown into one of the largest and most geographically diverse school districts in Washington state. Spanning 273 square miles across northern Clark County, the district serves nearly 13,000 students in 19 schools and more programs, bringing together communities from rural Yacolt and Amboy to the growing neighborhoods of Battle Ground, Brush Prairie, and Vancouver.

Today, BGPS offers students a wide range of learning opportunities, including neighborhood schools, alternative and virtual programs, career and technical education, and specialized pathways designed to help students thrive after graduation. Across these programs, students and educators work together to discover new possibilities, develop their strengths, and build connections that extend beyond the classroom.

Set between scenic views of Mount St. Helens to the north and the greater Portland metropolitan area to the south, Battle Ground Public Schools reflects both the small-town character and continued growth of southwest Washington. Alongside strong academics, the district is home to award-winning music, theater, leadership, and athletic programs that bring students together through shared interests and experiences. Since its inception, BGPS has continued to inspire greatness by creating welcoming schools, meaningful opportunities, and pathways for every student to learn, perform, innovate, and succeed.

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A LEGACY OF LEARNING

Pleasant Valley schools celebrate 50 years of relationships, relevance, and rigor.

When Pleasant Valley's current campus opened in 1976, the building wasn't even fully furnished — but the teachers were ready to teach, and the students were ready to learn.

Fifty years later, Pleasant Valley primary and middle schools marked the anniversary of that opening with a celebration Sept. 25, bringing together former students, retired staff members, current families and community members who have been part of the school's history.

The evening offered alumni an opportunity to revisit their school, look through old yearbooks and memorabilia, and reconnect with people they may not have seen in years. School mascots moved through the gathering, adding to the festivities, while displays of photographs and other keepsakes offered reminders of the generations who have passed through Pleasant Valley.

Music was also part of the celebration. Alumni with musical experience were invited to join an alumni band, giving former students an opportunity to perform

▲
Former Pleasant Valley students participate in alumni band.

▼
Board member Marshall Marrott reviews past middle school yearbooks.

together again. The event also welcomed former Pleasant Valley Middle School principal Duane Rose, who later served as interim superintendent of Battle Ground Public Schools.

For sixth grade teacher Amy Pace, who helped organize the event, the anniversary represented a significant milestone for a school that has shaped much of her life.

Pace attended Pleasant Valley as a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade student, completed her student teaching there and has taught sixth grade at the school for 20 years. Of her 48 years connected to Pleasant Valley, 30 have been spent there as an educator.

"Well ... it had to be done," Pace said of organizing the celebration. "Fifty years is a pretty big deal and it needed a great party in recognition."



She hoped the gathering would give former students, families and staff a chance to reconnect, particularly with longtime employees whose retirements can make reunions less frequent. For Pace, seeing familiar faces return was part of what made the anniversary worth celebrating.

“Pleasant Valley is my home,” she said. “I spend a lot of time here and value the lessons Pleasant Valley has taught me through the years.”

Although the current campus opened in 1976, Pleasant Valley’s educational history stretches back much further. Pleasant Valley District No. 60 dates to the mid-1800s before consolidating into the early Battle Ground School District in 1957. Community-approved bonds later funded the construction of the current campus.

The school’s early days were not without challenges. When the building first opened, it lacked some of the furnishings and materials expected of a new school. Teachers continued their work regardless, establishing a tradition of making learning possible even when circumstances were less than ideal.

That history of commitment is one current Pleasant Valley Middle School Principal Erick Suksdorf said he has come to appreciate since joining the school this school year.

Before taking the position, Suksdorf had heard about the school’s strong history and the community’s connection to the campus. Since arriving, he said, he has met families



▲
Celebration attendee interacts with Pleasant Valley Primary’s “Buddy, the Beaver” mascot.

Photos courtesy
Amanda Richter.

Pleasant Valley
alumni band delivers
a performance.
▼



who chose to remain in the area so their children could attend the same school. Many continue supporting Pleasant Valley through volunteering, field trips and donations.

“They not only want their children to have the same experience, but they also constantly check in with us, asking how they can support us,” Suksdorf said. “Whether it is helping out at recess, going to field trips, donating supplies, they show up.”

Staff members also collaborate to maintain high expectations, guided by the school’s “Three Rs”: relationships, relevance and rigor. Its mission is to know each student by name, strengths and needs. For Pace, that sense of community has kept Pleasant Valley special across generations.

“Pleasant Valley is a family — students, staff, families ... all of us working together for students!” she said.

Looking ahead, Suksdorf hopes to build on that legacy for the next generation.

“I want to build the next layer of the foundation,” he said. “I want to take what has been built in the past and take it to the next level.”



Together, WE PERFORM

YOU'RE IN THE BAND

From First Rehearsals to Friday Night Lights.

▲
Trombones play after
football team scores.

Photos by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

On October 2, the stands at District Stadium filled with middle and high school students, instruments in hand. On the field, the Battle Ground High School marching band prepared to perform a program of Michael Jackson hits. In the stands, eighth graders from four middle schools waited for their own moment to play.

Some students were nervous. There was a field show to perform, music to remember, and an audience to play for.

THEN THE BAND TOOK THE FIELD.

The musicians moved together through their formations, their steps falling into

rhythm as the show unfolded across the stadium. What had begun weeks earlier as a collection of students learning their parts was now an ensemble moving as one.

But the night's defining moment came after the field show was nearly over. The musicians lowered their instruments. The drum majors descended from their podiums and initiated the Zombie Walk, moving across the field as the high school students began their slow procession.

From the stands, the eighth graders launched into Michael Jackson's "*Thriller*." The younger musicians carried the music as the high school students crossed the field where they had begun Band Camp just six weeks earlier. Now, the eighth graders were playing on their own, providing the soundtrack to the final moments of the show.

The performance was the result of weeks of preparation, but the work behind it began long before the band took the field.



Two trumpet players share a single music stand to read music.

At Band Camp, Battle Ground High School Director of Bands Danielle Armstrong was beginning the process of bringing returning musicians and new students together as an ensemble. Returning students knew the routines, while freshmen were learning where to stand, what to play and who to ask when they needed help. Students had music to learn and a field show to prepare, all while adjusting to a new school year.

Armstrong described the opening stretch as “kind of like a sprint — a really short sprint.” Students were expected to learn their music and prepare for performances while getting to know one another and figuring out how to work together.

“We really want to create the desire to do the hard work, but we also want them to not feel afraid and intimidated,” she said.

For Thea Mitchell, a freshman baritone saxophone player, the transition initially meant getting to know people she had never played alongside before.

“I didn’t really know a bunch of people in my band,” Mitchell said. “But after the first day, I felt like I really started connecting with these people, and I made a lot more friends.”

The older students could seem intimidating at first. They knew the music, understood the routines and had experience that new members were still developing. Then Mitchell began to see them differently.

“Once you get past the feeling of, ‘Oh,

they’re so much older and so much more advanced than me,’ you start thinking, ‘Oh, they could actually really help me,’” she said.

Upperclassmen helped younger musicians learn and memorize the field show. Armstrong said that kind of support was essential to the band’s success.

“I am only one person, and I just can’t do it all,” she said. “In order for us to all be successful, we all have to be invested in everybody else’s success.”

For Betsy Emerson, one of the band’s three drum majors, this year’s Band Camp was not her first. She had returned to a program she knew, but with a different perspective: she was now among the students helping lead it. Emerson said the incoming freshmen seemed particularly confident and eager to learn.

“Everyone is super confident in their own abilities, and I think that’s such a great place to start because then we can just keep moving up,” she said.

Emerson said the group had already grown closer.

“It’s improved so much already,” she said. “It’s been super welcoming this year.”

She knows what it feels like to be the student who is not sure whether to continue. Before entering high school, Emerson nearly decided not to join band. The thought of entering a high school ensemble felt intimidating enough that she considered leaving the program behind.

“I almost didn’t join after eighth grade because I was so scared and intimidated by

Betsy Emerson uses a white board to tell musicians in the stands what to play.





being in a high school band," she said. "And it's literally been the best thing ever."

Now, Emerson is one of the students responsible for making that transition easier for others. The experience that nearly kept her from joining the high school band has become part of what she helps new members overcome.

Armstrong sees that process play out as students begin helping one another — and taking on some of the teaching themselves.

"One of the magical things about teaching band is everybody's invested in the success, and so everybody becomes a teacher," Armstrong said. "And it's fabulous. It's so cool to see that snowball effect and exponential growth."

By Friday, October 2, the water bottles and rubber chickens that had marked the rehearsal space during Band Camp were back in memory. The band lined the track, preparing to stage its field show at District Stadium.

This time, there was an audience.

Armstrong watched the performance as a whole, paying attention to whether the band's formations moved together and whether individual movements fit into the larger picture. For Emerson, the anticipation gave way to pride.

▲
"Headchopper" maneuver executed by trombone player during halftime on Sept. 25.

▲
Band members participate in "Zombie Walk" field show finale on Oct. 2.

▼
Eighth graders prepare to perform in the stands as the high school band stages field show.



“Obviously, I was nervous, but I was super proud of the band because it turned out way better than I thought,” she said. “They really pulled through, and so did the eighth graders.”

The eighth graders had come from Amboy, Daybreak, Tukes Valley and Chief Umtuch middle schools. They weren't simply there to watch the high school band, they were part of the performance.

For Mitchell, seeing the eighth graders brought back the feeling of being in their position just a year earlier.

“It kind of felt nostalgic,” she said. “Seeing the eighth graders, I know how it felt to be like, ‘That looks so cool. I can't wait to do that.’”

Armstrong was particularly excited that the middle schoolers had been included as an integral part of the performance rather than treated as a separate attraction. They were contributing to the same experience as the high school students, and the band was counting on them to do their part.

Photos by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

Clarinets play on
the field during
halftime on Oct. 2.



The field show was the culmination of weeks of work. For the younger musicians, it was also a glimpse of what might come next.

Soon, another Band Camp will bring new students to the field. Some will arrive confident; others may wonder whether they belong. The musicians who welcome them will have been through the same transition themselves.

Armstrong hopes this year's freshmen will carry that experience forward.

“Next year they will naturally be those leaders, eagerly welcoming these students at camp and saying, ‘Oh, here it's okay if you don't know that. Come sit with me. I'll help you,’” she said.

From the start of Band Camp to the roar of Friday Night Lights, every season is a journey from students learning where they belong to helping someone else find their place. By the end of the first fall field show, the message to every new ensemble member is clear: *you're in the band.*



Together, WE INNOVATE



OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Welcome to the
Tukes Valley Student Store.

The students at Tukes Valley Middle School had done their homework.

They had researched the company, studied its branding and developed a collection of product ideas. They prepared visual presentations, assigned speaking parts and even made examples of the products they wanted to pitch.

When Kim Berry arrived to hear their proposals, she expected a few ideas. Instead, she found herself watching a fully branded presentation, with students explaining seven or eight concepts and making the case for why each would work for Alden's Organic, where Berry is the vice president of brands and commercialization.

"I was absolutely blown away," Berry said. "They all had speaking parts of why they thought this would be good for our brand."

Berry had brought the students a problem. Her company attends 15 to 20 trade shows each year, where its sales



▲
7th grader
Millie Wilson
carefully works on
piece of jewelry for
the student store.

Photos by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

Packaging team of
eighth graders
prepares flexiwolves
for distribution.



team meets with retail buyers from companies such as Fred Meyer and Whole Foods. Promotional giveaways help draw visitors to the booth and give them something to remember the brand by.

But after years of handing out stickers, magnets and scrunchies, Berry was running out of ideas.

"I don't know what's trending out there anymore," she told the students. "I'm fatigued of all my ideas. What can you guys come up with?"

The assignment went to the Tukes Valley Student Store, a middle school STEM program where students design, manufacture and sell their own products. For the first time, they had a business client and a real-world design challenge.

Berry selected ideas from their presentation, and Alden's Organic hired the students to produce the products. Their work would eventually make its way to trade shows, where the company's team introduced it to prospective retail partners.

For the Student Store, it was another step in the evolution of a program that began with something much simpler.

From Bracelets to a Business

Tukes Valley Middle School STEM teacher Carol Voitik started the program while looking for ways to make LEGO robotics





more practical. Her students had learned to program robots; she wanted them to use those skills to create something bigger.

The class built on a program that used LEGO robots to weave bracelets. When the school acquired its first 3D printers, students began designing charms to attach to them.

In the program's first year, students visited every classroom to offer a bracelet to every student in the school. The operation grew from there, eventually producing items such as the signature Flexiwolf, a flexible, 3D-printed version of

▲
Three students work on removing excess vinyl from designs before they can be pressed on apparel.

The 2026–2027 Student Store staff pose for a group photo, many wearing apparel created by the program.



the school's Timberwolf mascot.

Today, students use the school's enhancement period to learn the many steps involved in running a business. They purchase supplies, process deliveries, track inventory, calculate prices, process banking deposits, manufacture products and handle sales and customer service.

The merchandise ranges from sweatshirts and earrings to water bottles, mugs and fidgets. Students brainstorm ideas, explore designs and consider whether a product can be made affordably enough to sell.

Not Every Idea Catches On

Last year, Voitik said, an apparel item failed to sell a single unit. Instead of simply moving on, students discussed why customers hadn't bought it and what they could learn from the experience.

"Sometimes, even when we think it's a great design, it flops," Voitik said. "That's also a great experience for them."

Unlike a conventional school store that buys finished merchandise for resale, Tukes Valley students make what they sell themselves.

"We make everything we sell from beginning to end," Voitik said. "We design





and fabricate all the way to the end where we sell the product.”

That hands-on approach took on new meaning when the students began working with Alden’s.

Designing for a Real Client

The partnership grew out of a Parent Teacher Organization meeting. Voitik had requested funding for the Student Store, and Berry, a PTO member and parent of a Tukes Valley sixth grader, began thinking about how her company could support the program.

Berry needed new promotional items and the students had the tools to help. Their task was not simply to put a company logo on something. They needed to understand the brand and develop products that made sense for its audience.

Berry said the students considered the emotions associated with ice cream — from celebrating a good day to finding comfort after a difficult one — and connected those ideas to Alden’s Organic’s bright colors and playful branding.

▲
8th graders
Brody Husemoen
and Koen March
operate a vinyl
cutter.

Photo by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

►
One-to-one
models of the
ice cream bars
sit on display
at a trade show.

Photo courtesy
Kim Berry.

They studied the company’s website, used its branded typeface and adapted an existing Student Store product, water bottle straw toppers, for the ice cream brand.

They also had to account for practical limitations. Because Alden’s Organic sells food, Berry explained, anything intended to go into someone’s mouth must meet food-grade requirements. Some ideas had to be ruled out because of the materials involved.

The students also developed miniature replicas of Alden’s ice cream bars for trade-show displays. Actual bars would melt before prospective retail buyers had much time to examine them.

Voitik said students received coupons for free ice cream and used the real products as references. They traced the bars before they melted, compared their shapes with online images and reimagined what they saw into digital models for 3D printing. Getting the dimensions right proved challenging, too.

The finished replicas offered a practical solution to a problem the company faced at trade shows — and gave the students a project that required more than a good-looking design.



More Than a Finished Product

Berry said she initially wondered whether the students' work might amount to disposable plastic trinkets. Instead, she was impressed by the quality and versatility of the finished products.

The items appeared at three or four trade shows. A sign at the company's booth identified the Tukes Valley Student Store as their maker, and Berry said visitors took the giveaways and stopped to ask about the partnership.

The project also gave students a chance to present their ideas to someone outside the school, explain their decisions, and respond to the needs of an actual client. Voitik compared the experience to a young adult's first job interview or professional pitch.

"They are developing entrepreneurial skills that will benefit them their entire lives, whether they decide to work in a small business or start an Etsy store."

The work also depends on collaboration. Different groups focus on jewelry, packaging, and 3D printing, but each product relies on those efforts coming together. When the store took on an order for more than 600 shirts for the primary



Students take a break from working on a design to set up earrings on a display rack.

Photo by Rye Geilenfeldt.

school's Fund Run, Voitik said, the entire class helped prepare them for delivery.

"None of this would be possible if they didn't work together as a team. I'm so proud of how far our students have come, learning from each other and the work of past groups to carry this program forward," she said.

For Voitik, the work is about more than what students can make together. It's about what they learn to do with those skills — and where those skills might take them next.



A display shows straw toppers on a tumbler water bottle.

Photos courtesy Kim Berry.

Kim Berry and a coworker present products at a trade show.



Together, WE SUCCEED



THE PEOPLE WHO HELP US BECOME WHO WE ARE.

Op-Ed by Shelly Whitten, superintendent and alumna.

When I was asked to reflect on my experience as a Battle Ground High School graduate and how it shaped the person and educator I am today, I found myself thinking less about my accomplishments and more about the people who helped me along the way.

Like many people, my childhood was filled with both wonderful memories and painful experiences. Looking back, I recognize that the opportunities I have had in life were not simply the result of hard work or determination. They were made possible by a community of people who believed in me, supported me through difficult times, and helped me recognize potential I couldn't yet see in myself.

My earliest challenge came when I struggled to learn to read. Frequent ear infections affected my hearing during critical years of reading instruction. Although having tubes placed in my ears at age seven improved my hearing, I had already missed important foundational

Staff member
greet young
student on first
day of school.

Photo courtesy
Jenna Buescher-Hill.

Photo by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

Shelly Whitten
observes as 9th grader
Sam Billups delivers
remarks during a
board meeting.



instruction in phonics and phonemic awareness. Reading was difficult, and I struggled to keep up with my classmates.

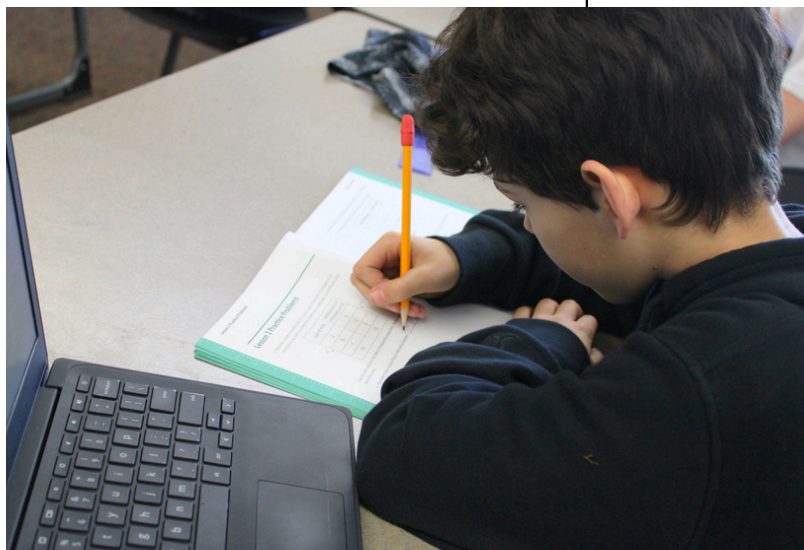
During those early years, my parents were a steady source of love and encouragement. They taught me the importance of hard work, perseverance, and taking responsibility for my own success. But when I was in third grade, our family experienced a significant change.

My mother began a ten-year struggle with mental illness. At a time when mental health challenges were often hidden from public view, she struggled to find the treatment and support she needed. Her illness brought periods of hospitalization, suicide attempts, and long absences from our family. As a child, I experienced uncertainty, shame, and a sense of emotional disconnection that I didn't yet have the words to explain.

While my father remained an incredible source of strength, other people in our community stepped forward to fill the gaps.

A childhood friend and her parents welcomed me into their family, including me on outings, holidays, and special occasions. Her mother happened to be a teacher at Yacolt Primary School. Together, she and her husband provided a sense of belonging and stability during a time when my own family was struggling. They





probably never realized how much those simple acts of kindness meant to me.

Their support helped me through those years, but academically, I continued to struggle. By middle school, I was still in the lowest reading group, and my academic performance was limiting the opportunities I might have after high school.

Then, in seventh grade, I met a teacher who changed the direction of my life.

At the beginning of the year, this young teacher met individually with every student to set goals. When she asked about mine, I told her I wanted to move into the highest reading group. It was an ambitious goal for someone who had spent years struggling with reading.

Rather than dismissing my goal or lowering her expectations, she helped me develop a plan. She asked me to complete additional reading assignments alongside the work required in my assigned group. It wasn't easy, but she provided encouragement, feedback, and the belief that I could succeed.

Over the course of that year, I moved from the lowest reading group to the middle group and, by spring, into the highest group.

What changed wasn't just my reading ability. For perhaps the first time, I began to see myself as a capable learner. Someone else's belief in me helped me develop belief in myself.

That experience has stayed with me throughout my life.

▲
8th grader
Hunter Halcumb
works on assignment
for math class.

Photo by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

Photo courtesy
Jenna Buescher-Hill.

Assistant
Superintendent
Lynnell Murray greets
students at Tukes
Valley Primary.
▼

By the time I reached Battle Ground High School, I was beginning to discover new possibilities. Choir, tennis, track and field, and student clubs provided opportunities to build friendships, develop leadership skills, and find a sense of belonging. These experiences helped me discover who I was and, perhaps more importantly, who I wanted to become.

I began to understand that my circumstances did not have to determine my future.

College was never part of my original plan. But my father insisted I continue my education. Like my seventh-grade teacher, he saw something in me that I had not yet fully recognized. His expectations, encouragement, and unwavering belief helped open another door.

When I think about what it means to succeed beyond Battle Ground Public Schools, I don't think first about degrees, job titles, or professional accomplishments. I think about the people who helped make those opportunities possible and the responsibility I have to do the same for others.

My experiences shaped three beliefs that continue to guide my leadership today.





First, every child matters. We cannot always know what a student is experiencing outside the classroom. A child who appears withdrawn, struggles academically, or lacks confidence may be carrying challenges we cannot see. Every student deserves adults who look beyond those circumstances and recognize their potential.

Second, honest feedback and high expectations are acts of care. My seventh-grade teacher didn't make learning easier for me. She challenged me to do more because she believed I could. She combined encouragement with accountability, and that combination changed my future.

Finally, personal responsibility matters, but success is rarely achieved alone. Hard work was essential to my progress, but hard work without opportunity, encouragement, and support may not have been enough. My success was built on the efforts of family members, educators, friends, and community members working together.

Today, as superintendent of the very school district that helped shape me, I carry those lessons into my work. I know firsthand that schools do far more than teach academic skills. They create opportunities for students to discover their interests, build relationships, develop confidence, and imagine futures beyond their current circumstances.

▲
BGHS class of 2026 graduate reaches hand out to another after receiving diploma.

Photos by
Rye Geilenfeldt.

Zander Crawford excitedly holds diploma during 2026 graduation ceremony. ▶

Nevaeh Fontaine and Maylee Geilenfeldt celebrate graduating together, alongside their moms. ▼

And schools cannot do that work alone.

It takes families, teachers, coaches, support staff, volunteers, community partners, and neighbors who recognize that the success of our children is a shared responsibility. Sometimes that support comes through a challenging academic goal. Sometimes it comes through an opportunity to perform, compete, create, or lead. And sometimes it is as simple as inviting a child to join your family for a holiday.

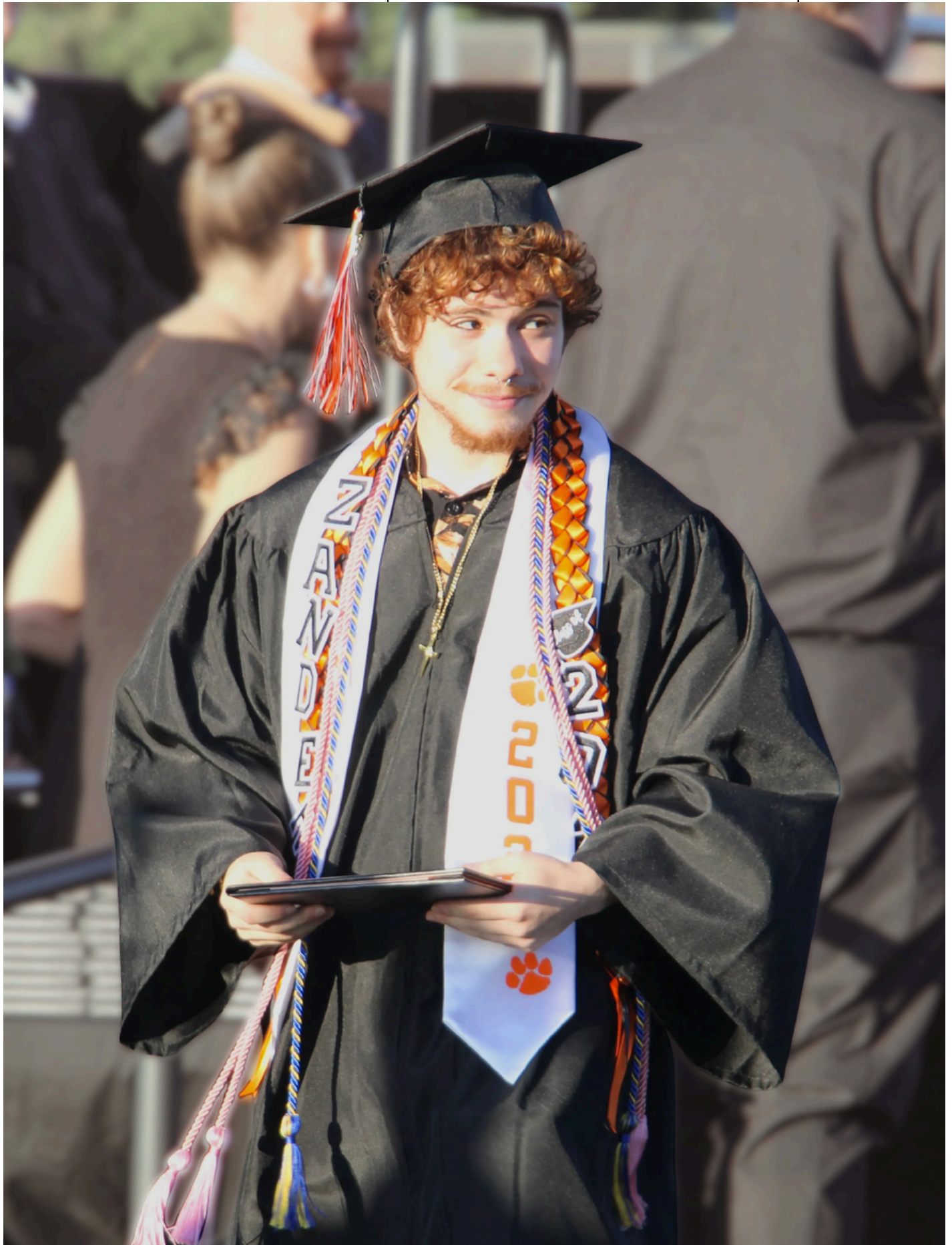
As I look at today's BGPS students learning, leading, working, performing, and creating together, I see young people developing skills and relationships that will serve them long after graduation. Their futures will be shaped not only by what they accomplish individually, but also by what they learn from one another and the community that supports them.

I am proud to be a Battle Ground High School graduate, but even more grateful to be a product of a community that helped me find my way.

The greatest lesson I took from my years in Battle Ground Public Schools is one I hope every student carries forward: Success is not simply about what we achieve for ourselves. It is also about the opportunities we create for others.

After all, none of us becomes who we are entirely on our own. We are better because of the people who walk beside us, believe in us, and help us see what is possible.







BGPS BULLETIN

monthly newsletter



[battlegroundps.org
/bgps-bulletin](https://battlegroundps.org/bgps-bulletin)

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**THANK YOU
FOR READING!**



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From classroom to newsroom: student journalism brings unique perspectives to storytelling.

Founded in 2025 as a project in a Tukes Valley Middle School yearbook class, *Your Battle Ground Public Schools* began as an effort to celebrate student success and preserve the history of the district. Inspired by a district publication that ran in *The Reflector* from 2009 to 2013 and traditional school newspapers from throughout the area, the revived *Your BGPS* combines student-led reporting with the visual storytelling of a magazine.

What started as a classroom project has grown into a publication connecting students, schools and communities across the district. Through original reporting, photography and student perspectives, *Your BGPS* highlights the people and experiences that make each school unique while documenting the history being made in and around the classroom, every day.

Today, *Your BGPS* is a recurring, districtwide student-led news magazine highlighting the people, programs and achievements shaping Battle Ground Public Schools. Led by Tukes Valley Middle School eighth grader Rye Geilenfeldt and Battle Ground High School freshman Paisley Dunn, the publication brings student perspectives to stories from across the district, connecting readers to the stories of student success that define BGPS.



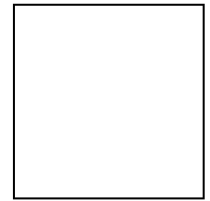


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AUTHENTIC STUDENT-LED JOURNALISM

Your BGPS is entirely led, written, and designed by students.



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Citizens' comments are welcome at public board meetings, held the second and fourth Mondays of most months beginning at 6 p.m. at Lewisville Campus: 406 NW Fifth Ave.

Meetings are recorded and can be viewed online. For more information, visit battlegroundps.org/board-meetings



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Your BGPS is published in the fall and spring of each school year at battlegroundps.org/your-bgps



REPORT TO OUR COMMUNITY

See the most recent report on district budget, financial information, and how BGPS students are ready for their futures.