

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker with your local news and commentary for Friday, September 20, 2024.

Jefferson County's public works department has announced plans for bike and pedestrian improvements scheduled to begin this coming December near Chimacum Schools. The project area follows State Route 19 from just south of the Chimacum Road-Center Road intersection to the West Valley Road intersection, and includes plans for an ADA-compliant sidewalk, curb, and gutter adjoining State Route 19; a bicycle lane, a multi-use path, and a pre-fabricated pedestrian-bicycle bridge across Chimacum Creek. It also allows for driveway entrances, stormwater facilities, a bus stop, pedestrian illumination, and pedestrian crossings. The project, which should take about a year to complete, is supported with funding from Washington's Climate Commitment Act.

For those of you who may be concerned about the quality of our schools, the *Washington State Standard* tells us that Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal has asked for an additional \$2.9 billion for Washington public schools in the next state budget. The funding increase has four primary objectives: to fully fund special education, to add and retain classified staff with higher pay, to cover inflationary costs of materials and supplies, and to provide more reliable school transportation.

"No matter how you look at the numbers, Washington currently underfunds K-12 education by around \$4 billion a year," Reykdal wrote in his budget request to Governor Jay Inslee this week. "I know that you and lawmakers will have some very difficult decisions to make, but our students and families need the state to step up and affirm the importance of public education."

In the current two-year operating budget, Washington is spending roughly \$30.6 billion of the general fund on public schools. That works out to 43%, down from the high-water mark of over 50% in 2019. Of the proposed funding, \$1 billion would go for special education programs. Another \$152.5 million is slated to provide reliable transportation to and from school for special passengers, including special education students, homeless students, and students in foster care. \$350.7 million is requested to cover the nearly 9.5% surge of costs for materials, supplies, and operations. And another \$695 million is needed, Reykdal says, to add and retain classified staff, including paraeducators, health services workers, clerical professionals, and IT technicians.

The bulk of the new dollars would go into those four main areas, but Reykdal is seeking funds for several other services and programs as well because, he told Inslee, "When districts aren't sufficiently resourced to cover the costs of the basics, they have to make cuts elsewhere – to programs, staffing, and other areas. Schools today are expected to do everything from feeding and educating students, to supporting, protecting, and nurturing their developmental, physical, and mental health." For example, 70% of students are getting free meals this school year. It will take another \$17.4 million to maintain that existing program, according to the budget request.

The Jefferson County Fire Marshal and the Jefferson County Fire Chiefs have lowered the Fire Danger Hazard Level to MODERATE. There is still a risk of wildfire, so land clearing, yard debris burning, and gas or propane weed burners are still prohibited. Care should still be taken when doing any outdoor cooking or enjoying recreational fires. Keep any flammable debris away from the heat source, keep kids and pets away from the fire, and never leave any fire unattended.

And finally, the City of Port Townsend reminds us that September is National Library Card Sign-Up Month! It's never too late to get your local library card and open up a world of possibilities. From Read to Rover to checking out unique items from the Unusual Items Collection, your City Public Library is free, open 7 days a week, and a terrific resource for learning and connection.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Diane Walker. Thank you for listening.