



Press Release
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Update from San Juan Island School District Superintendent

Dear Friday Harbor community,

In January I attended Friday Harbor High School's performance of *Romeo and Juliet* at the San Juan Community Theatre. I was thoroughly amazed by our students. It is no small feat to learn the difficult lines of Shakespeare and deliver each word in a manner that conveys the meaning. It was impressive. Our young actors, like our athletes, make what they do look easy, but this takes a lot of practice and dedication. Academically, the same can be said. Our students perform above the state level consistently because there is a commitment to success. The recognition our children receive in the arts, athletics, and academics is well deserved.

Here at San Juan Island School District (SJISD), we work to ensure that our students are given as much opportunity as we possibly can provide. To that end, two years ago the board of directors and superintendents from our four local island school districts began meeting to discuss the state's failure to fund our schools sufficiently. This has led to a grassroots effort that you may have heard about in various press releases or social media posts. All the island school boards and six labor unions are now speaking in one voice to our legislators, requesting they consider our specific situation. The three primary areas of concern are:

1. Special Education
2. Materials, Supplies, and Operations Costs (MSOC) – Non-personnel expenditures
3. Transportation

Since 2020, SJISD has had to funnel over \$6,000,000 from the general fund to make up for the lack of state funding in the three areas mentioned above. As you are experiencing personally, costs have risen drastically; for school districts statewide the costs of food, utilities, and insurance premiums have increased by between 33% and 60% since 2021. The state's response has been a 15.54% increase in apportionments, which falls short of the actual increased costs. This creates a funding gap that is straining all school districts and leading to limited student opportunities and offerings and growing class sizes for many schools.

Our district has been fortunate with a slight uptick in enrollment, a supportive community, and sound financial management that have thankfully kept us financially secure so far. According to Northwest Educational Service District, we are one of very few districts in this region with no warning indicators in our current budget. Although we are proud of this accomplishment, we do know that if the



funding trend continues, we too will face the same financial concerns other districts across the state are experiencing.

Therefore, earlier in February, the superintendents from all four island districts traveled to Olympia to meet with several legislators to plead our case. In addition to the three areas listed above, we also explained that the regionalization factor, which is supposed to be based on the local cost of living, does not reflect the expensive nature of living on the island. They must hear that we value the quality of our schools, and to maintain this quality, the Pre-K – 12 school system should be a financial priority. As our Washington State constitution clearly says, “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children.”

We will continue our work with legislators while also striving to honor the community that puts their trust in us. In 2024, voters graciously approved the capital and technology levy. Our first priority is to fix the failing exterior envelope on the secondary campus. The deterioration of the siding is clearly seen by all who drive by. We have received guidance from an architectural firm, and a bid packet is being developed that will be released on the fifth of March. The bidding period will end on March 26th, and we plan to have the work completed in the summer of 2025, barring any unforeseen issues.

Locally, we proudly announced last year the opening of our Early Learning Center. The Transition to Kindergarten and Developmental Pre-Kindergarten programs have been extremely successful and we are excited to continue them into the upcoming school year. The interest survey for enrollment in both programs for the next school year was released on February 21. The deadline for submission is March 21. Information and links can be found on the district website, www.sjisd.org.

Likewise, Griffin Bay School (GBS) is now accepting fall enrollment for all grades. GBS serves students from this island as well as from anywhere else in the state. Our unique system serves various students who need flexibility in their schedules, including partnerships with home school families or those who want a remote experience rather than the traditional approach. Although GBS has grown over the years, we still have room to welcome more students. If you know someone locally or from anywhere else in Washington who wants an alternative, personalized, and flexible approach, encourage them to reach out to the GBS office at 360-378-3292 for more information.

Friday Harbor Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, as well as Stuart Island School, are all already planning for next year. The annual kindergarten roundup is scheduled for March 20th. The middle and high schools are developing their master schedules and students in the high school have started the pre-registration process.

I will end by saying that as I walked through the elementary school this past week, I was reminded why going to Olympia was worth the travel and conversations. As I



have written before, my background was in the secondary. However, FHES is a magical place. Those students enjoy being there. The walls are covered with reminders of positive character traits and your teachers are consistently and genuinely guiding each child. Time there sets the foundation for an amazing educational journey ending in a triumphant high school graduation.

Spring is around the corner, and we have hopefully made it through the worst of winter. If you see a bus driver, thank them for keeping students safe during the dark and snowy winter days we are leaving behind. The temperature will improve, and before you know it graduations and promotions will occur. We remain proud of the work we do and look forward to what the rest of the school year brings.

Fred Woods
Superintendent
San Juan Island School District