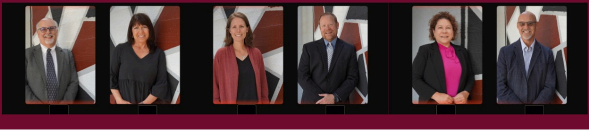
CHEHALIS
SCHOOL DISTRICT

FRIDAY
CONNECT
Oct. 20, 2023

SALUTE TO
OUR PRINCIPALS



Our Principals Work As a Team

Happy National Principals Month. In the Chehalis School District, we're lucky enough to have six talented principals who oversee our various programs and buildings. This team is further strengthened by the work of six Assistant principals.

"I am so thankful to our principals. They care deeply about our students, our staff, and our community and it is seen in their actions everyday," said Chehalis School District Superintendent Dr. Christine Moloney.

Assistant Superintendent Trisha Smith said one unique aspect about Chehalis School District's principals is how closely the work together. Despite the different ages, populations and program needs they oversee, Chehalis' administrators are truly a cohesive unit.

"The thing about our principals is that they really do work as a team," Smith said. "They don't think of themselves as individual buildings doing their own thing but as a team working toward the same goal."

CHEHALIS ADMINISTRATORS PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Meet The Chehalis School District's Principals

Rachel Dorsey

Principal of Orin Smith Elementary
Degrees:
AA Centralia College
BA St. Martin's University
Administrative Credentials University of Washington, Bothell

As a young mother, Rachel Dorsey loved volunteering in her kids' preschool and teaching aerobic classes through the parks department but had not seriously considered education as a career until it was suggested to her by others. Intrigued by the idea, she recalled visiting Centralia College to explore career possibilities in education with a counselor who asked her what she loved about teaching.

"They said 'is it love of students or love of curriculum?' and I said 'love of students,'" Dorsey recalled. "And they said 'then you're going to want to do K-8 education.' And they were not wrong."

Dorsey joined the Chehalis School District in 2001. She first taught ELA, reading and journalism at Chehalis Middle School before deciding she wanted to become an administrator. She has served as the Assistant Principal at Orin Smith Elementary before being offered the Principal position. She said that love of students continues to motivate her today.

"I love kids and I love being in classrooms. That's my happy place," Dorsey said. "When I get bogged down with paperwork or things like that I'll just walk through the classes and find inspiration in the teachers and students."

Dorsey said her leadership style is very much about working collaboratively with her staff to create an environment that is dedicated to student success. She said she also feels fortunate to work with other administrators in the district who share the same goals.

"I can truly say I value and enjoy every administrator I work with and that's really special," Dorsey said. "We're able to support one another and share with one another and it's a safe space so we can really dig into things we're dealing with in our buildings."

Katie Howell

Executive Director for Student Support and Principal of VISIONS
Degrees:
BA - St. Martins University
MA - University of North Dakota

Katie Howell's push to work in special education came to her while she was a preschool teacher at a private school. She remembers a family who moved their child out of that school so they could receive special education services in the local public school. "I remember wishing I could help that student," Howell recalled.

Howell worked in special education in the North Thurston School District before deciding to earn her Program Administrator and Principal Certification so she could work in special education administration.

"I wanted to work in administration so I could affect more students than just those passing through my classroom," Howell said.

Howell is now in her fourth year as Executive Director of Student Support for the Chehalis School

District. She said she did not realize when she initially took the job that it included serving as Principal of the VISIONS program. VISIONS is a special education program for students ages 18-21 where students learn employability skills, leisure skills and independent living skills.

Howell oversees the program's two certified teachers and six paraeducators. She said her leadership style stresses the importance of striking a balance between meeting the intense technical demands of special education and Section 504, while respecting employees' experience and professionalism, and also challenging them to set the highest expectations for each student based on their individual needs and skills.
"They're a great team to work with," Howell said. "They care deeply about their students and want them to be successful."

Because there are students in every building in the district receiving services of some sort from Student Support, Howell said she works closely with the other principals in the district. She said she rotates visits each week to a different building to make sure she is making herself available as a resource to everyone equally.

Brenda Pohlman

Principal of James W. Lintott Elementary
Degrees:
BA & Teaching Certificate - St. Martin's University
MA - Antioch University
Principal Certification - University of Washington

Brenda Pohlman became a teacher because "I always liked being a learner" and loved kids. She began her teaching career in 1996, first as a self- management teacher for grades K-6 for the Chehalis/Centralia Special Education Cooperative and taught 4th grade in Centralia. In 2003, she came to Chehalis to teach Special Education at Chehalis Middle School. She then was a Special Education Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) and Supervisor of Special Education in the Tumwater School District.

She returned to Chehalis in 2013 as Assistant Director of Special Education for the Chehalis/Centralia Special Education Cooperative, then Assistant Principal of Cascade Elementary (the now shuttered school that became James Lintott Elementary) and then Principal for James Lintott Elementary. Her Hawaiian family's belief in Aloha, the spirit of meeting each other with respect, honesty and unity, permeates the Lintott building including every Thursday, which is Aloha Day. As a leader, Pohlman said her job is to give a voice to staff and students and make sure they all feel empowered.
"I'm a leader among leaders," Pohlman said. "I'm not the be all end all and it takes all of us working together to make kids successful."

Pohlman said she also takes a great deal of inspiration from working with the other principals and assistant principals in the Chehalis School District. She said she loves when different buildings collaborate, such as the Middle School AVID students or W.F. West students helping out in her building. And whether they're collaborating on a project or doing their own thing, Pohlman said the district's administrators are a very close knit group.
"If I needed to talk to any of our administrators for ideas, advice or just to be a friendly ear, I know I could call and there's not not one person that I'd hesitate to call if I needed them," Pohlman said.

Chris Simpson

Principal of Chehalis Middle School
Degrees:
AA - Olympic College
BA - Western Washington University
MA & Principal Certification - City University
Administrator Professional Certification - Seattle Pacific University

Originally from Minnesota, Chris Simpson grew up in a family with a tradition of careers in education. His mother was an English professor and his father was a president of several community colleges, eventually bringing his family to Washington to take a job as president of Olympic Community College in Bremerton.

"That was always our thing in our family, even my parents' parents, just the history of being educators and leaders in education," Simpson said.

When his parents retired and moved back to Minnesota, Simpson stayed because he wanted to complete his education. After earning his Bachelor's Degree from Western Washington University, he worked in student admissions for City University while studying for his Master's Degree. He then taught K-6 and Physical Education for the Kent School District, which because of its size, had a robust program for aspiring administrators where he was able to work as Dean of Students.

In 2006, Simpson joined the Chehalis School District as Principal of Cascade Elementary then sx years later, was encouraged to apply for the Principal opening at Chehalis Middle School. He said his leadership philosophy is as simple as his office door always being open.

"I want this school to be a welcoming and safe place where we try to honor students and give them the opportunity to have a voice," Simpson said.

Simpson said from the very beginning of his time at Chehalis School District he noticed that the district's administrators not only worked collaboratively but also seemed to genuinely enjoy each other's company. It is a culture that he is glad has continued even through changes in administrators over the years.

"It's just amazing to me how we can all be so close . We don't see each other every day but we're always there for each other and when we do get together, we really enjoy it," Simpson said.

Tim Touhey

Principal of Green Hill School, Turning Point (Lewis County Alternative School), and Lewis County Juvenile Detention School.
Degrees:
BA Western Washington University
M.Ed Central Washington University
Principal Certification Washington State University, Vancouver

Touhey started in the Chehalis School District in 1988, teaching marketing and business, coaching girls soccer, serving as the district CTE director, and later as assistant principal. In 2011, he took on the role of Principal of Green Hill School, one of several schools in Washington that are legally required partnerships between juvenile detention facilities and school districts where they are located. Touhey had been a substitute teacher at Echo Glen Children's Center in Snoqualmie and had taught summer school at Green Hill for three years, "so, the system was not totally foreign to me," he said.

Soon after taking the helm at Green Hill, Touhey helped to open Turning Point, the district's first alternative school. He said the concept of an alternative school had been talked about for some time because the district knew there were some students who were not being well served by the traditional public school model. What motivates him at Turning Point is the same thing that motivates him at Green Hill: helping change trajectories for students.

"I really love puzzles and puzzles are meant to be solved," Touhey said. "So, everything we do in institutional education and alternative education is really about solving a puzzle and a lot of times that requires some very novel and unique solutions."

Green Hill's enrollment is about 100-110 high school students. Turning Point's enrollment fluctuates during the year but the program graduated 30 students last year. Touhey said that as the principal of these facilities, his leadership philosophy is to be a good partner with the other entities that are involved by staying focused on why the school exists: the students.
"Our job is to do school for these guys and not to worry about the drama," Touhey said.

Touhey shows a tremendous amount of pride in every success at his schools, especially the hard-fought graduations, many times for kids who are the first in their family to graduate high school. But he said that the real credit belongs to the teachers, who do the lion's share of the work while he is available for support.

"I don't even deserve the thanks I get from parents because I'm not the one who did the work but I get to accept it for my staff," Touhey said.

Even though what he does can be very different from the work of the district's other principals, Touhey said he still feels very much a part of a team at the Chehalis School District. He said he appreciates working with the other principals and learning from one another.

"They're a great group," Touhey said. "They're a lot of fun and also very dedicated and focused."

Bob Walters

Principal of W.F. West High School
Degrees:
AA - Centralia College
BA - Eastern Washington University
MA - City University

When Bob Walters graduated from W.F. West High School in 1980, he never pictured someday he'd be back as principal of his alma mater. In fact, he probably wouldn't have ever gone to college if he had not earned wrestling scholarships. Even while in college, Walters split his time between the classroom and trades such as plumbing and commercial fishing. Ultimately, what led him to choose education was a desire to help young people.

"I was a Young Life leader and I was looking for a way that I could make an impact," Walters recalled. "I thought in education, I might be able to have a greater impact on young people."

He began his teaching career in Kodiak, Alaska in 1987. From there he went to Snohomish High School where he taught woodshop, construction, physical education, coached wrestling and served as the ASB advisor. Walters returned to W.F. West High School in 2000, serving as Assistant Principal for five years. He then served as Principal of Green Hill Academic School for six years. He is now in his 14th year as Principal of W.F. West High School where he said he embraces a philosophy of servant leadership.

"I see myself as a support for our incredible teachers," Walters said. "They're the feet on the ground. What happens in the classrooms if where all the magic happens."

Walters said he feels fortunate to work with all of the other principals in the district. He said he works especially closely with Chehalis Middle School Principal Chris Simpson because there are a handful of staff that work at both buildings but that all of the administrators in the district really look to each other as counselors, confidants and support.

"I think we have a dynamic team," Walters said. "We're only a phone call away and we call each other a lot."

Our Assistant Principals
W.F. West High School
Tommy Elder
Christine Voelker
Mark Westley
Chehalis Middle School
Heidi Fagerness
Orin Smith Elementary
Jonathan Fox
James Lintott Elementary
Merisa Wilson

Assistant Principals Share the Leadership

In addition to our team of six principals, the Chehalis School District also has an amazing team of six assistant principals. All of our principals noted that the work they do could not happen without the hard work and support of the assistant principals who are part of their teams.

W.F. West Principal Bob Walters said he feels so fortunate to work with the team of Assistant Principals Tommy Elder, Christine Voelker and Mark Westley. He said each of them brings amazing backgrounds to their jobs and unique strengths that really compliment the work each of them does.

"I think we really feel like we're a team. We really support each other and really focus on the needs of students and teachers," Walters said.

Chehalis Middle School Principal Chris Simpson said that Assistant Principal Heidi Fagerness' forte is creating a feeling of community among staff and students. He said Fagerness is usually the one who comes up with themes for each year that really serve as a catalyst to unite the school.

"She deserves 99.3% of all the credit because she's amazing," Simpson said. "She's fearless. She's fun. She genuinely loves kids and she's all in."

Orin Smith Principal Rachel Dorsey said she is grateful for how well she and Assistant Principal Jonathan Fox work together. She joked that he is about the age of her son, so she sometimes jokes that he is her work son.

"I come with the experience and he comes with the technology side and the energy and I just love the way we work together," Dorsey said. "I really value him being proactive and I really view him as a partner."

James Lintott Principal Brenda Pohlman said she feels fortunate that Assistant Principal Merisa

Wilson has such an extensive experience in Chehalis teaching Kindergarten, as well as connections as a parent.

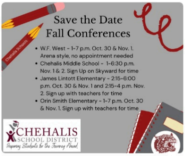
"Our approach to the kids and our philosophy is the same, meet them where they are," Pohlman said. "We laugh. We have fun and we always have a good day, even when that's hard to say ... and we never, never, never give up."

CHEHALIS ADMINISTRATORS PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE JOURNEY AHEAD

Fall Conferences Are Coming Up

Mark your calendar for Fall Conferences Oct. 30-Nov. 3. During that week, W.F. West High School, Chehalis Middle School, Orin Smith Elementary and James Lintott Elementary will be on early release schedule. Check the [School District Calendar](#) for information on your student's school's schedule. Lewis County Alternative School/Turning Point will be on regular schedule.

Conference schedules are:



Save the Date
Fall Conferences

- W.F. West - 1-7 p.m. Oct. 30 & Nov. 1. Arena style, no appointment needed
- Chehalis Middle School - 1-6:30 p.m. Nov. 1 & 2. Sign Up on Skyward for time
- James Lintott Elementary - 2:15-6:00 p.m. Oct. 30 & Nov. 1 and 2:15-4 p.m. Nov. 2. Sign up with teachers for time
- Orin Smith Elementary - 1-7 p.m. Oct. 30 & Nov. 1. Sign up with teachers for time

Chehalis Schools
CHEHALIS SCHOOL DISTRICT
Preparing Students for the Journey Ahead

- W.F. West - 1-7 p.m. Oct. 30 and Nov. 1. Parents do not need to make conference appointments. High school conferences are held arena-style.
- Chehalis Middle School - 1-6:30 p.m. Nov. 1 & 2. Parents should sign up for conference times on Skyward.
- Orin Smith Elementary - 1-7 p.m. Oct. 30 & Nov. 1. Parents should sign up for conference times with their student's teacher.
- James Lintott - 2:15-6 p.m. Oct. 30 & Nov. 1 and 2:15-4 p.m. Nov. 2. Parents should sign up for conference times with their student's teacher.

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Chehalis School District

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