

# Press Release



## Battle Ground Public Schools

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### HomeLink River moving to Brush Prairie

Fifteen years after opening the HomeLink River school in Camas to serve east county families seeking a different kind of educational experience, Battle Ground Public Schools is bringing the operation home.

HomeLink River this summer will vacate its classrooms and offices in the education wing of the Camas Nazarene Church and move onto the same Brush Prairie campus as the school district offices on Northeast 149<sup>th</sup> Street a half-mile east of state Highway 503.

HomeLink River and its sister school, HomeLink Battle Ground, serve students in a family-friendly alternative learning experience that involves considerable parental participation. The school opened in Camas in 1996 when HomeLink Battle Ground was on the verge of becoming overcrowded and many of the students were from east county. The Camas School District said it had no interest in opening a similar school and welcomed the move by Battle Ground.

#### A ‘perfect storm’ of events

Superintendent Shonny Bria said, “We have wanted to bring HomeLink River into our district for several years and have been looking for an alternative facility for at least two years.” Moreover, she said, “a perfect storm” of events and circumstances came together in recent weeks and days that prompted the district’s decision to make the move. Those factors included:

- A recommendation by the district’s insurance provider that there would have to be upgrades at the present facility in Camas if the district was to continue operating there.
- The finalization of the state budget, with its cuts to public schools.
- State House Bill 2065 and its impact on Alternative Learning Experience programs.
- The spring departure by WSU Cooperative Extension from Building C at the Community for Agriculture, Science and Environmental Education (CASEE) and the subsequent idea that it might be a good place for HomeLink River.

Building C is one of three buildings at CASEE owned by the school district. The land at the 80-acre center, 11104 N.E. 149<sup>th</sup> St., is owned by the state Department of Natural Resources.

#### Room for fewer students

HomeLink River this year has a “head count” enrollment of 512 and a full-time-equivalent enrollment of 430. Presently there is room at CASEE for FTE enrollment of 200. It is not yet

known how many students attending Homelink River in Camas will wish to enroll at Brush Prairie next year, but Deputy Superintendent Diana Gilsinger said she expects the new site will come close to or reach the 200 FTE maximum. It is possible some HomeLink River students will be able to take some programs and courses at HomeLink Battle Ground.

HomeLink River draws students from Ridgefield to the Stevenson area. Here are the numbers of students and the school districts in which they resided as of the start of this school year:

- Battle Ground – 16 students (3.13%)
- Camas – 188 students (36.72%)
- Evergreen – 113 (22.07%)
- Hockinson – 8 (1.56%)
- Ridgefield – 1 (0.20%)
- Skamania – 2 (0.39%)
- Stevenson-Carson 13 (2.54%)
- Vancouver 35 (6.84%)
- Washougal 135 (26.37%)

### **Financially, ‘very close to a wash’**

The school district this year is paying \$11,573.66 per month for 12,000 square feet in the educational wing of the Camas Nazarene Church. On the flip side, the school district had leased 5,000 square feet in CASEE C to Washington State University Cooperative Extension for \$6,169 per month.

Thus, there will be savings in facility costs and in the reduction of staff commensurate to the reduction in enrollment. Teachers who are excess to the new HomeLink River enrollment but otherwise were to have been rehired for next year will be offered other teaching jobs in the district. But fewer students mean less state financial support.

On balance, the financial pluses and minuses offset each other and the move will be “very close to a wash,” said MaryBeth Lynn, assistant superintendent for finance and school operations.

Mark Clements will continue as principal and the name will remain HomeLink River.



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