

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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June 10, 2011

Some spent the night in line to register their children for River HomeLink

CAMAS --When the doors opened at 8 a.m. Friday for 2011-12 registration at the Battle Ground School District's River HomeLink, about 100 eager parents were already there, many of them having spent the night in line.

After 15 years, the school is leaving the Camas Church of the Nazarene and moving to a smaller facility in Brush Prairie, in the heart of the Battle Ground district. The school will have the same name, River HomeLink, and Mark Clements will continue as principal.

The numbers explain the early queue of parents: This spring there are 512 River HomeLink students taking various combinations of classes and enrichment programs at the Camas site. They are the equivalent of 430 full-time students. But, there is room for only 200 FTE students at the Brush Prairie site.

The new site has about 5,000 square feet compared to 12,000 in Camas. The building, owned by the school district, is at 1104 N.E. 149th Street on the campus of the Community for Agriculture, Science and Environmental Education (CASEE), which is also home to the school district offices. The district wants and expects the program to expand in subsequent years.

Friday's registration was limited to returning students. By 2 p.m., when everyone had been processed, 259 had been registered. Their full-time equivalency is not yet known, so it isn't known yet how much room might be open this summer for new students.

First in Line

Parent Shari Roberts was so determined to make sure daughter Gabrielle, a ninth grader, is back at River HomeLink that she showed up at noon Thursday and was first in line. Her husband relieved her for the overnight shift. She replaced him in line Friday morning.

Another early bird was (Ms.) Quincy Anderson of North Bonneville, who registered son Magnus Anderson, a fifth grader this year. He attends River HomeLink two days a week and she home-schools him the rest of the week. Her one-way commute to Camas is 35 minutes. She said the commute to Brush Prairie next year will be one hour each way.

Teacher Darlene Wilgus, who helped organize Friday's registration, said "River HomeLink is testimony to the fact that one size does not fit all when it comes to education. Different students have different learning styles and some thrive in non-traditional learning environments."

There were plenty of hugs and some tears Friday as staff, parents and students contemplated the school's impending move to Brush Prairie, with half the enrollment and staff. Most of the excess teachers will be offered jobs elsewhere in the school district.

There are likely to be plenty more hugs and tears at a farewell party for present and former students, parents and staff, from 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, June 14, at the school in Camas.



For more details, including the reasons for the move, here is the June 7 press release that announced the move from Camas to Brush Prairie:

June 7, 2011

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.

River HomeLink 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 149th Street a half-mile west of state Highway 503.

River HomeLink 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 River HomeLink 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 River HomeLink.

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

Room for fewer students

River HomeLink 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 River HomeLink 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 River HomeLink students will be able to take some programs and courses at HomeLink Battle Ground.

River HomeLink 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 River HomeLink 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.

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