

2023 LEARN HERE HEROES

Battle Ground Public Schools



For twenty-seven years, band director **Greg McKelvey** has not only been a music teacher, but leader of talent at Battle Ground High School, Chief Umtuch Middle School, and Tukes Valley Middle School. Through a variety of electrifying musical events, Greg crafts an atmosphere where every note played resonates with positivity and inspiration. Greg understands that his impact goes beyond the confines of the classroom. He tirelessly works to make each student feel cherished, showing them that they are his priority. In his classes, he forges not just musicians, but a tight-knit community pulsating with camaraderie. He challenges them to scale the heights of excellence, coaxing brilliance out of each of his proteges. Through his magnetic passion for music and profound connections, he has transformed the lives of countless students, leaving an indelible mark of inspiration and achievement.



A passionate advocate of CAM Academy, **Hollie Amundson** dedicates her time by means of volunteering and substituting to make school a warm and enjoyable place to be. Whether it be school field trips, end-of-year field days, Pizza Hut Tuesdays, or various other school activities, Hollie is always there turning ordinary moments into extraordinary memories. She wants each student at CAM to step into the school—brimming with anticipation—knowing they are stepping into a space where they will be surrounded with love and encouragement. While Hollie continues to dedicate her time to the classrooms by means of volunteering and subbing, she is simultaneously pursuing her master's in teaching. Her commitment knows no bounds, so whether it be as a volunteer or a future full-time educator, Hollie will be there cultivating a vibrant community where everyone feels valued and inspired.

Camas School District



As an avid advocate for social and environmental justice, **Ali Coker** finds new and creative ways to weave vital subjects into the classroom for her high school students to learn and apply to the world around them. Tackling topics like food insecurity and climate change in past years—and now lessons in forensics in the present—Ali's students are given the opportunity to take a look at real-world problems while also having the chance to use innovation and find solutions to the issues presented to them. Within school walls, she fosters more than just knowledge. She cultivates an environment of support, communication, and space to be themselves. Every day, Ali sees immense potential and empathy in her teens. As such, she works hard to ensure that they have the space to grow upon those skills so that they have a chance to carry those qualities outside the world of the classroom and beyond.



In the captivating world of theater, actress and artist **Mishele Mays** emerges as a beacon of support and inspiration for her students in ways that extend far beyond the stage. Seeing all of the benefits the theater community has to offer, Mishele dedicates her time year after year to help these students grow a greater sense of community and confidence. Whether she's skillfully crafting intricate hair and makeup designs, constructing awe-inspiring sets, or orchestrating the magic of plays and musicals, Mishele's touch is evident in every theatrical masterpiece. Mishele cherishes the bonds that she gets to make with students along the way, and loves nothing more than to see their self-worth and character blossom both on and off stage. She works hard to ensure that they find themselves in an environment where they feel safe, heard, and supported. In all, Mishele's showstopping passion spotlights her heart for encouraging kids to step out of their comfort as they venture further into self-discovery.

Clark College



Once a newcomer to Vancouver herself, **Rosalba Pitkin** dedicates her time both inside and outside of Clark College to ensure that individuals, especially those of underrepresented populations, have the tools and encouragement needed to forge connections and seize fresh opportunities. As a member of Clark College's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Rosalba spends each day helping students navigate their educational journey. She lends her expertise to assist with community events such as Noche de Familia, Dia de Muertos, Black Student Family Fair, Powwow, and Dia del Niño. She also works alongside students by means of overseeing peer mentors or sitting down with students one-on-one. A catalyst for change and a sculptor of futures, Rosalba ensures that each of the students she connects with feels welcomed, acknowledged, and supported in their educational careers and beyond.



LeAnne Bremer is a member of Clark College's Board of Directors and through her role carries out her mission to support the college and all of its students. As a lawyer, it is at LeAnne's core to help others. Whether it be by means of offering patience, kindness, knowledge, or funds, LeAnne finds various and creative ways to play her part in giving back to the community. For example, every year Clark offers a chance for individuals to support students by means of offering them a scholarship. For three different years, LeAnne has participated in supporting this scholarship opportunity and ultimately helped transform the lives of three deserving students, providing them with the means to pursue their dreams and aspirations. As a general supporter of education—and public education at that—LeAnne channels her resources and energy into various programs that uplift the students of Clark College to ensure they are supplied with the tools and resources necessary to propel toward a future of limitless possibility.

Evergreen Public Schools



Ensuring that schools are a safe place for students, staff, and all building relations is at the heart of **Bridget Beaudoin**'s work as a Safety and Security Coordinator for Evergreen Public Schools. In the event of an emergency, Bridget is the person who makes the calls, relays critical information, and does everything she can to help calm those in distress. While instances like this can typically be high-stress, Bridget tackles these events with a level head and an open heart. She knows that being on the other end of the calls she is answering can be frustrating and scary, and she uses this knowledge to help support those she is responding to. By offering a calm voice, constant communication, and timely feedback, Bridget helps an array of different individuals navigate emergency situations when they arise in the schools. Outside of her own dedicated efforts, she knows that the team she works alongside is always there as a means of support and collaboration. Their mutual overarching goal to keep Evergreen Schools safe drives her team forward as they work to maintain a secure space for children to receive their education each day.



When Evergreen Public Schools calls, **Karen Harris** comes running! Through her dedication to the Family and Community Resource Program, Karen has streamlined the process of collecting donations for the families and children of her community. A skilled communicator and organizer, Karen utilizes online platforms like Facebook and Nextdoor to get the word out as to what students need during specific times of the year. She even has a donation bin on her front porch as a means of quick and easy donation access. Over the years Karen is in constant awe of the amount of support her community has to offer. However, she advocates that the needs of these kids are ongoing, and if we ignore the opportunities to do good for others and to help those in need, then the outcome of such negligence can be detrimental to us all. It takes the collaboration of the whole community to help care for and support these children. No matter the speedbumps she may face along the way, nothing stops her from getting her kiddos the support and resources they need to get by each day and succeed.

Hockinson School District



A Highly Capable Teacher for Hockinson Heights Elementary School, **Hollie Rose** works alongside gifted and talented kids to challenge them and foster their high ability to learn. Due to Hollie's classes being smaller in size, she is able to provide an enhanced learning experience for these students as she pushes them to go deeper in their learning. Many of the teachings within Hollie's classroom are project-based, thus allowing students to get more of a hands-on learning experience with the potential to connect their learnings to real-world applications. Outside of the classroom, Hollie also works with kids during after-school activities like nPower Girls and the Solar Car Challenge where students are offered a chance to explore passions, work on personal and professional development, and grow confidence. These opportunities

allow students to learn necessary skills—such as problem-solving, team building, and decision-making—that ultimately help shape them into the people they will become in the future.



A bundle of positive energy and ambition, **Evelyn Weed** serves the Hockinson School District in an array of different ways. Whether it be events sponsored by People Working Together (PWT), offering her time as a volunteer, or stepping in as a substitute teacher when needed, Evelyn is always there to offer a helping hand. She excels at connecting community members as well as organizing and helping at events where people can make meaningful relationships. Her skills in gardening have been put to work on a number of occasions for outdoor projects that help preserve a beautiful place for kids to attend school. Not only this, but Evelyn is also an avid supporter of music, dance, theater, and sports—including as a volunteer tennis coach. In all, Evelyn shows her love and appreciation for people through service and supporting her community. Through her service, she aims to help “knit people together” and offer students, teachers, and community members a sense of belonging and reassurance that they are cared about!

Ridgefield School District



David Jacobson knows that middle school is a hugely transformative time for young people, and now spends his days preparing View Ridge Middle School students for secondary school and beyond. Within the classroom, David engages with each and every student by way of telling stories, finding individual links, and connecting relevant moments to each of his kids’ own lives. Determined to leave no student behind, David is flexible and attentive in his teaching. Outside of the classroom, David works as a coach for both the Middle and High School Knowledge Bowl. For months at a time, David works with these kids outside of school hours to help broaden their knowledge and prepare for competitions. As a whole, David’s enthusiasm, passion, and kindness propel him forward as he continues to positively impact the lives of those he encounters each and every day.

Vancouver Public Schools



Living by the saying “hungry brains can’t learn,” **Susan Marino** works diligently each day to ensure that the kiddos at Alki Middle School are given the nourishment they need to tackle the school day. Faced with nearly 400 hungry mouths daily, Susan plays an irreplaceable role as she prepares two crucial meals of the day for these students. Susan is all too aware that the breakfasts and lunches she serves might be the only opportunity for a hot meal for some of her pupils, so she goes above and beyond to ensure that they are fed and sustained. Not only this, but working on the frontlines, she is also sometimes able to recognize first-hand instances of food scarcity in certain children’s homes—thus giving her the opportunity to voice her concern to administrators to help provide resources to families (who we might not

otherwise know) need it most. Between her passion for food service, dedication to her students, bright smile, and slick dance moves, Susan is a pillar of the Vancouver Public Schools community.



A master gardener and dedicated reading buddy at Washington Elementary School, **Anita Jinks** offers her time as a volunteer to help connect with students both inside and outside the classroom. Anita spends time in the garden with students helping to bridge lessons in the classroom to those in the real world. Through their time spent in the garden, Anita also aims to help students understand and connect with the world around them. As a reading buddy, Anita offers one-on-one attention to kids—giving them encouragement and helping them build a sense of confidence along the way. In all, Anita sees how bright and how much potential these young kids have to offer. Knowing this, she likes to listen deeply, treat them with the respect they deserve, and do her best to see the world through their eyes. In doing so, she feels that she experiences a greater sense of purpose that ultimately puts a smile on her face with each interaction she has the opportunity to encounter.

Washington State School for the Blind



Through her passion for learning and converting braille, **Kandi Lukowski** is wholeheartedly dedicated to ensuring equal opportunities and accessibility for visually impaired individuals. Ever since she was a little girl, Kandi knew that she always wanted to be a teacher for the blind. After working for a couple of years as a teacher's assistant at the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB), she found herself faced with an offer to join the braille department within the school and jumped at the opportunity immediately. It didn't take long before Kandi discovered that this was her new calling. As the main coordinator of jobs, Kandi works with a number of transcribers to facilitate the production of braille materials for children across the state of Washington. Tackling anywhere from 100 to 150 projects at one time, Kandi works tirelessly to provide school materials so that blind students have the tools necessary to work alongside their peers.



With a background in leading hikes in the Great Smoky Mountains, **Jim Selby** now volunteers his time to students at the Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) as he leads them on various hikes throughout the Columbia River Gorge. Alongside a handful of other volunteers, Jim takes anywhere between four to sixteen students out on easy, yet meaningful hikes in and around the Vancouver area several times throughout the school year. While sight is not the primary sense these students use to embrace the outdoor world, Jim is constantly in awe of the details they grasp—many of which would pass over his own head entirely otherwise. Watching students from WSSB make new discoveries, learn about collaboration, and develop a love of nature are at the center of why Jim continues to dedicate his time year after year to these kids.

Washington School For the Deaf



Alex Garcia is the type of person you know you can count on to call when a problem arises. As a former graduate of Washington School for the Deaf (WSD), Alex sees this school's positive impact on young people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Alex is a huge advocate of cultivating an environment that is centered upon equal communication and access, so he now works as a maintenance mechanic where he dedicates his time to ensuring that WSD is a functional, welcoming, and safe place for all who attend. Not only is Alex a dedicated worker to his school, but he does so with the utmost positive attitude. He is the ultimate problem-solver, wants nothing more than to help others, and sees his job as a way to alleviate stress on those around him. Even further, he sets the tone of each day with the underlying intention to be a positive role model for kids who witness the hard work he puts in each day. Alex is known among staff for his can-do attitude, friendliness, and smile.



David Born is a retired Deaf teacher for Washington School for the Deaf (WSD) and in his retirement offers his time by serving as Treasurer for the Deaf Education Advocates Foundation (D.E.A.F.). As WSD is a state-funded school, there are a variety of needs for students of WSD that ultimately need additional funding in order to be secured. As such, David and his team work on putting together an array of various fundraising events—like Bucks for Kids at Dutch Bros Coffee or through Washington Gives. A former graduate himself, David sees the incredible work that WSD does for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. He wants kids who attend WSD to have infinite opportunities, to be able to experience all that life has to offer, and for each of those students to know that they are supported and that they are not alone.

Washington State University Vancouver



Dr. **Adenike Otokhian**, Scholarly Associate Professor of Chemistry, (or “Dr. O” as her students call her) led the efforts that brought a BA in Chemistry degree to WSU Vancouver and the SW Washington area at large. She is the type of educator who acknowledges how difficult the work she teaches is to digest. However, she also sees the immense amount of potential in each of her students and has full faith that—with effort, communication, and dedication—they will be nothing short of successful. After discovering that she loved teaching upon starting college, she knew that it was her calling to obtain her Ph.D. and teach college students. Her passion for chemistry and devotion to her students are foundational qualities to both her and her students' success. She wants nothing more than to see those who attend her classes succeed. To help lead her students to victory, Adenike utilizes openness in her teaching style that ultimately fosters a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all who set foot in her classroom.



At a time when employee recruitment and retention is top of mind for many business leaders, **Nolan Yaws-Gonzalez** works diligently with students to ensure a smooth transition from the learning years to the earning years. Through his involvement with the Future Leaders Project, Nolan helps students from communities who have experienced long-standing inequities and exclusion, as well as first-generation college students, get connected with businesses that offer paid internships. Through these internships, students who participate have the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience and develop social capital. Even further, individuals participating in these work-based learning opportunities then have the chance to get their foot in the door as they enter the business world. Nolan sees how crucial these connections are as he explains that these soon-to-be graduates are the future of our community. As such, he dedicates his time to providing opportunities to students, educating employers, and ensuring that businesses have a chance to witness firsthand just how much potential these soon-to-be graduates truly hold.

Washougal School District



Making sure that students with disabilities have equal access to learning is at the foundation of the work **Leslie DeShazer** puts forth within the Washougal School District each day. She works with children in early learning programs to help prepare them for kindergarten. From sometimes before birth to five years old, Leslie offers these kids and parents additional help to ensure that each individual child is receiving access to the resources necessary to arrange a proper fit in their individual educational journeys. Not only this, but as the vice president of the teacher's union in Washougal, Leslie goes above and beyond to offer additional support to teachers while also advocating for equal opportunities for teachers and students alike. Whether it be offering direct in-home assistance, getting students enrolled in special-education preschools, or offering direct assistance by means of educating and offering resources to parents, Leslie ensures that families know they are not alone and that their kids are going to get the tools necessary to help them succeed.



A former teacher of twenty-one years, **Jeanie Moran** now volunteers her time to support the students of her community. By means of various fundraising efforts such as STRIDE and the Washougal Festival of Trees, Jeanie helps brighten the community while also securing additional funds to support the teachers and students of the Washougal School District. Outside of her efforts to bring the community together in support of the schools, Jeanie also offers her time to the Canyon Creek Middle School Boosters and volunteers as a reading buddy for students as well. In all, Jeanie states that children are at the heart of all she does. She feels that the incredible people that she gets to interact with make her time volunteering all that much more worthwhile, but that you ultimately "get back more than you give" along the way. The ultimate reward for Jeanie is watching the kids of her community grow and thrive.



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The Learn Here Project is a special project of Identity Clark County, a nonprofit business leaders group that strives to make Clark County an even better place to land, live, and learn for a lifetime. The Learn Here Project is made possible by Windermere Northwest Living, the Port of Vancouver USA, iQ Credit Union, and Identity Clark County. More information is available at www.discoverclark.org/learn.