

Superintendent's Message December 2015

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Almost daily, I am out in the community providing information about our three school measures—two levies and one bond—that will be on the Feb. 9, 2016, ballot. Just as frequently, I get questions about one of the bond's most significant projects: a new STEAM academic wing at both Foster High and Showalter Middle Schools. Thus, I want to take the time to talk more about these proposed new classrooms that (if the bond's approved) will solve critical space needs *and* spearhead our movement toward enhanced, innovative, and relevant educational programs for preparing students for high-demand jobs.

First things first, we need more space at all of our schools. As you can see, and your students have certainly told us, the buildings are full, and we expect between 18 and 44 percent more students in the coming decade! The bond, therefore, funds construction to provide additional classroom space for grade spans. At Foster and Showalter, that comes in the form of a new academic wing on each campus.

So why focus on STEAM for the additions?

STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math, and the Tukwila School District is moving towards becoming a premier STEAM leader across the nation. STEAM is much more than just a focus on these certain academic subjects; it is a way of teaching that helps students think deeply and critically as they use content knowledge to collaboratively solve real-world problems. Because business and industry are calling attention to the importance of these subject areas and their relationship to preparing students for the competitive workplace—where they will be expected to collaborate, cooperate, and communicate with team members using project-based scenarios—the district must respond accordingly. Therefore, Tukwila School District will begin to redesign its facilities and curriculum to mirror the real world, to ensure content knowledge is interwoven, layered, and sophisticated, not experienced in isolation such as in traditional education settings (separate math time, separate science time, etc.). The district's commitment is that every student will have many opportunities, from preschool to graduation, to see and experience relevant, high-demand career-focused programs to pique their interest and build their skills. Our goal is to strengthen global competitiveness for our students.

We have chosen to dedicate the new academic wings at Foster and Showalter to STEAM because it will allow us to create class spaces to promote STEAM methods of teaching. We don't know exactly what that looks like yet, but we are exploring innovative classrooms, creative spaces, and 21st century state-of-the-art technology. One potential model is called SmartLabs—a fully integrated learning environment where everything from the furniture to the technology to the curriculum work together to support hands-on, minds-on learning. If you were to peek into such a lab, you'd see students moving and creating, inquiring, building, exploring, and collaborating, working in pods with presentation stations. *There is a buzz!* Students lead their own learning with teachers guiding and facilitating. Students with all different abilities and skills—not just those who gravitate toward math and science—are engaged and successful. This is particularly powerful for gifted students who want to dig deeper, for special education students who may learn tactile-kinesthetically, for English language learners who understand through hands-on experiences, for un-engaged students who need relevancy in classwork—okay, this is a powerful model for *all* students! Our teachers and educational leaders will be involved in every aspect of designing the new classroom spaces to match these instructional practices.

We are also working on exciting new partnerships and programs that fit our STEAM focus. Our region is rich with industry: manufacturing, technology, medical care, aviation, and more. After meeting with business leaders, it is clear that they are hungry for graduates with skills to fill their job vacancies. We are speaking with some of these corporations about a national certificated program that would usher a student *directly* into a living-wage, career-oriented job. If a student is college-bound, she or he would enter with advanced credits and skills. If we can train our students, business leaders have told us they have space for them in abundance! Our efforts with students will begin early, helping even elementary children to identify career interests with job shadows, career presentations, STEAM clubs, mentorships, science and technology fairs, field trips and more.

Perhaps most simply stated, STEAM is our effort to prepare our students with 21st Century skills for 21st Century jobs.

This is our commitment to invest in our local and global economy. We will create clear pathways for every student to a skilled, living-wage job that matches their interests. We will enhance our community through ensuring our students are well prepared for future employment with local industry. All of this will take focused business partnerships, and we have started those conversations. We already have an analysis in hand of the top 25 jobs in our region that will be the most in demand in the next few decades. Our students will be ready to fill them.

I hope this gives you some sense of the vision that's included in our bond construction projects. If you want to learn more about the three school measures on the February 2016 ballot, please visit our homepage, www.tukwila.wednet.edu. You can also give me a call, 206-901-8006, because I am happy to talk with individuals or groups, wherever and whenever you're available.

In service,

Dr. Nancy Coogan, Superintendent