



Monte R. Woolstenhulme, Ed. S

Superintendent

PO Box 775 Driggs, ID 83422
Ph: 208 228 5923 Fax: 208 354 2250

Building A Bond: Preparing For The Future

A school is the building in which students learn, but the foundation of any school is its teachers. At Teton School District 401, 102 teachers dedicate their careers to ensuring Teton Valley's students succeed in and out of the classroom. In the midst of the board's work finalizing the details of the upcoming bond, we caught up with some of TSD401's valuable teachers—before summer break kicks off—to hear their perspective on the facilities, the future, and their experiences teaching in the district.

Sarah Granato is just finishing up her fifteenth year teaching first grade at Victor Elementary School, while Kim Hulet has spent twelve years as a kindergarten teacher in Victor.

For these long-standing teachers and the rest of the staff, the children always come first.

“We do everything we must do to make sure they are safe, well cared for, and learning, but not without effort, uncomfortable conditions, and letting go of some of the things we would do if we could,” Granato says.

The biggest challenge in their day-to-day tasks is the unreliability of the current conditions: Faucets might break, piping isn't working, or heating goes out.

“It has been worked on, adapted, fixed up, and in some cases renovated, but rarely to a high standard and generally not with small children in mind,” Granato says.

To Granato and Hulet, the bond is an opportunity to start from scratch and create a new building that meets the students' current needs.

“All children deserve a high quality school built with safety as the first priority,” Granato says. “We're sure our building was built to be safe, but the world is a different place now, and we have learned a lot about how to build secure schools since.”

As the board continues to help get information into the public regarding the facilities and conditions, Granato and Hulet think of the bond as a community investment.



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“Victor Elementary is a great school, with excellent staff, students, and community, but that can be hard to see when you look at our building. Whether new schools will directly benefit your children or not, we are all residents of Teton Valley,” Granato says.

Eight miles up the road in Driggs, Rachel Bates, Stacy Jackson, and Denise Huff are busy tying up the end of the school year. Huff has been a teacher at the district for 18 years and grew up in Teton Valley. Bates has worked for the district for eleven years as a kindergarten teacher and another two as a special education paraprofessional. Jackson is in her fourth year as a first grade teacher.

“You have to have a genuine love for children and all children. The most rewarding part of being a teacher for me is seeing these kids grow so much in a year,” says Huff. “It is such a rewarding and fulfilling career.”

For the three women, space and organization of the school presents a glaring problem.

“The biggest challenge by far for me is the lack of water fountains, sinks, and bathrooms for my kindergarten children,” Bates says. “These are young children who need water when they need water to drink and a bathroom when they need to go. They also need supervision in the bathroom, which I cannot give and at the same time remain in the classroom with the other children.”

Bates is constantly juggling monitoring students in the classroom, while shuffling others off to the only bathroom down the hall. Her hope is to one day have a classroom that was built for elementary-age students, with a bathroom connected to the classroom so she can assist any student at any time. She is also excited at the idea of more room for play and movement.

“The room size would be adequate for rows of desks, but does not have the space required for a kindergarten/elementary child’s needs,” she explains. “We need space for play and movement.”

For Jackson, teaching amidst tight spaces is a reality she faces regularly.



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“Our library isn't a real library. Mrs. H does a great job with what she is given, but I feel like that is what we all are doing, making the most of the space we are given,” she says. “The classrooms are small. When you have a bigger class—anything over 22 students—the classrooms are packed with desks or tables, so there isn't much room to move around.”

Bates, Jackson, and Huff reiterated that the potential bond will help each teacher have access to better resources and daily circumstances, but their ability to teach well and with passion is of the utmost importance.

“Voting for the bond will not make us better teachers nor will it guarantee the success of all of our students,” Jackson says. “To me, voting for the bond shows that the public is aware of our struggles and is willing to invest in the future of their children. Please know that we will provide the best education for your children with or without the bond. The bond will just provide us a safer learning environment as well as one that is more fit for younger students.”

Huff has watched the valley grow and change over the years. Now, she teaches in a classroom that once housed the wrestling team when she attended school. Every nook and cranny is being utilized, from the gyms to every corner of every room.

“They have used every bit of space in this building. There is not another corner,” she says. “They have band-aided it so well with the resources we have. I don't see anything getting smaller. It will keep getting bigger and the band-aids will have to get larger if the bond doesn't get passed. Band-aides aren't meant to last forever.”

The district invites the public to visit the schools and see firsthand the space in each elementary school is being utilized. Contact the school to schedule a visit. Visit tsd401bond.org for more information.



EMPOWERING OUR STUDENTS TO REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

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