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# District keeping an eye on substitute teacher numbers



District keeping an eye on substitute teacher numbers

By Ryan Hill

*Published: Aug. 17, 2025 at 10:48 PM MDT*

JEROME, Idaho (KMVT/KSVT) — The school year starts this week for most schools, and the Jerome School District is one of them. And they're doing last minute preparations for the students, this includes getting teachers, both full time and substitute ready.

The Jerome School District has been working on making sure their teachers have good start to the school year.

They've been making schedules more flexible for teachers, as well as adjusting the pay to make their district more competitive with others. Jerome School District Superintendent Brent Johnson said their pool of teachers this school year is looking good.

"We're always looking. This time of year is always a crunch figuring out those last couple of positions as all schools do, but overall we have a tremendously good teacher pool and really excited about the start of the year,:" Superintendent Johnson said.

As for substitute teachers, Superintendent Johnson said they're always in need of them. Their pool of substitute teachers is better than it was during COVID when there were more shortages. And the district has taken steps to make recruiting subs easier.

"We're transitioning to a new software platform to hopefully be able to communicate with them and make it easier to pick up jobs, and know what's out there and for them to schedule around their life," Superintendent Johnson said.

Superintendent Johnson added they've been listening to feedback from substitute teachers to help the district implement strategies to eliminate concerns and barriers substitute teachers might face.

"They can be as simple as, they didn't know where their classes were when they entered the building so we got them maps or we have some of the schools chaperones, kids who there assignment is to the classroom and make sure that they're ok," Superintendent Johnson.

Superintendent Johnson said they'll make sure substitute teachers have the proper equipment for the class and make sure they know how to operate it, and that everything goes smoothly for them.

If they don't have a good pool of substitute teachers, it can impact the classroom and administrators or other teachers may have to fill in.

"That becomes a burden to them, overloading them and taking away from their prep time. That we want to eliminate as much as possible," Superintendent Johnson said.

Superintendent Johnson added the Jerome School District is also moving around professional development days for teachers so it doesn't take teachers away from classrooms as much, which is anticipated to reduce the amount of substitutes needed on a daily basis by 10%.

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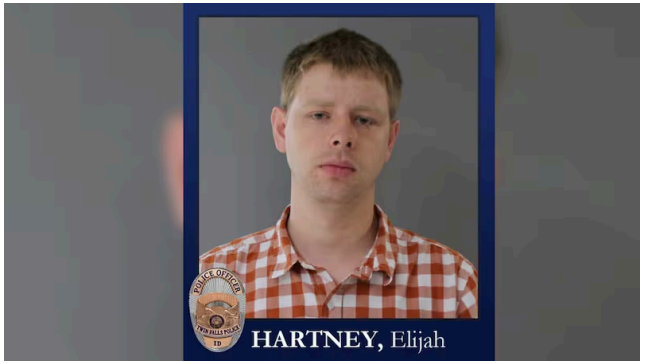

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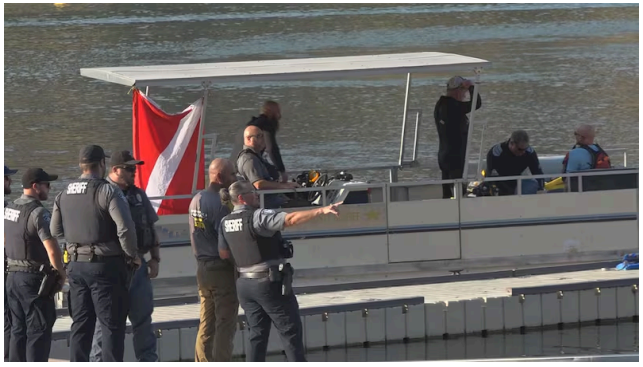
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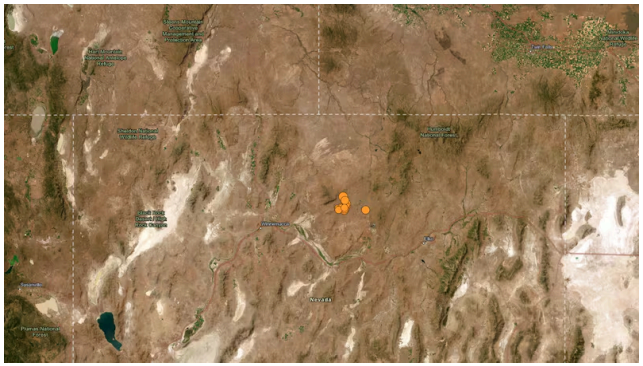

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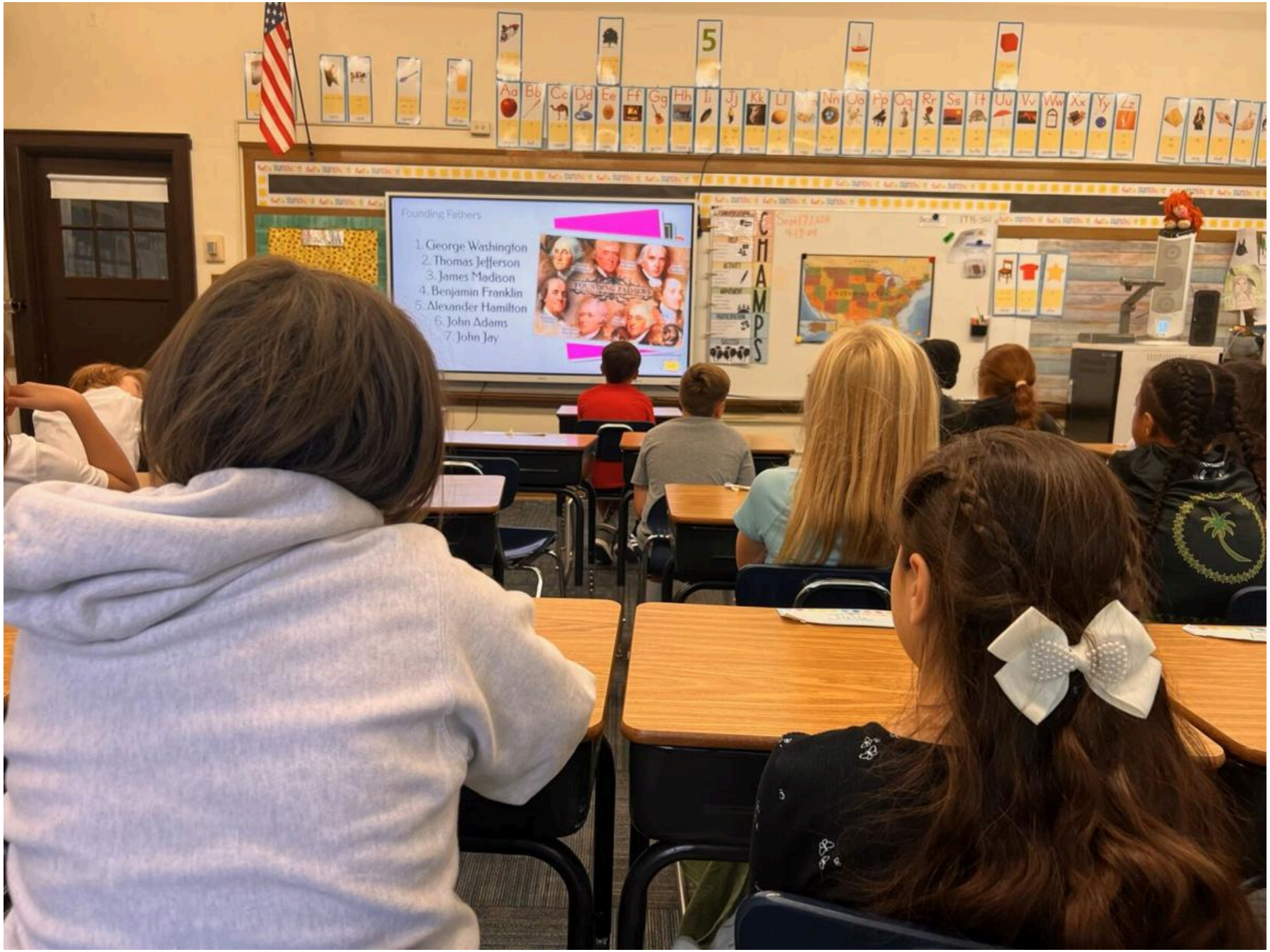
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TIMES-NEWS

2024 ELECTION

TWIN FALLS — Voters backed school funding measures across south-central Idaho Tuesday, with five districts winning approval for supplemental levies and one securing a plant facilities levy, according to unofficial results.

Twin Falls School District's $14.4 million two-year levy passed with 61% support. The measure will cost property owners $91 per $100,000 of taxable value annually, up from $72. About $8.8 million will fund staff salaries and benefits, while $3 million will support security staff, including armed guards at elementary schools and school resource officers. The remainder will pay for maintenance, supplies and extracurricular activities.




**2024 election results for Twin Falls and Idaho**

Jerome Joint School District voters approved a $3.5 million two-year levy with 54% support. The measure increases the tax rate to $66 per $100,000 of value from $37. About $1.5 million will fund staff salaries and benefits, with the remainder supporting transportation, including

new buses as the district transitions to an independent system, and program licenses.

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Twin Falls schools seek $5.7M levy for security, staff

Hansen School District passed both its measures. The $580,000 supplemental levy received 64% approval and will maintain programs with a slight tax increase to $125 per $100,000 of value. Most funds will support staff salaries, classroom materials and after-school programs. The $1 million plant facility levy passed with 59% support and will decrease taxes while funding maintenance and a new bus barn.

Gooding Joint School District's $1.5 million levy passed with 61% support. The measure reduces taxes to $84 per $100,000 of value from $86. More than $1 million will fund staff, with the remainder supporting security, classroom supplies and operations.

Camas County approved two levies: a $450,000 measure for operations and supplies and a $150,000 levy for fine arts programs, both passing with over 60% support. The tax rates will remain unchanged at $104 and $31 per $100,000 of value, respectively.

All supplemental levies required a simple majority to pass, while plant facility levies needed 55% approval.

## Fire levies garner support

The Rock Creek Rural Fire Protection District's temporary override levy passed with 56.6% of voters in favor.

In Blaine County, voters approved creating the Ketchum Fire District with 71.1% support.

IN THIS SERIES

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Gmail

Jeff Pierson <jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com>

# Fwd: Transportation updates

1 message

**Amy Pierson** <amylynnpierson@gmail.com> Sun, Aug 24, 2025 at 7:51 PM
To: Jeff <jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com>

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Brent Johnson** <broadcasts@schoolmessengermail.com>
Date: Sun, Aug 24, 2025, 6:16 PM
Subject: Transportation updates
To: <amylynnpierson@gmail.com>

**Important Transportation Updates**

**August 24th**

**More specific bus information is coming by email asap.**

**We know that a high volume of phone calls last week made it hard to get through to us. To make things better, we're changing our process.**

**Shortly, you'll get confirmation of your student's bus ridership. If you need to make a change or find an error, please use the designated form as the only way to submit your request. This is the most efficient method for us to process your request, so we ask that you don't call the transportation department. School staff can help you with the form if needed. This will allow us to focus on finding solutions and addressing every issue promptly.**

**URI to form**

**https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeboJDwuJX2xMHcyOZVvfFivuv9pU3Sjub1fbxxZh6kqYrR4g/viewform?usp=header**

**You can find the bus routes and stop information on the district website. Look for the yellow bus icon titled "See Updated Bus Routes and Stops" or check the transportation menu.**

**Our transportation department will work to resolve these issues and contact you once the changes are complete. We appreciate your patience, as our top priority is to ensure the accuracy of all routes. We're working hard to build the best system for our students and community.**

**Just a reminder: we use community stops, as we have for many years. This means a bus will pick up multiple students from a location in your neighborhood to ensure an efficient route for everyone.**

**Actualizaciones Importantes sobre el Transporte 24 de agosto**

**Pronto recibirá más información específica del autobús por correo electrónico.**

**Sabemos que el alto volumen de llamadas telefónicas la semana pasada dificultó la comunicación con nosotros. Para mejorar las cosas, estamos cambiando nuestro proceso.**

**En breve, recibirá la confirmación del viaje en autobús de su estudiante. Si necesita realizar un cambio o encuentra un error, por favor utilice el formulario designado como única forma de enviar su solicitud. Este es el método más eficiente para procesar su solicitud, por lo que le pedimos que no llame al departamento de transporte. El personal de la escuela puede ayudarlo con el formulario si es necesario. Esto nos permitirá enfocarnos en encontrar soluciones y abordar cada problema de manera oportuna.**

**URL del formulario https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeboJDwuJX2xMHcyOZVvfFivuv9pU3Sjub1fbxxZh6kqYrR4g/viewform?usp=header**

**Puede encontrar las rutas de autobús y la información de las paradas en el sitio web del distrito. Busque el ícono del autobús amarillo titulado "See Updated Bus Routes and Stops" (Ver rutas y paradas de autobús actualizadas) o consulte el menú de transporte.**

**Nuestro departamento de transporte trabajará para resolver estos problemas y se comunicará con usted una vez que los cambios se hayan completado. Agradecemos su paciencia, ya que nuestra principal prioridad es garantizar la precisión de todas las rutas. Estamos trabajando arduamente para construir el mejor sistema para nuestros estudiantes y la comunidad.**

**Solo un recordatorio: usamos paradas comunitarias, como lo hemos hecho durante muchos años. Esto significa que un autobús recogerá a varios estudiantes de un lugar en su vecindario para garantizar una ruta eficiente para todos.**

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Jeff Pierson <jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com>

# Update: JSD Transportation

1 message

**Brent Johnson** <broadcasts@schoolmessengermail.com> Tue, Aug 26, 2025 at 4:22 PM
Reply-To: do_not_reply@jeromeschools.org
To: jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com

**Aug 26, 2025**

## Important Update: Jerome School District Transportation

**Dear Jerome School District Parents,**

**Thank you for your continued patience as we work through the initial challenges of our new transportation system. We have established a base set of routes and routines, and we are now building upon that foundation. Understand that having a "No" for transportation doesn't mean it's permanent, and we are working through all submitted correction forms. We understand the frustrations, and we sincerely appreciate your cooperation and understanding.**

**We are diligently processing the transportation corrections and adjustments that you have submitted, and your feedback has been invaluable. We have identified some critical errors in our routing process that we are actively working to correct with your help.**

**Here is a summary of our current process and what we're addressing:**

- **Bus Compass App: The Bus Compass app is being updated and should provide much more accurate information in the future as we continue to refine routes.**
- **Routing Issues: We have identified a few critical errors in our routing process that we are working to correct using your feedback.**
  - **The routing software had conflicting rules for "halo" areas, which incorrectly removed some students from safety busing.**
  - **Some addresses continue to be flagged by the routing software as they do not properly function with Google Maps. We are addressing these individually.**
- **Correction Timeline: We will be updating busing assignments and adding new riders each weekend as we work through the submitted forms. This process is very involved, and our top priority is to make sure every change is accurate and effectively communicated. As we have stated a school district employee will reach out to you prior to the change happening.**

**By taking a careful and deliberate approach, we can avoid larger issues like overcrowded buses, dramatically extended routes, or widespread rider confusion. Our goal is to serve the needs of the Jerome community as our student population grows, and doing so carefully is the best way to achieve that.**

**On a positive note, we are seeing significant improvements in our existing routes. We are effectively transporting students who have already been assigned to routes, and we have been able to reduce travel times every day.**

**If you need to make a change or find an error, please use the designated form as the only way to submit your request. This is the most efficient method for us to process your request, so we ask that you don't call the transportation department. School staff can help you with the form if needed. This will allow us to focus on finding solutions and addressing every issue promptly.**

**We thank you again for your patience as we work to provide the safest possible transportation system for your students.**

**Sincerely,**

**The Jerome School District**

**26 de agosto de 2025**

**Actualización Importante: Transporte del Distrito Escolar de Jerome**

**Estimados padres del Distrito Escolar de Jerome,**

**Gracias por su continua paciencia mientras trabajamos en los desafíos iniciales de nuestro nuevo sistema de transporte. Hemos establecido un conjunto básico de rutas y rutinas, y ahora estamos construyendo sobre esa base. Tengan en cuenta que recibir un "No" para el transporte no significa que sea permanente, ya que estamos revisando todos los formularios de corrección que se han enviado. Entendemos sus frustraciones y agradecemos sinceramente su cooperación y comprensión.**

**Estamos procesando diligentemente las correcciones y ajustes de transporte que han enviado, y sus comentarios han sido de gran valor. Hemos identificado algunos errores críticos en nuestro proceso de rutas que estamos trabajando activamente para corregir con su ayuda.**

**Aquí tienen un resumen de nuestro proceso actual y lo que estamos abordando:**

**Aplicación Bus Compass: La aplicación Bus Compass se está actualizando y, a medida que seguimos mejorando las rutas, en el futuro debería proporcionar información mucho más precisa.**

**Problemas de rutas: Hemos identificado algunos errores críticos en nuestro proceso de rutas que estamos trabajando para corregir utilizando sus comentarios.**

- **El software de rutas tenía reglas contradictorias para las áreas de "halo", lo que eliminó incorrectamente a algunos estudiantes del transporte de seguridad.**
- **Algunas direcciones siguen siendo marcadas por el software de rutas porque no funcionan correctamente con Google Maps. Estamos abordando estos casos de forma individual.**

**Cronograma de corrección: Actualizaremos las asignaciones de autobús y añadiremos nuevos pasajeros cada fin de semana a medida que revisemos los formularios enviados. Este proceso es muy complejo y nuestra principal prioridad es asegurarnos de que cada cambio sea preciso y se comunique de manera efectiva. Como hemos dicho, un empleado del distrito escolar se pondrá en contacto con ustedes antes de que se realice el cambio.**

**Al adoptar un enfoque cuidadoso y minucioso, podemos evitar problemas mayores como autobuses sobrecargados, rutas significativamente más largas o una confusión generalizada entre los pasajeros. Nuestro objetivo es satisfacer las necesidades de la comunidad de Jerome a medida que nuestra población estudiantil crece, y hacerlo con cuidado es la mejor manera de lograrlo.**

**Una nota positiva es que estamos viendo mejoras significativas en nuestras rutas existentes. Estamos transportando eficazmente a los estudiantes que ya han sido asignados a las rutas, y hemos logrado reducir los tiempos de viaje cada día.**

**Si necesitan hacer un cambio o encuentran un error, por favor usen el formulario designado como la única forma de enviar su solicitud. Este es el método más eficiente para que podamos procesar su solicitud, por lo que les pedimos que no llamen al departamento de transporte. El personal de la escuela puede ayudarlos con el formulario si es necesario. Esto nos permitirá concentrarnos en encontrar soluciones y abordar cada problema con prontitud.**

**Les agradecemos una vez más su paciencia mientras trabajamos para ofrecer el sistema de transporte más seguro posible para sus hijos.**

**Atentamente,**

**El Distrito Escolar de Jerome**

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Jeff Pierson <jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com>

## Updates from the District

1 message

**Brent Johnson** <broadcasts@schoolmessengermail.com> Fri, Aug 29, 2025 at 4:25 PM
Reply-To: Do_not_reply@jeromeschools.org
To: jeff.a.pierson@gmail.com

# Updates from the District

**Dear Parents and Guardians,**

**Thank you for your patience and valuable feedback. We've heard your concerns about transportation, and we are working hard to make the necessary changes. We know it's a balance between moving quickly and making sure we get the routing right, and we appreciate your understanding as we work through this complex process.**

**Upcoming Route Changes: We've brought on an additional expert consultant to help us optimize our routes as quickly as possible.**

**New routing changes, which will include all 700 change requests, will be communicated on Friday, September 5th, for implementation the following week.**

**We will have no changes to routing next week following the Labor Day Weekend**

**This will give our drivers time to review the route modifications and allow us to communicate the changes to you as early as possible.**

**I know this is frustrating for families not receiving transportation but is necessary to communicate and route as best we can safely.**

**What we are addressing based on your feedback:**

- **We will communicate routing changes to parents earlier so you can be prepared.**
- **We are committed to implementing routing changes smoothly and accurately. We will still need your input moving forward to continue to adjust as needed.**
- **We're correcting routing discrepancies and ensuring that students who were mistakenly removed from busing lists are added back on, including students who qualify for safety busing.**
- **We are processing the long list of new student transportation requests. If your child received a notice that we are unable to transport, please know that we are working through the entire list of corrections to get everyone routed correctly. This is not permanent.**
- **We're working to address rural stops where students have to walk too far.**
- **We are optimizing routes to avoid having multiple buses come into the same areas.**
- **We are looking to add route/s to further reduce route times for students.**

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### Transportation

**We want to provide a clear and transparent update on our transportation progress.**

- **Daily Routes: We have enough buses to maintain all daily routes without disruption. We've improved route times throughout the week and have eliminated student transfers between buses to streamline logistics and improve safety.**
- **Addressing Concerns: We've received nearly 700 requests for route corrections and are working through them one by one. This is a time-intensive process, and we appreciate your patience as we work to get everything right. To help us, please do not submit multiple forms for the same student issue.**
- **Activity Busing: Temporarily, we are using subcontractors for athletic and activity trips. This helps us focus on our daily student routes. These trips may result in students arriving early, and we've asked coaches and chaperones to use this extra time for team building, homework, or practice. This is a sometimes unfortunate reality to all activity busing.**

#### Bus Route Guidelines

- **Siblings can ride together as long as one of the students has an approved route.**
- **Boys and Girls Club and approved daycare facility students can be routed to their respective locations directly.**
- **We transport to one address in the morning and one address in the afternoon. We can’t change your routing on different days of the week.**

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### District Operations

- **School Meals: We're excited to see more students enjoying our school breakfast and lunch programs and have received positive feedback on the new options.**
- **Facilities and Grounds: Our maintenance, grounds, and custodial teams are doing a fantastic job with preventative care across all our facilities. We're also developing a new landscaping plan for Jefferson and have conducted soil sampling to improve our grounds. We are also working with professionals to resolve electrical issues at JHS and HVAC issues at multiple buildings as soon as possible.**
- **Track Renovation: The new track surface is almost finished and looks great! We'll complete the final coating over the next couple of weeks, with striping to follow. The fencing is also being remodeled to allow community walking access on the north side.**
- **Soccer Under the Lights: This week, we hosted our first-ever soccer games under the lights, creating a fun and exciting environment for our teams and fans.**

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**We appreciate your continued support and understanding as we work through these updates. We look forward to a great school year!**

## Actualizaciones del Distrito

**Estimados padres y tutores,**

**Gracias por su paciencia y valiosos comentarios. Hemos escuchado sus inquietudes sobre el transporte y estamos trabajando arduamente para hacer los cambios necesarios. Sabemos que se trata de un equilibrio entre actuar con rapidez y asegurarnos de que las rutas sean correctas, y agradecemos su comprensión mientras trabajamos en este proceso complejo.**

## Próximos cambios en las rutas

**Hemos contratado a un consultor experto adicional para ayudarnos a optimizar nuestras rutas lo más rápido posible. Los nuevos cambios en las rutas, que incluirán las 700 solicitudes de cambio, se comunicarán el viernes 5 de septiembre para su implementación la semana siguiente. No habrá cambios en las rutas la próxima semana después del fin de semana festivo del Día del Trabajo.**

**Esto dará tiempo a nuestros conductores para revisar las modificaciones de las rutas y nos permitirá comunicarles los cambios lo antes posible. Sabemos que esto es frustrante para las familias que no tienen transporte, pero es necesario para comunicar y establecer las rutas de la manera más segura posible.**

## Lo que estamos abordando basándonos en sus comentarios:

- **Comunicaremos los cambios en las rutas a los padres con anticipación para que puedan prepararse.**
- **Nos comprometemos a implementar los cambios en las rutas de manera fluida y precisa. Aún necesitaremos su colaboración en el futuro para continuar haciendo los ajustes necesarios.**
- **Estamos corrigiendo las discrepancias en las rutas y asegurándonos de que los estudiantes que fueron eliminados por error de las listas de autobuses sean agregados nuevamente, incluyendo a los que califican para el transporte por seguridad.**
- **Estamos procesando la larga lista de solicitudes de transporte para nuevos estudiantes. Si su hijo recibió un aviso de que no podemos transportarlo, por favor sepa que estamos trabajando en toda la lista de correcciones para que todos tengan su ruta correctamente. Esto no es permanente.**
- **Estamos trabajando para abordar las paradas en áreas rurales donde los estudiantes tienen que caminar demasiado lejos.**
- **Estamos optimizando las rutas para evitar que varios autobuses pasen por las mismas áreas.**
- **Estamos buscando agregar rutas adicionales para reducir aún más el tiempo de viaje de los estudiantes.**

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## Transporte

**Queremos ofrecerles una actualización clara y transparente sobre nuestro progreso en el transporte.**

- **Rutas diarias: Tenemos suficientes autobuses para mantener todas las rutas diarias sin interrupciones. Hemos mejorado los tiempos de las rutas durante la semana y hemos eliminado los transbordos de estudiantes para agilizar la logística y mejorar la seguridad.**
- **Atención a las inquietudes: Hemos recibido cerca de 700 solicitudes de corrección de rutas y las estamos revisando una por una. Este es un proceso que requiere mucho tiempo, y agradecemos su paciencia mientras trabajamos para hacerlo correctamente. Para ayudarnos, por favor no envíe múltiples formularios para el mismo problema del estudiante.**
- **Transporte para actividades: Temporalmente, estamos utilizando subcontratistas para los viajes de deportes y actividades. Esto nos ayuda a enfocarnos en nuestras rutas diarias de estudiantes. Estos viajes pueden resultar en que los estudiantes lleguen temprano, y hemos pedido a los entrenadores y chaperones que usen este tiempo extra para actividades de integración, tareas o práctica. A veces esta es una realidad inevitable del transporte para actividades.**

### Pautas de rutas de autobús

- **Los hermanos pueden viajar juntos siempre y cuando uno de los estudiantes tenga una ruta aprobada.**
- **Los estudiantes del Boys and Girls Club y de guarderías aprobadas pueden ser transportados directamente a sus respectivas ubicaciones.**
- **Transportamos a una dirección por la mañana y a una dirección por la tarde. No podemos cambiar su ruta en diferentes días de la semana.**

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## Operaciones del Distrito

- **Comidas escolares: Nos entusiasma ver que más estudiantes disfrutan de nuestros programas de desayuno y almuerzo escolar, y hemos recibido comentarios positivos sobre las nuevas opciones.**
- **Instalaciones y terrenos: Nuestros equipos de mantenimiento, jardinería y limpieza están haciendo un trabajo fantástico con el cuidado preventivo en todas nuestras instalaciones. También estamos desarrollando un nuevo plan de paisajismo para la Escuela Jefferson y hemos realizado un muestreo del suelo para mejorar nuestros terrenos. Además, estamos trabajando con profesionales para resolver los problemas eléctricos en JHS y los problemas de HVAC en varios edificios lo antes posible.**
- **Renovación de la pista: La nueva superficie de la pista está casi terminada y se ve fantástica. Completaremos la capa final en las próximas dos semanas, y luego vendrá el marcado de líneas. También se está remodelando la cerca para permitir el acceso a pie a la comunidad en el lado norte.**
- **Fútbol bajo las luces: Esta semana, organizamos nuestros primeros juegos de fútbol bajo las luces, creando un ambiente divertido y emocionante para nuestros equipos y aficionados.**

**Agradecemos su continuo apoyo y comprensión mientras trabajamos en estas actualizaciones. ¡Esperamos tener un gran año escolar!**

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TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

Jerome Joint School District

# Owning the fleet: Jerome to switch to district-run transportation in 2025

SEAN DOLAN
Nov 28, 2024



In this file photo, Canyon Ridge students Isabelle May, left, 17, and Sydnee Morris, 14, board the bus Wednesday morning in Twin Falls in 2020. Jerome Joint School District will switch to a district-run transportation service in 2025, ending a 53-year relationship with private contractor North Side Bus Co.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO

When it comes to getting students safely to and from school, the Jerome Joint School District says it's time to take the wheel.

The district will end its 53-year relationship with private contractor North Side Bus Co. in 2025, switching to a district-run bus service. Tim Hicks, transportation director for the district, said taking ownership of student transportation will save taxpayer money over time and provide a safer experience for kids.

Hicks said that is not necessarily the case when it comes to a for-profit company.

“Their purpose is to make money, right?” he said. “Whereas at the district level, our No. 1 focus is safety.”

District ownership will strengthen bus driver training and oversight, he said.

When the *Times-News* first called North Side’s listed number last week, an employee abruptly ended the conversation, saying they were driving a school bus. In a follow-up call the following morning, the same employee, who declined to give their name, said the company would not comment. They clarified that during Wednesday’s call, they had been “moving a bus” with only their own children aboard.

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Jerome schools will continue its relationship with North Side through the end of the 2024-25 school year, Hicks said, and the district-run service will begin in August. Purchasing a fleet and hiring staff will take time. The district is in communication with North Side to potentially purchase buses and to see if drivers would like to become school district employees.

The school board in September approved the new transportation director job position and description.

"That's the reason why the position started now," Hicks said. "Is to make sure everything is in place, everything is good."

Buses aren't cheap. Hicks said a new school bus costs around $185,000. Voters in November approved a $500,000 levy to purchase new and used school buses.

It will take a large initial capital investment to purchase approximately 30 buses, but Hicks said it will help the district save money over time. It's like renting a house versus owning, Hicks said, you can pay rent every month or you can pay down a mortgage and build equity over time.

"With a contractor, that's just money going out," he said. "For fiscal responsibility, it's a benefit to the district, to the community's taxpayers."

Based on the state's reimbursement formula, districts that provide transportation services receive more funding compared with districts that use contractors. According to **Idaho Statutes**, the Idaho Department of Education reimburses school districts for 85% of bus depreciation and maintenance.

Scott Graf, communications director for the department, stated in an email to the *Times-News* that he anticipates the district will see "significant savings" by running its own system.

Out of 156 student transportation systems in Idaho, 54 currently use contractors, Graf said. Districts that use contractors include Twin Falls, Valley, Buhl, Hagerman and Caldwell.

North Side Bus Co. has two contracts, according to the list Graf provided the *Times-News* — Jerome Joint School District and Heritage Academy, a kindergarten-through-eighth-grade charter school in Jerome with 130 students.

The district plans to modernize its fleet with RFID tags on all buses, Hicks said. Parents will be able to track their child's bus in real-time through the MyView app. On snowy mornings, students won't have to wait in the cold — they can monitor their bus location and head to the stop just before it arrives.

"Parents will be able to identify where their child is at all times," he said.



**UPDATE: Jerome Kindergartner Left on School Bus, Found Wandering**

In 2015, North Side owner Jerome Fiscus said he fired a bus driver after a 6-year-old girl fell asleep on a school bus and was left alone for about two hours. A firefighter found the girl roaming the streets.

In 2018, parents in Jerome complained about overcrowding on a North Side school bus. Photos and videos showed some students sitting and standing in the aisle. The overcrowding was corrected, according to then-Superintendent Dale Layne.

**Fewer students assigned to overcrowded Jerome school bus after parents complain**

Sean Dolan writes about education and politics for the *Times-News*. Reach him at 208-735-3213 or email him at **sean.dolan@magicvalley.com**.

By SEAN DOLAN

Education/Political Reporter

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# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing | Photos

**DREW NASH**
Jul 15, 2025

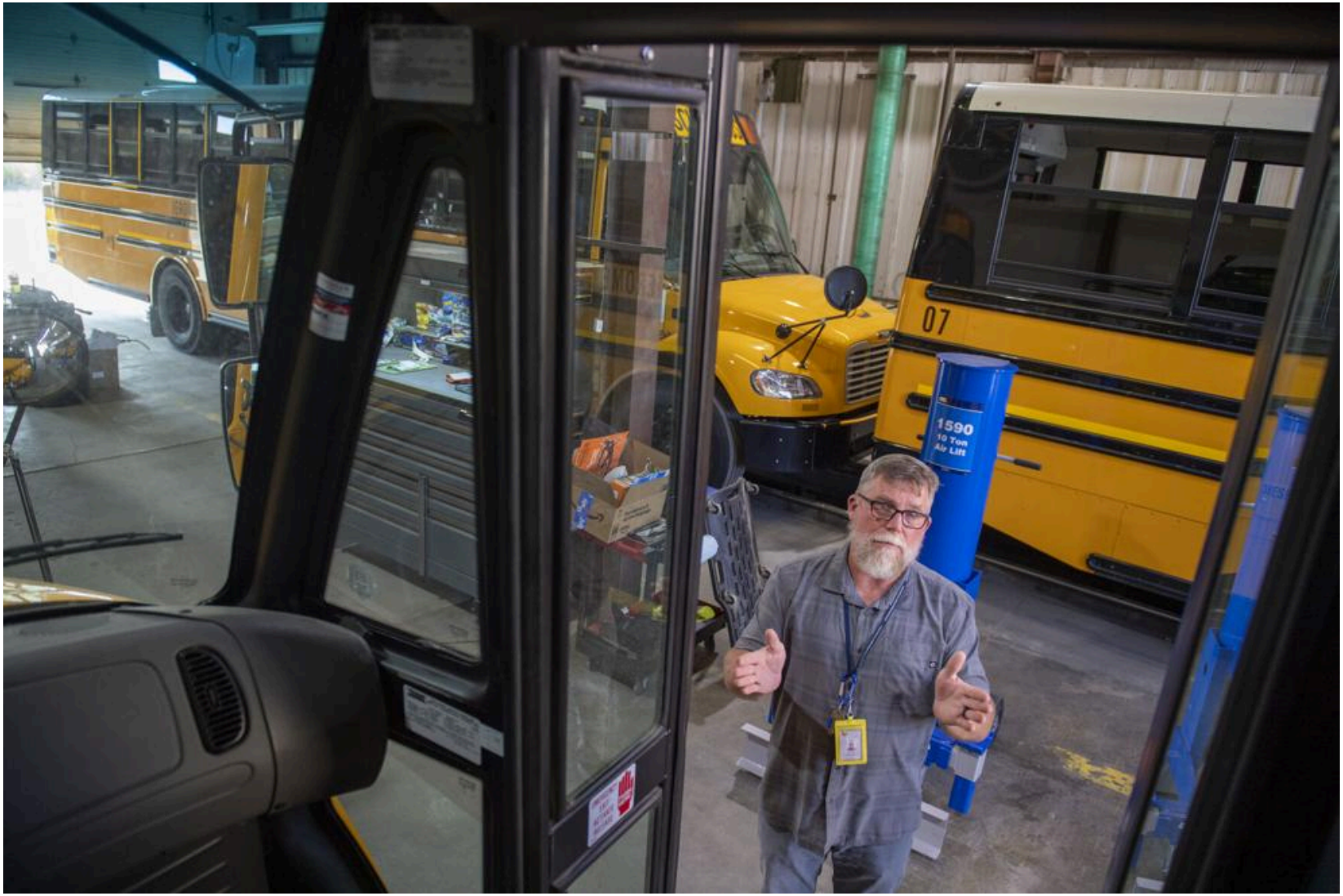
Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks about the school district taking over their own student busing Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at his office building in Jerome.

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing




Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks about bus routes Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at his offices in Jerome.
*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS*

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing




Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks about the technology that's going into the district's new buses Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at his offices in Jerome.

*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO*

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing



Angel Ornelas, technician, works on wiring up a camera system Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at the shop in Jerome.

*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS*

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing



A Jerome School District bus sits parked in the shop Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Jerome.

*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS*

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing



Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks busing Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Jerome.

*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO*

# Jerome School Dist. is getting into the business of busing



Multiple cameras will be used on Jerome School buses and they can be monitored remotely in Jerome.

*DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS*

By DREW NASH

Visuals Director

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# Jerome School District considering moving to a four-day school week




The Jerome School District began looking at a four-day school week about two years ago, by surveying the community.

By Elizabeth Hadley

*Published: Nov. 24, 2023 at 3:58 PM MST*

JEROME, Idaho (KMVT/KSVT) — 97 school districts across Idaho have four day school weeks, and the Jerome School District is the next one to consider moving to a four day week.

The Jerome School District began looking at a four day school week about two years ago, by surveying the community.

At that time, the Jerome School Board did not proceed with that four day school week option.

This year, the idea was brought up again, after the community questioned the school district and board about it.

A committee was formed in the district to survey the committee, speak with other districts and get more information on what this would look like for the Jerome School District.

“Doctor Charlton, our superintendent did go to a four day school conference from the University of Oregon, after coming back from that conference he was pretty energized and excited about learning that sometimes it has helped reduce behavior issues, helped with teacher recruitment and retention, attendance, all things that every district in Idaho, or probably around the world is struggling with right now,” said Kim Lickley, the federal programs director.

Surveys were sent out to the community and those results have showed everything from parents worried about what their children will do on that extra day because both parents have to work to afford all the bills, and some people are excited to have an extra day with their families.

“We’ve heard everything, we’ve heard the full gambit, we definitely have some parents and community members who are against it, they know that Jerome has a unique population of students, coming from households, low income, second language learners, special Ed students, all of them are concerned that those students need that 5th day, to the other half that are very much in favor, value that it may help with all of the things we mentioned earlier, as well as give them more opportunity to be with their families,” said Lickley.

It is unknown when the four day week would start if approved by the board.

On November 28, the Jerome School Board will be discussing this during their monthly meeting, which begins at 6:00 p.m.

Anyone is welcome to attend the meeting.

It is unknown if a decision will be made during this meeting, or if they will just hear the results of the surveys.

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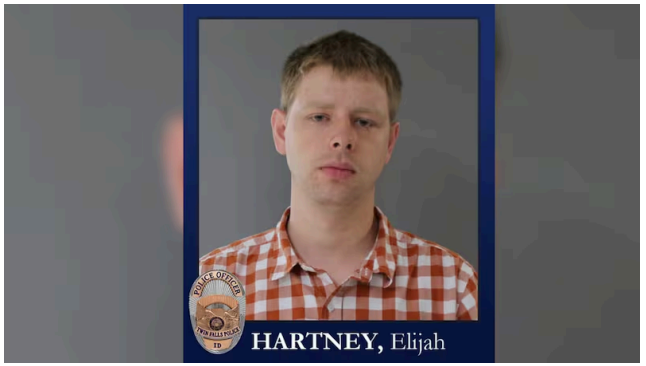

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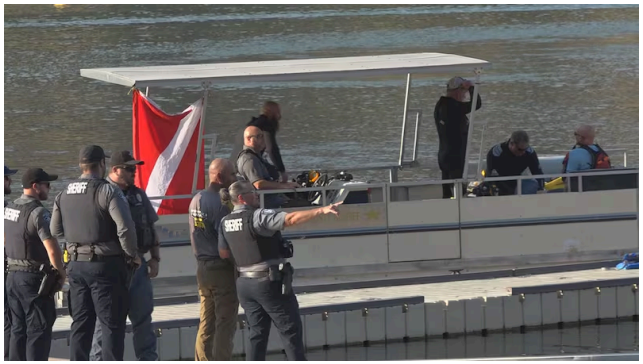

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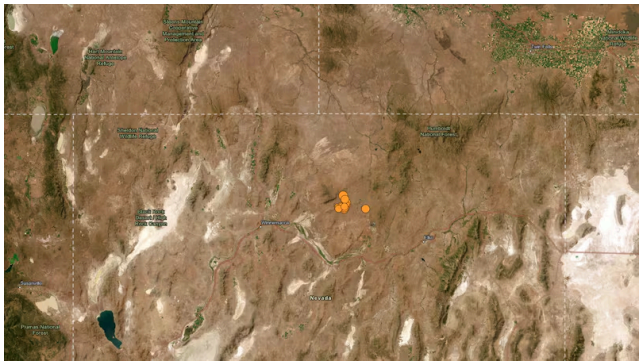
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TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

# Jerome School District considers outsourcing food service, wants meals from scratch

JEROME — Superintendent Brent Johnson in his first year on the job is taking a hard look at every department to see if they are running at an A-plus level.

Jerome Joint School District this month is considering outsourcing food and custodial services after rejecting last year's bid to bring transportation in-house beginning this fall, ending a 53-year relationship with contractor North Side Bus Co.

From the 7 Top stories from last week | Recap (April 7 - 14, 2025) series

SEAN DOLAN

Apr 9, 2025

Jeff Schroeder, school board member for Jerome Joint School District, discusses outsourcing maintenance and food service at a meeting on Monday, April 7, 2025, in Jerome.

SEAN DOLAN, TIMES-NEWS

Johnson used the analogy of going to different stores for different purposes, like getting groceries at Ridley's Family Markets in Jerome or driving to Twin Falls for a big haul at Costco.

"I do different things at all of those different locations for different reasons," Johnson told the *Times-News* in February. "The same is true with the school district."

In January, the district released two requests asking companies for proposals to take over food services and another for both custodial and maintenance services. The district received three proposals for custodial and maintenance and two proposals for food service.

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The board is expected to take a vote on the proposals at an April 22 meeting.

**Owning the fleet: Jerome to switch to district-run transportation in 2025**

At an informational school board meeting on Monday, Food Service Manager Bianca Sozzi told the trustees that she doesn't like the idea of outsourcing, but she will do what's best for the kids.

“I don’t like either one of these,” Sozzi told the board. “It’s a change. It’s something new. It’s something different. But I want ultimately what’s best for the district, what’s best for our employees and what’s best for our students.”

In an interview after the meeting, Sozzi said she knows food service is struggling and could be doing a lot better.

“I know we need a change, I know we need to change something to get something back on track,” Sozzi said. “We’re hurting, but for me personally, I don’t know if we have to. I don’t know.”

The two food service companies, Chartwells and SFE, would both provide institutional knowledge that the district simply does not have, Johnson said at the meeting, from logistics, recipes, ordering and commodities.

“I couldn’t even begin to think about how we’re going to bring that knowledge to us,” Johnson said.

Serving more homemade meals for school lunch is a big part of the push for hiring an outside company, Trustee Peter Gibbons said.

“Cooking from scratch was a major thing from both so that is something we wanted to see,” Gibbons said. “We saw proposals from both on how to retain our current employees and making sure they are taken care of as well.”

Approximately two out of five lunches are made from scratch, Sozzi told the *Times-News*.

On the custodial and maintenance proposals, Trustee Jeff Schroeder said a committee decided that maintenance is best left in-house, but could consider outsourcing custodial services.

"It got a little bit more than what we thought would be prudent for us to do," Schroeder said of outsourcing maintenance.



**Jerome school district cuts 20 positions for next school year**

Maintaining buildings in the school district is currently in triage, Johnson said, and they fix things only when they are broken or on fire.

The cost savings would be huge, he said, if the district could be more proactive.

In another decision in Johnson's first year, the school board voted in January to cut 19.75 full time positions for school year largely due to the ending of federal funding from the pandemic.

"We have great people," Johnson told the *Times-News* in February. "These are tough decisions, for sure."

Sean Dolan writes about education and politics for the *Times-News*. Reach him at 208-735-3213 or email him at **sean.dolan@magicvalley.com**.

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**By SEAN DOLAN**

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# Jerome School District continues to address bussing issue



By Dereka Kay

*Published: Aug. 26, 2025 at 8:57 AM MDT*

JEROME, Idaho (KMVT/KSVT) —The Jerome School District confirmed that schools are back in session this week, after canceling classes on Thursday and Friday due to transportation issues.

"We had a pretty catastrophic failure in our routing software. Jerome has a lot of areas where you use Google Maps or Apple Maps, and the addresses don't register, so we were getting a lot of strange returns to our software about corn fields or beat fields," said Superintendent Brent Johnson.

Johnson says because of this, the district had to go back and confirm the home addresses of nearly 400 students. Since last week, the district has been notifying parents whose drop-off location could not be confirmed, telling them their kids would not received transportation, starting Monday, August 25th.

This left parents upset, with some speaking out on social media. The district sent out a form to impacted families, asking them to update their students' records to help resolve the issue as soon as possible. But the district's fix could take a couple of weeks.

"We want them to use the form that we sent out. We sent them out a couple of times now; it's also on our website for transportation issues and changes. That helps our transportation and our routers work on that specific problem in an orderly fashion and make sure we have accountability to every notice that comes in," said Johnson.

These issues come after the district took over busing services beginning this year. Johnson says the district is adding additional measures to ensure smooth operations. This includes having BusTags available for the students, so the district can make sure they're on the right bus, and updating maps and routes.

"We're going to have a team on it for multiple hours a day, fixing and calling families that are affected by transportation issues. Our hope is to have them routed every day, until we get down to the last person, " said Johnson.

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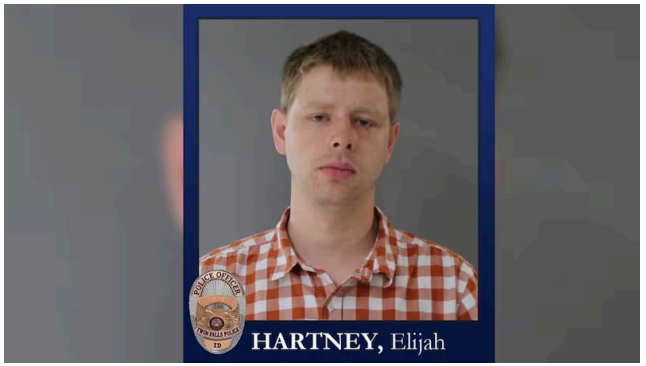

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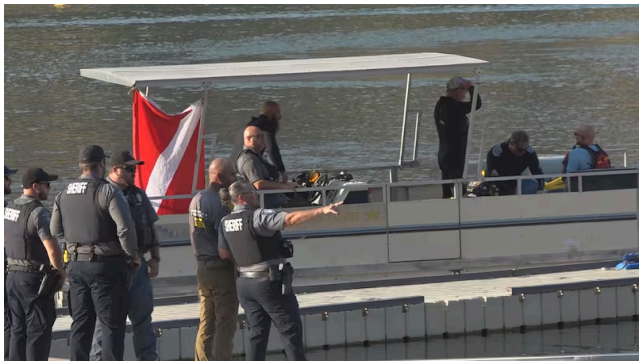

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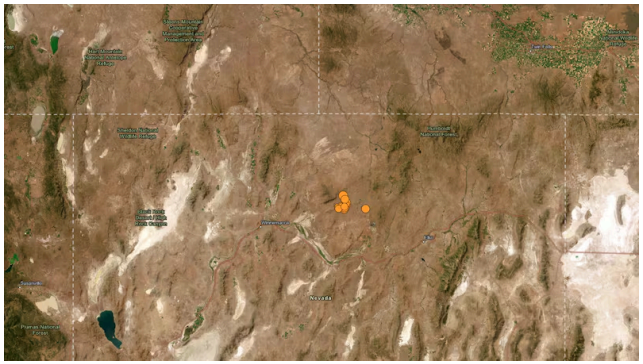
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TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Jerome School District

# Chaos e rome School D bus system

SEAN DOLAN
Aug 23, 2025

**LOOK:** Snap this code, then tap the link to find more online.

SEAN DOLAN

Chaos erupted this week as Jerome School District tried out its new bus system for the first time.

In the first week of running its own bus system, the district ended up canceling school on Thursday and Friday after logistical issues on Wednesday led to long rides, angry parents, and kids who were unaccounted for.

That's going to change when schools open back up on Monday, Superintendent Brent Johnson said, after the district made the "unprecedented step" of canceling school for two days.

Last school year, the district bused 950 students on its peak day, but ridership increased to more than 1,300 this week, Johnsons said.

Children who were registered for school — or routed to ride a bus — led to a lot of "by-hand work" to find student addresses, to find the right bus for them, and to drop them off, Johnson said.

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"Changing things on the fly and adding hundreds of students is beneficial for those parents that need that help, but that's something that we can't do right now and execute flawlessly," Johnson told the *Times-News* on Friday.

Brent Johnson, superintendent of Jerome Joint School District, is seen at a school board meeting on Tuesday, March 18, 2025, in Jerome.

TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO

A spokesperson for the Idaho Department of Education on Friday told the *Times-News* that the school district did not violate any state transportation policies by allowing students to ride the bus without pre-registration.

“The decision to allow students to ride the bus without pre-registration was made in the interest of ensuring access to and from school, particularly at the start of the year when some families may not yet have completed registration,” according to the department.

Routes took longer than expected, students were confused about what bus to take, and the district had “communication errors with parents,” Johnson said.

The district is now taking steps to build trust in the new transportation department.

During the two days off school this week, Johnson said school district staff have been calling and emailing parents to confirm ridership, limiting new rider registrations, consulting with the Idaho Transportation Department, and “establishing truth and accuracy” in routing.

The district is also changing procedures for bus transfers at the middle school for students who attend Jefferson Elementary, which takes kids from all over the city for the dual language immersion program.

“We’re trying to eliminate anything that is a potential point of confusion for our students, staff, or parents,” Johnson said.

New school buses in Jerome this fall will have "smart technology," including live cameras and a mobile app for parents to track the location of their kids.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEROME JOINT SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Jerome Police Department could not comment on the bus issues, according to an officer, and the Jerome County Sheriff's Department told the *Times-News* they were not involved in assisting the school district.

"I know it's been kind of a fiasco from what I've heard," Jerome Sheriff Cpt. Gary Taylor said Friday. "I have family that works for the school district."

## District cut ties with private contractor

For the past 55 years, Jerome Joint School District contracted out transportation to North Side Bus Co. This school year, however, the district decided to bring the service in-house.

Johnson said he would have liked the first week of running the bus service to be smoother.

In the days and weeks leading up to the start of school on Tuesday, he said the district received an overwhelming number of calls from parents about the new bus service.

"As school got closer, some people called in there those last couple of days," Johnson said, "and that overwhelmed our system and caused us those significant delays and some of the inability to track where kids are and have them on the bus."

It's like skydiving, he said. You can train and practice, but it's a different learning experience when you actually jump out of the plane.

In an interview in July, Transportation Director Tim Hicks told the *Times-News* that the in-house bus system would provide peace of mind for parents and improve safety.

Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks busing Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Jerome.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO

The district is using technology from Kansas-based company **Transportant**, with multiple cameras on each bus and key fobs that each bus rider can swipe as they get on and off, allowing parents to track their kids' location on an app.

Johnson said the district planned on rolling out the key fobs, similar to an Air Tag, in the second week of school, but it became clear that they are an "essential part of the technology package."

Staff will hand out those key fobs on Monday.

"That became something that we couldn't wait to do," Johnson said.

To prepare for the transition, voters within the school district in November passed a two-year, $1.75 million supplemental levy, with $500,000 set aside for purchasing school buses.

Hicks was in charge of purchasing 20 buses and hiring 20 CDL drivers this year.

The new fleet and drivers "operated flawlessly," Johnson said, and the issues this week stemmed from logistics.

Johnson said he is passionate about getting this right on Monday.

"Trust is earned, and I understand that," he said.

Sean Dolan writes about education and politics for the *Times-News*. Reach him at 208-735-3213 or email him at **sean.dolan@magicvalley.com**.

**By SEAN DOLAN**

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TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Jerome Joint School District

# Buses, drivers secured as Jerome switches to district-run transportation

JEROME — It's been a busy year for Tim Hicks.

The transportation director for Jerome Joint School District is overseeing the switch to a district-run bus service after ending a 55-year relationship with private contractor North Side Bus Co.

SEAN DOLAN
Jul 17, 2025

"It's the largest transition to district-operated in the state," Hicks said on Tuesday.

Since he took the job in November, he's been hard at work purchasing 29 buses and hiring 20 CDL drivers. But the hardest task, he said, was finding a suitable facility.

Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks about bus routes Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at his offices in Jerome.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

The district recently signed a lease on a Rich Thomas Trucking building after a seven-month search, he said. The facility has 25,000 square feet of usable office space, two large service bays, and a driver's lounge.

Switching to a district-owned bus system will save money over time, Hicks said, and provide parents with peace of mind with a smartphone app to track their kids.

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"Just like our Amazon packages," Hicks said. "We will be able to identify where the students are, whether or not they get on the bus."

## New tech

The new buses are packed with technology from Kansas-based company **Transportant**.

Three interior cameras will monitor students and two exterior cameras near the stop arm will snap pictures of any drivers caught passing when kids are getting on or off.

Hicks and his staff will be able to monitor up to 16 buses at a time on a 70-inch monitor. They can send out pre-recorded messages to students if there are behavior issues, he said, and can send images of stop-arm violators to the police within seven minutes.

To track students, kids will swipe key fobs to get on the bus and drivers will see their school headshots pop up on a monitor. Parents can use the app to keep tabs on their kids and can set up a “geocircle” around their house.

When the bus enters that circle, he said, parents will receive a notification that the bus is close.



Multiple cameras will be used on Jerome School buses and they can be monitored remotely in Jerome.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Angel Ornelas, technician, works on wiring up a camera system Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at the shop in Jerome.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

The days of students sweating or freezing while waiting at the bus stop are over, Superintendent Brent Johnson said Tuesday.

"The state has applauded us as being pioneers in safety, security and technology for transportation," Johnson told the *Times-News*.

## Cost savings

The idea to take on ownership of the fleet, Hicks said, came about as the contract with North Side was coming to an end and owner Jerome Fiscus was approaching 90 years of age.

"It's time," Hicks said. "He's got to enjoy some life and not stress about school buses."

North Side was one of the lower-cost contractors in the state, he said, and the district knew costs would go up if they went with a new company.

On top of that, Hicks said, the state reimbursement formula provides multiple cost savings to districts that run their own service, with discounts and refunds on fuel, staff and depreciation of vehicles.

To prepare for the transition, voters within the school district in November passed a two-year, $1.75 million supplemental levy, with $500,000 set aside for purchasing school buses. That's $1 million over two years.

The district has already paid $1.2 million for buses, he said, but the state formula will pay back $300,000 in depreciation in the first year.

In another way to save, Hicks said North Side had 24 bus routes but the district will reduce that down to about 18, resulting in fewer miles traveled.

"Contractors get paid per mile," Hicks said. "The more buses, the more miles. We can condense some of that."

A new state law also provides a new opportunity for school districts.

**House Bill 396** allows districts to use a variety of vehicles, besides yellow school buses, to transport students.

Hicks said this new law means they can use vans to pick up a handful of kids who live in faraway rural areas.

“We’re going to capitalize on that,” he said.

With multiple ways to save money, he said, the district can pay drivers who come from North Side at least $5 more per hour.

## Not his first rodeo

Before taking the job in Jerome, Hicks was the Region IV Transportation specialist for the Idaho Department of Education. He helped Filer School District and Xavier Charter School make similar transitions to district-run bus systems.

Transportation Director Tim Hicks talks about the technology that's going into the district's new buses Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at his offices in Jerome.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO

"It's a good thing that I had practice working with Filer and working with Xavier," Hicks said.

With the school year starting up in about one month, he said he expects to start with about 950 students riding the bus, but the district is prepared to transport 1,900 kids. There are about 4,000 students in the district.

Families will probably sit back and see how the transition goes, he said, before putting their kids on the bus.

“I want to pick up more students,” Hicks said.

Sean Dolan writes about education and politics for the *Times-News*. Reach him at 208-735-3213 or email him at **sean.dolan@magicvalley.com**.

**By SEAN DOLAN**

**Education/Political Reporter**

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# Jerome transitioning to district-owned school bus service

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Tim Hicks, transportation director for Jerome Joint School District, says the switch to a district-owned transportation service will save money and give parents peace of mind. Video recorded Tuesday, July 15, 2025, in Jerome.

## As featured on




### Buses, drivers secured as Jerome switches to district-run transportation

Just like you can track your Amazon packages, parents in Jerome will be able to track their kids as they ride the bus.




### Chaos erupts this week as Jerome School District tried out new bus system

Kids went unaccounted for, rides took too long, and the district made "communication errors" with parents on first week of running the bus service.

# Comprehensive Research Paper: The Jerome School District Transportation Crisis of 2025

In August 2025, the Jerome School District in Idaho experienced a transportation crisis that disrupted the first week of school, closed classrooms, and raised questions about safety, accountability, and state oversight. The district's decision to drastically expand student ridership, reduce the "walking halo" from the state standard of 1.5 miles to near zero, and implement new technology without adequate preparation created systemic breakdowns. This paper provides a factual account of events, a legal and ethical analysis under the Idaho Ethics in Government Act, and an evaluation of the role played by the Idaho Department of Education. Particular attention is given to statements made by Transportation Director T.I. Hicks, the role of reimbursements, and the potential conflict of interest involving Department official Ali Stolzman.

## Background and Timeline

- July 2024 – Superintendent Brent Johnson announced restructuring of bus routes, clarifying it was not budget-driven but logistical. - Oct 2024 – The district advanced a supplemental levy, explicitly linking funds to bus purchases and future in-house transportation services. - Aug 18, 2025 – Families were introduced to Bus Compass software by Transportant LLC, intended to manage routes. - Aug 20, 2025 – Severe routing errors, overcrowding, and unaccounted children caused a collapse; schools closed Aug 21–22. - Aug 21, 2025 – District admitted ridership grew from ~950 to ~1,300 due to halo reduction and unregistered riders. - Aug 22, 2025 – District reinstated a 0.25-mile halo, froze new additions, and issued bus tags.

## The Role of T.I. Hicks: 'High-Tech Example' and State Reimbursements

Transportation Director T.I. Hicks promoted Jerome as a potential "first in the state" high-tech example, deploying GPS-enabled apps, bus tags, and advanced routing systems. According to testimony and internal statements, Hicks suggested the district's innovations would be supported by state reimbursement. This framing is significant: 1. Pilot Positioning: Positioning Jerome as a showcase tied local decisions to expectations of state endorsement. 2. Financial Implications: Linking reimbursement to halo reduction created pressure to expand ridership beyond necessity. 3. Ethics Impact: If state officials gave assurance of reimbursement, it crossed the line from technical assistance into participation — a problem given Stolzman's household conflict.

## Legal and Ethical Assessment

Legal: Idaho Code § 74-404 prohibits public officials from acting in ways that produce pecuniary benefit for themselves or their households. Stolzman's husband's employment by Jerome created such a direct benefit. Disclosure alone was not enough; recusal was required. Moral: Officials bear a duty to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Allowing household finances to overlap with official oversight undermines trust. Ethical: State officials should have walled off conflicted employees entirely from Jerome's reimbursement process. Delegating to subordinates under her chain of command does not satisfy this duty.

## Findings from Verified Q&A;

From district emails and public statements, the following are clear: ridership expanded voluntarily, the halo was reduced, overcrowding occurred, children were unaccounted for, and schools were closed. Corrective measures were taken after the collapse. The full 40-question verified findings appear in Annex I.

## Conclusion

The Jerome School District's transportation collapse was not merely an operational mishap. It was the product of policy choices: expanding ridership beyond state requirements, pursuing a showcase "high-tech" approach without safeguards, and relying on assumptions about state reimbursement. Under Idaho law, any state official whose household benefitted financially from those reimbursements had an obligation to recuse entirely. If Ali Stolzman participated directly or indirectly, her role constitutes a potential violation of the Ethics in Government Act. Future prevention requires: 1) Independent audits of reimbursement claims. 2) Clear conflict-of-interest firewalling at the Department of Education. 3) Public disclosure of all technical assistance and assurances provided to districts.

## Annex I: Verified Findings (40 Questions and Answers)

Q1: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q2: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q3: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q4: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q5: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q6: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q7: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

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Q37: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q38: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q39: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

Q40: See Findings Appendix PDF for detailed verified Q&A.;

## Annex II: Interrogatories (10)

Identify all employees of the Idaho Department of Education, including Ali Stolzman, who reviewed or approved Jerome reimbursements.

State whether any DOE official provided advice assuring Jerome that reducing the halo would increase reimbursement.

Provide copies of any conflict-of-interest disclosures filed by Ali Stolzman.

Describe DOE procedures for handling conflicts of interest in reimbursement approvals.

Identify communications between DOE and T.I. Hicks about Jerome’s 'high-tech example' program.

State whether DOE conducted audits of Jerome’s reimbursement claims in 2024–25.

Provide documents reflecting policy on halo distance and reimbursable riders.

Identify all Idaho districts advised to reduce their halo in 2024–25.

State whether DOE staff had input in Jerome’s 2024 levy campaign tied to buses.

Provide DOE training materials on conflicts of interest for reimbursement staff.

## Annex III: Point–Counterpoints (10)

Point: Expanding ridership served families and improved access.
Counterpoint: State rules set 1.5 miles as the reimbursement standard; voluntary expansion increased costs without guarantee of reimbursement.

Point: High-tech solutions improved safety.
Counterpoint: Untested systems created new risks and contributed to the collapse.

Point: DOE gave only neutral technical assistance.
Counterpoint: If assurances of reimbursement were given, that became direct advisory participation.

Point: Disclosure of Stolzman's conflict was enough.
Counterpoint: Law requires recusal when benefits are direct and substantial.

Point: Jerome's levy campaign was transparent.
Counterpoint: It relied on a crisis created by questionable policy choices.

Point: Jerome was being innovative.
Counterpoint: Innovation must not compromise safety or legal compliance.

Point: Other districts faced growth too.
Counterpoint: Jerome manufactured growth by reducing the halo.

Point: Subordinates acted independently of Stolzman.
Counterpoint: Supervisory accountability attaches unless firewalled.

Point: DOE had no intent to benefit Stolzman's household.
Counterpoint: Intent is irrelevant; outcome determines conflict under law.

Point: This was only a local failure.
Counterpoint: State assurances and policy shaped Jerome's decisions.

## Annex IV: Questions for the Department of Education (10)

What guidance was given to Jerome on halo distance and reimbursement?

Did any DOE official assure Jerome reimbursement if ridership expanded?

Was DOE aware Jerome’s ridership would jump 40%?

What safeguards exist to prevent conflicts in reimbursements?

Did DOE review Jerome’s data before approval?

How many other districts reduced halos in 2024–25?

What role did DOE staff play in Transportant/Bus Compass adoption?

Did DOE provide input on Jerome’s 2024 levy?

Has DOE ever disciplined staff under the Ethics in Government Act?

How will DOE audit Jerome’s 2025 claims?

## Annex V: Anticipated Criticisms and Responses (20)

See Appendix C PDF for complete criticisms and responses.

## Annex VI: Formal Records Requests

Pursuant to the Idaho Public Records Act, I hereby request copies of the following: 1. All communications (emails, memos, texts, phone logs, meeting notes) between the Idaho State Department of Education and the Jerome School District concerning transportation, ridership, halo policies, and reimbursement (July 1, 2024–Sept 30, 2025). 2. All communications including or authored by the following individuals: Ali Stolzman, Jitter Jiminez (DOE specialist), T.I. Hicks (JSD transportation director), Superintendent Brent Johnson, members of the Jerome School Board, and any DOE representatives assigned to transportation. 3. All DOE internal communications relating to Jerome's transportation reimbursements during this period. 4. Any conflict-of-interest disclosures, recusals, or determinations filed by Ali Stolzman or other DOE employees regarding Jerome. 5. Any DOE policy or procedural documents concerning technical assistance, halo reductions, or transportation audits. These requests apply to all electronic, hard copy, and archived forms of communication.

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EDITOR'S PICK

# LETTER: Jerome schools to launch own bus service

Nov 23, 2024

On behalf of the Jerome School District, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your overwhelming support of the levy during the Nov. 5 election.

Your vote is a powerful statement of your commitment to our community's future and the success of our students. Your help will allow us to continue providing exceptional educational opportunities for our students and supporting our staff.

We're excited to announce the transition to district-run transportation services starting in August 2025. To ensure a smooth transition, we will continue utilizing Northside Bus services for the remainder of the current school year. This allows us to carefully plan and prepare for the launch of our new and efficient district-run transportation system.

We express our sincere gratitude to Northside Bus for their 53 years of dedication and service to our district's transportation needs. We look forward to providing you with more detailed information about the transition process in the coming months.

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Thank you once again for your unwavering support. We encourage you to stay tuned for future updates on the district-run transportation rollout.

Jerome is a thriving community for families.

**Brent Johnson,**

**superintendent, Jerome School District**

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# Man faces grand theft charge after more than $10,000 goes missing from high school booster club




The former treasurer of a high school music booster club is in jail after an audit discovered thousands of missing funds. (KMVT)

By Cole Quinn

*Published: Jul. 28, 2025 at 6:05 PM MDT*

TWIN FALLS, Idaho (KMVT/KSVT) — The former treasurer of a high school music booster club is in jail after an audit discovered thousands of missing funds.

Gordon Kealaiki, 58, faces one count of grand theft after an investigation into financial records from when he was the treasurer of the Jerome High School Music Booster Club, according to court records.



Gordon Kealaiki, 58, faces one count of grand theft after an investigation into financial records from when he was the treasurer of the Jerome High School Music Booster Club, according to court records. (Jerome County Sheriff's Office)

A police affidavit stated that board members and teachers became suspicious and told Kealaiki that the club needed an audit around the spring of 2023. One member told police that Kealaiki responded, “I will audit myself.”

Each band and choir student had an individual account to track fundraising, totaling the funds into a collective bank account, according to the affidavit. All personal accounts were under Kealaiki's control. In one case, a student raised around $500 in funds. The student's parent noticed the account only had $40 despite paying out-of-pocket for their T-shirt and field trip fees.

Parents began questioning the students' accounts and requesting financial records from Kealaiki, according to the affidavit. He would either not attend meetings or explain why he could not produce financial records. The club president told police they were lucky if Kealaiki even brought a student account sheet to meetings.

The booster club held a vote during their October 2024 meeting to conduct an audit to be completed by a former club treasurer. The auditor requested Kealaiki's electronic records, but he stated that his hard drive had crashed and had not been backed up for years. Kealaiki was relieved of his duties in November 2024, and at that time, he only provided a few folders with the previous year's county fair daily totals. He later told police that the hard drive was "destroyed" and did not keep hard copies of files either.

Student accounts showed a total negative balance of $5,838, according to the affidavit. However, no negative balance could be confirmed at the time of the affidavit filing since Kealaiki would shift money between accounts with "no apparent reason" and would not put funds back in.

As of June 2025, the booster club estimated through the audit that it is missing up to $10,665, while investigators believe the booster club is missing up to $16,505, according to the affidavit. The audit revealed that one fundraiser from the spring of 2024 shorted $1,456 from the students' accounts.

During an August 2024 meeting, Kealaiki provided a financial report that the booster club should have had around $38,345 in the collective account, but had no proof to back it up. The audit discovered that the account actually had $5,806.

The affidavit lists 43 unauthorized transactions from Kealaiki's booster club-issued debit card, totaling around $2,240, between March 2020 and September 2024.

Also included were frequent transactions labeled "deposit" and "ATM deposit" into Kealaiki's bank account from 2019 to 2024. The affidavit revealed that the deposits over the five years total around $92,000.

During a band trip to California in June 2022, Kealaiki used his booster card to pay $290 worth of meals at Margaritaville despite the club president telling police they told him not to, according to the affidavit. Other transactions include purchases at McDonald's, Ridley's, Sawtooth Veterinary, WinCo, Expedia, and more.

Kealaiki argued that many of the transactions were "accidental" or "mistakes" because his debit card looked identical to the booster club's card since the two accounts were at the same bank, according to the affidavit. Kealaiki also said he used the same PIN, and the cards were right next to each other in his wallet. He said he would not look to make sure which card he was using.

He explained that one of the times he "pulled the wrong card" was when making three transactions at a casino in Reno, Nevada. He said he realized he used the wrong card after a month or two and returned the money to the booster account.

Kealaiki made a series of transactions back into the main booster club account totaling roughly $19,000 on Sept. 16, 2024, according to the affidavit. He told police that the deposits accounted for the "accidental purchases" and the money raised during a fundraiser. Police told him that by their estimation, he deposited $12,000 more than he should have. Kealaiki told police he attempted to get the account back to "where it should be" by taking out a loan from his 401 (k). Authorities still decided to charge him with one count of grand theft.

The affidavit also stated that Kealaiki once served on the 93 Men's Golf Association board in 2005, according to the affidavit. Kealaiki was also the treasurer for the group when $4,000 went missing. A police report was filed, but no charges came from the report.

Kealaiki posted his $10,000 bond on June 6 and was last scheduled for a preliminary hearing last Thursday, according to court records. He is scheduled for a preliminary hearing on Aug. 21.

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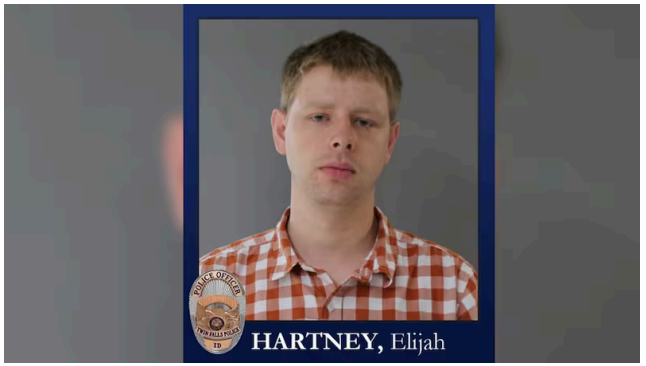

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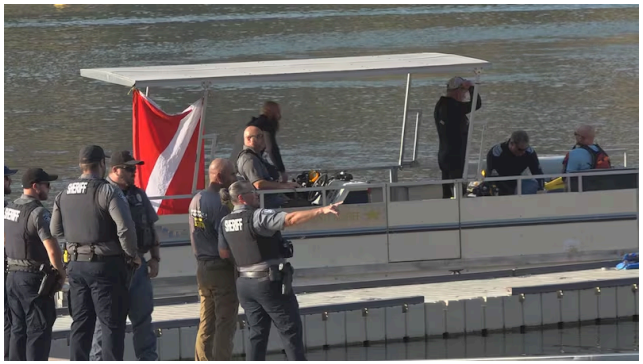

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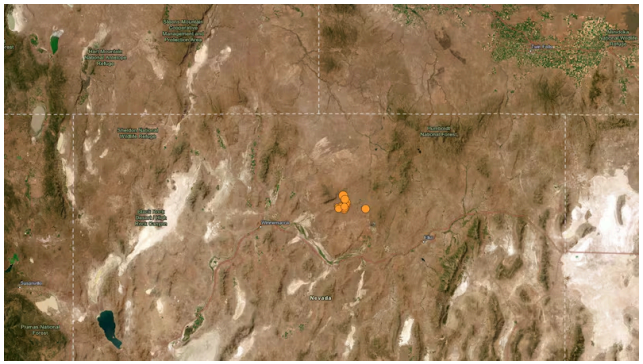
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# Parents address the Jerome School Board of Trustees about transportation issues




By Dereka Kay

*Published: Aug. 26, 2025 at 10:28 PM MDT*

JEROME, Idaho (KMVT/KSVT) — A week after the Jerome School District debuted its new bussing system to mixed reviews, leading to a two-day closing of classes and a re-tooling of the program. Emotions remain high among some parents of students.

While it was not officially on the agenda, the bussing issues were top of mind as the school district's board of trustees met on Tuesday night. Dozens of parents showed up expressing their concerns to the board.

Some of the concerns were young kids having to walk home from school, safety concerns and a lack of communication from the district. Parents complained about reaching out to the district office and not receiving a response.

Other parents were angry that they completed the required forms to update their information for the bus routing software, but still their kids aren't allowed on the bus.

"Nobody is giving me answers. I went to the school today, they said to fill out forms, I've already done two forms. Nobody's still contacted me," said Gabriella Gonzalez.

"I'm getting frustrated because I work. I can't miss work and there's nothing being done, and all the school can tell me is I have to wait for this phone call from them," said Gonzalez.

Tim Hicks, the Transportation Director for the District, gave a statement during the meeting, addressing those concerns and emphasizing that the district is working hard to fix the issue. However, parents still feel like they weren't being heard during the public comment period.

"What I took away from this meeting today is it's our fault. It's the parents' fault. It's our fault that the routes aren't right because information is not right," said Matthew Cardona.

"It just sounds more and more like they're just not taking accountability and blaming us as parents," said Cardona.

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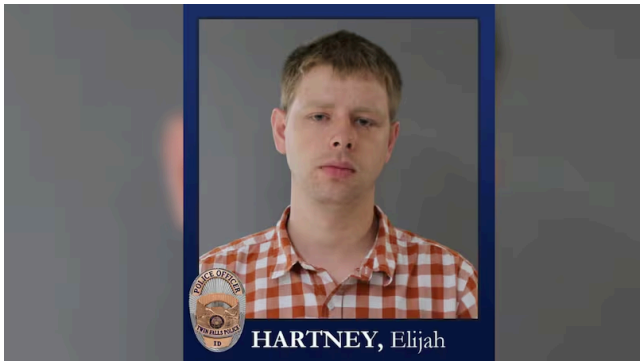

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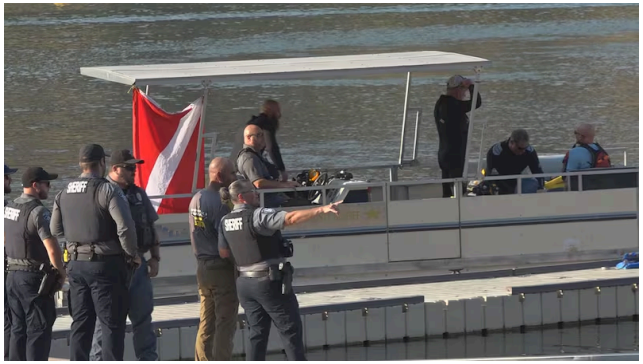


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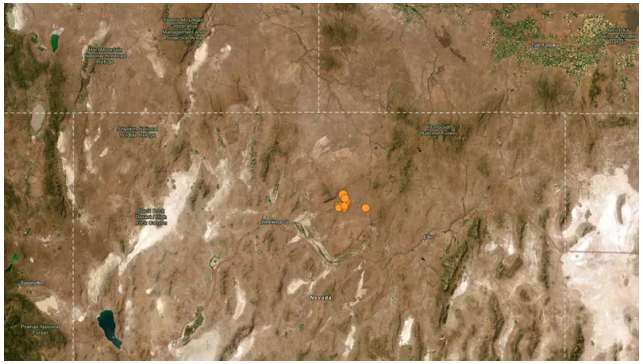


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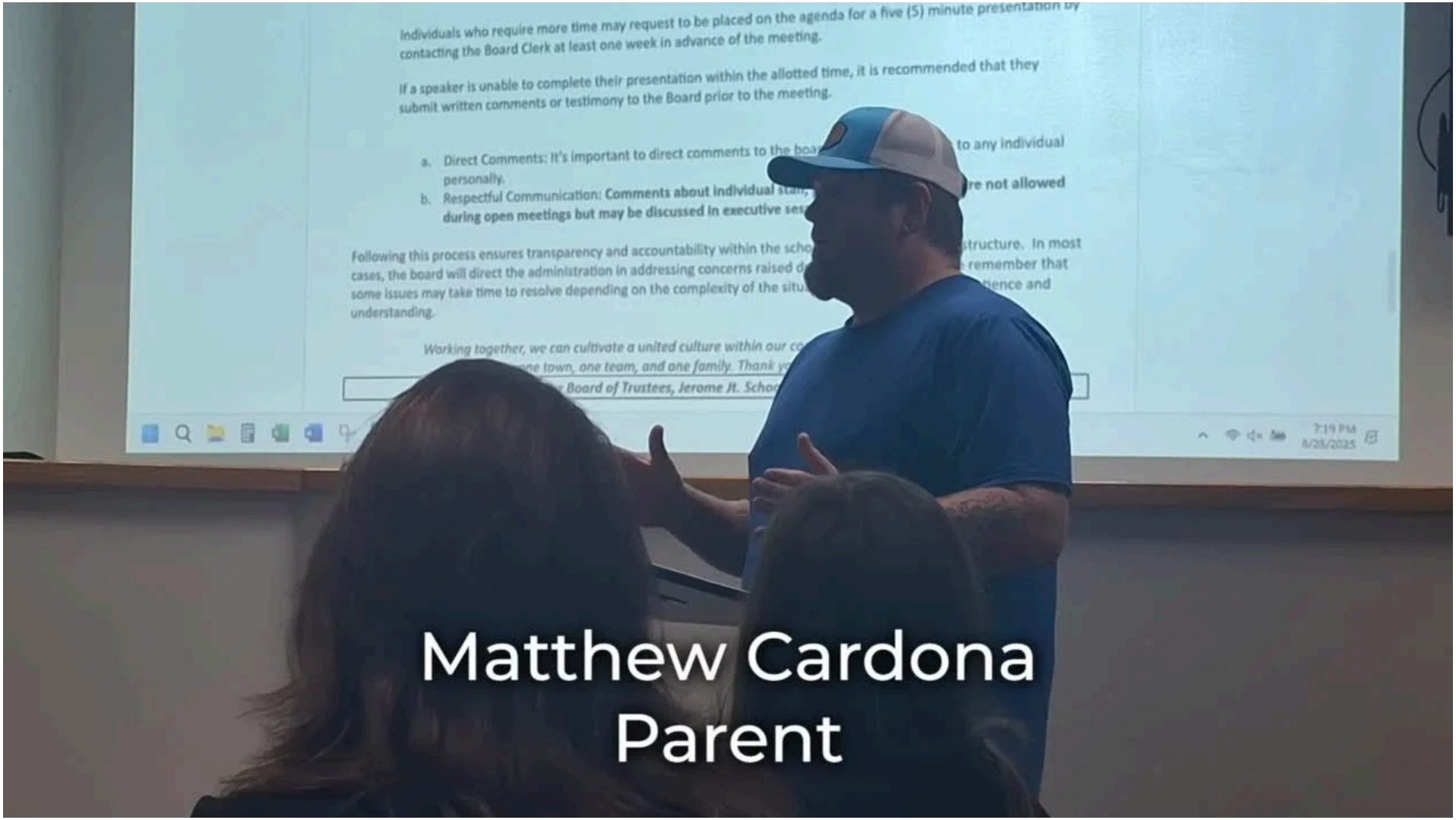
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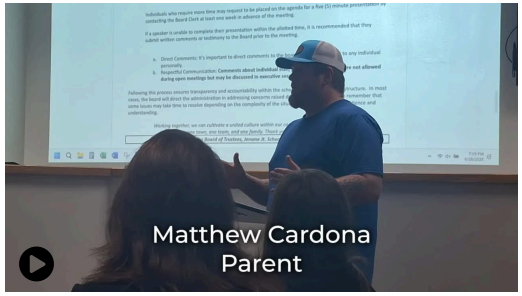
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# Parents express frustration with bus system in Jerome School District

Aug 27, 2025






**Parents express frustration with bus system in Jerome School District**




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Parents expressed frustration with the new bus system in Jerome Joint School District on Tuesday, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Board of Trustees meeting.

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### 'You guys are going to kill a kid': Frustrated parents speak to Jerome school board on busing issues

Jerome School District is 60% Hispanic or Latino. One parent said Hispanic families are afraid to speak up about the safety of the district's new bus system.



### Jerome School District to consider changing policy that prohibits recording public meetings

After prohibiting a television reporter from recording a public meeting, the superintendent said the district needs to amend a policy.

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FEATURED TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

# 'You guys are going to kill a kid': Frustrated parents speak to Jerome school board on busing issues

SEAN DOLAN
Aug 28, 2025

JEROME — Parents packed the school board meeting on Tuesday night to express their disappointment with the school district's new busing system that shut down schools last week.

Issues with registration and routing led to kids getting home late and being unaccounted for, while a lack of communication left parents frustrated.

It's a matter of life and death for some concerned parents, including Matthew Cardona.

"You guys are going to lose a kid," Cardona told the school board. "You guys are going to hurt a kid. You guys are going to kill a kid if you guys don't figure this out."



Parent Pamela Gutierrez gives public comment concerning the recent bus transportation issues during a school board meeting Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

The school district cut ties with a private contractor beginning this school year and is now operating its own transportation system.

Jerome schools were closed Thursday and Friday but opened back up on Monday.

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This week, the district tightened restrictions on who can ride the bus.

Cardona said the district sent him a message at 2 p.m. on Monday, saying his kid couldn't ride the bus home and had to be picked up. Cardona was at a doctor's appointment in Boise at the time and had to rush to the school.

"You didn't give anybody any time, anything," he said. "Just, 'Come get your kids.'"

The school district has one of the highest proportions of Hispanic and Latino students in the state, at 60%.



**Chaos erupts this week as Jerome School District tried out new bus system**
SEAN DOLAN

Those in the Hispanic community are afraid to speak up, parent Xochitl Valdez told the *Times-News*.

"Most of the people here are illegal, and they don't speak English, and they are not treated well by our school staff," Valdez said.

She translated last week for a Hispanic mother who couldn't find her young child.

"I had to step in because this lady was crying," Valdez said. "They couldn't find her kindergarten kid. Rode the bus and she said she didn't get home until like 7 o'clock at night."

Valdez said her own high school daughter got home at 8:30 p.m. Monday after being told she couldn't ride the bus home. After she couldn't find a ride, her daughter started walking and a stranger picked her up and took her home.

Valdez works until 7 p.m. as a car salesperson.

"I'm not on food stamps; I'm not on Medicaid," she said. "I work all day."

The root cause of the issues over the past week was the complications with student registration, Transportation Director Tim Hicks said, not a failure of transportation planning or operations.




Tim Hicks, transportation director for Jerome Joint School District, speaks during a school board meeting Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Registration data his department imported was incomplete, outdated or incorrect, Hicks said, and staff had flagged concerns before the first day of school.

“I want to be very clear,” he said. “My department did not manage and oversee the registration process. Our routing system can only function properly when it receives accurate input from the district’s information systems.”

The transportation issues in Jerome matter to everyone who works in student transportation, said Matthew Searby, operations manager for Kimberly School District.

“Tim built this department with incomplete information,” Searby said. “Now is the time to stand firmly behind him and his team, give them the resources and trust they need and hopefully not be looking for a scapegoat.”

Colleen Speaker and several other bus drivers spoke out at the meeting.

Speaker became emotional when she talked about the difficulties she experienced driving her bus over the past few school days, while being responsible for 71 students.

She said her kids got home just as late as the other kids.

“If you don’t think that we go home crying or upset because your kids were late or missed, we did,” Speaker said. “We went home in tears.”



Bus driver Colleen Speaker gives public comment during a school board meeting Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Hicks has been working long days to make sure the system works, she said.

“We’re not perfect,” Speaker said, “but we are trying.”

Substitute teacher Leslie Jones asked the school board members what they were doing over the weekend, as the transportation staff were working to solve the problem.

“Honestly, where were you guys?” Jones asked the trustees. “When this whole team was working so hard. Were you at home sipping on wine, watching the TV? They’re not to blame. You guys are.”

The *Times-News* on Friday emailed board Chair Staci Leavitt and Vice Chair Elizabeth Bingham, requesting an interview but did not receive a response.

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## Jerome School Board meeting | Photos

# Jerome School Board meeting



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DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

# Jerome School Board meeting




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DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

# Jerome School Board meeting




The school board meeting Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building was a full house with a crowd forming around the doorway.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

# Jerome School Board meeting



The school board meeting was at capacity Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

# Jerome School Board meeting



Superintendent Brent Johnson speaks during a school board meeting Tuesday evening, Aug. 26, 2025, at the Jerome School District building.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS

Sean Dolan writes about education and politics for the *Times-News*. Reach him at 208-735-3213 or email him at **sean.dolan@magicvalley.com**.

**By SEAN DOLAN**

**Education/Political Reporter**

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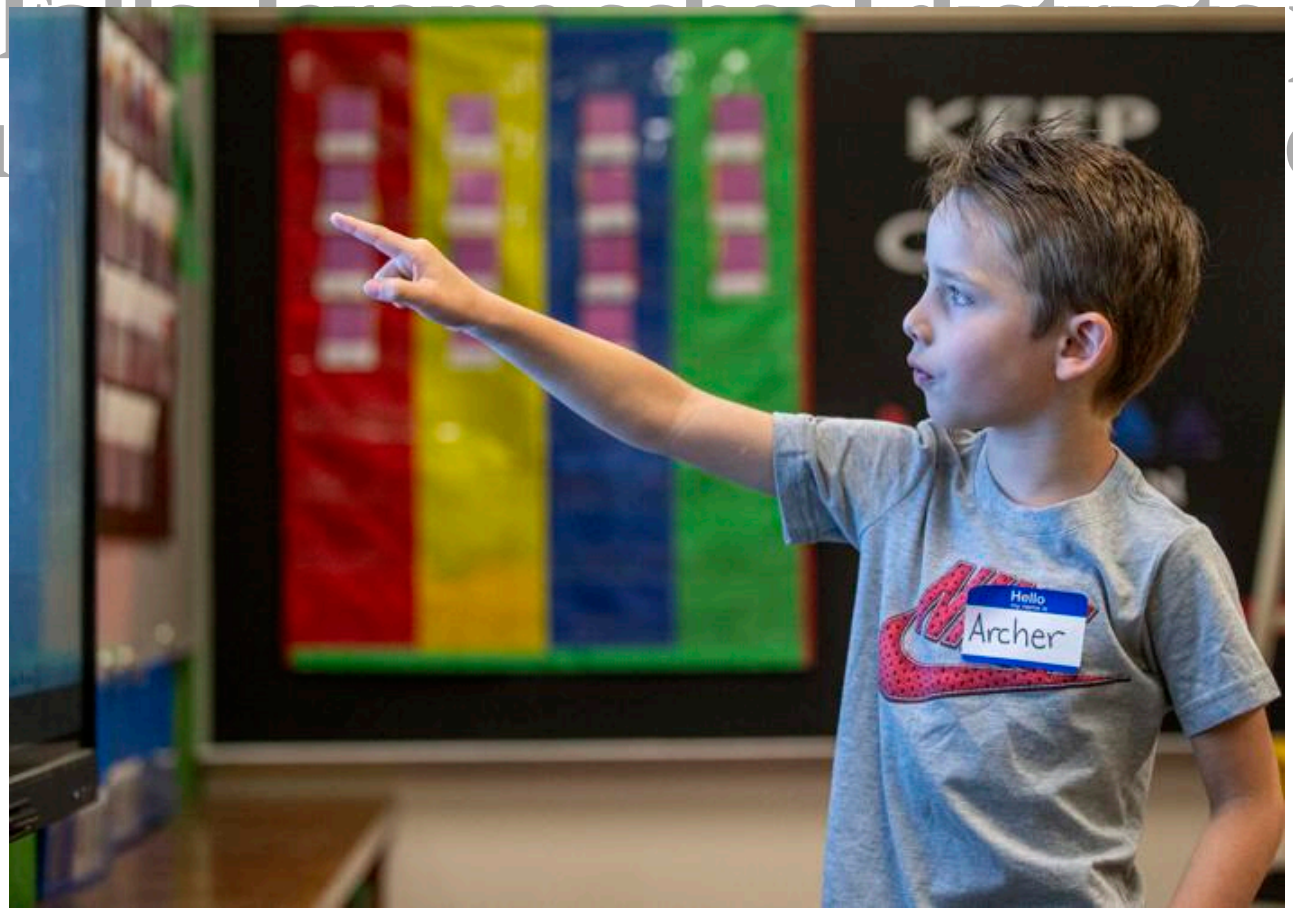
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FEATURED TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

SCHOOL FUNDING

# Twin Falls, Jerome school districts push for su[illegible]er

Sep 6, 2024




Archer Mackert looks over his assignment during the first day of school Aug. 16, 2023, at Morningside Elementary School in Twin Falls.

DREW NASH, TIMES-NEWS FILE PHOTO

**By Eden Turner**

**Education/Politics Reporter**

Eden Turner

TWIN FALLS — Both Twin Falls and Jerome school districts will try something new this November as the fiscal year ends next June.

Twin Falls asks for $7.2 million per year for two years, which will cover funding for armed security guards at elementary schools, school resource officers at high schools and salaries and benefits for more than 40 classified staff members and 20 certified staff members.

The levy will fund the gap in the district's maintenance costs that was created by the Idaho Legislature's reallocation of lottery funds and the end of federal COVID relief funds.

Additionally, the levy will support costs for student activities, including athletics, music, drama and debate, to ensure student participation remains free of charge.

The levy will replace an existing $5.7 million levy that expires on June 30, 2025. The estimated average annual cost to the taxpayer on the proposed levy is a tax of $91 per $100,000 of taxable assessed value per year based on current conditions, officials say.

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The estimated tax impact of the proposed levy will equate to $7.58 per month for $100,000 of taxable property values, an increase of $1.58 per month from the current levy rate.

Previously, the district proposed levies during the spring election. TFSD superintendent Brady Dickinson told the *Times-News* that it made the most sense to push for a levy in November, considering that the district's budgets are processed during the spring.

"The earlier we know, the better," Dickinson said.

As for Jerome, the school district's proposed levy will ask for $1.75 million per year for two years, a $500,000 increase from its previous levy.

The existing levy will continue to provide $750,000 for a portion of salaries and benefits for classified and extra-curricular staff, $300,000 for a portion of non-reimbursed student and extra-curricular transportation and $200,000 for program and software licenses.

The additional $500,000 will provide for the purchase of new and used school buses as the district begins to transition to an independent bus system.

Jerome's decision echoes those of various districts in the Magic Valley, most recently Xavier Charter School and Filer.

**MONEY TALKS: As third-party busing rates rise, school districts head in a new direction**
Eden Turner

At the beginning of the next school year, the district will be ending a 53-year transportation partnership with North Side Bus Company.

“In the long-term, it’s going to pay off in cost, safety, convenience and the ability to serve our community,” superintendent Brent Johnson said, “but we needed some capital to get started.”

The estimated average annual cost to taxpayers on the propose levy is a tax of $66 per $100,000 of taxable assessed value, an $19 increase compared to the current levy. The levy amount will be assessed per year for two years, based on current conditions beginning July 1, 2025.

In the upcoming weeks, the Twin Falls and Jerome school districts will host informational sessions to ensure voters understand the proposed levies and have enough knowledge to make an informed decision in November.



Gov. Brad Little talks to the *Times-News* about HB 521, one of the latest achievements for education funding in Idaho legislature at Morningside Elementary School on May 13. The bill allocates $1.5 billion to upgrade building infrastructure in schools across the state.


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**By Eden Turner**

**Education/Politics Reporter**