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## Marvin Williams Center in Bremerton becomes charter school's high school space



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Kitsap Sun

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### New school year brings book removals, religion and revisions to these states

As students begin a new school year, classrooms in some states are becoming battlegrounds over what should be taught and also, what's being left out.

### Key Points

Catalyst Public School has launched 9th and 10th grade classes at Bremerton's Marvin Williams Center near downtown.

The five-year-old charter school will spend \$1.5 million to upgrade an existing teen center on MLK Way.

BREMERTON — The Catalyst charter school in Manette is expanding, now heading downtown with plans to turn an area between MLK Way and Park Avenue into a high school campus.

The Marvin Williams Recreation Center has become part of the [Catalyst Public Schools](#) campus, where 9th- and 10th-grade students study in three

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*you think.*

classrooms and do other activities in the gym or at the open area inside the building. The school launched its high school last year at the center and recently signed a 30-year lease for the space. Catalyst now has 50 high school students, with a total enrollment of 100 students expected once juniors and seniors are added.

"This partnership is a very special one because part of the vision of [late] [Bishop Larry Robertson](#) - who envisioned and founded the center from the start - was to have a public school on the campus," Amanda Gardner, co-founder of the Catalyst Public Schools, said.



Sophomore Abigail Fletcher works on her Spanish class work in one of the Catalyst Public Schools classrooms located in the Marvin Williams Recreation Center in Bremerton on Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025. MEEGAN M. REID/KITSAP SUN

Robertson, a Texas native who came to Bremerton in 1978 and founded the Emmanuel Apostolic Church, was the driving force behind the construction of the Marvin Williams Recreation Center. He envisioned the center, which opened in 2018, as a place where the community could gather, take classes, participate in recreation or hang out. The building's namesake is Bremerton native Marvin Williams, who retired from professional basketball in 2020 after played for four NBA teams after winning an NCAA championship at North Carolina.

**More:** [Bishop Larry Robertson, who founded Emmanuel Apostolic Church, has died](#)

The school is planning to extend its campus to include the Opal Robertson Teen Center, a small building just south of the Marvin Williams Recreation Center, on the corner of MLK Way and Park Avenue. The teen center was named after [Robertson's first wife, Opal Robertson](#), who died in 2011.

The teen center will be remodeled and turned into spaces for classes, group discussion and staff offices, according to Catalyst officials. The building's main entrance, which currently faces the street, will be redesigned to face the Marvin Williams Center and have a path connecting the two buildings to create a campus feel. The renovation will allow students to easily go from one building to the other, Gardner explained.



Catalyst Public Schools is planning on renovating the Opal Robertson Teen Center building that sits next to the Marvin Williams Recreation Center Bremerton. MEEGAN M. REID/KITSAP SUN

The budget to renovate the teen center is \$1.5 million. The building may be ready for students to use in January next year, depending on the permitting timeline of the city, according to Gardner.

Once students are in the 11th grade, most of them will participate in Running Start at Olympic College and will be able to graduate high school with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or certified in a trade, Gardner said.

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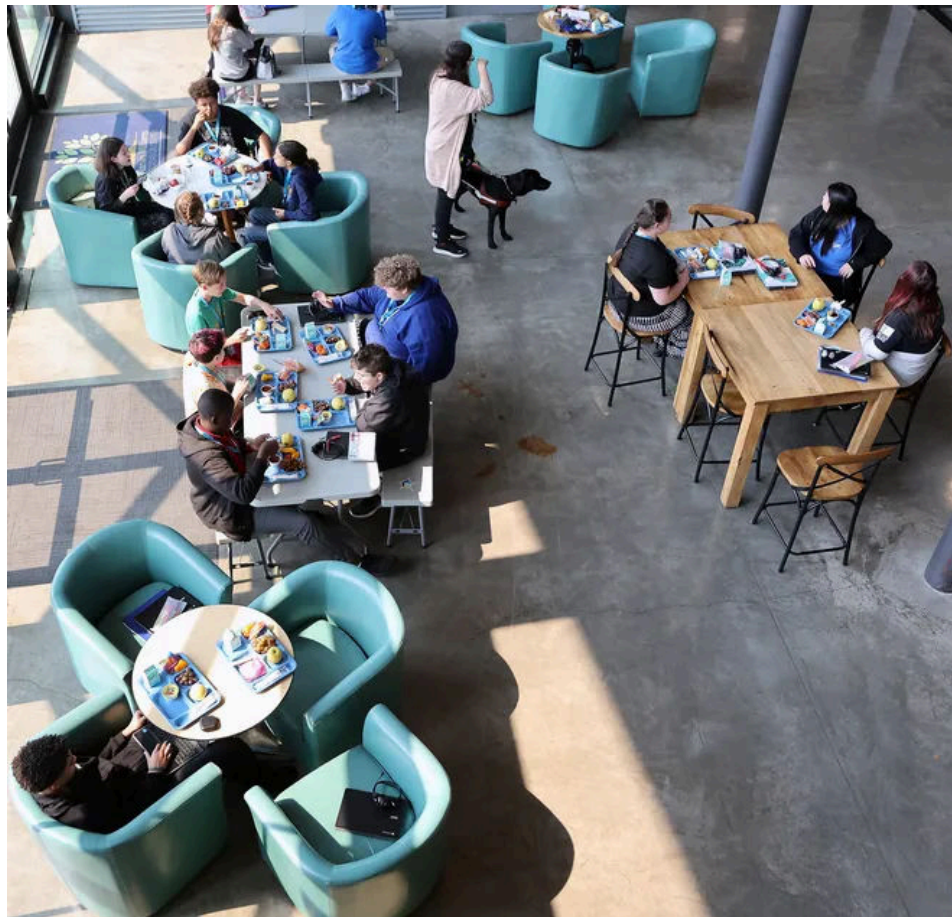


**A school tries to activate a neighborhood**

Bringing high school students to the Marvin Williams Recreation Center means more than just learning inside the building. Neighbors have noticed, and are glad to see kids or school staff going in and out of the

building frequently, said Stephanie Layson, director of support services and post-secondary success at Catalyst.

"Community members have mentioned they enjoy seeing it [Marvin Williams Recreation Center] full and busy during the school week, because it hadn't been in a while," Layson said.



Freshman Catalyst Public Schools students eat their lunch in the main floor gathering area at the Marvin Williams Recreation Center in Bremerton on Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025. MEEGAN M. REID/KITSAP SUN

Downtown residents are no strangers to the homeless population on the surrounding streets. In summer 2023, [large homeless encampments developed](#) on a block of MLK Way and nearby city streets for a few months before the tents were cleared by the city.

Gardner believes having anchor institutions like schools, churches, or nonprofits oftentimes provide more access to supports for individuals who might be experiencing homelessness, as more people are around, she said. While it is concerns to some families, "we have all the protocols in place," Gardner said. "We are working with youth here. Our number one priority is to make sure they're safe and that they're learning."

Layson said there were times when she had to call 911 for situations like a possible overdose. That happened once this semester and about three times over the course of last year. "It's not that often," she said. Usually,

she keeps friendly relationship with people who walk by, as well as with the nearby fire station and police officers.

"Folks that are spending a lot of time around here, they also know who I am, because I walk outside a lot. And so many of the folks that are here are like, "Good morning," and then they move off the property because they know that kids are here," Layson said. "I said hello. I'm not hollering anybody. I'm not instantly calling the police. If anyone is on the property, I'm like, "We've got kids here. Have a great day." And then they leave."

Staff make sure they interact with unhoused population and keep their dignity intact, just like the school would expect students to do with one another and teachers to do with students, Tatiana Epanchin, co-founder of Catalyst Public Schools said.

"One of our core tenets is that people get treated with dignity, and that people's dignity is always left intact," Epanchin said. "We talk about that with our scholars, and we talk about that with families."

"It also, I think, provides a really nice model about what's possible in terms of how all of us as community members interact with each other as community members, our unhoused population," Epanchin added.

**More:** [Bremerton charter school Catalyst expanding to add high school classes](#)

Catalyst Public Schools, Kitsap County's first and only charter school, [opened in 2020](#) at 13th Street between Hayward and Ironsides avenues in the Manette neighborhood. That facility has classes for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Charter schools are publicly funded, tuition-free independent schools that operate in Washington State under legislation passed in 2016.



Freshman Catalyst Public Schools students eat their lunch in the main floor gathering area at the Marvin Williams Recreation Center in Bremerton on Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025. *MEEGAN M. REID/KITSAP SUN*

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