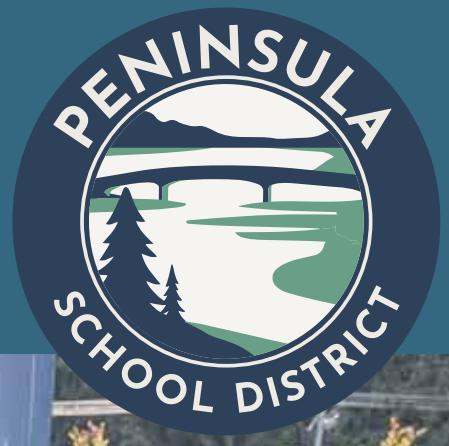


COMPASS



INSPIRING AND EMPOWERING
EVERY CHILD, EVERY DAY.

WINTER 2026

A Message from Superintendent Krestin Bahr



The Peninsula School District community's unwavering commitment to our students continues to make our schools places where children thrive and families belong. As we look ahead to continuing this work together, we have a Replacement Educational Programs and Operations Levy on the February 10 ballot. This three-year levy renews our expiring 2023 levy and accounts for approximately 17% of our district's overall budget.

State funding alone doesn't cover the full cost of running our schools. School districts statewide must run levies to bridge that gap, funding essential programs, staff, and student resources, including educators, paraeducators, arts, music, early childhood education, transportation, school safety officers, nurses, counselors, and technology specialists.

Did you know that athletics and extracurricular activities are 100% funded by the levy? And programs like band, choir, theater, and visual arts are also all levy-supported.

The levy also allows the district to invest in rigorous academic curriculum, instructional materials, and programs to help students succeed, providing targeted help for students who need it and additional staff to support academics, arts, music, and student enrichment. At the same time, our school board has made fiscal responsibility a priority. We continue to have the second-lowest overall local school tax rate in Pierce County.

I hope you enjoy the stories on the following pages, showcasing the incredible work happening in our schools every day. Thank you for your continued partnership in building a strong foundation for every student's success.

Sincerely,
Superintendent Krestin Bahr

The **Superintendent Student Advisory Symposium** is well into its third year, with eight students from each of our three high schools. Students recently attended a workshop and engaged in honest dialogue about student success, mental health, and belonging. They shared their experiences, highlighted programs making a difference, and collaborated to design innovative solutions to support PSD students, staff, and families. These student voices continue to shape the district's future, ensuring that every student is empowered to become a successful and engaged global citizen.

 **LEVY FUNDED**





Celebrating Our School Board This January

Behind every great school district is a great school board. This January, we're celebrating our Board of Directors, five community members who show up, dig in, and champion what matters most: our students.

For the fifth consecutive year, the PSD board earned the Board of Distinction award from the Washington State School Directors' Association – recognition reserved for boards that don't settle for the status quo, but actively work to break down barriers to ensure success for all students.

"Our board members bring exceptional commitment to Peninsula School District's students and families," Superintendent Krestin Bahr said. "Their thoughtful leadership and steadfast focus on educational excellence help shape our community's future. Though we take this month to celebrate their contributions, their positive influence extends throughout the entire year."

GHHS Student Honored With Spot on the Regional PSESD Board

Gig Harbor High School junior Kendra Smith was selected to be on the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) board, representing more than 400,000 K-12 students and families in our region. The board includes four student representatives, two juniors and two seniors, who attend monthly meetings.

Kendra recently had the opportunity to attend the annual Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) conference, where she listened to speakers discuss the inner workings and processes of our state education system. PSD is proud to have Kendra's voice representing our students and families at the regional level.



PSD Welcomes New Board Member Matt Bruhn

The Peninsula School District welcomes its newest board director in District 2, Matt Bruhn, a parent of two elementary school students who brings fresh perspective and a deep commitment to the community's 9,000 students.

Driven by a desire to step up and make a real difference, Bruhn brings cross-functional leadership experience and a collaborative approach honed through years of team building and complex decision-making. Though new to board service, he is skilled in bringing together diverse perspectives and finding common ground.

Bruhn's priorities are building trust and ensuring clear communication with families, empowering educators, and ensuring equity for every student. He envisions continued progress on creating safe, supportive environments while building on the district's existing strengths.

"I wanted my children to know that their dad tried to build something positive for them and for every family in our community," Bruhn shared. "My goal is to show up with an open mind, ask good questions, and make thoughtful decisions that support our students, staff, and families."





Inclusive Playground Helps Students Build Connections at Harbor Heights

New accessible playground equipment was recently installed at Harbor Heights Elementary, prioritizing inclusion for all students. Peninsula School District special education staff collaborated with the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) to provide input on the playground's new design, ensuring every student could enjoy the play equipment.

"The new inclusive playground provides accessible, developmentally appropriate spaces where all children can safely and confidently participate," said Justine Malek, special education teacher. "Our students with disabilities can engage more independently and access all areas of the new play space."

Harbor Heights houses the district's special education Options program, which focuses on developing students' communication, adaptive, academic, and social skills through inclusion and individualized support. Students in this program previously lacked accessible playground enhancements, but with the installation of playground equipment, rubber surfacing, and more ground-level toys, students of all abilities can join in recess. An upgraded asphalt walking track was also installed in 2024, which is wheelchair accessible.

"We've seen increased authentic peer interaction and genuine connection between our Options students and their general education peers," Malek said. "Students build social connections through shared play, modeling, and cooperative games, fostering empathy and understanding among all learners."

These improvements reflect a commitment to creating equitable learning environments where every child can fully participate in recess activities and are an essential step toward ensuring every student has equal access to recreational opportunities.

"Watching students of all abilities play together on our new playground reaffirms everything I believe about the power of inclusion," said Alivia Nation, special education teacher. "This space gives them more than play; it gives them a sense of belonging. And that is where learning truly begins."



PHS Honored with Three National Awards for Commitment to Inclusion and Positivity

LEVY FUNDED

Peninsula High School (PHS) recently earned national recognition from three separate organizations for its outstanding commitment to inclusion, engagement, and a positive school climate.

First, Special Olympics North America honored PHS as a National Banner Unified Champion School. To receive this recognition, schools must meet 10 rigorous national standards of excellence developed by a panel of education and Special Olympics leaders.

A December celebration honored the dedicated leadership and work of PHS students, Special Olympics State Youth Activation Committee members, and PHS Unified Coaches who championed the application process and guided the school to this milestone. December also marked the school's first-ever Inclusion Week.

"Being part of Unified has completely shaped how I see our school," said PHS junior Riley Ducharme. "The positive climate here came from students choosing to show up for one another and creating friendships that feel real and equal. Unified isn't a club you join, it's a community you build. These awards represent all the hours we spent practicing, cheering, laughing, and figuring things out together. They're proof of what can happen when inclusion isn't just a goal but a culture."

Each year, ESPN and Special Olympics North America honor one school in each state that goes above and beyond to create a culture of inclusion, advocacy, and respect for students with and without intellectual disabilities. In 2025, PHS also earned this award: a spot on the ESPN Honor Roll.

Finally, PHS received the incredible Culture Kickoff Award last month. This award, given by the Association of Washington School Principals and the Association of Washington Student Leaders, recognizes schools that begin the academic year with a strong, positive culture and a focus on student-adult collaboration.

PHS has successfully integrated Unified Champion Schools programming into daily life, fostering an atmosphere where all students can thrive together. This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of our students, staff, and community. Across the district, schools continue to demonstrate commitment to equity and inclusion in educational programs and community initiatives.



Peninsula Hands On Art

Brings Masterpieces to Life

LEVY FUNDED

Peninsula Hands On Art continues to transform elementary classrooms across our district into vibrant art studios. Nearly 4,000 students each year create four carefully crafted art projects that connect young learners with artistic traditions from around the world.

What began as a single-school initiative at Harbor Heights Elementary in 2003 has blossomed into a district-wide program that is partly levy-funded and partly non-profit funded. The numbers tell an impressive story: more than 236,000 art experiences created by curious hands over the years.

Professional local artists design and teach each project through engaging video instruction. Trained volunteer docents then guide students through hands-on creation in their own classrooms. This year's lineup takes students on a creative journey, from crafting copper wire pendants inspired by sculptor Alexander Calder to vibrant mola collages that honor the Kuna people's textile artistry. Students will also create polka-dotted masterpieces inspired by contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama before discovering the centuries-old art of quilling.

At its heart, Peninsula Hands On Art believes in "creating a community of young artists that embraces the artistic talents of each individual child." The program continues to prove that every student has an artist within, waiting to be discovered.



Communities In Schools

After-School Programs Help Students Thrive

Staff and volunteers with Communities In Schools Peninsula (CISP) support students across Peninsula School District (PSD) with after-school reading and math programs. Caring mentors work one-on-one with students every week, helping build confidence and a love for learning.

CISP has been helping students thrive academically and socially for more than 25 years. The nonprofit's core mission is "to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life." The after-school reading and math programs are on-site at Evergreen, Vaughn, Purdy, Discovery, and Harbor Heights elementary schools.

By providing a safe, supportive space after school, students strengthen their core skills in reading and math while working with a mentor and in small groups. For more information about CISP or how to get involved, visit peninsula.ciswa.org/volunteer.

LEVY FUNDED



Bus Drivers Collect 5,000 Pounds of Food in "Stuff the Bus" Event

Peninsula School District bus drivers gathered more than 5,000 pounds of non-perishable food and toiletries at their annual "Stuff the Bus" food drive. This community-driven event collects items just before Thanksgiving to distribute to local food banks when they need it most.

Donations filled two buses stationed at Target and Fred Meyer in Gig Harbor on a blustery Saturday. In addition, over \$1,200 was donated. Food and funds go to support three vital organizations: Fish Food Bank of Gig Harbor, Bischoff Food Bank of Key Peninsula, and Key Peninsula Community Services.

"This year we hit it out of the park. The Target location had food in every seat and on the floor," said bus driver Shawna Cerny. "The community really came out to help support those in need, which is absolutely wonderful."

The Stuff the Bus initiative was initially launched in 2007 by bus driver Shari Pace, who organized the event to boost morale. This year's event was spearheaded by driver Joni Dupille and Cerny, with the fitting theme "Driving Hunger Away."

"The drivers did an amazing job for our community, and I couldn't be more proud of our group for all they do for our students," said Dawnett Wright, Director of Transportation.



2026 Replacement Educational Programs & Operations Levy

VOTE by February 10



- The **Replacement Educational Programs & Operations (EP&O) Levy** replaces the expiring 2023 EP&O Levy, to provide continued investment in our staff and programs that are not fully funded by the state.
- The levy is critical to maintaining the quality of our local schools.
- The levy allows the district to invest in rigorous academic curriculum, instructional materials, and programs to help students succeed.
- Levy funds will provide targeted help for students who need it and additional teachers and staff to support academics, arts, music, and student enrichment.

Renewing the EP&O Levy will continue essential funding for Peninsula School District programs, staff and student resources.

psd401.net/levy





The levy renews the expiring Educational Programs and Operations Levy and accounts for 17% of the district's overall budget. The levy supports programs, staff, and student resources not fully funded by the state.

- Educators
- Paraeducators
- Athletics
- Arts and music
- Early learning
- Highly capable
- Curriculum updates
- Transportation
- School safety officers
- Nurses and counselors
- Technology specialists
- Preventative maintenance



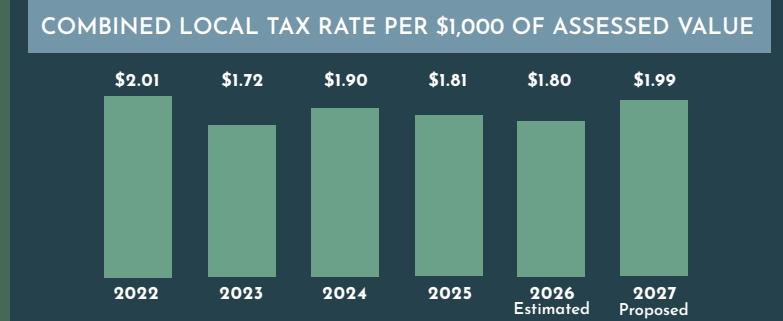
- The state only funds 1.38 school psychologists, but the levy funds an additional 9.42.
- The state funds 11.84 school nurses, while our levy funds an additional 12.59 nurses.
- 100% of athletic and extracurricular programs are funded by the levy.

DID YOU KNOW?



The Replacement EP&O Levy rate is estimated to be \$1.30 per \$1,000 of assessed value. PSD will continue to be fiscally responsible, making essential investments in our students while maintaining the second-lowest overall local school tax rate in Pierce County.

Levy funds support every child, every day. All levy funds approved by PSD voters stay in our school district.





Pioneer Elementary and Henderson Bay High School: Building Community Through Partnership

What began as an office assistant program has grown into a deeper partnership between Pioneer Elementary and neighboring Henderson Bay High School (HBHS), benefiting students at both schools while strengthening the community. Since Pioneer opened five years ago, HBHS students have served as office teaching assistants (TAs), developing professional clerical and communication skills while helping with daily operations.

"Our students love seeing the big kids and respond well to working alongside them and taking direction from the older students," said Anna Martin, Office Manager at Pioneer.

The partnership recently expanded through a joint food-and-toy drive. Working together, Pioneer's Volunteer Parent Organization (VPO) and a Henderson Bay TA organized a "neighbor helping neighbor" effort. HBHS leadership students created collection boxes and signs, then visited Pioneer to collect donations. Together, the schools collected more than 3,400 items, including 2,091 pounds of food, tripling last year's total.

"The Henderson Bay students who helped with the food drive, many of whom are in Community Leadership and Interact, really took the lead on this



one," said HBHS leadership teacher Emily Scheutzow. "They're already thinking about what else they want to do this year, and it's been exciting to see them step into those roles."

The two schools are exploring more ways to collaborate, including HBHS students potentially assisting in classrooms, with specialists, and even at recess. Pioneer's VPO has invited HBHS to host a room at their upcoming STEAM Night, where high school students will engage elementary students in interactive activities.

"Henderson Bay is great at finding ways to give their students opportunities while meeting them where they are," said Martin. "If Pioneer can fill a little piece of that, everyone is benefiting, and it's a win all around."



GHHS Welcomes New Leadership Focused on Rebuilding Culture and Belonging

Gig Harbor High School (GHHS) began the 2025-26 school year with an all-new administrative team: Principal Bob Marshall and Assistant Principals Tori Fairweather and Brandon Bakke. Together, they made it their mission to help the school rediscover and strengthen its culture.

The leadership team has centered its work on one shared belief: a school's spirit is measured not by events or traditions alone, but by whether students and staff genuinely want to be there every day. Early signs of momentum are promising. The school's daily attendance rate is 96% so far this year, a strong indicator that students are feeling connected and engaged.

"We believe the true measure of school spirit is if both staff and students want to come each and every day," said Marshall. "Although this is always a work in progress, and never about perfection, we are striving to be a place where 'You Belong.'"

That simple but powerful phrase – You Belong – has become the theme of the year. It greets students the moment they walk into the building and serves as a daily reminder of the kind of environment GHHS aims to cultivate: welcoming, safe, and grounded in mutual respect.

"I am always greeted by staff who are excited to teach and want to inspire students to do well in their classes, leading me to feel happier and like I belong in this school," said sophomore Will Behnke.

The principals view belonging not as a one-time initiative but as a mindset reflected in every interaction, from morning greetings at the door to supportive conversations throughout the day.

"It starts with how we welcome students each day, to the hundreds of daily interactions we have, believing in the best of each other," said Bakke. "Smiles go a long way."

Fairweather echoed that sentiment and noted that the GHHS staff has a strong foundation already in place. "It is easy to strive for creating spaces where belonging is the focus when so many students and staff have made a brand new admin team feel welcome," she said.

"I feel like our culture has really improved since past years," said senior Britta Nelson. "There's room to grow, but I am really happy with how this year has been going so far."

Looking ahead, the team hopes this focus on connection and community will shape not only the school's culture but the daily experience of everyone who enters GHHS. When people feel genuinely welcomed and valued, schools thrive.





Celebrating Our Girls' Soccer Teams' Historic State Runs

Our district's high school girls' soccer teams delivered outstanding postseason performances, showcasing not only exceptional athletic ability but also the character and determination that define our student-athletes.

The Gig Harbor High School Tides earned the number one seed in the WIAA 3A bracket and advanced to the state quarterfinals, finishing in the top 8. Their tactical skill and composure under pressure proved they belonged at the top.

The Peninsula High School Seahawks fought through a tough bracket to finish in the top 16 statewide. Against elite competition, they brought intensity and grit to every match, proving they're among Washington's best programs.

"Our team fought hard until the end, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to have worked with our talented, energetic, and fun group of players," said PHS coach Jose Brambila.

Beyond the rankings, both teams exemplified sportsmanship and dedication while balancing academics and the demands of playoff soccer. Both our coaches and athletes had an unforgettable season and set a standard of excellence in athletics for years to come.



DID YOU KNOW?

All 16 Gig Harbor High School and Peninsula High School fall 2025 athletics programs achieved a 3.0 or higher grade point average, earning them either Distinguished or Outstanding awards from the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA).



GHHS Freshman Takes State Diving Championship

Gig Harbor High School's Jane Jackman captured a state championship in diving, scoring an impressive 345.05 to claim first place. Jackman, who has been diving since second grade, is only in ninth grade.

"I couldn't have made it this far without the support of my many coaches, parents, and teammates from both Gig Harbor and Peninsula High School," said Jackman. "I can't thank them enough!"

Her performance under pressure at the state's premier competition showcased the skill and composure that define championship-level athletics. Jackman delivered when it mattered most in the final dive of the meet: a forward double somersault in the pike position.

"Jane brought positive energy and joy to the pool every single day," said coach Alyse Yeaman. "She consistently showed up with a mission – to hit her dives and perform at her very best. Her form was outstanding, and she stood out among the competition with her precision, strength, and focus. Watching her take the state title this year was truly a dream come true."

Congratulations to Jackman and all GHHS and PHS athletes who competed at state. The GHHS swim and dive team finished 7th overall, while PHS finished 11th overall.



Battle in the Harbor Tournament Brings Middle School Wrestling to Life

LEVY FUNDED

The energy was electric at Gig Harbor High School (GHHS) as 128 middle school wrestlers hit the mats for the annual Battle in the Harbor tournament. Athletes from all four middle schools – Goodman, Harbor Ridge, Key Peninsula and Kopachuck – competed with heart and determination, showcasing the incredible growth of wrestling in our district.

This year's tournament introduced several new elements, including streamlining brackets and results through TrackWrestling. The tournament also raised nearly \$1,000 through apparel sales, with each school receiving about \$250, to support their ASB programs.

Beyond individual victories, wrestlers competed for the Outstanding Wrestler award and Match of the Meet honors. Every first-place finisher received a certificate and crown. Harbor Ridge captured both the tournament victory and league championship this year. With several new coaches bringing fresh energy to our programs, growth across all four schools has been remarkable. Middle school wrestling participation is up 10% from last year, reflecting the dedication of our coaches, commitment of our athletes, and support of our wrestling community.

The tournament also showcased the strength of collaboration. The GHHS wrestling team demonstrated outstanding leadership by running scoring tables and supporting the event, serving as role models for our younger athletes.

From the first whistle to the final match, families packed the stands, cheering on wrestlers as they demonstrated the skills, sportsmanship, and determination they've been developing all season. Special thanks to everyone who made the event such a success. The Battle in the Harbor tournament continues to showcase the talent and heart of our middle school wrestlers.





Discovery, Pioneer and Evergreen Students Earn Honors at LEGO Competition

LEVY FUNDED

Student teams from across Peninsula School District competed in this year's two FIRST LEGO League (FLL) Unearthed regional competitions in Tacoma, with teams from Discovery Elementary and Pioneer Elementary going home with multiple awards. Two PSD teams are also advancing to the competition semi-finals: Team Artifact Hunters from Discovery and Team TheHornets6 from Evergreen Elementary.

Team 2 from Pioneer won the Innovation Project Award, earning the top recognition out of the entire field of 28 teams at the first competition. Judges praised the team for their creativity, research, problem-solving, and prototype development. Their project demonstrated a thoughtful and practical innovation connected to this year's theme, Unearthed, which focused on archaeology. Pioneer's Team 3 received a Finalist Innovation Project Award, placing them among the top event finishers.

"Our students worked incredibly hard, showed perseverance, and demonstrated what it means to learn by doing," said Justin Towner, Pioneer Innovation teacher. "To see two teams recognized at the highest level for innovation is something we are extremely proud of."

Discovery sent an impressive nine FLL teams to the second FLL competition. As rookie teams competing against experienced middle school programs, they earned four awards. Team Tera Discovery won the Innovation Project Award, the highest recognition at the event, while Team Treasure Seekers was named an Innovation Project Finalist, Team Finders of the Ancient earned Core Values Finalist recognition, and Team Time Voyagers received the Rising All-Star Award.

"Teams worked tirelessly during STEAM class, gave up lunch recess, and attended extra after-school practices, demonstrating remarkable dedication, perseverance, and collaboration," said Christina Massimino, Discovery STEAM teacher. "We are incredibly proud of our students for their hard work, creativity, resilience, and teamwork."

Student teams from Artondale, Swift Water and Vaughn also had a great showing at the competitions. FLL teaches real-world problem-solving experience and critical thinking and design skills. Students build habits of researching and teamwork through a guided, global robotics program, and their success reflects teamwork, creativity, and dedication to STEAM learning.



GHFMO Partners with PSD to Bring Real-World Science to Classrooms

Gig Harbor Fire and Medic One (GHFMO) partnered with Peninsula School District to bring real-world science to eighth graders. Firefighters joined Melissa Guttormsen's and Tami Bradford's science classes at Goodman Middle School to teach hands-on lessons about heat transfer: conduction, convection, and radiation.

"While students worked through the lab, firefighters added their own field experience, reinforced safety, and connected each type of heat transfer to real situations they encounter on calls," said Guttormsen. "Students were completely dialed in—they asked thoughtful questions, loved having the firefighters in the room, and were genuinely excited to learn from them."

UL's Institute for Research Experiences and Education provided training for firefighters and teachers with content aligned to secondary science standards. Division Chief Tom Wescott said the curriculum incorporates important safety messages, such as lithium battery safety and fire sprinkler importance, while introducing young people to the fire service as a career.

"The firefighters found it rewarding to watch students grasp the concepts of thermodynamics," said Wescott. "They enjoyed sharing information about the fire service and bridging the connection to fire science."

The partnership uses the Xplorlabs Science of Fire Forensics curriculum and will expand to other PSD middle schools, building on GHFMO's existing elementary and high school collaborations.

"This partnership has filled some instructional gaps in our current curriculum while bringing in authentic, standards-aligned, career-connected learning, and we're thrilled about it," said Guttormsen.



Peninsula High School Gets Major Auditorium Theater Lighting Upgrade

Peninsula High School's auditorium has undergone a dramatic transformation with a comprehensive theater lighting upgrade, including a completely new electrical panel to support modern LED technology. The new lighting replaces equipment dating back to the 1960s.

LED lights now illuminate the stage, offering energy efficiency and superior light quality. A programmable light board gives students control over lighting design, enabling them to create customized colors, execute mid-performance lighting changes, and program complex special effects. New technical capabilities allow students to bring their creative visions to life in ways the old system never permitted. Previously, all lighting adjustments had to be made manually.

"Providing students with industry-aligned experiences helps get kids ready for that next step post-secondary," said Kelsey Parke, Career and Technical Education (CTE) Director. "The new equipment is up to industry standard and gives students an opportunity for hands-on learning."

District staff spent over a year researching current theater lighting technology and consulting with surrounding districts

and theater companies to select the best and most cost-effective equipment. The new system's flexibility can extend beyond Peninsula in the future, because key components are movable.



"This upgrade has been such a great opportunity for all of us," said senior McKenzie McGee. "Not only do performances for both school and community groups look better, the new system is more reliable, and technical theater students are able to learn lighting design with equipment that professionals are using, better preparing us for potential careers."

The PHS theater curriculum blends art with technical skills like lighting design and set building. Students earn CTE credit through these hands-on experiences and can earn dual credit through Olympic College, as they develop industry-standard competencies that prepare them for postsecondary programs and careers in technical theater.



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BY FEBRUARY 10
psd401.net/levy

Peninsula School District Board of Directors: Natalie Wimberley, Matthew Bruhn, Lori Glover, David Olson, Chuck West | Superintendent: Krestin Bahr

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