NEWS

Mercer Island School District Volume 10 Issue #2, June 2009

This is the second issue of District NEWS for 2008-2009, designed to present information on the new 2020 Vision, district and school improvement planning and other programs. Please continue to check the district web site for the most current information. *www.misd.k12.wa.us*

District faces budget cuts

Along with all school districts across the state, the Mercer Island School District (MISD) anticipates unparallelled cuts in state funding over the next two years due to the state's $9 billion budget shortfall. As of May 27, 2009, the funding loss was expected to be just over $2,000,000 for 2009/2010.

On April 16, 2009, the school board listened to a staff presentation on how schools and departments across the district will absorb a $2 million reduction. Students and staff will be affected in the following ways:

- Up to 11 teaching positions will be eliminated from the staffing model.
- Class sizes will go up in nearly every classroom, to an average of 26 in the elementary schools and up to 35 in some classes at the high school.
- Classified staff reductions will occur in every school and at the central office campus. These reductions include paraeducator hours and secretarial/clerical hours.
- Reduction of district publications including the calendar.
- Reduction of professional development opportunities for certificated, classified and administrative personnel.
- Elimination of certain clubs and after-school activities at all levels.
- 5-12 music reductions.
- Restructuring of central administration including elimination of two associate superintendent positions with additional cost-containment reductions planned.

Community responds at a special board meeting on April 23

The school board asked for community response to the budget reductions at a Special Board meeting held on April 23, 2009 at Islander Middle School. The district has also been collecting comments on the Reduction Plan via a survey posted on the district web site. Most responses have focused on teacher reduction and class size; community members asked that the district restore cuts to class size first in the event the district raises additional funds. Other areas include restoring cuts to 5-12 music, clubs and activities, and professional development for teachers.

MISD selects *Math Expressions* as new elementary math curriculum

A unique and unprecedented collaboration between teachers and parents has resulted in a new 21st century math curriculum for elementary students called *Math Expressions*. The math Curriculum Team has been meeting since September to review the K-8 math curriculum, state standards, assessment data and surveys. According to Kathy Morrison, Associate Superintendent, "Our students are not able to meet the new standards with our current curriculum and the elementary *Investigations* curriculum has received mixed reviews over the years. We knew it was time for a change." The committee reviewed 9 out of 13 curricula ranging from reform to traditional curricula, finally narrowing the choices to *Envisions* and *Math Expressions*. *Envisions* is more traditional and *Math Expressions* is a combination of reform and traditional, an "elegant solution to the math wars." Kim Schjelderup, Math Team lead teacher said, "I can't thank everyone enough for all of your hard work, dedication, open minds, and commitment to ensure our students have the best math education possible."

Inside: **Find out how the district's new 2020 Vision plan is working in our classrooms!**

Mercer Island School District's 2020 VISION

Successfully preparing students for the cognitive, global and digital world



The story continues–

The following projects are examples of 2020 Vision grants approved this year.

The Mercer Trading Company featured on King-5 News

Julia Ball, senior at Mercer Island High School and president of The Mercer Trading Company, impressed the audience at the Breakfast of Champions with her in-depth look at this very unique venture. She also impressed Jean Enersen, King-5 anchor and MC for the morning. "I think we should do a news feature on this," she said. The very next day Eric Wilkerson, producer, contacted Carol Wiseley, Marketing/DECA teacher at the high school, to set up a time to interview and film the students. The segment aired on May 6. Since then, Wiseley has been invited to present the class to the Washington Association of Career and Technology's summer conference in August. "The state is very interested in this project," said Wiseley. "Our students are really paving the way for K-12 global and digital learning."



Julia Ball being interviewed for King5 TV news about the the Mercer Trading Company

The Mercer Trading Company is a collaboration between MIHS students and students at St. Augustine's College in Ghana to trade goods on-line. Mercer Island High School is the first school on the West coast to pilot this innovative learning experience offered by Achievers International. The school has been selected to participate in another on-line trading venture next year with a school in the United Kingdom. Over 37 students have registered for the class, up from 15 this year. Julia Ball and fellow senior Eric Bauer will be attending the Foster School of Business at the UW next fall. The Mercer Trading Company has been the most rewarding experience of my high school career," said Julia.

Congo Project

Ed Puchalla, International Studies teacher and Karen Campbell, drama teacher, are collaborating on researching the current conflict in the Congo and producing an original drama based on first-hand accounts of participants in that conflict. The classes are utilizing video conferencing to dialogue directly with persons involved in the conflict and to gather their stories. Students are using digital technologies such as wikis to build their understanding of the conflict, and to collaborate on script development. According to Karen Campbell, "Creating the script was a big challenge. This is a very sensitive and upsetting story."



Karen Campbell with drama students researching the script-writing phase of the Congo project

Modernizing the new Social Studies offerings

A team of social studies teachers are researching and designing up to ten problem-based learning experiences to be used as a framework for the new 9th grade Global History course and the new second semester of the 10th Grade World History course. These learning experiences include a career exploration element in order to make the projects authentic and open-ended. An example is, "Imagine that you are a museum curator. Design an exhibit around the art and inventions of Leonardo Da Vinci." Following the development and implementation of these lessons, the Social Studies department will evaluate the appropriateness and success of the assignments with the goal of choosing several common assessments for the 2009-2010 school year and beyond.

Music Commission Project

Mercer Island High School's band director Parker Bixby has contracted with a young professional composer named Carl Holmquist to compose a piece after meeting with and discussing compositional ideas and process with the students and directors of regional high schools in Washington state. The project includes two "webinars" in which MIHS students actively rehearse the piece for the composer who is in turn available over

the web to answer questions about the piece and its development. Mr. Holmquist will come to Mercer Island to rehearse the band and conduct the world premier of his piece.

Geocaching

Students in West Mercer's E2 program are learning about geography and orienteering through hands-on experiences. According to Mark Headlee, "We are using a "Travel Bug" to allow the students to watch their item travel around the country and even the world. This activity is tracked on-line. The students will be connecting with people from other areas by reading the logs people create about our Travel Bug. This is an exciting way for technology to help connect young students to the outside world."

***Budget Cuts* continued...**

Mercer Island Schools Foundation raises record funds at the 6th annual Breakfast of Champions

Thanks to generous response from the community, the MISF has raised over $430,000 to help offset the budget cuts and move the district forward with its 2020 Vision. In his keynote address, Superintendent Gary Plano outlined the impacts to students and teachers in the district.

"The main message I want to convey today is this: for the first time in three decades budget reductions from the state are forcing us to reduce our teaching force. This is a huge loss, not only for the teachers who will receive lay-off notices, but to our students who remind us every day that the single most important factor in the quality of their education is their teacher."

Dr.Plano looked back to the beginning of the school year, when he, Pat Braman and Mike Radow, president of the Mercer Island Education Association, "challenged our teachers to take risks in our classrooms." Plano said, "We need you to help us realize our 2020 Vision: Successfully preparing students for the cognitive, global and digital world." Plano spoke about 10 innovative ideas brought forward by teachers and funded by an anonymous donation from a generous community member. He said, "The bottom line is – we can't afford to lose any of our teachers, especially now." The message resonated with the audience, many of whom gave more than ever before.

"I am overwhelmed by the generosity of this community," said Dr. Plano.

School Board to take final action in August

The school board signed a resolution authorizing the central office cuts at a Special Board meeting on April 28. Final action on further cuts will occur in August, after contract negotiations with the Mercer Island Education Association. According to School Board president, Janet Frohnmayer, "This is a very difficult time for our district and we are devastated at the prospect of losing any of our staff. But, unfortunately, we have no where else left to cut." The district has reduced its budget for the past 3 years, to the tune of $2,053,096.

PTA and MISF continue fundraising efforts

PTA's from all schools have organized community coffees where the Breakfast of Champions program was re-created and people had an opportunity to give. According to Mary Kay Woolsten and Marnie MacDiarmid, PTA Council Co-presidents, "We are doing our very best to spread the word about the budget cuts. We are really worried about the impact of losing teachers – our children deserve the very best education we can deliver."

Donations are now being accepted via the MISF web site: www.mercerislandschoolsfoundation.com

The district will apply all funds raised until July 31, 2009 to budget restoration for next year. Please continue to check the district web site for the most current information.

Honoring our retiring staff

On June 1, 2009, MISD said goodbye to our 2009 retirees and acknowledged employees who have been serving students and community in benchmark service years of 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 plus years of service. "The quality of education in Mercer Island Schools is because of your dedication," said Dr. Gary Plano. "We are grateful and honored to include you among the best employees in public education."



Retirees Mace Brady, Ralph Allen, Gordon Davenport, and Janet Brady were on hand at the service celebration on June 1.

Teachers of the Year

On May 28, 2009 the school board recognized Gordon Davenport, Angela Carey and Melissa Ralph as Mercer Island's Teachers of the Year. The teachers were nominated by their principals and then selected by a district committee of administrators. Aside from being outstanding educators, teachers had to demonstrate their commitment to professional growth, community involvement and strengthening the teaching profession.

Gordon Davenport came to the Mercer Island School District and founded the Mandarin Chinese Program at MIHS in 1997. By creating his curriculum materials based on a "storytelling" teaching method, he was able to grow the program to over 230 students at four levels. Annual trips to China, leadership responsibilities with the Washington State Chinese Language Teacher's Network, and his dedication to Mercer Island School District's students, staff and parents make him truly deserving of this recognition.

Angela Carey has served as a kindergarten through fifth grade music specialist at Lakeridge Elementary since 2001. She spends an extraordinary amount of time organizing events for music festivals, assemblies and other special events with

Lakeridge's choir and steel drum band (which she founded) throughout the year. This National Board Certified Teacher recently published an article in Activate! Magazine and co-developed the Lakeridge Adaptive Music Program for students in the Autism Spectrum Program. Finally, Angela has served as a representative on the Lakeridge Site Council, Principal's Cabinet and MISD/MIEA Teacher Evaluation Subcommittee.

Melissa Ralph has taught in the Mercer Island School District since 1993 at Island Park, Lakeridge and Islander Middle Schools. Currently she teaches seventh and eighth grade math at IMS. Over the years she has been heavily involved as a district leader in the area of math. She has designed, planned and facilitated local and regional Developing Mathematical Ideas workshops for teachers; and she developed the model for parent math nights that was used at both Lakeridge and Island Park Elementary Schools. She has served at the school and district level through her service as a mentor teacher, LAP Supervisor, District Assessment Advisory Committee member, IMS Curriculum Council, and Building Guidance Team member.

Important Dates:

June 18 .....Last Day of School

June 22-July 31.....MIHS Summer School

July 6 – August 6 .....K-8 Summer Session

September 2.....School Starts

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Mailing Panel needs to be moved to the top of this page for next issues, per Doug 6-12-09