

about how we as an entire community can work together to better understand how our students learn. If you would like to receive the Community Conversations newsletter about follow-up events, send an email to Janet Frohn-mayer at [jfrohnmayer@comcast.net](mailto:jfrohnmayer@comcast.net) or Ralph Allen at [Ralph\\_allen@misd.wednet.edu](mailto:Ralph_allen@misd.wednet.edu). To learn more about Mel Levine, go to: [www.allkindsofminds.org](http://www.allkindsofminds.org).

**The Breakfast of Champions**

Over 400 people attended the Mercer Island Schools Foundation’s 3rd annual Breakfast of Champions on March 21. This event featured MIHS graduates KING TV anchor Jean Enerson and former Microsoft executive Pete Higgins, as well as a motivating keynote by Jim Donald, CEO of Starbuck’s Corporation. The program also included a video on the Autism Spectrum program at Lakeridge Elementary School and heartwarming musical performances from “Oliver” by students at West Mercer Elementary. To date, the Breakfast has raised over \$160,000, well past last year’s total and a huge success for the hard-working MISF board. Thanks to these committed volunteers and the more than 1,500 people who contribute annually, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation raises well over \$700,000 annually to support programs designed to ensure that all students meet or exceed state and district standards.



*Guest speakers Pete Higgins, Jean Enerson, and Jim Donald at the Mercer Island Schools Foundation's "Breakfast of Champions"*

**Congratulations!**

To our hard working teams that achieved top 5 recognition in State Competitions during the winter: MIHS Chess–1st in state (first time for MIHS since 1967), MIHS Boys’ Swimming–1st in State, Girls’ Gymnastics–2nd in State, MIHS Drill Team–2nd in State, and to the 12 MIHS students who qualified for the DECA National Competition in Dallas, Texas.

**District News**  
**Mercer Island Schools**  
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**Mercer Island School District** Volume 7, Issue #3, May 2006

This is the third issue of District NEWS for 2005-2006, designed to present information on district and school improvement planning, school board goals, and other programs. Please continue to check the district web site for the most current information. [www.misd.k12.wa.us](http://www.misd.k12.wa.us)

**Superintendent’s Message**

We are nearing the end of the 2005-06 school year in the Mercer Island School District, and it has been a year of accomplishment for our students, teachers, athletes, musicians, chess players, and their coaches. It has been a year of support from many hard-working members of our community, too. Please join me in thanking Terry Pottmeyer and Frank Morrison for being the “pillars” of support for our amazing Committee for Mercer Island Public Schools (CMIPS). This group earned the credit for “getting out the vote” for our February Levy Campaign, which once again passed by a wide margin. These funds account for 20% of

**We have wonderful programs for special education and gifted students, but what are we doing to meet the needs of students in the middle?**

our district budget and are absolutely essential to maintaining the level of excellence in our schools. Thanks to the members of CMPS and to all of you who said “yes” for schools.

I would also like to thank our school board for their efforts to reach out to the community through many new avenues including Key Communicators, Board Linkage meetings and full-day visits with teachers, students and parents at our schools. In addition, I have formed a District Advisory Council made up of staff, students, parents and community members to advise me on district plans regarding instructional programs to ensure that all of our students meet or exceed the Board’s Ends. All of these groups have been created to allow us to “cast a wider net” into the education/school community, to share what’s going on, and to get a “read” on our community’s view on important issues.

One comment and question often raised is: “We have wonderful programs for special education and gifted students, but what are we doing to meet the needs of students in the

middle?” In this issue of District NEWS, I am pleased to share with you some of the ways we are accomplishing this. I hope you will enjoy reading these stories and, as always invite you to call or email me with your questions, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,  
*Cyndy Simms*  
(206) 236-3300  
[cyndy\\_simms@misd.wednet.edu](mailto:cyndy_simms@misd.wednet.edu)

**How do we define “The Middle”?**

According to Michael Power, Director of Instruction and Assessment for MISD, the “middle” on Mercer Island is not the same as the middle for the rest of the country, or even the state of Washington. Looking at reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) as an example, in 2004, the average score of our 3rd grade students was in the 82nd percentile. (Percentile scores run from 1st to 99th and 50th is the national average.) Statewide, 3rd graders averaged the 58th percentile. Another way to look at it is that about 60% of Mercer Island 3rd graders scored in the top third of this test compared to 33% nationally. This pattern is repeated in the other grades and subject areas on the ITBS.

Statewide, our WASL passing rates for 4th, 7th and 10th grade reading are 97.3%, 92.8% and 93% compared to 79.2%, 68.7% and 72.4% for the state overall. So 20 to 30 percent more of our students are meeting standard than in the state overall.

Clearly on both of these measures of academic success, what we call “middle students” in Mercer Island are among the highest achievers nationally and statewide. But are we doing enough to support them?

Lakeridge Elementary principal Ralph Allen has this perspective to offer. “Some of the angst about the “middle” is the visibility of the gifted and special education programs



# Our first priority is to get all students to standard

- Patti Weber, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

and costs involved, excess costs that seem to “favor” these populations. In actuality the costs of these programs are precisely so the focus of the teacher of the “other” students is not as diffuse, leaving the teacher to provide more support for the students who are “regular” kids. Our curriculum is focused on grade level expectations and performance, and by definition, students in the middle are at grade level, especially on Mercer Island. This means that the bulk of the money we spend for regular program teachers goes to support students in the middle.”

## Student “Ends” address the needs of all students

Last year the MISD school board spent many hours learning a new model for board governance, and working with district staff, teachers, and community members to define what we are now calling student “Ends” in academic achievement and citizenship/personal development. All of these Ends are posted on the district web site (go to [www.misd.k12.wa.us](http://www.misd.k12.wa.us) then click on School Board and follow the links to Policies). End 2.2: Academic Achievement says: “Each student will achieve at individually and appropriately challenging levels.” This phrase states very clearly that our district is committed to meeting the needs of all students, no matter what their level of achievement.

According to Patti Weber, Curriculum Director for MISD, “First of all, our number one priority is to make sure all students meet state standards. But it is equally important to help individual students reach their goals. Even though politics have confused the issue, this is really the spirit behind education reform and No Child Left Behind. I believe it is our moral responsibility to make sure every child can succeed at appropriately challenging levels.”

Here are some district programs specifically targeted for students in the middle who might need extra assistance:

- **Learning Assistance Program (LAP) and Sound Partners programs (Elementary)**
- **Hand-in-Hand instructional assistants at Island Park Elementary (PTA funded). Differentiated instruction and trained parent volunteers**
- **Developing Mathematical Ideas (DMI) training for all elementary teachers**
- **Wolf Tracks program funded by West Mercer PTA for students in grades 3-5 who require additional support in reading**
- **Columbia University Writing Project at Lakeridge Elementary to improve the writing of all students**

- **Math Labs for students in 7th grade Math through Algebra II**  
Students who are below, or just at standard in math, often need more time to master concepts. The Math Labs for middle and high school students are extra classes students can take that preview concepts that will be presented in the next day’s math class, or review concepts presented that day in math class. The classes are smaller, allowing for both one-to-one and group instruction. Students are recommended by their teachers, or they may elect to take the classes on their own.
- **IMS Focus Block and proposed MIHS Focus Block**  
Students who find the district’s reading and writing standards to be a challenge are given the opportunity to enroll in the IMS Focus Block for 7th grade students. Patti Weber explains: “In this district we tend to enrich our instruction in language arts through the arts, connections to history and social studies. While we will always do this, the Focus Block really focuses the learning on the reading and writing skills students need to pass standards, and be ready for the higher expectations at the high school.” The high school is currently studying adding a similar class option. Again, students are recommended by their teachers, or they may choose the classes on their own.
- **K-12 Summer School**  
For many years, our elementary schools have offered summer school classes for students needing an extra boost in reading and writing. Crest Learning Center offered independent study courses in Pacific Northwest History, Physical Education, and Image for high school students who wanted to complete these graduation requirements during the summer. However, MISD did not offer a comprehensive K-12 summer school program to provide opportunities for students to reach standard in reading, writing, and math until the summer of 2005. Last summer, reading, writing and math classes were offered for elementary, middle and high school students. MISD is expanding the number of classes offered this summer (2006) and is considering offering summer school classes for students interested in accelerating their coursework in math and language arts in the summer of 2007. For more information about MISD’s summer school program, contact Mary Jo Budzius at 230-6161 or [MaryJo\\_Budzius@misd.wednet.edu](mailto:MaryJo_Budzius@misd.wednet.edu).
- **“Open Door” policy for high school Honors and AP classes**  
This is probably one of the more controversial policies that addresses students in the middle who are seeking more challenge. Patti Weber has this to say: “Years ago, when I was a high school English teacher, I thought we should limit honors and AP classes to only the best and the brightest. I could just close my doors and teach these students. In lots of ways it was wonderful. But it was also

## A Case Story, by Marion Mohler (with permission from Jenny Mohler)

Jenny will be the first to tell you that the reason she decided to challenge herself with honors and AP classes at Mercer Island High School is that she wanted to be in a classroom full of “smart” students. The bottom line is she wasn’t sure she would have had the discipline to work hard without the pressure from her peers. When she decided to take AP Studio Art, she liked the sounds of the “AP” – it validated what she had always felt to be a serious endeavor for her, her brain’s special “affinity” for art. Jenny will graduate in June with something close to a 3.3 GPA. She was thrilled to receive her acceptance letter from Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo, California as one of only 8 students to be admitted as a freshman into the Photography and Digital Media program. She says it was “all luck.” But when pressed, she will admit that maybe four years of varsity swimming, three years on drill team and a willingness to take challenging courses says something about a work ethic. She will quickly acknowledge those teachers and coaches who encouraged her every step of the way. She will say she learned that if she had a question, she had to speak up, or go find her teacher, counselor or coach herself. The answers were not always easy to find, nor were they supposed to be.

When we were on the group tour at Cal Poly, many parents wondered about the rumor that it is difficult to graduate in four years. Our student guides responded to this by saying, “With the exception of Engineering and Architecture, every student can graduate in four years. You just have to take responsibility for the registration deadlines, for keeping track of your courses and you may have to take some 8 am classes. But we’re adults now, right?” Hopefully, the answer is yes for all students who graduate from Mercer Island High School.

terribly unfair. Now I firmly support allowing all students to take the most challenging coursework if they choose to do so. Rather than suggesting to them that the course will be too stressful, we should ask them, ‘how can we help you get to where you want to go?’ This is not to suggest that we make the courses any less rigorous. But we can ‘scaffold’ the learning and build the steps so students can get there. In the end, our goal is to help all students develop good study habits, master organizational skills, learn to identify gaps in their own learning, and see themselves as capable of succeeding in the most rigorous courses.”

- **Crest Learning Center**  
Crest Learning Center, a satellite campus for Mercer Island High School, has recently shifted its student focus to ensure that all students meet or exceed state reading, writing and math standards using alternative educational teaching strategies. Crest has always provided a caring, welcoming learning environment with smaller class sizes for high school students who prefer an alternative approach to learning. Now Crest classes are compa-

table to courses taught on the main campus of MIHS i.e Algebra I, America History, World History, English 9,10,11,12, etc. The difference is that these courses are taught using alternative instructional strategies. For more information about Crest, contact Mark Roschy, Assistant Principal assigned to Crest, at 236-3332 [Mark\\_Roschy@misd.wednet.edu](mailto:Mark_Roschy@misd.wednet.edu).

# Community Partnerships help all students succeed

## Fine Arts Showcase

*“If we omit the arts from the curriculum, we are in effect shortchanging the mind.”*

Howard Gardner, Professor of Education, Harvard University

On March 7 and 8, the Mercer Island School District celebrated K-12 art programs at the annual Fine Arts Showcase, a lively exhibit of fine art and music presented by students and teachers from every grade level in the district. This program, the only one of its kind in the state, is put on every year by the Fine Arts Advisory Committee (FAAC), a non-profit organization dedicated to “providing each student the opportunity, encouragement, and resources to achieve creative expression through the arts.” The FAAC, in partnership with the school district, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation, and PTSAs, ensures that we provide resources to support the arts as core curriculum in our public school system.

## A Community Conversation with Mel Levine

Over 1,200 people, including parents, community members, and the entire District staff listened to Dr. Mel Levine’s inspirational and compassionate approach to educating and honoring the “all kinds of minds” that our students bring to our schools. Thanks to the efforts of the Mel Levine Planning Committee of parents, teachers and administrators, co-chaired by Janet Frohnmayer and Ralph Allen, and supported by the MISD school board and administration, this March 14 evening and all day event on March 15 has stimulated the “Community Conversation”



*Dr. Mel Levine surrounded by members of the Mel Levine Planning Committee*