



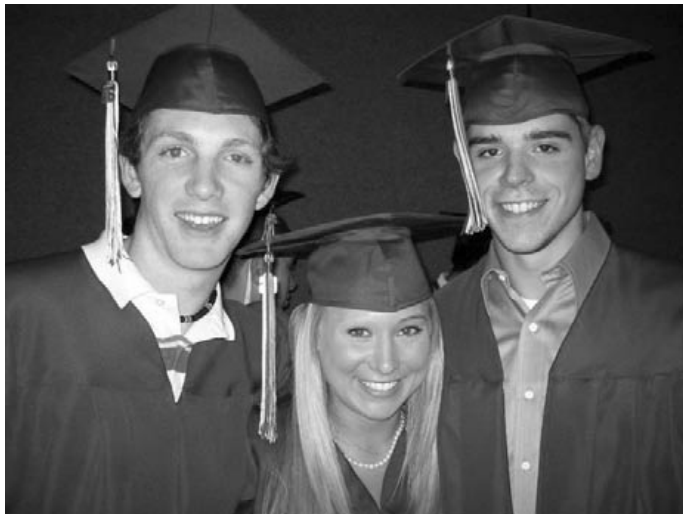
NEWS

Mercer Island School District Volume 7, Issue #4, June 2006

This is the fourth 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

Superintendent's Message

On June 15 we said goodbye to the 364 seniors who graduated from Mercer Island High School. Congratulations to the students, their families and teachers who have supported them so well during their school years. When I watched these students and listened to their remarkable words of wisdom, I was struck, once again, by the power of a community that is willing to work together to ensure the best possible education for our young people. I would particularly like



On June 15th 364 students graduated from Mercer Island High School

to acknowledge our extraordinary teachers, counselors, coaches, administrators, parent volunteers, and School Board members who have given so much of their time to help us continually improve our programs. These graduating seniors are a testament to your commitment. Thank You!

Last month we presented an article on students in the middle and some of the programs we offer. This month we are continuing the conversation with some of our teachers weighing in on the special challenges and opportunities they face working with students in the middle every day. Thank you to Nancy Frost, 4th grade teacher at West Mercer, Dave Segadelli, 7th and 8th grade math at IMS, and Christina Serkowski, English teacher at MIHS for sharing your thoughts with us.

Also this month I am very pleased to present the work of the Ad Hoc Committee, a group of teachers who worked all year with Gary Plano, Director of Instructional Services, on the district's Five-Year Plan for Instructional Improvement. This group's vision of our district as a Powerful Learning Community will truly transform the way our teachers work together for students.

And finally, there is wonderful news from the Mel Levine Planning Committee – 64 teachers and all of our administrators are participating in Schools Attuned training in June and August. So please read on and as always, contact me with your questions and comments. Enjoy your summer! (206) 236-3300 cyndy_simms@misd.wednet.edu

Sincerely,

Cyndy Simms

Students in the Middle

Last month we presented data showing that most students (about 84%) in the Mercer Island School District meet district and state standards. We also presented some of the programs in place for students just below or at the standards. But how do teachers meet the individual needs of the 22-30 students per class that they teach in our regular education classes? Here are perspectives from 3 of our teachers.

Nancy Frost, 4th grade, West Mercer

Nancy Frost has been teaching for over 30 years, across districts in 5 different schools. She said, "Students in the middle are the ones I teach everyday – it's what I do. Most of my students are right at standard, but sometimes they need help reviewing concepts, and sometimes they are ready to move beyond. One of the best programs I have ever seen in all of my years of teaching is the *Houghton-Mifflin Literacy* adoption we are working with this year. It lays out reading strategies and provides extensive materials to apply them. My favorite materials are the Leveled Reading books, written below, at and above standard. These allow me to be flexible in my teaching, working with different groups of students all of the time. The program comes with well organized WASL-oriented theme tests, which means we are preparing for the WASL all year long. My students are writing more and have to prove their point with concrete detail. They are learning to be critical thinkers in 4th grade!

In math, Frost and her colleagues use a combination of *Investigations*, for a deeper understanding of numbers, and *Addison Wesley* supplemental materials to teach computation and algorithms. “I see students who are good at multiplying 46×25 , but can they tell me what that really means? They need to be able to do both.”

The district’s K-5 literacy and math adoptions used by all K-5 teachers are aligned with district and state standards, include formal and informal assessments and extensive materials for flexible grouping and differentiated instruction. Every teacher has been trained in the materials and works in professional learning groups to share ideas and strategies that work for students.

Dave Segadelli, Math Teacher at IMS

Dave Segadelli, a 2006 recipient of a Washington State PTSA Outstanding Educator Award, is completing his 6th year teaching math at Islander Middle School. Currently, he is teaching about 100 students (four classes of 25 each) in grade level Math 8 and has a class of 8 eighth grade students taking the high school course in geometry. Dave helps coach this year’s Math Club and runs the Math Homework Center after school on Thursdays. “I find with this age of student, it’s best to develop and maintain a routine in class.” We begin with a “pencil” or “mental-math” warm-up, then correct the previous day’s assignment. I always devote 15 to 20 minutes explaining and discussing the day’s lesson coupled with several example problems. Any remaining class time is given to the assignment. Sometimes, the day before a quiz or test we use math bingo to review. Occasionally on a Friday, a competitive game called “Play for Points” is enjoyed. On Mondays the class will engage in “board work.” I send several students to the board and everyone in class is given the same problem



Teacher Dave Segadelli works with 8th grade students at Islander Middle School

to solve. As students get the correct answer, I designate them “teachers” and they are to circulate and help their fellow students.”

Every year Dave has students in class that find math very difficult or meaningless. Not all his students are college bound. “I do my best to engage these students—I want all of them to enjoy being in my class. That has always been one of my goals as a teacher.”

Christina Serkowski, English teacher at MIHS

Christina Serkowski is a 5th year English teacher at MIHS currently working on her National Board Teacher certification. She teaches over 130 10th and 11th grade students in “regular” (as opposed to “honors”) classes of 29 students at a time. She says, “The first week of class I do a mini-unit on multiple intelligences (based on the work of Howard Gardner) and ask my students to think about their strengths and weaknesses in different spheres of intelligence. Then, I use strategies throughout the year that call upon these facets of intelligence in order to teach literature, reading and writing. I have a background in drama, so I often ask my students to re-create scenes from the books we are reading in a tableau, or “freeze frame.” The class then discusses the choices the actors have made about the scene. A physical enactment helps students get into the skin of the characters and create the story in their own imaginations. From this understanding they are ready to discuss character and theme development in meaningful ways. This approach is particularly effective for students who are kinesthetic or more visual learners, but it is also valuable in developing these intelligences in all students. I feel it is important for students to recognize their strengths and build on those, while also challenging themselves in areas of weakness – we all become better learners in general when we experience this kind of balance. Some will say that the multiple intelligences approach isn’t challenging enough; but I believe that it is just as challenging, if not more so, to learn to use *all* parts of the brain.”

Nancy, Dave, and Christina are representative of the many excellent teachers working to meet the needs of our students “in the middle”.

Schools Attuned training coming to Mercer Island

“To treat everyone the same is to treat them unequally. We are making a plea for the understanding of diversity, for greater flexibility in education and parenting, so that every child can find success in his or her own way.” Dr. Mel Levine

Thanks to the tremendous outpouring of support and the commitment of our teachers, staff, and administrators, 64 MISD teachers and all of our administrators will be attending “Schools Attuned”, the professional development program based on the work of Dr. Mel Levine. Since Dr. Levine’s visit to Mercer Island in March, the Mel Levine Planning and Fundraising Committees have been hard at work raising funds to support teachers’ attendance at this training. Every PTA contributed including the District PTA Council. Families wrote checks of every size and the Delman family and the planning committees hosted a fabulous Cinco de Mayo party. The Mercer Island Preschool Association raised almost \$11,000 through individual gifts and an MIPA grant that was then matched by a very supportive family. Some amazing staff members have even written personal checks to ensure that all of their interested colleagues could attend. **The total amount raised as of June 1 is over \$79,000!**

This impressive sum will fully fund each staff member so there will be no out-of-pocket funding requirement. Plus, we have \$11,000 pledged for Schools Attuned for the 2006/07 school year. We will be hosting three Schools Attuned courses on Mercer Island this summer. Two are primarily for elementary and middle school staff and will take place June 26-30 and July 17-21. Elementary administrators and some district administrators will attend the June 26-30 training. The third is for middle and high school staff and will take place June 26-30. Our secondary administrators and the rest of our district administrators will be traveling to San Jose, CA in August for special training for school leaders.

Student VOICES –

The District Advisory Council 2006



Sarah Spranger, Will Stoney, and Amanda David are three of the student representatives on the District Advisory Council

This school year Superintendent Cyndy Simms formed a District Advisory Council to advise her on the district's School and District Instructional Improvement Plans. These plans are designed to ensure that all Mercer Island School District students successfully achieve the Board's Ends for students (the full text of these in under Student Ends on the front page of district web site www.misd.k12.wa.us). The Advisory Council is made up of staff, parents, and community representatives and 4 MIHS students selected by Principal John Harrison. We asked these students, **Amanda David**, **Sarah Spranger**, and **Will Stoney** to comment on their experiences. Sophomore **Zoe Nemerever** is also on the committee, but we will catch up with her in the fall. These students are serving for 2 years on the DAC.

Amanda David (11th grade): "We feel honored to be included in the committee. Everyone likes hearing what we have to say. The student Ends are very ambitious goals and very well thought-out, but I think our biggest challenge is to figure out the best ways to communicate the Ends to students and the community. One way is to talk about the Ends in Bridges sessions. I think understanding the Ends will encourage students to take school climate surveys more seriously."

Will Stoney (11th grade): "Measuring success is going to be hard to do. It's easier in the academic subjects; but E-3, which deals with Citizenship and Personal Development is all about being happy with yourself. How do you measure that? I am looking forward to more conversations about this."

Sarah Spranger (11th grade): "It's nice to be able to voice our opinions and let people know what is going on at the high school. I think it is important to reduce the stress here. It's great that we have so many people working on the same goals. This committee gives us a chance to experience "the real world." It's cool to be able to offer our opinions."

Learning About Learning

Workshops for Parents and Caregivers

This spring parents and caregivers (including grandparents) in Lori Brennan's kindergarten class at Lakeridge Elementary have participated in a series of 2-hour sessions designed to explore specific school-related demands through a neurodevelopmental lens and identify strategies to support children in accomplishing these tasks successfully. Facilitated by Brennan (who has completed the Schools Attuned course), these "Learning About Learning" workshops have been so well received that we will be offering them again in the fall to a broader audience of K-8 parents and caregivers. Watch for sign-up information in your fall school newsletters.

Building Powerful Learning Communities Strategic Instructional Initiatives for 2006-2012

During this past school year a team of 16 teachers and administrators worked in an Ad Hoc Committee to develop a multi-year, strategic District Instructional Improvement Plan guided by the previous Five-Year Strategic Plan and the Board Ends. The vision of "Building Powerful Learning Communities" applies to student communities (classrooms) as well as communities of adult learners – or communities of teachers in professional practice. The intent of such communities is to "continuously seek and share learning which engages students' and teachers' thinking and is transformative in nature." The five strategies listed below have action plans under each one that will be further defined by a new permanent committee next fall.

Strategy #1:

Implement and support a Standards-based Teaching and Learning System

Strategy #2:

Use formal and informal assessment data to guide instructional practice

Strategy #3:

Implement and support appropriate academic programs to meet student needs based on formative input from staff

Strategy #4:

Implement and support student-centered programs designed around Citizenship and Personal Development

Strategy #5:

Build, implement and support professional learning communities

For the full text please refer to the district web site

Dates to Remember

June – August District offices remain open

August School offices re-open

MIHS 8/14

MIHS Counseling Center 8/22

IMS 8/21

IP 8/7

LR 8/7

WM 8/9

September 5 First day of school

THANK YOU

To the Mercer Island Schools Foundation

The district would like to publicly acknowledge the ongoing support of the MISF in helping us improve our program offerings for all students. Without this critical funding, programs such as Investigations math and the Houghton-Mifflin Literacy Adoption mentioned in this newsletter would not have been possible. The Schools Foundation recently approved over \$700,000 in funding requests for 2006-07. The MISF "Phone-A-Thon" is October 16-17. Watch for information coming to your mail boxes in the fall, and please say "YES" when they call! Your dollars support all students at every grade level.

In grateful appreciation

Please join us in thanking the following retiring district staff for their years of service to our children:

- John Cameron, Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services
- Bruce Dodge, Island Park Music Teacher
- Linda Gruss, IMS Language Arts/Social Studies Teacher
- Sandy Gruwell, Island Park Administrative Assistant
- Renae Harris, Director of Student Services
- Bonnie Hawthorne, IMS Science Teacher
- Loretta Kusak, Lakeridge Kindergarten Teacher
- Carolee Mathers, Island Park 3rd Grade Teacher
- Arlene Naganawa, IMS Language Arts/Social Studies Teacher
- Wendy O'Leary, IMS Language Arts/Social Studies Teacher
- Marilyn O'Neill, West Mercer Kindergarten Teacher
- Ed Swidler, IMS Language Arts/Social Studies Teacher
- Mike Ziara, Associate Superintendent of Business Services

Congratulations

To **Lori Brennan**, Kindergarten teacher at Lakeridge Elementary for being named Mercer Island School District Teacher of the Year and our nominee for state teacher of the year

To the **MIHS Boys Golf team, Girls' Water Polo, Boys' Tennis and Boys high school and middle school Lacrosse teams** for winning the state championships

To the **cast, crew and director Karen Campbell of the MIHS spring musical "The Cradle Will Rock"** for receiving 9 nominations for the *5th Avenue Theatre Washington High School Theatre Awards*

To the seven **MIHS teams** that were honored with *WIAA Distinguished Scholastic Awards: Boy's Track, Baseball, Softball, Boy's Soccer, Girl's Golf, Girl's Track, and Girl's Tennis*. As a result, WIAA has awarded MIHS the *3A Scholastic Cup* for the entire state!

To the **graduates of Mercer Island High School**

To the **Mel Levine Planning and Fundraising committees**

To our amazing **PTSA's** for their hard work, dedication and contributions to our schools

To the **Mercer Island community** for your continuing support of excellence in education

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