

NEWS

Mercer Island School District Volume 7, Issue #1, December 2005

This is the first issue of District NEWS for 2005-06 designed to present information on district and school improvement planning, school board goals and other programs. Please check the district web site for the most current information. www.misd.k12.wa.us

Superintendent's Message

It has been another wonderful start to a new year in the Mercer Island School District. Thank you to our students, teachers, staff, parents, board members, and community for your commitment to making our district such a positive place for all.

On September 6, we welcomed 3,947 students to our district. Our students returned to a new literacy reading and writing program for grades K-8 and new Algebra II math materials (funded by the Mercer Island Schools Foundation), and additional support in math through side-by-side math classes in grades 7-11.

Our PTSA's worked hard during the summer months to prepare "back to school" information, and this fall they have already held



*Dr. Cyndy Simms,
Superintendent*

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numerous fund-raising activities to provide enriched educational opportunities for students and teacher. On October 24-25, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation held their 23rd annual Phone-a-Thon, raising \$424,373 for district-wide programs, \$14,000 more than last year at this time. I am particularly proud of the additional efforts taking place in our schools to support the Katrina Hurricane Relief effort and the Pakistani earthquake survivors. We may live on an island, but our concern for others extends far beyond our island borders. Thank you to all!

I want to thank Carrie George and John Fry for their dedication and commitment to our students these past four years on the Mercer Island School Board of Directors, and welcome Adair Dingle and John DeVleming as our new Board members. Serving on the Board is challenging, but very rewarding work. Please

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Superintendent Commitments to the Board of Directors 2005-06

During the 2004-2005 school year, Mercer Island School District Board of Directors and the District completed the 2001-2005 Strategic Plan and initiated a new framework based on the Carver Model of Board Governance. This new model focuses on student Ends policies that include a comprehensive Mission Statement and describe the academic and personal knowledge and skills students will have when they graduate from the Mercer Island School District. The full text of these Ends is posted on the district web site under "Student Ends".



On December 1, 2005 Mercer Island welcomed new board members Adair Dingle and John DeVleming, along with Pat Braman, Lisa Strauch Eggers and Leslie Ferrell at their official swearing in.

As superintendent, I am committed to ensuring that our District focuses its work on these student Ends. The following is a summary of my Superintendent Commitments to the Board for 2005-06. The full text, including criteria for success and measurements, may be viewed on the District web site or by calling Superintendent Services at 236-3300.

Governance

Administrative policies and decision-making processes will routinely include consultation with the Student Ends and Executive Limitations policies.

Superintendent's Commitments continued on page 2

thank all of them when you see them.

As always, please call or email me with your questions, comments, or concerns. I also invite you to attend our board meetings, with dates and times posted on the District web site and advertised in the Mercer Island Reporter.

Best wishes for the upcoming holiday season and the coming new year!

Sincerely,



Superintendent's Commitments continued from page 1

Secondary Level: Advanced Placement/Honors/International Baccalaureate Study

At the secondary level, a well-researched study of Advanced Placement/Honors/International Baccalaureate courses will be completed by June 8, 2006. The study will include the identification and study of "benchmark schools" and best practices research. Questions to be addressed by the study include: a) student access to advanced courses; b) student preparation for advanced courses; c) strategies to support students wanting access to advanced courses; d) alignment of advanced courses with End 2: Academic Achievement; e) impact on students not choosing to take advanced courses; f) teacher time for professional development to teach advanced courses; g) additional advanced course offerings; h) impact on other MIHS courses, programs, and curriculum; and i) alignment with K-12 curriculum and programs. This study is being co-chaired by John Harrison, MIHS principal, and Dr. Gary Plano, Director of Instructional Services, who are working with an advisory committee consisting of four MIHS teachers, four MIHS parents, and four MIHS students. The research results will be presented to the Board of Directors at its February 16, 2006 meeting and the final report with timelines for implementation to the Board at its June 8, 2006 meeting.

10th Grade English/Social Studies Challenge Option

Last year the MIHS English department, principal, and I made a commitment to evaluate the World Cultures course as comparably challenging to the Honors English 10 course. Patti Weber, Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, will lead this study in concert with Mr. Harrison and Dr. Plano, and will involve MIHS teachers, parents, and students. The study will culminate in a 10th grade English challenge option and/or 10th grade English/Social Studies challenge option beginning with the 2006-07 school year. Questions to be addressed by the study include: a) student access; b) alignment with End 2: Academic Achievement; c) compliance with appropriate Board policies; and d) consideration of the research results from the AP/ Honors/IB study. The final report will be presented to the Board of Directors at its February 16, 2006 meeting for implementation in the 2006-07 school year.

Indicators, Baselines, and Goals for the Student Ends

In order for students to achieve the Ends academically and personally, and to empower the staff and the Board in decision-making, specific indicators of each Ends policy are being identified. Using these indicators, baseline information will be gathered and goals established by the Board to focus the District's ongoing work with students.

End 2: Academic Achievement indicators include the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) for reading, writing, math, and science as well as math target tests, number of students taking AP tests, and SAT/ACT scores. Other indicators are under study by the Department of Instructional Services to determine students' annual and continuous progress.

End 3: Personal Development and Citizenship indicators include "input" measures and "output" measures of students meeting this End. Output indicators are measures of the skills students develop and can be identified through surveys and collections of data such as questions on the Healthy Youth Survey and the Assets Survey. Many of the outputs are heavily influenced by non-school experiences as well as what happens in the classroom. It is also important to focus on the inputs – the work the schools and community do to contribute to this End. Examples of inputs include the PAWS (Practice kindness, Act responsibly, Welcome challenges, Show respect) program at West Mercer and the BaSoC (Building a Spirit of Community) program at Islander Middle School.

K-5 Standards-Based Report System

A comprehensive K-5 standards-based reporting system will be broadly field tested during the 2006-07 school year and fully implemented in the 2007-08 school year. The reporting system will be aligned with the Washington state EALRs (Essential Academic Learning Requirements) and GLEs (Grade Level Expectations) and will eventually replace the existing K-5 report card system.

School improvement planning

All MISD schools are continuing to work on school improvement focused on the student Ends for Academic Achievement and Personal Development and Citizenship. We are particularly grateful for the additional support provided by the Mercer Island Schools Foundation and our PTSA's to help us continue to evolve and change to meet the needs of our students.

Elementary Schools

Lakeridge, Island Park and West Mercer elementaries are working with the new Houghton-Mifflin literacy program to improve student skills in reading and writing. The goal is to decrease the number of students not meeting standards by 20% each year. The programs developed last year to improve student relationships are in place and working well to address E-3: Citizenship and Personal Development. These are: Kelso's Choice at Lakeridge,



MISD elementary schools are working with the new Houghton Mifflin literacy program to improve student skills in reading and writing.

Peer Mediators at Island Park and PAWS at West Mercer. In addition, individual schools have areas of focus that are unique to their school.

Lakeridge is working on year 2 of the district's Autism Spectrum program, and is studying the integration of Columbia University's "Writer's Workshop" program with the district's new literacy adoption.

Island Park is continuing to focus on math, with the goal of decreasing the number of students not meeting math standards by 20% each year. Island Park houses the Extended Resource Room for students with special learning needs, along with the English Language Learners (ELL) program.

West Mercer is in year 2 of the district's elementary Academically Gifted Program (Expedition for Excellence) for 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students. West Mercer is also focusing on math and recently held a "Math-nificent Day" featuring math exploration stations based on activities that support Investigations, the district's elementary math curriculum. Again, the goal is to decrease the number of students not meeting math standards by 20% each year.



Islander Middle School students are working up to standards and beyond in reading and math.

Islander Middle School staff is working collaboratively to bring students up to standards and beyond in reading and math, focusing on reading across the content areas and a deeper understanding of mathematics instruction. In the past two years the school has implemented Focus Block classrooms for 7th and 8th grade students who need focused literacy instruction. Last year they added math to the 8th grade Project Block and are now in year 2 of the Building a Spirit of Community program to strengthen student relationships with peers and adults.

Mercer Island High School is working to implement the Culminating Project, a state graduation requirement for the class of 2008, as well as programs to increase the percentage of students meeting standards in math and writing. The school is also developing individual learning plans for students who score a 1 or 2 on one or more WASL tests, and is implementing the BRIDGE-ES2 Advisory program focused on E-3: Personal Development and Citizenship.



All students in the class of 2008 at MIHS will complete a Culminating Project.

2005 SAT scores show impressive gains

After several years of little change, MIHS students in the class of 2005 made strong gains in SAT scores – math is up 25 points (from 610 to 635) and verbal increased 23 points (from 590 to 613). This compares with virtually no change at the national level and a few points gained in the state performance. While MIHS SAT scores have remained among the highest in the state for the past 9 years, it is a testament to the hard work of the students, staff and families that after years of little change the scores can increase this much in one year. (Since most of the students in the class of 2005 took the SAT as juniors, most of these scores come from the previous version of the SAT test).

Mercer Island High School Band to participate in Tournament of Roses Parade-"It's Magical"

Did you know?

- The MISD band program consistently receives superior ratings at local, regional and national events
- Over 50 students have been selected to participate in All-State and All-Northwest honor bands over the last 5 years

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- MIHS is recognized as one of 50 Grammy Signature schools not once, but twice
- More than 20% of the high school student body is in the marching band

On Monday, January 2, 2006, our high school marching band will be participating in the 117th Tournament of Roses Parade, themed "It's Magical". We are so proud of our students and very excited by their selection. It will indeed be a magical experience for our entire 275 member band. Mercer Island High School is one of only 19 national and international bands selected for this honor and the only marching band from the Pacific Northwest region. For more information, including a 20 year history of the band program, read the Tournament of Roses press kit on the District web site (www.misd.k12.wa.us/news/districtnews/MIHSBand.pdf)

Skyward Family Access: On-line communication between school and home

Students and parents at Islander Middle School and Mercer Island High School are now able to view schedules, daily attendance, quarter/semester grades, and general and emergency information through Skyward Family Access, a new state-wide student information system. A letter of instruction, login and password was sent to families by mail in September. If you have questions about accessing this new program, please contact Mary Newcomer at 206-236-3330.



IMPORTANT DATES

February 7, 2006:

Maintenance and Operations and Transportation Levy Vote
(Watch for details in the January issue of District NEWS)

March 7-8:

Fine Arts Showcase

March 14-15:

Dr. Mel Levine is coming to Mercer Island

March 21:

Mercer Island Schools Foundation
"Breakfast of Champions"

District News

Mercer Island Schools

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