NEWS

Mercer Island School District

Volume 8 Issue #3, June/July 2007

This is the third issue of District NEWS for 2006-2007, designed to present information on district and school improvement planning, school board Ends, and other programs. Please continue to check the district web site for the most current information. *www.misd.k12.us*

Superintendent's Message

On June 14 we said goodbye to the 360 seniors who graduated from Mercer Island High School. Once again, I would like to congratulate these students, their families and teachers who have supported them so well during their school years. Our graduates are attending colleges and universities all over the country and the world. I know they will be outstanding representatives of the Mercer Island School District!

Mercer Island School District's

Culture of Responsiveness:

An ongoing commitment throughout our school district to be responsive to the learning needs of each student.

On June 23, our school board held their final retreat for the year and completed their Priorities for 2007-08 and beyond. The Board "has a desire to celebrate and expand our culture of responsiveness, recognizing that students are different and should be challenged to achieve to their individual levels of ability."

Ensuring a "culture of responsiveness" requires an on-going commitment throughout our school district to be responsive to the learning needs of each student in our district. This coming year, you will see the results of that commitment in several new programs including the K-5 Struggling Learners Program, the K-5 Standards-Based Report Card, new "SMART" goals for middle school students, and the Culminating Project, new AP courses and support classes for high school students.

Also in the fall you will see new and familiar faces in leadership positions throughout the district. In the central office, Sharon Gillaspie will serve as the interim Director of Testing and Evaluation and Todd Kelsay as the new Transportation Director. In the schools, Mary Jo Budzius is the new principal of IMS. Erin Heitman joins Aaron Miller as IMS Associate Principal, and Ralph Allen returns as principal of Lakeridge Elementary.

It's always a little sad this time of year to say goodbye to our graduating students and their families, many of whom have been with us since preschool. But it's also gratifying to see the results of our work together culminating in the hopes and dreams of these talented young people. We have much to celebrate and much to look forward to in the years to come as these young people take the lead in our state, our country, and our world. Please read on and as always, contact me with your questions and comments. Thanks for all you do and enjoy the peace and quiet of a summer on Mercer Island!

Sincerely,

Cyndy Simms

Wolf Tracks Comes of Age:

West Mercer's Pilot Program is Instructional Model for K-5 Struggling Learners

Nearly 10 years ago a group of parents at West Mercer Elementary started a unique program designed to meet the needs of students who were struggling in reading, but who were not eligible for special education services. Working with teachers and school administrators, these parents volunteered their time to work as tutors, often spending as much as 10 hours per week at the school. They found and coordinated other volunteers, investigated reading tutoring programs and even wrote grants to fund a Volunteer Tutor program. Over time, and with the tremendous support of the West Mercer Site Council and PTA, the volunteer tutoring program became part of West Mercer's School Improvement Plan to address the needs of all students struggling to meet district and state standards in reading, writing and math. Doris Stuck, Learning Support Paradeducator at West Mercer, remembers the early days of Wolf Tracks. "The original tutoring program was a great example of parents advocating for all children, not just their own."

> "The original tutoring program was a great example of parents advocating for all children, not just their own." Doris Stuck

In the meantime, in 2004, Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). "The government mandated a program called Response to Intervention

(RTI) ensuring that all children will receive high quality instruction/ intervention matched to their needs" said Pat Turner, Director of Student Services. RTI practices are proactive, incorporating both prevention and intervention for students as soon as the need arises, which is very different from the methods associated with special education, often seen as a "wait to fail" approach." Most students are served in the general education classroom through differentiated instruction, which is considered the "first tier" of intervention. The "second tier" of students receive strategic interventions delivered in short blocks of time with 3-6 students in a group, for 30-60 minutes a session. The "third tier" commonly serves most special education students and provides more intense services.

"Our teachers work hard to address the needs of struggling learners and all schools have parent volunteer programs and other support services," said Turner, "but we have never had a district-wide, comprehensive program for students grades 1-5 to intervene at the first sign of trouble and match instruction to individual needs. We have pooled our resources in LAP (Learning Assistance Program), Title 1, Title V and I-728 to fund the program. Each school will be refining the "Wolf Tracks" model to fit their community. This is a long time coming and very exciting for students, teachers and parents."

Elementary Teachers Implement Standards-Based Reporting System

For the past two years, teams of K-5 teachers have been field testing a new reporting system based on grade level expectations (GLEs) and state standards. Beginning in 2007-08, the Standards-Based Reporting system will be used throughout our K-5 classrooms. The implementation will take place through grade level and Professional Learning Communities representing all 3 schools. "We are using the new reporting system now," said Patti Weber, Director of Curriculum and Staff Development. "Our work next year is really about making sure that the standards and assessments look the same at every school, in each grade level."

Teaching in a Standards-Based Classroom – 3rd grade students understand and apply the concepts and procedures of mathematics

Number sense, geometry, measurement, probability and statistics and algebraic sense: these are the concepts and procedures of mathematics that students learn from kindergarten through 12th grade, building on their skills and depth of understanding every year. A 3rd grade lesson in geometry teaches students to "identify, describe, and classify two dimensional shapes and figures."

One day this year children in Cheryl Sandstrom's third grade classroom at Island Park Elementary spent a class period building polygons in their "Investigations in Number, Data and Space" workbook. Using straws and pipe cleaner pieces to make corners, students created triangles that were the same size and shape (congruent) and the same shape, but different sizes (similar). One assignment asked them to "find 3 straws that won't make a triangle." After much trial and error, the students discovered that they cannot make a triangle if one straw is longer than the sum of the lengths of the other two straws. "The beauty of "Investigations," said Ms. Sandstrom, "is that students explore, manipulate and visualize concepts long before they have to use them to solve geometry problems."

Linus Toy, parent volunteer, was busy correcting timed multiplication sheets while the students were investigating shapes. "I am happy to help," he said. "Our elementary teachers have a tremendous amount of work to do – I honestly don't know how they manage to accomplish as much as they do!" Ms. Sandstrom says that she depends on her volunteers. "My students want to see how they did on their timed tests right away so they can go home and practice." Linus Toy says the timed tests remind him of the "old" days of math lessons. Ms. Sandstrom says "yes", but with a "new twist" of connecting math strategies to memorization. "If I have a student who struggles with multiples of 7 (7 x 8 = 56) but knows their "5's" and "2's", I help them to see that 5 x 8 = 40 and 2 x 8 = 16 and 40 + 16 = 56, or 7 x 8 = 56. I want them to have multiple strategies to solve problems."



Students in Cheryl Sandstrom's class build polygons in their "Investigation" math lesson

"One thing I have learned," said Mr. Toy, "is that there is no magic bullet for any of this. Even in one family, children vary tremendously in how they learn."

MISD Math WASL Percentage of Students at Standard 1997-2006

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Grade 4	57.8	66	78	79	80.6
Grade 7		58.1	63.1	72.4	73.8
Grade 10			75.7	78.3	79.9

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Grade 4	81.5	86.8	88.5	91.9	91.8
Grade 7	72.3	80.7	88.0	88.1	90.5
Grade 10	77.5	78.7	79.1	84.6	88.3

Islander Middle School's Stretch Goal = Rigor

"In the middle school, we will ensure a challenging, relevant and engaging experience where every student is able to advance to a greater level of understanding, ability and performance."

School Improvement Planning at Islander Middle School has taken on new meaning with the school's Stretch Goal to ensure a rigorous program in every content area in the school. A group of teachers formed a committee, studied the book, "Learning By Doing" by DuFour, et.al and led the entire staff in the goal setting process. They learned that the key to systemic change is staying focused on achievable goals. For example, the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Relevant, Time bound, Strategic) goal for 7th and 8th grade Science is: "Science teachers will deliberately instruct systems and energy concepts early in both the 7th and 8th grade curriculums." Every staff member in every department of the school is represented in the SMART goals, whether in academic content teams or departments. According to Sharon Gillaspie, last year's IMS principal, "This work truly represents the power of collective thinking. It is student-centered, dynamic and best of all, achievable in a short time frame." Gillaspie credits the IMS School Improvement Planning team including Mary Jo Budzius and Aaron Miller, and Curriculum team leads for their work in defining the goals, and parent and organizational consultant Sue Bennett for her skills in helping to facilitate the school-wide conversation.

Students Present First Culminating Projects

This spring two early graduating seniors from the class of 2008, Adrianna Pinegar and Greg Andonian, presented the district's first Culminating Projects. Their presentations represent 80 hours of work on a plan that was preapproved by the Culminating Project committee. The Culminating Project is a graduation requirement for the class of 2008.

Adrianna Pinegar's goal was to combine her love for traveling with her interest in photography and desktop publishing to produce a tangible product, in this case a photo essay and book on her senior trip to Vietnam. She wanted to take photos that represented the "real" Vietnam, beyond the typical postcard image. She took over 1000 photos with a Canon Powershot digital camera, then came home and selected a desktop publishing program to create her book. Adrianna enjoys photography, but after this experience, she hopes to learn more about publishing, possibly designing magazine pages.

Greg Andonian has always been interested in metal fabrication, so the first time he saw the "Solid Works" computer aided design program in Grant Bower's classroom at Mercer Island High School, he knew he wanted to learn how to use it. His goal for his Culminating Project was to become proficient in "Solid Works" and create designs for products. His presentation was a Powerpoint on how the program works, from building 2-D shapes, then 3-D (cubes, cylinders etc) selecting the materials and backgrounds, then assembling the product. He showed the committee some of his "products", a grill guard for a truck and a tool box to fit in the back of a pick-up. "The challenge", he said, "is that it doesn't always work the way you want right away. But the beauty of the computer program is that you can work out all of the design flaws before you ever start cutting any metal." Greg is excited about computer-aided design and hopes to have a future career in engineering, or maybe even start his own business.

Dr. Cyndy Simms offered her congratulations to Adrianna and Greg "for being our first presenters, meeting the standards and graduating! I am looking forward to hearing about more Culminating Projects next year – all 350 of them!"

Directed Studies, Tutoring, SAT Prep and more

Students at MIHS are being provided with more help than ever to achieve at the highest levels. Directed Studies, a new program last year, will be expanded from 2 to 3 periods a day, offering students the opportunity to get help in core academic classes during the school day. The Tutoring program, now offered on Wednesday evenings in a different subject every week, will be expanded, and the Counseling Center is offering an in-house program through SAT Prep that costs less than commercial programs. According to John Harrison, Principal of MIHS, "We feel strongly that all of our students should have access to a rigorous program of study and college test preparation classes. Through our School Improvement Planning process, we have developed these programs to provide students with the help they need to succeed."

New Courses at Islander Middle School and Mercer Island High School

As a result of last year's AP/IB/Honors study and the secondary Social Studies Curriculum review, our middle and high schools are offering new courses this fall. A reorganized Social Studies course sequence begins in 2008-2009.

Social Studies 2007-2008

- 7th Grade Washington State History
- 8th Grade US History
- 11th Grade AP US History
- 12th Grade Revised Humanities course
- AP Psychology

2008-2009

- 9th Grade Early World History (Washington State History stays at MIHS for two years to meet state requirement)
- 12th Grade AP Macro Economics (counts as a social studies credit)

2009-2010

- 10th Grade Honors World History
- 10th Grade World History
- AP English Literature

Math Honors Classes 2007-2008

- Honors Algebra I (offered at Islander Middle School)
- Honors Geometry I
- Honors Algebra II
- Honors Pre-Calculus

Congratulations to...

- The MIHS Boys' Tennis team for winning the state championship
- The cast, crew and director Karen Campbell of the MIHS spring musical "Anyone Can Whistle" for receiving 5 nominations from the 5th Avenue Theatre Awards
- The Mercer Island High School coaches honored in the Mercer Island Reporter for "Making an Impact" on students: Megan Elston, Girls Lacrosse; Lauren Ayers, Girls'Waterpolo; Joyce Hedlund, Boys' and Girls' Tennis; Jeff Lowell, Boys' and Girls' Swimming; Dino Annest, Volleyball; and Dick Nicholl, Football, who just retired after 33 years of coaching on Mercer Island
- Erica Hill, MIHS English teacher, cross-country and track coach, for winning the MI Rotary Achievement Award
- The 12 MISD teachers who earned National Board Certification
- The 360 graduates of Mercer Island High School
- The West Mercer Elementary Chess Team for winning first place at the state chess tournament
- The MIHS Chess Team for winning first place at state for the second year in a row
- Our amazing PTSA's, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation and the Mercer Island community for your continuing support of excellence in education

In Grateful Appreciation

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

- Sue Barnes, Paraprofessional, Lakeridge Elementary
- Lhonda Backman, Spanish teacher, MIHS
- Mary "Pete" Becker, Counselor, MIHS
- Ray Brautigam, Director of Transportation
- Elaine Lotzkar, English teacher, MIHS
- Suzie Buer, 6th grade Math/Science teacher, IMS
- Karen Simons, 3rd/4th grade, E2 teacher West Mercer
- Marna Pettigrew, 4th grade teacher, West Mercer
- Jim McDonald, Bus Driver



Some of our retirees, from left to right: Ray Brautigam, Lhonda Backman, Elaine Lotzkar, and Suzie Buer

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