



Ian Henry <ian.henry@mercerislandschools.org>

December Message From Superintendent Rundle

1 message

Fred Rundle <communications@mercerislandschools.org>

Thu, Dec 1, 2022 at 1:01 PM

Reply-To: communications@mercerislandschools.org

To: Ian.Henry@mercerislandschools.org



MERCER ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT #400

4160 86th AVE SE • Mercer Island, Washington 98040

www.mercerislandschools.org

T: 206-236-3300 F: 206-236-3333

Fred Rundle, Ed.D, Superintendent

fred.rundle@mercerislandschools.org

Dear Mercer Island Community,

December is a complex month in many wonderful ways. Our communities celebrate various holidays this time of year, illuminating our religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity. The opportunity to unite through our differences yields learning opportunities for children and adults alike. As inclusive as this time of year has the potential to be, it can also be divisive without intentionality.

Growing up in a rural, mountain community near Denver, the dominant December traditions all centered around Christmas. The culture, even in our schools and classrooms, taught me that the only recognized holiday in December was Christmas. In fact, even in the earlier parts of my career as a teacher, the winter break was still referred to as "Christmas Break." We have come a long way toward greater inclusivity this time of year, but we can still do more.

Something we need to pay greater attention to is a construct known as *othering*, which is [described by Cherry \(2020\)](#) as a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labeled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group. Mercer Island is composed of people from all over the world. Our students in the school district speak 54 different languages, represent 95 different racial categories, and identify as 23 distinct ethnicities. While Christmas will certainly be celebrated by many, including the Rundle family, let us keep in the forefront of our thinking that our strength is in our differences. Whereas otherness aims to separate and exclude, togetherness strives to unify and promote belonging. MI, let's choose the latter this December.

To this end, I would like to spotlight some upcoming December traditions and days to celebrate.

December 2 - Special Education Day

Special Education Day is celebrated on December 2 to commemorate the signing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) into law on December 2, 1975. IDEA granted access to a free and appropriate public education, particularly to students with different abilities or what is commonly referred to as disabilities. The act has been revised several times but the crux of it remains the same, and is the foundation for special education in the U.S. In support of this act, many organizations, including Mercer Island School District, pledge to provide a quality education to students with unique and varying needs.

December 16 - Student Half-Day

Though not in recognition of any special day, this is just a friendly reminder that students will have a half-day on Friday, December 16.

December 18-26 - Hanukkah

Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights or Jewish Festival of Rededication. The festival commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem where Jews warded off and revolted against the Greek-Syrian oppressors in the Maccabean Revolt. The victorious Maccabees had only enough sacred olive oil available to burn for a single night, but it miraculously lasted for eight. This is the reason for the eight lights (candles today) on the menorah not including the shamash (candle used to light the others during the festival) that are lit over the eight-day Hanukkah celebration. Many Jewish families also give or exchange gifts on each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, adding to the festivities and shared interaction with loved ones and friends.

To learn more about Hanukkah, Mercer Island's very own [Stroom Jewish Community Center](#) will bring "Hands on Hanukkah" to communities throughout the region.

December 24 and 25 - Christmas Eve and Christmas

Christmas Eve is recognized by Christians as the beginning of the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth. It is believed that the shepherds tending to their flocks witnessed a bright star in the sky, signaling the birth of Jesus at midnight. Thus, while Christmas is celebrated on December 25, Christmas Eve is also an important date for Christians. Interestingly, Christmas Eve's celebration is also rooted in the Jewish traditions of beginning observances and celebrations at sundown and extending into the following day.

The rise of Santa Claus or St. Nicholas is relatively new and really did not grow in popularity until the early 20th century. Beyond the celebration of Christmas described above, the holiday like many others around the world has become a time of togetherness and connection with family and friends.

December 26 - January 1- Kwanzaa

Searching for a way to unify African Americans following the Watts riots in 1966, Kwanzaa was conceptualized and launched by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Each of the seven nights during Kwanzaa focuses on a different African cultural value: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Similar to Hanukkah and the lighting of the Menorah, those who celebrate Kwanzaa light candles on the Kinara (candleholder) and discuss one of the seven principles. Celebrations vary, but the festivities often include storytelling, dance, music, and meals.

For some, 2022 was filled with fond memories and happiness while others cannot get to 2023 fast enough. Regardless of how you will look back upon 2022, I wish everyone a happy holiday season and peaceful conclusion to the year.

Sincerely,

Fred Rundle

Mercer Island School District 400 would like to continue connecting with you via email. If you prefer to be removed from our list, please contact Mercer Island School District 400 directly. To stop receiving all email messages distributed through our SchoolMessenger service, follow this link and confirm: [Unsubscribe](#)

SchoolMessenger is a notification service used by the nation's leading school systems to connect with parents, students and staff through voice, SMS text, email, and social media.