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MISD Special Services Newsletter - Vol. 1 Issue 4

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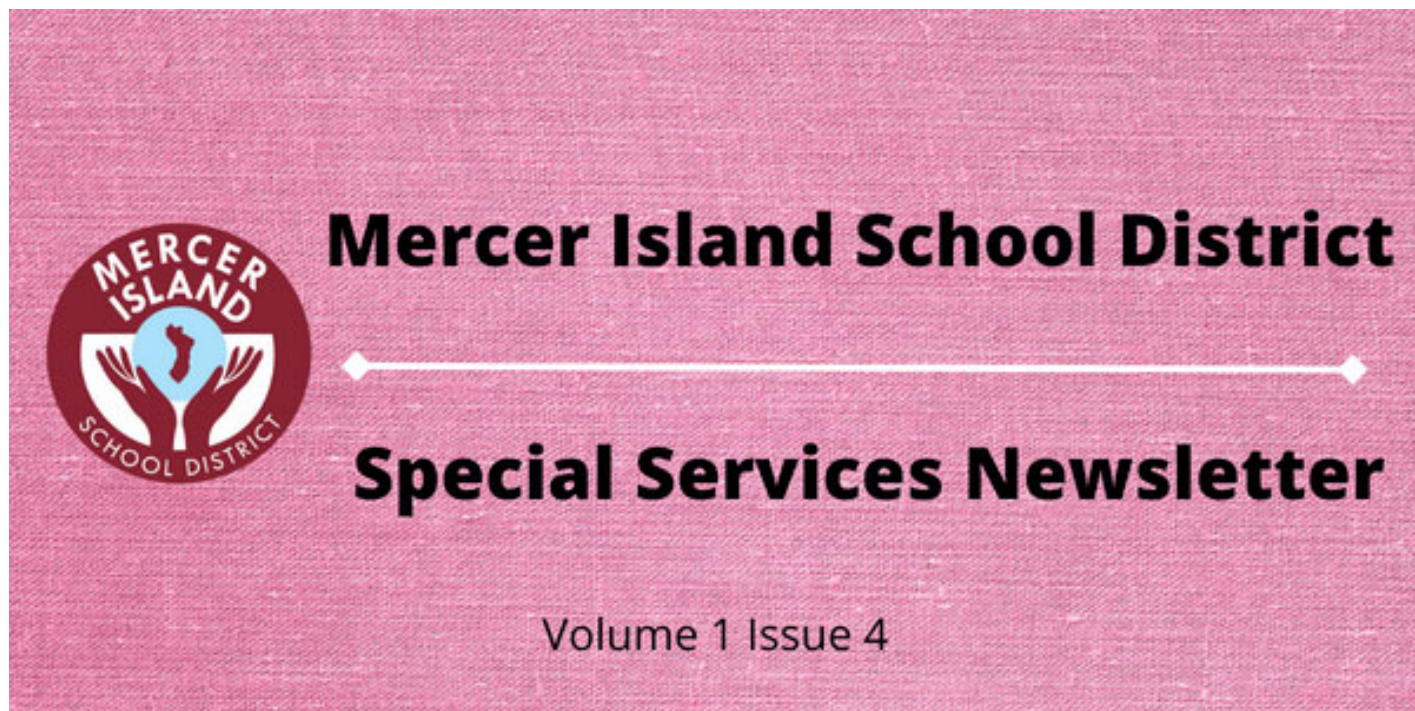
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Thu, Jun 16, 2022 at 12:00 PM

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MISD Special Services Newsletter



Celebrating Long Careers & MISD Pre-School

Endings and New Beginnings: The end of the year is always marked with celebrations as we graduate a new class but with some sadness as staff also transition to new chapters. This year we are celebrating several long careers in Special Services with well-earned retirements, career changes, movements to other parts of the country, and some transitions to other districts.

Karen Wilke has been with the Mercer Island community for over 20 years. She began her career as a MIYFS counselor at West Mercer before serving the district special services students as a school psychologist. She is counting down the days to retirement.

Heidi Richards, Occupational Therapist, has been with the district for nine years serving mostly students at IMS and Northwood as well as West Mercer. Heidi has already partially retired last year but now is ready to reap the full benefits of full-time retirement.

Elaine McClellan, has been a School Psychologist for over 30 years, primarily supporting Islander Middle School.

Dawn Winters, an island resident, and school psychologist is celebrating the graduation of her youngest daughter and is looking forward to their new home in Oregon.

Beth DeGrace, Assistant Director of Special Services for the past 3 years has accepted a position in the Everett school district as their new Director.

Deb Limon, an elementary special services coach, has taken an MTSS job with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. We wish her the very best as she works to support change across the state.

Christine Kenyon, a long-time PLP teacher in elementary and high school has resigned from her position but will continue to stay connected with Mercer Island School District.

Lori Grata, a resource teacher at Crest has accepted a position to support Northwood elementary school and **Ben Turley**, a resource teacher at IMS has accepted a position to support Crest. **Alyssa Alexander**, a resource teacher at IMS has taken employment outside the district. **Rachel Gentillon**, a resource teacher at Lakeridge is enjoying parenthood and will be looking for work closer to their new home.

We wish each employee the best as they start a new chapter in their career or their lives. With the sadness of their leaving also comes the joy of welcoming new staff into the District. We feel fortunate that we have been able to fill most positions at this time by either hiring new staff, increasing contracts for current staff, or moving staff from one building to another.

Andrew Schulman, coming to us from Lake Washington, will be supporting Northwood Elementary and the ECSE program as our new school psychologist.

Usma Hassan-Merchant, will be supporting IMS and Lakeridge as their new school psychologist. She has recently completed her internship in Shoreline. She speaks Hindi, Urdu, and Panjabi as well as English.

Courtney Deveny, is excited to join us as a school psychologist as she completes her program through Central Washington University. She will be supporting Island Park and West Mercer Elementary Schools.

Sopphia Johnston, current Lakeridge employee who has been filling in for Rachel Gentillon, has accepted a full-time position at Lakeridge for next year.

Rachel Heidling will be joining us as our new Occupational Therapist. She has most recently been working as a pediatric occupational therapist in a private practice in Bothell.

Holly Purcell, long-time Pathways Teacher, who has also supported Northwood this year, accepted a position at MIHS taking over for Christine Kenyon.

As our enrollment and student needs continue to evolve our office is continuing to review staffing needs. For example, the special services IMS enrollment has decreased by 29% since 2019, and the elementary special services enrollment has remained stable but the number of service minutes has increased. Enrollment in special services is not increasing equally among buildings and some are seeing a significant decline while others are seeing a significant increase. Resources are continuing to be redistributed as the needs warrant.

MISD Inclusive Preschool Program: Our District's preschool program will be expanding to provide a program to students with and without disabilities beginning in the 2022-23 school year. The program offers a 'hands-on' teaching approach to promote academic, social, communicative, behavioral, and motoric growth and development. Our curriculum is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features inquiry, exploration, and discovery as the foundation of all learning. As a content-rich,

developmentally appropriate curriculum, it delivers academic rigor alongside social-emotional learning and cognitive development. The [website](#) is a great place for more information.

To qualify for the program, the following criteria must be met.

Applicants must:

- Be residents of Mercer Island School District
- Be three years old by September 1, 2022
- Demonstrate strong communication and social skills
- Participate and meet criteria in a screening process

Acceptance to the program will be determined based on all of the above criteria, including the screening process.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Tuition & Fees: \$300 per month for peers

Transportation: We are working on transportation details. At this time, transportation services will be offered for midday only. We understand the importance of this midday service as parents/guardians are working and need support getting their child from school to home or a daycare/preschool.

Hours: AM session: 9:30am- 12:00pm or PM session: 12:45pm- 3:15pm

Days: Preschool is in session Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays are reserved for screening, testing, conferences and training.

Right Size and the Right Work

For the past 2 years, Special Services has been intentionally overstaffed, which has allowed us to serve students in some very flexible ways during the COVID pandemic. This allowed us to be one of the first districts to bring students back in the Fall of 2020. We were able to bring more than 40 students back to school within the first few days and provide online and small group and 1:1 instruction while fully implementing all the COVID mitigation measures. No other district in the state can say that they had 10% of students with disabilities back in the building within the first week of school. This was an amazing accomplishment! This staffing model continued through the 2021-22 school year which allowed us to be flexible as staff experienced daycare closures and other personal impacts of our new COVID reality.

As we look to the 2022-23 school year and beyond, we are taking time to reflect on the needs of students. Analyzing student IEP goals, services, and accommodations will determine what services we need to provide and where in the following year. For example, IMS graduated more than 40 students with disabilities to the High School but only 20 moved up from elementary. Pathways also had a significant shift as 50% of their students graduated this year. Looking at our data there is an increasing need for speech and language services at Northwood as well as social-emotional support. This type of analysis is ongoing. The Special Services office is staying connected with building administrators to ensure that as needs shift we are able to continue to be flexible and provide services where they are needed.

This shift has also resulted in the elimination of the assistant director of special services. As we analyze the work, some of the workload will remain at the central office with the Learning Services Coordinator position and other responsibilities will be shifted to the building level. For

example, a full-time psychologist may not be needed at a building level but to keep a full-time staff at the building level, some additional responsibilities need to be shifted.

By The Numbers

Special Services funding is a complex calculation with monies coming from State, Federal, and Local Levy dollars. State dollars are also subdivided into basic education, special education, and Safety Net.

Overall for the 2021-22 school year 53% of funding is coming from State sources, 40% from the Local Levy, and 7% from Federal. The Levy dollars have also seen a marked decrease in what the District can collect. For example, prior to 2018, the Levy funds averaged \$16.975 million, but in 2024 we will only see \$11.152 million collected due to the Levy cap initiated by the legislature in 2022.

Special Services is also required to maintain the level of spending funds under a requirement in Part of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, called Maintenance of Effort (MOE). A school district must expend (except in certain situations) as much or more for the education of children with disabilities from either local funds only or a combination of state and local funds. Some exemptions provided by MOE are a decrease in enrollment, the retirement of highly paid staff, and the termination of costly long-term expenditures such as the acquisition of equipment for the construction of facilities. The district watches these calculations and has met this requirement in past years and will continue to meet this obligation under IDEA.

Have a question about Special Services? OSPI has a [Parent and Student Rights webpage](#) that includes [Procedural Safeguards](#) that explain your rights (translations available).

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