



NEWS

Mercer Island School District Volume 9 Issue #1, October 2007

This is the first issue of District NEWS for 2007-2008, designed to present information on district and school improvement planning, Student *Ends*, and other programs. Please continue to check the district web site for the most current information. www.misd.k12.wa.us

Gary Plano takes the helm

Dr. Gary Plano, former Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services has been asked to serve as Interim Superintendent for 2007-2008. He told that staff that "we are in a good place due to Cyndy's leadership these past four years." He thanked Cyndy Simms for taking a chance on him by giving him "the opportunity to provide instructional leadership in a wonderful school system." Plano hopes to involve staff with helping him set his early priorities during his first 100 days.



*Interim Superintendent Dr. Gary Plano, and Kathleen Morrison,
Interim Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services*

Gary is conducting "listening sessions" with the Central Office Team, District Advisory Council, Class Size Study Group, School Principals, MIEA, Bus Drivers, PTA Council, MIHS Student Council, IMS Student Council, MISF, Maintenance and Custodians. "My goal," said Gary, "is to find out what people think we are doing well, what we should continue or stop doing, or what we need to begin." From that information he will form a short list of community priorities to focus on over time.

Kathleen Morrison appointed Interim Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services

On September 27, the MISD School Board accepted the recommendation of Dr. Gary Plano that Kathy Morrison, principal of Island Park Elementary for the past eight years be appointed Interim Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services. The appointment will take effect on October 12th, after the placement of Interim Principal Dr. Nancy Loorem at Island Park.

Kathy graduated from Eastern Washington State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education, a Master of Arts in Education from City University with an emphasis in technology, and she received her Principal's Certificate from Seattle Pacific University. Prior to her years as Principal of Island Park, Kathy was Associate Principal at all three elementary schools. Kathy spent 13 years as a teacher, eleven years as music teacher and two years as the fine arts curriculum lead. Kathy and her family have lived on Mercer Island for 27 years and moved here for the schools! She and her husband Frank have raised four children on the island, all of whom attended MISD, K-12. In a memo to staff and parents, Gary asked that all "join me in welcoming Kathy Morrison and wishing her well in her new leadership role."

MISD staff is welcomed back for a new school year

On August 29, 2007 school district staff gathered at Mercer Island High School for the annual All Staff Welcome Back Breakfast. Leslie Ferrell, President of the MISD Board of Directors, introduced her fellow board members Pat Braman, John DeVleming, Adair Dingle, and Lisa Strauch Eggers and then spoke of the teachers who "made a difference" in her life, praising our teachers for "making a difference everyday. We are humbled by what you do" said Ferrell. Mike Radow, President of the Mercer Island Education Association, urged staff to "celebrate our common accomplishments with open, honest communication," and Mary Kay Woolston, President of the PTA Council elicited laughter from the group when she said, "There are 1,000 PTA members out there committed to supporting teachers. "We try not to be difficult, and we try to get past our personal agendas, all 100 of us!" Mercer Island Schools Foundation Dirk van der Burch thanked

teachers for the outstanding job they do. "We are successful because of you," he said. Last year the MISF raised \$840,000!

Jessica Garwyn, a 2004 graduate of Mercer Island High School currently studying Political Science and French at Whitworth College, urged teachers to "share your passions with your students." She said that Mike Radow's lecture on Israel and Palestine, and Chris Twombly's poetry reading in Hungarian (Twombly served in the Peace Corps in Hungary) helped her realize that she wanted to "better understand the world and learn a different language." Her years on the MIHS Drill Team with Elaine Lotzkar taught her about "authentic leadership."

Finally, Superintendent Cyndy Simms announced that she is departing Mercer Island for the Walnut Valley Unified School District in California and thanked everyone for the memories. She welcomed our new staff – 39 new teachers and classified staff, and talked about the highlights of her 4 years on Mercer Island.

Simms is "sad to be leaving, but confident in the leadership abilities of Dr. Plano, his central office team and our school principals." Thanks to these people, and our hard-working staff, we will have a "smooth transition" in leadership. "Gary will not miss a beat!" said Simms.

Schools Attuned Update: Mercer Island Teachers Continue Mel Levine Program

"There is considerable interest among staff and parents in ensuring every student receive an excellent education in the Mercer Island School District. This is a vision that transcends test scores – where we already perform impressively – that has at its very heart a recognition that there is tremendous diversity among learners and that we need to continually enhance our ability to understand and nurture "all kinds of minds." Ralph Allen, Lori deStwolinski, Janet Frohnmayer, The Mel Levine Planning Committee

MISD is embarking on the 4th year of the Mel Levine/Schools Attuned journey which began in 2002/03 with a staff book study of Dr. Levine's book, *A Mind at a Time*. This past year groups of teachers throughout the district participated in fall and winter practicums, and created year long plans to teach one neurodevelopmental construct a month and one strategy per week to elementary through high school classes. Over 200 parents and caregivers attended "Learning About Learning" workshops designed to explore specific school-related demands through a neurodevelopmental lens and to identify strategies to support children in accomplishing these tasks successfully.

In August, sixteen MISD staff representing every school in the district attended the Schools Attuned summer course. This brings the number of Schools Attuned trained District staff to over 80! Throughout the 2007-08 school year teachers will have the opportunity to attend the fall (November 3) and late winter practicums, as well as apply for grants of up to \$1,200 for projects that will further Schools Attuned principles and practices in classrooms. The Schools Attuned "Learn a Little, Learn A Lot" sessions, offered Mondays at 4:00 pm in the Lakeridge library, offer flexible learning opportunities for interested teachers and staff; plans are being made for other learning opportunities for parents, including future workshops in the Learning About Learning series. For more information on Schools Attuned on Mercer Island, please contact Ralph Allen at Ralph_allen@misd.wednet.edu or Janet Frohnmayer at jfrohnmayer@comcast.net.

State Releases New Information on WASL scores

WASL scores were released on Friday, August 31 at 11:00 am, about a week earlier than in previous years. A two-year comparison of Mercer Island scores show a "mixed bag" of gains, declines and status quo, but the overall trend is up for all grades. At grade 4, 86% of students passed all 3 standards: reading, writing and math. At grade 7, 82% passed all 3, and at grade 10, 89.5%. In science, 76.4% of 5th graders, 84.8% of 8th graders and 81.10% of 10th graders met the standard. Beginning in 2006, the No Child Left Behind Act required annual testing to track yearly progress in math and reading at grades 3-8: reading and math scores for 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th grade students range between 84.8% and 92.10%.

According to Sharon Gillaspie, Director of Testing and Evaluation, "MISD scores may reflect some "ceiling effect" that comes when 90% of the students have achieved standard. At the elementary schools, one student represents a percentage point; at the middle and high school level, it's approximately 3 students. This means, for example, that we have 7 students in grade 4 who have not passed the reading exam and 30 students in grade 7. The important thing to remember is that we pay close attention to individual students and make sure they get the help they need to pass standards and graduate.

For a Two Year comparison of MISD scores, go to the MISD website at www.misd.k12.wa.us/curriculum/assessment/WASLcomps06to07.pdf

Culminating Project UPDATE

Last spring a total of 5 graduating seniors from the class of 2008 presented the district's first Culminating Projects. They are: Adrianna Pinegar, Greg Andonian (featured in the June/July issue of District NEWS), Kelsey Gaines and Katherine Rogowski. Gaines created a "blog" on her travel experiences in Israel and Katherine Rogowski, who came from Poland just 4 years ago speaking no English, also finished high school in 3 years. Her project was an examination of her family history, which, since she was adopted from an orphanage with two of her sisters by a family on Mercer Island, was very difficult to track down. Kate won a Counselor Department scholarship and a Rotary scholarship to BCC, where she is studying nursing.

Mike Radow, Culminating Project coordinator at Mercer Island High school, reports that "most of our seniors have submitted proposals and plans for their projects and I know several of them completed their projects this summer. There are some phenomenal things going on – from learning how to make maple syrup, building kyaks, climbing Mt. Rainier to designing clothes and fashions. All of the projects require a detailed plan for implementation including a time line, detailed activities, budgeting and more. This is real life stuff and very valuable for students. We are excited to begin hearing the first group of presentations on December 17. The rest will be heard in late May."

Student Attendance Expectations:

A Message to Students and Parents

It takes a school to educate students – it also takes students and their families. Our teachers work hard to prepare meaningful lessons for our students. Please schedule vacations and appointments outside of scheduled school days. Check the MISD calendar that was mailed to all families, or on-line at www.k12.misd.wa.us. Thank you!

New Graduation Requirements for the Class of 2008

State lawmakers recently made changes to the state's high school graduation requirements. Beginning with the class of 2008, students who meet the reading, writing and mathematics high school standards will earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) or Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA). Students in the graduating class of 2008-2012, however, can still earn a high school diploma without earning a certificate. Those students must meet reading and writing standards, continue earning math credits and attempt to pass the math WASL every year. The graduating class of 2013 will now be the first class required to meet the state's reading, writing, math and science standards and earn a certificate. In addition, the class of 2008 must complete a Culminating Project.

EHJR 4204: Important Info

EHJR 4204, a referendum to allow school levies to pass with a simple majority, will be on the November 6th ballot.

Questions & Answers

How does Washington's current school levy system work?

Currently, local school levies must receive both a 60% supermajority approval and meet the 40% validation requirement to pass.

What would EHJR 4204 do? EHJR 4204 would amend the Washington State Constitution and would provide that a simple majority of voters (50% + 1) could authorize local school district levies. The amendment also removes the 40% election validation requirement for levy elections. It does NOT apply to school bond elections. EHJR 4204 will be on the November 6th ballot.

What do school levies pay for? Local levies support school needs. In our District, the levies help to support education programs and school operations such as teaching, Special Education, athletics, buildings and transportation. Our levy pays for 23 percent of the District's operating budget.

What happens if school levies don't pass? Some school levies have failed because they do not meet the supermajority requirement. Levy failures can result in budget cuts, which require program cuts, staff and/or teacher layoffs, and other disruptions. Elections cost money. If school districts need to run a subsequent election for the same levy, it will take money away from educational programs. It cost our District \$50,500 to run the most recent levy election.

Do all types of levies require a supermajority to pass? No, they do not. Regular tax levies do not require supermajority approval. Public hospital districts, metropolitan park districts, and other taxing jurisdictions can pass levies to operate hospitals, parks, and other facilities with a simple majority vote. School districts are held to the supermajority standard to pass a local levy.

Congratulations! Mercer Island High School's National Merit Semi-Finalists and Commended Scholars

Twelve students from Mercer Island High School have been selected as National Merit Semi-Finalists in the 2008 National Merit Scholarship Program and 29 students have been named Commended Scholars. They are:

National Merit Semi-finalists

Joel Azose
Taisha Barton-Rowledge
Ryan Ellis
Sherrie Hsu
Carmaine Ma
Samuel Magaram
Megumi Page
Steve Severson
Benjamin Shoemaker
Sara Stern
Brian Tolkin
David Veith

National Merit Commended Scholars

Erik Adams
Gilad Amital
Victoria Bachman
Alyssa Bobman
Deborah Burstein
Michael Choi
Hannah Choi
Elizabeth Crane
Morgan Flake
Krista Garrett
Erin Gibson
Alex Glass
Maxi Gumprecht
Evan Jensen
Mary McKee
Rahul Misra
Alex Myerson
Christina Neary

Ruben Raychaudhuri
Lindsay Smith
Michael Snodgrass
Harry Spitzer
Jeffery Stafford
Alexander Strong
Kaleb Tsang
Tara Vaziri
Charles Wang
Evan Zahniser

National Merit Semi-Finalists are among the less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors nationwide who have outstanding academic records throughout high school, are endorsed and recommended by their school principal and earn SAT scores that confirm the student's earlier test performance. Commended scholars are recognized for the "exceptional academic promise demonstrated by their outstanding performance on the qualifying test used for program entry. The students were recently honored at the MI School Board meeting on September 27. "We are so proud of your tremendous accomplishments," said Adair Dingle, Vice President of the School Board.



Interim Associate Superintendent Gary Plano with several of the National Merit Scholars: Sherrie Hsu, Carmaine Ma, Megumi Page, Steve Severson



committed to improving their professional practice and has engaged in department and subject wide professional development activities. This year they will be focusing on effective assessment practices and how those practices may be used to improve instruction and student performance.

**MIHS
Math Department:**

- *Sawn Basoglu*
- *Beth Herburger*
- *Lee Jahncke*
- *Clay Laughary*
- *Pam Lowry*
- *Brett Ogata*
- *Kim Schjelderup*
- *Mark Shafer*
- *Steven Smith*
- *Grant Weed*
- *Kate Yoder*

School Board Honors MIHS Math Teachers

The eleven members of Mercer Island High School's math department were honored by the MISD school board at a special presentation on September 27 for their hard work and commitment to students. According to Michael Schiehser, Associate Principal at the high school, "Of the 68 students taking AP Calculus at MIHS, all passed with a score of 3 or above and 55 received a perfect 5 score."

The math department has worked hard over the past two years to develop clear standards, common assessments and an honors-based system to meet individual student needs. The math department is

Important Dates

October 29 and 30
MISF Phone-a-Thon

November 6
General Election Day

November 9
Elementary LID Day

November 12
Veteran's Day – no school

November 15 & 16
Elementary Parent teacher conferences

November 22 & 23
Thanksgiving break

December 20 – January 2
Winter Break

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