



NEWS

Mercer Island School District Volume 8 Issue #1, October 2006

This is the first 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.wa.us

Community Partnerships Equals Success for Students

On August 30, 2006, a record number of Mercer Island School District staff gathered at Lakeridge Elementary for the annual All Staff Breakfast. Superintendent Cyndy Simms welcomed the group, especially the 42 new staff members, and introduced our community partners who help to ensure excellence in education in the Mercer Island School District, student by student. Lisa Strauch Eggers, President of the MISD School Board, introduced her fellow board members, Leslie Ferrell, Adair Dingle, John DeVleming and Pat Braman. Eggers praised teachers for their hard work and thanked her team of board members for their on-going commitment of time and leadership for students. Mary Lindquist, President of the Mercer Island Education Association, introduced the members of the MIEA Executive Board: Mike Radow, VP, Tracy Michaels, Josh Berger, Patty McCann, Tani Lindquist, Kerida Millison, Molly Harnish, Monte Scholz and Rob Wick. Lindquist acknowledged that teaching is a “tough job with wonderful rewards – every day we have a chance to do something meaningful for our students and our society.” Mercer Island PTA District Council President Toby Suhm expressed appreciation for the opportunity to partner with teachers in providing the best possible education for all students. The PTA will be spending time this year understanding the implications of the November 2006 final recommendations from Washington Learns, Governor Gregoire’s initiative to examine our state’s education funding system, early learning to K-12 to higher education.

Finally, Dirk Van der Burch, President of the Mercer Island Schools Foundation Board, expressed appreciation to our teachers and staff and announced that the MISF, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising funds for all Mercer Island schools, raised a record \$840,000 in 2005-2006. The MISF holds two fund-raisers a year—the

Mercer Island High School is a Blue Ribbon School for 2006!

Mercer Island High School is one of 250 schools nationwide and the only high school in Washington to be honored by the U.S. Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon School Award for 2006. Congratulations to the preK-12 staff, students, volunteers, parents and supporters of the Mercer Island School District! (Read the full story on the back page).

Phone-A-Thon, on October 16 and 17 this school year, and the Breakfast of Champions on March 27, 2007. Watch for more news of these events in this newsletter and on the district web site.



Staff members and community partners listen to the presentations at the MISD staff breakfast on August 30th

Highlights of Our Year Ahead

Superintendent Simms congratulated our great teachers, coaches and staff for the tremendous successes of the past year for students both academically, intellectually, personally and physically. She emphasized that this year we will be “continuing down the path of excellence”, building on a long tradition of educational excellence in the Mercer Island School District.

Student by Student ... We Can Do It

Mercer Island remains the top district in the state for the number of students meeting or exceeding standard on all 3 WASL's: 84.5% of 4th graders, 82.1% of 7th graders and 86.9% of 10th graders achieved this goal last year. Can we reach 100%? Dr. Simms says “Yes, we can” by continuing to work together on the District Instructional Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans, both of which emphasize providing teachers with tools to meet the learning needs of each student. One of these is Dr. Mel Levine's *Schools Attuned* training (see story below). Other examples are the K-5 Standards-Based report card designed to help teachers report student learning using state standards as the baseline for success, and our teachers' new instructional vision for learning together – “Building Professional Learning Communities.”

Mercer Island Staff Earn High Marks from *Schools Attuned* Facilitators

During the summer, Mercer Island hosted three week-long *Schools Attuned* professional development programs which were attended by over 65 Mercer Island School District staff. *Schools Attuned* is a comprehensive professional development program based on the work of Dr. Mel Levine and “All Kinds of Minds”, a non-profit Institute which is dedicated to student success. Participants in the summer course will be continuing their studies and practice during the school year to qualify for *Schools Attuned* certification. Facilitators agreed that “The Mercer Island staff was absolutely outstanding. They were knowledgeable about Dr. Levine's work having read his books and attended his day-long presentation in March, 2006. Their pre-course assignment, which was to build a student profile, was thoughtfully and carefully completed. And, during a week of long days filled with activities and discussions, they were consistently engaged and enthusiastic. It was very apparent that these are teachers who are deeply committed to success for all students.”—*A collective statement from the Schools Attuned facilitators, Summer 2006*

District Advisory Council Reviews Student Ends

On September 27, our District Advisory Council met for the first time this school year, their third meeting since convening last March. The District Advisory Council is a representative body to advise the Superintendent on the school district's plans to ensure that all Mercer Island School District students achieve the Board's Ends for students. These plans are the District Instructional Improvement Plan (DIIP) and School Improvement Plans (SIPs). Among the topics of discussion during the September meeting were the revisions to the Board Ends, which have been changed so that they are easier to read. The changes are the result of feedback received by the board during monthly linkage meetings with a broad range of groups in our community: City Council, MIEA leadership, PTA District Council, Key Communicators, Mercer Island Schools Foundation, religious leaders, elementary, middle and high school parents, alumni/students and through all-day site visits to IMS and MIHS.

The groups represented by the District Advisory Council are elementary, middle and high school teachers, paraprofessionals, MIEA, administrators, students, parents, school board, PTA District Council and community representatives. The names of all of the representatives may be found on this page of the district web site: <http://www.misd.k12.wa.us/departments/superintendent/DistAdvCouncil.html>

Key Communicators to Meet Quarterly

The Key Communicators is a group of nearly 30 influential community members who have agreed to meet quarterly with the School Board to bring questions and comments about current education issues to the Board. On October 5, they discussed issues related to K-12 class size, including student achievement, student and teacher stress, course offerings and selection and the impact on funding and facilities.

Class Size Study Group

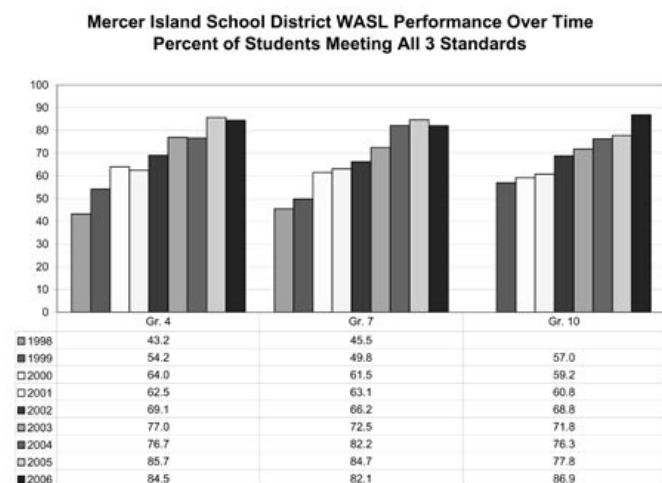
This fall the Superintendent is forming a Class Size Study group of interested parents, staff members, and MIEA to study the effectiveness of small classes. The group will be studying the available research, examining the costs and working with interested representatives from the Citizens for Mercer Island Public Schools (CMIPS) and the Mercer Island Schools Foundation (MISF) to identify funding sources. They will consider the alternative uses of new revenues to determine if smaller class sizes are the best use of those revenues, and make recommendations. Watch for more news from the Class Size Study Group on the Superintendent's page on the district web site.

WASL Scores are Tops! Congratulations to Students and Staff

Once again, Mercer Island students and teachers are at the top of their game on the WASL. For the 9th year in a row, the Mercer Island School District is the #1 district in the state for the number of students meeting all 3 standards on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. According to Michael Power, Director of Instruction and Assessment, "The best news is the percent of students meeting all three standards in grade 10 based on strong gains in reading and writing. This is the class of 2008 which needs to meet standard on the WASL to graduate. We are now up to 87% of our current juniors having already met this graduation requirement."

Power said that there were some drops in scores this year, noting that 4th grade writing dropped from 91.3% to 86.8%, or 18 students. "In a small system like ours," said Power, "a 1% drop is equivalent to 3 students. Each one of them has a Student Learning Plan, developed with his or her parent. In addition our teachers are continuing to work with the new writing curriculum adopted last year. The most important thing to keep in mind is over time we are seeing gains. This is to the credit of our teachers, students and parents."

3rd grade students took the reading and math WASL for the first time this year. These scores will be posted on the district web site after they are presented to the school board on October 5. A full report on district-wide testing will be published in the District Annual Report in December 2006.



Percent of Students Meeting All 3 Standards

15 MIHS Students are National Merit Semi-Finalists

On September 6, 2006, high school counselors Deborah Kraft, Mj Hillstrom, Principal John Harrison and Superintendent Cyndy Simms proudly announced to 15 students that they have been named semi-finalists in the 2007 Merit Scholarship Competition. The students are:

Micah Babinski	Andrew Lu
Jacob Bobman	Daniel Naylor
Bridget Crawford	Alexandre Puttick
Katherine DeFliese	Elliott Spelman
Meghan Flaherty	Laura Vogel
Anders Forsgaard	Rachel Wold
Devin Hawkins	Brittney Wong
Michael Holtzman	

These academically talented high school seniors represent 4% of the class of 2006 (15 out of 361), and are among a pool of semifinalists representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors nationwide. They now have the opportunity to continue in the competition for some 8,200 Merit Scholarship awards, worth \$33 million, that will be offered next spring. About 90 percent of the semifinalists are expected to attain finalist standing, and approximately half of the finalists will be selected as Merit Scholarship winners, earning the Merit Scholar title.

School Board Adopts New Wellness Policy

On the web at

www.misd.k12.wa.us/parents/families/wellness.html

The Mercer Island School Board took an important step toward improving the health of our children when it passed a district-wide Wellness Policy on June 22, 2006. This policy was required by the federal Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. The Mercer Island Wellness Policy is far-reaching and courageous and will positively affect the school food environment in our district at many different levels: the cafeterias, the student store at the high school, and in the classrooms. The 2006-07 school year will be a transition year. There will be opportunities for community input and implementation strategies will be researched, phased in and revised as appropriate. Full implementation of the policy will occur in the 2007-08 school year. We hope that parents and community members will be excited and enthusiastic about the positive changes to come. We invite you to drop by our school cafeterias during lunch time to view the progress!

The MISD Wellness Policy Development Committee:
School Nurse Bonnie Barthelme, Chartwell's Regional Director Cameron Danby, King County Child Nutritionist Kari Fisher, Pediatrician Dr. Danette Glassey, Lori Kovarik, Sports Nutritionist Kathy Middleton, Island Park

Principal Kathy Morrison, MIHS Associate Principal Craig Olson, MISD Director of Food Services Rolando Visitacion, and MISD Director of Curriculum and Staff Development Patti Weber.

"MIHS is a Blue Ribbon School"

continued from front page

Friday, September 22 was a "BLUE RIBBON DAY" for Principal John Harrison and the staff, students, parents and supporters of Mercer Island High School. Harrison received an early morning email from the Department of Education and delivered the news with his usual (perhaps unusual) style. "I played one of my favorite songs, "Sweet Home Alabama" over the loudspeaker and then told everyone that this song doesn't have anything to do with the fact that we just won a Blue Ribbon Schools Award, but I really like this song and I'm in the mood to celebrate!"

Being singled out as a Blue Ribbon School truly is cause for celebration. This year 250 public and private schools were selected by the U.S. Department of Education to be honored. Mercer Island High School is the only high school in Washington to be selected this year. All of the schools were nominated by each state's board of education on the basis on one of two criteria: 1) Schools with at least 40 percent of their

students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests and 2) Schools whose students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests. Mercer Island High School students consistently achieve in the top 10 percent of students state-wide on the Washington State Assessment of Student Learning.

According to Harrison, "This award is a validation of the great work of the teachers and support staff in our district from preschool through high school. It is a tribute to the tremendous support we receive from our parents and community partners – in the home, at school, and through the many organizations that support education in our community."

Islander Middle School was honored as a Blue Ribbon School in 2003. The 2006 Award will be presented to principals and teachers from each school at a special ceremony in Washington D.C. on November 9-10, 2006.

Important Dates

October 12: School Board Meeting
October 13: Learning Improvement Day K-12
October 16 & 17: MISF Phone-A-Thon
October 26: School Board Meeting

Mercer Island Schools

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