



NEWS

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MERCER ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

WATER QUALITY: A GLOBAL ISSUE BECOMES LOCAL

**MERCER ISLAND STUDENTS NAMED
NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS**

**SUPERINTENDENT: 'SUCCESSFUL START
TO NEW SCHOOL YEAR'**



Mercer Island students turn trying situation into a learning experience

Before last week, Mercer Island High School social studies students, like ninth grader Aidan Dobson, only had to think about how a lack of clean drinking water would impact ancient civilizations and areas around the world without access to clean drinking water.

“In class we discussed the importance of a strong and efficient sewage system in a modern city or ancient civilization and how easily diseases can spread if not handled with care,” said Dobson.

Many of the questions that Mercer Island students and staff had to answer earlier this month seem more suited for a class in global studies. How does a community operate without access to clean water? What does access to clean water mean to a student and how does that access impact learning over an undefined period of time?

Those questions had to be answered throughout the district and City of Mercer Island when the community was notified that E. coli and Total Coliform bacteria had been discovered in the public water supply.

“This has been a remarkable

example of problem solving,” said Lakeridge Elementary Principal Andy LaBadie. “Beyond that, it is a learning experience that would not have happened any other way. Students have

been asked to think globally – to think about what it would be like if they did not have bottled water so available and if this was a part of their daily life.”

“Conveniently, the day after school was shut down we had a video due about geographic problems and solutions. Some students even parodied the E. coli contamination when they discussed waterborne illnesses,” said MIHS social studies teacher Amanda Mattocks. In another project this week in her class, every student had to look at waste management procedures to prevent diseases within an ancient community. “Our essential question looked at what hinders civilization development. During the crisis we drew out a chart that defined E. coli, noted



Bottled water available at Mercer Island High School

the infrastructure problem, estimated the community impact, and then discussed potential solutions.”

The unexpected experience created a wonderful opportunity for students to look at the local impact of a huge global issue. Globally, one in nine people, or 780 million, lack access to clean water. Each year, 3.4 million people die from a water-related disease.

Last year Jan Brousseau’s eighth grade Islander Middle School Global Citizenship class raised money for two international aid projects. One of them was to pay for water purification technologies in rural villages overseas. Their fundraising was a part of their entry to We Day

in Seattle, which requires students to complete a local and global service project. Tickets for We Day cannot be purchased – they must be earned through service.

On the operational side, the Mercer Island School District provided about 10,000 bottles of water each day while access to clean tap water was limited. Drinking fountains were taped over, temporary hand-washing stations were placed in kitchens, sanitizer was in bathrooms and lunch menus were limited to “heat-and-eat” meals such as pizza and chicken nuggets, which don’t require water for preparation.

Since the event was limited to Mercer Island, there was plenty of water and food for students and staff. Thirteen-year-old Mithril Hugunin said, “In class, we learned that E. coli can be less problematic in a developed area, because we have spare resources to deal with it.” Several students noted that they did

not feel personally impacted by the situation. “The day we came back to school after a day off, there were 10,000 water bottles ready for the students and staff, and the lunches were modified,” said senior June Kissel. “This fast turnaround, although I am grateful for it, did not allow me, and perhaps other students, to truly appreciate not having water because we never really went a day without having clean water immediately accessible.” ■



Elementary schools add security feature to increase student safety

The Mercer Island School District has installed a new security feature at each elementary school to increase student safety and make the check-in process for visitors more efficient.

The new tablet-sized *LobbyGuard* kiosk at the front desk of each elementary school quickly scans a visitor’s driver’s license against a national database and local customized lists to prevent visitors who should not be in school buildings for a variety of reasons. It also identifies the purpose of the visit, takes a photo and prints a one-time, wearable badge for the visitor.

“All visitors to our schools must be easily identifiable,” said Superintendent Dr. Gary Plano. “This new security tool will help us ensure that only those people with a reasonable purpose for being in our schools are there and that every adult on campus will have a district badge. Any non-student who does not have a staff badge will be required to immediately go to the front office to check in using this process.” ■



The *LobbyGuard* kiosk at West Mercer Elementary

Successful start to 2014-15 school year

We have completed nearly two months of the 2014-15 school year, and we are well on our way to another successful year of classroom experiences for our students.

I am happy to announce that four of our young scholars from Mercer Island High School have been named National Merit Semifinalists and 19 more have been named National Merit Commended students. The high school also jumped to the 159th position in the *Newsweek* rankings of best high schools in America and the class of 2014 received the best composite ACT scores in at least five years.



Dr. Gary Plano with second grade students at West Mercer Elementary

It takes an entire community to create an educational system this special. Our mission begins when students enter our elementary schools and continues through middle and high school until students are prepared for college and their careers.

The generous donations from the Mercer Island community to the Mercer Island Schools Foundation are essential to funding classroom teachers, an elementary art specialist, instructional coaches for elementary, middle and high school teachers and the enrichment programs that make success at this level possible. My most heartfelt appreciation goes to supporters of the Mercer Island Schools Foundation, the PTAs and the many Boosters who help ensure our schools are the best regionally and nationally.

Through the Phone-a-Thon, Bridge-the-Gap campaign and many PTA and booster events, the Mercer Island School District received more than \$1.6 million to fund teachers and targeted programs, such as the new K-2 reading program, to help our schools meet the diverse needs, intellectual drive and curiosity of our students.

Last year our elementary schools had some classrooms with as many as 30 students. This year, there is only one elementary class with as many as 28 students and that class is one classroom in the highly capable program. We average about 23 students per classroom at the elementary level. That does not happen without the support of our community.

Thank you!

This year the Mercer Island Schools Foundation Phone-a-Thon will take place on Nov. 3 and 4. I know this community will continue to answer the call to make our public schools even stronger and to provide the support and programs our children deserve.

A handwritten signature of Gary Plano in black ink.

Gary Plano, Ed. D.
Superintendent

Four Mercer Island High School students named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists

In September, the Mercer Island School District and National Merit Scholarship Corporation announced the selection of four Mercer Island High School students as National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists.

The 2014 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists from MIHS are Lauren Hsue, David Emanuels, Louis Lam and Carlin Chuck.

“I could not be more proud of Lauren, David, Louis and Carlin. This accomplishment is a result of their dedication and focus,” said MIHS Principal Vicki Puckett. “Congratulations to our four National Merit semifinalists for this distinctive honor.”

Seventeen-year-old Hsue has not chosen a college yet, but is interested in Stanford University and Brown University. “I would like to go into medicine, although I am not sure what specialty I intend to pursue. At the moment, I consider orthopedic surgery and anesthesia my main interests. A career in medicine would allow me to use my strengths to help others, and would bring me plenty of opportunity for lifelong learning in a constantly-evolving field,” said Hsue.

Emanuel, who also has an interest in becoming a doctor, says, “My teachers have done a great job incorporating new technology, current events, and global issues into their curriculum and have helped me develop my critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills, which I feel has prepared me very well for college and my future career.”

“Particularly in the last few years, instructors have really emphasized the practical applications of class material,” says Hsue. “Last year our AP Calculus class



National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists (L-R) Lauren Hsue, Carlin Chuck, Louis Lam and David Emanuels

studied rates of change using newspaper articles, most of which dealt with global economics. This year, my studies in Business Law will touch on small business ownership and on corporate regulation policy. More generally, my education prepared me to effectively analyze arguments and opinions; acknowledge alternate viewpoints; and extend basic skills and knowledge to solve an unfamiliar problem. Success in the 21st century economy depends on lessons like these.”

“This is a tremendous achievement for these students and we are incredibly proud of them,” said MISD Superintendent Dr. Gary Plano. “I look forward to recognizing them before a joint meeting of the Mercer Island School Board and City Council.”

Semifinalists represent the top one percent of entrants from each state on the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. ■

Mercer Island senior recognized as Seahawks 'Athlete of the Week'

In a special event at Mercer Island High School, the Seattle Seahawks, CenturyLink, Inc., Q13 Fox and Sports Authority announced David Emanuels as the CenturyLink High School 'Athlete of the Week.' Emanuels was also recognized during the Sept. 21 Seahawks game against the Denver Broncos.

"David is a wonderful example of a student-athlete. He shows exemplary performance in the classroom and on the field," said MIHS Principal Vicki Puckett. "David is a kind, yet strong leader among his peers. He is a very strong student and makes his studies his number one priority while also excelling athletically. He truly is an academic leader at MIHS."

"I'm so honored to receive this award from the Seahawks," said Emanuels. "I couldn't have done it without the constant support of my family, teachers, coaches, and friends."

Emanuels was selected to be the 'Athlete of the Week' based on his dedication to academics, community involvement, leadership and athletic performance. He has maintained a 4.0 grade-point average and is enrolled in four advanced



SeaGal Tamaria, David's mother Anne Emanuels, coach and teacher Brett Ogata, David Emanuels, and David's father Brian Emanuels at Mercer Island High School

placement classes, one honors course and robotics. Emanuels was also recognized as one of four National Merit semifinalists from MIHS and has been an active member of Volunteers Outreach in Communities Everywhere, volunteering for many organizations including the Special Olympics and Boys and Girls Club. He also spent his summer volunteering two days a week at the UW Medical Center. Athletically, Emanuels is a multi-sport athlete and was selected as captain both his junior and senior football seasons. He was selected as his team's Defensive Player of the Year along with second team all-league honors in the KingCo conference during his junior year.

SeaGal Tamaria was on hand to present the various awards to Emanuels. In addition to the ceremonies at MIHS and CenturyLink Field, Emanuels received: a \$1,200 grant from Sports Authority to be utilized for the MIHS athletic department; a personalized Seahawks jersey; a custom Seahawks football; two game tickets and sidelines passes to the Seahawks home game against the Broncos; a CenturyLink High School 'Athlete of the Week' patch for his letterman jacket; and recognition on the HawkVision video board, Q13 Fox, Seahawks Game Day broadcast and Seahawks.com. ■

High school recognized in state and national rankings, achieves new heights in ACT scores

The month of September saw exciting news for Mercer Island High School and the Mercer Island School District as a whole. *Newsweek* announced their rankings for the best high schools in America and MIHS was named the 159th best high school in the country, which is a significant jump from last year. In 2013, MIHS ranked 855th.

“This is a tremendous honor and is reflective of the incredible work and dedication of our students, teachers and support staff, and parents throughout the Mercer Island School District,” said Superintendent Dr. Gary Plano.

The *Puget Sound Business Journal* then ranked MIHS as the fifth best high school in the state of Washington. “It is an honor to be a part of this school and this community,” said MIHS Principal Vicki Puckett. “This is welcome news and only encourages us to work harder to support our students.”

Six high schools in Washington state were included in the *Newsweek* list of the top 500, including the International Community School (39th), Newport Senior High School (219th), Bainbridge High School (311th), Issaquah High School (380th) and Kentridge High School (483rd).

The rankings are based on a college readiness score including enrollment rate, graduation rate, AP and International Baccalaureate scores, SAT and ACT scores, change in student enrollment between grades 9-12 and counselor-to-student ratio.

The graduating class of 2014 also earned the best composite ACT score for the Mercer Island School District in at least five years. The ACT college readiness assessment is a standardized test designed

to assess student readiness for college or the workplace.

The class of 2014 earned a composite score of 27.6. The state composite score was 23 and the national composite score was 21. Mercer Island students



MIHS College Counselor Mj Hillstrom (right) with 2014 Mercer Island High School graduate Sarah Hardisty

also earned their highest scores in English (27.5), Reading (27.6) and Science (27.2). Only the class of 2011 surpassed the class of 2014 in Mathematics, with a 28.1 over the 2014 score of 27.4. Scores range from one (lowest) to 36 (highest).

“I am very proud of our students and staff for their outstanding performance on these important benchmarks for college-readiness,” said Dr. Plano.

MIHS College Counselor Mj Hillstrom said, “Because the ACT is curriculum based and achievement oriented, rather than ability oriented, these scores tell me that MIHS students are learning very well and teachers are teaching very well. My hat is off to the partnerships that make this learning possible.” ■

FALL DISTRICT NEWS

Mercer Island School District

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Notice of Nondiscrimination & Prohibition of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB). The district shall provide equal educational opportunity and treatment for all students in all aspects of the academic and activities program without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sex, sexual orientation including gender expression or identity, religion, age, veteran or military status, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability or non-program-related physical, sensory or mental disabilities. District programs and activities shall be free from sexual harassment and unlawful discrimination. In addition, the District provides equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. The district is committed to a safe and civil educational environment for all students, employees, parents/legal guardians, volunteers, and patrons that is free from harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

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