

# COMMUNITY



# +Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools

IN THIS ISSUE

FALL 2019 NEWSLETTER

## Welcome to the 2019-20 School Year!

Welcome to the 2019-20 school year! This is a year of change in the Mount Vernon School District. For the first time in 23 years, we opened a new school and modified student attendance boundaries in grades K – 8. After 80 years of service to our community, Lincoln Elementary was closed. This marks the first time, since Roosevelt and Cleveland Schools closed in 1972, that a school in our district was taken out of service for students.


Two school moves took place this summer – i.e., Madison moved from their temporary home at Harriet Rowley Elementary to their newly rebuilt school on East Fir St. Staff from Lincoln Elementary moved into Rowley. On the Mount Vernon High School Campus, staff began the process of relocating offices and classrooms in the Fine Arts Building to prepare for renovations. Thanks to community support, we have been able to take some large steps forward in providing ample and suitable space for teaching and learning.

On a less positive note, we entered the school year having taken some strides backwards in class size and several initiatives that are critical to our mission, as a result of changes to the state’s system for funding public schools. These changes included the reduction in the amount our district can levy for Educational Programs and Operations (EPO). In 2018, this rate was \$3.93 per \$1,000 of assessed value. In 2019, we were limited to \$1.50 per \$1,000.

Recognizing that the \$1.50 limit on EPO levies was not feasible for districts, the Legislature acted to increase the limit to \$2.50 per \$1,000. To collect the new rate, our district must ask voters to approve a Supplemental EPO levy. In August, our School Board voted to place a Supplemental Levy proposal on the November 5 ballot. More details on this ballot proposition are provided beginning on page 3.

As I have made the rounds of our schools and classrooms across the district these first few weeks, the passion that our teachers, administrators, and support staff have for educating our children and youth is evident everywhere. We take this responsibility very seriously and look forward to a great school year!



  
**Carl Bruner**, Superintendent  
Mount Vernon School District

## Featured Alumni

You will find our alumni working in every field imaginable, changing the world around us every day. Take a look at what our alumni are doing today and where they started.

## Featured Articles

- Answers to your Levy Questions
- New Graduation Requirements
- New Madison Elementary Grand Opening

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# FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.

## After years in the service, MVHS alum returns home to begin new ventures



Andrew Miller

After a successful career in the military and in corporate positions, in 2016 Andrew Miller returned to Skagit Valley with a mission to increase economic development. Before he left to serve our country, he was a Mount Vernon High School Bulldog, class of '94. When he wasn't on the soccer team preparing to bring home the state title, he was busy attending other sporting and after-school events as a writer for The Bulldog and fulfilling the duties that came with being a member of student government. As a student, a young Miller loved classes that left him with more questions than answers like History, and the classes that rewarded curiosity, which is why he chose two foreign languages, Spanish and French at MVHS. When asked about Mount Vernon teachers who made an influence in his life, Miller mentioned he is grateful for Mark Pearson, Bonni Etter, Jake Jacobsen, Scott Stromer, and his coaches, Gary Warman and Darren Bell. Miller said he also has fond memories of his 1st grade class and teacher at Jefferson Elementary, Mrs. Pugh.

After High School, Andrew moved to Brazil as a missionary before returning to the states to join the Air Force. Miller's extensive education experience includes an Associate of Arts in Spanish Linguistics and Spanish Literature from Monterey Peninsula College, a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College, a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership from Gonzaga University, a Masters in Business Administration from Pacific Lutheran University, and a Juris Doctorate from Seattle University. Miller earned a Master of Arts in Strategic Studies from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School, is a graduate of the USAF Squadron Officer School, and a Distinguished Graduate of the USAF Officer Training School.

During his time in the Air Force, Miller flew intelligence gathering and electronic warfare missions before his commission as an electronic intelligence officer. He transitioned to the private sector doing enterprise program management and strategy for Weyerhaeuser, Expedia, and Amazon before returning to Skagit County in 2016 to teach in the leadership institute at Western Washington University.

Miller recently reunited with some of his best friends, who have started a private equity fund. Known as "Spinach Bus Ventures", the team includes Miller and fellow classmates Rachel Ward, Angela Speer, Donnie Keltz, and Randy Howard. Their 30 years of friendship makes for trusting teamwork. The Spinach Bus team recently purchased Tulip Town and Fairhaven Mill and are working on other investment projects in outdoor recreation, tourism, and multi-family housing. He is proud of his team "tribe" and their accomplishments. The career advice he offers, is focus. "Focus is your friend, but not at the expense of perspective," says Miller.

When he's not venturing out with the Spinach Bus team, Miller loves to travel with his wife and six kids. He said it is exciting to be in Skagit Valley where it all started, and to be contributing to the vibrant, quality of life in the valley.

“  
If you can't find your  
tribe, make one!”  
– Andrew Miller





# ANSWERS TO YOUR LEVY QUESTIONS

Q&A

Mount Vernon School District

## Why is the District requesting the supplemental Educational Programs & Operations (EPO) Levy?

The District's replacement EPO Levy passed in November 2019 was calculated based on a levy cap of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. This cap was approved by the State Legislature in their 2018 session in response to the McCleary lawsuit.

The \$1.50 levy cap reduced the Mount Vernon School District's allowable levy by 66% or approximately \$9.0 million. While the state did provide some additional funding, these funds did not begin to make up for the amount lost in EPO levy funding. As a result, the District was forced to reduce our educational programs by several million dollars for the 2019-20 budget. This included cuts to teaching, support staff, and administrative positions, curriculum improvement efforts, and before and after supports for students.

In the 2019 Legislative Session, the Legislature raised the EPO Levy cap from \$1.50 to \$2.50 per \$1,000. The District's Supplemental EPO request

is intended to provide the difference between what voters approved in February 2019 and the new EPO state cap of \$2.50. The additional funds would be used to restore some of the most important programs and services that were reduced, helping lower class size, supplying teachers and students with updated curriculum materials, and providing after school programs for students in need of enrichment and tutoring.

## How will the Supplemental EPO Levy impact current property taxes?

Taxpayers in the Mount Vernon School District are currently paying \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation for the current EPO Levy. The Supplemental EPO Levy would add \$.079 per \$1,000 in calendar year 2020 and \$0.54 per \$1,000 in calendar year 2021. For a home assessed by the County at \$300,000, the increase would be \$237 per year in 2020, or \$19.75 per month. The cost for that same home, assessed in 2021 at \$320,000, would be \$172.80 or \$14.40 per month.

While the EPO tax rate will increase for 2020 and 2021 with the Supplemental Levy, it's important to note that it will still remain \$1.43 lower than the 2018 EPO rate, when property owners paid \$3.93 per \$1,000.

## The District and State collect other property taxes beyond the EPO. How will this supplemental levy impact the combined tax rate?

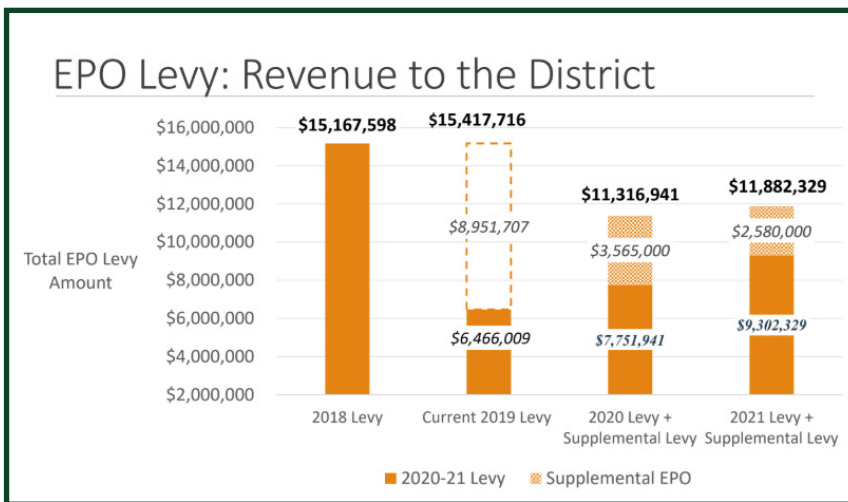
In addition to our EPO Levy, the District collects funds from local taxpayers through our Technology & Security Levy and our construction bond approved by voters in 2016. The State also collects a property tax for schools.

In 2019, before Legislation passed in response to the McCleary lawsuit went into effect, the total combined tax rate for schools in Mount Vernon was \$8.69 per \$1,000. The legislature's reduction of the EPO rate to \$1.50 combined with increases in assessed property values has resulted in a combined rate of \$6.28 per \$1,000 for 2019.

With the Supplemental EPO Levy, the combined rate is estimated to increase to \$7.67 in 2020 and 7.54 in 2021. This is approximately \$1.00 per \$1,000 higher than the current rate, but \$1.00 per \$1,000 lower than the combined rate in 2019.

## Can senior citizens or individuals with a disability receive an exemption?

Yes. If you are 61 years of age or older or legally disabled, you could be eligible for an exemption from all or part of the property tax. Contact the Skagit County Auditor's Office at (360)416-1780 for more information.



Due to the \$1.50 per \$1,000 cap, the district has only been able to collect approximately \$6.5 million of the \$15,417,716 approved by the voters for the 2019 levy. While the supplemental levy will increase the EPO levy by almost \$3.6 million in 2020 and \$2.6 million in 2021, the total will remain over \$3 million less than taxpayers were paying in 2018.

# Changes in Graduation Requirements



In the 2019 session, the Washington State Legislature made significant changes to high school graduation requirements, beginning with the Class of 2020. Most of these changes relate to how students are allowed to demonstrate they are ready for the next steps after high school.

Through the graduating Class of 2019, students were required to pass state assessments or meet one of the state approved assessment alternatives to be eligible for a high school diploma.

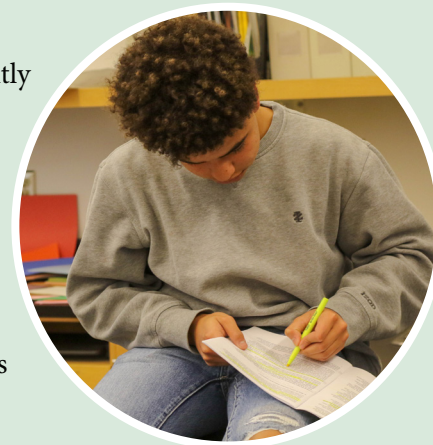
These alternatives included:

- Established scores on college admissions tests, Advanced Placement exams, or International Baccalaureate exams.
- Comparison of a student's grade point average in two credits of English and/or Math with the grade point average of students who took those same courses and passed the state test in English Language Arts and/or Math.
- Earn college credit in a dual credit course in English Language Arts or Mathematics.

With the passage of House Bill 1599, these alternatives to the state tests have been expanded to include:

- High school transition courses in English Language Arts and math
- Sequence of career and technical education (CTE) courses, including completing a Core Plus branded program
- Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

The State Board of Education is currently working to adopt rules for each of these pathways and other changes in the law to provide additional clarity. Once these rules are adopted, we will inform students and families.



| LEVY                       | 2018          | 2019          | 2020          | 2021          |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| State Tax for Schools      | \$2.04        | \$2.45        | \$2.45        | \$2.45        |
| 2016 Construction Bond     | \$2.24        | \$1.89        | \$1.66        | \$1.58        |
| Technology & Security Levy | \$0.49        | \$0.44        | \$1.06        | \$1.01        |
| EPO Levy                   | \$3.93        | \$1.50        | \$1.71        | \$1.96        |
| Supplemental Levy          | \$0.00        | \$0.00        | \$0.79        | \$0.54        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>               | <b>\$8.70</b> | <b>\$6.28</b> | <b>\$7.67</b> | <b>\$7.54</b> |

While the combined estimated tax rate will go up with the Supplemental Levy in 2020 and 2021, it will remain below the combined rate in 2018.

| Calendar Year | Estimated Rate per \$1000 | Cost for a Home Assessed at \$300,000 |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2020          | \$0.79                    | \$237                                 |
| 2021          | \$0.54                    | \$162                                 |

## What is the timing for the November 5 Election?



Ballots will be mailed on October 16, 2019. To be counted, completed ballots must be deposited to one of the Skagit County drop box locations or postmarked by 8:00 PM on November 5.



I invite you to contact my office at (360) 428-6110 if you have questions about our proposed levy.

**Carl Bruner**, Superintendent  
Mount Vernon School District



# WHAT'S NEW AT MVSD?

Changes and updates in our district

## New Face in Leadership



Joy Walton  
Kawasaki

We are excited to introduce Joy Walton Kawasaki as the new Principal of Skagit Academy. She has approximately 28 years of experience in alternative learning as both a teacher and administrator. She was most recently employed by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia as School Choice and Enrollment Options Manager. Prior to moving to the state office, she worked for the Olympia School District as an administrator of alternative learning programs. She

was the architect and administrator of the Olympia Regional Learning Academy (ORLA) for 9 years. ORLA includes services for home-school students and their families, an online learning school, a Montessori program for students in grades P - 6, and a project-based middle school. She taught at alternative high schools in Bethel and Tacoma for 7 years and was hired to design and implement an alternative high school for students in the Coupeville and South Whidbey.

We are grateful to have someone with Ms. Kawasaki's knowledge and experience joining our leadership team.

## Welcome to our Student Board Representatives



(Left to Right): MVHS Seniors, Renad Alsilimy,  
Lissa Covarrubias, Liliana Cervantes

## New Madison Elementary

As hoped, the new Madison Elementary opened in time for the beginning of the school year on September 4. Students, families, and community members gathered on September 17 for a formal dedication and ribbon cutting.

Though it will be a while before all of the punch list items have been addressed, we believe the project will come in under budget, as did the Rowley Elementary project the year before.



"We are excited to be a voice  
and advocate for students of  
our school!"

The Mount Vernon School District does not discriminate in employment, programs, or activities on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability or use of a trained guide dog or service animal by a person with a disability and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to the District's Title IX/Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator, Bill Nutting, Assistant Superintendent, 124 E. Lawrence Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 (360)428-6110; Section 504/ADA Coordinator, Clint Carlton, Director of Special and Support Services, 920 S. Second Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, (360)428-6141.



# Defining the Rowley Way

# Postcard Contest: *Every Day Counts*



Creating a new school community is both exciting and challenging. Staff, administrators, and students at Rowley Elementary are off to a good start this fall as they work together to define the “Rowley Way.”

An important part of a school’s identity is represented by their colors and mascot. In their first all school assembly in early September, revealed their school colors – teal, black, and gray. These colors were selected by a committee based on suggestions from staff, families and students.

Principal Shanander has formed a team to review options for a school mascot. This group includes students, staff, and families. They hope to finish their work this month!



As part of our focus on attendance, the District sponsored an Every Day Counts postcard competition this fall. A total of 80 submissions were received.

At the secondary level, junior Lilianna Sustaita’s design was selected. Jefferson 5th grade student Arya Youngren was declared the winner at the elementary level.

These students’ designs will be used on postcards reminding students and families of the importance of attending school every day. All day.

## New Certificated Hires

### Madison Elementary School

Chloe Kastelic, Grade 2  
Karissee Moore, Special Education

### Washington Elementary School

Allison Andrews, Grade 1  
Elsa Mansfield, Grade 3  
Brittany Vereidi, Special Education

### Mount Baker Middle School

Danielle Pomeroy, Math  
Nicola Rodriguez, Spanish  
Samantha Sandoz, English Language Arts  
Kate Taylor, Band

### LaVenture Middle School

Case DeVries, PE & Health  
Paige Hurst, Math & Science

### LaVenture & Mount Baker

Jim Harmon, Math  
Mason Cole, Music & Choir

### Mount Vernon High School

Steve Erickson, Woodshop & Power Tech  
Mac Hopkins, Welding  
Elizabeth Riley, Language Arts  
Kelsey Sager, Math

Shiree Taylor, Family & Consumer Science

Courtney Witter, History  
Hanine Castro, Counselor

### Skagit Academy & Special Services

Monica Schmidt, Academy Teacher  
Catherine Wheeler, Psychologist

### Northwest Career & Technical Academy

David Crain, Aviation  
Arthur Wattawa, Teacher on Special Assignment

Jodi Wireman, Money & Business

