

COMMUNITY



+Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools

IN THIS ISSUE WINTER 2019 NEWSLETTER

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 2019 Levy Questions**
- **Students Explore Opportunities for Careers in Computer Science**
- **January is School Board Appreciation Month**
- **Bond Construction Progress Updates**

www.mountvernonschools.org

@MVSchools

facebook.com/mvschooldistrict

Answers to your 2019 Levy Questions



The February 12 Special Election will include two propositions related to funding for Mount Vernon Schools.

One is meant to replace our Educational Programs and Operations (EPO) Levy, though at a much different rate. The other will replace our Technology and Security Levy. If approved, both propositions will replace our current levies, passed by voters in February 2017, which expire on December 31, 2019. The voters must approve these propositions this school year to ensure continued funding.

School levies have been an important part of funding for public K-12 schools in our state for many years. And while it is always important to help ensure that voters have the information they need to make informed decisions about our levies, given the significant changes that have recently taken place in state and levy funding for schools, it is especially important that we take time to outline the major points of the new laws, how they have impacted our District, and, more importantly, our levy proposals. The following is intended to answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

Continued on inside »



NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. Postage
PAID
Mount Vernon, WA
Permit No. 30

*****ECRWSS*****
POSTAL CUSTOMER

Successful Learners Strengthening Our Community

Mount Vernon Schools
124 East Lawrence Street
Mount Vernon, WA 98273-2999
www.MountVernonSchools.org





FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.

MVHS alum Gabriel Mast is community college dean



Gabriel Mast

For Mount Vernon High School graduate Gabriel Mast, pursuit of a multi-faceted career has taken him to several countries, throughout the United States., and eventually back to his home state of Washington -- a career journey that also has offered opportunities to wear a number of vocational hats.

After graduating from MVHS in 1991, Mast earned a B.A. degree from Dickinson College in Environmental Science and Biological Anthropology, which led him to teaching positions in Europe and North and South America. After working and traveling for several years, he received a M.A.T. degree from Brown University and returned to MVHS to teach Biology. He later held teaching and senior administrative positions at Whatcom

Community College and Bellingham Technical College. Mast has since earned a Ph.D degree in Higher Education from the University of Washington and currently serves as Dean of Arts and Sciences at Skagit Valley College.

Mast credits several MVHS teachers with sparking his interest in English, history, social studies and philosophy, including Steve Clark, Trish Johnson, Dave Cornelius, Dick Dixon, Kate Armagost, and many others. "But it wasn't until my senior year," he says, "that I really became interested in science after taking Dean Summers' amazing biochemistry class."

As a dean at Skagit Valley College, Mast values the opportunity to work with a diverse body of students, some of whom are right out of high school and pursuing degrees, others who are gaining hands-on workforce skills, and adult learners who are transitioning into new careers. "There is a real focus on teaching and helping students to be successful at community colleges," he says. "I am proud to be part of that effort. It is so rewarding to see our students overcome obstacles to successfully complete their degrees or certificates."

Mast urges MVHS students to be committed to goals, but to allow for flexibility on the career journey. He also counsels that room should be made for decisions to expand some capabilities beyond previous experience and points to his recent decision to play the cello for the SVC production of "Beauty and the Beast", despite not having practiced in two decades.

“There is a real focus on teaching and helping students to be successful at community colleges...I am proud to be part of that effort.”

– Gabriel Mast



ANSWERS TO YOUR 2019 LEVY QUESTIONS

Mount Vernon School District

Q&A

What changes have been made to school levies and why?

In 2012, the state Supreme Court ruled that the State of Washington was not meeting its constitutional duty to provide ample funding for public schools, instead forcing school districts to rely on local Educational Programs and Operations levies to fund basic education services. In 2017, the Legislature passed a bill reducing the amount a school district may levy local taxpayers through their EPO levies from 28% of their total state and federal revenue to \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value or \$2,500 per student – whichever is less. EPO levies for “property poor” districts like ours were capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000, reducing our EPO levy capacity by approximately \$10 million. No changes were made to capital levies, including Technology and Security levies. The chart below shows the changes to our EPO levy cap, tax rate, and total dollar amount, for the first year of our proposed replacement levy:

Levy Lid/ Cap	Tax Rate	Total Amount
Current (as of Dec. 2018)		
28% of total state and federal revenues	\$3.93 per \$1,000	\$15,078,402
Proposed Replacement		
\$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value	\$1.50 per \$1,000	\$7,700,000 (estimated*)

* **Note** - Levy rate is capped at a maximum of \$1.50/\$1,000 of assessed value. As a result, the total levy amount is unknown until assessed values are calculated for that year.

Didn't the State increase their funding for school districts?

Yes. While they reduced the amount school districts could levy their local community for programs and operations, the Legislature increased the state property tax for schools by an additional \$0.81 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The funds generated by this increase were distributed to school districts across the state according to a new formula. However, for Mount Vernon, increased state funding does not cover the decrease in EPO levy revenues and increased operating costs. Specifically, even when accounting for state funding increases, we are facing a \$4.5 million deficit in the 2019-20 school year.

Does the EPO levy still support the same activities?

The State Supreme Court ruling emphasized that the state is legally responsible for funding basic education. These costs may not be borne by local EPO levies. The amount of state funding schools receive is based on a “prototypical schools” model, which outlines staffing, supplies, and materials typically provided for elementary, middle, and high schools. The challenge is that the number of staff funded and their salary levels are far short of employee costs for the large majority of districts across the state. We can and do use EPO funds to make up the difference by funding, beyond the state allocation, additional staff and activities including, but not limited to:

- Teachers and para-educators
- Counselors and social workers
- Services for highly capable students
- Services for students with disabilities
- Instructional materials
- Student activities
- Safety and security staff

With the reduction in our EPO levy, even when accounting for increased state funding, we will fall short an estimated \$4.5 million, in being able to retain current levels of programs and services for students.

What are the estimated costs to taxpayers for the Technology and Security Replacement Levy?

This chart shows the estimated costs of the replacement Technology and Security Levy compared to the current levy:

Tax Rate	Total Amount
Current (as of Dec. 2018)	
\$0.49 per \$1,000 of assessed property value	\$1,900,000
Proposed Replacement - 2020	
\$1.01 per \$1,000 of assessed property value	\$4,800,000
Proposed Replacement - 2021	
\$0.92 per \$1,000 of assessed property value	\$4,800,000





Why is the Technology and Security Replacement Levy being increased?

The District has funded a number of technology and security staff out of our EPO levy in an effort to keep the levy as limited as possible. With the large reduction in our EPO levy, we have shifted the majority of our technology and security staff to this levy.

What is the purpose of the Replacement Technology and Security Levy?

Funds provided by this replacement levy will be used to:

- provide students with greater access to technology in the classroom by adding mobile technology labs;
- replace and repair aging equipment;
- upgrade software licenses;
- fund support staff to maintain the District's equipment and network and to provide training for teachers in using the technology to increase student learning;
- replace outdated school security cameras;
- add keyless door entries to some doors at Mount Vernon High School.



How will the combined costs of both replacement levies and the state's increase in property taxes for schools affect Mount Vernon taxpayers?



The chart below shows the projected impact of both levies together with the state property tax. As noted, the **total dollar amount** requested by the district for both levies combined is lower than what taxpayers authorized in 2017:

EPO Levy authorized in 2017	\$15,000,000
Tech & Security Levy authorized in 2017	\$1,900,000
Total	\$16,900,000

EPO Proposed Replacement Levy	\$7,700,000
Tech & Security Proposed Replacement Levy	\$4,800,000
Total	\$12,500,000

The combined tax rate will **decrease** as well:

EPO Levy authorized in 2017	\$3.93 per \$1,000
Tech & Security Levy authorized in 2017	\$0.49 per \$1,000
Total	\$4.42 per \$1,000

EPO Proposed Replacement Levy	\$1.50 per \$1,000
Tech & Security Proposed Replacement Levy	\$1.01 per \$1,000
Total	\$2.51 per \$1,000

Continued on next page »

ANSWERS TO YOUR 2019 LEVY QUESTIONS

Continued

Q&A



As shown below, even when the recently increased state property tax for schools is considered, the total tax rate will decrease substantially.

Levies		TAX RATE PER \$1,000 OF ASSESSED VALUE		
		CURRENT LEVY RATES	2020 PROPOSED	2021 PROPOSED
Educational & Program Operations Levy	\$15 million voter approved 2/2017	\$3.93		
	\$7.7 million estimate** for 2020		\$1.50	
	\$9.3 million estimate** for 2021			\$1.50
Technology and Security Levy	\$1.9 million voter approved 2/2017	\$0.49		
	\$4.8 million total		\$1.01	
	\$4.8 million total			\$0.92
State Property Tax for Schools	Includes the \$.81 increase per state legislature	\$2.89	\$2.89	\$2.89
TOTAL TAX RATE FOR SCHOOLS		\$7.31	\$5.40	\$5.31
			<i>Lower taxes in 2020 & 2021</i>	
Total cost for a home with an assessed value of \$300,000		\$2,193	\$1,620	\$1,593

**** Note** – Levy rate is capped at a maximum of \$1.50/\$1,000 of assessed value. As a result, the total levy amount is unknown until assessed values are calculated for that year. For example, the 2020 total levy amount will be known in early 2020 when the Skagit County Assessor's Office releases 2020 assessed values.

Students Explore Opportunities for Careers in Computer Science

Amazon Corporate hosted 36 Mount Vernon High School students and their chaperones to an engaging Career Day that was packed with opportunities to learn and explore computer science.

During a tour of the corporate campus, students explored the Spheres, the Nest and other campus highlights. Amazon employees led workshops focused on resume writing, interview skills, and interaction with a career panel. "The world at Amazon is more than just a workplace. I was amazed to see how everyone treats each other like family," said MVHS senior Cristian Sanchez. "This experience excites me about jumping into the world of computer science and what Amazon does."

Students learned more about the opportunities available to them through the recently launched Amazon Future Engineers Program, a national initiative to educate and train students from underserved and low-income communities to pursue careers in computer science. "There is no doubt that our students came away from the experience with renewed knowledge to tackle the amazing career opportunities available to them," said Assistant Principal and CTE Director Ryan Beatty. "The company's focus on computer science, workplace passion, and programs like Latinos@Amazon was contagious."

The district is grateful to Amazon and staff for opening their doors and encouraging our students to pursue computer science career opportunities.

What is the timing for the February 12 Special Election?

Ballots will be mailed on or around January 23, 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 February 12.

I invite you to contact my office at (360) 428-6181 if you have questions about either of our proposed replacement levies.



Carl Bruner, Superintendent
Mount Vernon School District



The Nest at Amazon's corporate HQ

January is School Board Appreciation Month

Proclaimed as School Board Appreciation Month by Governor Inslee, January is an opportunity for the district and community to formally thank and recognize our five elected Directors. »»

School Boards are at the heart of public school governance in Washington and across the country. The Mount Vernon School Board is responsible for an organization employing over 900 staff and serving 6,800 students. The board promotes student learning by establishing a vision and mission and annual work plan, setting clear standards for accountability, establishing policy, and providing oversight for a budget totaling over \$70 million. Our Mount Vernon School Board Directors are community volunteers that generously donate their time, which includes many hours attending board meetings, work-study sessions, committee meetings and school events, and fielding questions and concerns from community members.

Students, staff and community have benefited from a uniquely collaborative and dedicated school board team that dedicates their time, attention, and efforts to those things that relate most directly to teaching and student learning. The leadership and passion of the board continues to focus on the district commitment to ensure that 100% of our students graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. **Please join us in thanking the Mount Vernon School Board!**



Wendy Ragusa



Rob Coffey



Tony Cook



Olivia DeLeon



Larry Otos



MVSD Board of Directors was recognized with the 2018 Board of Distinction Award by the Washington State School Directors' Association. L to R- Tony Cook, Robert Coffey, Olivia DeLeon, Superintendent Carl Bruner, Larry Otos. Director Wendy Ragusa is not shown. For more information: <http://www.mountvernonschools.org/Board>

Washington State Teacher of the Year Robert Hand partnered with Inspirus Credit Union to provide **600 new coats for students**, which MVHS students helped to distribute.



Bond Construction Progress Updates

Madison Elementary Rebuild



Check out the Work Zone Webcam to see daily progress: <https://bit.ly/2MusgXG>



The benefits of careful oversight and excellent communication and coordination between the District, Lydig Construction, and TCF Architects continues to reap benefits for the Madison Elementary project. Despite rising construction costs and a tight timeline, the project is nearing the halfway mark and is currently on schedule and on budget. It is scheduled to open in Fall 2019.

Mount Vernon High School



Planning efforts have picked up speed at Mount Vernon High School. Bond projects on this campus will include:

- Modernization of Old Main
- Fine Arts building tenant improvements
- Replacement of the Ag Shop
- Construction of new classrooms

Given the complications that can arise in the process of modernizing an historic building, Old Main has been prioritized in the sequence. The project team is working with the high school to determine how best to relocate students during the 18 months Old Main is projected to be under construction. Ideas are being evaluated based on safety, capacity, proximity to the high school, convenience, and cost. The order for the other MVHS campus projects is currently being evaluated.

Madison Elementary students, staff and parents generously **gathered food and presents into baskets** to support 46 grateful school families and 65 children!