

COMMUNITY



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WINTER 2020 EDITION

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.

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Superintendent's Message

We are presently around the midpoint of the Governor's six week closure of all K-12 schools in the state implemented in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus. We are trying to fully understand and adjust to what it means to serve students and families in this unfamiliar environment. Educators are motivated first and foremost by the opportunity to work with and make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth. Working in the absence of students has been disorienting.

As the efforts to restrict social contact have increased, most of our employees are either working from home or on a leave due to being at-risk of contracting COVID-19. Those who remain are providing leadership for the ongoing operation of the District, supporting essential functions (i.e., maintenance and custodial services, human resources, financial transactions, planning for teaching and learning, fielding calls to schools, departments, and the district office) and providing those services to our community requested by the Governor, including:

- distribution of meals to approximately 1,500 students daily; and
- childcare for families of first responders and health care workers.

Access to school facilities has been restricted. Facility rentals have been discontinued. Our playgrounds have been closed as we are unable to maintain and sanitize them regularly.

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Superintendent's Message Continued

As challenging as organizing food distribution and childcare services has been, transitioning to remote and virtual teaching for students remains the largest challenge. The power of teaching is rooted in the relationship and interaction between students and teachers. Shifting to a model that is based on remote contact with students and families has been jarring for all of us. Yet, public safety requires us to do just that at least through April 24. We are fully committed to this challenge.

Over the years, online learning has been promoted by many as an effective substitute for classroom instruction. Certainly, over the past several years technology-assisted instruction has become an important part of all classrooms. Yet, for the majority of students, technology is most effective as a tool to support, rather than replace classroom teaching. In the current environment where classroom instruction is not an option, we are obligated to maximize technology options to provide teaching solutions.

Thanks to the support of our taxpayers, we have been able to invest significant resources over the past 11 years in classroom technology, infrastructure, and software. These investments have provided enough devices to allow students daily access to technology in the classroom. We are working to get chromebooks into the hands of students who need them at home. But these devices are not useful unless students are able to access the internet from home. We know this is a challenge for a number of our families and are working with suppliers on solutions. In the meantime, we are preparing to provide hard copy supplements to lessons for students who need them.

State Superintendent, Chris Reykdal, has called on all districts to begin providing "flexible instruction" based on district and student resources and student needs by March 30, with an emphasis on high school seniors. Many of our schools have been able to reach this timeline. We are working with others to establish supports and systems they need to provide instructional support for all students.

The effectiveness of our new model of remote teaching will require the direct engagement of students and families. This will necessitate a large mindshift on the part of both. We know that intentions aside, some families are facing challenges that limit their ability to provide the level of support at home that other families are able to provide. This works against our goal of enhancing equity for all students. Yet we are committed to doing everything we can to help meet the needs of all students, while following those practices necessary to keep our staff and students safe.

Many questions have yet to be answered. Will school start again on April 27 or will the closure be extended? How will high school seniors be able to earn all of their required credits for high school graduation? What about college entrance and AP exams? Will we have adequate staff to maintain meal service and child care up to April 24? How do we grade those students who we are unable to reach during the closure, for whatever reason? How do we make up for lost learning in the future?

The situation is fluid and, rather than wait for answers, we must push forward based on the best information we have at the time.

We are enormously grateful for those in our community who are on the front lines of the battle to contain the pandemic including all those in health care, law enforcement, firefighters and paramedics, childcare, grocery workers, and the many other essential services that place individuals in contact with the public on a daily basis. In our District, this includes all those involved in meal preparation and delivery, custodial and maintenance services, security, secretarial services, childcare, and administration.

In the coming weeks, we will provide updates through our website and social media sites.

Stay safe during this uncertain and challenging time!



Carl Bruner, Superintendent
Mount Vernon School District



FEATURED ALUMNI

Our Alumni are working to change the world around us.



Gracie Ermi

Gracie, a 2012 Bulldog Alumna, is a true Skagitonian. She and her sisters all attended Mount Vernon schools including Little Mountain, Jefferson, Mount Baker, and Mount Vernon High School. Her mother, stepmother, and father all have taught in the district.

Gracie discovered her love of math and physics during high school, where she also realized her love of band. She was the drum major of the marching band and she played baritone saxophone in the jazz band and wind ensemble. Not to rest there, she also played volleyball and golf.

Gracie attended Western Washington University, earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science. Vulcan, Inc. hired her after completing her internship with them.

Gracie is an avid community volunteer who helps kids learn to code and encourages them to consider computer science as a career. She was recently selected as an American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) If/Then Ambassador, along with 124 other women in STEM fields from across the country. Through this platform, they share their stories and serve as role models to encourage pursuit of careers in the STEM fields. Gracie said, "That has been a huge honor to be recognized alongside those women, and it has given me an incredible network of women to learn from and work with to further my own engagement with kids."

Gracie valued her high school teachers who instilled in her a love of math and problem solving. She remembers fondly band instructor Jacob Scherr, who provided her with opportunities and pushed her to believe in herself as not only a musician, but also a leader.

When starting college, Gracie enrolled in a math trajectory. After taking a computer science class, she discovered the many opportunities available in that field and switched her degree path. She now uses technology to aid wildlife conservation, utilizing machine learning to build artificial intelligence. Her projects have helped to protect elephants, sharks, rays, and killer whales.

Her current project includes using computer technology to locate and separate images of animals in their natural habitat from hundreds of thousands of images. Scientists are then able to identify the animal's health and environment. These images may include those from the air, land, or water.

Gracie relates computer coding to a puzzle. By solving those puzzles, she is able to gain the reward and satisfaction from using scientific results to make a positive difference in the world. Gracie values her writing and speaking abilities that she learned in school as they allow her to share her ideas with other scientists. She believes science, when communicated clearly, allows the listener, no matter their background, to learn and share in the exciting things happening in the science and other STEM fields.

Gracie's philosophy on careers is to try everything. She said, "Don't count yourself out before you give something a real chance." Use your own unique ideas and perspectives, and build a great community around you to ensure your success.

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Don't count yourself out before you give something a real chance.
– Gracie Ermi



HiCap students organized a successful movie night fundraiser, raising \$1700.94 to benefit the Skagit Humane Society. The fundraiser planning included students researching the organization, contacting local businesses for donations, and creating flyers, advertising, and finally hosting the event.

Mr. Dabbs' annual class coin drive has once again raised a new high. This year, the 5th grade class class raised \$413 to help Skagit families in need. In addition, the class took a field trip to Helping Hands Food Bank.

Change in School Board Membership

In November's general election, Laura Cailloux was elected to the seat vacated by Olivia DeLeon, who moved out of Director District 1 toward the end of her term.



Ms. DeLeon was elected to the Board in 2015. Throughout her term, she was a strong advocate for all students and families and a steadfast supporter of our mission.

Dr. Cailloux, who previously served on the Board from 2006 - 2011, has served in a variety of faculty and administrative leadership positions at Skagit Valley College, including Vice President of the Whidbey Island Campus and Centers. She currently teaches in the Adult Basic Education program and provides leadership for the Latino/a Leadership Initiative Collaborative and Leadership Skagit. She took her seat on the Board on January 8.

Census 2020

The Mount Vernon School District is proud to support the 2020 US Census. We want to ensure that our community is accurately represented. This count affects the allocation of funding for our community's public resources (e.g., roads, hospitals, schools), how we plan for the future, and our voice in government. For the first time, in 2020 the U.S. Census Bureau will accept responses online. To learn more about what to expect, visit 2020census.gov.



COVID-19 District Updates

The district will continue to post updates during the school closure on our website and various social media channels. Please check in regularly for updates on our continued services as we continue to receive guidance during these uncertain times.

mountvernonschools.org/COVID19

Supplemental Educational Programs & Operations (EPO) Levy

We are extremely grateful to our voters for their passage of our Supplemental EPO Levy on November 5.

Intended to lessen the impact of the \$3.5 million in budget cuts we implemented for this school year due to our loss of levy revenue, the Supplemental EPO Levy allows us to collect the difference between the former state imposed levy cap of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value and the new cap of \$2.50, approved by the Legislature last spring.

Supplemental EPO funds will be used to:

- restore some of the nearly 20 teaching positions eliminated for this school year due to the \$1.50 cap;
- begin the process of updating reading and science curriculum materials for grades K - 5;
- restore assistant principal positions needed to ensure adequate supervision; and
- increase academic and social emotional supports for students.

While the Supplemental EPO Levy impacts property taxes, the combined rate for all property taxes going to public schools is lower than it was in 2017, prior to the Legislature's changes to the state's system for funding public schools.



FACILITIES RELATED UPDATES

Change of Location for MVHS Graduation Ceremony



Over the years, it has become increasingly difficult to accommodate our growing numbers of students and families attending commencement ceremonies in the Mount Vernon High School gymnasium. While a number of neighboring districts hold graduation ceremonies in their outdoor stadiums, our seating capacity and lack of covered grandstands make that impractical.

After several months of discussions and surveys involving Mount Vernon High School seniors and their families, the School Board approved the District's recommendation to relocate our graduation ceremony, beginning this year, to the Angel of the Winds Arena. Located in downtown Everett, this facility will accommodate a much larger audience and includes a number of services. The District will provide transportation for students and families. Previously scheduled for June 12, graduation has been rescheduled for June 5 in order to allow use of this new venue.

District Properties



With the second phase of our 2016 Bond projects underway, we are now turning our attention to longer term facility needs and options. The closure of Lincoln Elementary School and relocation of the Skagit Valley Family YMCA to their new building on Hoag Road has us considering the long term future of the Lincoln and Lawrence Street properties, particularly in light of our current and projected student enrollment.

There are a number of variables to consider, including the cost of demolishing or renovating older buildings compared to the benefit of selling those properties and building new. Also for consideration is the District's future need for space to house students while schools are being renovated; the need for space close to the high school to house satellite programs as the school continues to grow; and the need for vacant land to serve as a site for a future school.

Wanting to avoid a piecemeal approach that could jeopardize future options, the School Board has commissioned a comprehensive review of all District properties and recommendations for retaining, selling, and/or repurposing our current facilities and land parcels. This report is expected in April.

Construction Update

By the time of publication, work on the new Agriculture Shop on the north side of the Mount Vernon High School (MVHS) campus will be almost complete.

This 7,500 square foot space will eventually replace the 1952 Agriculture building. In the immediate future, it will be used as temporary classroom space to house students while Old Main is undergoing renovation.

The renovation of the MVHS 1922 Fine Arts building is well underway and expected to be at or near substantial completion in April. First built as the high school gymnasium, this building is being reconfigured to house the administration and counseling offices, currently located in Old Main. Several classrooms will remain on the bottom floor.

In June, all classrooms and offices will be relocated in preparation for the renovation of Old Main. This project is expected to last for approximately 18 months and will be followed by:

- the demolition of the 1952 agriculture building, and
- the construction of a new classroom building.



School Board Names Dr. Ismael Vivanco as New Superintendent

The Mount Vernon School Board has named Dr. Ismael Vivanco as its new superintendent, to follow Dr. Carl Bruner's June 30 retirement. Vivanco currently serves as the Superintendent for both the Palisades and Orondo School Districts. The board approved Vivanco's appointment in a unanimous vote on Thursday, March 5, 2020. Dr. Vivanco was selected from a large pool of well-qualified applicants for his demonstrated collaborative leadership qualities, focus on equity for all students, and rich background that resonates with staff, students, and community. "The board was impressed with Dr. Vivanco's passion for educating the whole student and belief in equity for all," said Board President, Larry Otos. "Dr. Vivanco brings the enthusiasm, drive, and energy that became abundantly clear in the interview process. Vivanco will be a change agent for our district as we move forward."



Vivanco is a Skagit County native and graduate of Burlington-Edison High School. He will be returning home after 26 years. When asked what interested him about the Mount Vernon School District, he commended the district for its positive work being done on equity, diversity, and inclusivity for all students. Vivanco added, "I am happy to be returning to the Skagit Valley and to give back to a place that has given so much to me." Vivanco is scheduled to begin on July 1, 2020.

Thank you, MVSD employees!

Thank you to our dedicated staff for helping make these essential services possible!

