

COMMUNITY



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IN THIS ISSUE

FALL 2020 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

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Welcome to the 2020-21 School Year!

Welcome to Fall of the 2020-21 school year. It has been four months since I became the Superintendent of the Mount Vernon School District. This is a tremendous honor and I value the trust put in me by the school board, families, staff, and community. For the past few months, my focus has been on making sure the district developed the best way to teach our students and support our families for remote learning to begin the school year. This process brought opportunities to hear from many families, staff, and administrators. I have listened and learned from countless people who want only the best for our students and families.



Along this interesting path, we have engaged in conversations with your legislative representatives, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Skagit County Public Health and Community Services Department, community leaders, district administrators and staff, families and many more. I have learned much about the variety of programs offered to support our families. Programs such as the Extended Meal Services, Parent Academy, partnerships with community organizations, and alternative learning programs demonstrate the depth and breadth of how our community works together to support student learning and life. This doesn't happen overnight. It takes trust, caring, and leading by example. It also takes listening and seeing what can be done and how, together, we can do it.

In this issue, you will learn about our Nutrition Services department, the status of our construction projects - made possible by your support of the 2016 Bond, how our Bulldog alum have used their education and experiences to enhance their community, and more. These big picture projects come down to one common goal - 100% of our students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education, careers, and life.

Mount Vernon Alumni Return to Teach Future Bulldog Graduates



In this issue, the Mount Vernon School District would like to recognize a group of Mount Vernon High School alumni who have returned this fall to teach at the district. We asked each of them to share a little about their background and why they chose their Alma Mater as their place to make a difference. On this page you will read about Jasmine Martinez, James Matson, Jasmine Sanchez, and Kylie Arrellano.



Jasmine Martinez

Jasmine is a 2011 MVHS graduate who also attended Mount Baker Middle School. After graduating from MVHS she went on to study at Western Washington University. She received her bachelor of arts in history and social studies in 2016 and returned to earn her teaching certificate in 2017. Jasmine joins the MVSD team as a LaVenture Middle School teacher. She teaches Dual Language Social Studies, English Language Arts, and AVID.

Jasmine credits three MVHS teachers for their support that contributed to her success: Mr. Ruiz who offered guidance, Mrs. Ousselin for offering a safe space within her classroom, and Mr. Ellefson for pushing her to do better.

"I am looking forward to giving back to the community that gave me so much and taught me so much, most importantly working with the students."

Kylie attended Washington Elementary, LaVenture Middle School, and graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 2013. She went on to study at Western Washington University where she received her degree in Elementary Mathematics Education in 2017.

Kylie remembers Mr. Meldahl was one of her biggest supporters in high school. He often pushed her further than she believed she could go and taught her that no goal was too big. She follows in the footsteps of her mother, who is a teacher at Washington Elementary. Through her high school and college career, she enjoyed the 'aha' moment on kids' faces and creating relationships with students that didn't have enough support at home. She is excited to continue that work every day at MVSD.

"I am so excited to come back and teach in the community that I grew up in."



Kylie Arrellano



James Matson

James joined the Mount Vernon School District to teach 6th grade Language Arts and Art at LaVenture Middle School. James, a 2015 Bulldog graduate, received his degree in English with a focus on creative writing and a teaching certificate from Western Washington University in 2018. James was inspired by his high school teachers to pursue teaching and become an educator who works to push students to a love of education and growth, while providing a positive and safe environment in which to learn. He credits Bonnie Killion, Anya Keen, and Nicole Preston for providing that inspiration.

"I look forward to continuing working with the awesome staff and administration at LaVenture. I am very excited to be working with such a great school."

Jasmine returns to the Mount Vernon School District to teach LaVenture Middle School Health & PE. She graduated from Western Washington University in 2013 with a bachelors in science education. Jasmine attended Washington, Madison, and Centennial elementary schools, LaVenture Middle School, and graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 2007.

Jasmine chose to pursue teaching as her profession because she remembers feeling the presence of her teachers as they put effort into her education and well-being. She wants to help students, especially those that need extra support. Jasmine wants to be a teacher that reflects the student population and one that students of color can see their future selves in.



Jasmine Sanchez

Introduction continued

That means the kindergarten student learning how to be a part of a classroom, the 3rd grader celebrating their accomplishment of reading at grade level, the 6th grade student finding new opportunities to learn through a wide choice of electives, and the high school student successfully completing their math course or earning their seal of biliteracy. Student success comes from every teacher, every family, every community partner, and every student.

While we know that remote learning is not ideal for students, it is the reality that we have been given for the start of this school year. As a district, we were charged with developing a plan that will keep our students learning, engaged, and progressing. The Remote Plus for a Safe Start Learning Model, designed to capture the best opportunities for the most numbers of students, does just that. Developed with input from nearly 100 staff members - many who are parents, it has incorporated creativity into daily lessons. With the support of the Information Technology Department, led by Tim Papendorf, Supervisor, we have distributed over 6500 Chromebooks, 300 hotspots, and logged countless hours of support calls. Our Food Services Department, led by David Connors, Supervisor, and Transportation Department, led by Kelly Johnson, worked together to find a way to safely provide 85,812 healthy meals to students in just the first 24 days of school. Not only is the number remarkable by

volume, but it also demonstrates the significant community need for food support. Students need healthy nutrition to learn.

We will continue to work closely with the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Governor's office, state and county Health Departments, and our district neighbors to determine what is best for our students to return to the expert teaching that you have every right to expect. This goal must be balanced with the necessary efforts to protect the health and safety of our students, family, staff, and community. With the continued challenges that lay ahead, including finding our way back to a more traditional teaching model, we know that by working together with our community and listening to the important messages being shared, we will give our students the education, security, and emotional well-being they need.

Please stay healthy and safe.

Warm regards,

Ismael Vivanco, Ed. D
Superintendent
Mount Vernon School District



Construction Update

Early last spring a new shop building was completed on the north end of the Mount Vernon High School campus. Ultimately, the new shop will house CTE programs. In the meantime, the building will be used as general classroom space during the remodel of the Old Main building.

Also in anticipation of upcoming work on Old Main, the Fine Arts building was remodeled and repurposed as the administrative and counseling center. This new "Administration" building was completed this summer. Administrative staff and counselors have moved in, as well as other staff that are housed in this remodeled space.

Work on Old Main is scheduled to begin in the Winter of 2021. Old Main will see many improvements, including seismic upgrades, new stair towers on each end of the building, improvement to and enlargement of the auditorium space, and an increased number of classrooms. All of this will occur while retaining the unique feel and look of this 100 year old building.

Still to come as part of the voter-approved 2016 Bond is additional classroom space on the high school campus and additional classroom space at LaVenture Middle School.



Mount Vernon High School Administration Building

Family Engagement

Each of our Mount Vernon schools has at its heart a liaison who is hard at work for our families. This fall, liaisons have been making home visits to as many families as possible to help those who had not or could not connect to online classes make every day count. Thank you, liaisons, for everything you do!



Racial Equity Policy

“The Mount Vernon School District defines equity as providing every student what they need to be successful. When students engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchanges, when race is no longer a predictor of student performance, and when each student and family feel a sense of community within the Mount Vernon Schools, we are closer to this goal.”

This definition of equity comes from the Racial Equity Policy that was recently adopted by the School Board in Spring 2020. The policy is a result of the MVSD Equity Initiative, established in 2017 after the school board and district administrators saw a need for more equitable systems and practices. The Board of Directors has been hands-on in the development of the equity initiative that works in support of the district’s goal of 100% graduation by seeking to provide each student with the tools and resources they need to be successful.

The MVSD Equity Initiative kicked off through a partnership with the University of Florida’s Lastinger Center. Consultants from this program led several school-based teams through an action research project lasting the 2017-2018 school year. The project was a catalyst in developing the district’s current equity model which now encompasses Equity Leads, Equity Lead Facilitators, the Racial Equity Policy, and the forthcoming Equity Action Plan.

The Equity Lead model supports the professional learning around equity for MVSD employees. Each school has a small team of teacher leaders, called Equity Leads. They work with building principals to plan and deliver learning opportunities for staff. At the district level, the role of Equity Lead Facilitators was implemented in the Fall of 2020 as a way to organize the work happening throughout the district and support each building’s team of Equity Leads. The Facilitators have worked closely with new Equity Leads as well as the Transportation Department, administrators and new educators to provide learning experiences in support of the Equity Initiative.

With the passing of the district’s new Racial Equity Policy, a committed team of educators continue to work closely under the leadership of Dr. Vivanco and the Board of Directors to develop an Equity Action Plan to take the next step of implementing the Racial Equity Policy across the district. The district will continue to elicit feedback from community stakeholders as the work progresses to ensure the success of every student in the Mount Vernon School District. While we look forward to the forthcoming Equity Action Plan, there are several celebrations of the Equity Initiative that have taken place over the last several years:

- 168 MVSD staff have participated in a “Leading for Equity” Summer Institute
- A total of 42 teacher leaders have served as Equity Leads over the past 3 years
- The implementation of the Equity Lens Tool (referenced in the Racial Equity Policy) to guide Fall Reopening and PLUS services in Fall 2020
- The development of a new social studies course for all Freshman focusing on themes of identity, social responsibility, social justice, and social change by developing students’ critical consciousness and creating a space for civil discourse and dialogue
- Partnering with Erin Jones, Equity Consultant, to guide conversations at the High School level
- The selection of our new Superintendent, who was attracted to our district in part for our progressive Equity Initiative

WHAT'S NEW AT MVSD?

Changes and updates in our district

Aspire Academy Opens

The Mount Vernon School District is pleased to announce the fall opening of our district's newest school, Aspire Academy. Aspire Academy has been established to provide a quality education to high school students in a small school setting. Students work through their classes at their own pace. Like the rest of our district, Aspire is currently providing courses remotely, but when safety restrictions are lifted, Aspire will offer in-person instruction that includes personalized, project-based learning. As students build organizational skills, they will learn to design their own projects that are based on their interests - making learning relevant to what they want to do after high school. Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning.

“With such a close staff, it is clear that the focus of Aspire is to provide equitable and alternative learning for students from all backgrounds.”
-Taylor Latimore

Aspire is not an easy way to earn a high school diploma, but many students find it more manageable. Students take fewer classes at a time and when they begin attending on-campus, they will have a half-day schedule or, under certain circumstances, could remain in a fully remote program. Students find they can get a lot of help from their teachers as needed to progress through their classes. Instruction is provided individually and in small groups. Aspire maintains high expectations for all students and welcomes all students to consider enrollment.

Teachers have found starting a brand new school both fun and challenging. “I love working at Aspire Academy because I get to customize the learning experience that my students have,” shares Aspire teacher, Taylor Latimore. “Even though I see students virtually for the time being, I am still learning a lot about the amazing students at Aspire and I am able to meet them where they are academically, while pushing their understanding of science and math.”

Aspire Academy is in operation at its temporary location at 2120 N. LaVenture Rd. Aspire will eventually move to a permanent location in the Skagit I-5 Business Park on Cedardale Rd. in the next few months. For more information about Aspire Academy, please contact Joy Walton Kawasaki, Principal, at 360-428-6216, or aspire@mvsd320.org.

New Face in Leadership



Jon Ronngren has joined the Mount Vernon School District as the Human Resources Director. Before coming to MVSD this summer, Jon was the principal of Anacortes High School for nine years. Prior to his building administrative roles, Jon was a high school guidance counselor for 16 years, including in Coeur d'Alene, Bellingham, and 4 years at Mount Vernon

High School (1992-96). Jon is enjoying getting to know new staff and running into old acquaintances from his time at MVHS. “I work with a great group of individuals at the district office and they are very helpful with me as I learn new staff, programs and processes.” Jon is working toward his superintendent's credential through Western Washington University. We are grateful to have Jon as part of our administration and school district.

Welcome to Student Board Representatives

At the September 8th board meeting, three student board representatives took their oath of office for the 2020-2021 school year. Mount Vernon High School seniors, Brian Conde-Martinez, Alexa Grechishkin, and Chase Rochelle join the school board this year as liaisons for the board and MVHS student population. They are excited to represent their peers this academic year. “I look forward to helping propel our community forward and gaining more insight into the inner workings of our schools,” said Brian Conde-Martinez. Another board representative, Alexa Grechishkin shared, “I am excited to participate in discussions about future changes being made and offer my opinion from the perspective of a student.”



Student board representatives (L-R): Chase Rochelle, Alexa Grechishkin, and Brian Conde-Martinez.

Meal Services

The Nutritional Services Department, in collaboration with the Transportation Department have been providing extended meal services for families throughout our community. In addition to daily meal services at each of our schools, staff has been providing meal packages for families to pick up in the evenings. Each meal package includes 5 breakfasts and 5 lunches per child so that families can access meals for the entire week with the convenience of only one pickup. This service is intended for families who are unable to make it to our daily meal services at each of our schools during the lunch service.

In the first few weeks of extended meal services, the MVSD Nutritional Services Department averaged 500 meals each evening, while daytime services served an average of 3600 meals per day. These services would not be possible without the dedication of our Nutritional Services and Transportation departments.



Nutritional Services Staff provide meals to families during extended services.



Scan to access our Meal Services Schedules. >>



Pumpkin Distribution

Thank you to the Mount Vernon Public Schools Foundation and their partnership with Gordon Farms for providing pumpkins to K-2 students at all elementary schools.

