

# COMMUNITY



Mount  
Vernon  
Schools

# +Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools



## IN THIS ISSUE

## FALL 2017 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

- *Community Kickoff for the District's 100% Graduation Goal*
- *Your Levy Dollars at Work*
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- *Every day, all day makes the difference*
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- *New Writing Curriculum Comes to our Elementary Schools*

[www.mountvernonschools.org](http://www.mountvernonschools.org)

## Welcome to our fall 2017 edition of Community Link!



In this publication, we have provided you with updates on our District's:

- 1 Commitment to our students and community.
- 2 Latest efforts to improve learning outcomes for all of our students.
- 3 Outreach to the community to create partnerships that will support on time graduation for 100% of our students.
- 4 Construction projects funded by our 2016 voter-approved bond.
- 5 Current plans for use of funds provided by our Educational Programs & Operations and Technology replacement levies.

In addition, we have highlighted another successful Bulldog alumnus! We have also included an update on the changes to funding for public schools included in House Bill 2242, passed by the State Legislature on June 30, 2017.

If you have questions about any of the enclosed information, feel free to contact my office at 360-428-6181.

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

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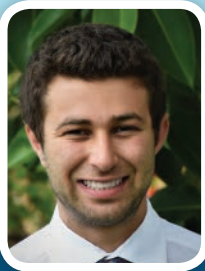




# FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.

## MVHS alum finds new challenges in Africa



Jeff Levine

For Jeff Levine, a 2013 graduate of Mount Vernon High School, reaching out for the next adventure and measuring his success by personal growth began, in part, in Mount Vernon classrooms. It was there, he says, that both his curiosity and imagination were sparked. He still has his Aladdin poster from Mr. G's and Ms. Vaughn's fifth and sixth grade classes and he credits Mr. Shepard's and Mr. Shasta's Honors English courses at MVHS for helping to expand his world view.

Levine earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in Environmental Studies and International

Relations from the University of Southern California and is currently a Princeton in Africa Fellow working with a developmental consulting firm in Blantyre, Malawi. The international Princeton in Africa program offers year-long fellowships to recent university graduates from 36 countries who work on projects to improve public health, education, economic development, environmental conservation and more.

"I've always been interested in the interaction between technology, agriculture and the developing world," says Levine. "The Princeton in Africa fellowship offers me opportunities to work at the intersection of all three." Currently Levine is helping to advance agricultural development projects in Malawi, and uses GIS mapping technology to prevent elephants from trampling crops in nearby national parks. He says he values the chance to work on multiple projects under the fellowship program and to make an impact on a daily basis.

Levine's advice to MVHS students is to "take on that new challenge and see where it leads. Acquiring new skills and exploring new issues don't have to end when you leave school. Learning is a lifelong pursuit."

*"...I've always been interested in the interaction between technology, agriculture and the developing world."*

– Jeff Levine





# Community Kickoff for the District's 100% Graduation Goal



On October 12, over 100 people attended a community kickoff for the District's 100% graduation goal at Skagit Valley College. The event was jointly sponsored by Mount Vernon Schools, Skagit Valley College, and Western Washington University.

School Board president, Dr. Rob Coffey, introduced the Board's goal, which was inspired by the successful efforts of the Sunnyside, Tacoma, and Highline School Districts. Though what we are doing works well for many of our students, he stressed that we must do better for those students who are not graduating within four years.

Skagit Valley College President, Dr. Tom Keegan, emphasized the importance of high school graduation in light of changes in the labor market. By 2020, 65% of jobs are expected to require some level of education or training beyond high school. He shared that partnerships between schools and the community are essential for student success.

Superintendent Bruner shared that communities that have been successfully increasing their graduation rates have partnered with parents and other community members to:

- Promote the importance of high school completion.
- Mentor students.
- Provide paid summer internships in local businesses.

Madison parents, Jeremy and Jamie McCullough closed by encouraging those in attendance to commit to supporting our 100% initiative in one or more of these ways.

If you were unable to attend and would like more information about pathways to graduation for all students, please call 360-428-6110.



## Your Levy Dollars at Work

This school year, our Educational Programs and Operations Levy funds are used to:

- Maintain average class sizes below 20 students in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade.
- Purchase and implement a new, comprehensive elementary writing curriculum.
- Purchase and implement new social studies curriculum programs for grades 6–8.
- Review our physical education and health curriculum, and high school English curriculum.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers and support staff.

Technology & Security Levy funds are allowing the District to:

- Replace and add over 1,700 Chromebooks across all schools and grade levels.
- Expand audio enhancement technology into 3rd through 5th grade classrooms.
- Expand wireless access points to cover every classroom and common space across the District.
- Begin to install keyless door locks across the District.

Photos from Community Kickoff for the District's 100% Graduation Goal.



# Every day, all day makes the difference



Across the district, principals and staff are creatively working with students and families to emphasize the importance of on-time, all-day attendance.

*“We want every student to be successful and studies show that good attendance habits and learning go hand in hand.” says Dr. Joni Swanson, Executive Director of Teaching & Learning for the District.*

Celebrating and rewarding daily and weekly attendance are just a few of the many tools our schools are using to raise student awareness of the importance of consistent attendance habits.” In October, a friendly inter-school challenge for the highest monthly attendance resulted in Lincoln Elementary capturing the traveling trophy with a 96% record!

In addition to providing a welcoming school environment and engaging learning opportunities for students, staff are focused on early detection of absenteeism so they can partner with families on effective solutions. Absences can add up quickly and research demonstrates that when a student misses just 10% or more of school days - 18 or more days in a school year—they are much more likely to fall behind in reading and math, and ultimately, be less likely to graduate on time.

Ensuring regular and on-time student attendance is a crucial first step toward reaching high school graduation for 100% of our students. Let’s work together to make it happen!

## Construction Project Update: New Elementary School off E. Division

Thanks to close communication and collaboration between the District’s project managers, Lydig Construction, and TCF Architects, the new elementary school off E. Division St. remains on schedule and on budget.

Site utilities are installed, the building foundation work is completed, and the exterior walls are beginning to take shape. Structural steel is delivered and installation has begun.

Thanks to all of those who submitted suggestions for naming the new school. The School Board should have reached a decision by the end of November.

**Don’t forget to check out the construction progress at:**  
<http://eastdivision.lydig.com>



## Building a community of caring

*Here are a few ways we can work together to address absenteeism.\**



**Parents** can set the routines that help their children get to school on time every day.



**Health care programs** can take preventive steps to keep children from getting sick and ensure schools are equipped to address the needs of children with chronic illness.



**Preschool instructors and early care providers** can help families and children build good attendance habits.



**Foundations** can support public efforts to improve attendance.



**Afterschool programs** can reach out to the families of chronically absent children to uncover and address barriers to attendance and help children catch up with school work.

\*used with permission of Attendance Works



# *Our commitment to our students and community!*

## **Our Goal**

100% of students will graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in post-secondary education, careers, and life.

## **Our Vision**

To graduate inspired and critical thinkers who embrace diversity and are committed to the betterment of their own lives and the lives of others.

## **Our Mission**

To expect, encourage, and facilitate the pursuit of excellence and life-long learning in our students, equipping them for future success and happiness.

## **Key Strategies**

### *Early Learning*

Promote school readiness for kindergarten and foster successful transitions throughout grades K-3, ensuring students meet grade level standards in reading and math by 3rd grade.

### *Powerful Teaching & Learning*

Inspire every student to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, through high expectations and instruction that is engaging, research-based, and relevant.

### *Family and Community Engagement*

Embrace the strengths of the district's various communities and organizations. Work together with families and other partners to provide students with powerful learning experiences that lead to their success.

### *Individual Determination and Creativity*

Encourage, develop, and strengthen student independence, perseverance, creativity, and a willingness to take risks and embrace new ideas, laying the foundation for continuous learning.



**64% increase** of MVHS  
Advanced Placement course  
enrollment in last year.



# New School Funding System passes State Legislature

In June, the Legislature passed major changes in the way public schools are funded in the state of Washington.

Intended to respond to the State Supreme Court's ruling that required the state to meet its constitutional obligation to provide ample funding for public schools, the bill implements a number of changes over the next four years, decreasing school districts' reliance on local levies while increasing the state property tax. The law is lengthy, spanning 121 pages, and complex. While the rules (i.e., WACs and RCWs) clarifying the details have yet to be adopted, the bill:

- Revises and increases state salary allocations for education staff.
- Revises state and local education funding contributions.
- Increases transparency and accountability of education funding.

Several of the most significant changes take effect in the 2018-19 school year. At this time, we are unsure what it will mean for Mount Vernon Schools. We expect to learn more as the rules are finalized in the coming weeks.

# New Writing Curriculum Comes to our Elementary Schools

Students and teachers in the elementary schools in Mount Vernon are using a new writing program this year, Writing Fundamentals.

This is the first time in many years that all teachers in grades K-5 and special education classes are using a common curriculum to teach writing. The selection process began in the spring of 2016 and continued throughout the 2016-17 school year. Two programs were "piloted" by 30 teachers across all grade levels and in all elementary schools. Parents of children who were in the pilot teachers' classrooms were invited to share feedback gathered from their children about the program.

*"Students are writing personal stories, informational papers, persuasive articles, and in the style of specific authors."*

Writing Fundamentals was chosen by an overwhelming majority of the pilot program teachers. The program features "mentor" reading books, so students can listen to the author's ideas and learn about how to write in different forms or genres. Students are writing personal stories, informational papers, persuasive articles, and in the style of specific authors. A Spanish version of the program is available to students at Madison, the District's dual language school. Teachers will continue to receive professional learning throughout the 2017-18 school year. Thank you to the residents of Mount Vernon who made this new curriculum possible through levy funds.



**One Million Meals – MVSD Food Services serves nearly 1 million meals each year. (combo of breakfast, lunch, dinner programs)**