

# COMMUNITY



# +Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools



## IN THIS ISSUE

## WINTER 2018 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

- *More on Attendance*
- *Partnership With University Of Florida*
- *Partnering With Our Community*
- *Parent Academies*
- *Legislative Visits*

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## Our Partnership for Equity

The word, equity, is just about everywhere you turn in publications related to education and other social sciences these days.

Like other words or phrases that become popular, it is in danger of becoming just another catch phrase. However, equity has deep importance to public education and it is important that we are clear about what it means for both educators and students.

From the time public schools first took hold around 1830 until the latter part of the 20th century, their commonly accepted purpose was to sort students according to their perceived abilities. Those who seemed destined for higher education and careers in white-collar jobs and who typically had financially stable families were placed in a college preparatory track. Those who were seen as better suited to blue-collar jobs were placed in a vocational track.

Until 1954, African American students were typically educated in segregated schools. Children and youth with disabilities were not assured a free and appropriate public education until 1975.

Teaching was directed to the "typical" learner. That some students on either end of the learning continuum would disengage was accepted as an unfortunate reality and it was taken for granted that many students would not complete high school.

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# FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.

## MVHS alum works with family to provide quality community dental services...



Kjersten Heron, DDS

There's something to be said for keeping a profession in the family. Just ask Mount Vernon High School alum Kjersten Heron, DDS. Today the Mount Vernon High School graduate practices at Division Street Dental with her parents and colleagues, Drs. Dana and Vicki Otterholt, who have been providing dental services to residents of the Skagit Valley since 1977.

After graduating from MVHS in 2005, Heron earned a Bachelors degree from Pacific Lutheran University and a DDS degree from the University of Washington. She gained experience working for two years at a health clinic in the small rural community of Stronghurst, IL before returning home to Mount Vernon to join her family's dentistry practice in 2015.

At MVHS Heron enjoyed Mr. Meldahl's graphic design and photography classes and honors English with Mr. Hanrahan, but credits an early interest in life sciences and her ultimate career choice to biology classes.

Heron finds practicing dentistry to be satisfying, challenging, and the fulfillment of her earlier goals. "I wanted a career where I could work with and help others, create things, problem solve and, possibly, be my own boss," she says. "I've been fortunate to find all that, plus opportunities to volunteer my services in my own community and beyond, while working with my family."

Today Heron lives in the Skagit Valley with her husband, Scott and their daughter, Adeline. She finds time from her busy practice to be involved in the community as a member of Skagit Women in Business and as a volunteer at Friendship House. She encourages MVHS students to find their strengths and develop a strong work ethic that will serve them in their future careers and throughout their lives.

*"...I wanted a career where I could work with and help others, create things, problem solve and, possibly, be my own boss."*

— Kjersten Heron, DDS



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POINTS OF PRIDE

ABOUT YOUR MOUNT  
VERNON SCHOOL DISTRICT

# More on Attendance



As mentioned in our Fall edition of Community Link, our schools are focusing more intently this year on identifying early warning signs that predict student achievement problems. Their efforts have revealed the obvious – students who are often late to school, leave school early, and/or who are absent an average of two or more days per month TEND TO FALL BEHIND academically. Research has shown that:

- Children who are frequently absent in kindergarten show lower levels of achievement in math, reading and general knowledge in third grade.
- By 6th grade, students who miss an average of two or more days per month are more likely to drop out of high school.
- The impact of missing two or more days per month is the same whether the absences are excused or unexcused.
- Students who improve their on-time attendance can improve their chances of graduating from high school.

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*Again, none of this is surprising. But, while it is one thing to identify the problem, it is often quite another to know what to do about it.*

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In addition to schoolwide efforts to encourage and recognize good attendance, our school counselors, social workers, nurses, teachers, administrators, and Communities in Schools staff are working with students and their families to help address barriers to regular, on-time attendance. We cannot do it alone. We need the community's help. As a continuation of those tips provided in our fall article, the following suggests additional ways families, businesses, and other community entities can help ensure student attendance every day, all day.



**Lego Robotics MVSD Hi-Cap teams excelled** in competition at the First Lego League (FLL) Robotics event for grades 4-8.

*You can help ensure student attendance, every day, all day.*



## Families

- Help your child get into the habit and learn the value of regular routines.
- Teach your child that attending school is nonnegotiable unless they are truly sick.
- Build relationships with other families and discuss how you can help each other out in times of need or emergencies (e.g., drop off or pick up children, babysit, translation assistance).
- Identify non-academic activities (drama, art, music, etc.) that can help motivate your child's interest in school and learning and seek out schools that can offer those experiences.



## Faith Based Groups

- Recognize and appreciate good and improved attendance. Support school efforts to recognize students and families who are turning the corner on attendance.
- Encourage students to attend school regularly, sharing the connection between regular attendance and academic achievement.
- Help families overcome barriers to good attendance.
- Volunteer in schools and encourage others to serve as attendance buddies or mentors for chronically absent students.



## Business Leaders

- Talk to other business leaders and your employees about the important role regular, on-time attendance plays in academic and school success.
- Encourage your employees to serve as attendance buddies or mentors for chronically absent students.
- Work with our District to provide incentives for good or improved attendance.

# Partnership With University Of Florida

Last August, teams of teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators from each of our schools participated in a three-day Equity Institute facilitated by Lastinger faculty from the University of Florida. For the past 15 years, the Lastinger Center has partnered with local, regional, state and national education agencies across the world to create solutions to educational challenges. Teams from six Mount Vernon schools are working with the Center on projects that will lead to Equity Certification. These teams will present their work publically in May.



## Partnering With Our Community

We are engaging and partnering with our community using proven strategies that are common to school districts that have improved their graduation rates:

### Mentorship

Ask any young person what made a positive difference for them in school and they will point to caring, supportive adults. Families typically play an important role, yet research by a number of leading institutions has shown that children and youth who have a formal or informal relationship with a positive mentor outside the home do better in school and in life. School based mentoring programs that involve adults from the community have been found to be effective so long as they include training and support for mentors and last at least one school year. Serving as a mentor can take a number of different forms, including:

- Meeting with an individual or several students weekly to learn to play a game (e.g., chess) or discuss a book.
- Checking in with one or more students weekly on their grades and attendance.
- Helping with an activity or team.

If you have an hour or so per week and would like to discuss mentoring opportunities, please contact Carol Ledin at [cledin@mvsd320.org](mailto:cledin@mvsd320.org) or 360-428-6181.



### Summer Internships

Employers often talk about the importance of “soft” skills to an individual’s success. While an applicant’s technical skills may be important to getting a job, their work ethic, attitude, communication skills, ability to work well with people – often referred to as “soft” skills – are equally, if not more important to their career advancement and success. Soft skills are difficult to teach in a classroom. They are most effectively learned and developed within the context of the workplace. Educational opportunities that are directly connected to career settings is motivating for students and helps them clearly understand the reason for what they are learning. Communities from Wenatchee to Tacoma understand this and have joined together to create paid summer internships for high school students between their junior and senior years. The District is interested in using what these communities have learned to build a similar program, in partnership with local businesses and the Mount Vernon Chamber.

If you are a business owner or manager and would like to learn more about the possibility of providing a paid internship for a high school student, please contact the Superintendent’s office at 360-428-6181.



### Messaging

When a community gets behind a common message, that message becomes important and people take notice. We invite you to show your support of our 100% graduation goal by displaying a Proud Partner bumper sticker and/or window cling on your car or in the window of your business. We would also love to receive photos of you and your family, friends, or co-workers displaying 100% campaign materials for use on our web and social media sites. To request materials or send photos, contact Sharon Schell at [sschell@mvsd320.org](mailto:sschell@mvsd320.org).



# Parent Academies

Early childhood educators often remind us that it is important to remember that parents are their children's first teachers.

Engaging parents and families as partners in their children's education is essential to student success. School districts have known this for many years, yet they haven't always understood what meaningful parent and family engagement looks like.

Almost four years ago, our Teaching & Learning Department set out to develop a curriculum to help parents and families learn about important aspects of education in the 21st century. They started by asking parents what they wanted to learn more about. This information, combined with input from teachers, was used to develop lessons for our Parent Academy program – a six-week classroom based training taught by parents, for parents.

Our first Parent Academy classes were implemented in the 2015-16 school year and involved approximately 80 parents of elementary-age children. This year, the programs engaged approximately 200 parents and family members of students in grades K-12. Classes were taught in English, Spanish, and Russian and culminated in a graduation ceremony on December 7.

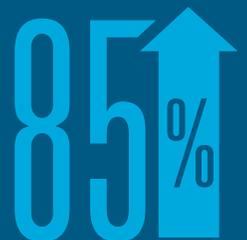


*Parent Academy was an overwhelming success with approximately 200 parents of K-12 students learning ways to help their children succeed. The academies were taught in English, Spanish, and Russian and held in all 9 MVSD schools, including MVHS.*



**New Elementary School Named** – Our new elementary school off E. Division has been named Harriet Rowley Elementary School, in honor of pioneer and humanitarian Harriet Rowley, who opened the first hospital in Mount Vernon in 1920. Thank you to our community for your input and suggestions!

AP Enrollment **MVHS** Advanced Placement course enrollment grew by 85% during the past 5 years!



In 1950, the high school completion rate was 59%. Most assumed that students who did not graduate from high school could enter the work force and earn a living wage.

As the nature of work has changed and our student population has become more diverse, educators have begun to recognize that if our communities are to thrive, schools must prepare all students for post-secondary education or training. It is no longer acceptable to “teach to the middle” and let others fend for themselves. We must reach and teach each student, providing them with what they need to learn important skills and knowledge. That is the meaning of equity in education.

Of course, that is easier said than done. Try as we might to level the playing field for all students, there are practices ingrained in schools that give some students advantages. These practices are, all too often, just part of doing business the way it has always been done. To deliver on our commitment to graduating all students with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in post-secondary education, careers, and life, we must learn how to examine our practices and detect barriers they create for students. To help us with this work, we have partnered with the Laster Center at the University of Florida. You’ll read about this partnership on the inside pages.

Partnerships with the community are essential to our ability to ensure equity of learning opportunities for all students. On the inside pages, you’ll read about our work to engage the community in three strategies that are common to school districts that have improved their graduation rates:

- **Messaging**
- **Mentoring**
- **Paid summer internships for high school students**

Please consider one or more of these opportunities.

With your support, we are looking forward to a successful second semester in Mount Vernon Schools!



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

# Legislative Visits

Maintaining good communication and relationships with our legislators remains a priority for the District



*Barbara Bailey legislative visit to Centennial School*

On November 27, five members of the State House Education Committee and their staff spent most of the day in our District speaking to Board Chair, Rob Coffey, staff, administrators, and leadership from Skagit Valley College and Western Washington University. Their purpose was to learn about training provided for our School Board, our partnerships with higher education to provide a pipeline for prospective teachers, and additional efforts we are engaged in to recruit and retain teachers.

During the month of December, Senator Barbara Bailey visited Centennial Elementary, Representative Norma Smith toured Jefferson Elementary, and LaVenture Middle School hosted Representative Dave Hayes. Each visit provided an opportunity for these officials to visit a number of classrooms and have conversations with principals, teachers, and students.

A District group representing certificated and classified employees and Board members traveled to Olympia on January 10, where we met with Senator Kevin Ranker (40th District), Senator Barbara Bailey (10th District), Representative Dan Kristiansen (39th District), Representatives Norma Smith and Dave Hayes (10th District), and Representatives Kristine Lytton and Jeff Morris (40th District) to discuss local issues of importance.



*MVSD School Board Directors, Superintendent, student reps and staff met with state legislators in Olympia. Shown in the gallery with Rep. Kris Lytton (front) and Rep. Jeff Morris (back).*