

# COMMUNITY



# +Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools

## IN THIS ISSUE

## SUMMER 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.

### Featured Articles

- Construction Updates: MVHS Fine Arts Building
- Congrats to 2020 MVSD Retirees!
- Community Champions
- Reopening Schools

Welcome to the summer edition of our community newsletter, dedicated to the graduating class of 2020! These students were thrown a major curve ball on March 17, when schools were closed for what turned out to be the remainder of their senior year. Watching them rise to the challenge has been a testament to their flexibility and resilience, as well as the support of their families, teachers, and friends.

Regardless of their college or career path, our graduates, and graduates across the country, will face challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic in the coming months as they navigate what are predicted to be the ups and downs of the global health crisis. At the same time, they will likely have much to teach the rest of us about how to adjust to change.

The public health, as well as the social changes we have experienced in 2019-20, have reminded us as a District that:

1. The Mount Vernon School District is filled with staff who are relentless in their commitment to teach and support all students.
2. The relationships between K-12 students and teachers and other support staff are at the heart of learning. Maintaining those relationships requires consistent, face-to-face contact. As powerful as classroom technology is, it is not, for most students, a long-term substitute for face-to-face interactions.
3. For remote learning to be successful, students and teachers must have ready access to the internet and to on-line resources and assignments. In middle and high school, these resources and assignments must be coordinated between teachers so families and students do not become overwhelmed.
4. Despite the work we have done as a District to become more aware of issues of racial equity and barriers that exist for our students of color, we must begin to include students in these conversations to increase their awareness and understanding, building unity, not further division. Teaching tolerance and respect, beginning at the elementary level, followed by focusing on the skills of civil discourse beginning in middle school, will be central to these efforts.

*Continued on inside* ➤

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

\*\*\*\*\*EGRWSS\*\*\*\*\*  
POSTAL CUSTOMER

Successful Learners Strengthening Our Community

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





# FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.



Juan Zavaleta

## MVHS grad helps underachieving students to succeed and thrive

For Mount Vernon High School alum Juan Zavaleta, personal achievement was the beginning of a commitment to help students who struggle in our education system. Zavaleta came to the United States from Mexico at age six, attended Mount Vernon schools and graduated from MVHS in 2014. While pursuing his B.S. degree in Psychology from the University of Washington, he discovered a passion for working with students furthest away from educational success. As a college junior, he worked part time as High School Graduation Coordinator at Seattle’s Ingraham High School. Following his graduation from UW, Ingraham offered him a full time position helping their students to close the education gap.

Today Zavaleta works as a Familias Unidas (F.U.N.) Bilingual Instructional Assistant at Ingraham High School, working primarily with Latinx students and their families to form stronger relationships that bolster their academic success.

“The most satisfying part of my job,” says Zavaleta, “is breaking down the walls of students who are ‘difficult.’ I work to establish relationships in which they trust me enough to come for advice, knowing that they have a safe space.”

One of the MVHS programs that Zavaleta credits most with supporting and motivating him as a student is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which aims to close the achievement gap by preparing students to succeed in education and a global society. He particularly recalls the help and support that he and other students received from Mr. Shepherd, without whose AVID classes Zavaleta says he would not have achieved the success he has today. “Mr. Shepherd always went out of his way to make sure his students had the best chance to be successful,” he says. “I hope to use his model of teaching to help students in the future.”

Next for Zavaleta is a return to the UW to pursue a Masters degree in Education. It is his hope to return to the Mount Vernon School District and give back to the community that helped him so much. His advice to students will undoubtedly be based on his favorite quote, “Tell me and I’ll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand.” -Chinese Proverb

“I work to establish relationships [with students] in which they trust me enough to come for advice, knowing that they have a safe space.”  
– Juan Zavaleta

Points of Pride  
About your Mount Vernon School District

### Since schools closed on March 17, the District staff have:

Distributed an average of **3,759 meals per day** to students, through a combination of school pickup sites, bus stop deliveries, and home deliveries.



Provided a combination of **food, infant supplies, and household products** to a number of families through the Mount Vernon High School and Madison food pantries.

Provided a variety of support to families through the **COVID-19 funds** collected by the parent groups at Little Mountain, LaVenture, and Mount Baker.





# Introduction

*Continued from cover*

Along with other skills and concepts, teaching tolerance and respect through civil discourse to K-12 students is very difficult in a remote learning environment. This brings up the question on all of our minds – i.e., “What will the reopening of schools look like next fall?” Information on the planning process we are undertaking to answer this question is included on p. 3.

In closing, I would like to thank the Mount Vernon School Board and community for the privilege of serving your schools for the past 16 years. My time here as Superintendent has been the highlight of my professional

career. Your consistent support for our schools has allowed the District to achieve many positive improvements to curriculum, instructional programs and opportunities for students, and the facilities in which they learn. There is much left to be done, yet I leave confident that the District is in very capable hands. I look forward to seeing the great things our staff and students accomplish in the years to come!



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

## Construction Updates: MVHS Fine Arts Building

In spite of a two-month delay, related in large part to the pandemic, the renovation of the Fine Arts building on the MVHS campus is continuing and scheduled to be completed on or around June 30. On a recent visit to the site with two school board directors, we were impressed by what is being accomplished. When completed, this 1922 structure will be upgraded into a safe and efficient facility that will serve the high school well for many years to come.

While planning for the modernization of Old Main is continuing, the start date for this project is contingent on final approval of a FEMA grant and state matching funds. The approval process has, in both cases, been disrupted by the health crisis. We expect to learn more about the status of these funding sources this summer.





# Congrats to 2020 MVSD Retirees!

At the end of this past school year, we had the privilege of recognizing and thanking 11 individuals who represent a combined total of 209 years of service to our schools. They include:

Staff Member	Current/Last Assignment/Location	Years of Service to MVSD
Dave Anderson	Assistant Superintendent	20
Celia Campbell	Math Teacher, Skagit Academy	12
Deana Elliott	Librarian and Health Teacher, Mount Baker	21
George Garcia	Maintenance	37
Karen Lewis-Hart	Paraeducator, Jefferson	22
Kathy Lester	Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant	26
Richard Morgenthaler	Art Teacher, Mount Vernon High School	18
Nina Spittler	Paraeducator and Volunteer Coordinator, Jefferson	26
Carla Trosper	Paraeducator, Mount Baker	9
Pam Valentine	Reading Specialist, Centennial	40
Pam Van Selus	1st Grade Teacher, Centennial	32

*We extend our gratitude for our retirees' years of dedicated service to our students and our schools. Our retiree recognition video is posted on the District website.*



# Superintendent's Message to Our Graduates

On behalf of the Mount Vernon School District and our Board of Directors, I'd like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Mount Vernon High School and Skagit Academy Class of 2020.

We know that education is a team sport and that these students would not be celebrating this milestone if not for the support and encouragement of teachers, counselors, family, friends, and others who have supported them along the way. Our District joins together to express our deep appreciation for your partnership.

Graduates, in the startup business world, entrepreneurs often talk about the need to pivot, or adapt quickly to new, unexpected realities. Stories abound of businesses that have either failed or succeeded based on their foresight, flexibility, and their will to pivot when faced with unforeseen challenges.

Never in my career have I seen a group of seniors who have been required to pivot as you have. The closure of schools statewide on March 17 introduced you to a whole new reality. All those events that have traditionally marked your accomplishments and a way to celebrate your transition were canceled. Google Classrooms and video conferences replaced face to face interactions with teachers and friends. Your teachers and staff did their best to reproduce awards ceremonies virtually, yet there was no way to provide the direct personal contact that we all so desperately need. The disruptions to normal life have, for many, led to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the future.

Pivoting in the face of COVID-19 means, in part, refusing to let the current situation define your senior year. It means making a conscious choice to grieve the losses you've experienced without holding on to them.

Historian Howard Zinn once said

**“What we choose to emphasize will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something.**

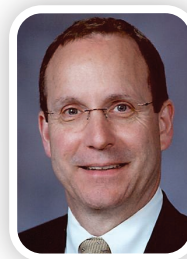
**Being hopeful in bad times... gives us the energy to act, and the possibility of sending this...world in a different direction.”**



Regardless of the educational and/or career path you take, I urge you to use your experiences this spring as an opportunity to embrace hope yourself and inspire hope in others. Help others see that difficult times in life don't have to lead to difficult lives.

Easier said than done? Absolutely. Most things worth doing are. But you're the Class of 2020, living through the COVID-19 pandemic. You know how to do hard things. And remember, we'll always be here rooting for you.

Again, congratulations on all you've accomplished in the face of big challenges. I wish for each and every one of you the happiness of a productive and healthy life, the respect of your fellow human beings, and the love of your family.



**Carl Bruner**  
Superintendent  
Mount Vernon School District

Equipped **3,000+ students** with Chromebook devices for use in online learning.



Addressed the needs for students without home internet access by:



- Connecting families through the Utilized Comcast Internet Essentials program to Wi-Fi.
- Staff distributed a total of **150 Wi-Fi hotspots**.
- Installing Wi-Fi access devices in four apartment buildings that are home to many of our families.

Outfitted 4 of our school buses with Wi-Fi devices to provide **scheduled internet access** in specific neighborhoods. Starting May 22, these buses began to park in high density locations for two hours every morning and two hours every afternoon, Monday through Friday, through June 19, the last day of school.

Distributed **hard-copy assignment packets** to students who were unable to achieve Wi-Fi access.



# Community Champions

This spring, the District honored 14 community members for their contributions to our schools and students. What was planned as our second annual Community Champions Breakfast became a video celebration:

Scan to watch the Community Champions Recognition! >>



The following individuals were recognized as this year's Champions:

## 2020 CHAMPION RECOGNITION

Little Mountain	Jan Brown
Jefferson	Jim Anderson
Centennial	Trish Beagle
Madison	Summer & Travis Houlihan
Washington	Tahlia Gage
Harriet Rowley	Ron Frederick
Mount Baker	Amy Beek
LaVenture	Elvira Ronces-Delgado
MVHS	Blaine McCoy & Bill Dunlap
Skagit Academy	Mindy Sneva
Administration	Flora Lucatero & Ario Salazar

*Thanks to all of our Community Champions for what they have done to support our students and schools!*

# Reopening Schools

On June 11, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in Olympia released their long awaited guidance for reopening schools next fall. This document, titled, Reopening Washington Schools - 2020 District Planning Guide, outlines the planning work that is needed to be done by each school district.

State Superintendent, Chris Reykdal has made it clear that the goal is for schools to begin providing face to face instruction next fall. At the same time, he acknowledges the difficulties schools will face as they work to comply with the guidelines issued by the Department of Health.

**We have created a team to coordinate and communicate our planning work over the coming weeks. This team's work will focus on:**

1. Placing the safety and emotional well-being of students and staff at the forefront of planning in order to most effectively re-engage our students in learning.
2. Monitoring reopening guidance from the state and develop plans accordingly while being ready to adjust as circumstances and guidance changes.

**Beginning next week, the team will meet to begin to plan for the following in preparation for fall:**

- Purchasing and organizing safety supplies and materials (PPE, masks, gloves, signage, Plexiglass barriers, cleaning supplies, sanitizing supplies)
- Improving our system for remote teaching and learning
- Mapping out daily routines (physical distancing, transportation, drop-off/pick-up, check in procedures, school and hallway traffic patterns, classroom logistics and practices, custodial, meals, recess, passing times, special populations, hygiene practices)
- Identifying schedule modifications to allow for physical distancing (split or rotating schedules, phased in schedules)\*
- Creating systems for attendance, learning standards, assessment, and grading
- Developing a COVID-19 exposure and shut down plan

*\*Families can expect to be surveyed on their schedule preferences.*

Families, students, and our staff are all anxious to see our schools reopen and to begin educating students face to face again, but no one wants to sacrifice the health or safety of students or staff in the process.

Thanks to families for your patience as our team works through these issues carefully and thoughtfully in the weeks ahead.

