

COMMUNITY



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A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools

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WINTER 2021 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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Superintendent Message: Next Steps Toward Hybrid Learning

It has been about ten months since our way of living was turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic. We have endured many trials and tribulations, yet we continue to persevere as we face these challenges together. With new vaccines approved for emergency use, there is hope and light at the end of the tunnel. As we move to the second half of the school year, there is anticipation in bringing back and expanding in-person learning beginning with our youngest learners toward the end of January to early February.



In mid-December, the Governor referenced the Institute for Disease Modeling (IDM) data on various practices and instructional models this fall from around the state and country. The data indicates the risk of infections spreading in schools remains low as long as health and safety protocols are in place. That is good news for our students, families, and staff. This data aligns with our own experience. Since the beginning of October, with about 450 students coming to school for what we call Plus services, and with stringent following of health and safety protocols, we have been able to operate safely for students and staff.

This data did not exist when the Department of Health (DOH) decision tree was originally created and community case counts were published. IDM's data, along with data from other sources, is the rationale for modifying the case count numbers on the decision tree and what is recommended to occur at each of the three levels. The DOH recommends we consider the following educational modalities based on community transmission and other health and education risks and benefits:

continued on page 3

SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Continued from front page

- **Low risk**, below 50 cases per 100,000 (was 25)
 - i. Provide in-person learning for all students
- **Moderate risk**, between 50 and 350 cases per 100,000 (was 25 and 75)
 - i. Phase in in-person learning
 1. Prioritize elementary (pre-K through grade 5) if not already receiving in-person learning and middle school
 2. If schools can demonstrate the ability to limit transmission in the school environment, add more high school students when case rates are below approximately 200 cases per 100,000 in 14 days
- **High risk**, above 350 cases per 100,000 (was above 75)
 - i. Phase in in-person learning in groups of 15 or fewer students for pre-K through grade 5 and those with highest needs
 1. Prioritize Pre-K through grade 3, and students in any grade with disabilities, students living homeless, or those farthest from educational justice
 2. If schools can demonstrate the ability to limit transmission in the school environment, add grades 4 through 5



The **next steps** for the Mount Vernon School District is to first ensure we fully understand the modified case count guidance and any modification to the health and safety protocols that must be placed in schools, as per the DOH's new checklists. We will continue monitoring our community health data. Skagit County reported over 350 cases per 100,000 people over the last 14 days of December. Additionally, we will work with our employee groups, transportation, food services, etc., to be sure solid plans and agreements are in place to support a safe return of more students and staff.

As stated earlier, our priority remains to bring back our youngest learners next, beginning with kindergarten and first grade students. This will be in a hybrid model that combines in-building and remote learning time so that we comply with physical distancing requirements. We anticipate that the earliest we would begin a K through 1st grade hybrid model would be at toward the end of January. We will be communicating with parents and staff. We will be surveying our parents to determine their preference of morning or afternoon in-person service or to remain in remote learning. We will then build cohorts, bus routes, and provide teachers preparation time to move from remote to hybrid instruction.

This continues to be a moving target, but one that now has more clarity and is within our scope. We need to move forward based on the best information we have at this time. We understand many families face challenges that limit their ability to provide the level of home support that other families are able to deliver. This remote learning environment has worked against our equity goal of providing each student with what he or she needs to succeed. Nevertheless, we have been committed to doing everything we can to help meet the needs of all students, while following health and safety protocols to keep staff and students safe.

Our deepest appreciation for those in our community who continue to be on the front lines of the battle to contain the pandemic by being in daily contact with the public. In our district, this includes those involved in secretarial services, in-person instruction, meal preparation and delivery, transportation, custodial and maintenance services, security, childcare, and administration.

We will continue to provide updates through our website and social media sites. I want to ask again for your assistance in helping us increase the number of students involved with in-person learning by staying vigilant and cautious to help us reduce the spread of COVID-19. Please stay healthy and safe during these uncertain and challenging times!

Respectfully,

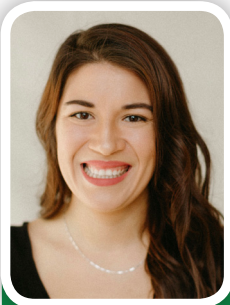
Ismael Vivanco, Superintendent
Mount Vernon School District

FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.



Life Long Learner MVHS Alum Loves Working in Higher Education



Veronica Perez

Although Veronica Perez graduated with the Bulldog class of 2006 where she was heavily involved in leadership, her passion for the Mount Vernon and greater Skagit County community remains with her today. After completing her Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science from Central Washington University in 2010, and earning a Master's Degree in Athletic Training from California Baptist in 2013, Veronica returned to the valley where she joined Skagit Valley College as an athletic trainer.

While at Skagit Valley College, Veronica discovered her love and the reward of serving students. During her tenure at SVC, she dedicated her time to the SVC Red Group (DREAMers Club) helping undocumented students navigate through their challenges while pursuing their education.

She shares that the most challenging part of her career was passing the Board of Certification, INC. exam to become nationally certified to practice athletic training. The most rewarding part so far was her time at SVC supporting the Red Group.

Veronica credits her Mount Vernon teachers for their positive influence; including Mr. Potter for his constant pushing, Mr. Wright for accepting her for who she was, Dr. Fox for showing her a different way of life, and Mrs. Lewis for making everything fun. The lessons learned from those teachers have proven to be a recipe for success. The attributes have helped her become the task driven person that she is. They have given her the ability to connect with others and collaborate on a team to get the job done right, creatively, and while having fun. Looking back on her time as a high school student, when asked what advice she would give her high school self she said it would be to trust herself more and to understand that her decisions lead to valuable lessons and experiences. She would also encourage herself to believe in and love herself more.

Veronica has now transitioned from an athletic trainer to student services in higher education at Whatcom Community College. As a member of the student services department, Veronica practices her passion for supporting students as they navigate the ups and downs of their educational pursuit and coaches them through their academic coursework. Veronica loves working in an educational environment and considers herself to be a lifelong learner. As for career advice, she offers to our readers to stick to what they love and know. Be honest, work hard, and set goals. Most importantly, "surround yourself with people who will support your ambitions and goals, take care of your mental and physical health, and above all keep a positive mindset".

“Working with students and helping them realize their potential and reach their academic goals is the most rewarding work I can find.”

– Veronica Perez



Pictured is Perez and members of her extended family.

ANSWERS TO YOUR LEVY QUESTIONS

Q&A

Mount Vernon School District

What are school levies and how are they collected?

School districts receive funding through Levy propositions, which are approved by voters and based on local property evaluations that are determined by the County assessor. The amount each property owner pays is determined by each property's assessed value. The Mount Vernon School District is limited by state law to collect no more than \$2.50 per \$1000 of assessed value. In addition, the District cannot collect a larger dollar amount than was approved by voters, even if the \$2.50 per \$1000 generates more than the voter approved amounts.

What is the purpose of the Renewal EPO Levy?

The district EPO levy provides approximately 9.6% of our total operating revenues. As shown below, the funds are used to bridge the gap between the state and federal dollars the district receives and the cost of educating our students. These dollars provide support for:

- Teachers, instructional assistance, bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, nurses, counselors, security staff, and administrators.
- Programs for students with disabilities and other special needs.
- Programs for highly capable students.
- Art, music, and athletic programs.
- Upkeep of facilities and grounds.

The totals of both levies combined can be found in the table shown.



What is the duration of the proposed levies?

Both the EPO and Technology/Security levies will remain in effect for three calendar years, beginning in 2022. This represents a change from the district's current two-year levies.

How will the combined costs of both renewal levies and the bond approved by voters in 2016 affect Mount Vernon taxpayers?

The combined tax rates per \$1000 of assessed value are as follows (includes EPO, Tech/Security and Bond levies):

- \$5.10 - 2020 current tax rate
- \$4.89 - 2021 estimated tax rate
- \$4.85 - 2022 estimated tax rate if levy renewals approved
- \$4.65 - 2023 estimated tax rate if levy renewals approved
- \$4.43 - 2024 estimated tax rate if levy renewals approved

What is the purpose of the Renewal Technology and Security Levy?

Funds provided by this renewal Levy will be used to:

- Provide students with greater access to technology in the classroom by supporting mobile technology labs.
- Replace and repair aging equipment.
- Upgrade software licenses.
- Fund support staff to maintain the district equipment and network, and to provide training for teachers in using technology to increase student learning.
- Security upgrades including additional security cameras, access controls, and required points of entry.



LEVY	2022	2023	2024
EPO Levy Renewal	\$2.50	\$2.50	\$2.50
Tech & Security Levy Renewal	\$0.95	\$0.86	\$0.79
2016 Construction Bond	\$1.40	\$1.29	\$1.14
TOTAL	\$4.85	\$4.65	\$4.43

ANSWERS TO YOUR LEVY QUESTIONS

Continued

What if the February 9 levies fail to win voter approval?

By law, school districts are allowed two opportunities in a given calendar year to seek voter approval for school levies. If our renewal levies are not approved in February, the district would have one more opportunity to seek voter approval in the spring. If the levies fail a second time, the district will be forced to make significant program reductions for the next several years.

Can senior or disabled citizens receive a tax exemption?

Yes. If you are 61 years of age or older or legally disabled, you could be eligible for an exemption from all or part of the property tax. Contact the Skagit County Assessor's office at 360-416-1780 for more information.

What if I don't receive my ballot?

Ballots are expected to be mailed on or around January 20, 2021. If your ballot does not arrive within one week of this day, please call or visit the Skagit County Auditor's office at 360-336-9305 for a renewal. Ballots must be returned by February 9, 2021.



I invite you to contact my office at (360) 428-6110 if you have questions about our renewal levies.

Construction Update

As part of the voter-approved 2016 capital projects bond, facility improvements on the Mount Vernon High School campus are continuing. Last summer, the remodeling and repurposing of the Fine Arts building was completed. This building is the new home of the administrative and counseling groups, plus added classroom space. In addition to administration and counseling, this building now centrally houses special education, health, attendance and our family liaisons. The school district received \$2.9 million dollars in state matching funds to complement our bond funds for this project.

MVHS Assistant Principal César Bernal commented, "The new admin building still represents the character of our campus. It is warm and welcoming to our community, families, and students. In it, we will be able to continue to maintain and grow our bulldog community's heart, continue building minds, and continue building the traditions that have made this school and community so great."

This month, construction begins on the Old Main building. 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 much improved classroom spaces. All of this will occur while retaining the unique feel and look of this 100-year old building. The school district will receive over \$10 million dollars in state matching funds to support this project.

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.

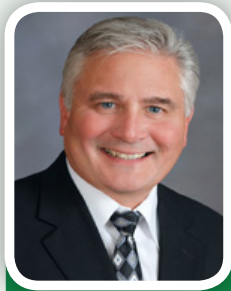


Construction site at Old Main on Mount Vernon High School campus.

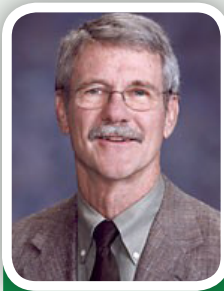
The Mount Vernon School District does not discriminate in employment, programs, or activities on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability or use of a trained guide dog or service animal by a person with a disability and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to the District's Title IX/Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator, Bill Nutting, Assistant Superintendent, 124 E. Lawrence Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 (360)428-6110; Section 504/ADA Coordinator, Clint Carlton, Executive Director of Student Support Services, 920 S. Second Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, (360)428-6141.

School Board Appreciation Month

Proclaimed as School Board Appreciation Month by Governor Inslee, January is a time when we formally thank our five elected Directors.



Larry Otos



Rob Coffey



Wendy Ragusa



Jessica Samora



Laura Cailloux

School Boards are the head of school governance. Your Mount Vernon School District Board supports student learning by setting the district vision and mission and annual work plan. They approve policy, set expectations, demonstrate good moral character and accountability, and provide oversight for the district's \$119 million budget. They donate many hours of their time to attend Board meetings, work-study sessions, committee meetings, school events, and to respond to questions and concerns from community members. Their leadership continues to help your District remain focused on student learning.

Please join us in thanking the Mount Vernon School Board!

Message From Your School Board

Greetings to our families, students, teachers, and district partners:

First, we want to thank everyone who is helping to educate our students in this unprecedented time of a global pandemic. We are all making sacrifices to make the best of a difficult situation, while providing the highest quality education possible. As a board, we understand the frustration of those who want to return to in-person learning and those who want to remain in distance learning. The district and board have heard very compelling requests from both sides of the issue.

We understand that online learning has created a burden for families. Many have shared disappointment that students have been in this mode since March. Although we are aware that COVID continues to be a serious issue in our country, state, and local community, our goal is to bring students back into the buildings for in-person learning as quickly as possible. Please understand that while our directive is to return students to their classrooms, this is dependent on many factors including the quickly changing levels of infection and spread, combined with the protocols that will keep students and teachers safe.

Of course, this presents a difficult dilemma. As a board, we must attempt to make sense of comparing the risk of significant educational loss for many of our students to the risk of severe disease or death. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) continues to work hard with their consultants to review and understand the complex data surrounding this issue. The result of their continual review is to provide guidance to school districts on balancing the risks, while leaving the final decision of in-person services to the Skagit County Public Health and each district.

We are fully involved in guiding the district in the return to in-person learning. We also realize the mental health and social emotional needs of our students are important factors. We sympathize with the struggles some students and families are having with the continued distance learning mode of education. If you have concerns in this area, you are invited to contact your child's school or the district office for information about available resources.

Thank you for helping your children do their best work. We encourage the community to do their part by conscientiously wearing masks, maintaining proper social distancing, and following all other health guidelines. Our promise is to keep you updated regularly, and more often with breaking news, regarding our work in this effort. Please see the Superintendent's weekly blog for updates – including the latest on vaccinations as they become more readily available. We wish you and your family all the very best.

Best regards,

Board of Directors,

Larry Otos-President, Rob Coffey-Vice President, Wendy Ragusa-Legislative Chair, Jessica Samora, and Laura Cailloux

