



# goodTIMES

West Mercer PTA Newsletter

PTA #2.9.35

March 2009

Volume 22, Issue 6

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## Homework: So what's the deal?

by Rich Mellish, Principal

I asked several teachers this question, along with why they assign homework and what form it takes. Here is a paraphrasing of their reply:

*I want my students to use the skills they developed in class and apply them to real life at home. I assign tasks that make them interact with their home using the school lessons.*

*Homework is used to help develop time management skills and build background knowledge. I help student take long-term tasks and projects and plan how to schedule their work.*

*I set up a pattern where students practice skills that need repeat exposure to learn such as spelling, math skills and then have students read and write every night.*

This sampling of responses illustrates the thoughts about homework as well as the individual approaches different teachers are taking to homework.

This week Alfie Kohn will be presenting to the Mercer Island Community his ideas and research around homework. As Kohn shares his point of view and challenges our ideas we hope any ensuing discussion will be a broad and thoughtful dialogue about homework and it's role in the school and district's *2020 Vision*.

Our staff team understands that homework has a significant impact on students and that we have great diversity of learning styles, interests and needs among our students. We know that some enjoy homework and some find it a personal struggle. Some finish quickly while others take a long time to complete homework.

We also understand that the interests and needs of parents are very diverse. I would wager that every teacher, every year, has parents who ask for more homework and parents who ask for less.

So why do teachers at West Mercer tend to have weekly or daily homework? Though we know that no homework policy is perfect our approach to homework is intentional and based on the following ideas:

Homework is one way of communicating and demonstrating to parents what children are learning in class.

Homework is used to give students time not available in class to practice important basic skills or complete complex projects. Research shows that using certain skills at various times during the day helps with retention.

Homework is used to help students extend their identity and habits as a learner beyond the school and prepare them for the next day's lesson.

Homework helps students learn study skills, organization skills and time management; critical life skills in secondary and post-secondary education and work.

(Continued on page 3)

## What you can do to support our schools — some thoughts from your PTA President



**Dear West Mercer Families,**

The subject of highest urgency to me is our school budget for next year. As you probably know, decreases in state tax revenue have forced our state government to predict a \$6 billion budget shortfall for next year. Well, the news story I heard yesterday said the newest projection is for an additional \$2.3 billion shortfall! This will mean serious trouble for most state-funded services, and our school district budget is no exception.

### **Here are the main points we should all know:**

Our current MISD annual budget is right under \$40 million and we have approximately 4,000 students in the district.

Prior to yesterday's grim news, the expected decrease in our district funding was projected to be \$1 - \$3 million.

Our district has trimmed its budget for each of the last four years, and no further cuts can be made without negatively affecting students.

What effects could we see? A reduction in teachers, leading to an increase in student class sizes, a decrease or elimination of programs we value dearly, a large decrease in staff training hours, and more.

Assuming the next state budget decreases our district revenue \$3 million dollars, we would need voluntary contributions of approximately \$800/student to make up that shortfall!

The school district, in conjunction with Mercer Island Schools Foundation leaders, PTA leaders and community members are discussing ideas on how community members could make contributions to either the MI Schools Foundation, or the school district.

### **What are important timeframes?**

We hope the State Government will finalize the state budget by mid-late April, so we will know the specifics of the budget problems. It is possible a final budget will not be agreed on until mid-late summer.

By May 15, 2009, our district needs to notify any employees who might not be offered an employment contract for the 2009-2010 school year. Those employees are free to search for other work during the summer months, or hope MISD finds enough funding to hire them for next year.

If you are interested in making a financial contribution to our district, the best time to do that would be in late April of this year. The Mercer Island Schools Foundation is holding their annual fundraising breakfast, the Breakfast of Champions on Tuesday April 28<sup>th</sup>, and it is an ideal time to make a contribution either to the Schools Foundation, or directly to the district.

### **What is happening right now to address this situation?**

It is difficult to know the extent of the financial cuts because the state budget has not been finalized. Currently, representatives from the school district and the Schools Foundation, PTA leaders, the School Board, and community leaders are meeting to discuss alternatives.

Within the next 6-8 weeks, you should see specifics on the opportunities to donate the Schools Foundation or the school district.



Please do all you can to keep up on the news and the funding situation for Washington State schools. My expectation is that the need for donations will urgently arise in the late April, mid-May timeframe. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions, or if you want to offer suggestions.

Sincerely,

Diane Johnson, [dianejohnson5@comcast.net](mailto:dianejohnson5@comcast.net)

Mom of: Luke- Grade 2 WM, Bella – Grade 4 WM, Blake – Freshman MIHS, Cole – Junior, MIHS

Teachers seek to balance purpose and pragmatics. While aiming to maintain a high level of quality for their homework it is often helpful for both students and teachers to establish a regular, predictable routine with homework. Though no one claims that all our homework is perfectly designed, I am impressed with this staff team and their openness to the homework discussion and desire to refine their practices.

Beyond each individual teacher's planning, there is a larger context for our approach to homework. The district policy and generally accepted practice statewide is to aim for a maximum of 10 minutes of homework per night per grade level (40 minutes for 4<sup>th</sup> grade...) plus reading each night. We universally encourage parents to cut students off if they are making a concentrated effort for that time and did not finish, unless they are having too much fun. Most of the highly competitive international educational systems rely on learning outside the formal school day, whether private afternoon school or homework.

Another context for our approach to homework is compelling research that encourages the use of well-designed homework. If you are interested one favored researcher is Robert Marzano. Kohn specifically disagrees with Marzano's work and a quick Google search will readily unveil a lively debate on the topic and articles by both authors.

So we welcome hearing Alfie Kohn's ideas and challenges and any healthy, constructive dialogue around homework that touches on larger issues informing how we implement our school and district's *2020 Vision*. For at its heart, our vision always has been to meet the immediate and long term needs of our students and provide the best possible preparation for each student's future.

Sincerely,

Rich Mellish



## THANKS FOR ATTENDING!



I want to give my appreciation to those who attended the PTA meeting on February 2<sup>nd</sup> to hear about the district and school's *2020 Vision* as presented by Superintendent Plano and myself. I was particularly interested in the questions posed and the interest expressed in seeing how the ideas of the *2020 Vision* will be applied. In the months to come the staff team will be working on the application of the *2020 Vision* to how we approach instruction and how we focus our efforts to ...

- \* building positive attitudes and habits toward learning
- \* pursue their personal best academic achievement and
- \* prepare for their future leaning and work in the modern world.



The staff team is preparing to take focused, tangible steps in the fall. We will be sure to give progress updates as the work continues.

Sincerely, Rich Mellish

## Principal's Coffee



Please join other West Mercer parents for coffee and casual conversation with Principal Rich Mellish. We will be meeting at 9:30 on the scheduled Friday mornings in the staff lounge. Here is the coffee schedule for the remainder of 2009:

**March 6, April 10, May 1, June 5**

Please join us for these relaxed and informative get-togethers with the Principal.

### FOR THE WEST MERCER

### SCIENCE FAIR

March 4th,  
5:00-8:00pm at  
West Mercer Elementary

**Fun, entertainment, food, and science, science, science!**



Come and explore the excitement of chemical reactions from atoms to fireballs with Pacific Science Center's Radical Reactions show! View the 6 foot working model of a Rolls Royce Trent 1000 jet engine! Browse student exhibits and support our kids' curiosity and love of science!

Visit [www.misiencefair.org](http://www.misiencefair.org) for more information.



# Standardized Testing Update

*DRA, ITBS, Cogat, WASL – or is that old news – and what ever happened to Terra Nova? Have you even heard of any of this? Are we over-testing, testing enough or testing the right things? Are we teaching to the test? Becoming test obsessed? What are these tests used for? How can we prepare?*

During the second half of the year we have a set of standardized tests we use at a variety of grades (see the table below). Questions abound about standardized tests, their use and their usefulness. This is also a time of change, locally and at the state level. So below is an attempt to straighten out the story.

First, a couple of important points to remember:

**No, we don't "teach to the test".** The WASL is a test with enough specific formatting that we do need to teach students how to take the test and the formats and expectations, but this is primarily integrated into the content. The WASL is designed to assess student progress toward standard. As such, the best preparation for the WASL is to learn the academic content and skills. Good learning generally does result in meeting standard on the WASL. The other tests we give are designed to measure growth, so we don't teach specifically for the test.

**What can be done to prepare?** Simply learn. Then relax. It is so critical that students do their best on everything they do and *not worry about one test* more than any other activity. Too much stress only decreases performance. What we want with all assessments is to get an accurate picture of student achievement.

**If I could change one thing** about testing at West Mercer it would be the stress some students feel during standardized testing. Please help us in this effort.

**WASL.** This is the big one. This is a state-mandated assessment compounded by the federal No Child Left Behind requirements. New State Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn has announced the intent to make major changes to the WASL for 2010, but the test remains for this year – *but it is shorter*. Here are the details:

The WASL will be given according to the schedule below. If your child is taking the WASL please...

**Avoid vacations or appointment during the WASL (April 13-May 1)**

**Be sure your child gets a good nights sleep and a good breakfast each day**

**DECREASE STRESS. Encourage your child to relax, it is just an opportunity to show what you know. It doesn't determine if a child graduates to the next grade. It can be fun if you let it.**

3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade students will take the WASL in reading and math

4<sup>th</sup> grade will take the writing WASL

5<sup>th</sup> grade will take the science WASL

There will be fewer and shorter sessions this year with only multiple choice and short answer (up to a couple sentences) responses, except in writing which remains an extended writing sample.

**DRA.** The Developmental Reading Assessment is given in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades at various times of the year. This is individually administered to assess each student's progress in reading. It checks student's reading rate, fluency and comprehension.

**ITBS.** The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is given at a variety of grades to check student achievement progress and as a qualifying criteria for the gifted program and accelerated math program (replacing the Terra Nova).

**CogAT.** The CogAT is a cognitive abilities test used to qualify students for the gifted program.

## TESTING CALENDAR BY GRADE

Grade	Tests
<b>Kindergarten</b>	None
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Grade</b>	DRA – given in February and again in May/June
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</b>	DRA – given in September and May/June ITBS – given to all 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade students this year in January. CogAT – given in February to students nominated for the gifted program.
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</b>	WASL – Reading & Math in April/May ITBS / CogAT – given in February/March to students nominated for the gifted program
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	WASL – Reading, Writing & Math in April/May ITBS – the math portion is given to all students in February to determine which students qualify for accelerated math. The language portion is given in March to students nominated for the gifted program CogAT – given in February to students nominated for the gifted program
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	WASL – Reading, Science & Math in April/May ITBS – the math portion is given to students not in accelerated math in February to determine which students qualify for accelerated math in middle school. The language portion is given in March to students nominated for the gifted program CogAT – given in February to students nominated for the gifted program

### WEST MERCER WASL SCHEDULE

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> Grade \*other makeup days may be added**

Day of Week	Date	Subject
Tuesday	April 14	Reading I
Thursday	April 16	Reading II
Tuesday	April 21	Math I
Thursday	April 23	Math II
Wednesday	April 29	Make-up day
Thursday	April 30	Make-up day

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Grade \*other makeup days may be added**

Day of Week	Date	Subject
Tuesday	April 14	Math I & II
Wednesday	April 15	Reading I & II
Thursday	April 16	Writing I
Thursday	April 23	Writing II
Tuesday	April 28	Make-up day
Wednesday	April 29	Make-up day

# THE HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL

## 2009 WM School Musical

This play is a spookical! A comedy with a little old fashioned rock music that will give you Goosebumps! It's Halloween and Danny Klein has taken a dare from the neighborhood kids. There is an abandoned house and rumor has it, the House is haunted by a ghost, witches, zombies and monsters. In fact there are entire families of these creatures that secretly live in that house. Danny and his friends must spend the night there and if they do, they will be heroes and the most popular kids in town. But soon they will meet a Ghost and a Mummy, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, Dracula just to name a few! A ghoulish good time is guaranteed for all!



Registration and Audition information and forms are available on the West Mercer PTA homepage at: [http://www.misd.k12.wa.us/schools/wm/pta\\_info.html](http://www.misd.k12.wa.us/schools/wm/pta_info.html). From the PTA homepage, click on the link for "West Mercer Musical Audition Forms".

**Plan to attend an Audition Workshop to prepare for your audition!** These are optional but encouraged. Email Kathy Gersch at [kmmgersch@aol.com](mailto:kmmgersch@aol.com) to reserve your space for **Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 7:15-8:15pm**; or **Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2:15-3:15pm**.

**Auditions will be held on the following three evenings – pick the ONE that is most convenient:**

**Mon, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 6:00-7:30pm \*\* Tues, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 6:00-7:30pm \*\* Wed, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 6:00-7:30pm**

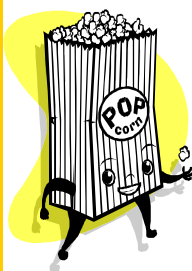
No reservation is necessary, and there will be no call-backs.

### Any questions?

Kathy Reitinger, [reitingers4@comcast.net](mailto:reitingers4@comcast.net), 230-9493

Kathy Gersch, [kmmgersch@aol.com](mailto:kmmgersch@aol.com), 425-269-9089

Diane Johnson, [dianejohnson5@comcast.net](mailto:dianejohnson5@comcast.net), 232-1696



## POPCORN FRIDAY!

Coming soon! Please look for the Popcorn Friday flyer in your child's folder. Interested in volunteering for future Popcorn Fridays? Contact Karen Upson at [kjanemcnally@hotmail.com](mailto:kjanemcnally@hotmail.com) for information.

## PTA PARENT COALITION

Parents of children with **special education and learning differences** now have a PTA parent coalition just for them; it meets the first Sunday of every month.

This Sunday, March 1, 3:30-5 p.m.

For contact information and more:

<http://mi-parentsonspcedlearningdiff.wikispaces.com/>.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY PHOTOS TO SHARE?



We have a great PTA Bulletin board and would appreciate it if you could share any photos you have of your kids during the year. These will be included on our internal PTA Bulletin Board. Please email photos to Nan Burton Studer at [nanburton@yahoo.com](mailto:nanburton@yahoo.com).



### DON'T MISS THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

#### Cool-headed Parenting Strategies for Hot-Headed Times

Laura Kastner, Ph.D.

Monday, April 20, 2009 MIHS Library

*Has your delightful, sunny child turned into a surly, risk-taking teenager? Help is on the way!*

The disrespectful, defiant, moody phase is nothing new. What is new is the science of why. Recent brain-imaging studies have documented how the thinking part of the brain is literally "under construction" during the teen years. During this process of brain maturation, neural connections are wiped out, giving way to a period of high vulnerability for emotional volatility, poor reasoning skills and parental button-pushing. If you find yourself longing for the good old preschool days, take heart! Come develop tools you can use to navigate the rocky times.

**Dr. Laura Kastner, Ph.D.** will discuss illuminative research on teen brain changes and the dynamics of emotional regulation. She will enable us to use this information for more effective parenting and provide useful tips for keeping "cool-headed" so we can choose how to best handle the classic challenges of adolescence.

Dr. Kastner is a clinical associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington and a nationally-recognized expert on teen development and behavior. She is also a practicing clinical psychologist and co-author, with Jennifer F. Wyatt, of *The Seven Year Stretch: How Families Work Together To Grow Through Adolescence*, *The Launching Years: Strategic Parenting From the Senior Year to College Life*, and *Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Teens and Tweens*.

**Presented by the Parent Education Committee of the Mercer Island School District and St. Monica School.**

**CREATIVE to the CORE**  
**30<sup>th</sup> Mercer Island Fine Arts Showcase**  
PRESENTED BY THE MERCER ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT & THE FINE ARTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**TUESDAY MARCH 24 & WEDNESDAY MARCH 25**

**5:30 - 9:00 pm at MIHS**

**Time to order Showcase tickets! Support fine arts education throughout our District while treating yourself and your family to a fabulous array of multi-media visual artwork and musical, dramatic and dance performances by our truly talented students. New this year on Tuesday night: advanced art student-led docent tours, and family friendly food available for cash purchase. Advance purchase deadline: March 13. For complete program information and to order tickets, please see the Showcase flyer mailed to your home or visit [www.mifineartsed.org](http://www.mifineartsed.org).**

**DON'T MISS THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY**

Acclaimed Parenting Expert

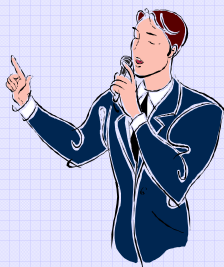
Alfie Kohn discusses...

***The Homework Myth***

**March 3, 2009 @ 7pm**

MIHS Performing Arts Center

**\$10 Tickets available at Island Books\***



We're all familiar with the downside of homework: frustration, exhaustion and nagging. But we assume it's worth it because homework promotes higher achievement and responsibility, right? Maybe not so right. World-renowned education and parenting expert Alfie Kohn discusses ***The Homework Myth: Why Our Kids Get Too Much of a Bad Thing***, his stunning exploration of how homework fails our children, why it's widely accepted, and what we can do to rescue our children's motivation and love of learning.

Kohn is the author of ten previous books including *Punished by Rewards*, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, and *Unconditional Parenting*. He has been featured on hundreds of TV and radio shows, including Oprah and Today, and profiled in numerous publications, including *Time* and *The Washington Post*. He works with educators and parents across the country and speaks regularly at national conferences. For more information: [www.alfiekohn.org](http://www.alfiekohn.org).

**Jointly sponsored by Parent Map Pathway Lecture Series and the Parent Education Committee of Mercer Island schools and St. Monica.**

*\*A limited number of \$10 tickets are available for purchase by Mercer Island parents at Island Books. Parent Map tickets can be purchased online for \$18 at [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com) or at the door for \$25.*



**Healthy Pups Needs YOU!**

Are you interested in making healthy habits fun for kids and their families? Do you have ideas for weekly Healthy Pups tips? Are you interested in promoting Healthy Ways to

School at West Mercer? We need a few more interested parents to join the Healthy Pups Network at West Mercer. The idea behind Healthy Pups is to make health and fitness FUN. The more participants we have, the more we can assist our kids in developing healthy nutrition and fitness habits at a time in their lives when they are (mostly) willing participants! We need your ideas and energy to make things happen! If you have a great idea, or would like to get involved, please contact Kathy Reitingger, [reitingers4@comcast.net](mailto:reitingers4@comcast.net), 230-9493.



**Is your child earning PAWS at home?**

**If so, remember to reward them with the PAWS we sent home in the Friday Folders. Better yet, send in a description of their good behavior (either a few words or a photo) and we'll publish it in our April GoodTIMES newsletter. Please send all submissions to: [dianejohnson5@comcast.net](mailto:dianejohnson5@comcast.net).**



## 2009 MI Schools Foundation Business and Community Breakfast

### Now, More than Ever – Schools Fundraiser!

**You are Invited: Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Mercer Island High School**

**(7AM registration, 7:30 program, done by 8:30!)**

Come celebrate excellence in education with business and community leaders and corporate sponsors who will demonstrate their support for Mercer Island students, teachers and their schools. Don't miss the opportunity to hear inspirational stories from students of all grades and help raise funds for our schools through the Mercer Island Schools Foundation.

Don't let expected state budget cuts hamper our district's 20/20 vision of successfully preparing students for the cognitive, global and digital age!

### **NOW MORE THAN EVER – YOUR ATTENDANCE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

The Schools Foundation, in partnership with local businesses, education leaders and the community, is tasked with raising funds (especially important in this tough budget year) ensuring our schools have the necessary resources to guarantee that our classrooms evolve, students are fully engaged in meaningful learning and teachers have the opportunity to further develop their skills to help our students as all work toward making the 20/20 vision a reality.

**We Need:** Business Sponsors,  
Donation-matching Angels  
Table Captains  
Attendees

**To sign up or for more information please contact Penny Yantis at [payantis@hotmail.com](mailto:payantis@hotmail.com) or 206-275-2550.**



### **Announcing the March to March BAND Uniform Campaign**

Our MIHS band uniforms were purchased in 1979 (making them 30 years old). They are wool (terrible in the rain), the maroon runs on the white, the zippers are broken (we used 3 rolls of duct tape on the kids during the homecoming parade to keep their pants up), the style is terrible for marching (the bellbottoms are definitely not a fashion statement)...and desperately need to be replaced.

The urgency for replacing the uniforms is NOW. The band is growing to 300+ students next year—rather than paying for 30 new uniforms to match the current ones that are old, irreparable and uncomfortable, we have launched a campaign to replace them all. It is a bit of a daunting challenge, as we need to raise \$157K by March 1st to have the uniforms ordered in time for the 2009 marching season.

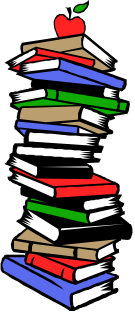
**Learn more at our website [www.mihband.com](http://www.mihband.com)**

The 300 member MIHS Band is an shining example of our outstanding music programs and school district, consistently receiving high national recognition and performance invitations, ie; the 2007 Rose Parade and a candidate for 2009 Presidential Inaugural Ceremonies in Washington, DC. Our band uniforms should reflect that quality. Today's preschool, elementary and middle school students will benefit from this effort, and we are counting on your support.

**To donate, please download the donation form at:**

**[http://www.mihband.com/Images/Quick\\_Donation\\_Form.doc](http://www.mihband.com/Images/Quick_Donation_Form.doc)**

## Dear Fourth Grade Parents,



This is my third and final year as a fifth grade parent, and since Sarah Rowe asked what she should expect next year as a first year 5th grade parent, I'll tell you a few things I've learned.

Beginning instruments (band or orchestra) begins in 5th grade, which means early morning (8:15 - 9:00) practice at IMS or the high school two days a week. If your 5th grader starts playing an instrument, they get to start taking the middle school bus. For some kids, this can be traumatic, especially if they don't have any neighborhood friends in middle school, or any other 5th band students on the same schedule. **Get to know your neighbors!**

Homework gets harder. **Much more math.**

Student council, Peer Mediators, and Safety Patrol are all terrific opportunities for your fifth grader to take on some extra responsibility, or even assume leadership role.

The art projects are less craft and more art.

Lots of people who have volunteered all through the grades burn out by fifth grade, and it is harder to find classroom helpers. But that is okay, because the kids do so much for themselves, and the teachers do a great job of running things without much parent assistance.



Hormones kick in big time - for boys and girls. Emotions can run high. The separation begins in 3rd grade, and intensifies in 4th grade, and by 5th grade, the boys and girls have all but segregated themselves, which is okay, because they find each other again soon enough.

On a more personal level, and again, I can only speak from the perspective of a mother of daughters: even though they seem so big in 5th grade, even though you can see and hear the physical changes, they are still just 10 or 11 or 12, and that means they are still very much kids. There may be pleas for independence, or permission to watch PG-13 movies, or to stay up later, but they are still young. Don't rush out of childhood too quickly. I don't think they mind too much if you cuddle up on the couch together and read a story out loud, or tuck them in with a kiss at night.



I have found fifth grade to be a very affectionate year, maybe because all around them their peers seem to be growing so big and independent, and middle school looms in the near future, or maybe because as much as the wide world beckons, safe at home is where things make the most sense.

### So what should you expect?

More of the same, just bigger, hungrier, busier, maybe a little sweeter. And if it worries you because your fifth grader just looks and seems so much older than those little kindergartners, go take a visit to the middle school, and hang out with some 8th graders. They look huge!

### What should you do?

Attend all the parent information meetings, maybe sit in on a middle school PTA meeting or parent peer group. They can be very enlightening. Keep volunteering if you are able, and enjoy the year.

**Have fun!**

*Kate Lepp*



***From Islander Middle School: Class of 2016***

**Parents of current 5<sup>th</sup> graders are invited to  
REGISTRATION NIGHT**

March 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm  
Islander Middle School

Transition activities for the 5th graders include a classroom visit by the principals, Counselors and the registrar the week of **March 9th**. Fifth graders get their initial glimpse of the exciting opportunities in middle school and receive registration information to take home to parents.

Parents of current 5th graders are invited to a Registration Night on March 16th at 7:00 pm. This event will be an opportunity for parents to learn more about the overall middle school schedule, class options, grading in middle school, and after school clubs and activities. Parents will have opportunities to interact with administrators and counselors while getting their questions answered throughout this program.

Current 5th grade students and their parents will complete the IMS registration form at home and return that form to their 5th grade teacher by March 19th. Tina Meade and Sue Ames, IMS Counselors, will visit each elementary school to guide students as they enter their registration information online.

During the week of March 30th - April 3rd, Skyward Family Access will be open for parents to verify that their child's registration information has been entered correctly into the system.



***Fifth Grade  
Art***

Fifth grade artists are drawing all sorts of things this winter.

- \* January Art Enrichment taught 3 dimensional perspective drawings, emulating Vincent van Gogh's painting of his bedroom in Arles. Students recalled their fourth grade Vanishing Point exercises, and expanded their understanding by representing solid, 3-dimensional objects using parallel horizontal and vertical lines, as well as orthogonal lines. (Don't know what an orthogonal line is? Ask your fifth grader!)
- \* In February, students studied Advanced Stick Figure theory, drawing bodies in motion, and some classes even made flip books.
- \* Looking forward to March, your Art Volunteers will need extra help in the 5th grade classrooms for our Clay Mask project. Please contact your Classroom Art Volunteer or room mother if you'd like to volunteer.

**PTA NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Are you interested in getting more involved in your child's school? You should consider becoming a PTA Officer. The PTA Nominating Committee is currently taking applications for next year's Executive Committee and committee chair positions.

If either you or someone you know is interested in becoming more involved, please submit the following information to Theresa Magnussen [mtmagnussen@msn.com](mailto:mtmagnussen@msn.com) or it can be dropped off at the school office.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email & Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Previous PTA & volunteering experience \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Interest \_\_\_\_\_

Other Background Information \_\_\_\_\_



# Second Grade Artists

By An Tootill

Working with clay is always enjoyable for our students. In January, the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade had its turn, and the students created clay geckos and snakes. The students began with butter-stick size wedges of clay, which they rolled into a long coil. They used this coil to create either a snake or the body and legs for a gecko. After learning how to score the clay and make slip, the students added tails and heads. To complete their reptile, they used a variety of clay tools to make impressions in the clay.

A power outage at the school made this project a bit more challenging for Miss Harnish's students, but they persevered and used their fingers to "see" the clay.

After the first firing, the students applied brightly-colored glazes to complete their reptiles, and the pieces were fired again and taken home.

In February, the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade learned about the life and art of Vincent Van Gogh. Modeling his short, overlapping brushstroke style, they used oil pastels and construction paper to create their own versions of Starry Night.



————Thank You, Art Volunteers!!!————

There are a great number of people to thank for making the Art Enrichment program a success this year. First, thank you to all the parents who make this program happen, by teaching the lessons, preparing the materials, assisting in the classroom, and much more. Our children are very fortunate to have such involved, caring parents.

A huge thank you is owed to **Jennifer Sidney** for running the kiln room this year so our children have an opportunity to work with clay. She is responsible for purchasing the clay and glazes, maintaining the kiln room, and firing each student's clay piece (not just once, but twice!).

Thank you to our Grade Level Art Coordinators:

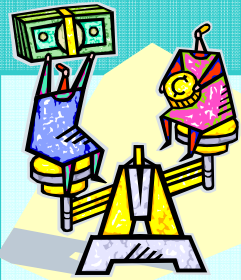
\* Kelly Casey, 1<sup>st</sup>; An Tootill, 3<sup>rd</sup>; Janice Asmus, 4<sup>th</sup>; and Kate Lepp, 5<sup>th</sup>.

Their hard work keeps everything running smoothly.

Many thanks to **Brandy O'Briant**, who orders the art supplies each month and keeps our supply closet well-stocked and maintained.

***Lastly, a big thank you to our amazing teachers for supporting this program every year.***

# MISD SCHOOL BOARD NEWS



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MISD School Board Approves Superintendent Plano's Central Office Restructuring Plan

On February 12, 2009 the Mercer Island School Board approved Dr. Gary Plano's Management Review and Restructuring Plan (Resolution #562), the culmination of a process that began in the fall of 2008 with an independent review conducted by the Puget Sound Educational Services District (PSESD 121). The results of this review recommended that the Superintendent trim central office costs and realign the centralized functions to more directly support the work of MISD schools and the district's new 2020 Vision: Successfully preparing students for the cognitive, global and digital world.

In order to accomplish these goals, Dr. Plano has eliminated both associate superintendent positions and created two new ones specifically: Executive Director of Learning and Technology Services and Executive Director of Human Resources and Business Services effective July 1. Several existing positions are newly named with new job functions

intended to support the work in the schools. Details on who will be working in the newly configured positions will be made available soon.

According to Dr. Plano, "This was a "brave exercise" on the part my entire staff to take a closer look at our work and see how we can do a better job of serving our students and teachers. The current budget crisis requires that we have a plan to reduce costs, but it also presents opportunities to create a "new synergy" of skills and talents to accomplish the 2020 Vision."

The final report on potential cost savings will be presented to the School Board by July 1, 2009. The PSESD Management Review and Restructuring Plan and the School Board's Resolution #562 are now posted on the district web site: <http://www.misd.k12.wa.us> ][www.misd.k12.wa.us](http://www.misd.k12.wa.us)

### **Gary Plano, Ed. D.**

Superintendent  
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**The board extends its thanks to all who came out Jan. 30 to brainstorm solutions to the impending district budget crunch.** The national economic crisis will seriously impact

school budgets in Washington State. Preliminary estimates indicate Mercer Island may receive between \$1 and \$3 million less than expected for the 2009-2010 school year. Some 140 of you attended the community forum organized by PTA President Mary Kay Woolston and the PTA Council. You were asked to prioritize what we must do to continue to create 21st century minds, what aspects of our system are most important to preserve and how we can best attract additional investment in our schools. We came away from the meeting impressed by the depth and diversity of your suggestions.

As Superintendent Plano pointed out, our district is in better shape than most to weather this storm. Not only do our citizens regularly pass our levies with wide majorities, many of you go further and contribute generously through the schools foundation and donate your own time supporting schools projects. Those contributions will be more important this year than ever before.

In addition, the board and superintendent have for many years insisted this district's finances be conservatively managed. As a result we have little outstanding debt at this time and a portion of that was recently re-funded at a significantly lower interest rate. Our full four percent emergency reserve is intact and some of it could be applied to avoid the worst cuts if state funding falls to the low end of estimates. Nevertheless, this will be a difficult budget cycle and we will keep you informed of the difficult decisions we will face.

On more positive note, this month the board received a demographic study of likely future enrollment. Our consultant predicts slow but steady growth in headcount over the next two decades. This is good news as slow growth is the easiest trend for a district to manage. Greater numbers of students bring greater state funding and create potential surpluses that can be creatively applied to areas of greatest need.

As always we welcome your comments and concerns. The website at [www.misd.k12.wa.us/](http://www.misd.k12.wa.us/) offers a wealth of information about the district, including minutes of past Board meetings and dates and agendas for those in the future.



## EXCITED ABOUT EDUCATION REFORM VISION...BUT SHOW ME THE MONEY!

By Stowe Sprague, Vice President, Mercer Island PTA Legislation/Advocacy

Your PTA advocacy parent volunteers have whooped with excitement about the recommendations from the bipartisan Basic Education Funding Taskforce. After 103 studies, it looked the most realistic way to finally redefine education in modern terms and fully fund it. These recommendations are now in bill format and the question is: is this good for Mercer Island? The answer is a cautious yes, “but” the actual implementation depends on your talking to your legislators about your hopes and concerns.

We PTA advocates are 100% behind a new vision for education funding. Without a powerful end goal, we are left with a creaky system patched with opaque formulas and goosed by lawsuits and voter initiatives. No such system is worthy of increased funding – however valid – and we will remain around 45<sup>th</sup> in funding nationwide. House Bill 1410 and Senate Bill 5444 – “Model Schools bills” for short – encapsulate a very worthy vision: **raising the bar** (longer school day, more school days, more credits required from high school students), **class size reduction**, supporting **quality teaching** (more professional development; thoughtful changes to teacher career ladder and compensation), and **transparent school budgets** for accountability and communication to parents and community.

We are optimistic because we laud these end goals. The means to this goal, however, is where “Model Schools bills” remain a work in progress.

**Redefinition of basic education is truly basic.** It falls short of what Mercer Island actually offers (e.g. 7 period MIHS day vs. the proposed 6 funded periods) and what it strives to be (2020 Vision). “Model Schools bills” extend a funding hand to bring districts up to the median good, but offers little to districts which are competing at a national and global level.

**Where’s the money, and meanwhile, don’t take ours.** There’s no funding mechanism or rollout plan yet defined, yet the Model Schools bills force Mercer Island to decrease its

local levy funding by 2012 in the name of formulaic equality. This is a twin blow to Mercer Island: we are very wary about reform being rolled out as unfunded mandates, and our levies – our community investment in education and its kids – are critical to backfilling existing unfunded mandates (special education, teachers) and delivering a beyond-basic education to kids. If there is one important message to legislators, it’s about local investment in education:

- Focus levy equalization on per-pupil amount. 25% of schools can ask for more than Mercer Island, even with its “high” levy lid
- Advocate, rather than diminish, local investment in education, a powerful engine for the State and for the community. Research shows that higher/unlimited local funding actually boosts overall state funding. Cutting edge investment will push improvements in education statewide
- Stabilize levy collection: a cut in I-728 or other state funding cannot doubly hurt regions by lowering the voter-approved levy ask from one year to the next (SB 5721 / HB 1776)

**Special needs and gifted kids aren’t a formula.** Transparent per-pupil funding is also needed for special needs and gifted students. The Highly Capable Allocation is capped at 3% and, unlike all the other allocations, is specifically not permitted to count the actual number of students. Special needs kids are funded more, but still according to a one-size-fits-all formula that probably won’t sum up enough.

Parents, we’re terrific advocates for our kids. Now is the time to tell legislators to seize this vision and work out a thoughtful implementation plan to funding. Our kids can’t wait for another study.

Email your 41<sup>st</sup> District legislators: [Jarrett.Fred@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Jarrett.Fred@leg.wa.gov); [Maxwell.Marcie@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Maxwell.Marcie@leg.wa.gov); [Clibborn.Judy@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Clibborn.Judy@leg.wa.gov), as well as Senate and House leaders: [Chopp.Frank@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Chopp.Frank@leg.wa.gov); [Brown.Lisa@leg.wa.gov](mailto:Brown.Lisa@leg.wa.gov) or call 800/562-6000

**PTA Advocacy.** *Get involved. Make a difference.* We meet monthly and advocate all the time. Join the PTA advocacy team: check out <http://milegislativeteam.wikispaces.com/> or email: **Aleta Finnila** ([aleta@hugunin.net](mailto:aleta@hugunin.net))

### **Sign on to a Coalition:**

**Education Funding Reform** (Claudia, [robbs\\_pc@msn.com](mailto:robbs_pc@msn.com)); **Bullying** (Stowe, [stowesprague@hotmail.com](mailto:stowesprague@hotmail.com)); **World Language** (Tim, [tim@discoverybio.com](mailto:tim@discoverybio.com)); **Math reform/Curriculum review** (Aleta, [aleta@hugunin.net](mailto:aleta@hugunin.net)); **Food Allergies** (Margie, [margie.willett@comcast.net](mailto:margie.willett@comcast.net)); **Special Education** (vacant – interested? Email [stowesprague@hotmail.com](mailto:stowesprague@hotmail.com))

# Thank You

- \* A huge thank you to Principal **Rich Mellish** and Superintendent **Gary Plano** for speaking at our February 2nd General PTA Meeting.
- \* Sheri Robertson for coordinating the February 9<sup>th</sup> Community Service Day with the Humane Society.
- \* Thank you to our room parent - Michele Schuler - and many other parents in room 8 – who planned the best Valentine's Day Party! We had treats, games, activities and fun, fun fun! Thanks to all the parents in room 8 and especially Michele.
- \* Thank you to Maricel Aziz for her countless volunteer hours working on the Weekly Wolfwatch.
- \* Thank you to Becky Costello, Jennifer Sydney and Maricel Aziz for putting together the Friday Folders every week.
- \* Thank you to all the copy corp volunteers who come every Thursdays and collate flyers for the 600+ Red Friday folders. And to those who come and make copies for the teachers. We really are doing them a big help and thank you for making it possible. Cynthia Winiski, Sheri Robertson, Boyce Robertson, Vicki Goldfarb, Jennifer Muscatel, Becky Costello, Jennifer Sidney, Judy Petrie, Karen Upson, and to others who just stop in and help even for a short time.
- \* A furry **THANK YOU** to all who donated to the **Seattle Humane Society**. To all who patiently waited to get in the Max Mobile, created beautiful posters, made blankets and catnip toys. We had a very successful event and a lot of very happy animals! To Sheri Robertson who organized the event and Vicki Goldfarb and other parents for helping with the craft stations.



## Humane Society Project



Smiling faces, happy hearts and helping hands!



# Shopping Online?



If you are going to be shopping online, please start at [www.boxtops4education.com](http://www.boxtops4education.com), [www.onecause.com](http://www.onecause.com) (formerly Schoolpop), [www.escrip.com](http://www.escrip.com), or [www.upromise.com](http://www.upromise.com) first and make sure you have designated West Mercer Elementary as your school to support. There are a large variety of merchants to choose from. We can earn up to 9% of your purchases at some of the merchants.



## Box Tops and Campbell's Labels

**Do you want to dunk Mr. Mellish or Mr. Alin at the Fiesta Carnival in the spring?**

If so, send in your Box Tops and Campbell's Labels. If we reach our goals (double last year's earnings) they will each sit in the dunk tank. Watch the wall by the gym in November for details and updates.



## Become Involved! Join PTA!

Are you new to West Mercer? Did you miss the fall PTA membership drive? Do you need a PTA school directory? There is still time to join the West Mercer Elementary School PTA.

The PTA Membership Form is on the school website at <http://www.misd.k12.wa.us/schools/wm/wmpta/pta%20membership%20form.pdf>

Simply print the Membership Form and fill it out, then drop the completed form and check at the school office. You will receive one free PTA school directory per paid membership.

If you have any questions please contact me at: (206) 275-2577 or [mac\\_sue@msn.com](mailto:mac_sue@msn.com). Suzanne Lusnia

## IDENTIFICATION STATEMENT

*goodTIMES* is a monthly PTA publication staffed by West Mercer volunteers and funded by the PTA.

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Published monthly: Sept-June (except Dec)

## March 2009

3rd	7pm	Speaker Alfie Kohn, "The Homework Myth"
4th	5pm	WM Science Fair
6th	9:30am	Principal's Coffee
8th	—	Daylight Savings Time starts
13th	School	Snow make-up day
16th	7pm	IMS Incoming Gr. 6 registration
17th	—	St. Patrick's Day
24th-25th	5:30pm	Fine Arts Showcase
25th	9:30am	Elementary School tours
30th-31st	No School	Spring Break

## April 2009

1st-3rd	No School	Spring Break
10th	9:30am	Principal's Coffee
28th	7:30am	MISF Breakfast of Champs

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**ABSENTEE ALERT LINE: 206-236-3434**

