

# COMMUNITY



# +Link

A Publication of Mount Vernon Schools

IN THIS ISSUE

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



## Welcome to the 2021-22 School Year!

Welcome to Fall of the 2021-22 school year. It has been about 16 months since I became the Superintendent of the Mount Vernon School District. This is a tremendous honor and I value the trust put in me by the school board, families, staff, and community. I have learned so much this last year and, in some respects, this year feels like my first year. It has been heartening to learn about the many different learning options our students have available to them like our Transitional Kindergarten, 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, Mount Vernon High School, NCTA (Northwest Career and Technical Academy), Aspire Academy, Skagit Academy, and Open Doors both at NCTA and Skagit Valley College. Additionally, we have a new online learning program called Mount Vernon Virtual Learning (MVVL).

Equally as valuable is the great partnership we have formed with organizations like the United Way, who's bold goal is that by 2025, all Skagit children entering Kindergarten are ready to learn. This, of course, aligns well with our district's vision and mission. We continue to partner with organizations like SPARC (Skagit Preschool and Resource Center), Children of the Valley, Boys and Girls Club, and the YMCA just to name a few. These organizations have walked beside us during these times to provide both educational and social emotional supports for our students and families. These partnerships demonstrate the depth and breadth of how our community works together to support student learning and well-being.

This fall, my focus has been on making sure the district developed the best way to teach our students as we have returned to full in-person learning, while ensuring the health and safety of our students, staff, and families. We understand that we are still not back to our 'normal' pre-COVID learning environment, so we continue to put into practice the health and safety measures needed to provide safe learning conditions for our students. We will continue to work with the Governor,

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# SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Continued from front page

Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Skagit County Public Health, and community partners to provide academic and social/emotional learning supports for our students and families.

In this issue, you will learn about our Transportation department, the status of our construction projects - made possible by your support of the 2016 Bond, how our Bulldog alum have used their education and experiences to enhance their community, and much more. These big picture projects come down to one common goal - "100% of our students will graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in post-secondary education, careers, and life." That includes the kindergarten student learning how to be a part of a classroom, the 3rd grader celebrating their accomplishment of reading at grade level, the 6th grade student finding new opportunities to learn through a wide choice of electives, and the high school student successfully completing their math course or earning their seal of biliteracy. Student success comes from every teacher, every family, every community partner, and every student.

As a district, we were charged with developing a plan that will keep our students healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. While we are not fully back to the learning environments we are accustomed to, it takes all of us to do our part to provide optimal learning conditions for our students. Getting vaccinated, wearing face covering, frequent hand washing, social distancing, etc., are some of the more promising safety measures that are designed to create those conditions. In the event that we are not able to continue basic education in-person learning due to a disruption, the district has a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) in place to address such disruptions if needed.

We will continue to work closely with the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Governor's office, state and county Health Departments, community partners, and our district neighbors to determine what is best for our students as we move forward throughout the school year. With the continued challenges and opportunities that lay ahead, we know that by working together with our community and listening to the important messages being shared, we will give our students the education, security, and emotional well-being they need and deserve.

Please stay healthy and safe.

Warm regards,



Ismael Vivanco, Ed. D  
Superintendent  
Mount Vernon School District



## Construction Update

As students headed back to school this fall, the improvements to Old Main continued. Outside the building the two new stair towers are beginning to be erected. These contribute to the seismic upgrade of the building and they will improve student flow during passing times. Inside the building, additional seismic work is occurring. The auditorium has been expanded and will be a beautiful venue upon completion.

While Old Main is unavailable to students this year, freshmen are being housed at Lincoln School. Freshmen spend either their Green Day or their White Day at Lincoln, with the other day spent on the main campus. Named MVHS South Campus, Lincoln has provided a positive and calm learning climate for our 9th graders. Additionally, over the summer three portables were relocated from Little Mountain to MVHS to provide additional classroom space on campus. These portables will be removed when Old Main is completed, which is scheduled for the summer of 2022.



# FEATURED ALUMNI

Our alumni are working to change the world around us.



From being a Bulldog graduate, to working as the Skagit County Parks and Recreation Manager, Tony Tewalt has a long history of being part of the Mount Vernon community. Tony grew up in Mount Vernon, and attended the Mount Vernon Schools. As a child, he attended Jefferson Elementary, LaVenture Middle School and Mount Vernon High School. Tony graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 1989 and went on to attend Washington State University.

Tony knew he wanted to work in a sports management field, and after he graduated from WSU, he returned to his hometown to work as the Skagit County Parks and Recreation Manager, and has been building the organized sports league ever since.

Fast-forward to March 2020, a time when things in the Skagit area were beginning to close down due to COVID. Organized sports were placed on hold. Tony quickly adjusted to the need at hand. He began to utilize his skills in a manner that once again benefited not only Skagit County, but Mount Vernon Schools. As a way to help support the city of Mount Vernon, Tony switched roles and became the Logistics Coordinator assisting the Skagit County Emergency Management Department in disseminating Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The goal was to get the much needed PPE organized and distributed to those organizations who were in need. This included care facilities, hospitals, and schools.

Parks & Recreation Director, Brian Adams, said, “As the pandemic emerged and recreational activities subsided, Tony stepped into a new role as the logistics coordinator to bring PPE and other resources to the schools and throughout Skagit County. Tony provided expertise in this role due to his experience and expertise. Tony has had over twenty years of experience in putting together basketball tournaments with over one hundred participating teams. Anyone who navigates the logistics in coordinating the necessary gym space, referees, scorekeepers, and other resources for a tournament this large has the perfect skill set for moving supplies where they need to be during an emergency. It’s just another way Tony found a way to serve the community when there was a need.”



Tony recently received Mount Vernon School District’s Community Bulldog Award for his contribution in securing PPE for the schools. “Tony was supportive and responsive and presented a can-do attitude to support our schools, students and staff in Mount Vernon” said MVSD Assistant Superintendent, Bill Nutting.



Tony has since moved back to organizing youth sports teams for Skagit County Parks and Recreation. Currently he is working on organizing a Fall 2021 MV Girls Basketball Club for students in 4th-8th grade. These groups allow students of every skill and income level to participate.

When asked what he appreciates about his Mount Vernon School District experience, Tony said “I like the diversity of the district. I can appreciate that having kids in the district. I know Mount Vernon schools has great teachers at every level, and students are receiving the best.”

If you would like to know how you can help the Skagit County Parks & Recreation organized youth basketball teams, please feel free to reach out to Tony at [tonyt@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:tonyt@co.skagit.wa.us)

“I know Mount Vernon schools has great teachers at every level, and students are receiving the best.”



# VAN STRATEN JOINS THE TEACHING & LEARNING TEAM

Melissa Van Straten is a familiar face to many of our families in the community. She joined the Mount Vernon School District as the Assistant Principal at Madison Elementary in 2017 where she worked to support the district's dual language program and was recently hired as the Director of Teaching and Learning.

Melissa has a long history of working with students. She began her career teaching English to students in Reynosa, Mexico where she worked and lived. After returning to the United States, Melissa worked as a paraeducator at an elementary school and later as a classroom teacher in an elementary school with a bilingual program. Melissa moved on to become an instructional coach and then the curriculum director before moving to Washington state.

Melissa likes to begin each day focusing on the District's Equity Goal #3: Provide instruction, curriculum, and learning environments reflecting the strengths and needs of our students allowing them to reach their academic and social emotional potential. Her motto is "Every Student. Every Day. Everyone. Every Way." "I strive to be intentional in the ways in which I work toward these goals, ensuring that with each decision I make or action I take I am moving closer to reaching this goal and living out this motto. Working collaboratively with colleagues to build a multi-tiered system of support is one of the concrete ways that I am working towards Equity Goal #3 and my motto. Expanding educational access and opportunities for multilingual students is another way that I am working towards that goal and motto."

The district is excited to welcome Melissa Van Straten to this role. You can reach Melissa at 360-428-6110 ext. 11412.



## WELCOME MITCH EVERTON

Mitch Everton was recently hired as the district's Project Manager for the CTE Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment. Although he is new to this position, Mitch has a long history of working with school districts.

Before taking on this role, Mitch was an advisor for school districts. He assisted over 40 different districts as they worked through their strategic planning process.

Mitch grew up in Lafayette, CA (Bay Area). He received a BA in Economics from UC Santa Barbara and an MBA from UC Berkeley.

Mitch is an asset to the Mount Vernon School District. When asked what his goal for MVSD is, he said "My goal is to help further the great work currently being done at NCTA-students and staff-in any way that I can. Equity is vital to the health of our society-we need to do everything possible to encourage and ensure that every student achieves to his/her fullest potential."

We would like to welcome Mitch to the Mount Vernon School District

## KATIE JOINS THE WASHINGTON TEAM

Katie Hohimer joins Washington Elementary School as the newest administrative team member. She brings with her years of experience in education and in administrative work.

Katie graduated from Richland High School in eastern Washington. She earned her Bachelors at Eastern Washington University and her Master of Education in Educational Administration from Whitworth University. Katie's previous roles include bilingual elementary teacher, building facilitator, and literacy interventionist. Katie became an assistant principal of a dual language and STEM elementary school before joining our team.

This fall, Katie was hired as the Assistant Principal at Washington Elementary School. "I am thrilled to have returned to the role of assistant principal, as it truly is the best job ever. I get to be involved in all aspects of the school, from solving tricky problems to celebrating successes. I love how each day is different at Washington Elementary, and that I get to partner with wonderful families, dedicated educators, and a strong principal to meet students where they are and help them grow academically and socially."

We would like to welcome Katie Hohimer to the Mount Vernon School District.

# Mount Vernon Alumni Return to Teach Future Bulldog Graduates



In this issue, the Mount Vernon School District would like to recognize a group of Mount Vernon High School alumni who have returned this fall to teach at the district. We asked each of them to share a little about their background and why they chose their Alma Mater as their place to make a difference. On this page you will read about Brenyn Hart, Eden Mayfield, Brianna Pimentel, Katie Rawls, and Azucena Zavala-Montalvo



Brenyn Hart

Brenyn is a 2015 MVHS graduate. After graduating from MVHS, she went on to study at Central Washington University. Brenyn joins the MVSD team at Mount Baker Middle School where she teaches Mathematics.

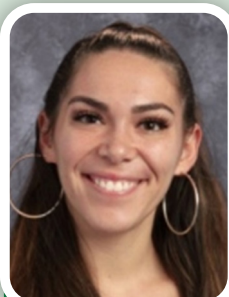
Brenyn recalls her MVHS teacher, Mrs. Farren, being an influence in her career choice. Mrs. Farren pushed her students to reach their full potential through fun and engaging activities. Brenyn aspires to be a teacher like her.



Eden Mayfield

Eden is a 2016 MVHS graduate. After graduating from MVHS she went on to study at Western Washington University. She received her special education/elementary degree at Western. Eden joins the MVSD team at Washington Elementary School where she is the Librarian.

Eden recalls Shawn Servoss as being a source of inspiration in becoming a teacher.



Brianna Pimentel

Brianna is a 2013 MVHS graduate. After graduating, she studied at Western Washington University where she received her Bachelor's in Spanish and her teaching certificate. Brianna joins the MVSD team at Centennial Elementary School where she is the Elementary Language Specialist.

Brianna studied language because of the influence that her language teacher, Mrs. Hodgson had on her. She recalls how Mrs. Hodgson made learning fun.

"It is really exciting to be working in the school district that I grew up in! It is also exciting to see the changes that the District is trying to make as a whole with respect to equity and access. These things weren't talked about very much when I was in school (or at least it didn't always seem so) so it is really great to see those changes trying to be made and it being taken seriously."

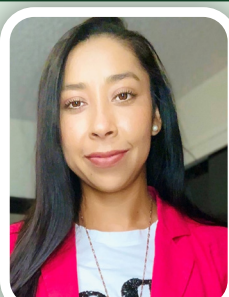
Katie returns to the Mount Vernon School District to teach 1st grade at Centennial Elementary School. Katie attended Mount Vernon schools from kindergarten through high school and graduated from Mount Vernon High School in 2008. She then went on to graduate from Western Governors University.

Katie remembers taking classes that prepared her for her future career. Mrs. Sager was one of those teachers who sparked the passion in her that allowed her to follow her heart and pursue a career in education.

***"I am a bulldog through and through. I attended schools in Mount Vernon from kindergarten through high school."***



Katie Rawls



Azucena Zavala-Montalvo

Azucena is a 2013 MVHS graduate. After graduating from MVHS she went on to study at Skagit Valley College and received her degree from Western Washington University (Woodring College of Education). Azucena joins the MVSD team at Madison Elementary where she teaches 5th grade.

Azucena credits a math teacher she had during her high school educational career that influenced her to become a teacher. She remembers how this teacher went above and beyond her work to support her students. Azucena noticed this teacher's peculiarities, and started to identify what attitudes enriched the role of an educator and how these extra efforts made a significant impact on student's lives.

***"My goal as an educator is to create a strong positive relationship with my students and to offer them my unconditional support."***



# Transportation Services

Did you know that the transportation department transports approximately 4700 students to and from school on any given school day? This is all due to the dedicated employees within the transportation department. Supervisor Kelly Johnson employs 42 bus drivers, 10 part time substitute drivers, 17 bus monitors, 4 office staff and 3 mechanics. Along with the daily transportation, the team buses our students to extracurricular, sporting, and many other events throughout the year. This fall, the Mount Vernon School District awarded the transportation department with the “Bulldog Award” for their hard work and dedication to our students. Way to go team!



The Mount Vernon School District bus fleet departs at 6am for their first run.



“ Our department employs wonderful, dedicated, resilient, highly trained, caring and compassionate people!

-Kelly Johnson  
Transportation Supervisor

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## WELCOME STUDENT BOARD REPRESENTATIVES

At the September board meeting, the board interviewed and selected three students for the 2021-2022 Student Board Rep positions. These

Mount Vernon High School seniors join the team as liaisons for the board and the MVHS student population. They are (L to R): Adam Wagenbach (Mount Vernon High School ASB President), Leydi Hernandez-Quiroz, Viridiana Ponce-Cisneros. The board and superintendent are excited to have them on the team.



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.