

Superintendent's Message

Dr. Gary Plano

August 2013

I can sense fall in the air as we ready our schools and classrooms for the arrival of our students on Tuesday, September 3rd. I hope this message reaches you feeling relaxed and excited about the start of the new school year.

I am happy to welcome three new administrators to our amazing management team. Andy LaBadie is Lakeridge's new Principal, following the reassignment of Fred Rundle who now works in the Learning and Technology Services area. Andy comes to Mercer Island from Ohio, where he was an elementary principal and also served as a director of curriculum. Aimee Batliner-Gillette is our new elementary associate principal. Aimee will be working at all three schools and supporting all three elementary Principals. Aimee comes to us from the Tukwila School District. Lindsay Myatich returns to the district in a new capacity as the Assistant Director of Learning Services in Special Education. Lindsay worked at Lakeridge a few years back as a special education teacher in the autism spectrum program. I am fortunate to have three amazing new leaders join our team!

At the June 27, 2013 regular meeting of the Mercer Island School Board, the Mercer Island Schools Foundation Executive Director, Penny Yantis, presented a check to the Board for \$1 million, which has maintained approximately 17 teaching positions, district wide in addition to funding an elementary arts specialist and secondary coaches at MIHS and IMS. The funds were raised as part of the *Bridge the Gap* campaign, a cooperative effort of the schools' PTAs; our community has once again provided us with this remarkable gift of support.

Our custodial and maintenance teams have been busy throughout the summer. Portable classrooms have been added at Island Park Elementary, and at the high school, a new press box has been underway for some weeks now, allowing for better access to concessions and to bathrooms.

Please see an important message below from our Communities that Care (CTC) team:

Welcome back to school, from the Mercer Island Communities That Care (CTC) Coalition. CTC is a group of Island parents, youth, and professionals whose mission is to prevent underage drug and alcohol use. Now that I-502 has legalized marijuana and marijuana-infused products for adults over age 21, CTC hopes parents will help their students be informed about marijuana and stay safe.

No longer the “ditch weed” of the sixties and seventies, today’s marijuana is a different and more powerful drug. Genetic engineering has resulted in a drug that is 3-4 times more powerful than in previous generations.

While marijuana grows stronger, our knowledge of its health effects has also increased. For example, we know heavy use by teens can permanently lower IQ, increase the likelihood of mental health problems, impair coordination and lead to car crashes, and lead to lower academic performance.

We recommend parents educate themselves about today’s marijuana and talk to their kids. Under the new law, it remains illegal for youth to smoke or ingest marijuana, there is a “zero tolerance” policy for minors driving impaired by marijuana, and marijuana-infused edibles (candy, brownies, soda pop, etc.) will soon be sold in marijuana retail stores alongside the dried plant product.

With the commercial marijuana marketplace just around the corner, it is important we arm our youth with the facts. As opposed to what one might hear in the school hallway on Monday morning, the fact is that even among MIHS 12th graders, MOST (61%) have never even tried marijuana (2012 Healthy Youth Survey).

Please visit the CTC [website](#) for more information. We also invite parents to watch our [educational video](#) on the new marijuana laws with their teens.
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Thank you again for your continuing support of our schools. I look forward to seeing you in the classrooms, practice fields, at community events and during the opening days of school at the PTA Welcome Back meetings.