

Dear Mercer Island parents,

I can't believe it's almost Thanksgiving! The school year began in earnest with welcoming over 300 new families to our district. Many are new to our state or even to the United States. The district held a new family welcome last month, where our new families and students met with other families, some of whom we called "parent ambassadors." Many of these parent ambassadors are multi-lingual, and offered to help with school and community transitions to a new home and locale. Please help us welcome these new families to our school community when you meet them in the shops, playfields and schools.

Our enrollment is higher than in prior years. Overall we gained 33 new students district-wide over last year's total, putting enrollment at 4,256. Just since 2010, nearly 200 more students have joined our school district.

While construction continues on the new Northwood Elementary School and Islander Middle School, the new 10-classroom wing at the high school has been in use since the first day of school in September. It includes four new science labs, designed for science, technology and engineering and six new general-purpose classrooms.

Our new Northwood Elementary School is going up before our eyes. It will open in the fall of 2016 with nearly 450 students, as we 'right-size' all of our elementary schools. In fact, all of our elementary schools will be 'new' in that they will have the right number of students that each school was designed to accommodate.

Finally, our expanded Islander Middle School has a new parking area and student drop-off area. The buildings that will house the gym and the music rooms are taking shape. This expansion will be completed and open for students in the fall of 2016.

All of our construction projects remain on time and within budget.

Regarding start times for high school, parents will receive a survey from the district examining the feasibility of starting school late only on Wednesdays, instead of early-release Wednesdays.

Our K-8 schools will remain on early-release Wednesdays. This *possible* high school change is designed to reflect research regarding our high school students' sleep needs and their biological clocks.

We are continuing our study to bring a Spanish-language program to all of our elementary schools beginning in the fall of 2016. This will require the expansion of our elementary instructional day by some 15 minutes. Please watch for a survey that will come out before the Thanksgiving break, to seek your input and support. Please take the time to respond and give us your feedback.

Finally, our Mercer Island Schools Foundation recently held its annual Phone-A-Thon to raise money for classroom enrichment and teacher training. Thank you for supporting the Foundation's work. This fall's Phone-A-Thon has a campaign goal of approximately \$500,000 to purchase curriculum materials and support professional development throughout our system. Next spring, the Foundation will hold its annual *Breakfast of Champions* event, where another \$1M is often pledged and supported by you.

I look forward to meeting all of you, including new families, in our school communities in the coming weeks. If I do not know you by name, please help me get to know you by introducing yourself to me.

Dr. Gary Plano