



MERIDIAN CONNECTION

Winter 2026 Newsletter

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Superintendent's Message



We are excited to welcome new families as kindergarten registration opens this month.

Registration for our early childhood programs also begins, with expanded offerings at Irene Reither Elementary for 3- and 4-year-olds. You can learn more about these programs on page 4.

Across the district, our schools have been focused on improving attendance and we are seeing outstanding progress. Students thrive when they are in school, and we appreciate our families for prioritizing consistent attendance. Meridian Middle School recently earned state recognition for building a strong, welcoming school culture; you can read about their award on the back page.

MP3 also celebrated 20 years of supporting students and families, you can learn more on page 6.

At Meridian High School, we are excited about new courses this year, including Latinos in Action (page 5) and the Allied Health skills center course. Planning for next year is underway, with a dual credit information night on Feb. 24 and an 8th-grade family night on March 26. We are also expanding our Northwest Career & Technical Academy (NCTA) partnership, adding Early Childhood Education and Tourism & Hospitality courses. These classes depend on student interest, so please encourage junior and senior students to register by contacting their counselor or visiting the NCTA website.

As we enter budget season, you may be aware of the challenges school districts are facing. Recently, Board Director Marty Gray, student representative Logan Ignacio, executive assistant Angie Hoyt and I (photo above) met with legislators in Olympia to advocate for fully funded



education. Despite record state revenues, districts continue to absorb rising costs and increasing student needs. Meridian annually receives strong audit results, and we are careful stewards of every dollar. Our budget is available on our website, and monthly financial updates are presented at school board meetings. If you have questions, I welcome a conversation.

Despite these challenges, outstanding work is happening every day and I am incredibly proud of our schools.

*Dr. James Everett
Superintendent*

School Board Update

Board of Distinction

Our school board was recognized as a 2025 Board of Distinction by the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA). This is the second time that our school board has received this recognition.

Meridian board members who received this recognition were Steve Corwin, Marty Gray, Jana Haugen, Jarrod Karuza and Michelle Simmons. Our student school board representatives are Logan Ignacio and Eden Bernardy.

This recognition celebrates school boards that demonstrate exemplary leadership and governance practices aligned with the Washington School Board Standards, resulting in improved student outcomes. WSSDA recognized our school board for its strong leadership in equity work grounded in data. The effective collaboration

between the board and superintendent, combined with community input and a commitment to ongoing improvement, reflects a thoughtful and well-rounded approach that is helping our district move forward.



Left to right: Superintendent Dr. James Everett, board directors Jana Haugen, Jarrod Karuza, Michelle Simmons and Marty Gray.

Welcome Jasmine Fast

During the Dec. 10 school board meeting, a new director took the oath of office. Jasmine Fast is the new board director for District 3. Jarrod Karuza who is the board director for District 2 was reelected. Each board member will serve a four-year term which expires in December 2029.



Right: Board director Jasmine Fast

District Updates



Register for Kindergarten

Register for kindergarten in Meridian School District! Kindergarten registration for the 2026-27 school year begins Tuesday, Feb. 17. Children must be 5-years-old by Sept. 1, 2026 to be eligible.

In kindergarten, children learn and grow through fun, hands-on activities. They begin building important skills in reading, writing, and math while also learning how to make friends, share, and work with others.



Irene Reither Elementary School offers a variety of pre-kindergarten programs for children ages 3-5. Learn more on the next page, scan the QR code or call us at

360-398-7111.

Free Developmental Screenings Offered at IRE

Meridian School District offers free developmental screenings for children ages 3–5 through our Child Find program.

These screenings help identify children who may benefit from early learning support or Special Education services. A developmental screening is a free check for children to see how they're growing and learning. It helps families understand if their child is developing skills at the expected pace and whether extra support might be helpful.

Each month, Meridian School District is hosting free screenings at Irene Reither Elementary School. If you have concerns about your child's development in areas like speech, motor skills, or learning, this is a great opportunity to connect with professionals and learn more. To sign up for a screening, complete our referral form.

If you have any questions, contact our Special Services Department at 360-318-2154 or visit www.meridian.wednet.edu/special-services/.



Improving School Lunch One Meal at Time

Healthy, nutritious meals play a vital role in supporting children's school success. Meridian continues to offer a variety of homemade meals including chicken fajitas, chicken pot pies and lasagna at our middle and high school. In addition to the daily hot lunch offerings, we offer a full range of Grab & Go options including salads, wraps and bagel sandwiches. All meal options are nutritionally balanced.

We encourage all families to complete a free and reduced-price meal application. Even though every student at Irene Reither Elementary currently receives free meals, this depends on the district staying eligible. Submitting a new application each year helps us keep this benefit in place and may also qualify your family for additional support. View more about our food program on our website: www.meridian.wednet.edu/food-service-program/.



Receive Regular District News

Our District News ParentSquare group is a great way to stay connected with what's happening across the district. We share announcements, updates, stories, and even weather notifications. Whether you are a grandparent, neighbor, or local supporter, we invite you to scan the QR code, or call 360-318-2159 to sign up!



Register to Vote



Online and mail voter registrations must be received at least eight days before Election Day. You may register to vote in-person any time before 8 p.m. on Election Day. Online voter registration is available through voter.votewa.gov. Registration forms are also available in any school office or at the District Office. You can also register to vote at the county elections office at 311 Grand Ave, Suite 103, Bellingham, WA.



Building Strong Foundations

Learn more about Irene Reither Elementary's early learning programs



At Irene Reither Elementary (IRE), the first floor is buzzing with energy and curiosity. It's home to our youngest

learners, ages three to five, who are beginning their educational journey in programs designed to support lifelong success.

Research shows that high-quality early learning improves long-term academic and social outcomes, and students who begin kindergarten ready to learn are more likely to stay on track.

"Our teachers are creating a school experience where children feel safe, known, loved, and valued," said early childhood specialist Natalie Eining. "At this age, children can take risks, share their thinking, and start building friendships. It's this collective effort that's happening across each classroom."

Pre-Kindergarten Programs (PK)

In addition to kindergarten, IRE offers a full-day preschool experience for eligible three- and four-year-olds. The Pre-Kindergarten (PK) Program brings together Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP, pronounced E-Cap) into one inclusive model where children learn through play, exploration, and connection with peers. Teachers focus on early literacy, foundational math, problem-solving, language growth, social-emotional development, and kindergarten readiness.

"Kids are excited to come to school. They love one another, and they love the staff," Mrs. Eining said. "Even in a few months, the growth we've seen is tremendous. It's such a special foundation for their learning journey."

Families also receive support through strong collaboration between school staff and community partners.



Eligibility for PK is based on age, need, and family circumstances, following TK and ECEAP guidelines.

Developmental Preschool

Developmental Preschool serves children ages three to five whose families have concerns about their child's development or learning. Students may experience communication delays, motor or adaptive challenges, social-emotional or behavioral needs, or have a diagnosed disability or health condition. Through specialized instruction and individualized supports, the program centers each child's strengths. Children qualify through a free evaluation that families can request anytime during the school year.

"All of our staff are here for the kids and what's best for kids," Mrs. Eining said. "This year, especially with adding so many students, everyone's excited to have them here. They love building relationships and creating intentional experiences to support a lifelong love of learning."

Both PK and Developmental Preschool prepare young learners for a successful transition into kindergarten while offering families ongoing



Top: Kindergarten students play at recess.
Above: TK teacher Atalia Jones.

support. Whether a child thrives in an inclusive, play-based environment or needs more specialized services, Meridian provides pathways that meet children where they are and help them flourish. Early childhood education at IRE isn't just about academics—it's about belonging, confidence, and joy. By investing in these programs, we are giving our youngest learners the tools they need to succeed now and in the future.

Kindergarten registration and applications for PK programs open annually on the Tuesday after Presidents Day. Visit our website to learn more.

Stories from our Schools



Unified Sports at Meridian High School



Unified Basketball returned to Meridian High School and, once again, we teamed up with Nooksack Valley to form our combined Laurel Valley team. Unified Sports is an initiative of Special Olympics and brings together students with and without intellectual disabilities to train and compete on the same team. The program continues to break down stereotypes and strengthen a culture of belonging. By playing side-by-side, students build genuine friendships, increase understanding, and contribute to a school community where everyone is valued. They had a great season and honored their senior athletes during the Feb. 10 game at Meridian High School. All season long our players brought heart, hustle and smiles to the court!

Diving into Digital Citizenship Lessons



Students at each of our schools receive digital citizenship instruction to prepare them for an evolving digital world. Using Common Sense Media’s research-based, standards-aligned lessons, students learn to use technology safely, responsibly and respectfully.

At Meridian Middle School, lessons are taught by education technology instructional coach Cynthia Richardson (this position and student devices are funded by the capital technology levy). Throughout the year, students learn about digital footprints, online safety, media literacy, healthy tech habits, and responsible online communication.

“Our goal is to help students use their growing digital skills for positive purposes and develop the critical thinking they’ll need in high school and beyond,” Mrs. Richardson shared.



Reading Buddies Bring Students Together



Every week, students from Meridian High School step into a first grade classroom at Irene Reither Elementary. The “big” buddies and “little” buddies settle in and read together. These high schoolers are part of Latinos in Action (LIA), a year-long class that builds leadership, prepares students for college and careers, celebrates cultural identity, and encourages meaningful community service.

Each visit, the high school students read with their first-grade buddies, modeling confidence, kindness and a genuine love of learning. The bigs and littles may come from different buildings and different stages of life, but each week their shared joy fills the room and that joy is contagious.





The MP3 staff stands at the entrance of MP3 during the 20th Anniversary Celebration.

Celebrating 20 Years of MP3: Empowering Families and Students



This year marks a special milestone for the Meridian Parent Partnership Program (MP3): 20 years

of supporting families through personalized learning. Founded in 2006, MP3 partners with parents and certified teachers to create flexible, high-quality learning experiences that meet the needs of every child. To celebrate the anniversary, MP3 hosted a celebration on Jan. 20 featuring student work and a slideshow of community memories.

“For two decades, MP3 has shown what’s possible when families and educators work together. This program is built on trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to helping every child thrive,” said Principal Michelle Siadal.

MP3 is a public K–8 Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) program within Meridian School District. As a parent partnership program, MP3 combines home-based learning with on-campus instruction and support from certified teachers.

Parents provide primary instruction at home, while each family is paired with a certificated teacher known as a Student Learning Plan Consultant (SLPC). SLPCs support learning, monitor progress, and help develop a personalized student learning plan aligned to five core academic areas: math, reading/writing, social studies, science, and physical education.

At the start of each school year, SLPCs meet with families to create a student-centered learning plan using district-approved curriculum options.

Parents select the curriculum that best fits their child’s learning style with guidance from their SLPC. Throughout the year, teachers stay connected through weekly check-ins (by phone, email, or Zoom) and monthly reports aligned with state standards and learning goals.

In addition to home-based instruction, MP3 offers on-campus courses two days a week, where students participate in enrichment and core academic experiences that complement home learning.

“When I first went to the school, I was super duper nervous, but the teachers were all so nice that I quickly felt comfortable,” MP3 student Joey said.

Classes are taught by certified teachers and designed to be



Above: Families and community members visit MP3 during the 20th Anniversary Celebration.

collaborative and hands-on. Students in grades 1–8 attend a rotation of classes, while kindergarten students attend a half-day with a cohort of peers.

“The many times I picked up my kids from school and they were talking over each other to share something fabulous they did that day at MP3 remains one of my favorite parts of the school,” said Kym Franklin, MP3 parent.

Over the past 20 years, MP3 has grown from its early days at Laurel Church to Ten Mile Creek Elementary and now to its permanent campus near Meridian High School. Throughout each chapter, one thing has remained constant: a strong sense of community.

“As we celebrate MP3’s 20th anniversary, one of my greatest joys as principal has been greeting our students each morning,” shared Principal Siadal. “Watching students grow from curious kindergartners into confident eighth graders is a privilege I never take for granted. MP3 truly feels like a village where every child and family is known, welcomed, and supported.”

That sense of community is echoed by alumni as well.

“There’s no way to pick just one memory,” shared Victoria, a former student. “The teachers and students left such an incredible impression. If I had to choose, it would be the laughter during something as simple as taking our eighth-grade class photo. It’s moments like that that make me

miss MP3 and the environment our teachers created.”

Today, MP3 serves families across Whatcom County and students throughout Washington state, continuing its mission of flexibility, partnership, and personalized learning as it looks ahead to the next chapter.

“I am grateful for the meaningful connections built with families across the county. Partnering with parents in their children’s learning is at the heart of who we are,” Principal Siadal said. “I feel incredibly fortunate to have worked alongside so many dedicated, passionate staff members over the years. Their commitment has made MP3 not just a school, but a community. Here’s to 20 years of learning, connection, and growth and to many more ahead!”



Meridian School District No. 505
214 W. Laurel Road
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Meridian Middle School Earns State Recognition



Meridian Middle School has been selected as a 2025 Association of Washington Student Leaders / Association of Washington School Principals "Culture Kick-Off Award" winner!

This statewide recognition celebrates schools that launch the year with intention, inclusion, and heart, and who place connection, collaboration, and belonging front and center. The selection committee highlighted how Meridian Middle School's student-centered kickoff and sustained culture-building efforts have created a place where students and adults lead together.

Principal Robert Kratzig said this award recognizes the intentional efforts made by school staff to build a strong culture of belonging.

"As Ms. Hammack and I reflected on last year and began setting goals for this year, we recognized an opportunity to really focus intentionally on making our school a place where kids feel welcome and safe – physically, emotionally, and academically," he shared.



Principal Kratzig said as they prepared for the school year, they worked with staff on how to build a classroom culture that values all learners and fosters strong connections. He explained when students feel they belong, they do better in school. MMS is already seeing real results due to this intentional effort.

"One way we are seeing the benefits of this work is in our attendance numbers where we have over 5% more students in good standing with attendance this year versus the same time last year!" Principal Kratzig said.



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Dr. James Everett

School Board
Jasmine Fast
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