

MERIDIAN CONNECTION

Fall 2026 Newsletter

District Updates

Stories from our Schools

MERIDIAN learning thrives here

MERIDIAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Interim Superintendent's Message

What a great start to the school year! Across our schools, classrooms are filled with students learning, growing, and building relationships with the adults who support them each day.

Our theme this year is "One Team, One Purpose." This means that no matter your role in our district, each of us contributes to student success by working together to ensure every student has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

I am grateful for the incredible care and commitment our staff bring to their work.

One of the highlights of the first few months of my role has been spending time with different roles throughout our district. These experiences have given me a better understanding of how these different jobs each contribute to the success of students and schools. Each experience has reinforced the importance of working together as one team. You can read more about this on page 6.



Another example of our commitment to learning comes from our staff learning day in early October.

Our staff had an amazing day of professional learning focused on making learning transparent by helping students understand exactly what they are learning, why it matters, and how to succeed. Days like that remind us that we are always learning and getting better together.

And what a great community! Thank you for welcoming our students and staff, supporting our schools, and helping make Meridian such a wonderful place to be. I am excited about the year ahead and grateful to be part of this team and this community.

Dr. Kurt Harvill
Interim Superintendent

Have feedback, questions or an idea? *Dr. Harvill wants to hear from you! Contact him at kharvill@meridian.wednet.edu or 360-398-7111.*

School Board Update

Superintendent Search

A search for Meridian's new superintendent is underway. The Meridian School Board of Directors authorized the process to identify and select a search firm during the Oct. 7 meeting.

This consultant will work closely with our board to solicit community feedback to understand the needs and expectations of the district in their new superintendent. The consultant will advertise the superintendent opening and collect applications. Our school board will work with them to screen applications and select finalists for our community to meet.

We will continue to provide updates as the process moves forward. Thank you for your continued support!

Welcome Ashley Geist

The school board appointed Ashley Geist as the director for District 4 on July 29. She will serve through December 2027.

"My husband and I have three children—one in middle school and two in elementary school—all of whom attend Meridian schools. I am grateful that our children have the opportunity to be part of such a supportive and close-knit community," Geist shared in a message.

For more than 20 years, Geist has worked in early childhood education and currently serves as the director of a childcare center.

Throughout her career, she has seen firsthand how strong early learning experiences help build the foundation for lifelong success.



Director Geist taking the oath of office on July 29.

"It is a privilege to serve on the Meridian School Board, and I look forward to working collaboratively with district leadership, staff, families, and our community to help ensure every student has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential," Geist shared.

Cover photo: IRE third grader Daniel



From Concrete to Canvas: Students Create Mural at Meridian Middle School



8th graders Alexa (left) and Hannah (right).

You may notice a vibrant new addition to Meridian Middle School's play field: a colorful sunset mural designed and painted by 8th graders Alexa and Hannah. Inspired by the four Meridian Mindsets of caring, courageous, trustworthy, and open-minded, Alexa and Hannah transformed a plain concrete wall into an uplifting piece of art. Hannah said she was inspired after painting a mural in her own room.

"I painted a mural in my room and it turned out really well," Hannah said. "We wanted it to be a Meridian mural and there are the four Meridian Mindsets and we thought we should use those. We wanted it to be colorful so we included the sunset behind it."

The project was grounded in research showing how bright, inviting colors positively impact learning.

"While I was studying what we could paint that would benefit our school, I learned that bright colors can be helpful for childhood development," Alexa said. "So adding bright colors could better the environment and the overall vibe of the school. Then I looked at the sky and thought it was really beautiful and it would be nice to look at."

Alexa and Hannah created a proposal for their leadership advisor Spenser Stumpf and Principal Robert Kratzig. The proposal included their objective, research, and an estimated cost. Once approved, they wrote letters seeking donations to support their project. Bringing the vision to life was a true community effort, with paint, supplies and labor generously donated by Sherwin Williams, the Meridian Booster Club, and Washboy Pressure Washing.

Despite battling summer heat and poor air quality, Alexa and Hannah persisted.

"It was fun to hang out with Alexa and work on the mural and kind of fun to be at the school during the summer," Hannah said.

Both students expressed how rewarding it was to leave a positive, lasting mark on their school.

"It was really rewarding to make a positive change to the school and it made me really happy and like I was more important to the school," Alexa said.

Principal Kratzig also expressed his appreciation for the new art.

"It's been so rewarding to see this project become reality through the hard work and dedication of these students and Mr. Stumpf. It has turned what was an eyesore into a meaningful art installation that students see daily at lunch and our community can experience as they drive by," Principal Kratzig said. "It's an excellent example of how meaningful student voice can make a tangible impact on our school."



Meridian Middle School is a School on the Rise!

Meridian Middle School was one of just 15 schools statewide to earn the Washington Schools on the Rise Award! The award was presented by the Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL) and the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) on Sept. 18. The award recognizes schools where students and adults work together to build an exceptional school culture, elevate student voice, and create meaningful opportunities for shared leadership. This focus is driving real improvements in student outcomes.

"We're incredibly honored to receive this award because it recognizes work that has become central to who we are at Meridian Middle School!" Principal Robert Kratzig said. "Our staff have worked intentionally to create real ways for students to help shape their school. We don't just ask students what they think; we listen, respond, and work alongside them to make our school better."

Investing in Our Students

2024 Technology Capital Levy Update

Thanks to voter support in February 2024, we continue to make progress on the commitments outlined in the Technology Capital Levy. Most projects are complete or underway, with remaining work scheduled through next school year. Regular updates on levy progress and upcoming projects are reported to the school board in July and November each year.

Devices at Irene Reither Elementary
Based on staff, family, and student needs, Irene Reither Elementary School (IRE) students no longer take home school-issued devices. While take-home devices were once necessary to support at-home learning, they are no longer needed at the elementary level.

Kindergarten and first-grade students use iPads to build technology skills, learn responsible device use and practice online safety. Students in grades 2-5 use Chromebooks for classroom learning, assignments and assessments. Technology use is intentional and paired with age-appropriate digital citizenship lessons.

To help prepare for middle school, fifth-grade students will receive instruction midway through the year on responsibly using and caring for a take-home Chromebook.

New Devices
Keeping technology current is a key part of the levy. Student devices for Meridian Parent Partnership Program (MP3) and IRE second-grade students were replaced at the start of the 2025-26 school year.

The district recently secured 1,500 new Chromebooks to replace the student devices purchased in 2020 that have reached the end of their life cycle. All new devices include four years of accidental damage protection. The Chromebooks that are being replaced will be repurposed as loaner devices for students and staff, if they are in good enough condition. Staff laptops, purchased primarily in 2020, will also be replaced this year.

Classroom Technology
Classroom technology upgrades at Meridian High School, IRE and MP3 began in 2024, ahead of schedule. Every classroom across the district is now equipped with a display screen and wireless document camera. Additional upgrades to classroom audio systems at these schools are planned for summer 2027.

Technology Support
As technology needs continue to grow, the district has expanded support for students and staff. A full-time support technician has joined the team to maintain nearly 1,800 student devices, 300 staff devices, and other technology systems across the district.



Technology staff distribute new student devices at Meridian High School in October.



The district has also added a second technology coach, allowing one coach to focus on elementary schools and one on secondary schools. Together, Instructional Coaches Rebecca Montgomery and Cynthia Richardson support teachers, families, and students with effective technology use and digital citizenship (photo below).

Looking Ahead
Our goal is to ensure students have the technology skills they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world while also building the critical thinking, communication and academic skills that remain essential for lifelong success.

Learn more on our website:
www.meridian.wednet.edu/technology-levy/

Items on the 2024 Technology Levy

Complete and Ongoing

- ✓ Hire Second Instructional Coach
- ✓ Full-time Technology Support Technician
- ✓ Professional Learning for Staff
- ✓ Software for Learning

In Progress for 2026-27 School Year

- ✓ Student and Staff Laptop Replacements
- ✓ Update Classroom Technology
- ✓ Expand Security Cameras

Planned for 2027-28 School Year

- ○ Update CTE Computer Lab
- ○ Network Infrastructure Replacement
- ○ Network Server Replacement



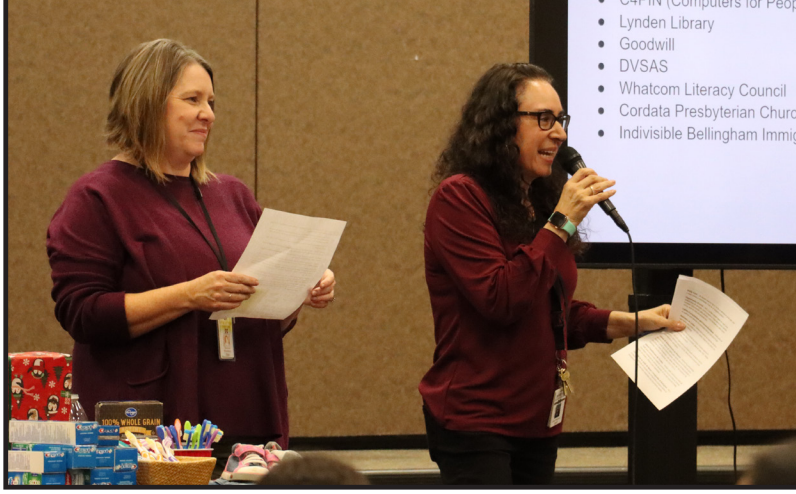
Breaking Down Barriers: Meridian Family Support Center

The Meridian Family Support Center provides essential resources and assistance to Meridian families and students. Staffed by Family Resource Specialist Alicia Roberts and Cultural Liaison and Migrant Student Advocate Elvira Trautman, the center offers experienced support tailored to family needs. The family center assists with basic needs such as food, clothing, referrals to services and more. The center also has a food pantry on Wednesdays from 2-5 p.m., and a clothes closet where families can get gently used clothes. This summer, the family center hosted a Back-to-School Fair providing school supplies, community referrals and resources. Heading into the holiday season, they are working hard to make sure no families go without support.

"Recognizing current hardships and removing barriers to food and clothing allows families to focus on supporting their children's education," Roberts said.

Roberts also serves as the homeless liaison to ensure students experiencing homelessness have access to school and support. As the migrant student advocate and cultural liaison, Trautman builds trust and helps families who speak Spanish navigate the school system.

"Families need an advocate to hear and support them, helping them to overcome language barriers so they can stay connected and involved," Trautman said.



Alicia Roberts (left) and Elvira Trautman (right) at the multilingual family night in 2025.

Additionally, the center arranges transportation for eligible students, delivering wraparound care to keep children engaged in school.

"Their dedication to supporting families and helping students thrive is an essential part of what makes Meridian such a caring community," said Interim Superintendent Dr. Kurt Harvill.

Donations of new or gently used clothing and linens in excellent condition are always welcome during business hours. Visit the center in Portable 400A at Irene Reither Elementary School (954 E. Hemmi Rd.) from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday (open until 5 p.m. on Wednesdays). Questions? Contact the center at 360-318-2486 (English) or 360-306-2886 (Spanish).

MP3's Student Newspaper: The Vibe

Students at MP3 are sharing their projects and learning through The Vibe, a student-led newspaper created as a way for students to connect and share their work.

Each month, whether students attend MP3 on campus or learn remotely, they can submit their work. Student editors review the submissions and bring each edition together, while also creating special sections featuring staff members, school events and other things happening at MP3. The student editors are supported by MP3 teacher Rachel Oscarson.



The Vibe editors, front row: Hazel and Joey. Back row: Caprice, Lucille and Abram.

The Vibe is more than just a student newspaper. It gives students an audience for their work while helping them develop skills in writing, editing, design and teamwork. It also gives students a chance to learn more about their peers and feel connected to a larger school community.

"I really like it because it's a way that I feel I can do my part to kind of connect the community and let them have a voice in the bigger community," said 8th grader Joey.

Lucille, an 8th grader, enjoys being part of the creative process, adding, "I like being able to see everything that people enter, and I like to put it together in a way that looks cool."

Ultimately, The Vibe gives MP3 students a place to share their voices, celebrate one another, and discover the many interests and talents within their school.

Student Voice Shapes Meridian School District

What happens when students have a voice in the decisions that shape their schools? They provide insight that helps schools better serve students.

This year, Meridian High School senior Eden Bernardy and junior Paloma Padilla Solis are serving as our student representatives, bringing their ideas and hopes of their fellow students to the school board.

Their presence is an important reminder that students should not simply be the recipients of decisions but that they should have a voice in the conversations that affect their education.

"There are a lot of decisions that would need a student point of view," Paloma shared. For her, representation is also about creating a stronger sense of belonging, particularly for students who may sometimes feel overlooked. She is passionate about making sure all students, including multilingual and Hispanic students, feel seen and heard and know that their experiences matter.

"I believe it's important to help them feel like their voice can be represented and that their opinion matters," Paloma said.

Eden also sees student voice as an essential part of making informed decisions. While adults may have the best intentions, students experience the impact of school decisions. Her work with student advisory groups creates opportunities for students to share their experiences and work together.

"Without the input of students who experience the impacts of these decisions firsthand, there is no certainty that these changes will be what's best," Eden explained.



Student board reps Eden (left) and Paloma (right).

Together they are creating stronger connections between students and the school board. Their service makes sure students know that their experiences matter and their voices can shape the future of their schools.







Left: Dr. Harvill mowing the MHS courtyard. Middle: Dr. Harvill reading to kindergarten students. Right: Dr. Harvill and Lori Velthuizen serving lunch at MHS.

On the Job with Dr. Harvill

Interim Superintendent Dr. Kurt Harvill started the school year off with the theme "One Team. One Purpose." This means that no matter your role in Meridian School District, you contribute to helping all students learn, grow and thrive. To learn more about each role in our district and see how they contribute to student success, Dr. Harvill has been spending time in each job getting a firsthand experience.

Since August, Dr. Harvill has worked with maintenance and grounds staff, custodians, student monitors, health services, secretaries, bus drivers, food service, a principal and spent time in a kindergarten classroom, and he's not done yet.

While we all have a general understanding of these roles, spending time in them gives a much better perspective to the complexity of the jobs and how they work together to support student learning.

Before students arrive, our maintenance, grounds and custodial staff are preparing our facilities and schools for students and staff. Bus drivers are the first face our students see and can set the tone for the entire day. Our secretaries welcome students and families, answer questions and help everyone be ready for the day. Our student monitors help keep students happy and safe at lunch and recess. Food service makes sure students are fed and ready to learn.

Each position has its own task that contributes to the operation of our district, but each role also has the opportunity to build meaningful connections with our students. Students who build connections at school are more likely to attend and stay engaged. That's why a "One Team. One Purpose." approach is essential to student success.



Maintenance and Grounds staff Johnny Wiley pauses while trimming a hedge for a quick photo.

Facilities Update

While our schools may have seemed quiet over the summer, maintenance, grounds and custodial teams were hard at work preparing our schools and facilities for a successful school year.

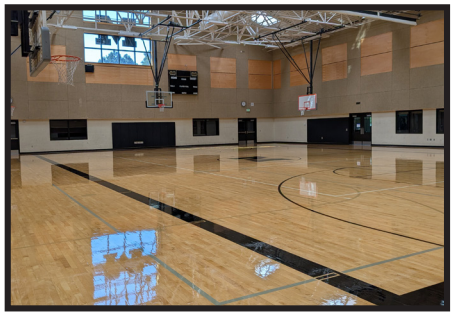
Across the district, staff deep cleaned more than 323,000 square feet of school facilities, completed preventative maintenance projects, addressed repair needs and enhanced campus safety. From replacing hundreds of HVAC filters and maintaining nearly 90 acres of grounds to repainting, resurfacing and refreshing learning spaces, the work touched every corner of our schools.

Thanks to the hard work of our maintenance, custodial and grounds teams, Meridian students and staff returned to campuses that are clean, safe and ready for another great year of learning.

IRE (Building B) Roof Replacement
The district received an OSPI Emergency Repair Grant of over $250,000, which covered nearly the entire cost of this important project. This work comes after ongoing issues with the roof, which had been leaking and maintained with temporary fixes over time. Work included installing new metal flashing, tar paper, and shingles, along with replacing sections of underlying plywood. The project was completed before school started.

MMS Parking Lot
Several sections of asphalt were replaced to improve drainage and extend the life of the parking lot, which was also completely restriped with additional no-parking zones to improve bus safety.





Left: The roof at IRE being replaced this summer. Above: Gym floors were resurfaced at the middle and high school.



Meridian Middle School

We are continuing to work on next steps for Meridian Middle School. After failed bonds in November 2024 and April 2025, we paused to listen to our community, staff, families and students about how they would like us to move forward. Feedback confirmed that people understand the need, but the cost is a challenge.

MMS was built in 1938, with additions added over time. Our maintenance teams have been diligent in ongoing maintenance and repairs to keep the school operational. This summer, a classroom had to be closed because the wall is separating from the floor, making the room unsafe (photo above). In early October, engineering and construction experts conducted exploratory work on the classroom's floor to plan necessary repairs. We are currently evaluating funding options through insurance coverage and emergency repair grants to address the issue promptly.

This is just one example of the condition of the building. We are planning to convene a new facilities task force of staff, families, students and community members to problem-solve together and discuss the best course of action.

We want to honor our community while also emphasizing the importance of student and staff safety in our buildings. Please watch for a call for applications later this school year.

Meridian School District No. 505
214 W. Laurel Road
Bellingham, WA 98226

District Updates

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/.

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.

Receive District News

Our District News group is a great way to stay connected with what's happening. We share updates and stories regularly. 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!

Meridian School District
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Interim Superintendent
Dr. Kurt Harvill

School Board
Jasmine Fast
Ashley Geist
Jana Haugen
Jarrod Karuza
Michelle Simmons

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MERIDIAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Connect with us!
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