

Lopez Island School District #144

86 School Road
Lopez Island, WA 98261
Phone 360-468-2202 Fax (360) 468-2212
www.lopezislandschool.org

Dr. Carl Bruner, Interim Superintendent

Mary Fordham, Interim Elementary Principal

Dr. Martha Martin, Secondary Principal

January 11, 2021

Lopez Island School District Families:

Happy New Year! It's my pleasure to introduce myself to you as the District's new Interim Superintendent. I began in my new role on January 4 and will serve in this capacity through June 30.

I come to Lopez Island with many years of experience as an educator in the State of Washington. Since 1983, I have worked for 2 Educational Service Districts and 2 school districts in a variety of roles, including school psychologist, program director, special programs director, alternative high school principal, curriculum director, and assistant superintendent. Last June, I retired after 16 years as superintendent of the Mount Vernon School District.

I was born and grew up in San Antonio, Texas. I earned my undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and completed my masters and doctorate work at the University of Washington. I live in Mount Vernon with my wife. Together, we have 5 adult children and 6 grandchildren, ages 2 - 11.

It doesn't take long to recognize the many strengths of Lopez Island Schools. From a widely recognized nutrition program and school garden to a creative and talented staff who work hard to make a broad range of experiences available for students, the District has succeeded in providing educational opportunities that are rare in school districts its size. This would not be possible without the leadership of a committed School Board, the consistent support of families and other voters, and partnerships with strong community organizations.

Of course, there are challenges as well. In the coming weeks, I will be working with the Board and District leadership and staff to address two of the most pressing priorities.

The Lopez Island School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following employee(s) has been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination: Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator, Superintendent Carl Bruner – cbruner@lopezislandschool.org, Title IX Coordinator, HR Specialist Renee Koplan – rkoplan@lopezislandschool.org, Section 504 Academic Case Manager, K-12 Counselor Jeanna Carter – jcarter@lopezislandschool.org, Section 504 Health Care Case Manager, Karen Hattman, RN – khattman@lopezislandschool.org
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Restarting School:

Getting safely back to some form of face-to-face instruction is a priority for families and educators alike. While some students have been able to successfully navigate the challenges of remote learning, many have not. At its best, remote learning simply cannot replace in-person teaching and learning for children and young people in grades K-12. Yet we know we need to exercise flexibility and caution in bringing students back to school.

The emergence of new strains of the COVID-19 virus, the size of the community, the lack of local access to a hospital, and the small size of our staff can make planning to bring students back to school challenging. In the coming days, I will be meeting with a group of staff representatives and our principals to develop a restart plan. Informed by guidance from the San Juan County Department of Health and Community Services and input from families, this plan will prioritize our youngest students first and include tentative timelines for other grade levels. To the extent possible, we will try to accommodate families who do not wish to have their children attend in person.

If there is one thing we have learned over the past 10 months, it is that plans will change in response to public health guidance.

Thank you for your patience. We know remote schooling has placed sizable burdens on many families and hope to be able to begin reengaging students in-person soon.

Budget:

The state's response to the McCleary lawsuit limited the ability of school districts to collect local levy funds. This has had a disproportionate impact on small districts in particular. Our District's local levy funding has been reduced by 40% or approximately \$380,000.

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The District was forced to make major budget reductions for this school year to absorb this shortfall. Certified staffing was cut 6%. Reduction in classified hours totaled 20%. Funding for field trips, classroom supplies, sports, and the school garden were cut.

Going forward, sustaining much of what makes our schools unique requires a solution to our budget challenges. A team of School Board Directors, staff, administrators, and community members recently met with legislators to help them understand the District's dilemma. They were understanding and supportive yet offered little hope for solutions this legislative session, given the state's large budget challenges related to the pandemic.

We are confident that, over time, the legislature will adopt strategies to help address our funding problem. In the short term, the School Board and District are considering other options to help avoid additional cuts for next school year and restore funding in at least some areas.

In November, the Board appointed a community budget advisory committee to consider alternatives. A staff committee will be formed soon to review their input and begin planning for the 2021-22 school year.

Challenges are nothing new for public schools. I am convinced that, in partnership with you and the larger community, we can and will ensure that the District remains a source of great pride for the Lopez Island community.

It is my privilege to be able to serve your schools in an interim capacity and I look forward to partnering with you in the days and weeks ahead.

Sincerely,



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