

Educationally Speaking

January 2010

Wise decision making typically includes having a thorough knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and challenges, awareness and evaluation of multiple solutions, and a willingness to decide. Absent any of these components, wise decisions typically do not occur. In the next few months, the Board of Trustees will be placed in the position of having to make difficult decisions related to two critical items. One is the 2010-2011 district budget and the other is the direction the school district chooses to take relative to implementing 21st Century Learning Concepts. The wisdom of the Board's decision making in each of these areas will increase as quality input is provided by parents, community members, and staff.

Budget. Initial budget assumptions for the fiscal year 2010-2011 were presented to the Board of Trustees on November 16, 2009. At this time, the District has a projected deficit of \$1,476,169. This deficit has been determined by taking into account several factors. First, the 2010-2011 school year is the second consecutive year of declining enrollment. Additional years of declining enrollment are also forecast for 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 based upon CBEDS information from our three feeder school districts. Second, the state's economic crisis is not over. Current forecasts are for a projected state budget deficit for 2010-2011 to be 17.967% with the expectation that the state's economic environment will continue to be poor for an additional 2-3 years after next. The result is that education funding is not expected to improve for several years. Third, the bulk of the one-time federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) monies are being utilized this year to help support current year educational programs and there is no expectation for any additional funding.

In addition to reviewing prior years' recommendations for increasing income and reducing expenditures, the District has held two stakeholder meetings in order to gather additional thoughts and insights from staff and community members. A third meeting is scheduled for January 21, 2010, after the release of the initial state budget. Parent and community members who are interested in providing input are encouraged to attend Board meetings and/or the next stakeholder meeting. The next Board meeting is Monday, January 11, 2010, at which time initial District recommendations for restructuring/expenditure reductions will be presented.

21st Century Learning. One of the district's goals this year is to explore strategies and options that would increase the quality of instruction aligned with 21st century skills and knowledge. A committee consisting of students, parents, teachers, classified staff, and administrators has met on four occasions to research and discuss relevant literature; to evaluate our educational program in relation to 21st century learning literature; and to develop a draft plan for expanding the implementation of 21st century learning strategies in our schools.

The following suggestions were identified during the December committee meeting: Require all students to take and pass one online class; Recognize that the Expected Schoolwide Learning Results are comparable with 21st century learning skills and that students should be held accountable for learning these skills; Students need to do more collaboration/work in teams; Implement Project-based Learning to a greater extent; Change instructional practices so that students develop a greater depth of knowledge and skills; Require students to do more problem solving and critical thinking; Revise existing courses to incorporate technology; Increase student use of technology in classes; Embed technology use within lessons; and Establish online courses. You are encouraged to either respond to the recommendations regarding 21st century learning and/or add additional thoughts and insights. Strategies will be finalized and submitted to the Board of Trustees for initial consideration on February 1, 2010.

As previously stated, the wisdom of the Board's decision making in each of these areas will increase as quality input is provided by parents, community members, and staff. I encourage you to voice your perspective.

Dale J. Mitchell
Superintendent