

## State of the School

Over the past ten years, we have had to deal with a very tight budget. Controlling salaries, reduction in staff and close monitoring of expenditures has helped the district to maintain fiscal integrity through these times. Due to that, the former two contracts with the CTA contained no or very small base salary increases. The average increase on the base was 0.6% over six years. It is important we recognize that even with a 0 percent increase on the base, our salary costs will still increase due to longevity increases. The contract last year agreed to a 2.5% increase on the base. Our state funding has increased for the past two years. We are unsure as to why and the current biennial budget is slated to provide a very small increase in state funding for our district. Although our financial status has improved, we will still watch our spending very closely due to continued pressures from many fronts. We are beginning to increase the number of repairs of building maintenance issues that we had put off due to finances. Although our buildings are not in bad shape, we shouldn't continue to put off periodic maintenance, upgrades and repairs. Our permanent improvement fund will cover some of these repairs, but with approximately 70K a year, it won't carry us very far. Things that need attention are discussed later in the facilities section.

### Challenges:

1. Contract negotiations- We have a one-year contract and will negotiate again this year.
2. Mandates – There have been a myriad of unfunded mandates from the state and federal level and I expect this to continue. Special Education expenditures are proving to be the biggest challenge. The mandates and costs of educating students with special needs are growing far faster than is the funding for these programs. The lobby for special education children has become a very powerful entity at the federal level.
3. Enrollment – Our enrollment has begun to increase, but it is still lower than it was 10 yrs. ago. Some reasons are:
  - a. Charter schools – We have about 40-50 kids in charters. Most are in ECOT or K-12 online (both of which have dismal academic standings). Students leave for charters for a myriad of reasons including easier academics and attendance policies.
  - b. Fewer students statewide - Ohio has had a drop in population below the age of 30. The drop in school-aged children is supposed to continue over the next 10 yrs.
  - c. CC+ - This is a growing program. (Allows HS students to attend college during their HS years). I see this growing to 50 to 75 students. I fully support this program but again, it is not fully funded by the state. We do have staff that are becoming qualified to teach CC+ at our school but we will not get the funding when they teach those classes.

However, by having students stay CC+ classes here we get funding for the other classes they take through us.

## **Facilities**

The facilities assessment has helped us to be able to plan for large expenditures. We won't do some of the recommendations on the assessment. An example is the parking lot repair. The recommendation is to completely tear up the lot, replace the base and resurface it with new asphalt. Although this may be the ideal scenario, we do not have the funding to do that. Our process has been to grind and topcoat areas needing repaired and fill them. This has worked well. The front lot at the HS needs finger drains installed and then grinding/topcoat but I don't see a complete replacement being prudent. We had the same problem with the bus lot at the HS/MS and that repair fixed the issue.

I have begun to move some facility expenses from the PI/OSFC funds to the general fund in preparation for large projects. I believe that replacing the outside lights will prove to be the right decision and I am currently working on replacing the metal halides in all of our buildings. Contractors constantly want me to replace all of our lights with LED, but I don't think that is the right way to go. Once we get our metal halides done, I'll begin looking at what is the best way to move toward LED's, since I expect the T-5 vapor lights to go away. We continue to struggle with roof leaks in the HS. These leaks have been present since the building was opened. The school was in a suit and settled for a lump sum payment in 2004, so there is no recourse for warranty. We are looking at what to do and may be at the point of biting the bullet and fixing it right.

Because of stagnant growth, space hasn't been an issue. We are beginning to see more growth that may become an issue in 5-10 years. There is a lot of talk at the federal and state level about required preschool. We do house special needs preschool in the administration building. If these requirements come to pass, we will have to expand what we are currently doing. I think it would be prudent to address the restrooms on the first floor of the administration building and look at the heating and cooling systems. I think doing parts of it at a time allows us to make better decisions and get things done correctly as opposed to waiting until we are placed in an emergency situation when preschool requirements pass. I do believe it is coming in the next few years. I have had one company tell me about an air conditioning system that has been engineered for old buildings like ours. They are going to give me a cost estimate and we can discuss it at that time. I don't think multiple window units are safe for the old electrical system in this building and my guess is they are incredibly inefficient.

A possible issue may arise from the decrease in support from Developmental Disabilities programming. This has moved very high need students from residential

units to single family homes and requires us to provide educational services here at the school. These services used to be supplied by the county DD program, but they now only serve adults. Multiple Disability classes are only permitted to have 8 students with a teacher and an aide. Some of the kids have severe emotional disorders and require a one on one aide. If they are foster kids, then we can charge excess costs back to the district of residence of the parent but if not then we have to pay the costs. What I worry about more is finding room in the buildings if these numbers keep growing. They have to be housed in the same building as the regular education students.

Security upgrades need to be addressed in the administration building due to preschool and head start being on the first floor. The handicapped lift has not worked for a couple of years and parts are not available to fix it. Right now we haven't had any complaints, but I'm guessing eventually we will have to deal with this problem. My biggest concern is the roof. We have had some leaks and have been able to have someone come in and repair them, but I think we're probably close to a full replacement in the next 5 years.

The current construction program, I think, will be a big help in moving toward more needed facilities. Athletically, I think we will at least have facilities for all of our programs. I do think eventually it will be a good idea to move the baseball and football facilities over to the High School property. It will be much easier to access those facilities and parking will be light years beyond what we have currently. When/if that happens then I think we should look at taking the football field behind the Elementary and do a complete renovation of the playground including an area for soccer, kickball, or other types of activities usually played by elementary age students in phys. ed. classes.

### **Academics**

Fundamentally, we are a solid academic institution and are seen inside and outside of the county as a good academic school. The new versions of testing have been a challenge. The current value added data we received in November show positive signs we will have increased achievement this coming year. Federal mandates require we meet the needs of students with special needs. We, along with most districts, have had minimal success with special needs student growth mandates even though we have directed more funding in that direction. I expect more funding to be mandated to this area. Data shows our gifted kids are not growing at the same rate as other students. The law requires we identify gifted students, but there is no funding or mandate to serve their specific learning styles. Our gifted plan states, we do not provide gifted interventions. College Credit plus gives gifted students some options at the HS, but that means the kids have to leave our school to benefit. It is possible that the assessment process we are trying to initiate this year will help identify these deficits and we could find ways to better serve gifted students, however, we won't know that for a few years. The introduction of online learning has not panned out in education as once was thought. There are many articles

coming out about how personalized online learning is not effective across the board with K-12 students. The current trend is to use software that adjusts to the student's abilities as they work on current class objectives. By doing this, it stretches all levels of students by creating challenging learning assignments regardless of their level. We presently use a few of these in our school. We are investigating more ways to accelerate students into higher grades, but state testing and EMIS requirements are so restrictive that it keeps us from being able to accelerate kids by subject.

The teaching staff has gone through a large change over the past five years, due to retirements. Our staff is well educated. Most are dedicated to doing their best and going the extra mile to help students learn. The staff is learning "reformed" education practices to support the "new reality" in education. They are under pressure to develop new technology based teaching practices and at the same time deal with more inclusive classes that have students with more diverse needs than ever before. Morale of employees is a little low. Surveys across the educational field find that stress is part of this, but more importantly, educators feel that they are not respected nor valued by society anymore.

The administrative team is progressive and working to move the district from the agriculture/industrial education model to the 21<sup>st</sup> century/reform model. Teachers we hire from other districts tell us we are ahead of the districts that they left. It is a frustratingly slow process. The principals' days are overwhelmingly absorbed by the day-to-day operations of the buildings and supervision of 40+ teachers and 500+ students. The state mandated teacher evaluation system is incredibly cumbersome and time consuming. More than ever, outside problems enter the school and affect the student body and teaching staff. All of the requirements, meetings, documentation and mandates of highly regulated programs absorb the time of the Director of Special Education and Federal Programs. The testing process in Ohio schools has become an enormous task. More focus is being placed on family engagement and mental health issues. This used to be handled by county programs, but the legislature continues to mandate schools to be responsible for them. I don't think society understands how much the state and federal governments have increased the workload on schools in this area. There is a massive need in our society to deal with mental illness, dysfunctional families, single parent issues and poverty. In most cases, the legislature sees the schools as having influence over these areas. Because of this, the management requirement and increased social services required has overwhelmed the staff. We are in decent shape with two social workers to handle these issues. We are using the social worker at the HS/MS as a dean of student.

The curriculum at the HS is still too narrow. Our high achieving students run out of classes to take in their senior year. We attempted to fix this by offering online options. We have tried four different providers and have found them to be lacking in quality and support. We continue to look for a quality online option to help our advanced students to take classes we cannot afford to provide. The possibility of

purchasing online curriculum, training our own staff and then paying a stipend is cost prohibitive. Attempts to partner with other county schools have not been successful. The concept behind the greenhouse is to offer more Ag possibilities, but also to expand the use into some kind of business class, technology class, and maybe science.

More testing has been mandated at the high school level. These tests dictate the direction of our curriculum more than we would like. We have to find a way to respond to intervention services that are needed for those in the high school, who do not meet minimum standards. If a student does not achieve at a minimum level, then he or she is not permitted to graduate. This has introduced a need for high school intervention programs. We have added an everyday after school homework help program with some success.

### **Extra-curricular**

The Centerburg Extra-curricular program offers something that very few schools around us offer; free athletic participation. We have no pay to participate fees. We offer a variety of extracurricular programs, both academic and athletic, and meet all Title IX requirements. We have active music and athletic booster clubs that help offset some of the costs for these programs. We get a request to start a soccer program every now and again, but we do not see how that is possible with the number of students we have. East Knox started soccer multiple years ago and discontinued it this year due to low participation.

### **Transportation**

A transportation audit was completed in the spring and summer of 2015. We have a good transportation program which offers reliable and safe transportation for our students. The audit raised concerns about the age of our fleet due to maintenance and fuel mileage. Presently, I see no process that would allow us to take the older busses off of routes and replace them with new units that get better mileage. Our busses must last 14 years before they are replaced. We will continue our purchase schedule of one bus a year for the foreseeable future. Again, mandates of serving students with special needs are placing stress on our transportation program. Specially equipped busses and transportation programming that is unique for students with special needs continue to challenge our abilities. We continue to contract with Knox Area Transit, but they are required to place us in lower priority due to their funding requirements. I fear this system is getting overwhelmed and will leave us depending on our own resources.

### **Food Service**

The district went through the process of contracting out the food service program in 12-13 due to continual deficit spending. We seem to have reached the level that the

food service program is self-sufficient. When we contracted out, we asked that our staff be kept on the same pay scale and some sort of health insurance. All new hires were to be paid and given benefits solely at the discretion of the contractor. Some staff has left, which has reduced costs and the current health care insurance has gone under some changes. Student meal participation increased the first two years of the contract then leveled off. This is mostly due to the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act, which required whole grains, and less sodium, which students did not like. The current federal administration has relaxed this slightly and we hope it will help. Nutrition Group has been creative and by starting the “snack shack” at the HS/MS, they have seen an increase in student participation.

### **Goals.**

Our number one goal is to provide all students an opportunity to reach their potential by offering a solid academic program.

We want to reform our instructional practices away from the agricultural/industrial model to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning model. This model offers more flexibility for students to learn at their pace and reach their potential through the use of technology. By using technology, we are able to collect real time, formative data to assess student learning instantly which enables staff to intervene immediately rather than later. We want to expand the college credit plus program in house to enable students to get college credit but still participate in other high school classes.

We want to continue to try to find a way to expand the High School curriculum to offer students a wider variety of courses.

We will need to continue to face the increased demands of special education mandates.

We will continue to face the ever-increasing issues of student mental health, family issues, drug and alcohol abuse and other social issues that are funneling into our community.

We need to continue to ensure the food service program continues to be self-sufficient to keep us from using general fund monies to support it.

We want to continue to partner with the booster clubs and other groups to offer extra-curricular opportunities for students, fully supported and with no participation fees.