

Oracle School District

Update

Dear Staff,

In the blink of an eye we find ourselves closing in on the end of the school year. I feel optimistic about where we are as a school district and think there are many positive opportunities in our future. Certainly we face some stiff challenges but I am confident in you and I know if any district has a chance to succeed it is ours. I would like to take this opportunity to give you an update on the many things going on in our District, State and on the Federal level that impact our District mission to expand expectations by providing an innovative and boundless educational environment that develops adventurous learners and responsible citizens.

District Finances:

- **Enrollment:** Enrollment is our primary challenge this school year and in the years to come. Our enrollment (ADM) has decreased by approximately 21% or 86 students over the past three years. In dollars, this equates to over \$300,000 in lost revenues. It is important to understand that this loss in enrollment also lowers our money we receive in all areas including our budget override and our capital funding. A huge factor in this enrollment number is the lack of affordable housing and jobs in our district. As a district the number one thing we can do to remain viable and competitive is have excellent academic programs and customer service. Building a positive brand is the key to our future.
- **General district funding:**
As mentioned above, due to enrollment loss we have experienced a significant decrease in all of our funding areas. Through good fiscal planning we have been able to weather this without significant cuts to academic programs and staffing. We will continue to try our hardest to minimize the impact this decreased revenue has on our district but inevitably there will be some impact that we cannot help. One such area that will likely change for next year is restructuring the way the district provides health benefits to its full time employees. This could either be an employee cost for part of the premium or perhaps a lesser premium offered by the district with the option for the employee to buy up to the next level of coverage. This is something that almost all districts have had to do and we have been able to avoid for several years.
- **Long term capital planning**
For several months the Governing Board and I have been meeting to develop a plan to meet the districts long term capital needs. We are exploring strategies that will help us address a wide variety of areas from school buses to school safety to upgrading some of our oldest buildings. We have done a great deal of work in house to improve our

facilities but will likely need to look for help to make some of the bigger changes that we need in the future. The next phase in this process is the Governing Board has appointed an advisory committee made up of people from the surrounding communities as well as district staff. This committee will utilize the Board's completed work to continue a district capital needs study. Ultimately this committee will make a recommendation to the Board regarding a prioritized list of district capital needs including a strategy to fulfill these needs.

- **The future of the Oracle Ridge Campus**

This year is the last year in the foreseeable future that we will have people at the Oracle Ridge Campus. The current transportation building on the Mountain Vista Campus is in disrepair and has far exceeded its shelf life. Starting in May we will replace this building with a modular building that is somewhat larger in order to house the District Office staff and to also accommodate the uses the current transportation building already provides. Currently we spend well over \$15,000 per year to keep the Oracle Ridge campus open. The savings and efficiency of having the district staff here on the Mountain Vista Campus will be a long term benefit to the district.

- **Oracle Schools Foundation:** The Oracle Schools Foundation continues to be a driving positive force for our school district. This year alone the Foundation has contributed over \$48,000 to help us have tuition free preschool as well as provide assistance with some of our other programs. The Foundation is made up of tireless volunteers from all of our surrounding communities. Windy Messing and I are both Foundation Board members.

Academic Progress:

AZMerit and AIMS Science start next week and I am very confident in our students' ability to improve on their achievement level from last year. It is important to remember that a huge portion of the A-F accountability system involves a student's academic progress from year to year. Our combination of excellent teachers, strong programs and plenty of academic support will help ensure that we continue to move forward and that our students have opportunities to grow as people and learners.

School Climate:

PBIS, good communication, positive role modeling from adults, excellent supervision and a caring staff go hand in hand towards creating a positive school climate. We are trending in a positive direction in all of our discipline areas and have made great strides towards making our school a more productive and happy place. We are not perfect but we have absolutely put our heart and souls into addressing bullying, aggression and general respect and it shows in many ways. We are concluding our climate surveys and I am hopeful we will see gains in how our students view the overall school climate.

School Safety:

We had a very successful lockdown drill albeit a little different because it was pre-scheduled. Scheduling the drill in advance did allow for a great deal of discussion about emergency situations and for some really powerful teaching to take place. One drawback was that because it was scheduled there was no way for us to observe how quickly and efficiently we could lockdown because when the drill started we were already essentially locked down. We may try different scenarios where only the week or the day of the drill is announced.

Our long term capital planning committee will be studying the physical layout of the school to explore ways we can “harden” the campus with things such as buzz in entry systems and scan card type locks for entry into the back of the school for vendors.

Technology:

- **One-to-One:** The district is moving towards being a one-to-one school in the next few years. This would eliminate textbooks in the older grades, provide for us a much more flexible curriculum and open up limitless educational pathways for both our teachers and students. We have done a great deal of research on this topic and would likely use chrome books which have excellent built in classroom instructional programs and allow us to secure them even when kids take them home.
- **Tech Academy:** Tech Academy has been a huge success for us this year and will only get better. Mrs. Soule has put together a grant funded upgrade package for next year that will provide more hands on technology for the primary grades. We have a great deal of technology already available for our older students so as their skill set improves they will have plenty of room to grow. A very cool thing you may or may not know is that in our afterschool technology program we actually employ a few of our outstanding former students as technology tutors. These brilliant role models will even be a part of our summer program.

Transportation:

We are very lucky to have our own mechanic Leo Martinez who saves us thousands of dollars each year because he is amazing and dedicated. We do everything in-house from changing tires to transmissions. Our greatest challenge in this department is that our bus fleet is very old and we have almost no funding from the state to upgrade our fleet. This is something that our long term capital planning committee will be working on. About three quarters of our bus fleet has over 300,000 miles on them and the price one new bus is over \$160,000!

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.” Ghandi

Thank you very much for serving the children in our school district. My own children are a product of our district and I wouldn't have had it any other way!

*Respectfully,
Mr. Blausen*



Small town roots, Global expectations