

Let's Talk



Monthly Updates from Your Superintendent

August 1, 2011

After some well deserved rest for staff, parents and students, it's time to start thinking about getting back to work and kicking off the 2011-2012 school year. Much has changed in public education over the past few months and we can only imagine what may be next. Many challenges face education as a whole, but we are determined to continue to provide a world class education and top-notch services to our children. We recognize students are our future and that we must give them the tools they will need to compete in a global economy.

As with all other schools, Belding Area Schools has been forced to make some hard decisions relating to our budget. It would be great if we could continue to function as we always have, but increasing costs, declining enrollment (across the state) and cuts to public education from Lansing make this impossible. I ask that you please contact your legislators and let them know if you are unhappy with the funding situation for public schools. The State School Aid Fund was established to fund K-12 public schools. That money has now been diverted to pay for colleges and community colleges. Had the School Aid Fund been left alone, public schools in Michigan could have been given an increase in funding for this school year. Instead, Lansing "created" a funding crisis by going against the intent of the voters and giving Proposal A and school funding a whole new meaning. We have no control at the local level over what we receive. Our only option is to react to the budget that is forced upon us. The only people that can change our funding dilemma are the folks in Lansing. They need to hear from you if you disagree with what is happening to public schools.

The question often comes up, "how can we be adding on to our facilities when we are cutting in other areas?" This can be a very confusing situation, but there is actually a very easy answer. The bond that was approved in February of 2010 was put before the Department of Treasury before the Belding Community voted. There are very strict laws regarding how we spend bond funds and Belding Area Schools is committed to spend the funds on the projects described before the vote took place. Additionally, bond funds cannot be used for operations (heat, gas, programs, salaries, benefits, etc.). Bond funds may only be used for capital improvements. We are proud to say that we will have facilities and tools (technology) that allow us to provide the world class education Belding students will need to be successful in their post secondary education endeavors and in life. We will experience many "inconveniences" throughout this building process, but in the end, our students and staff will have a learning environment that will put us on the cutting edge.

The Budget

I was able to present to many groups regarding the budget last spring. The bottom line is that due to cuts in funding and increasing expenses, Belding Area Schools cut over \$1 million from the 2010-2011 budget and reduced six teachers. For 2011-2012, we have made further staff reductions (teachers, administrators and support staff), made cuts across budget areas and implemented employee wage and insurance concessions to cut approximately \$2 million plus from the budget. We are still facing an \$800,000 deficit that can be covered by our fund equity. This will be our fourth year in a row of using fund equity (savings) to cover our budget and not make further drastic cuts. As our fund equity decreases we will be forced (as are many schools) to borrow funds for cash flow during the time we do not get state aid payments. At some point, fund equity will run out if this trend continues. Luckily, we are in a position that we can maintain this spending pattern for longer than many districts are able to. Without a change in funding from the state, all public schools will eventually be bankrupt. Our legislators need to hear that we want to maintain a viable, competitive public school system.

Finally, thank you to all of our students, staff, parents and those in our community that continue to be supportive of Belding Area Schools. You can be assured that the children of our community and their education are our first priority. The next few years are going to see us enter uncharted times with regards to funding, change and accountability. We need to continue to work hard and stick together so that Belding Area Schools emerges from this time of uncertainty as a leader in educating our children.

I am looking forward to the 2011-2012 school year and expect that it will be very exciting in terms of educational advances for our children and progress as our construction projects continue. It's a great time to be associated with Belding Area Schools. Remember, we have little control over what happens from the outside, but we can control how we respond and what we provide. I choose to provide all we can for our students and believe that we will overcome all obstacles to be the best school possible for our children.

Sincerely,
Leslie Mount
Superintendent