

Let's Talk



Monthly Updates from Your Superintendent

October 2, 2010

Welcome to fall. It's hard to believe school has been in session for a month already. This is the second installment of monthly updates from my office. This month I'll be sharing information regarding good news, the bond, the budget, Lansing and legislation, and the school calendar.

Good News

Belding Area Schools has received a lot of recognition recently. Last spring, Woodview Elementary (Reading Enrichment) and Belding Middle School (Technology in Math) received Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) Excellence in Education Awards. These awards recognized the top three programs in pre-determined areas across the state. This summer we were notified that Belding Middle School was the overall winner in their category for the State of Michigan. They will receive their award Saturday, November 6th at the MASB Conference.

The Belding Board of Education also recently found out that they were the winners of the MASB Visionary Award. This award will be presented Friday, November 5th at the MASB Conference.

The Belding Food Service Department has received a lot of positive attention as well. The Michigan School Business Officials awarded Belding Food Service the Meridian Award (\$1,000) for implementation of the Universal Breakfast Program. Additionally, Belding was the overall champion of State Superintendent Flannigan's Breakfast Challenge (\$5,000). Both awards included cash prizes to continue to improve the overall quality of our food service program.

Belding High School was ranked at 93 percent in the State Top to Bottom List. This put them above any other high school in the area. The high school has made tremendous gains on the Michigan Merit Exam over the past few years leading to this high ranking.

The Bond

Work continues on the bond projects. Over the summer, the Belding Middle School gym received a facelift. If you have not been in the gym you should stop by – it's beautiful. The bleachers look great and are now much more safe, easy to operate, and comfortable. Planning for the high school is beginning to wind down. That project will be ready for bids some time late this winter. Construction there is likely to begin around Spring Break (gym and auditorium) with science labs currently slated to be renovated this summer. Planning for Ellis is scheduled to begin in January. Construction at Woodview should begin late this month. A public bid opening was held for the Woodview project on September 28th and we were very excited that many of the bid divisions came in well under budget. This will allow us to take care of some necessary roof repairs at Woodview as a part of the project.

The Budget

The business office will begin to work on an amended budget this month. Some key information we have been waiting for has become available. It appears that our prediction of 50 less students was right on. While we hate to see enrollment decrease, this is good news in that we budgeted the appropriate amount and early estimates were that we may be down significantly more than that. The amended budget will reflect another increase in the retirement rate. Last year, Belding Area Schools paid the retirement system 16 cents for every payroll dollar spent. Indications were that we would be paying about 19 cents this year. We have been notified that it will actually be around 20 cents and that over the next few years that could climb to 26 cents. While this sounds insignificant, it represents a large increase in expenses for us (approximately \$75,000). Another change in the budget will be a reduction of \$360,000 in special education funds that we had anticipated and will not be receiving. Our original budget passed in June was at a \$660,000 deficit. The increased retirement rate and lack of special education funding will put the amended budget over a million dollars in deficit. The Federal Government allocated money to Michigan for the Ed Jobs Program. That money has not been received, but is estimated to be around \$448,000. This money can be used over a two-year period, but is one-time revenue that we will not receive in future years. All-in-all, we continue to face greater expenses with fewer revenues and try to meet the challenge of greater accountability and demands with less staff.

I had the opportunity to listen to the State Treasurer last week. The outlook for education financing in Michigan is grim. For the 2012 budget year, it is estimated that there will be a \$215 million deficit in the School Aid Fund. In fact, the entire Michigan budget for 2012 is expected to be one of the most difficult in history. It appears that all the "band-aids" of supplemental funding have come to an end. This could mean up to a \$400 per pupil reduction (about \$887,000 for Belding) if nothing is done. You can rest assured that we are budgeting carefully and trying to prepare for a very uncertain future in school funding. To that end, Belding has made the following budget cuts over the past few months: one secretary at central office (effective 10/19); one district computer technician (effective 10/4); combined technology director with director of instruction; one elementary teacher; three middle school teachers; two alternative education teachers; administration at alternative education was combined with the high school; salaries have been cut over the past two years for the superintendent, high school assistant principal, middle school assistant principal and Ellis principal; approximately \$65,000 in insurance savings for administrators, non-union staff and bus drivers; and cuts to extra-duty assignments where possible.

Lansing/Legislation

When Proposal A was passed to fund schools in Michigan, schools lost the ability to raise millage for operational expenses. At that time, a commitment was made that the School Aid Fund would be used solely to fund K-12 education. This fall the legislature transferred \$208 million out of the School Aid Fund. Ironically, this is almost the exact amount that the School Aid Fund is slated to be in deficit in the near future. This year, there will be historic turnover in the State Legislature. Education legislation continues to increase with over 500 bills each session. Education is a large part of our legislators' job and is an area we need to be sure they are informed about. The state senate will only return eight folks and around half the house will be new. There will be very little experience and/or history with the issues that surround education. Also new will be the governor, the secretary of state, the attorney general, four United State representatives, two state board of education members and two Supreme Court justices.

School Calendar

We continue to get many questions about the calendar for this year. Please understand this is a negotiated item and negotiations are still taking place. For the duration of negotiations, the Board of Education will implement a month-to-month calendar. We will certainly do our best to answer your questions regarding the calendar until an agreement is reached.

In closing, we are in a difficult financial time in education, but as always, our focus continues to be on learning for all. We are off to a great start at Belding Area Schools.

Sincerely,
Leslie Mount
Superintendent

 **Belding Area Schools**
The right size. The right choice.