

Let's Talk



Monthly Updates from Your Superintendent

March 1, 2011

Exciting things are happening at Belding Area Schools. Recently, we were informed that senior Zach Kunkle was awarded a commission to West Point – what a prestigious honor. This is truly a huge accomplishment. Our school community is very proud. Mrs. Moayer and the drama club are gearing up for the Willy Wonka production in March and under the direction of Mrs. Feuersetin, our FFA took a third place (demonstration team – Sarah Ring, Kelsey Puehler and Rhiannon Bowen) and fifth place (freshmen parliamentary procedure team – Monica Meyers, Courtney McKeever, Cheyenne Paulson, Jessica Tuttle, Sarah Rodel and Megan Stout) at their Caledonia competition. Mr. Battle and Mr. Daller took three teams to the MSU VEX Robot Competition. One BHS robotics team (Caleb Marvin and Andrew Walker) was runner up for the entire competition. Additionally, BHS had the only robot that could climb a ladder – the crowd was very impressed. Battle of the Books is gearing up at BMS as well. Also, Mrs. Lehman (BMS) was a GVSU Cool Teacher Award recipient and Mr. Carlson was recently recognized by the Ionia Sentinel Standard. There are many more accomplishments taking place, but these are a few highlights. Thanks to all of you for your hard work and achievements!

Collaboration

Belding Area Schools, the City of Belding and the Belding Chamber of Commerce are working together to promote education, living, business and industry in Belding. We must all support each other in order for our community to grow and prosper. The more positive we can be; the more likely people are to want to live here and become a part of our community. Our hope is to help each other through this difficult economic time and to promote our community as the gem it is. Ideas and suggestions are welcome by all three groups to promote our schools, our community and business growth.

The Bond

It was just one year ago that our bond initiative was successful. Time has really passed by quickly. It's exciting to see the projects progress. Please remember that the bond projects are completely separate from our general fund. I know it can be confusing as we hear about hard economic times and cuts for schools, to see new additions and upgrades taking place. The bottom line is that we had to submit our plans for the bond project to the Department of Treasury before the election could even be approved. We are held accountable to stick to those plans to the best of our ability. Also keep in mind that we cannot use bond funds for operations (salaries, utilities, etc.). Please feel free to explain this to students or adults who question how we are able to proceed with upgrades when most Michigan schools are talking about drastic cuts. Again, relative to the bond projects, keep in mind that there will be major and minor inconveniences along the way as we renovate, upgrade and build. Ultimately, we will have fantastic facilities and technology to help our students learn when the process is complete (estimated total project finish is April 2013).

The Budget

I spent several hours with each of our building administrators and directors discussing potential savings ideas for next year. Meetings will continue and expand. We already knew we faced some pretty major budget challenges (\$2.3 million projected deficit without cuts) before the Governor released his budget. We are taking a "double hit" as we now have the reductions for next year and our deficit from this year to overcome. Obviously the Governor's news, as with all schools, was devastating to us as it only compounded our budget problem (\$470 cut per pupil is about \$646,671 for Belding). Additionally, our February unaudited count was -58.13 students from last February. That is more than double our loss for the same period last year (-22.06). This will account for 25% of our funding for next year under the blended count formula (another hit to our budget). We all have areas that are important to us and that we feel are "sacred." It is clear that there will have to be very difficult cuts across the state – even to the sacred areas. We will not be alone in making extremely difficult decisions and cuts. Along with cuts to our per pupil allocations, cuts are also on the table that will impact us in the areas of declining enrollment (-\$19,109), Title I at the federal level, special education, Bilingual education (\$19,427), and ISD programs that provide "flow through" money to us. It appears that At-Risk funding, early childhood funds, vocational funds and adult education will be protected from cuts.

A quick summary of the Governor's proposal shows a \$470 per pupil cut along with a \$230 per pupil increased cost for retirement. In essence, that is \$700 per pupil we will lose. Another disappointment is that Proposal A was originally intended to solely fund K-12 education as we have no other means to generate operational revenues. At this point, it appears that community colleges and universities will now benefit from the School Aid Fund. The Office of Retirement Services predicts that the employee retirement rate will go up to 24.46% for next year (\$230 per pupil increase) and then to 27.37% the following year. With all this said, our per pupil funding for this year was \$7,390. The prediction for next year is \$6,846 along with increased costs.

Hopefully, the bad weather is behind us so that we can concentrate on teaching and learning all we can before spring break. Third trimester will begin shortly and the end of another year will be in sight if you can believe it. Our high school students have MME (ACT, Work Keys and Michigan Wrap-Arounds) this week so let's wish them success on these very difficult tests. The PTO Winter Carnival is Friday as well. Winter sports are wrapping up and spring events will begin before we know it. Our band seems to have a concert scheduled each time we have a snow day so we're hoping they will be able to get some performances in as the weather clears.

Finally, thank you to all of our students, staff, parents and those in our community that continue to be supportive of Belding Area Schools. We are blessed to have so many volunteers and supporters. We will survive this economic downturn – we have before. Belding Area Schools has survived times of split sessions and no bussing. It may not be easy, but we can and will survive this new challenge as well. I may be a new superintendent, but I am not new to Belding. After 15 years in this district I care too much about our kids and community to see us do anything but come out of this stronger. It's a hard time in education. Funding is questionable at best and accountability is ever increasing. We need to lean on each other and be confident in our knowledge that we are making a difference every day. Let's continue to work together to offer the best program possible for the children of Belding.

Sincerely,
Leslie Mount
Superintendent

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