

Let's Talk



Monthly Updates from Your Superintendent

May 2, 2011

It's hard to believe it's May already. This school year has gone by so quickly! This month the Class of 2011 will graduate and we will start to wind down toward the end of another academic year. During this first week of May, we also take time to thank the staff at Belding Area Schools for their dedication to our children and helping secure the best possible future for them. It truly is a team effort and takes hard work on the part of everyone in our organization to make sure we put forth the best program for our children every day. Saying thanks alone seems small to recognize what our folks do. We truly appreciate our staff and all they do more than can be expressed by words.

Good News

Many "good news" items have taken place since the last update. Two of our wrestlers placed at the state competition. Myron Hosey took third and Anthony White took sixth. Our girls bowling team took first in their district and region. The boys and girls basketball teams achieved Academic All State Honorable Mention. Our band continues to be successful at every competition they attend.

In addition, Junior Liz Wittenbach scored well enough on her ACT to qualify for National Merit Scholar consideration. The VFW Ladies Auxiliary awarded Nichole Peterman, Katie Groening and Lindsay Fortuna in the Creative Patriotic Contest. Nichole went on to take third at the state level and will therefore be in the national competition as well.

Some of our staff members should be recognized for their hard work. Our bus fleet and mechanic achieved a perfect inspection from the Michigan State Police. This is a huge accomplishment that we tend to overlook as they achieve this rating each year. Mary Beth Rogers, finance director, was named one of the honorary chairs from the Michigan Women in Finance group. A very special thank you to Heidi Wilker and Amy Deiter for the countless hours of work they put in to make our Kindergarten Roundup and Screening a great success this year. These two took on coordination of this gargantuan and very important project for the first time this year.

The Bond

Work at Woodview is essentially wrapped up. Outdoor grading and landscaping still need to be finished up (Mother Nature has not been very cooperative), but the new classrooms and conference rooms are already being used. Site visits and input sessions have taken place for Ellis. The architects are working on a first draft plan for us to review in the near future. Input sessions for the middle school will begin soon as well. The high school groundbreaking ceremony will be May 3 at 2:00 p.m. We anticipate that dirt will start to fly soon after.

Keep in mind two things about the bond work. First, it will make life difficult as we work through the process. Please be patient and understand the end product will be worth the inconveniences along the way. Second, the funds being used for the bond cannot help us offset the drastic cuts being proposed at the state level. Legally, bond funds can only be used for capital improvements (remodeling, construction, buses, and technology). They cannot be used for operations (heat, gas, salaries and benefits).

The Budget

I have been around to each of our buildings to share information on the budget outlook. Additionally, I have met with all of our parent support groups with the exception of Band Boosters (which was cancelled due to weather). However, I plan to meet with this group in the near future. A letter also went home to all parents explaining the impact that the proposed cuts to education would have on our district and all others in the state. Belding has been financially responsible, but there is no way for any district to maintain current programming and offerings under the proposal from the Governor. If the School Aid Fund were left to K-12 education (as intended by the voters for Proposal A in 1994) we would be fine – possibly even see an increase in funding. By robbing the School Aid Fund, Lansing is manufacturing a funding crisis in education. All involved are predicting that Revenue Estimating Conference on May 16 will show at least \$500 million more in funds than expected. How can a cut to the level being proposed be enacted when the state expects to take in more revenue than anticipated and the School Aid Fund is doing well enough to offer us an increase next year without the surplus funds? The bottom line is that this proposal is not good for children. The Governor presented a special message on education where he asked us to ramp up efforts and performance in education. That will be very difficult to do with less staff and fewer programs. Please continue to contact our legislators to let them know children are a priority and to leave the School Aid Fund alone and honor the wishes of the citizenry of Michigan in 1994.

If current proposals from Lansing hold true, Belding Area Schools will need to cut \$2.7 million to achieve a balanced budget. Likely, we will utilize some fund equity to buffer those cuts for as long as possible. A first wave of cuts will be taken to the Board of Education in May. From there, we will wait a bit to see what direction Lansing seems to be going before taking cuts to a level that would tragically impact current services and programs. Know that as with everywhere else, cuts must be made and that any cut is a difficult cut. There is no "fluff" left in our budget. We will feel these cuts. Things that folks are accustomed to having will have to go away. This is the case everywhere – not just in Belding – we are not alone in this struggle. Let's be supportive of trying to make these cuts have the least impact on our children. We will need to work together not against ourselves to make next year as productive and positive as possible.

Finally, thank you to all of our students, staff, parents and those in our community that continue to be supportive of Belding Area Schools. As we head toward the end of another year I reflect back on all that has happened this year and know that Belding Area Schools is successful due to the efforts of folks who are willing to give of their time and talent to make this a better place for our children. 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.

Sincerely,
Leslie Mount
Superintendent