

To view this newsletter and more online visit <http://www.usd437.net/staff/index.htm>

Budgets, buildings, feedback, and audits

By Dr. Brenda S. Dietrich, Superintendent of Schools

I hope you all have survived our first major snowfall of the winter! We are now past the 100 day mark of the school year and only about 6 weeks from the end of the 3rd quarter. This time of the year is a very busy “budget” time for administrators. I would like to up-date you on our schedule and let you know about some things that are happening in the district of which you might not be aware.

Current Budget News

First, I have some good news regarding our budget for this school year. We knew our enrollment on the count date in September was up at least 50-60 more students than we had projected. When the auditor visited us in late November he weighted some of our vocational and special education students differently and calculated an increase of 82.5 student FTE’s (full-time equivalents). The actual student count increases were at Auburn Elementary, Pauline South, Wanamaker, WRMS, WRHS and WRAHS. Because our enrollment is greater than what we expected when we published our budget last August, we are allowed to re-publish this year’s budget and will gain \$318,697 in budget authority. That money cannot be carried over in salary accounts or in the General Fund. The Board is considering putting the money in our textbook account this year, which does allow for a carryover from year to year.

Governor’s Budget Recommendations

The Governor’s Budget, with a recent modification in how special education is funded, will add more dollars to the General Fund by

- Increasing the base state aid per pupil by \$100 for 2004-2005 school year (adds \$560,000 to our budget)
- Increasing At-Risk weighting from 10 to 15% (adds \$123,000 to our budget)
- Decreases Correlation Weighting (adds \$212,762 to our budget)
- Increases bilingual education weighting from 20 to 22% (adds \$30.00...yes, that number is a whopping 30 dollars!)
- Equalizes capital outlay mill rate up to 4 mills. This and the changes in correlation weighting are controversial issues for some smaller districts but will do no harm to our district.
- Provides funding for full-day kindergarten in attendance centers with 60% or more free and reduced price lunch students (adds no additional money to our budget)

The additional dollars I listed above are based on the weighted FTE student count from 2002-2003.

We are all hopeful that some of the dollars the Governor is proposing will find its way into our classrooms via the General Fund Budget increases. It would certainly be welcomed. Parental support and the communication of that support to our legislators are key to this proposal’s successful passage.

Future Budget News

We are preparing our budget for next year with no additional budget authority or revenue expected simply because it is too risky to second guess the legislature and assume they will provide any additional dollars for schools. This means that we will not be increasing any line items from last year and an increase in staff is highly unlikely unless it can be funded from another source or reductions made in other areas to offset the cost. Until the legislature takes action on funding schools for next year, the most prudent course of action is to go forward expecting no new money.

Tallgrass Construction

Sunflower Construction out of Manhattan will begin the construction of a new Tallgrass shortly. We had planned to have a groundbreaking ceremony on Monday, January 26th, but the weather was wet, snowy, and cold, so we cancelled. We will definitely have an open house soon after the facility is completed in late July. The construction of this building was a necessity due to the growth of the student population with disabilities that would best be served in a self-contained environment like Tallgrass. Unfortunately, we have no space available in an existing school building so we had no choice but to “create” a new space. We could not wait any longer because it is essential that all facilities for exceptional children are comparable to those provided to non-exceptional children of that same age group and this will be noted by the Special Education Compliance Monitoring Team that will visit USD 437 in the spring. The modulars behind the high school are temporary facilities and do not have any space for physical activity or lunch preparation, and are simply inferior to any other space we have in the district for special education students. We are very fortunate that we are able to construct this facility using Capital Outlay funds.

Middle School Track

The Board of Education voted to approve the bid for construction of the new Middle School track at the meeting on February 2nd. The track will be a 6-lane asphalt track that should be completed by March 31st. The Middle School and High School track coaches will have to share the high school track at the beginning of the season until the new track is fully operational. The completion date is dependent upon weather.

Focus Groups

We have nearly arrived at the end of the Focus Group input for Strategic Planning purposes. These past two weeks we have gone out to large corporations in the greater Topeka area to solicit their ideas on how we can best prepare our graduates for success in their companies. We have visited Goodyear, Payless, Westar, St. Francis, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Security Benefit. The information we have received from all groups will be analyzed for trends and shared with the Board in March. At that point in time, Central Office staff will begin to create a draft plan to present to the Board in May/June. Our goal is to have a new Strategic Plan to present to all of you in August.

Curriculum Audit

The Board of Education has approved a comprehensive independent audit of our curriculum and assessment processes and practices. The purpose of the audit is to determine how closely our written, tested, and taught curriculum is aligned. The Education Division is providing a significant amount of written information to the auditors prior to their arrival in our district the week of April 19th. During their visit, the team will interview Board Members, staff members and visit all buildings to speak with the principals as well as see our curriculum “in action.” There will be an opportunity for teaching staff to visit with the team at the end of each day. The team will provide us with written recommendations, called Opportunities for Improvement, that we will use to make the kinds of improvements necessary to meet the learning goals of the district and be much more responsive to staff and student needs. The cost of the audit is being expensed from a salary line for an unfilled facilitator’s position this year. I think the information we receive will be extremely valuable and timely.

Distinguished Staff Award nominees sought

Nominations are now being accepted for Auburn-Washburn Distinguished Staff Awards. You can get the nomination form and complete instructions from your building office.

The awards are open to all staff members. The nomination materials are due Monday, March 8th by 4:30 PM at SEC. The combined award and retirement reception will be held on Wednesday May 5th at 6:30 at SEC.

In addition to the Distinguished Staff and retirees we will honor staff members who have worked in the district 25 years or more. We will also honor our recent Horizon Award winners Jerrod Bohn, Language Arts teacher at Washburn Rural High School, and Kristen L'Ecuyer, 5th Grade teacher at Jay Shideler Elementary School.

Foster receives writing leadership award

Dr. Tom Foster, Instructional Facilitator has been selected to receive the Judith C Gilbert Outstanding Educational Leader Award. The selection for the award is based on contributions to the profession in the area of support for the teaching of writing that goes beyond the requirements of everyday classroom life.

The award is given as part of the annual Conference on Writing and Literature. Presentation of the award will be made at the Conference Reception on Wednesday, February 18th at the University of Kansas.

KPERS Retirement Deadline

Staff members planning on retiring at the end of the current year must complete their paperwork with the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS) by April 1st. More information can be obtained by contacting the Business Office at the Shuler Education Center.

Summer School positions available

Certified, classified, and administrative positions are available for the 2004 Summer School. Check with your building office or the Education Division for more information.