

Superintendent Update
D. John Downs
May 15, 2020

Spring and Summer

As I write this, we just finished recording the virtual senior awards ceremony, which will be shared online. I am thankful we have dedicated educators who take initiative to provide recognition to our students. Kellie Austene led the charge on this project; please take the opportunity to thank her, along with Kari Yeagy, Matt Heet, Matt Boyer, and Scott Daly for the roles they also played in developing and implementing the ceremony.

Additionally, please thank Mrs. Yeagy for all the work she has done on both the Senior Spotlight and Hallsville on the Front Lines social media campaigns. These projects have garnered significant public interest, and Kari has done a fantastic job with them.

Summer school plans are being developed, with the understanding that the county health department's continuing orders may limit or even prohibit implementation of any planned in-seat programs. Mr. Cooley is finalizing plans for an online-only high school session in June. This week, K-8 families were surveyed on their interest in late July and/or early August programs. In addition to the county orders, student interest and staff availability will be two critical factors in determining if K-8 summer school will be possible.

A traditional graduation ceremony has been scheduled for late June, with three back-up dates scheduled into late July. As with summer school, restrictions on mass gatherings will have an impact on our plans. We are hopeful that the county will allow for an outdoor ceremony that includes limitations on the number of guests to allow for appropriate physical distancing.

Preparing for Fall Semester

As you have undoubtedly heard, the Missouri School Boards Association (MSBA) released a 97-page document listing considerations and suggestions related to the reopening of school. The document has generated a controversial response in the public. It is important to note that this document represents one institution's opinions among many; for example, MUSIC and legal firms have also published guidelines for consideration. The organizations authoring these documents have done their best to address considerations that may or may not be applicable across the many districts in Missouri—from large districts in densely-populated urban areas to tiny rural schools with only 50 students.

Hallsville has begun our preparations for the fall. As plans are developed, we will continue to reference documents like those mentioned above, along with official guidance from the CDC and our county and state health departments. Once completed, we will have developed various primary and contingency plans specific to the unique needs of our district. Some of the areas to be addressed include health and sanitation, curriculum and instruction, building and transportation logistics, impacts on athletics and activities, and human resources considerations, among others. Plans will be finalized over the coming weeks and months.

The first area to tackle is the impact on curriculum and instruction. Teacher-leaders and administrators have been working with teacher teams to document the fourth-quarter standards that will need to be addressed and reinforced in the fall in order to ensure students have the foundational knowledge and skills for the next level of learning.

Curriculum camp will be held starting after Memorial Day with this focus. Currently, roughly 80 teachers are planning to participate in this year's camp, which will be held virtually. The time spent will be a combination of collaboration and independent work in order to adjust unit and lesson plans, materials, assignments, and assessments for next year. Cross-grade communication will ensure a clear understanding of the content that will need additional time and attention. Teachers have been asked to also prepare contingency plans in the event of additional closures in the fall.

Facilities and Construction

As the Primary School construction project approaches completion, the construction manager has determined the project is running under budget. During its special meeting on May 11, the Board of Education elected to reduce the GMP to reclaim some of the funds for use on other projects. These funds—along with remaining bond premium, interest income from investment of bond proceeds, and capital projects reserve funds—will be used to complete the following high-priority projects: installation of security cameras and a public address system in the secondary building, partial roof replacement on the high school, and demolition of the old maintenance shop.

Change orders for some of these are included in the packet for Board approval. Bids for the low-voltage systems in the secondary building are due next Thursday. SM Wilson will likely request a special Board meeting in early June for approval of those bids.

Now that these decisions have been made, the district will resume our revision of the district facilities plan, including the identification of priorities for the next round of capital improvements. The pandemic has slowed this process and will continue to impact the work moving forward, but it is my hope that we can complete the process by this fall. The full process will include the administration of a community survey to solicit input on perceived facilities needs. Mrs. Yeagy applied for and was awarded a no-fee professional community survey administration from Patron Insight that we will use for this purpose.

FY21 Budget

Mr. Hoffman and I continue our work on budget scenarios for next year. DESE has released the application for CARES Act funding, and there is additional discussion on another federal aid package for public schools. The Missouri legislature passed a budget with full funding of the foundation formula in FY21, which will hopefully materialize and not become subject to withholding. Year-to-date sales tax revenues are holding at a slight increase over the prior year through April. By contrast, DESE just announced they will reduce our May payment due to a lack of gaming revenue. It is still too early to know the full potential impact of the pandemic on next year's budget. We will continue to move forward with a conservative approach and present the FY21 budget for approval as usual in June.