

December 16, 2008

Colleagues,

I want to take this opportunity, as we move into the holidays, to share some important information with you about the state of our District. Following the November election, I wrote to you about tough budget reduction times our organization would have to work through. In the weeks since that letter, you have displayed true leadership and teamwork. Your level of engagement in providing ideas, feedback and recommendations regarding difficult reduction discussions has been wonderful and greatly appreciated.

While we move through our process, the state and nation's economic situation continues to be uncertain. We are not only challenged by local factors such as lowering enrollment projections by 1,200 students, increased medical costs and less local specific ownership tax revenue (sales of cars and car title renewals), now more than ever we also face concerns regarding state funding. Areas such as PERA and the State Funding Formula will likely become topics of discussion this legislative session. We will keep a close eye on the impact throughout the year. It makes sense for us to further streamline our work, and maximize resources to focus on our mission – providing a quality education to the students in our community. The plans we make now will strengthen our organization and help it withstand a weakening economy. We will take careful steps to minimize impacts on the classroom while ensuring the financial strength of DCSD.

Our budget reduction process is beginning to take shape. Thanks to your work, and the thousands of elimination, redesign and reduction ideas generated, consistent areas (or themes) have been identified as we continue reduction planning. Once again, central administration, compensation and a re-examination of existing educational programming and support services are major areas of focus. Ideas were also put forward regarding revenue-generating possibilities.

I have always had a tremendously high level of confidence in our staff and leadership to make the best decisions for our students. As we work on this reduction process, we will look for ways to distribute existing funds in such a manner that schools and feeders will have more flexibility than ever before to make the best site-based decisions for kids. Parameters will be established, but in times of challenge, opportunities also present themselves.

We are currently studying and reviewing the ideas against pre-determined decision-making filters. These filters include the Board of Education Vision for student learning in the 21st Century; requirements defined by law, policy, or negotiated agreements; stakeholder agreements based on prior voter approvals; and financial implications. In January, all stakeholders (internal and external) will be provided with the next level of reduction work regarding themes and ideas. An open survey, like the one you completed, will be available for our community. Continue to check our website at www.dcsdk12.org for updates. Stay tuned for the final stages of the process to occur between January 5 and January 23.

I am grateful for the people we have in our organization. I feel very fortunate that despite challenges, our team represents the best thinkers, leaders and doers in public education. We continue to pursue the highest quality education for kids. Please be careful over the holidays and take time to enjoy time with family and friends. Thank you to your commitment to the students of Douglas County.



Jim Christensen
Superintendent