

Superintendent's Report July 10th, 2014

It has been a very busy summer for the Searcy County School District. With any change, there is always a certain amount of added stress for everyone involved and that has been very true in the transition from Mr. Vining to myself. I have worked in the district for the past 19 years (with the last 13 serving as Marshall High School Principal) and have seen many changes over the years. A great deal of change has taken place just in the last three months. Some say change is good; some say things are fine just the way they are. As I transition into my new role as Superintendent of Schools, I find that things are going to be different for all involved.

The District and the voters are about to face some very big decisions. The School Board voted on June 24th to ask for a 3.8 mill increase in September. This increase will allow the district to build classrooms at both Marshall High School and Marshall Elementary, add a heating and cooling system to the Leslie Campus, and make the high school campus more compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The question that is always asked is, "Do we really need this?" I could answer this in many ways, but the simple answer is YES! The MES Campus has seen the district through for many years, but we have come to point that we must make improvements to the campus. **Neither the previous administration nor I determined that these changes needed to be made.** The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has a system of calculations to determine the lifespan for school buildings. According to ADE, most of the buildings on the MES campus have outlived their lifespan. But ADE also has a system in place to help us replace those buildings. This system comes in the form of a Partnership. In this Partnership, ADE will give us a percentage of the funds needed to build new facilities; the district has to provide the rest of the money. In our case, we have four approved projects (as mentioned above) that Partnership funds will be used for. ADE will give us \$2.7 million for the projects but, in order for the district to get that money, we MUST pass the 3.8 mill increase.

Also, along with millage projects, the district has been mandated by the State to make upgrades/improvements to district facilities. First, the district was told in October of 2013 that fire alarms had to be installed in the business labs and cafeteria at MHS as well as the Jennings Building, H-Building, and old gym at MES. The State Fire Marshal returned in May of 2014 and found that fire alarms were needed in the band/agri building and the field house on the MHS campus. In addition to fire alarm problems, the district was also found to be out of compliance in several areas in the field house, with electrical wiring and proper ventilation just a few among many. The district was told to bring all the buildings into compliance by the start of the 2014-15 school year. We are currently working to bring these buildings into compliance prior to the start of school in August.

I understand these are tough financial times for everyone. But the Board and I know that this is a one-time opportunity for the school district to take advantage of the Partnership money to help build classrooms and make much needed improvements to our facilities. If the district fails to pass a millage increase we will lose the partnership money and will be faced with the question of how to build and improve our facilities without the financial help the state will provide. In the district's current financial state, trying to build facilities without using ADE funds will be very, very difficult.

Even with all the challenges mentioned above, I am still very excited about the opportunity to serve the district as Superintendent of Schools and look forward to working with everyone involved to make the Searcy County School District the very best it can be.

Stay tuned in two weeks and watch for more newsletters from the Searcy County School District.