

Superintendent's Column No. 4 for May

On Tuesday, the Mineral County Board of Education will finalize the county schools budget for 2015-16. Like many agencies we are facing some losses in revenue and how to manage those losses has caused concern.

I want to share some of my concerns impacting the budget with you.

First, Medicaid funding has been significantly reduced because of changes from the federal government. This year (2014-15), 11 positions were funded by Medicaid. While we do not have an exact number for the reduction, we anticipate about a \$100,000 reduction in these funds which has been utilized for staffing.

We will no longer be able to rely on this funding stream.

The next issue is that local tax revenue is projected to be \$11,697 less for Fiscal 2016 than for the current year. State Aid to Education for Mineral County, based on a formula that relies heavily on enrollment and other basics is \$356,157 less for Fiscal 2016 than for Fiscal 2015.

For every 13 students that are lost from enrollment, the state reduces funding to the equivalent of one professional position (\$67,000) and one service personnel position (\$46,000).

Personnel costs are 83 percent of the budget. This includes salary and benefits.

Occupational and physical therapy expenditures for Fiscal 2014 were \$159,042. As of today these same expenditures for the current year are \$195,412. About \$137,000 is budgeted, thus these expenditures exceed the budget by \$58,412 or approximately the cost of one professional position.

The substitute budget for all employees for Fiscal 2015 is \$706,348 from all funding sources. The expenditures to date for Fiscal 2015 are \$923,699 exceeding the budget by \$217,352.

In Fiscal 2015 expenditures to the Jefferson School were \$55,232.82, and as of today, expenditures budgeted for Fiscal 2016 are \$66,849.12, for a total of \$122,052.

In past years, carryover monies from the annual fund balance have been available to balance the proposed budget. Half of the total carryover available was used to balance this year's budget, \$1,602,681. Unless we make some changes the remaining half will be gone and there will be no more in reserve.

These highlights of budgetary challenges do not include the growing cost of utilities, school supplies, and other general operations.

I only wish to share this information so that you understand that we must find more efficient ways to conduct school business. Last year we used 1.6 million dollars of the carryover budget to balance the budget. This was almost half of the total carryover budget. This funding can only be used one time.

These overages and growing cost must be met with new approaches to sustain a balanced budget.

We can do that while still providing new opportunities for our students to enhance their learning and our teaching. However, it will take all of us working together to begin to formulate plans and ideas that will help transform Mineral County Schools so it will operate efficiently and provide first class 21st century learning.

One of the ways we are looking at is having an Innovation Zone. The purpose and intent of an innovation zone is to:

1. Improve educational performance;
2. Provide principals and teachers greater flexibility by removing certain policy, rule, interpretive and statutory constraints;
3. Provide a testing ground for innovative educational programs at the school level;
4. Provide information regarding the effects of those innovations;
5. Document educational strategies that enhance student success; and
6. Increase the accountability of public schools for student achievement as measured by the state assessment and local assessments.

In order to create an Innovation Zone, we would have to request a waiver of those specific policies, rules, or statutory constraints mentioned in the first purpose that the state may have in place.

We have already requested a waiver to allow us to establish collaborative time for educators with a two-hour early dismissal each month.

As we move forward to meet budgetary challenges in the future these are the kinds of things we will be talking about during collaborative time as well as other opportunities for input from staff and the community.