

Mineral County Schools Superintendent Shawn Dilly Column No. 1

The mission for Mineral County Schools is “Success for all students – no exceptions, no excuses.”

When I accepted the position of superintendent in Mineral County, I spoke with business leaders, community organizations, political leaders, and students and learned that education is very important to this community.

I hoped to seek out new ways to bring the community into the schools. I planned a Transformational Summit to which we could invite those same business leaders, community organizations, parents and others to participate in the plans for the future of education in the county that would insure achieving the mission statement above.

Before I could do that I had to learn about the schools and the various programs housed in them as well as determine how the system budget is formulated based on the existing programs.

In doing so, I also had to realize that in order to make changes that will benefit students I had to follow state laws in taking action which call for notification of any personnel that might be affected by a change in program status well in advance of changes that might be made and approved by the county board of education.

Leonard Nimoy, who died recently, played the character Mr. Spock on the television series Star Trek and several of the subsequent Star Trek movies that continued to draw fans to Gene Roddenberry’s sci-fi creation and its humanitarian truisms. Early in the series, Spock states that “change is the essential process of all existence.”

But with change comes the hard decisions. Facts, not emotion, should dictate decisions but as Spock also pointed out “insufficient facts always invite danger,” a fact I have recently learned. It is unfortunate that all of the facts that we must look at to make these decisions have not been presented for the community to make a fair interpretation.

The hard decisions at this time are primarily because of funding issues, issues that cannot be ignored.

There are increasing transportation and operations costs that are not likely to decrease. The current budget for 2014-15 required \$1,693,885 to balance and that came from half of the carryover funds from 2013-14.

Another year of not making changes could create a situation in which we would be facing a deficit.

There have also been changes in service demands along with an increased cost in specialized services. There is a growing population of our students needing specialized equipment and support personnel.

Some of these changes are occurring in the Kindergarten, Pre-K, Special Education, Pre-K Special Needs groups. It is the numbers in these groups and other areas that determine the state education funding formula for Mineral County Schools.

In looking at these issues, there are questions that we need to answer. Do we need a realignment of personnel? Perhaps changes in procedures or policy will help us perform more efficiently. And most importantly – what is the overall impact and value for the students of the program?

I want to look at whether there are equivalent or acceptable alternatives that meet the same need at less cost. It requires determining whether the benefits of one program outweigh other programs and whether they align with the needs.

I want to emphasize that none of the decisions can be made without the full approval of the Mineral County Board of Education in a public meeting. My proposals are made to the board for their decisive action, without which no changes can be made. When it comes to school closings, a number of public hearings are required before any decision is made.

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