

April 10, 2013

Dear Kinnikinnick Community,

Did you know that you can use Oreo cookies to replicate the phases of the moon? Have you ever heard the joy in children's voices when they beat their own records on math fact applications on the iPad? Or have you listened in on students as they discuss how measuring a gallon of water with an eyedropper is probably not the most effective tool for this measurement? These are the types of discussions and products I witness as I walk through the halls of the Kinnikinnick schools. My spirit is lifted as I see the joy in the faces of our students as they engage in light bulb moments that show that learning is taking place. However, I am almost simultaneously saddened that there is a threat overshadowing these experiences because of the uncertainty surrounding the District's economic outlook.

The facts are easy to state, but hard to digest. Illinois has cut 42% in the reimbursement our district receives to transport our students between home and school and has also made deep cuts in General State Aid (GSA) (education fund). This school year, the GSA was cut by 11% and next year we anticipate a 20% reduction. The money lost by the State's failure to provide basic funding has been absorbed by the District since we rely on it to operate our schools. In the near future we will also be faced with financial decisions regarding our financial obligations regarding employee health care and pensions. While they are necessary expenditures, these government mandates will also have to be absorbed into the District budget.

We continue to make reductions and cuts that we feel will have the least impact on the quality of education our students receive, but after multiple years of cutting back, we are at a point where staffing and educational programming are the only things left standing. While we continue to spend down our reserve funds, they too will eventually run out, which by the latest projections will be in 2016. The education fund pays for everything that is crucial to our students' education: staff, instructional materials, and student textbooks i.e., if it is used to educate our children, it is at the heart of the education fund. To date, we have made reductions in every program and position in the District, with the latest being a two year salary freeze by all District staff and a reduction of Educational Support Personnel. A list of reductions can be found on the school website home page, <http://www.kinn131.org/>.

The cost of educating students continues to rise but the amount of money that we receive from the State continues to decline. A difficult decision we are faced with this spring is the need to reduce staff based on a decrease in student enrollment numbers which will create a slight increase in class sizes. Over the summer, if the financial situation changes due to increased enrollment or a change in government mandates, the decisions we make this spring will be revisited.

The Board of Education as well as every educator in the District works diligently day after day with fewer and fewer funds in order to maintain the focus on our mission which is to develop all students to their highest potential. Just as you have adjusted your household budgets to align to the current economic downturn, we too have "cut off the cable and started brown bagging our lunches." In the near future the Roscoe community will be asked to make a decision about the future of education for our schoolchildren because the reductions the District has made and continues to make are not enough for us to regain financial stability.

I invite you to attend our monthly Board of Education meetings where these difficult decisions are made. Like everyone in our community, we do not want to compromise our children's Oreo cookie learning moments or put the brakes on our students developing the skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century. Our goal will always be to provide the very best possible learning environment and educational opportunities for our students. The only way we can realize this goal is to get our district back on a path to fiscal stability as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,
Keli Freedlund
Superintendent