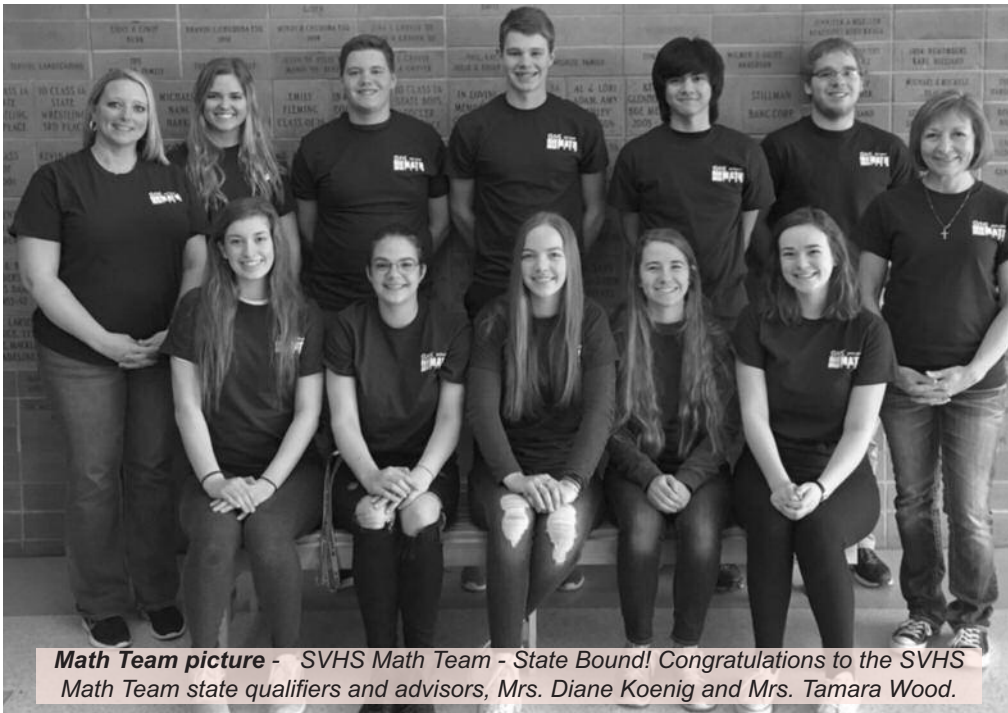


Meridian CUSD Newsletter

Spring 2018



Math Team picture - SVHS Math Team - State Bound! Congratulations to the SVHS Math Team state qualifiers and advisors, Mrs. Diane Koenig and Mrs. Tamara Wood.

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR SCHOOL, OUR STORY

A Word From Our Superintendent

By Dr. P.J. Caposey



Occasionally, I will make the short walk over to the Wooden Nickel for a quick salad bar for lunch. The usual crew is in there and ask for updates on athletics and let me know anything they believe I, or the district, can be doing better. As you may expect, they are not very shy nor are

they short on opinions. Over the past five years I have gotten to know the usual lunch crew and look forward to our friendly banter.

A few weeks ago, I walked in, unusually late for lunch. There was only one couple sitting down to lunch as I shuffled in. I said hello but did not recognize the husband or the wife. As I was about halfway past the table, the gentleman asked me, "So what are you doing with all those extra tax dollars you wanted?"

I was not expecting to engage in that conversation that day, but I was prepared. I went into a quick debrief about all of things we are doing and some of the things we wish we could do, but still cannot afford. The conversation ended pleasantly about four minutes later and I had not thought much of it since.

Then, about three weeks later I received a phone call

from Bob Farlik. Bob was one of the first people I met when I entered the district and has been a great friend since. Bob, who in some form or fashion worked for Meridian for 50 (yes, fifty) consecutive years, is also not shy in telling me what he thinks we can be doing better as a district.

Bob casually said during the phone call that I should be doing more to let people know what we are doing with the money we received from the referendum. We discussed this for a bit, but I was still not sold on the idea. Then, as I reflected on what Bob suggested I thought to my random encounter while trying to secure my weekly dose of chicken noodle soup and beets from Fritz.

I thought if two different people – one person I did not know and one person who I know pays keen attention to the district suggested this – then I should listen to our public. So, instead of our typical newsletter format this edition will detail where we were several years ago, where we are now, and where we hope to be.

I hope you find this newsletter as informative and enlightening to read as it was to put together. My biggest takeaway is that we have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Where We Were...

In February of 2014, we held a Board of Education meeting in the old cafeteria/gymnasium at Meridian Junior High. At that emotional meeting, over \$1 million dollars in personnel and programs were cut in an attempt to balance the budget. Some of the details of reductions and eliminations were as follows:

Instructional Aides – 6 positions eliminated – \$64,000+ reduction in salaries and benefits

Teachers – 7.79 positions eliminated — \$390,000+ reduction in salaries and benefits

Administration – 1 positions eliminated and 1 administrator moving back to the classroom — \$45,000+ reduction in salaries and benefits

Secretarial – 1 position reduced — \$10,000+ in reduction in salary and benefits

Custodial – 4 positions eliminated — \$125,000+ in reduction in salary and benefits

Technology – 1 position eliminated — \$21,000+ in reduction in salary and benefits

Food Service – 3 positions eliminated — \$34,000+ in reduction in salary and benefits

OVERALL Personnel Reductions – 24.79 positions eliminated, 22 employees with over 80 years of the service to the district were reduced leading to more than \$680,000 reduction in salary and benefits.

As a result of these reductions we had major gaps in the services we provided our students. In order to best describe the situation our schools faced at the conclusion of the 13-14 school-year is to examine the situation school by school and department by department.

Highland Elementary School

- One Special Education teacher for 3+ grade levels
- No Counselor
- Tattered and frayed carpeting throughout
- No security cameras
- One mobile computer lab
- One playground for all kids, including Pre-K
- Part-time Kindergarten
- No support staff for math interventions
- No access to school supported professional development for teachers (true for all schools)



Tractor Day

Monroe Center Grade School

- One computer lab for 380 students.
- Years of only 2 special education teachers
- Pull out ESL services k-5 for 2014-2015.

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

- No security cameras at any entrances.
- Old, stained carpet in entry way and leaky roofs.

Meridian Junior High School

- No 6th grade sports for multiple years
- No JH sports whatsoever in 14-15
- One computer lab; one portable lab
- One additional PE teacher (net loss)
- Poor, unreliable internet services
- Full time band teacher; shared chorus with elementary (net loss)



Stillman Valley High School

- 4 additional staff - 1 French Teacher; 1 Business & Tech Teacher; 2 FCS Teachers, Full Time Band and Choir (we have since added a second Art teacher – so net (-) 4
- Small and dated lockers in hallway & locker rooms
- Stained & old carpet throughout the building
- Limited security camera coverage in the building
- No buzzer system at entrance
- Main parking lot in poor condition without proper drainage
- 3 mobile computer labs for the building
- Eliminated Random Drug Testing for HS students participating in extra-curricular activities

Transportation

- Two-tier bus system
- Aging fleet
- Excessive annual repair cost
- Multiple buses failing inspections
- No systematic evaluation process or procedure for employees (true for all support staff areas)
- Extreme driver shortage

Buildings and Grounds

- Bleachers failed inspection
- Asbestos tile in multiple buildings and multiple rooms
- SVHS parking lot deteriorating
- Significant roof issues in all four buildings
- Literally years behind on state mandated Health, Life, Safety repairs
- Aging equipment (tractors, plows, etc.) with no replenishment cycle identified

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Food Service

- Highland & Monroe Center had one entrée choice
- No student lounge tables
- No equipment inventory maintenance log on kitchen equipment

Health Services

- Staffing shortages (due to pay)
- Few PD opportunities offered
- Limited wrap-around services (services promoting student wellness outside of the traditional school role of a school health professional)
- Fewer AEDs

Technology

- No clear technology plan
- No backups of any data
- Spotty wireless at best in most areas – very poor connection to Transportation garage
- No processes for handling tickets in an efficient manner, tickets taking months to close
- Aging wiring infrastructure
- No CIPA Compliance
- Barely functional networking equipment
- Slow Internet (25Mbps)
- Old, inefficient copiers
- Deteriorating phone system



Where We Are...

This section of the newsletter will focus on where we are now. The intent is to show that marked improvement and changes have been made in literally every department throughout the district. While referendum money does not directly impact each department, I thought it prudent to share the trajectory the district is on at this time. I think it is also important to demonstrate that not everything that has been reduced has been able to be added back. Notably, the high school is now serving as many kids as it has in its history and doing so with approximately 90 percent of the staff the district employed just six years ago.

I also wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the ways in which the district has been recognized for outstanding performance over the past four years. These recognitions, separate from numerous individual recognitions, include:

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

- Schools of Opportunity – Silver Award Winner
- US News and World Report Top High Schools – Silver Award Winner
- District Administration – District of Distinction
- IL Performance Excellence – Interest in Excellence Award

Highland Elementary School

- Counselor hired
- Instructional coach added to provide embedded ELA professional development K-5
- Revised improvement processes
- Security cameras strategically placed throughout buildings (true for all buildings)
- Introduction and implementation of Leader in Me at Highland and Monroe Center.
- 7 mobile computer labs - 1 stationary lab
- New carpeting in all classrooms
- New Journeys Reading Series resource (at MC as well)
- New Pre-K play area with fencing and concrete slab
- ESL services within classroom at Highland
- iRead program for students before school
- MyOn reader being used to support student reading (MC as well)
- All Pro Dad Breakfast once a month (MC as well)

Monroe Center Grade School

- 8 Google Chromebook carts, one tablet cart, and one computer lab for 330 students
- Three full time special education teachers for 2017-2018 school year.
- New carpet installed in entry way, office, and 3rd grade hall.
- More teachers interested in flexible seating with the allotment of Meridian Education Foundation grant.
- Revised Student Assistance Team processes to ensure students receive interventions for the appropriate length of time
- Implemented STAR assessment to measure student growth (all K-8 buildings)
- Implemented Math 2.0 and Math Facts in a Flash as Math interventions (all K-8 buildings)
- Created a Math Interventionist position
- Cluster groupings in Math to best serve our accelerated learners (HES as well)

Meridian Junior High School

- Hard wired lab in 219; 7 Chromebook carts; projectors in every room
- Water fountains with bottle fillers and filters
- New copy machine; new doors on band room; new gym doors
- New carpet; painting in several rooms

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

- Repaired ceiling, new bleachers, and improved lights in large gym
- SOAR classes with Math 2.0 – targeted to improve student Math performance
- Sports were reinstated
- New conference room; new front sidewalk; repaved parking lot
- New technology supports for teachers like Pear Deck, Google Classroom, etc

Stillman Valley High School

- Still down 4 faculty members from the 12-13 school-year
- New lockers installed in hallway & locker rooms
- New carpet installed
- Additional security cameras installed
- Buzzer system installed at the entrance
- Paved main parking lot with appropriate drainage and handicapped parking
- 1 mobile Chrome Book lab per department
- Random Drug Testing for HS students participating in extra-curricular activities reinstated
- Increased AP offerings
- 12+ program instituted to recognize students involved in many EC activities
- New competition gym floor and scoreboards (internal and external)
- Changed admission cost to allow students in for free to add to HS experience and home-court/field advantage



Transportation

- Single Tier busing
- Here Comes the Bus app to let parents know where their child's bus is located
- Sufficiently staffed for routes (however, national bus driver shortage is still impacting ability to procure subs)
- Rotational cycle of leases to ensure safe buses – oldest bus is 3 years old

Buildings and Grounds

- Significant roof repair at 3 of 4 buildings
- New gymnasium bleachers in JH and HS
- HS Front parking lots and drive resurfaced
- Long-term agreement with HVAC support provider to help ease our aging system forward
- Outsourcing less work

Food Service

- Two lunch items for students at El Ed
- New seating at HS
- Tracking and new procedures for account deficiencies

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

- Changed to Pepsi products
- Added salad bar to JH and HS
- Offering multiple fruits and vegetables to hot lunch students
- Share table for students to best use food that will not be eaten
- Breakfast available at elementary schools

Health Services

- Sufficient staffing and more sub nurses
- Medicaid billing improvement to increase district reimbursement
- District Epi Pens available for emergency situations
- CPR Training available to staff & added several AED's
- Partnering with Crusader to provide services to in need students (field trip model)
- Wellness Committee is evolving
- Continuing dental partnership with OnSite Dental
- Decreased exclusion numbers due to increased wraparound services and communication



Sam Winter
*Samuel earns IHSA
 All-State Academic
 Team Honors*

Technology

- Re-built infrastructure
- Over 1500 mobile devices added in past three years
- New phone system
- New copiers through systematic lease agreement
- Cameras at every building
- Technology plan in place
- All data is being backed up hourly
- New wireless system with full coverage in all buildings
- New tickets system and process in place to handle tickets efficiently putting our close time average to less than 48 hours
- Logically designed network and installed new networking equipment
- Fast Internet (1Gbps)
- Many mobile carts at each building
- Purchased security equipment to ensure CIPA Compliance
- New fiber connection to the bus garage
- All buildings re-wired
- Collaborative partnership with the Village of Davis Junction to support their technology needs

Local Postal Customer

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Where We Are Going...

The vision of the district is World Class Results, Small Town Values. In order to actualize this vision we have significant work left in front of us. While it is important to celebrate our successes, it is also important to recognize that we are not *yet* world class in terms of our student performance.

In terms of district operations, we have stabilized. When I officially assumed the role of superintendent I was the fifth district leader in three calendar years. We have very little in terms of leadership turnover and have been able to establish positive momentum moving forward.

Additionally, we have been able to reach a place where the district is no longer in financial turmoil. While we have reached a 'healthy' state, the future is always uncertain given the 7 year-term of the referendum. In the last newsletter I reported that even with the additional revenue we still spend less to educate our students than our surrounding districts. That chart is below again for reference, but we remain proud that we provide a great 'bang for your buck education' and have continued to remain fiscally responsible even with the increased revenue provided by the referendum.

DISTRICT	INSTRUCTIONAL EXPENDITURE PER PUPIL
Meridian	\$4,888
Byron	\$9,835
Genoa-Kingston	\$6,167
Oregon	\$5,822
Forrestville Valley	\$5,325
Winnebago	\$6,160

So, what is next?

- Continued work with STAR and other supports to ensure maximum student growth
- Ubiquitous access to technology (cart in every classroom)
- Leverage our partnership with CEANCI and Rock Valley College to career pathways for our students who are not college-bound
- Continued investment and improvement in the safety and security of our buildings
- In several years revamping our HVAC system will be a major expense
- Focus on flexible seating and creating an environment more conducive to 21st century learning
- Repair of the back drive at SVHS and the driveway to Transportation
- Bathroom renovations and 'catch-up' on annual work deferred when struggling financially, for example interior painting.