

Superintendent's Report

March 20th, 2015

BOARD UPDATE

- **Two Graduations** – We had two students graduate this week through two different Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE) programs we offer. The first student is Chris Berkholtz (see photo) who graduated this week from Bridges Academy at the Skills Center. The ceremony occurred in Ms. Patton's office with Wendy Chord doing the honors to give the diploma. The second student is Travis Heidegger who is actually our first graduate of our new LINX program. Congratulations to both of these young men! We wish them all the best in their future endeavors.



- **More Construction Projects Occurring on the High School Track** – We continue to have a dedicated crew of volunteers working to make improvements of our track facility. Over the past couple of weeks they have formed up and poured concrete on three different projects. The first project is the creation of a long-jump pit located on the east end of the field (see photo). The other projects are located on the west end of the field and include the new discus throwing pad and the footing for the wall that will go in front of the storage container holding up the main scoreboard. A huge thank you to all of the wonderful and seemingly tireless volunteers who continue to make tremendous contributions to making the dream of having a quality athletic facility a reality.
- **Special Education Program Review Process Continues** – As you know we are working to

review our contractual relationship with ESD 112 as the providers of the special education services within the district. This service contract has been a long-term partnership with the ESD, which has provided many years of support to our students. That said, over the past couple of years we have faced increasing challenges in the responsiveness and openness to innovation from the ESD.

I believe this relationship began to decline three years ago when the ESD moved away from a cooperative structure to what is now called an Educational Service Agency structure. This moved the locus of control away from the district as part of a shared service co-op to a very centralized decision making structure. At the same time as this structural change was occurring, key long-term leadership within the special education department began to leave the ESD. The result of the leadership transition was a sharp change in culture that has led us to this juncture. In my opinion, it has become increasingly difficult to say with confidence that the contract with the ESD for special education services effectively helps us achieve the Board's Ends expectations relative to our special education students.

To help in defining what our future services might look like (whether provided by the ESD or doing the work on our own), I have pulled together an initial group of four teachers from across the district (one from each grade band – K-2, 3-5, MS and HS) along with a building administrator to help me gain further insights into this matter. We met for the first time this week and these educators provided me good perspectives on what they believe needs to change within our special education program. In a nutshell, their experiences are that the ESD regularly takes too long to respond to what these educators feel are the needs of our students. The increasingly bureaucratic processes of the ESD are in stark contrast to the way we make decisions relative to our regular education students across the district. They also shared with me that from their observations of the special education staff (the ESD employees who they work side-by-side with every day), in their opinion are not being supported as they should. Whether that support is as basic as receiving necessary supplies in a reasonable time to operate their classrooms or in being provided the time they need to serve students all-the-while complete a rapidly growing mountain of paperwork that is burying them.

These perspectives from our own staff are parallel with what I have been hearing from other sources connected to this program. That said, I believe the ESD administration is trying to make changes in an attempt to provide better services. I am just growing more and more doubtful they will be able to close the gap to the point we need in order to have a substantial impact in our ability to meet the Ends policies as I know we are capable of doing on our own. I will need to make a decision whether to renew or not before April 30th. The district will need to provide the ESD a preliminary notice of non-renewal of our special education contract with them at that time or it will automatically extend the contract. Even if I make such a decision and submit this notification, we will officially have until August 30th to make a final decision of non-renewal of the contract. Then according to the contract we have with the ESD, once a final notice of non-renewal is given we will still required to stay with the ESD for another full year (through the 2015/16 school year) or face a penalty for terminating the contract early. FYI.

I think that is all for now. Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark