Superintendent's Report

April 23, 2010

LEARNING UPDATE

- **Corbett Trip Learning** – On April 15th, I joined a team of seven elementary teachers and Scott Lincoln on a site visit to the Corbett School District in Oregon. What was of interest to us was their model of multi-age classrooms that could serve as examples of the types of erosion of barriers of isolation between learners (students and teachers) that we are working on ourselves. I was very impressed with the work the Corbett students, teachers and administrators were accomplishing. Without question, our learning model and framework aligned well with that learning environment and the results are hard to argue with. They have gone from the worst district in the state a decade ago to one of the top schools in the nation. The numerous examples of internally motivated learners were very exciting to observe first hand.

  I am sure you will be hearing more about this experience in the future, but I would like to share one interesting idea that they have developed. They called it the "Cardinal Three" (Imagine our own "Hawk Three" expectation). Each middle school student had to accomplish three specific additional tasks before they could move on to the high school. First, each student had to complete 60 hours of community service (10 in the 6th grade, 20 in the 7th and 30 in the 8th). Next, each student must complete a public speaking opportunity in order to communicate his or her perspective on a topic. Finally, every student had to have at least one original piece of work published.

  To me, these three expectations are examples of a significant swing in the flow of information. Typically we expect students to take in information the "experts" (i.e. books, teachers, other adults, etc.) claim as important, which represents an inward only flow of information. The Cardinal Three represents an outward flow of information (one by action, one by spoken words and one by written word) that requires students to analyze, evaluate and synthesis; all high cognitive demand endeavors. Being intentional about these types of expectations in a way that links the work back to our learning model all coalesces on the central premise of the experience we are working to create for students as spelled out in the Board's Ends policies.

  To be sure we will not create a "Corbett North" in La Center. We will do our work in our way for our students. However, I found the Corbett experience to offer a healthy dose of confirmation that what we are working on is the right direction to go as well as provide us with a rich source of examples from another district that is on a parallel trajectory. I am sure you will hear much more about this experience as well as other Corbett examples in the future.

BOARD UPDATE

- **Budget Update –** Brett and I have had preliminary discussions on the budget variables and we feel very confident that no-RIF budget can be created for next school year. We also believe we will be able to make some in-district staff moves to cover all programs we currently offer as well as even expand our kindergarten offerings for next year. We are in the exploration phase of determining if a tuition based full-day, every day kindergarten is possible. If we get the response we think is likely, it's possible we could offer two sections of full-day, every day

kindergarten and three sections of all-day, every other day kindergarten (our current model) in the fall. Ultimately the state has committed to all-day every day kindergarten as a direction we need to head, so this will be a step in that direction. Additionally, if you saw the article in the Columbian where Evergreen S.D. is moving to free all-day every day kindergarten for next year you know this topic will be more of an expected service in the future. The Evergreen decision is being made possible because of deep budget cuts in other areas and frankly is a very bold move. Whether it is a success or not is yet to be determined. However, when the biggest district in the area makes a move like this we are certainly going to be impacted by it in one way or another. More on this as things develop, but I think we can take a deep sigh on the budget relative to what was possible from either the Governor's original budget proposal or the Senate's version. Once again the House budget served as the lighthouse in the storm.

- **Race to the Top (RTTT) –** If you are not aware of this federal program, this is the federal government's latest version of the carrot (of course woefully underfunded as usual) and stick approach to national education reform. I would prefer to identify it more accurately as "Race to the Trough". Our state, along with everyone else is racing to get federal money at any cost. In the end, only a few states will get any money, yet significant changes are being made by our state simply to line up to the federal governments "trough". As part of this effort, the state is asking all districts, teacher associations and principal associations to sign on to be part of this. Unless directed by the board, I do not plan on wasting any district energy chasing these funds. The money available to the district could be as much as $30K per year for four years, but I believe the true costs of the expectations required on the slim chance we get any money will be far more than this and we will need to further erode local control as a consequence. I am usually a positive person, but this (and the information described in the next section on Race & Ethnicity) is beyond ridiculous. With this in mind, I simply don't even see that it is worth any expenditure of the board's time on the agenda.
- **Race & Ethnicity Requirements –** The federal government and therefore the state are now requiring us to collect additional information on the Race and Ethnicity of our students. I find these efforts to be not only an intrusion on the privacy of our students and their families, but also a monumental waste of time, energy and resources. What the government is demanding that we do is request this information be provided by parents and if they do not provide it we must follow up with a second effort to reach them (i.e. second letter, phone call, email, etc.). If they still refuse to provide this information, they are requiring us to train staff to identify the race and ethnicity based on our own judgment. This will not only require time, but training as well. Now, given our mostly uniform demographics this will most likely be minimal. With that said, I feel this is yet another intrusion into local control and one more small step in an effort to turn a community owned "public" school into a "government" school. I am providing this information to the board because I want you to know that my diligence to accomplish this requirement will be minimal. When I do take action to meet this expectation (unless directed by the board to do otherwise), I will most likely do so with a local perspective rather than what the state or feds would want us to present as a more positive request for information. FYI.
- **Food Service Advisory –** I have sent the food service advisory the following information/questions to ask for a perspective on how to provide better meals for students. My request to this group was to have a report back to me by the end of June so that we could plan next year's program and budget with better information from stakeholders.

<u>Food Service Advisory Overarching Goals Established in 2008</u>

1) To provide the most nutritious meal options possible for all children at the most reasonable cost.
2) To educate parents and students
    - On the nutritional content of the meals we serve.
    - On the benefits and concerns of the nutritional components.
    - On the choices we make when selecting a meal and how to make healthy choices.
    - On the risks associated with being over or under weight.
    - To develop good eating habits.
    - Tie meals into the health curriculum in the classroom.
    - To provide healthy choices at all meals
3) Visually indicate to the students what the healthier choices are and how to build a balanced meal.
4) Provide simple indicators in the lower grades and add the nutritional details as the students get older.
5) Limit less healthy choices and treats to no more than twice a week.
6) Improve the nutritional content of the meal items based on a measurable standard beyond the USDA standards currently in use.

Essential Questions

1) Looking at the revenue and expenditures of our food service program, what have been the impacts of any changes to the program in terms of sales and costs?
2) What actions have been taken by the food service program to educate parents and/or students about nutrition, choices of food, good eating habits, etc. over the past year?
3) What actions have been taken to provide more healthy meal choices?
4) How have less healthy choices and treats been limited to reach goal #4 stated above?
5) Besides the current state and federal standards for nutrition, what other models for nutrition are being used by schools either locally, in-state or across the nation?

Areas of Exploration

1) If any above goals have not yet been met, what barriers or challenges are being encountered to achieving them and what strategies are being considered to do so?
2) Now that it appears as though our breakfast program numbers are strong, what would it take to move toward a cooked from scratch model for breakfast instead of using predominately prepackaged food (i.e. cold cereal, cherry turnovers, etc.)?
3) At the high school, what are the items being offered ala-cart both in the morning and at lunch, and how do these products align with the overarching goals listed above?
4) How have students been engaged in conversations about food service program over the past year and what specifically are they telling us?
5) How are adult stakeholders (e.g. advisory committee members or other volunteers) being engaged in conversations or work around making our food service program even better?
6) How are we (either as an advisory and/or as a food service program) intentionally collecting data to determine program effectiveness, needs or impacts from any changes being made?

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

Mark