

The State of Our School District

Current

This article is to inform the readers of our county about the current state of our school district. This overview focuses on beliefs, learning goals, finance, personnel, facilities, and the challenges we are facing as a school district. Recently we completed the Strategic Plan for our district. The Strategic Plan focuses on student learning, teaching, schools, and the role of central office. In giving an overview we must begin with our priorities, or what we believe will help us “give every child a high quality education”.

What we believe about student learning:

- All students have worth and dignity and should be expected to achieve at high levels.
- All students have the potential for high achievement.
- All students will be challenged with rigorous work at all levels.
- All students will be educated so that they will become productive members of society.
- Every stakeholder is responsible for continuous improvement in student learning.

What we believe about teaching:

- Proficient teaching matters. We will continually train and monitor our professional community to ensure that we are leaving nothing about teaching and learning to chance.
- Planning matters. Teachers will intentionally plan rigorous lessons that address all students’ educational needs.
- Student work matters. Learning activities will be relevant, connected to real-life experiences and designed to actively engage all students.
- Results matter. Student learning will be frequently assessed and students who need interventions or enrichment will receive it in a timely manner.
- Character matters. Teaching moral values, self-discipline, respect for authority, as well as respect for others and self are important.
- Culture matters. It is important to immerse students in a school culture that is conducive to optimal learning.

What we believe about schools:

- Schools will be safe places.
- Schools will be organized around the needs of students.
- Schools will generate the active involvement of parents, teachers, students and the community in order to be successful.
- Schools will ensure that all students develop positive relationships with caring adults at every level.
- Schools will focus on helping students develop good character, citizenship, and employability.

What we believe about the role of Central Office:

- Central Office should be a support to the schools.
- One of the goals of Central Office personnel should be to remove barriers to student achievement at the building level.
- Central Office staff should be visible in the schools and community.
- Central Office procedures should be structured to be thorough yet streamlined to reduce burdens on folks at the school level.

Our beliefs help drive how we organize and function as a school district. They help us prioritize our needs by focusing in on everyone’s responsibilities in the educational process.

Learning Goals

By articulating our **learning goals**, we are helping students attain them and become ready for success at each level of education. We understand the importance transitioning plays in student success. It is through successful transitioning processes that students are able to succeed in moving from one grade level to another, from one school to another and from school into adult life.

Pre-K

- Every student is Kindergarten ready. Define key terms according to state guidelines for readiness.

K-5

- Every student has fluent, grade-level literacy skills.
- Every student has fluent, grade-level numeracy skills.
- Every student has fluent, grade-level writing/communication skills.

Middle School

- Every student reads on grade level with fluency.
- Every student has grade level, fluent numeracy skills.
- Every student writes and communicates with grade level fluency.
- Every student has critical thinking and problem solving skills that have been enhanced by a technology rich environment in every content area.
- Every student has a four-year course taking plan for high school developed and shared with parents including appropriate career pathways and/or explorations.

High School

- Every student will be college and/or career ready, possessing the following 21st century learning skills to be successful and productive citizens:
 - Critical Thinking & Problem Solving
 - Creativity and Innovation
 - Communication & Collaboration
 - Visual Literacy
 - Scientific and Numerical Literacy
 - Cross Disciplinary Thinking
 - Information Literacy
 - Media Literacy
 - Information, Communication and Technology Literacy

As a school district these goals lay out an aggressive strategy of preparing our students to become successful and productive citizens.

Finance

Our district works on a twenty seven million dollar budget. This budget includes different “pots” of money.

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State Money

Local Contribution

Federal Monies

In formulating a districts budget the largest expense is personnel. The Kentucky Department of Education believes districts that have less than seventy-six percent of its budget allocated to personnel to be operating at an ideal level. According to our auditor, Garrard County School system operates at a level of seventy-four percent on personnel costs, two percent below the “ideal” level. We are fortunate as many districts across the commonwealth are in the eighties on the percent cost of personnel. How do we do this? First in most cases we have re-organized without adding positions to the district. For example, when we created an Assistant Superintendent position, we eliminated an instructional supervisor, thus creating no additional personnel at Central Office. The same principal was applied with the Assistant Principal position at Lancaster Elementary School (CDR already had an Assistant Principal). There was a position at LES that we eliminated when we created the AP, thus creating no additional staff at LES. We did go from one PE teacher split between two elementary schools to one PE teacher in each building, thus adding one teaching position there. This allows our elementary students to have PE more

often, and in the era where obesity is a concern with elementary students, this is a plus for our students. Any other recent staffing came through increases in population or funding through grants. Another way our district saves money is the employment of part-time staff. An example would be we currently employ three part-time staff whose combined salary is less than the cost of one full-time DPP position (we are required by law to have a DPP). These personnel bring much needed expertise/experience to their positions for pennies on the dollar. Garrard County Schools is working to provide a quality education while being as frugal as possible with personnel.

All districts across the state gave a one percent and two percent raise over the past two years to staff. In my opinion our hard working staff certainly deserved this raise. This equated to an increase of close to \$400,000 for our school district. As stated earlier we are in the KDE recommended range of percentage of staff costs to the total budget.

We are always looking at ways to save to money. Currently we are in the process of developing our energy RFP in hopes of saving money on energy costs. This could include lighting and HVAC upgrades to our buildings. We have also looked at cutting the midday run for preschool that would have saved the district \$140,000. We have to always be on the lookout for ways to save money.

Our biggest challenge currently is the condition of district infrastructure and facilities. Why would I say this? As we completed our district facilities plan last spring we saw a major increase in identified district need. In 2008 the district had an identified need of eleven million dollars. When we revisited our Facility Plan last spring we saw that number rise to forty three million dollars. This increase is due in a large part to the age of four buildings (PLE, LES, CDR, GEC) that are all past the twenty year mark that calls for renovation and updates. The district has limited bonding capacity and have tried to fix (not patch) HVAC issues as they have happened. The concern here is that we are either working on twenty five year old equipment or replacing it a higher cost. We have so many schools that are close to the same age that the costs rise quickly as they are often mirrored in other buildings. Needs include HVAC updates, controls, lighting, boilers, chillers, and other ways to save energy and money. It is our hope to address many of these concerns through our RFP on energy savings. We only have one school (GCHS) that has automated controls (this helps save large amounts of energy costs).

We have several roof issues across the district as well. GMS, LES are both in need of a roof replacement. We are getting a new roof at PLE from the storm damage through insurance. CDR has roofing issues as well and we are working with Patrick Murphy and Associates to determine how to proceed at CDR. GCHS is also being reviewed to make sure the storm didn't damage its roof as well.

In looking at other districts across the state similar in size you will find that many of those districts have two elementary schools, one Middle School and one High School for a total of four buildings. We have a total of six buildings (CDR, LES, PLE, GMS, GCHS, GEC) and this adds an additional cost of \$600,000 to our budget. I am not advocating two elementary schools, I'm just giving an example of how other districts our size function and budget. A big challenge for us is what to do with the GEC (old middle school) building. It's a challenge because if we don't find a way to create a revenue stream it will only increase the cost of the use of that building.

Future

Our challenges are like many other school districts across the Commonwealth. We must become as efficient as possible in all aspects of our business. We must save money on energy costs, find a way to repair roofs and make the most out of energy savings project. The task is daunting, but by working

together on behalf of our students, who are our future, I know we will find a way to make this work. I believe the future to bright for our district.