

COLUMBUS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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DECEMBER 2016



SUPERINTENDENT, JEFF BERMES

I would like to start my message this quarter by wishing everyone a happy holiday season. It is hard to believe how fast time flies. It seems that we just started school and now we are fast approaching the holiday break.

As most of our community is aware, we have a growing population of elementary students and a building that no longer has the sustainability to house any more students. When I took over this position a year and a half ago, the topic of finding solutions to our growing student population and overcrowding in our elementary building was going to be at the forefront of my administration. I have taken a lot of time researching the information along with community feedback in determining what would be the best way to solve our overcrowding issues in the elementary. I have been working very closely with the Board of Trustees to determine the best steps to approach this issue. We have determined it is now time to move forward with project plans to expand our school system with the input that has been given to the board in the past. It is very important as we move forward that the community has a voice in the decisions that will be coming in the future. The fact of the matter is that our elementary building is no longer able to serve our current student population. Here is a little information regarding why it is time to plan for the future!

For this current school year our elementary enrollment sits at 345 students, the most students we have had in the school at one time. Every nook **and cranny at the elementary is being used whenever possible. Individuals and small groups are tutored in** the hallways while music classes are conducted in the cafeteria. Title I classes are held in a space that had been used exclusively for paper and supply storage. Recesses and lunch must occur in at least three shifts to accommodate the sea of bodies. Needless to say, **we are full!** If you ask any parent who has had a reason to spend any time in this building, they will reiterate this observation.

Said another way, we are at 98.2% of capacity if we use student to square footage ratio as the measurement for effective student educational space. This calculation would assume that all students are *equally* distributed across all grade levels and available spaces. They also count on having 28 students per classroom, even though state regulations limit K-2 classrooms to 20 students; Grades 3-4 to 28 students; and all other grades to a maximum of 30 students per classroom. Should we continue to grow and not address our need for more space, we will potentially need to move the fifth graders to the middle school building. This would then put 225 students crammed into a middle school building that has a maximum capacity of 240 students. This would also require the elimination of one computer lab, and it would substantially change the programming offered within the middle school. But it would give some slight relief to the elementary, which is already bursting at the seams.

Because of these growth factors, the Trustees have initiated a facility planning process of adding classrooms to the middle school to move 5th grade and remodeling of the lunch room area to accommodate the need for more room for lunches and kitchen space, and remodel of the high school to include a new main entrance with a commons area, and the addition to classrooms and a functioning stage area of the new gym. After many months of looking at possibilities of additions to accommodate our growth in the district, this plan seems the most effective financially and logistically.

This is an invitation for members of the community to take part in this process. We need to have your input as we move forward. The district is now working on putting together a building plan to present to our community for feedback. There will be numerous public meetings coming in the future to inform our community on the process we will be taking from the building design to financial aspects of the project.

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The district will also be sending out numerous flyers and updates on the process for those that are unable to attend meetings or for those that would like to know what is happening. The board had already chosen A&E Architects to lead in the planning stage and will present the final ideas to the community in a public meeting. If you want to have a voice in this discussion, please contact me at 322-5373 or email me at jbermes@columbus.k12.mt.us to get your name on a list for future involvement on one or more of the committees that may be formed. I cannot stress the importance of getting involved in this process. One of our greatest assets in our community is our school and education system, and we need to come together to help shape the direction of this District and help plan the future education of our youth! Go, Cougars!!!

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, GEORGE MCKAY

"Building a Community of Excellence, One Student At A Time"

The Times...They Are a Changing

I've titled this writing as I did for two basic reasons. First, the newsletter is being sent out only a few times per year as a cost savings to the budget. Short and sweet. The times they are a changing.

The second attachment of the title to this writing requires a short travel through time beginning with Bob Dylan writing, in 1964, what would become a big hit for him that has lasted through time all the way to being quoted in this newsletter. In his folk tune he states, in part, ".....If your time, to you, is worth savin', then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone". To me this line means that you must keep up with the pace or drop from the race.

Fast forward to Columbus High School, present day. In the student handbook under the policy of open lunch it says "Columbus High School has an open campus lunch period. This is a PRIVILEGE for the students who maintain minimum requirements (..'eligibility' and keep up on assignments.) Failure to meet minimum requirements will result in restriction to school grounds during the lunch hour until those requirements are re-established." This policy has been in place ever since I can remember. In recent years the teachers have voiced concern that the number of students missing assignments has been on the rise and they wanted to do something proactive to curb this trend. Over the summer and into the beginning of this school year the teachers and administrators put together a support program to reduce the number of missing assignments. The proposal became policy passed by the School Board beginning this school year. Remember, The Times They are a Changing'.

The program is called Homework Central. It calls for students who have missing assignments posted in the gradebook to be restricted to the campus at lunch time and be assigned to a support location supervised by two or more teachers (volunteers). Students must be present for 30 minutes and have the opportunity to catch up with missing assignments, ('start swimmin', or keep up the pace'). The students get 15 minutes at the end of Central to grab a bite. First lets present the 'facts' of the case. First of all, the students do not like losing their lunch hour to making up work. Second, if the students keep up on their work they will not have to give up their lunch time. Third, Homework Central, while construed as punishment by the students is actually perceived by the teachers as opportunity to 'keep swimmin'. Finally, some students believe it is their choice to turn in, or not turn in their work. This is true, however, it is the school's determination as to whether you have 'earned' the PRIVILEGE to an open campus lunch period. If you don't want to turn in your assignments you can stay at school during lunch. Plain and simple. Sink or Swim. The Times They are a Changing.

This change in enforcement of an existing policy has resulted in a drastic reduction of 'D' and 'F' letter grades on mid-term and quarter reports. This penciled out to a reduction of 60 to 70 percent fewer 'D's and 'F's on report cards this year over the same grading period last year. On a darker, yet not dismal side of the story, this current week's list of missing assignments included 95 students. This is nearly half the population. On the brighter side, the number of missing assignments is far less than usual AND the students get the weekend to make up work before noon on Monday. 95 names on the list became 17 students expected at noon this past Monday. After one, two, maybe three lunch sessions that list will be trimmed still further to a few who still have work to do.

Homework Central is working in a positive direction. The burden of getting homework done has been placed in the laps of the students some of who, in the past, have chosen not to do it. Their 'lap' is their preference to have open lunch and their motivation to earn that PRIVILEGE depends on their effort to keep 'swimming' or 'sink'. This has been a real CHANGE, but the teachers feel that it has been very much worth the effort and direction. THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING-Bob Dylan, 1964.

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Middle School Message

MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, RON OSBORNE

“To equip students with the skills to develop their talents and become productive, responsible citizens.”

HOLIDAY SEASON IS UPON US! I hope that as you read this your family is preparing for a joyful holiday season and that your middle school child will be getting some well-deserved time away from school!

Christmas/Winter vacation tends to serve as a half-way point for the school year. In January, students now have the opportunity to return to school refreshed and ready to continue their efforts to learn new information during the second half of the year. This is a good time for parents and teachers to review with students their progress from the first part of the year and to set achievement goals for the remainder of the year. Refocusing students’ efforts can help them be more successful.

In dealing with student success, I am still always concerned over student attendance issues. Attendance is a critical factor in school success. Studies have shown that consistent school attendance, academic success, and school completion have a positive correlation. The educational process requires continuity of instruction and students need to experience classroom discussions, debates, and independent study in order to increase achievement. *I again ask that you work with your child to make attendance a priority. In the case of absences, please make sure your students make up any work they miss. Grades and academic growth are adversely affected by missing school.*

Throughout the year we send home letters notifying parents that a student has accumulated a significant number of absences. If you have any questions regarding this letter please feel free to contact me. On the same topic, if your child is going to be absent, for any reason, it is critical that you call the office on the day your child is absent and then send an explanatory note with your child when he or she returns to school. Thank you for your help in this matter.

All of us at CMS thank you for your continued support in making our school the best educational institution possible. We wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season. If you have any questions or concerns please don’t hesitate to contact me any time by phone or email as listed above or on our web site www.columbus.k12.mt.us.

V & J

GET THE LEAD OUT!

pencil sales

Who: Vincent and Jordan
 What: Pencils for Sale
 When: Between classes and after lunch
 Where: Outside of the high school office

COST: 25¢

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, MARLENE DEIS

“Providing a foundation of skills to prepare students for life.”

Dear Parents and Community Members,

I hope you all have enjoyed the beautiful fall we had. Winter is right around the corner. We have lots going on here at the elementary during December and things will continue to be busy this winter. I will include some things I know about at the bottom of this newsletter.

This fall we have seen our highest enrollment ever. We are currently at 337 students in grades K-5. This is about 25 more than in the past. The teachers are doing a wonderful job of working with these large groups. We make use of every bit of space we have and our very creative and cooperative staff make sure all of our students get what they need. We also have an outstanding volunteer support team that come in and donate hours of time to help teachers organize, prepare materials, or provide a little extra practice time with students. We love our volunteers!

Thank you for your support in the 7th Annual Bobcat/Grizzly Food Challenge. This year the big winner of the Food Drive was the Grizzlies. This is their first win so congrats to them. In the past 7 years Columbus Elementary has donated over 8000 pounds of food to Project Hope! I am so proud of all of our students and families for this continued Community support! Way to go Cougars!

Thanks, also for your support during our annual Book Fair and our Elementary Fundraiser. We had a great turn-out for both! We had the biggest Book Fair ever as well as the most successful Fundraiser we've ever had. We will add close to \$5100 towards our electric reader board fund! These boards aren't cheap, but this is a great start towards the total! Thanks again, we couldn't do it without you.

Christmas parties are set for Dec. 22nd for all grades. **We will have a 1:00 dismissal on that day**, so parties will be at various times. Please be looking out for information from your child's teacher. We will try to keep our schedule fairly regular until party time.

I hope your holidays are wonderful and full of time to make memories with your family. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Columbus Elementary!

Christmas Concert Dates

Elementary 12/13 7:00 HS Gym
Middle School 12/20 7:00 MS Gym
High School 12/19 7:00 MS Gym



COLUMBUS SCHOOLS

Columbus School District
433 North 3rd Street

Elementary Phone: 406-322-5371
Middle School Phone: 406-322-5375
High School Phone: 406-322-5373
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