

COLUMBUS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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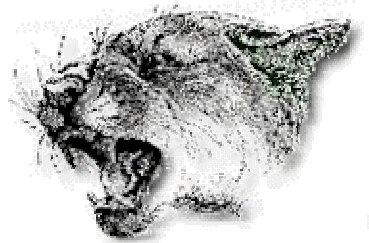
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OCTOBER 2017



SUPERINTENDENT, JEFF BERMES

I hope this message finds everyone doing well as we embark on a new school year. I would like to use this opportunity to provide our community with some information regarding our school. I have had a lot of questions regarding a couple of these topics I am addressing in this newsletter. My thoughts are that if some of you have these questions then there might be more that seek the same information. I will hit on a couple of the most asked questions I have received lately. If you still have any questions or others, please do not hesitate to call me or stop by.

Block Scheduling

I have heard a lot about what is block scheduling and are we going to implement block scheduling in the high school next year. First, block scheduling is a scheduling format some schools are using to increase instruction time for our students. The idea is that students will meet for 90 minutes a day per class with a total of 4 classes per day. Students are still offered 8 classes, as they are currently are now, but those classes would be split into two days instead of one. Our current high school class schedule is 8 classes of 45 minutes per day. The discussion has been that with only 45 minutes there is little time for instruction and time to help students. The idea of a 90 minute class would allow teachers more time to work with students. There are numerous pros and cons with this concept. In short, the high school is looking at this type of scheduling to determine if it would provide the district with improvement in student learning by increasing teacher interaction time with our students. The district has not made a decision on whether we will implement block scheduling or remain with our traditional schedule. We are seeking input from all parties as we continue to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of a block schedule. I ask that you reach out to your high school teachers, principal and me with your concerns or comments. If it was implied by the district that this was a done deal for next year, I apologize. The decision has not been made and will need to have my recommendation and the school board's approval before anything can be changed.

High School Closed Campus for Lunch

There has been a rumor out in community the district is going to close the high school campus for lunch. This is not true. The district has not discussed this issue.

Potential Building Project

The Columbus School Board of Trustees has decided to move forward with a potential building project of adding more classroom space in our elementary and high school buildings. The district will be moving forward with acquiring a design programmer for our school who will help with the steps of need and design. The district will be holding informational meetings regarding the potential of a new construction and remodeling project of our schools in the near future. As the district moves toward design, it is important that all input is heard on the direction our community would like to see our district go. I will be advertising and posting meeting notices in our local newspaper, on our district website and at our school buildings. It is the hope of the district to be able to start these meetings in the next couple months.

Some of asked why is this coming forth at this time. I am not sure most people are aware that the old building bond of the new high school gym and middle school classrooms will be paid in full this upcoming July. The district has been trying to hold out as long as possible for any building project until we had this paid in full so that our taxpayers would not have to pay for two projects at once. We feel now is the time to address our overcrowding issues in the elementary and lunch facilities at the high school.

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You future input in this project will be greatly appreciated. Please get involved as your child’s education will be one of the greatest gifts we can provide. Meeting announcements will be forth coming.

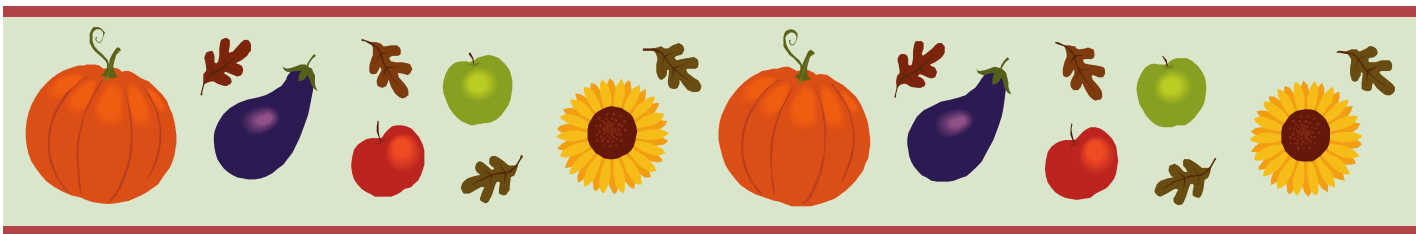
Property Tax Increases

You just recently received the first half of your property tax bill. A big portion of the property tax bill is for public schooling. Our state has chosen this method to raise revenue for schools and government operations because it is a predictable and stable source of funding. Even with fluctuations in the economy, property values traditionally do not change tremendously from year to year. However, this year taxpayers have seen an increase in their tax bill due to the recent legislative action of moving a portion of the State public school funding to our local taxpayer shifting that burden from the state to the local property owner. I cannot stress enough that this was not a decision from your local school board or administration to increase your taxes for school operations but a component of the recent legislature. As a district we are unable to control the state funding mechanisms in place for our schools, but, as a district, we work very hard to keep our mills at the minimum levels necessary to maintain an effective and efficient school without assessing more than we need for the upcoming school year. I have included the chart below as a point of reference to the number of mills the district has assessed our community in the past to operate our schools. You will notice that the millage has remained fairly consistent throughout the years. The increase in millage this year is a direct effect of the state not funding our school as they have in the past. We feel it is very important that you understand why your property taxes have increased and why they will continue to increase in the next year as a result of the Montana State Legislature removing money from the school funding formula and moving it to you, the local tax payer.

Mills Assessed (All Funds)

	Elementary	High School	Total Mills
2017-18	93.64	60.90	154.54
2016-17	88.93	57.41	146.34
2015-16	93.12	58.96	152.08
2014-15	96.18	64.89	161.07
2013-14	92.99	65.03	158.02
2012-13	88.04	59.98	148.02
2011-12	97.02	66.84	163.86
2010-11	93.31	64.80	158.11

You may have also heard of the shortfalls in revenues for the State’s General Fund. This is also impacting our schools. In the recent legislative session Senate Bill 261 was passed which states that if State revenue projections fall short, money will be cut from numerous programs including schools. The revenue projections have fallen short and Columbus Schools is looking at funding cuts from the State. Columbus is projected to have a short fall of approximately \$47,000 this year. However, we have been informed that the funding cuts might not stop there and the district might incur more cuts, but we will not know the exact shortfall until mid-October. SB 261 also states that once the funding is removed from this fiscal year it will also be removed from the 18-19 fiscal year leaving our school short funding for the upcoming school year, also. My hope is that with this information will you have some insight into what our district is facing in the upcoming future. These shortfalls from our state affect us all but my hope is that you will understand the foundations for some of the fiscal decisions that we will be making as a district in the upcoming future. If there is a positive lining in this situation, which can be hard to find, the district has had the foresight to use past legislative funding flexibility statues to move some of our funds from last year to maintain our current funding levels despite the recent shortfalls. It is my hope that with the foresight of the Columbus Board of Trustees that we will be able to absorb the lack of funding from our State without any ill affects to our school.



HIGH SCHOOL - GEORGE MCKAY

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

“LET’S ROLL!”

When I was pondering how to title this expose’ I tried to keep it a little original as compared to previous writings. ‘Let’s Roll’ falls into the same category of familiar sayings as “Rollin, Rollin, Rollin” (circa Rawhide, of early 1960’s TV, and Blues Brothers, circa 1980 movie, AND “Rollin, Rollin, Rollin on...” (circa 1969, Credence: Proud Mary). ‘Let’s Roll’ has been quoted in many movie depictions but is most notoriously tied to the heroes of Flight 93 on 9/11 (01). My intended meaning pertains to the starting weeks of the school year.

On October 1st, I am pleased to inform you that the 2017-2018 school year is in full swing and ‘rollin on’. School has been in session for about 30 days. Classes and activities are sailing along. Mid-term grades have been sent out, the students are in their groove and the ‘exhaust’ of learning permeates the classrooms and hallways. Many organizations tied to the school have initiated their activities as the ‘other curriculum’ emerges in their efforts.

The tracks of the days in September have been laid behind us and the mechanism continues to roll. However, there is no coasting with this juggernaut. Nor is there a predestined path set in stone. The march forward continues in spite of hurdles placed before us, some of which we do not see up ahead (yet). This journey lasts until the end of May. Only then will we be able to gauge our successes and lament our disappointments.

It would be a consistent journey up the road if there were 180+/- days of uninterrupted instruction during which teachers and students have fluency in presenting/studying/learning “how to learn”. Unfortunately, such smooth sailing does not exist. Many ‘bumps in the road’ occur. Classes (and fluency) are interrupted by a sundry of student centered assemblies, guest presentations, absences, early dismissals (for activities), pictures, student screenings, mandatory testing dates, field trips, and so on. The number and type of disruptions is ominous when they are placed on a calendar. The goal of the school is to provide the ‘momentum’ to keep rolling. Teaching and learning is not the daily/weekly routine that it used to be. There is much more ‘chunking’ of learning in continuing and progressive units. Timelines, such as one chapter per week are supplanted by more individually paced projects where the end date is not tomorrow, but instead, down the road as students accomplish the goals of the lessons learned. This pacing allows for periodic interruptions and long weekends. Students are given more time and access to help during the processes of learning.

The staff does not live in the here and now of today only. They have to plan for the end goals of their teaching. The ones down the road where students have to demonstrate their proficiency in the subject. At the same time, the same staff is developing a ‘vision’ for the future. This vision includes how ‘things’ may be modified to improve the learning processes and environments. Concepts such as more time in the classroom, fewer disruptions, standards based teaching/learning, block scheduling, longer school years, more breaks in the grueling schedule of the year, and so on are being looked at as pathways toward improvement in instruction and learning.

Making schools productive and proficient requires a ‘call to action’, unified effort, endurance, tolerance, compliance with the demands of federal, state and local oversight, and a grand dose of ‘get ‘er done. All of us have a stake in the achievement of objectives. “LET’S ROLL!!



MIDDLE SCHOOL - RON OSBORNE

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

Our school is alive, once again with the bustle of 160 students moving from one learning adventure to another throughout the day. I hope you are hearing positive stories about your child’s experiences at school! (mixed perhaps with a few groans about homework...) It seems to take awhile for students to develop an evening routine that allows for both study and play. We appreciate your efforts to help kids establish a time and place where they can routinely settle in for a period of concentrated study and homework completion. It is also very helpful when parents take time to deliberately ask their children about the events of their school day and discuss with them some of the concepts they have learned. Connecting school-based knowledge to their home lives helps student retain information.

Students are working hard, and teachers are doing everything they can to meet the needs of each and every student. We have gone through the first round of our MAP testing and will look at the results of the data when it becomes available. This data will help guide our instruction to give our students the best education we have to offer.

Attendance is another one of my concerns. Attendance is a critical factor in school success for students. 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, debate, and independent study in order to increase achievement. Please make every effort of having your child at school. Please visit the following website to get an insight on why attendance is so important. The website is: http://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/AAMMessages_2015.pdf We have to work together and realize the importance of being at school for the success of our students and your child.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers that have helped in all aspects of the Middle School. Many thanks to those who helped with the football games, the volleyball matches and within the Middle School building itself. Your time is greatly appreciated!

All of us at CMS thank you for your continued support in making our school the best educational institution possible. 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.

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL - MARLENE DEIS

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

Happy Fall... It is really starting to look and feel like that time of year. We seem to have a lot going on during this month. We have our annual Fundraiser kick-off on October 9th, Lifetouch Individual Pictures on October 11th, Fire Hall tours on the 11th, and Red Ribbon Week and Halloween parties at the end of the month! Please be watching the weekly newsletter for information about special events tied to all of these. Thanks to all of the volunteers that make the fire hall tour such a highlight and to Mrs. Behrent who plans all of the Red Ribbon activities!

Our first Mid-term reports will be sent home on October 11th. Remember this year we are on a trimester schedule, so this will be your first official chance to see how your child is doing.

Your children will not have school on October 19 and 20. This is for the annual Montana Educator's Association conference.

Here's a little heads-up about the Halloween parties. Teachers will be giving you more information about these as the time gets closer, but we have all parties scheduled from 2:00-3:00 on Tuesday, October 31. We will have a parade around the outside of the school (weather permitting) starting at 1:45. If the weather is bad we will move the parade into the building! **We ask that students wear fun and creative costumes. No blood, guts, gore, or weapons are allowed.** Teachers will let students know when they can change into their costumes. Face paint and hair dye do cause a bit of a commotion, so if you can save them for later it's appreciated. This is one of our craziest parties, so we try to maintain a bit of calm for the first part of the day. If your child does not celebrate Halloween and you plan to pick him/her up from school, please wait until lunch time as classes will be doing regular work in the morning.

I've overheard a couple of different community people in the last week comment about what kind, polite students we have! Our Cougar kids are working hard to be kind, caring, and considerate. Thanks for your help encouraging them. It truly makes a difference. Enjoy the fall colors as they start to decorate the landscape!

