

December 14, 2021

To say that the past 22 months have been a blur would be a huge understatement. When I attempt to communicate with our community about issues associated with our school district, the first question I ponder is, “where do we start?” So many aspects of our school district and our efforts have been changing daily. Responding to those changes have tested the resources and patience of our staff, students and parents.

One recent example is responding to an ever growing student population. The current second grade class is a visible example. When they were in Kindergarten, the class totaled 283 students. We added a teacher at one site to reduce class size after the school year started. Due in large part to the COVID pandemic, that number dropped to 200 when the class was in first grade. We were staffed appropriately and didn’t need to add any teachers. This year, to address the growth from last year we have added two teachers for second graders in the district. Classes at two sites were approaching 30 students when the decision was made to split up classes and reduce class size. Each of those sites has continued to enroll new students as the Fall semester has progressed. We have over 270 second graders this year and continue to grow. This has required students to change teachers which naturally is not the best situation but ultimately is a better option than continuing with an overcrowded classroom. Second grade is a very pivotal year for learning to read under normal conditions. Considering the situations of many current second grade students not being in brick and mortar learning last year, the learning environment and ability to deliver instruction in smaller classes is essential for the future success of our students.

You may have heard school districts would receive federal assistance due to the COVID pandemic. We have been allocated over \$9.7 million in relief dollars. Because of this assistance, many of the bond projects scheduled for the next three years may begin much sooner. Additionally, we have targeted areas where our students need extra support socially and emotionally. We partnered with multiple agencies both public and private to assist. We have created an English Language Learner Coordinator position. This person serves as a liaison between our staff and the ever-growing Hispanic population within our school district. Soon, we will have thermal cameras online that will notify us if a student has a fever when they walk through the path of the camera. These are only a few of the items we have used the federal funds to purchase. Collectively, we have attempted to utilize these funds for items that will impact learning for all of our students.

We recently re-opened the COVID testing hub provided by Total Wellness at Cottler Elementary. They provide much more in the way of services as they can also administer flu and strep tests and provide a telehealth appointment. The provider may even issue a prescription if needed and all services are delivered without a copay provided you have current health insurance. Because of rising COVID, flu and strep cases locally we felt renewing this service would offer a much-needed option. They plan to be open during the Winter Break as well.

As we approach the Winter Break, I want to wish everyone a happy Holiday Season. We have made great progress in closing the achievement gap created for our students by the pandemic. Our teachers, staff, students, parents and community have rallied behind each other and our hard work in paying off. Please take the time to rest and enjoy family and friends.