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West Jefferson Hills School District

Message from Dr. Timothy McNamee

Letter to the Community:

About six weeks ago, a local newspaper reporter interviewed me and printed a very flattering article. She titled that article, "WJH's Leader Plans to Keep Things Positive." That is very true; I do plan to keep things positive in the West Jefferson Hills School District. My mantra has always been: if you look for the silver lining in every dark cloud, good things will happen. Well, recently the Governor and some state lawmakers have sent several dark clouds over the entire educational community and local taxpayers that are even testing MY abilities to find something positive.



First, Governor Corbett proposed a state budget that reverts school district revenues back to 2008 levels. His proposal reduces the West Jefferson Hills SD revenue by \$807,000. Additionally, the Governor completely eliminated several state-funded programs that pay for kindergarten teachers, class-size reduction teachers, tutoring, and classroom technology. Federal funding cuts represent another \$650,000 for the district, totaling nearly \$1.5 million reduced revenue for the 2011-12 school year. To make up the loss of these state funds, our state officials leave the school district two options: 1) eliminate programs, including teacher furloughs and increasing class sizes, and/or 2) raise local real-estate taxes to the allowable index. Neither of these options is supported by our School Board or beneficial to our students or taxpayers. The Governor and legislators have available options to increase state revenue, rather than decrease educational expenses to balance the state budget. They are not inclined to do so for political reasons. Investing in our students' future is not a motivator for them.

The West Jefferson Hills SD School Board and Administration have always been fiscally responsible and managed to keep the district financially stable. Government officials obviously do not believe this is true because they are painting all school districts with the same brush. The district is being forced to make difficult financial decisions because of reduced state and federal funding. The School Board and Administration will make the tough choices necessary, but all decisions will consider our common belief--"Kids First".

The second black cloud blowing in from Harrisburg is the proposed Senate Bill One (SB1). This Bill would allow low-income students the right to School Choice. That means they can leave their district of residence, take their allocated tuition dollars (vouchers), and enroll in a school of their choice: private, parochial, cyber, or another public school. That is, if the school of choice accepts them. SB1 is limited in the first two years, but, beginning in the third year, all low-income students will have the right of school choice. The School Choice Bill does not include any accountability for student achievement at the schools of choice or fiscal responsibility for the use of taxpayer monies. As students leave their district school, local costs will rise because of lost student tuition without the opportunity to lower school district expenses. Some financial researchers predict that SB1 will cost PA taxpayers nearly \$1 Billion by the fourth year of implementation. Once again, it's hard, even for ME, to find a silver lining in this political cloud.

This message does not bring my usual positive outlook. I assure you though, that I will work tirelessly to deliver the highest-level programs and educational opportunities for our students with the resources we have in the West Jefferson Hills School District. One of the greatest resources in this school district is human capital. The residents of WJHSD will collaborate and support the schools and teachers in every possible way. I think you will also fight for your children's rights to an excellent education by calling on the Governor and locally-elected legislators to invest in the future of our children through strong public schools. I am sure you are aware that Thomas Jefferson said, "Education is the foundation of our democracy."

If you feel the WJHSD is fiscally responsible and providing a quality education to our students, please contact the Governor's Office and our local PA Representatives and Senators to uphold their responsibility to adequately fund public education.

Sincerely yours,

Timothy F. McNamee, Ed.D.

Acting Superintendent

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