Larry B. Hammond, Superintendent

Board Report

September 21, 2021

District and school staff remain focused on providing the very best educational experience for Gallatin County Students in spite of the ongoing controversy generated by COVID and the resulting reaction of the government, KDE and local decisions/desires regarding the mask issue. The leadership team, inclusive of the administrative staff at the district level and the school level is committed to following required guidance. All school staff are challenged with being able to provide services to students with masking requirements possibly being changed on a fluctuating basis.

Our reopening plan which required masking of everyone in the school buildings and on buses seemed to work well with the masses accepting the requirement and proceeding accordingly. This is not to say anyone likes the requirement of masks, although some have stated the masks provide a sense of security when closely associating with students as well as staff. A variety of concerns were created with the board resolution which makes the wearing of masks optional. Staff reference to the desire for students to receive more in-person instruction has been frequent, which was the number one focus during the 2020 – 2021 school year. While everyone understands the masks are not a cure nor do they totally prevent the spread, consensus remains toward the thought masks are without a doubt an inhibitor of the spreading. While some guidance may be questionable such as wearing a mask to physical education classes or athletic events and then removing the masks for participation, everyone has accepted the requirements. In addition, the knowledge of resulting cases locally which vary in degree of seriousness, the local deaths that are well known throughout the community as well as the deaths that have been publicized of educators and support staff at all levels in other districts seem to elevate everyone’s concern. The determination of whether or not to require masks is not a popular vote decision which is realized and accepted by all. However, the lack of continuity with our plan and being one of the few districts that has implemented a form of local option to allow everyone to make a choice will likely create more staff vacancies for the 2022 – 2023 school year. This issue coupled with the noncompetitive salaries in comparison to surrounding districts is concerning for long range planning.

Mrs. Beatty is working endless hours to maintain up to date numbers of positive cases in addition to contact tracing. The demands on health services is at an all-time high. She and the assistants model the commitment to meeting student needs daily and making adjustments accordingly.

Currently we have 11 regular bus drivers and have adjusted routes accordingly. The process of notifying families of adjustments due to drivers being absent has been accepted quite well. I base that statement on the volume of concerns shared with me. They have been very few in number and parents have understood the need for additional drivers. Four (4) drivers have been hired and the training classes have begun with 2 of the new hires. Hopefully, all 4 of the group will be ready to drive by the end of October. Training will occur during fall break.

The contract with the cleaning company has not gone well as we discussed in an email previously. In the absence of a rapid change, I expect to request the termination of the contract in the near future. We will be pursuing an additional contract after consultation with adjoining districts and getting recommendations to consider. The custodial positions have remained open with no additional applications being received.