Larry B. Hammond, Superintendent

Board Report

December 14, 2021

A major concern at this time is the planning for a new superintendent in the district. During my tenure in Gallatin County we have discussed many issues facing the district and what brought it to the point of needing an interim superintendent in 2017. You can reflect on the status of climate and culture in the district and individual schools. The central office was the most toxic environment I’ve encountered in 42 years of experience. To say the board was not united is an understatement. As you recall, the board consisted of 4 members due to previous controversies in the district. During my 5 years in the district, I have worked with you in addition to 3 additional members. All principals have been replaced during that time. Three principals have led both the middle school and upper elementary since 2017. Claims of bullying were through the roof in 2017 and minimal expectations were prevalent. Two district administrators have also been replaced. Discipline on school buses was nearly non-existent. Bus drivers along with long term administrators expressed the inability to change many of the issues, due to a lack of support from district administration as well as the Board of Education. The bus fleet was in dire straits due to an obvious lack of attention and planning for many years. Five of the buses were over 20 years old which is unbelievable. We received a significant discount to purchase 5 new buses from the Volkswagen settlement fund. The maintenance of facilities was in tremendous need of improvement. The practices and personnel had existed for many years. Prior to adjustments in the assessment system, we were showing some positive results with the star rating system. Regardless of the changes in assessment, a strong school district will reflect a continuum of positive results if the foundation has been properly laid.

I am well pleased with the leadership team. They have continually adjusted to meet the needs of COVID and worked to improve instruction at the same time. District leadership has worked successfully with OVEC to address social and emotional learning issues, (SEL) as well as positive behavior intervention strategies (PBIS). This is occurring through regular meetings to address a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Adjustments are being made as a result of data. Data driven decisions will generate positive results. Curriculum alignment is occurring while standards are being evaluated throughout the various grade levels. The future for the district is very positive. However, the future will only be bright if effective leadership and support exists. Your choice in the next superintendent is doubtlessly the most significant decision that you as a collective group, will ever make. Your community is depending on you and the future of the district is in your hands. The results of your choice become more visible with the passage of time. Judgement will continue to be passed on your decision with each progressive year.

Trust is essential to the health of an organization/school system. Trust is something that does not come with a position or an event. It increases or diminishes with time. During my tenure in the district, I feel firmly you trust the recommendations that I have given you. That does not mean that you have taken all recommendations. I also would be first to acknowledge, that I do not claim to always be right. Many of the recommendations made by a superintendent are not immediately quantitative. In many cases, it takes several years to pass judgement as to whether the recommendations generated the overall desired results. I say this to remind you of the obligation to evaluate the overall situation and respond accordingly. The “jury is out” phrase is very applicable with lots of choices that are made within a school district. In many cases, the jury is out for several years. When a board chooses a superintendent, the board should support the superintendent and guide the overall direction by appropriate actions. Expectations should be clearly stated when a superintendent selection is made and reaffirmed through the conducting of business. When possible, surprises should not occur. Trust is essential but total trust should NEVER happen with human beings! When a board allows a superintendent to operate as a one person show, it will begin a downward spiral. Everyone needs some accountability. I have worked with 35 board members since first becoming a superintendent in 1995. In addition, you allowed me to serve as a board member which provided further enlightenment.

Crucial budgetary decisions will be made prior to July 1. These decisions will have a major impact on the future of the district. The incoming superintendent will inherit a situation and adjust as needed and supported. Staffing allocations and salary schedules will signify your support. The continuation of support to make salaries more competitive with the region are essential to maintain a high-quality teaching staff. The anticipated PILT funds with Nucor, will play a huge part in meeting district needs. Certified teachers will be in high demand for the upcoming school year. COVID will likely remain an issue which will require appropriate measures to negotiate as well as staff. Kelley and I will be working toward an appropriate staffing allocation soon. I will also be discussing tentative staffing adjustments due to anticipated retirements. You will once again get the opportunity to evaluate recommendations/considerations to effectively meet future needs.

My recommendation would be to simply reflect on the past and determine what created the upheaval of the board that eventually led to the need for an interim superintendent in 2017. Consider the occurrences since 2017 and determine what could have generated more positive results. As a previous employee of the district, Amanda can provide details of the ongoing practices that could have changed and possibly have prevented many of the overall issues. Becky and Sonya can discuss the past from board members’ perspectives while Chuck and Hargis can discuss issues as observed from outside the district. These reflections will doubtlessly be beneficial in your planning process and discussion with the new superintendent, when you outline expectations for the future.