

Superintendent's Letter

Mifflin County School District
201 Eighth Street – Highland Park
Lewistown, PA 17044

February 29, 2016

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing to you today with the goal of improving communication between the Mifflin County School District and the community. This letter, I hope, will be the first in a series of letters in the coming years—letters intended to inform you and highlight some of the great things that are happening in our schools. In a time where divisive politics are ruling the day in Harrisburg, our public schools are getting caught in the middle, and often being targeted by politicians for unwarranted criticism. In the midst of that political firestorm, it's often easy to forget about the many good things that are happening in our schools in PA, especially rural ones like ours. With that said, I'd like to share a few of the good things that have been happening at MCSD in each *Superintendent's Letter* that I send out during the coming years—things that many of you may not have heard. I promise that no letter will be more than the front and back of a single page, as I know you are busy with your lives and every minute counts!

Student Success/Honors

In my five-plus years as superintendent here, we have had many students achieve phenomenal success in academics, the arts, and in athletic endeavors. Did you know that, since the 2011-12 school year alone, we have had an average of 42% of our graduates move on to attend 4-year college or university programs? We've also had two students admitted to Ivy League Schools, two students admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point, and three students who were semifinalists in the prestigious National Merit Scholarship Program! Further, in 2015 alone, over \$60,000 in local scholarship monies were distributed to local graduates. In athletics and the arts, we have had numerous students and/or teams achieve distinction, whether it be winning team championships in district athletic competitions, or individual rankings of student-athletes when compared to other individuals in their respective sports (some individuals even ranking at or near the top nationally). Year in and year out, our music and art students achieve distinction in district or state band and chorus, or place strongly in individual art competitions. Further, in the areas of engineering and engineering technology, students in our TSA program have competed and placed at the top of their peer groups both at the state and national levels.

In the area of Career and Technical Education, we are also seeing a tremendous showing at state competitions among our students at The Academy. Many of our Academy students are scoring at the very top levels when competing with students across PA in Skills USA. And, the district is planning to commit even more to career and technical education in the coming school year, with the addition of a new program called Mechatronics, which prepares students for great careers in industrial maintenance/ electro-mechanical engineering, often referred to as 'Gold Collar' jobs because of their high demand value and very competitive market pay rates. In addition, we are seeing a statistically significant increase on our Academy students' NOCTI and NIMS results. 88% of our Academy students who graduated in 2015 scored proficient or advanced in these skill assessment areas, which are indicative of not only the quality instruction our Academy students receive, but also of the commitment of the students themselves to master these vital career skills.

Facilities Improvements

Mifflin County School District has also made a commitment to updating facilities for 21st century learning. Pre-dating my arrival, the district committed to the building of a new state of the art high school facility that is both beautiful and extremely functional. High school students now have fantastic laboratory science rooms, highly functional music and art suites, great weight training and exercise rooms, and numerous computer labs. These spaces are competitive with any districts across the Commonwealth and they are heavily utilized by students and staff alike. Since then, we have also made tremendous improvements to Indian Valley Elementary School and Mifflin County Junior High School, as well as creating additional classroom space at Lewistown Intermediate School. In every case, including the new high school, energy efficiency figured heavily in the development of improvement plans, and as a result, we are already seeing tremendous energy savings and/or energy cost avoidance.

Professional Development

As we continue to strive to improve overall student achievement, Mifflin County School District is investing heavily in teacher and principal professional development. Since my arrival, and particularly during the past two years, a concerted effort has been made to allocate funds toward instructional improvement, especially in elementary school reading, writing, and math. Our teachers are spending weekends and portions of their summers attending high quality training to help them better work with children in small groups and individually and to employ best practices in areas such as *Guided Reading*, *Interactive Read-Alouds*, *Writer's Workshop*, and small-group math instruction. Further, additional professional training is occurring in the area of formative assessment, so that a real determination of student growth can be obtained, thus informing future instruction. We are very proud of the direction we're heading, and in all cases, our principals are participating right alongside our teaching staff so that they, too, understand better what's happening in classrooms and can provide more support for our faculty.

Great things are happening here each day! You don't always hear about them because public schools, unlike for-profit institutions, don't typically invest millions of dollars in public relations and advertising campaigns. Rural public schools like ours simply don't have the kinds of funds at our disposal to hire professional marketing and public relations firms—rather, with the funds we have, we try to invest them as close to the children as possible. With that said, however, I am making my individual efforts to let folks know about the good things happening when I get opportunities to attend Rotary luncheons, Kiwanis meetings, Planning Commission events, and other local committee meetings. Each day I marvel at the efforts our teaching and administrative staff put forth to make good things happen for our students in Mifflin County. We have many good things to be proud of here, and we will continue to strive to make life better for all the children we serve! Hopefully, you will find these letters worthwhile. I would be happy to receive any feedback you would like to offer regarding the *Superintendent's Letter*. Our office number is 248-0148, and my email address is jae13@mcsdk12.org. Feel free to reach out any time! I look forward to writing you again in the future.

Sincerely,



James A. Estep
Superintendent