

# Superintendent's Letter

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

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March 30, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I'm writing to you today to provide you some updates on some of the good things that are happening in the Mifflin County School District this year, and so that I can update you on some important developments in the state and federal legislature that may have a significant impact on our schools. As was the case last year when I disseminated the first Superintendent's Letter, my goal is simply to further open up lines of communication and highlight some of the accomplishments of our students and staff.

## Student/Program Successes

As measured using *Guided Reading Instructional Levels*, 88% of our K-5 students met or exceeded growth measures from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year. This data is indicative that our recent efforts to change the way reading instruction occurs in our classrooms is having an exceptionally positive impact on our students. We are very proud of both the kids and their dedicated K-5 teachers for the progress they have made!

In addition, all of our elementary schools are implementing a *Positive Behavior Intervention and Support* initiative (PBIS) that focuses on creating a culture in which good behavior is highlighted and rewarded. We're already seeing a marked improvement across our buildings with regard to the way students interact with one another and with the teaching staff. We've seen a reduction in discipline referrals to the principals' offices and a reduction in bus discipline referrals as well. Though we are early in the rollout of this initiative, early signs are pointing out that we are headed in the right direction.

At The Academy, our Early Childhood Program, which already awards students a *Child Development Associate* credential (CDA), is now partnering with Penn Tech to offer dual enrollment credits. This partnership will enable our students to begin accumulating college credits toward an associate's or bachelor's degree in early childhood from Penn Tech.

At MCHS, nine students have been selected to participate in All State Chorus and/or Band. This is a phenomenal accomplishment that shines light on the talents of our students, as well as the talents of our district's choral and band instruction. We are very proud!

Also at MCHS, students from our Ecology of Mifflin County science class will be conducting a neat activity on April 28<sup>th</sup> with 5<sup>th</sup> graders from LIS. Together, they will participate in a *Trout in the Classroom* activity day. The ecology students will be tutoring and mentoring their 5<sup>th</sup> grade counterparts by conducting stream studies at Rec Park, culminating with the release of 50 brook trout into the stream. We love the idea of our high school students working with their younger peers, as it models positive behavior, stirs excitement about learning, and teaches our younger students how they can do things to benefit the larger community.

At MCMS, Mr. Reeder has shared that the new *Character Counts* program initiated by Mrs. Welham is really beginning to take off. This is another district effort to promote, reward and recognize positive behavior among students. The focus is to get our kids thinking about always trying to do the right thing, even when no one else is looking. There has been tremendous community support for this initiative as well, as individuals and businesses have sponsored various rewards for students who are recognized for their good deeds.



Finally, at both MCMS and MCJHS, great progress is being made this year in curriculum development in both math and science. Teachers and teacher-leaders have been rewriting curriculum and local assessment to better align with the new PA Core Standards. Concerted efforts are being made to incorporate STEM into the overall curricular and instructional picture.

Good things are happening all over MCSD!

### **State and Federal Legislation**

I also want to make you aware of developments in the U.S. Congress and our state legislature which could have a serious impact on our local schools. I am sharing this information because I know how deeply you feel about our school system and our community in general, both of which could be adversely affected.


First, at the national level, our new President has proposed his federal education budget. Of real worry in that budget is a proposal to eliminate Title 2A funds. This may not have much meaning to a lot of folks because most people don't know what Title 2A is. These funds are provided to school districts like ours to help keep elementary class sizes lower. For instance, it is strongly recommended that class size at grades K-2 be kept at maximums of 16-18 students if at all possible to ensure that adequate individualized attention can be given to children in these early growth years. MCSD receives over \$350,000.00 per year in this category, and we use it to support the salaries/benefits of five class size reduction teachers around the various elementary schools in our district. The loss of this funding could potentially mean the loss of these five positions, which would drive up our early childhood class sizes into the mid to upper 20's. When that happens, our youngest children become more at risk of not receiving the kind of individual attention that they need, thus risking a greater chance of falling behind developmentally. In addition, there has been talk at the federal level of cutting Medicaid. If that program is cut, it actually cuts about \$125,000.00 dollars from the district budget—money that is specifically used for the district's most severely disabled special needs children.

At the state level, our legislature is currently working on the PA budget. Efforts are being made to reduce expenditures in the state budget, which is always a good thing. We try to reduce expenditures where we can locally, too. The problem with one of the expenditure cuts in the proposed state budget is that it would dramatically impact the district's transportation budget. We are set to see a cut of \$270,000.00 for transportation. Rural schools like ours, especially county systems, are hurt far more by these kinds of cuts because we tend to have more students riding buses to school and we tend to cover more square mileage than city schools or suburban schools.

I have shared this legislative information with you in the hope that you would see how much a loss of these funds could hurt our local system and directly impact children in a negative way. My hope is that providing you this information might spur you to reach out to your US Congressman and your state representatives to ask them to try to save this funding. This information lets you know specifically how it affects you right here in Mifflin County, which I know is near and dear to your hearts.

I hope all of this information about MCSD is helpful to you, and if you ever need further clarification on any of this, feel free to reach out to me. Our office number is 248-0148, and my email address is [jae13@mcsdk12.org](mailto:jae13@mcsdk12.org).

Sincerely,



James A. Estep  
Superintendent