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# Superintendent's Message for the 2009-2010 Budget

By Dr. Linda Henke

Budget messages have never been a favorite genre of mine, and in these recent times, they are especially difficult to write. They are important, however, in helping the community understand how the Board of Education has allocated its tax dollars. At Maplewood Richmond Heights School District this is especially important because unlike many of the school districts in Missouri, most of the revenues for the operation of our district comes directly from local taxpayers. At MRH we receive 10.6% from the state and 4% of our overall budget from the federal government. Thus the district relies primarily on increases in property values to grow our budget.

We had hoped for an infusion of funding from the stimulus legislation and had prepared several proposals, but the state government has absorbed a great percentage of the funding to balance its own budget. Therefore the president's stimulus package is not very stimulating for the MRH District. We will receive \$30,000 in new monies from this program over the next two years—funds that will pay for two paraprofessionals to work with students struggling with reading.

As you are probably aware, because of the downturn in the economy and the issues surrounding home values, MRH tax base did not increase very much this year. We will receive approximately \$45,000 in increased revenue from our tax base. This means we must dip more deeply into our reserves than ever before to continue to fund the district operations. Because of this, we did not fund any increase in the district salary schedule. Unfortunately, our schedule now places us close to the bottom of the 23 schools in the county.

We have, however, been able to retain our fine teachers with outstanding working conditions including small class sizes, something that is considered critically important to teachers and parents at MRH. We are also able to reward some of our best and brightest with an agreement we worked out several years ago to move teachers who receive National Board Certification to the highest level of our salary schedule—the column generally reserved for teachers with PhD's. The National Board process is highly rigorous, involving over a year of self study. At the end of the process, teachers submit portfolios of their work to a panel of experts. Most teachers do not make it through the first time. By this fall, MRH will have eight National Board teachers and another seven who have completed their work and are waiting the panel's decision. An additional six will begin the study this year. This means over 20% of our teachers will be involved in the National Board process—an amazingly high percentage considering that nationally less than 1% of the teachers have completed the National Board's expectations successfully. This year approximately \$60,000 will be spent to fund teachers involved in National Board study and to reward those teachers who have accomplished this high status.

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**In 2009-2010 I will not be wearing a construction hat for the first time in seven years. We have completed the first three phases of the four-phase plan developed by the community in 2000. We have one bond issue left to prepare, but this year we will see no construction work around this district. The community will, however, be using the beautiful new theatre and the wonderful ECC preschool and library additions that were completed during 2008-2009.**

**Three of our most prominent new initiatives at MRH have come with partnerships and grants that have helped us conserve our budget. Our home visit program—that is rapidly receiving recognition across the state—is funded in large part with a grant from the Kalish Foundation. This program allows teachers in pre-school through high school to visit students and parents in their homes to build partnerships. The research is very clear that parent -teacher partnerships improve student achievement across the board. We are receiving over \$50,000 from the Kalish Foundation for this exciting work.**

**Our seed to table program that provides students with gardening and cooking experiences to build their nutritional understandings also originates with a grant—this one from the Health Literacy Council. Over the course of two years, we are receiving over \$240,000 in funding to implement this program. If you visit ECC, our Elementary School, or the New Vision Center (where the Middle School garden is located), you will see the results of this labor of love: beautiful vegetable gardens cultivated by kids who are learning the pleasure of growing and cooking their own food.**

**And finally, a grant with Saint Louis University this year will allow us to provide 20% of the produce used in our kitchens from Missouri farmers who are not using chemicals on their crops. This means our students will be increasing their intake of healthy fruits and vegetables that are locally grown and processed right here in St. Louis. Dr. Mattfeldt-Beman, the Chair of the Nutrition and Dietetics Department at Saint Louis University, was instrumental in selecting MRH to receive this amazing grant that is designed to showcase healthier nutritional models in school lunch programs that can be replicated across the country.**

**I am proud of the work we have been doing here at MRH to partner with the community in raising and educating its children. I believe this budget demonstrates that we are doing our best to manage our funds carefully and to stretch our options by seeking alternative funding whenever possible.**