

From The Desk of Mr. Dicks

The best time of the year is when students come back. It is a time full of excitement not only for students but all employees of a school. We get to see how kids have matured, physically grown, and always bring a level of energy that can drive a culture.

Regardless of what has happened in the past, we focus on a clean slate for all students because we know from our vast experiences, everyone deserves a second chance. I have seen this play out time and time again throughout my educational career, but especially at the start of school.

It is very gratifying to see our staff in action, with the renewed sense of energy and passion, helping kids launch into new beginnings of a new school year. At Stewart, I didn't see one kid with tears of anxiety on the first day of kindergarten, not that there might have been some anxious moments, but our staff had a smile on their face and anxiety was put to rest.

Lincoln is implementing a new behavior program called Positive Behavior Intervention Supports(PBIS) and I saw everyone, teaching kids the expectations of the building and district. What I most like about it, it also systematizes how we all speak to students, so the message is always consistent from classroom to classroom and even in the hallways when they talk to

support staff. Our staff did an awesome job of teaching the proper behaviors to our students.

The middle school has also had a great start. Since I have a student in the building, I attended the welcome back night and our staff did an outstanding job of opening the doors to the outstanding opportunities of middle school. We have changed some systems as far as handling some behaviors and our veteran staff has really stepped up to support our new staff and leading by example. We will have a maker space being created and our Talented and Gifted (TAG) program ramping up to create some innovative opportunities for kids. We have also relocated some things to systemize how we address behaviors and so far the culture of the middle school is off to a great start.

While all buildings have their challenges, the stakes are rising for kids in our high school. Society expects students to choose a career path earlier and earlier, and our teachers try to link student passion to a direction of a career, however, technology is changing so fast, new job opportunities are created before a student leaves us in four short years. The days of teaching, in the same way, year after year can no longer be effective as the demands of our students continues to increase. Our staff has done a great job of modeling problem solving and resilience as we implement a new student management system that serves as a great example for our students.

I hope you can appreciate the time and intentional planning our entire staff goes through to prepare for when the “students are back”. When you match the energy and excitement of students with the passion and mindset of continual improvement of our staff, you have the makings of the best year yet!

The Necessities of Operational Sharing

As the students are back, it also marks the countdown to our certified enrollment. As we work our way to October 1, the official count day, we also anticipate the Legislature to set the funding for the FY19 school year. As you have read of the struggles of the State budget, it is critical we advocate for as many resources as possible. One way we offset this low funding is through operational sharing incentives. Operational sharing has been around for quite a few years, but they are set to expire at the end of this year pending Legislative action during this next session. Operational sharing is being maximized by the Washington district for this year.

We are again sharing Superintendent, Transportation Director, and Maintenance Director with WACO. We are also continuing Maintenance Director with Highland. We have also added Maintenance Director and Business Manager Services with Keota.

All of these shared “operational” positions carry an incentive with them. Superintendent is weighted at 8 students. Transportation, Maintenance, and Business Manager are weighted at 5 students respectively. However, the State limits your total weighting to a total of 21 students in any given year. Our weighting total is actually 33 but we get the State maximum of 21 students.

Current funding per student is around \$6,650 so our total incentive is \$139,944. Both districts involved in the sharing agreement receive the incentive based on the position being shared. Despite only receiving the weighting on the maximum number of students (21), there is another piece to the sharing puzzle.

All of the costs associated with the shared employee, salary, FICA, IPERS, and benefits, are shared and billed to the receiving district. Washington currently bills out another \$174,594 to the receiving districts for the percentage of service that is requested, with the minimum of 20% shared services. Our transportation and maintenance positions are shared at the minimum 20%, that means we bill 20% of the employee's total package. Business Manager is shared at 25% and Superintendent is shared at 30%. So the total incentive and shared contracts total approximately \$314,000.

While we compromise the consistent service when we share positions, the services shared don't have a direct effect on students and provides funding that can be used for students. However, because these incentives will expire without Legislative action, I am very cautious of committing this money to ongoing expenses. I appreciate all of those employees who serve in a shared role and enable Washington to generate some additional funding during these times of consistently low funding levels. While I understand the budget of the State of Iowa is struggling, we desperately need these operational sharing incentives to be extended in the next Legislative session.