Reflections on a memorable school year

In a week or two, our school doors will close on another memorable year. Our staff will give you back your child, whom you entrusted to our care nine months ago. Each will have grown, physically, emotionally and academically.

As superintendent, I have the pleasure of seeing our staff interact, engage, teach, model, console and guide your child. I marvel at the development I see from the first day of school to the end of the year. Our investment in all learners is guiding them on their pathways to graduation.

Visits to schools and classrooms are among the highlights of my work. They offer an opportunity to hear from teachers and paraprofessionals, principals and secretaries, custodians and bus drivers, food servers and volunteers. All share stories and wonderful snapshots of students learning, playing, laughing and enjoying their time in our care.

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On those occasional days when outside forces converge to impact a student’s life, our staff is there to provide encouraging words, a hug or high-five … an ear to just listen.

On behalf of our 1,700-strong team of dedicated employees, we wish all our students the very best and know they will make us very proud in their future endeavors. We’ll also say goodbye to our graduating seniors, and wish them much happiness and success in whatever path they choose. We know we’ve done our best to prepare them for college or career, and are confident they will make us very proud in their future endeavors.

Most of our staff will be leaving us for a few weeks to continue their education, spend well-deserved time with loved ones, and recharge the mind and soul. We know they are never far from their work; it’s in their DNA to always learn and prepare to be the best at what they do. So, until we see you again, in August for staff and September for students, be safe and enjoy your summer.

Plan to align district expenses with revenues is first of multi-year process

As school district officials prepare the final 2015-16 budget, it will reflect less spending of at least $4 million in the first of a multi-year Right Sizing the Budget process. In February, the School Board approved a set of budget reductions and funding shifts to bring the school system’s spending more in line with revenues. The reductions will result in a net loss of approximately 15.5 full time equivalent (FTE) positions, including 12 non-tenured teachers and two enrollment specialists assigned to the district’s Welcome Center, according to Mary Burroughs, director of human resources.

Burroughs said these current staff are eligible to apply for open positions as a result of retirements and employees leaving for other opportunities. In many cases, there will be minimal impact at the individual classroom level. A number of other clerical and para-professional positions will be eliminated, left vacant as a result of retirements, or have their hours reduced for the 2015-16 school year.

Technology has also made adjustments to save $600,000 in additional schools and program budgets, according to John Weisser, executive director of technology and information services. Weisser said nearly all of the technology equipment in the district is funded through the Technology and Safety and Security referendum passed in 2013. This separate funding source means the costs of technology infrastructure, such as networks and cabling, computers, projection units and printers, do not impact the general fund.

Continued declining enrollment and the impact of the state budget deficits over the past decade has caused the basic funding formula to lag behind inflation. District officials are contributing to a need to right size the budget.

Preliminary budget projections indicate another $4.5 million will need to be cut in the 2016-17 school year.
A number of leadership changes in the district and new principals highlight the spring hiring season for the 2015-16 school year. The following will assume their new responsibilities on July 1, 2015:

Eric Melbye, the current Executive Director of Student Services, will become the new Assistant Superintendent following the resignation of Chris Lennox, who will become the new Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for Mounds View Public Schools.

Melbye is in his fifth year as a director with the district but also was a special education supervisor from 2003-06. He also served as the director of the Carver Scott County Education Cooperative. Melbye is completing the superintendent’s license requirements at St. Thomas University, where he also earned his master’s and educational specialist degrees. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education from Moorhead State University.

Andrew Kubas is the new Executive Director of Learning Supports, which will oversee the offices of Educational Equity, Family Engagement, English Learners and Health Services. Kubas has been with the district for the past 20 years as an elementary and middle school teacher, dean of students, assistant principal, and principal at both Valley View Middle (4 years) and elementary (5 years) schools. Kubas holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from Winona State University, and educational specialist and leadership degrees from Minnesota State-Mankato.

Tamra Sieve has accepted the Executive Director of Community Services following the retirement of Thomas Holton. Sieve has led the Metro South Adult Basic Education program (formerly SHAPE) since 2006. She has taught and held leadership positions in the Hopkins and Richfield school systems, and at Cretin-Derham Hall High School. Sieve holds a bachelor’s degree from St. Mary College in Leavenworth, KS, and a master’s from St. Mary’s University of Minnesota. She is the recipient of the 2013 Minnesota ABE Program Excellence Award, 2011 Minnesota ABE Leader of the Year, and 2009 Minnesota Community Education Association’s Educator of the Year.

Roberto F. Cantu is the new principal of Poplar Bridge Elementary School. He’s been the interim principal since January, and has been a teacher, dean of students, and assistant principal at Valley View Elementary School since 2005. He also served as the district’s summer school principal and taught in the Minneapolis and St. Paul school systems.

Cantu holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Minnesota, and earned his K-12 principal’s license from St. Mary’s University.

Calvin D. P. Keasling is the new Principal of Hillcrest Community School, taking over for the retiring Paul Schullo. Keasling is the current Arts Content Lead for the Minneapolis Public Schools Arts Team. He served as an instructional coach, administrative intern, music teacher and English Language Learner teacher for St. Paul Public Schools, and taught choir and general music in Roseville Area Schools. Keasling holds a principal’s license from the University of Minnesota, a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education from St. Olaf College, and a graduate degree in ESL from Hamline University. He is an ardent supporter of the arts and advocate for arts education, and serves on the Minneapolis Arts Commission and Arts Legacy Funding Advisory Committee.

2013 Referendum Update
Summer renovations focus on safety, facility improvements

Summer construction work will focus on the second year of school safety and security enhancements funded through the community-supported 2013 referendum, and facility improvements. Safety and security enhancement work includes the following:

- Main entrance renovations for the new School Safety Plan’s access management system will be completed at Oak Grove and Westwood elementary, Valley View middle, and Jefferson and Kennedy high schools. The new entrances are designed to limit school access by funneling visitors into the office once school is in session.
- Entry into some schools will be limited or alternate locations identified during the safety improvement work. Access to Kennedy will be through its lunch room doors on the building’s northwest side, and Valley View Middle School can be accessed through the bus pick-up/drop-off entrance on the west side of the building.
- Additional safety measures include classroom doors with keysets that lock from the inside, and alarm activation devices and color strobes to indicate the school is in a safe condition in emergency situations.
- The remaining schools — Pond and Southwood Family Learning Centers, Washburn elementary and Oak Grove middle schools — are part of the summer 2016 construction schedule.

Facility improvements:

- Oak Grove Elementary School is undergoing a major facility upgrade that will require the building to be closed for the duration of the summer. Facility upgrades include new heating and ventilation systems, plumbing, window and ceiling replacements and a new school intercom.
- Jefferson High School will undergo a roof replacement that will require the tennis court parking lot and student overflow lot to be closed during the project.
- Ventilation system improvements at the Kennedy High School Activity Center will require the east parking lot to be closed at times, along with the Pond Family Learning Center’s southwest parking lot.

Valley View Middle School AVID Celebration

Valley View Middle School eighth grader Sabrina Dothe Chavez shares her SMART goals with school board member Jim Sorum at an end-of-year celebration. Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) students are required to develop short-term and long-range goals to plan for high school and beyond.
The following three employees recognized for more than 30 years of service chose to be featured in this issue.

Debra Dargay
World Languages Teacher, Jefferson High School
32 years of service

Dargay’s first experience with Bloomington was student teaching in 1977, and she has continued teaching Spanish at Jefferson throughout her tenure. She has served on many school and district committees, including over 20 years both on the district recredentialing committee and as a Bloomington Federation of Teachers building steward. She said the latter has been the most rewarding part of her career outside of the classroom. Her favorite experiences include taking students abroad to Spain, Costa Rica, Argentina and Mexico and “seeing them experience a different culture.” Said Dargay, “So many Jefferson students have continued their education with stints studying abroad, an important step to becoming an adult and a global citizen.”

Diane Fischer
Food Services Secretary, Educational Services Center
34 years of service

Fischer has been the food services secretary for the last 34 of her 35 years of service. She started with the district in 1980 as a payment clerk in the finance department, moving on to work for the special education department and summer school office before becoming the food services secretary. Fischer has served on the Labor Management Committee for many years and as an officer for the Valley View Middle School seventh grade Michelle Arias Trejo gets acquainted with her Chromebook during students' first day of the devices last September.

 Gaulin has been a teacher at Jefferson for 10 years, and the past six years has been an adult in the classroom. Her favorite experience includes taking students abroad to Japan, Hong Kong, and China, and helping with the United Way.

A Fond Farewell
Thank you for 925 years of service

This year’s Celebration of Service honored 62 employees with a combined 925 years of service to Bloomington Public Schools. The annual reception is held at the close of the school year to recognize those who are retiring or have left within the last year, and have more than 10 years of employment with the district.

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Denise Snyder
Speech Language Pathologist, Westwood Elementary School
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Snyder has worked as a speech language pathologist at Westwood, Indian Mounds, Poplar Bridge, Normaldale Hills, Ridgeview, Washburn and the former Cedarcrest elementary schools. She also served as team facilitator for special education at Westwood, Washburn and Ridgeview elementary schools. Snyder said her favorite aspect of her work is her students, adding that “every day is a new day for students to learn. “Each student has unique life experiences and challenges,” said Snyder. “It has been my goal to find new ways to engage them and teach them.” She said one of the most rewarding parts of her job is when students who struggle with classroom behavior and communication find that they can be successful.

We thank the following dedicated professionals and wish them success in their future endeavors.

PayPAMS software user group, Fischer says she will miss working with “the fabulous kitchen staff.”

LOG IN TO THE HUB
Parents and students are encouraged to log in to the Hub to view student schedules, locker numbers and bus information. New this year, parents will also complete emergency contact information forms in the Hub.

Parent Hub passwords will remain the same for next year; but student passwords will change in August. Parents and students can access students’ new passwords in parent Hub accounts in July, and will receive email reminders prior to the switch. If you don’t know your Hub password, it will be emailed to you in August.

Personal Growth Plans

The third component of NTL is the development of Personal Growth Plans (PGPs) for each student, which will be available to high school students and their parents in the Hub. This fall, selected high school students will serve as a pilot group for new PGP features focused on three areas: academic skills; life and social skills; and college and career planning. Features planned for the pilot include goal setting, a real-time grade point average calculator, career interest inventories, and more. The phased approach will integrate PGPs for all high school students for the 2016-17 school year, followed by middle school students and eventually all Bloomington students.

NTL aims to provide all students with a “digital backpack,” transitioning from textbooks to personal learning devices. Through NTL’s phased approach, each middle school student began carrying a device at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year. Over the course of the school year, the percentage of middle school students who said they access digital content outside of school daily increased from 46 percent to 72 percent. Students also indicated the devices allowed them to work with classmates in projects and out of school, find answers to questions quicker, create websites and email classmates about homework.

This fall, all high schoolers will have access to a device, whether it is provided by the district or one already purchased by the student. Elementary school students will begin planning for the implementation of a one-to-one environment for grades 3-5 beginning in 2016-17. Pre-K through second grade students will have increased access to technology but will not receive personal devices.

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Anyone, Anytime Learning

District staff continues to expand access to the Internet for student online learning resources. Wireless upgrades were completed this year at all school sites. The district has responded to the limited need for Internet access outside of school with wireless devices that can be checked out of each school’s media center, as well as the work that lies ahead.

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Points of Pride

STUDENT AND STAFF ACHIEVEMENTS

Jefferson High School senior Brendan Klein qualified for the National Speech and Debate Association National Tournament, to be held June 14-15 in Dallas, marking the fourth consecutive year a Jefferson team member has qualified for the national tournament.

Kennedy High School technical education teacher Kevin Baas was named a Fox 9 Top Teacher award winner. He was nominated by a Kennedy alumnus and surprised with the award during the lunch period.

Summer Musicals

Students in grades 7-12 will perform “Grease,” at 7 p.m., July 29–Aug. 1 and 2 p.m. Aug. 1 in the Kennedy High School auditorium, 9701 Nicollet Ave. S. Tickets are $8 for seniors and students and $10 for adults.

Students in grades 3-7 will perform “Aladdin Jr.” at 7 p.m. July 23-25 in the Valley View Middle School auditorium, 8900 Portland Ave. S. Tickets are $7.

Eighth annual Food Drive a success

Schools and a number of business partners collected 13,639 pounds of food and $7,946 in cash during the seventh annual District-wide Food Drive.

School Board Election

The Bloomington School Board has three seats up for election this fall. The terms for board members Dick Bergstrom, Maureen Bartolotta and Nelly Korman end in January 2016. The filing period for school board candidates opens July 28 and closes Aug. 11.

Seeking Literacy and Math Tutors

The district is seeking literacy and math tutors for positions offered through the Americorps programs Minnesota Reading Corps and Minnesota Math Corps.

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Oak Grove Middle School Assistant Principal Tim Ciavari has been named Assistant Principal of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) Hempen Division. Ciavari will be honored at this year’s MASSP summer conference.

Bloomington high school students named finalists in the 60th annual National Merit Scholarship Program are Jefferson High School’s Jackson Haas, Matthew Wales and Kathleen Wong. More than 1.4 million high school juniors entered the 2015 National Merit Program by taking the preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship qualifying test.

News for a better Bloomington

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2015 Bloomington School Board
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