

Dear Community Members:

Welcome to 2016! It is great to get the kids back to school and hopefully we can get this first week of January in without a hitch. I am not sure that we have ever gotten through the first week of January without a calamity day during my time here!

I wanted to start the year off with a look ahead at what we can expect to see for 2016.

ACADEMICS

Later this month, the state will release the first of two sets of information on our Report Card for 2014-15. The delay in the information was created by the need to set cut scores for the new tests students took last year. In the first batch of information to be released in several weeks, we will get three informational items dealing with Graduation Rate, K-3 Literacy, and Prepared for Success. In February, we will get information on Student Performance and Growth along with other Federal compliance data points.

It will be very interesting to see how the information is received. We will see a decline in some past achievement rates. Last year we were one of a handful of NW Ohio districts that had passage rates of 80% or higher in all areas with most being over 90%. This year, all districts are going to see a reduction in their passage rates due to more rigorous assessments and curricular expectations. While, it appears that we will make all of the indicators as set by the state for student performance, we will see some rates drop into the 70% range. In looking at similar districts, I think our performance last year will be comparable to results in previous years.

This year the assessments are changing for language arts and math. Thankfully, they will be somewhat shorter and on the same platform as Science and Social Studies. While we will strive to learn what we can from the data provided to us, we will continue to rely on **our own** student data to help us improve learning outcomes for our students.

We will be looking to make some improvements in student resources prior to the start of next year. We have multiple textbooks and resources, particularly in the intermediate grades that are dated and need to be upgraded. We have been piloting a few things this year, and the results have been positive. Textbooks are taking on a totally new face compared to what we have seen in the past. In yesteryear, districts bought books and used them for long periods of time. Now, many companies charge a yearly rate which includes an online component as well as a consumable text. This practice prevents districts from squeezing out additional years from a textbook, but it does give students access to very useful online resources. There are tradeoffs, and we will be looking to improve the materials for students. Some things may get phased in over the course of the next couple of school years.

In the area of technology, we will continue to provide devices for students in grades 8-12 and have devices for classroom use in grades K-7. There may be a change in the device of choice instituted in grade 8 that will be more economical without sacrificing

functionality for the students. We also will be looking at other aspects of our tech program to see where we can provide more support to students and staff.

FINANCES

In looking not only at this year but into the future, please keep the date of January 1, 2026 in mind. On January 1, 2026, Eastwood Schools will be debt free. The bonds on the HS addition and those for the new K-5 building will be paid, and there will be \$1.275 million of cash flow designated for bond payments that will open up in the district's General Fund. Before that date in 2025, the community will need to make some decisions on whether or not to put the money back into the district's operating fund or into further facility upgrades to the MS and HS. That decision is 10 years off into the future.

Between now and then, we have ten years to look at our operating budget. On the revenue side, we will be seeing a reduction of \$878,000 in the coming years due to the district's decision to not renew the Emergency Levy which expired at the end of last year. Taxpayers will see relief of roughly \$150 annually on a \$150,000 home starting this calendar year. It is very possible that sometime before January 1, 2026 we may need to recover some of that tax cut by passing a new operating levy similar to the one that expired. However, the district is going to do what it can to manage its budget to prolong the need to bring the levy back. In the meantime, taxpayers will benefit from the reduction.

This March, voters will be asked to renew the income tax. This levy now represents the sole source of operating income above the state minimums in the district. It is the district's hope that our efforts to keep taxes low, along with our continued strong academic performance, will be supported by voters.

For the remainder of this year, we will be looking to stay the course with our budget projections. We should end the year with a cash balance of over \$9 million, but we are in a deficit spending pattern. Our goal will be to more aggressively find ways to limit expenses while maintaining quality programs and offerings. We have a new treasurer on board, Brad McCracken, and having a new set of eyes to question and challenge the status quo can only help.

Financially, we are in a solid position. We have a strong cash balance, but that will be shrinking with a reduction in revenue. Again, our goal is to manage the budget with the date of January 1, 2026 in mind. That management will include looking to reduce operating expenses where possible and leaving open the possibility of looking to recover all or a portion of the \$878,000 tax cut **to get us through 2025.**

FACILITIES

Plans are to break ground for the new K-5 school this spring. Currently, the architects are working with the CMR to develop a cost based on the Design/Development

documents. This is the second of three phases and perhaps the most important. The building has been designed down to the classroom level with a possible range of options for materials and finishes. Think of it like a home renovation with a budget. You may choose to put a laminate floor in the kitchen to get the cabinets you want. However, if the cabinets come in under your budget, you can choose to put ceramic tile or wood down instead.

Later this month, we will be getting an estimate for the base building along with desired alternates. Just like doing a renovation to your own home, you will look at those estimates and look for ways to maximize the quality for the price. There is no doubt that there will be significant challenges, but I have to say that our design professionals do an excellent job of coming to us with ideas on saving money without sacrificing quality on the end product. Over the course of the last ten months, they have asked a number of questions to staff, community members, and administrators so they understand our priorities. That helps as well. Importantly, we do have some dollars budgeted to help if there are places where we do not want to compromise, but there will still need to be some tough decisions made.

Also this spring, we will be forming a committee to help us create a legacy wall in the main hallway. Eastwood today is built on a legacy of education that goes back to one room schoolhouses in the 1800s. Our goal is to create a timeline using photographs and important historical dates for the history of education in the Eastwood district. I know at the Wood County ESC, there are pictures of a school in Stony Ridge and one in Dunbridge along with one labeled Middleton Township. We will search historical records at the Wood County Historical Society as well as pictures that may have been taken and passed down through generations or archives and use those to create our wall. I know that former teacher and coach Dale Bruning did an extensive history of Pemberville and Freedom Township. Denny Henline shared with me a picture, I believe is from that archive, of the original Pemberville School that was built on the current site of the school and torn down to make way for the current building. Those kinds of artifacts will be the target of our search. The legacy wall will be computer generated based on photos and labels. We have not decided if it will be laminated to the wall or placed on boards that will be mounted in an artistic fashion. Either way it will be a tribute to all of the efforts since the founding of Ohio to educate students in what is now the Eastwood Local School District.

SUMMARY

We are very blessed with great teachers, terrific kids, and a supportive community. It is our hope and prayer that we will provide our staff with the tools to be successful, our kids with the quality education they deserve, and the community with a quality product that they can be proud of.

Best wishes on a successful 2016!