

Mountain Empire Unified School District

State of the District

Presented by

Steve Van Zant, Superintendent

After nearly a year as the superintendent, I feel very good about the foundational work we did toward building a district of excellence. In the past year, we have worked to make improvements in our financial structure, our educational programs and the services we offer to the community. I feel good about the direction we have set for ourselves and excited about the future that now lies before us.

After taking a few months to absorb the culture of the backcountry and understand the hopes and aspirations of the many of our residents and families, we developed a plan to upgrade our educational program for 7th and 8th grade students. By closing a school

that was in program improvement for a number of years and transferring responsibility for educating our young adolescent students back to the community where they live, and to schools that have been highly successful over the past several years, we feel confident that we will do a better job of preparing students for the rigors of high school and the many demands that come from attending school in a rural setting.

Another significant move this year was the creation of systems to make our business systems more efficient and cost effective. The institution of a position control system and staffing ratios for teachers have led to less waste and more efficient use of staffing. Bus routes have been reworked to provide for optimum efficiency and work is being done to make our schools more energy efficient and reduce our energy bills. We even bought a phone dialer system to improve our communication with our families and employees.

In addition, we are also proud that we have successful relationship with our labor unions and have significantly reduced legal fees paid out to attorneys this past year to handle various lawsuits brought against the district. We have worked together to create a strategic master plan that will be updated each year to guide the work of our district and our schools.

Finally, we have increased our actual attendance this year after four years of decline and provided a vehicle to increase funding in future years by sponsoring three charter schools. Over the next few years, this additional funding source can grow to as much as an additional \$300,000 per year and allow us to transfer some of our business service expenses to the charter schools.

However, as much as we have done to put the district on a sound financial course, increase efficiency and provide better educational opportunities to our students, we still have a lot of work to do. Career/Technical Education opportunities need to be expanded at the

high school and a plan to develop a more rigorous educational program need to be instilled at all levels. Opportunities for children to participate in afterschool athletics and other interest based programs need to be fully developed and implemented so that our students feel more connected to our schools, and our schools more connected and responsive to the backcountry. A district-wide facilities plan also needs to be developed and acted on appropriately to include the expansion of field spaces and upgrading of other spaces to support athletics, the arts and sciences, and to provide for the inclusion of exciting new technologies our students need to keep pace in an already competitive world.

Making this challenge more daunting is the need to cut approximately one million dollars from our budget. Through use of an early retirement program, shifting categorical dollars from the sites to the district, and making use of limited layoffs, we have nearly closed

the gap without mortgaging the future critical services or program or by asking employees to work fewer days or for less pay

In summation, we are much further along the road to excellence than we were at this time last year. We have laid a foundation that will allow us to better serve the community and our students. The future is full of challenges and opportunities. It is ours to seize or to ignore. Therefore, Despite the budget turbulence a the state level, the time is now to create a district that is a model of excellence, to work toward providing our students the type of education we all wish we can have for them, and to create schools the entire backcountry can look upon with pride and appreciation.

Thank you for your continued support of our schools. We look forward to delivering on our promise to prepare students to participate in a competitive global society.