

This week, instead of addressing one topic in the Lancer Letter, I'd like to update everyone on a few items.

Planned Late Starts. In Lancer Letter #123, I outlined the tremendous amount of initiatives coming at public education from the state level. Aligning all curriculum to the Common Core, new comprehensive teacher evaluation system, new principal evaluation system, redesigned PSSA tests for grades 3-8, new Keystone exam system, Act 126 (related to child molestation) and expanding special education regulations were initiatives that all required time for training. I went on further to list other educational topics requiring time for training and noted we simply had to find more time for what is called, professional development.

Enter the late start for students with teachers reporting at the normal time to engage in two hours of professional development before the students arrived. This system worked well for us and we began to catch up on all the initiatives.

Last spring when I presented the school calendar for 15-16 to the board, I reduced the number of planned late starts from 4 to 3, citing a belief that the new Governor and Secretary of Education would not be continuing to pummel us with new systems and regulations as did the Corbett administration. It was early in the new Governor's term so I couldn't be sure.

Having followed closely our new Secretary of Education, Pedro Rivera, I am quite relieved and optimistic. Being the first Secretary of Education I can remember that is an educator (teacher/principal/superintendent), he understands our plight. Every indication I see is that he is trying to stop the insanity and restore some common sense to what schools are being asked to do. Rather than dropping scads of requirements and initiatives on us, he is trying to make the existing requirements more "doable." Of course, some of that will require legislative approval which hopefully will go better than the budget.

I am saying all this to announce that we are eliminating the scheduled late starts entirely for this year. We no longer need the extra time for professional development and can continue to address what is needed in existing in-service days and other contracted professional development time. The only late starts we will have this year will be weather related and I'm keeping my fingers crossed there will not be any at all! (Hey, I can dream.)

I know this will make some parents very happy but don't thank me. Thank Secretary Rivera.

State Budget Impasse. With other districts in the news running out of money without a state budget, the natural question is, "What is the status of General McLane in this regard?"

First, it's important to remember that each district receives a different proportion of operating funds from the state. Erie receives approximately 80% of its funding from the state so the 20% of local revenue runs out when 20% of the fiscal year has passed. Twenty percent of the fiscal year has passed.

At General McLane, we depend on the state for about 50% of our funding. Our local funds will get us halfway through the year (December) at which point we will need to look at a line of credit. We also had two CDs mature recently so instead of reinvesting right now, we are holding on to the money in case we need it and will look at other ways to utilize reserves to avoid paying interest.

In short, from the GM perspective, if we don't get a state budget before Christmas, it will be at the top of our list for Santa. For now, thank you all who have paid your taxes early or on time. Without you, we'd be sunk!

Student Pick up Issues. We are having some issues with parents picking up children after school. This problem is especially significant at Edinboro Elementary where we have a very small lobby and restricted parking. Some new parking procedures went into effect this week which should help somewhat with the parking lot. Permanent paving will be done in the spring to alleviate more issues. We will be adding cameras to both elementary lobbies to increase security and we're also asking parents not to come into the lobby so early (sometimes as much as 40 minutes early). The individual elementary schools will be sending communications to parents involved in the pick-ups.

Transportation. We continue to tweak the new bus routes. The major changes have been implemented and we continue to address outstanding situations. There seems to be a misconception that we have no idea what the financial impact will be of the new routes. We knew last year at budget time that the new routes would save us \$300,000 to \$400,000 annually. Not a figure to sneeze at; however, we have had to add some routes to deal with the length of routes and numbers on the busses so we will have to recompute that after we make all the adjustments.