

Coopersville Area Public Schools
State of the Schools Report – Introductory Comments
Monday, January 24, 2005
7:00 PM

Tonight marks the beginning of my eighth year as Coopersville Area Public Schools superintendent. This is my seventh State of the Schools Report. This year's State of the School Report is quite a departure from other years' reports. We have created a snapshot of the district from A to Z, and have assembled it in a booklet format. I hope you enjoy reading it.

My remarks this evening will be focused solely on the financial challenges that have plagued us for the last three years, and which will continue to be our greatest challenge during 2005. You will note in the report that I have once again graded State Funding with an "F". Our state legislators and governor have not yet stepped up to the dual challenges of funding equity and funding adequacy.

No school district in the state has received less money per pupil than has Coopersville Area Public Schools in each of the last ten years. However, there have been hundreds of school districts that have received more per pupil funding. Given that all communities and individuals in the state pay equal tax rates for public schools, how is it that more than a decade after Proposal A was passed with the promise to correct that problem, that the funding gaps not only still exist, but that the gaps have increased in the last three years? I challenge every citizen of our great school district to call, write or visit their state legislators and demand to know why our own legislators are not making a public issue out of this incredible unfairness.

So much for equity. The other issue is adequacy. Is our current funding base of \$6700 per pupil enough to provide an education for our students that will prepare them to be contributing members of society, and to be able to meet the demands of our rapidly changing business climate? The reality of school funding today is that we have seen three years of funding decreases combined with 3 years of increasing expenses imposed on us by the state in the form increased costs of the state retirement system. In addition, we have our own increasing costs in the form of higher utility expenses, textbook prices, supplies, and insurance costs. Our school board is one of several hundred school boards to petition the State Board of Education to conduct a study to determine how much money it takes to educate each student. If the State Board of Education accepts that challenge, the next logical step will be to ensure that all students in the state, including ours, receive that amount.

It is sad that we have to spend so much time and energy seeking fair and adequate funding. We should be spending our time improving our curriculum and programs for students. In the next year, we will be reworking our strategic plan, modifying much of our curriculum to match new state testing requirements, and we will be looking at solutions to our lack of classroom space. We have contract agreements with all of our employees which expire this year, and we are facing ever-increasing demands from the federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

We were spared devastating cuts in programs so far because of our increasing enrollment and careful fiscal management. However, there are limited numbers of ways to cut before we affect the quality of our programs, and we cannot always count increasing enrollment numbers to bail us out of financial trouble.

I have compiled a small booklet that describes the State of the Schools from A to Z. The booklet does not attempt to encompass everything, or even the most important things that we do in the district. It does try to capture a snapshot of the district at this particular point in time. I hope you enjoy reading it, and I challenge you to work with us as we tackle the number one challenge of the new year – financial stability. Financial stability will help us preserve the best of Coopersville Area Public Schools and allow us continue our never ending drive toward educational excellence.