

# Superintendent's Report

## *"The State of the District"*

**January 16, 2018**

As we ring in 2018 here at Staunton Schools, it is a time of renewal that serves as an opportunity to share with you, our school family and community, where we are as a District, celebrate the good things happening, and briefly share some of the challenges and the opportunities ahead.

The annual State of the District Report is a component of the District's communication plan to improve upon communication, transparency, and trust. This report focuses on all aspects of the District, including a review of the school report card, review of the curriculum and instructional services, and recommendations based upon the information presented. With these points in mind, let's review *"The State of the District."*

The District currently has a total of 1,306 students enrolled. We have 928 students enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten through Eighth Grade and 376 students at Staunton High School.

We have 7 Board members elected by the community to set policy and direction for the District. Employees of the District include 4 administrators, 67 certified teachers, and 50 classified staff including bus drivers, one chaperone, cooks, custodians, secretaries, teacher aides, one nurse, maintenance and transportation supervisors.

The District is located on 32 acres in a single building complex in Staunton. The entire school, Pre-K through grade 12 is housed in a series of interconnected buildings that share common grounds and facilities, such as the media center, cafeteria, and gymnasiums.

The School District, in an active partnership with families and community, will promote excellence in a caring environment in which all students will learn and grow. This partnership shall empower all students to develop a strong self-esteem and to become responsible learners and decision makers. The District is committed to developing and using a visionary and innovative curriculum and knowledgeable and dedicated staff.

With the input of over 200 stakeholders the District has developed a comprehensive and collaborative strategic planning effort led by teachers and administrators. Within the strategic plan the vision and mission of Staunton CUSD #6 has been defined as "At Staunton Schools we expect everyone's best: LEAD-CHALLENGE-ACHIEVE!" Specifically, our values are defined by:

- Offering a wide range of academic and extracurricular opportunities;
- Challenging all to learn and achieve;

- Financial stability;
- Expect everyone's best.

We are now engaged in action steps for achieving the following goals:

- Leadership training for all staff and students;
- Improve communication, transparency, and trust;
- Develop and implement a technology plan;
- Provide social-emotional support for students.

In July of 2017 the District began the fiscal year with a fund balance of \$2,496,609. The District maintains nine funds within the budget, of those four are considered operating funds: Educational Fund, Operations and Maintenance Fund, Transportation Fund, and Working Cash Fund. Our current fiscal year 2018 (FY18) estimate for revenue within the operating funds is \$9,118,561 and the FY18 estimate for expenditures is \$9,357,859. When building a budget the District overestimates expenditures and underestimates revenues to the most realistic extent possible given the unpredictable nature of state supported funding for schools. While deficit spending for FY18 is still projected, it is possible the District may have a balanced budget at the end of the year for the first time since 2008 if new state tier funding is disbursed to districts this spring. It is important to remember that current budget numbers serve as more of a guide, as figures used are conservative projections of the year's expenditures and revenues. Any one factor can dramatically change the calculations.

Since 2012 the Board of Education and District employees past and present have worked tirelessly with the support and backing of our community to reduce the District's deficit spending by over **\$1.1 million**; all the while we have been able to maintain a high level of program offerings and services for our students! We thank the taxpayers of our community because we can regularly count on receiving the tax dollars levied to support our schools.

This past fall school districts and communities throughout Illinois scored a historic victory for our students by reforming the most inequitable school funding formula in the nation! This was done in no small part from the efforts of our teachers, board of education members, families, community, and administrators who advocated tirelessly for the best interests of our students.

At the present, however, we are disappointed that schools are still waiting on the new tier money that is mandated by law to be sent to schools. The Governor's amendatory veto (AV) of Senate Bill 444, a bill that was to be merely technical clean-up language, is especially disappointing because it does not put our students first. Once again, here we are with our schools and students being used as political pawns at a time when we should be talking about investing in excellence in education. The Governor's AV has tacked on additional issues related to private school tax credits. This AV is non-compliant and includes language to direct more public funds to private

schools that are not registered, accredited, or under the same accountability standards as public schools. This is nothing short of unacceptable!

Our State has left far too many children disadvantaged far too long. After years of dysfunction, we're on the verge of making Illinois notable for something else: one of the most equitable school funding systems in the nation. We have fixed the formula, but students in schools throughout our state have not seen new funding.

It is far past time to end the years of uncertainty and instability for schools and focus on what matters most: investing in student excellence.

The educators in our district care deeply about the social and emotional well-being of the students we serve. Over the past year the faculty and staff from each school has had regular discussions, professional development, and improvements to current practice on trauma informed practice. During this current year the district has partnered with Southwestern CUSD #9 to add additional counseling services to each district. The District has outstanding family contact and involvement. Families attend Back to School Nights, Open Houses, interscholastic events, and are involved with their child's education. As our district strives to build upon family engagement strategies and social emotional supports for students, we will continue to look for ways to communicate with families to meet their needs. Most recently the District has been selected as one of three recipients statewide to receive a mini-grant in partnership with the Real Learning for Real Life Coalition to conduct a pilot parent teacher home visit project. The goal of the project is to build capacity within school districts to work with families to achieve the promise of an education by closing achievement gaps and preparing the whole student for college, career, and life after high school.

Offering a wide variety of extra-curricular, co-curricular and fine arts is core value of the District strategic plan. Our Fine Arts programs are a key component of our community engagement. Crowds pour into our schools to see the outstanding talent displayed by students in our concerts, plays, art show, and fine arts night! The band program continues to impress as one of the top small school bands in our area. Choir and drama put on many outstanding performances throughout the year. Staunton boasts a wide variety of extra-curricular sports and clubs. Athletic programs have been on an upswing fielding teams of quality student-athletes. Our students who have so much talent and dedication in representing our schools are truly amazing!!!

Over the past year faculty and staff from the District have been charged with creating a shared vision for technology as part of the district strategic plan. A goal for this vision is to become a 1:1 technology district. With the help of the Staunton Education Foundation's \$25,000 donation the District was able to get a jump start on the technology plan. Beginning in the fall a pilot program will begin where all 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students will have personal laptops as part of their instructional resources.

Our students receive outstanding instruction in Mathematics, Science, English/Language Arts, Social Science, Art, Music, Physical Education, Foreign Language, Vocational Education and more! Our teachers are all highly qualified, care deeply about our students as individuals and learners, and nearly 50% of them hold a Master's Degree or above. The ratio of certified staff and administrators to students is above the state average while salaries for both are below the state average.

Relationships between the Board of Education and the two collective bargaining units, the Staunton Federation of Teachers and the Custodial Council of the Staunton Federation of Teachers, are positive with all parties working collaboratively to provide the best learning and working environment possible. Most recently a four year collective bargaining agreement was made between the Board and teachers and a five year collective bargaining agreement was made between the Board and custodians.

We are fortunate that this community supports the District with not only money but time as well! The Staunton Education Foundation, the Parent Teacher Organization, the Athletic Boosters Club, the Band Boosters Club, the FFA Alumni along with the Staunton Federation of Teachers, the Retired Teacher's Association and many, many individuals, organizations and businesses support Staunton KIDS! Thank you!

### **Our District focus is Student Learning!**

#### **Staunton Elementary School**

Great learning opportunities begin at the Staunton Elementary School as children arrive in a safe community setting with a warm, dedicated and caring staff. The foundation for being successful students throughout school starts with our pre-kindergarten and primary grades, who are second to none. This past year our pre-kindergarten program was recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education as a Gold Star Rating program of excellence. The response to intervention program in grades K-2 continues to be an area of focus as teachers build upon instructional strategies and interventions to help students succeed at their highest levels. This effort will continue to expand throughout grade levels in future years. It is exciting to see a love for learning being instilled within students from teachers and staff who are caring, innovative, and treats each child as one of their own. Grade level teams collaborate with each other in such a way that challenges their peers and students while encouraging everyone's best. In addition to developing outstanding learners, it is a priority for Staunton Elementary to develop great people. Our students are the next generation's leaders. The generosity and caring attitude from others is often on full display, but especially so when others are experiencing difficult times. It is inspiring to see a school community rally around each other when others experience hardships.

#### **Staunton Junior High School**

Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth graders are at the Junior High where they are able to experience different teachers, changing of classes, and new challenges. Teachers at SJH instruct students at

a very high level and are on the cutting edge of continuing to improve their craft of teaching. This attitude leads to engaging and exciting lessons for students. The teachers at SJH have outstanding relationships with students and truly understand how to assist them with learning how to navigate the social and emotional challenges of becoming teenagers. Looking ahead to the future, junior high students will look forward to a selection of elective courses that will help prepare them for what lies ahead in high school.

One cannot discuss charity and caring for others without mentioning SJH! Led by the student council and a staff full of innovative teachers who lead by example and have fun with kids, it takes only a quick look at the many events that raise awareness and funds for those in need to highlight the caring attitude and civic mindedness of students and staff!

Junior High Students are offered eleven extra and co-curricular programs in which they can participate throughout the school year. Many victories, championships, state appearances, and recognitions are prevalent throughout our programs in recent years. Teams and individuals have had great success in athletics that builds momentum for high school. This past fall marked the inaugural season for the Terriers Softball program. With the strategic plan as a guide, the district and community were able to partner together to offer this new program to our students at no financial cost to the district! Band and Chorus continue to build the foundation for what is a strong tradition of excellence in the Staunton Fine Arts Programs. During concerts it is common (and fun) to hear spectators comment that our student's performances sound as good as many high school programs! Despite all the accolades, the greatest success of our programs at the junior high are the values that our coaches, sponsors, directors, and volunteers work to instill within the young people involved in our many programs!

### **Staunton High School**

Freshmen through Seniors attend Staunton High School. SHS is known for excellence and continues to be a top tier school for academic learning as faculty and staff work very hard to prepare students for whatever path they may choose among the endless possibilities. Last year Staunton High School was recognized by the U.S. News and World Report as one of the top high schools in the nation with a bronze rating, the highest rating Staunton High School is able to receive! This recognition is a small reflection of the dedication, talent, and support of the entire district family! Teachers strive for and ensure that our students are well prepared. Twenty-two dual credit classes are offered providing students rigorous coursework, a head start in post-secondary education, and help families financially. The Vocational Department offers thirty-four classes in agriculture, business, family consumer science, and technology. The Fine Arts Department is overflowing with students as they choose art, band, and choir. Students are active as there are many clubs, organizations, and athletic teams for students to join and earn valuable leadership skills, a mindset of teamwork, and grow socially and emotionally. All of these things point to the high graduation rate and number of freshmen on track at Staunton High School.

The Macoupin County CEO class is offered to students throughout Macoupin County and is in the second year. Nine students are enrolled in CEO, leading the way in the county in what is a competitive admission process. In this class students learn to write business plans as well as operate a class business and their own individual business with real money, successes, and failures. These students also learn a very in depth set of skills in interpersonal communication and responsibility. This class prepares students to be successful in business and in life. We are proud of our SHS representatives as they serve as outstanding examples of the leadership traits we instill within our high school students!

SHS has had an amazing fall! Six students were named as Illinois State Scholars. These students represent our best of the best and are to be celebrated for not only their excellence but they also serve as examples of the rich academic tradition SHS has to offer. Just this past fall nearly 200 students were recognized during the annual Academic Awards Banquet for their achievements and heard an inspirational message from Dr. John Comerford from Blackburn College. Behind the successes of our students are our families, teachers, and staff! Inside and outside of the classroom our students are talented, work exceptionally hard, and they excel! Their performance is a treat for all and everyone should be very proud!

### **What is the State of the District?**

Staunton Schools are a source of pride within our community. Students are successful because of the outstanding relationships between them, their teachers, and support staff. As schools, we succeed because of the support from our community in time, money, and a belief in what we are doing to help everyone be their best!

Over the past year we have specifically worked on the following:

- Being the difference for each other and our community.
- Making student learning the first and foremost priority.
- Building trust between the board, administration, faculty, staff, parents, students, and community.
- Using the County Schools Facilities Sales Tax dollars to make \$2.4 million in much needed repairs and improvements to our facilities. Thank you!
- Building teacher leadership capacity.
- Worked to secure a more equitable funding formula for schools.
- Working toward a balanced budget while still providing a high level of programming and services offered to students.
- Identifying and renegotiating any agreements, contracts, or services in order to use taxpayer dollars as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Demonstrating open communication with stakeholders.

- Enjoying every opportunity to do our best while expecting the best from our students each and every day!

Along the road ahead there will be many successes but there will almost certainly be challenges within our path. Just remember, within these challenges lie our greatest opportunities for growth! We will continue to need to be prepared for:

- Rebuilding from the damage that was done after years of the State underfunding our schools in an inequitable manner.
- Prioritizing programs and services to restore and add that will have the greatest return on investment for student learning outcomes.
- Meeting the district's adequacy target over the next decade.
- Meet the growing needs of students and families.
- Assessing the local funding capacity target.
- Advocate for continued and additional State funding.
- Writing District and School Improvement Plans.
- Addressing the statewide certified and substitute teacher shortage.

As superintendent, I am both humbled and honored to serve in a community that has great pride and support for its' schools! The community of Staunton and our schools are truly special places. Despite the challenges and adversity we face due to things outside of our control, we will continue to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead. Each day our families send us their best, their children. And it is our children who deserve no less than our best. I am looking forward to what lies ahead in 2018 for Staunton Schools, our students, faculty, staff, families, and community. Here is to leading, challenging, and achieving to do our best each and every day!

Be the Difference,

Dan W. Cox  
Superintendent of Schools