

December 13, 2011

Dear DCSD Employee:

Happy Holidays! I hope you are enjoying this festive week and gearing up for some time with your friends and family. I can't wait to spend some dedicated time with mine. This past weekend we had our bi-annual board retreat, and my little Olivia let me know that the amount of time I spent with her this past week was unsatisfactory by gluing herself to me on Sunday. I could not leave the room without her hollering her now, family-famous word of discontent, "Oy!" and gently (as to not injure herself) falling to the ground in protest of my temporary absence. This is new to me – my oldest skipped the fit stage, I think...maybe I just blocked it out. ☺ Anyway, I know all of us will really appreciate some family time. I am writing today to wish you a wonderful holiday season and to tell you about a few important things, as promised, prior to break.

## BUDGET

I'd like to start with a budget update. The following budget items were recommended to our Board of Education as part of our budget/negotiations preparations, during their winter retreat this past weekend, and I want to share that they are completely in support. I must state, for my own peace of mind, just one more time that these recommendations are based on the information we have right now. If there should be a significant change in the FY 2013 state reductions (if they get a lot worse), we MAY have to revisit some items below. We do not believe that will be the case – it is unlikely, so don't worry. On the other hand, if the state reductions improve (get a lot better), we would like to improve the school reductions (reduce the reductions).

1. Again, I hope this information gives you some peace of mind before you leave for break – that is the intent. Please recall that we are working to reduce approximately \$25 M from our reoccurring budget, so given that expectation/context, I feel we are in a good place. Being an optimist, I believe it might even get better. Here are some key details.
  - a. We are committed to preserving employee compensation and improving quality of life. Therefore, we have worked hard and found some opportunities that could get us to zero furlough days. It is possible! However, these are negotiated items, so I can't guarantee anything yet. What I can tell you is that through some reallocations, and/or reductions in other areas **we could reduce our furlough days from 4 to possibly 0.**
  - b. We are committed to preserving (hopefully improving) class sizes and specials for our elementary students. Therefore, I believe we will be looking at a **\$50 SBB reduction in our elementary schools.** Remember that we started with \$200 reduction (blue budget) + \$166 reduction (Governor) = \$366 reduction, so \$50 is MUCH better! Progress!
  - c. We are committed to preserving the middle school concept, class sizes, advocacy (exploration of self, careers, and multi-year planning), and electives for our middle school students. Therefore, I believe we will be looking at a **\$100 SBB reduction in our middle schools.** Again, we started with a \$366 reduction, so while far from ideal, \$100 is a great improvement.
  - d. We are committed to preserving (hopefully improving) class sizes, electives, and opportunities for our high school students. Therefore, we are asking our **high schools to find district efficiencies through schedule changes.** This not ideal, and we hope it is not forever, but given the lean nature of our elementary and middle schools, looking to

our high schools for leadership in creating higher levels of efficiency to preserve the elementary and middle school programs makes a lot of sense. If we cannot provide the high quality education we have provided in our elementary schools, we will all suffer – most importantly, our students will suffer, and that is not acceptable to us.

e. We are committed to leading where we all must go, so even though the central leadership has taken disproportionate reductions (as we should), including \$500,000 reduction from the cabinet for this fiscal year (FY 2012), and \$2 M in reductions for this fiscal year (FY), **we will reduce another \$1 M for FY 2013**. We are committed to continuing our ground-breaking work in assessment and curriculum. We are committed to improving your quality of life. We are committed to more and better technology and continuing our world class offerings in PD, so we will have to find our reductions in other places. A strong organization does not reduce in areas that are part of its future, and we know that you need a stronger learning management system. We know that you (and our families) need state-of-the-art assessment options that measure the most important outcomes, and we know that you need professional development opportunities that feed your desires to learn and to grow as professionals. Those will continue. We will find a way.

Here are a few less riveting items...☺

2. Just in case you are confused or missed the explanation I want to circle back on “It’s me, Millie.” Neither my name nor my nickname is Millie. ☺ Millie was my childhood dance teacher, and a close friend of my grandma’s, who used to call, talk, hang up, and call right back with one more thing to discuss. Today, we often refer to my mom as Millie because she does the same thing, and since I kept writing to you last week with one more thing, I thought I’d share the story and call myself out - as Millie. I was out in a few schools last week and this was by far the number one thing I was asked about, so I thought I’d circle back. I’ve enjoyed the jokes. ☺

3. If you are seeing “J” in my emails, you are reading them on a device that does not support my favorite electronic, email-tone-helping smiley faces. ☺ Just FYI

I promised myself I would try to keep this short (by my standards), so I want to stop here and wish you a wonderful holiday season. Please find time to “sharpen the saw” and take care of a few of your “big rocks.” (I love Covey’s work.)

I am looking forward to our new year together. The work you continue to do is excellent, and I am very excited to see where we will go together in 2013. I wish you and your family the best.

Happy Holidays,

Liz