

December 16, 2011

Dear Douglas County School District Families:

I hope you are enjoying the holiday season. I am looking forward to spending some dedicated time with my two, young daughters and my husband. I have been dreaming about enjoying some hot chocolate while decorating sugar cookies with my girls for weeks now - a sure sign I am ready for winter break! I think I might even be excited to clean my house in preparation for visits from family and friends.

I am writing to you because, as a parent, I think you might be wondering about our Fiscal Year 2013 budget preparations and the potential impacts on your children and their schools; and I believe that given our economic circumstances, I have some good news that might take at least one thing off your mind this holiday season.

It is true that, currently, we have approximately \$25 M in budget reductions in order for us to live within our means. Given the Governor's proposed reductions, the increased costs in the district, and all that we know today, I believe \$25 M is our worst case scenario. With all that we know right now, here is what I believe you can expect to see next fall.

1. We are committed to supporting our schools in maintaining, and hopefully improving, class sizes in our elementary schools. We are also supporting our schools in maintaining specials and opportunities for our elementary students. Therefore, we have moved from a potential \$366 student-based-budgeting (SBB) reduction to our elementary schools to a \$50 SBB reduction. We have done this through a detailed analysis and reallocation of our budget. We remain hopeful that we may be able to move this to zero with improvements to the state budget or through additional budget reallocations yet to be discovered.
2. We are committed to supporting our schools in maintaining, and hopefully improving, class size in our middle schools. We are also committed supporting our schools in maintaining electives, student advocacy where applicable, and the middle school concept. We know that middle school is a key time of personal, college, and career exploration, and we know that this is key to success in high school and beyond. As such, we have moved a potential \$366 reduction to middle school SBB to a \$100 SBB reduction. Again, we remain hopeful we can bring this number down further.
3. We are committed to supporting our schools in maintaining, and hopefully improving, class sizes in our high schools. We are also committed to supporting our schools in maintaining electives, activities, athletics, and unique concurrent enrollment opportunities for our students. In fact, we would like to see more opportunities. Therefore, after much analysis, we are asking our high schools to look at their schedules to create greater efficiency in our district. Currently, our high school teachers teach five periods. We have asked them to look at a new schedule that maintains their planning time, does not dramatically increase their student loads, but adds additional sections to the master schedule by teaching six periods. This can be done through the use of an A/B block schedule, a 6 of 8 schedule, or an alternative. This schedule change will be school-by-school decision. We understand that this is far from ideal, and we hope that it is temporary. However, we must preserve the high quality instruction in our elementary and middle schools - it is best for our students.
4. We are committed to leading where we all must go, so even though the central leadership has taken disproportionate reductions (as we should), including a \$500,000 reduction from the cabinet for Fall 2011, and \$2 M in total reductions for Fall 2011, we will reduce another \$1 M for Fall 2012. In addition, we will continue to find every efficiency so that we can reallocate dollars to our schools.
5. Finally, you may be aware that we have discussed the possibility of furlough days with our employees. Again, we are committed to maintaining (hopefully improving) compensation for our high

quality employees, and we have found a pathway to bringing those furlough days to zero. I think it's important to share that all of these must go through negotiations so I cannot promise anything at this time, but I am hopeful.

I believe that this is a good news budget update. As a parent, it gives me a sense of relief to know that my daughter's school will not be hit with a \$366 SBB reduction and that her amazing teachers may not receive multiple furlough days. It makes me hopeful that her class sizes will not grow while she is learning those early reading and math skills and that she will still have access to the specials she loves. Based on my conversations with many Douglas County parents, I am certain you have a similar story, and hopefully I have provided some relief.

Have a wonderful holiday with your family. I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

Liz Fagen