Superintendent Letter

Dear Patrons-

Spring has come and life is good! We have almost completed our Idaho Standardized Achievement Tests (ISAT) and the outlook seems great. Remember that standardized tests are to help us measure areas of strength and weakness in the district. We will then look at what implemented strategies are working and what we can do better. We are committed to using multiple data sources to help us make data driven decisions to better serve our students.

I want to express appreciation to you as patrons for the support you have shown the district in the way of our plant facilities and supplemental levies. We are just finishing up our opening year in our music room, and will be hosting the district track meets for both the high school and Jr. High culminating events at our track facility. The students who attend our schools may never know how fortunate they are to perform in a venue like the Gem Valley Performing Arts Center or compete on our track. These facilities reflect the commitment our community has made to our children, and as a result our students feel compelled to reciprocate that commitment in quality productions and performances. We are excited about our spring musical concerts, talents shows and graduation that are all just around the corner! Your continued commitment to our programs and to making our school facilities great is commendable.

In this issue is a letter from Ryan Merrell our Construction Project Manager for the Elementary School. In that letter he talks about some construction trends and timelines for our Elementary project. Please take time to read his letter. Also in this issue is a color rendering of the Elementary reflecting the new steel construction.

In a recent press release published by greatschools.org, Grace High School is recognized as a College Success Award Recipient. The article ranks the top 32 schools in Idaho “based on their success in preparing students for college and ultimately career. The College Success awards recognize public high schools that stand out in getting students enrolled in - and staying with - college.”

Grace High School is ranked 11th overall but 2nd overall in persistence, which indicates that once our students go to college they are finishers! Century High School in Pocatello was also recognized. We want to congratulate our high school staff and students for being recognized as among Idaho’s elite.

Our students are gearing up for their community cleanup day scheduled for May 8th. Our students will be working around the community on various projects as a service to our patrons. Please encourage them to work hard and appreciate the opportunity to give back to those that have given them so much.

In this issue you will also find information regarding our new school lunch initiative. Mrs. Alplanalp has worked extremely hard to provide a fun and nourishing program that helps keep our student’s minds stay sharp and their bodies strong.

We are also preparing to celebrate the graduating class of 2019 on Wednesday May 29th at 7:00pm in the GVPAC.

It is an exciting time of year! Please help your students and staff members finish strong and continue to be engaged as there is much more to learn and apply! I appreciate all you do to support our staff and students.

Go big R.E.D.,

Jamie Holyoak
Superintendent of Schools
Grace School District #148
Dear Patrons of School District #148:

At the request of Superintendent Holyoak, I’m writing an update letter describing some of the setbacks, victories, advancements, and projections of the new Elementary School. As we move from the design phase into the production phase of this project I want the community to see the processes (the good and not so good) that have brought us to this point. While there have been delays, they have been necessary and some even beneficial in nature. It is said before you start construction you should build it 2-3 times on paper before you actually build it. Another way to put it is, you need to make sure everything is in line before you move forward. Through this process we have had to take steps back in order to properly move forward. Had we not done so, we would have stumbled and fallen short of the finish line. I hope the community will see, as I do, the great momentum that we have going in our direction. The key is capitalizing on this momentum, and as Coach Holyoak puts it, “Score in Transition”. We have a number of great things happening to this project right now, despite it being an uphill battle. If we can capitalize on the momentum we have I believe great things will continue to be drawn our way.

Building any project in general comes with its share of difficulties, and this project is no different. The key is, and has been with this project, finding the right solutions to the difficulties associated to it. One of our major setbacks has been the budget we have been tasked with to build this project. This has caused us to approach the construction in a different manner than traditional design-build construction. As such, we have had to go back to the proverbial “drawing board”, as well as the actual drawing board in some cases to accomplish this.

The previous design of the building combined with the budget allotted did not allow a pathway for us to build and complete this project. So because of that challenge, a seed of opportunity presented itself. We were able to look at other methods of construction, and were able to benefit from previous relationships established to pursue steel construction. As many of you may or may not know we had the entire steel structure construction package donated to the Grace School District by a very generous man through the company of R&M Steel. This is something that is unheard of in our industry, and it is no question that it is a blessing to this community. This is a direct result of positive attitudes, people building quality relationships, and the hard work of so many. With this news there was no question we needed to convert the building to a steel structure.

As such, this presented another problem, but also an opportunity. Our completed set of plans was no longer effective, so now we had to go back to the literal drawing board to acquire new plans that would be sufficient to build this structure. While much of the initial physical appearance of the building could remain the same, as well as the conceptual idea, there were many structural, architectural, electrical, mechanical, civil, and some cosmetic changes that would have to take place in order to build the structure with steel, and within our budget. This would take us back months in the design process, and inevitably delay the project due to this procedure. However, in the course of doing so we were able to procure the services of Ted Booth, from Booth Architects in Pocatello, which has been an incredible and invaluable asset to this venture. We are expecting any day now a full set of plans that are more complete, detailed, and functional than the other plans we had previously.

We realized that we were going to be delayed on this due to the fact that we had to wait for the plans to be fully completed. Delays on any project can be a death blow, and we as a construction department were all very concerned about what these delays were going to cost us. To our great surprise, after running the numbers and projecting the results of time, we are actually able to save money by these delays. To build during the winter there are added costs that inevitably occur due to keeping construction going during winter months, especially when it is outside work that is being done. We were excited that we were able to save not only a few dollars, but tens of thousands of dollars by not building through this winter. Savings that occur because of not having to use extra heat, use more additives, use more expensive products, cost for extra materials, etc. As it is, we will be able to resume construction this spring, and be at a point during the winter months that we will not have the cost of winter construction. These are savings that will make it more attainable to build this school.

Some have asked why we did not push the snow off the pad to resume construction earlier. Mother Nature is a particularly unforgiving mistress, especially up here in Grace Idaho. Unfortunately we have been through extreme cold and high amounts of snowfall this year. We as a construction department were concerned that because of the amount of snow and cold temperatures we would not be able to do anything on this project until June. We were also afraid that any work we had done on the structural pad would have been destroyed. However, because of some foresight from our construction team we determined not to drive on or try to remove any snow on the construction site. As a result the snow acted as an insulator, and the frost that would have inevitably been pushed very deep into the structural pad by driving equipment on it, has stayed on the top layer, and is melting off at a very rapid pace. This will allow us to resume construction in a matter of weeks, instead of a matter of months. Also because of not putting equipment on it we have maintained the structural integrity of the pad because the frost only penetrated into the top layer which allowed the pad to remain flat, structurally sound and workable.

Some of the real blessings due to delays have come in unexpected ways. We have had the necessary time to have been able to research multiple different types of products; we have been able to establish relationships with multiple vendors and trades that will be to a mutual advantage. Products that were priced out last year are half the cost due to the technology advances. Trades that would not give us the time of day last year because of how busy they were at the time we needed them have expressed direct interest in our project. Material costs have decreased across the spectrum, many of which were making it impossible to complete the entire project. One such is in correlation to the Gymnasium. A gym floor that
would have cost us well over $100,000 to have installed and seemed impossible to accomplish due to budget restraints, has become a reality (see attached picture). By happenstance and due to a consequential relationship built by our team we were able to secure an amazing gym floor for around half the cost, with the potential for further savings on future products for the school.

We have chosen to do a majority of the work in house which will provide the School District a significant percentage in savings. Thankfully, back in August 2018, we had Josh Hobbs join our construction team. While he is very humble and would never boast of himself, I will boast of him by saying he is one of the most sound and knowledgeable construction minds I have ever had the privilege of working with, and quite possibly the most valuable asset to this project and our team (give him a hug and tell him thanks if you see him in public, he’ll love it, I’ll be able to gauge how many people read this newsletter by how many hugs Josh gets). We have elected to purchase products directly from manufacturers where permissible. This will deliver massive savings by going straight to the manufactures, and then completing the installation where we are capable. There are also additional savings by not having to pay markups on material, labor, insurances, bonding, and taxes. It will save us money by pursuing this approach of construction, but as a consequence it will extend the build time on the project. As a result of doing much of the work in house we request the patience of the community as we do so.

As a construction schedule is a very fluid thing, exact dates are difficult to express with accuracy right now due to the many variable factors involved. However, we hope and expect to see equipment out on site within the next few weeks (weather permitting) to finish up the structural pad, after which we will move on to concrete, and then to underground plumbing and electrical. Hopefully around July we will be able to start the erection of the steel structure. While there are many variables involved in this process, we hope to be dried in (meaning the building exterior or shell completed) by the end of fall 2019. That will allow us to work inside throughout the winter and not have to pay for the extra cost associated with exterior winter construction.

These are just a few examples of the setbacks, and benefits we have seen during this process of construction. I truly feel that the seeds of opportunity have significantly outweighed the seeds of adversity in this venture. I credit my team for researching good deals, building great relationships, and working hard despite a steep uphill battle. And while I do give credit to my team for all they have done, I share these experiences not to boast of them or anything they have done; but I share these examples to highlight the blessings, and show personal gratitude for the determination, drive, and confidence of those on my team, your School Board, the School District, and Superintendent Holyoak (who has never wavered in his confidence that things would come together). I want to express my appreciation to them and this community for the confidence, and patience they have allotted us. While progress may not be materializing out on the construction site as of yet, there have been countless amazing benefits materialize through the hard work of so many. And while there is still an uphill battle, we are making great progress. Any project is so much more attainable when we as a group/community have a definitiveness of purpose, and the support of those involved to accomplish the assigned task. So, I sincerely want to say, Thank you!

Sincerely

Ryan B Merrell

Construction Project Manager

School District #148
Grace Elementary
Exciting things have been happening in our elementary cafeterias! For the last two years, the school lunch department has been working with members of the Eat Smart Idaho team to make our cafeterias a fun and inviting place to be. Thatcher and Grace elementary schools had a “Name the Lunchroom Contest” in November. The winning name, “Hungry Bears Café”, was submitted by Cashlee Smith and Mark Hulse. Eat Smart Idaho presented the schools a banner with the name.

We have also renamed most of our menu items with fun, descriptive names. They can be found on a dry erase board and on flip charts in the cafeterias. The dry erase board and flip charts were also provided by Eat Smart Idaho. We appreciate all they have done to make the cafeterias a fun place to be!

Eat Smart Idaho is provided through the University of Idaho Extension and provides nutrition and physical activity education for low-income Idahoans. They also work on the Smarter Lunchrooms program in qualified schools. The Smarter Lunchrooms Movement is dedicated to providing schools with the knowledge, motivation, and resources needed to build lunchroom environments that make healthy food choices the easy choice. The Movement brings evidence from the fields of economics, marketing, and psychology into the school cafeteria.