

October 27, 2020

Dear Slate Valley Community Member,

Not all that long ago, November of 2019, the Slate Valley Board voted to put forth a bold plan known as the Slate Valley Innovation Project and sent a bond consideration to the voters in March of 2020. Since this time, we have been largely focused on the response to COVID-19. While we remain focused on the pandemic, we also need to consider the future of the Slate Valley School District.

Much has changed in light of the pandemic, but also some concerns remain:

1. Declining enrollment;
2. Increasing costs;
3. Decreasing capacity to meet student needs despite our very best efforts;
4. Infrastructure needs.

When I started in this district 10 years ago we had 1461 students, today we have 1186 students. That is a dramatic decrease, not uncommon across many districts in the state. It is unsustainable for our communities to continue operating 6 schools in the current format. We have a long history of failed budgets in this district, the most recent this past year. In August, our third budget vote this year, the budget passed by just 16 votes. Our response to failed budgets has been to cut programs/personnel without looking at reorganization. This is simply not sustainable in our current configuration, and not what is best for our students.

The original principles of the Innovation Plan were based on student needs that are still present today. The school board met on October 26th and agreed to move ahead with exploring district reorganization. At the end of the retreat the board asked the administration to develop plans to do the following:

- Develop a plan to address the current facility and infrastructure needs of schools across the district (including core maintenance);
- Create a unified district Middle School;
- Add both educational and economic value for taxpayers;
- Enhance the delivery and quality of district programs through a collaboration with community partners.

With respect to the Middle School, the board is exploring the consolidation of grades 7th and 8th at the High School beginning in the Fall of 2022. The School Board and Administration believe that despite our best efforts, Middle School students need additional opportunities that can only be offered in a larger educational setting. We cannot do this across 4 middle schools with low student numbers; it simply isn't sustainable. The administration has been tasked with bringing forth a plan to the school board that addresses the following:

- Communicate a plan for community feedback;
- Develop mock schedules/programs/curricula;
- Present a cost/benefit analysis
 - Infrastructure
 - Personnel

The creation of a district middle school would result in the closure, or educational repurposing, of Castleton Village School for the 2022-2023 school year. As a result, Castleton Village School 6th graders would return to Castleton Elementary School.

In addition, the board is exploring moving Benson 7th and 8th grade students beginning next Fall (2021). We will have 8 students total, in grades 7 and 8. Currently, we have 2 teachers that are teaching across 5 grade levels. While we deeply appreciate the wonderful job these teachers are doing this is not a sustainable model.

The board will consider by way of a vote on December 7th to make Benson Village School a PreK-6 school with in-district choice for 7th and 8th grade. Should the school board decide to move in this direction they will provide transportation for Benson 7th and 8th graders to any Slate Valley middle school.

While there is still a tremendous amount of work to be done in regards to our reorganization, I wanted to make sure you are aware of the direction we are headed as a district. There will be time for feedback and participation in this process. While I know change can sometimes be hard, I am motivated by the fact that I believe a consolidated middle school is what is best for our students and the future of Slate Valley.

Best Regards,

Brooke Farrell
Superintendent