

# School Talk: Columbus Prepares for New School Year

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Last Saturday I saw my first Back-To-School commercial on TV. Although the advertisement on school clothes and materials did seem to be a little premature, the 2011-2012 school year will be here before we know it.

My first year in Columbus was a good experience that allowed me to learn a lot about our students, families and community. I continue to be impressed with the community and parental support for education. During my career in education, I have rarely witnessed the commitment to students that I have experienced here during the 2010-2011 school year. This provides me with a renewed sense of optimism and hope as we prepare for the 2011-2012 school year. However, to be honest, our preparation is not without challenges. Our District faces over a \$600,000 reduction in state funding (a 10% reduction in state funding from 2010-11) as we prepare to maintain and improve our services to students.

Through sacrifices from all staff members in the form of increased health care payments and retirement contributions, we were able to recover some of the loss in state funding. Additional cuts needed to cover the reduction in state funding came from district budget teams (teams made up of staff, administrators, and Board members recommending areas to reduce the budget) and the administration team. The cuts resulted in over \$600,000 of reduced resources and reductions in staff. Essentially, our staff will be doing more with less. The encouraging sign is that our staff has been working hard all summer preparing for the school year. We have many staff members working in our quality summer school program to provide students with the academic interventions in math and reading that the students will need to continue to be successful. We have many teachers working on curriculum teams, in all content areas, to improve the resources and instruction in classrooms this coming year. The commitment shows that even during these difficult times, our staff is working twelve months a year to ensure a quality education for our students. I am looking forward to working with them during this school year.

We also have some new faces on the School District Administration Team in 2011-2012. Jeff Mastin has replaced Connie Valenza as the Columbus High School Principal. Jeff previously served as the Senior/Junior High Principal in Oakfield. Brian Johnson has replaced Joanne Grassman as the Director of Student Services. Brian worked at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction where he served on the Special Education Team and as the lead consultant on Autism. I am excited about the experience and resources that Jeff and Brian bring to the families and children served by the Columbus School District.

Another change this school year will be the School Board Members joining me in writing articles for this School Talk section in the Columbus Journal. This will provide the parents, students and citizens an opportunity to get insight about our programs and services from a School Board Member perspective. This will be important as we continue down our path of improving teaching and learning for all students.

I am excited about the 2011-2012 school year. The commitments made by our School Board, Staff and Administration Team all point to a bright future for the Columbus Schools, even in a somewhat bleak financial picture. I am looking forward to my second year of service as your school superintendent.