

Jackson County School District

Superintendent's Update – May 12, 2020

Dr. John D. Strycker



Jackson County School District Students are Still Raising the Standard during COVID-19 Board also discusses district finances and facility plan midst COVID -19

The school buildings in Jackson County School District have been closed since March due to the COVID-19 outbreak, but that hasn't stopped learning from taking place across the district. Elementary and middle school students in JCSD have utilized hard copy packets, as necessary, and online comprehensive assessment and instruction program i-Ready for math and reading to continue their learning.

"I'm proud of our school community! Our parents, guardians, friends of the family, grandpas and grandmas have all united with us at school to continue learning during the COVID -19 outbreak – **and we have data to show it,**" said Dr. John Strycker, Superintendent of Jackson County Schools.

According to data released this week regarding the district's online instructional program i-Ready, student usage and performance for the past two months, students in Jackson County School District are not only utilizing i-Ready at home, but they are excelling with it. From March 16 – May 6, 2020, 67% of JCSD elementary and middle school students have used the i-Ready program in reading while 70% have used the program in math. These numbers are astounding considering that approximately 30% of the students in the district are currently without internet/device access.

What is more astounding is that data shows in areas where students are without internet/device access, they are still finding a way to get the job done. At St. Martin Upper Elementary, for instance, only 56% of students have home internet/device access, yet over 70% of these students are reported as using the i-Ready program over the past two months.

The numbers also show that students are not just logging on to the program, but they are also staying on for meaningful instruction and practice. In both reading and math, students have spent an average of three and a half hours per student on instruction. Additionally, the passing rate of the tasks being performed is quite impressive with 75% of students passing in reading tasks and 86% of students passing in math.

Dr. Penny Westfaul, Director of Curriculum and Central Office Administration, expressed, "We want to commend our parents and students for working diligently at home to maintain a high standard of learning in this difficult time."

In addition to student achievement, Dr. Strycker also updated the Board regarding district finances. "I am very pleased to report that we are about 3% above our already conservative Fund Balance reserve goal of 12% at 14.9% (each percent is about \$750,000). That is the good news. The challenging news is that there is a possibility that ad valorem taxes will be flat, interest revenue will be down, and MAEP funding is projected to be significantly less than the current year." Therefore, the district is currently projecting a decrease in local and state funding from the current year of \$1.8 million. In April, the district was projecting a local and state funding increase from the current year of \$1.5 million and has had to reduce this estimate by \$3.3 million.

After a lengthy discussion regarding finances and current curriculum and district initiatives, the Board decided to continue key investments like the ACT initiative and use the fund balance to weather the storm for now.

“We will closely monitor our finances as always; however, we feel strongly about our current focus on ACT and other initiatives and need to press forward,” said Board President Troy Frisbie.

The Jackson County School Board also discussed plans to proceed with the current facility plan which could include possible bond funding. The Board discussed next steps that include selecting the architectural/engineering firm that will work with the district for the project beginning with a complete facility plan.

“We need to begin our facility planning with a thorough study of the district’s mechanical, structural, electrical, grounds, and athletic facilities. We need to also consider enrollment trends and urban planning. We need our building drawings and mechanical processes organized and standardized. Then, we can draft a plan based off need from solid data,” said Superintendent Strycker.

Board President Troy Frisbie added, “We are approaching a facility plan because our students deserve the very best facilities our district can afford. While we are conservative with our spending, we need to properly serve our children.”

If anyone has questions or concerns, please call Superintendent John Strycker at 228-283-3000