

EPS Community,

It is hard to believe we are already into October. The beginning of a school year always moves quickly, and now that we have several weeks behind us, I wanted to share a few things happening across Evart Public Schools.

One of our biggest priorities continues to be improving literacy. We have talked quite a bit over the last couple of years about the work we are doing in this area, but I think it is important that our community also knows whether that work is actually making a difference.

This fall our elementary teachers completed their initial training in Bookworms, and we are now implementing the program in our classrooms. Bookworms is another piece of the literacy system we have been building through LETRS training, IMSE Orton-Gillingham+, coaching, and better use of student data.

We are beginning to see some encouraging results. Our DIBELS data showed the percentage of students performing well below benchmark decrease from 43% to 33%, while students performing above benchmark increased from 13% to 24%.

We aren't where we want to be yet. But when we invest this much time, effort, and money into improving something, we should expect results. These numbers give us some evidence that we are moving in the right direction.

We are also continuing to look for ways to provide more opportunities for our students.

Our College & Career work is expanding this year, including the use of Xello to help students begin thinking more intentionally about what they want to do after high school. We have also been fortunate to receive competitive grant funding that allowed us to make significant technology improvements at both the middle school and high school, including new computer labs and expanded opportunities involving career and technical education and artificial intelligence.

We don't believe being a smaller school district should mean our students have fewer opportunities. We may have to be creative about how we provide them, but we should

continue looking for ways to expose our students to experiences and technology that prepare them for what comes next.

Another area I want to continue talking about with our community is how we pay for improvements. We have a lot of needs. Every school district does. Our responsibility is to address those needs without automatically assuming the answer is asking our taxpayers for more money.

The approximately \$3.1 million elementary HVAC project is a good example. We now have a construction manager and architect working with the district to move that project forward. When completed, it will address aging heating equipment and finally provide air conditioning at the elementary school. More importantly, this project is being made possible through grant funding.

The same is true of many of our recent technology and school-safety improvements. We have been aggressive about pursuing grants and outside funding so that we can improve our schools without unnecessarily increasing the burden on our local taxpayers. I think our community deserves to know that, and it is something we intend to continue doing.

There are plenty of smaller things happening that matter too.

Our elementary MTSS work continues to grow. You will soon see new expectation signs throughout the elementary school designed to make expectations consistent in hallways, bathrooms, the cafeteria, recess, and arrival and dismissal areas. Our high school recently received grant funding to purchase new and replacement library books. Our transportation staff continues its safety training. We are also beginning the process of exploring outside management options for our food-service program to determine whether there is an opportunity to improve service and value for our students and families.

And sometimes it is worth recognizing the things that don't involve a new program or a grant at all.

October 2 was National Custodian Day. I enjoyed watching emails circulate throughout the district as staff members thanked our custodial and maintenance employees for

everything they do. Schools don't operate without people willing to do work that most people never see. Someone opens the building. Someone cleans the classroom. Someone fixes the boiler, drives the bus, prepares the food, helps the struggling student, coaches the team, answers the phone, and stays late when something doesn't go according to plan. We have a lot of those people at Evert.

There are certainly things we need to improve, and there always will be. But I also think it is important every once in a while to look around and recognize the progress being made.

Our students have more opportunities. Our teachers have better tools. We are improving our facilities. We are paying closer attention to our academic results. And we are finding outside resources to help us accomplish things that would otherwise fall on our local taxpayers.

Thank you for your continued support of Evert Public Schools.

Dan Boyer
Superintendent
Evert Public Schools