

Wheatland USD 292

"Teamwork=Excellence; Excellence=Achievement"



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To: Members of the Wheatland USD 292 Communities
From: Gary Kraus – Superintendent of Schools
Re: Possible Suspension of School Funding

Due to a developing situation related to school finance, I felt it necessary to share important information with the Wheatland patrons and tax payers. You may have heard statements in the media to the effect that the Kansas Supreme Court may close schools on July 1. It is important to understand that this is a very generalized statement and not completely accurate.

The current situation is this: the Kansas Supreme Court found that the current school finance law is unconstitutional because it is not equitable for all Kansas districts. The court has stated that all students must have similar opportunities for an education through similar tax efforts. The court has further stated that because the current system of school finance is unconstitutional, "*no valid school finance system exists through which funds for fiscal year 2017 can lawfully be raised, distributed or spent.*" The Kansas Legislature has until June 30 (the end of fiscal year 2016) to enact a system for school finance that is constitutional.

Unfortunately, this is the type of situation that can lead to finger pointing and attempts to assign blame. However, assigning blame is not the real issue. The State of Kansas has three separate branches, each with its own set of responsibilities. The Legislature is responsible for establishing law and making appropriations. The Executive branch is responsible for enforcing the law. The Judiciary is responsible for interpreting the law using the state's constitution as a guide.

As I stated above, assigning blame is not the issue. The real issue right now is how this will impact our kids. Schools, and by extension, our kids are caught in the middle. At this point, it is impossible to know what will happen prior to the June 30 deadline. But as a district leader, I must make plans for the various scenarios in order to be as ready as possible for students on August 25th. At this point, it appears there is a chance that any operations after July 1 will be conducted solely with cash reserves. The Wheatland District is far from flush with regard to cash balances. With that in mind, I must also take in to account there are certain essentials that cannot be ignored. Examples include property insurance, utilities, maintenance and preparing buildings, office and clerical work necessary to minimize any disruption to the education of our students. As of now, there is no clear idea of exactly how this situation will play out, making it very difficult to develop a specific plan if funding is suspended on July 1. Moving forward, we are going to be even more conservative in our spending by identifying those items that simply cannot be delayed. This will serve as a means of maximizing our resources for the start of the next fiscal year.