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Set stability for schools in Marysville

New leadership, its school board and the community can restore the school district's finances.

By Chris Rekydal

For The Herald

To the Marysville community: After more than a year of financial monitoring by my office, where we have steadily increased our levels of involvement and oversight, the Marysville School District is at a critical juncture on its path to financial stability.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's financial oversight role is spelled out in state law, and it is very rare that any school district has needed this level of oversight. We have worked hard to support the school board as its members faced several hard decisions recently. The remaking of the Marysville district's executive leadership was and remains a high priority to ensure fiscal stability and longterm success; prior leadership did not have the experience or background in Washington state public school finances needed to address financial challenges of this scale.

With the board's hiring of Dr. David Burgess as interim superintendent and my appointment of Dr. Arthur Jarvis as special administrator, the district has a unique opportunity to leverage the extensive expertise of two veteran school district leaders to put the Marysville School District on the path to long-term financial health and stability.

Through their work together, Drs. Burgess and Jarvis and the school board will be making additional changes to the district's leadership, budget and internal processes. While these changes may be difficult, they are necessary to fix the district's budget and repair trust with the community.

Getting through the changes that are coming will require school district leadership and the Marysville community to continue working together with the shared purpose of protecting the school district's future and regaining independence. With district management, labor, Tribal leaders and community leaders all engaged, the future for the district looks brighter.

The district's current financial distress, though problematic, is solvable. I want to extend a huge thank you to the Marysville community for passing the district's most recent local levy. Without local levy dollars, no school district can offer programs and services beyond the basics that are funded by the state. Having grown up in Snohomish County, I know that Marysville has much higher aspirations for its students and families than the bare minimum!

Serving Marysville's students well in perpetuity will require the school board and the other interested parties to make hard choices together in the short-term to establish a solid financial footing for the long-term.

With new leadership, the district will make significant progress toward a balanced budget this year, and financial reserves will be restored over the next two years by "saving" more than is spent annually. To do this, my office will partner with the Legislature to increase school funding that is the state's obligation for basic education programming, that at times, the district has had to pay for out of local levies; district leaders will manage staffing levels and facilities within their means; and the community will need to maintain its commitment to the local share of education funding, approximately 15 percent of the district's total budget.

Sports, extracurriculars, additional support staff, some technology, and competitive staff pay are just some of the opportunities provided for students and paid for with levies. In short, it will take a partnership that is now well underway with new district leadership. Please support these leaders with grace and patience over the next year and more as they right-size the district's budget to ensure long-term success.

I am confident that the Marysville School District will emerge stronger from this, though the work may take multiple years. It has not been easy — and it won't be easy — but nothing worth doing ever is. Marysville is worth the effort!

To the Marysville community: Thank you. Thank you for getting involved, maintaining high standards, and standing shoulderto- shoulder to advocate for your children and your community. Your engagement, voice and partnership will ensure that your school district stands the test of time.

Chris Rekydal is the state Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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