

The holiday season presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the past year and look toward the future.

*“Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation,” Nelson Mandela said. “They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth who care for and protect our people.”*

Mandela spoke those words at a school dedication. I found it appropriate as we near the completion of work at Elk Ridge and Wilkeson elementary schools and begin construction tasks at Glacier Middle School.

Students in the White River School District are blessed to have a community that treasures them and believes they are the leaders for tomorrow. It is with a grateful heart we thank the community for the recent passage of our bonds and levies. We regard each completed construction project and every day of learning as a gift from our community. Sometimes it is hard to put into words how much we appreciate this community’s support, so this month we put it into pictures on the adjoining page so you can see the progress being made – the promises kept. It is a holiday and thank you card rolled into one.

We are also thankful the state has started to tackle fair education funding, but with the New Year around the corner we are urging them to do more. The state’s new education funding plan will not fully cover our special education needs.

While our percentage of special education students (in relationship to general education students) has decreased slightly over the past five years, expenditures continue to increase. In 2017-18, our costs for special education were more than \$5.7 million. Revenue from the state was \$4.6 million. In other words, costs total 125 percent more than what we received in revenue.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is proposing a tiered model of funding based on the number of minutes a student receives special education services each week. Under this model, we would receive approximately \$50,000 more in the next fiscal year. In order to meet the needs of our special education student population, our expenditures typically increase 10 to 15 percent each year. Conservatively, we could experience an increase of \$580,000 in expenditures in fiscal year 2019-20. The proposed new funding would cover less than 10 percent of the increase, and would have no impact on the already existing deficit.

At White River we find the funding to care for and educate ALL OUR students, but each year it becomes more difficult. Meeting the learning needs of our students and providing the appropriate service is the right thing to do, and we are asking the state to step up. We believe the funding model proposed by OSPI will not help us or other districts cover the true cost of special education.

In the recent passing of President George H.W. Bush, I found this reassuring quote: *“Think about every problem, every challenge, we face. The solution to each starts with education.”*

We urge you to educate yourself about the funding model proposed by OSPI and then discuss it with our Legislators. We are here to answer your questions. When the 2019 Legislative session opens we encourage you to talk with, or write, your legislative representatives. Let them know you are watching them and how they support OUR schools and OUR students. Educate them on the needs in our district. We’ve done some of the legwork for you.

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Let me end where I began with a quote from Nelson Mandela, *“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

Thank you.