

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, January 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of public education in countless ways over the past ten months and has required an inordinate amount of planning, creativity, resources and focus. Despite these challenges, we remain fully guided by our Plainville Community Schools' Vision: *To inspire and prepare lifelong learners to follow their passion, engage in their communities, and positively impact our global society.* To fulfill this vision and aligned goals, we must maintain a commitment to operating our school district as effectively and efficiently as possible. One of the primary responsibilities each year is to develop and put forth a school district budget that adequately supports our district vision and goals while remaining fiscally responsible to taxpayers.

This year, it is important to note and emphasize the financial, social, emotional, and academic impact that the pandemic has had on public education across the nation, state, and in our school district in Plainville. While we continue to strive each day to provide the best education possible for *all* students, we also continue to endure the limits, constraints, and ramifications of COVID-19, and the responsibility we have to invest in the appropriate resources to ensure our students continue to advance academically, socially and emotionally in the 2021-22 school year and beyond.

Our budget planning process for the 2021-22 school year began over the summer and during the fall, when our school and district administrative team developed priorities aligned with what we believe will best support positive outcomes for *students, teaching, and learning* during the next school year, and beyond. Through this process, areas of investment and reallocation of resources are identified for each school and department in alignment with our Plainville Community Schools' *Vision*. We continue to pursue the goals within our strategic plan, with a specific emphasis on ensuring equitable opportunities for all students, supporting social and emotional learning needs, and working toward mastery of critical skills to support life-long success. This work is highlighted by our overarching *Portrait of the Graduate*

framework, which illustrates the primary tenets for students districtwide including being communicative, mindful, resilient, innovative, and collaborative.

Through the budget planning process this year the two questions that guided our planning included, “*What challenges will we face moving forward?*” and “*What systematic and individualized supports will be needed?*” And while it is impossible to predict with precision what will happen going forward, it is imperative that we do our best to plan for resources and supports in our key focus areas together with our typical operational expenses and contractual obligations such as salaries, health insurance, and utilities. As a result of the COVID-19 impact on our educational system and our collective goals, areas of investment have been identified that include: remediation and acceleration programs and supports for students during the school day, after school, and over the summer, a School Psychologist to support social and emotional needs, a Family-School Liaison to build bridges of support, care and home-school consistency, additional academic tutor supports for English and Mathematics at our high school, after school skills and enrichment programs, and continued adaptive/responsive software and programs to allow students to practice independently and with guided support.

Over the next couple of weeks, the *Superintendent’s Proposed Budget for Plainville Community Schools* will be reviewed and adjusted through a series of budget work sessions with the Board of Education before becoming the *Board of Education Approved Budget*. This budget will then be shared with the Town Council for further review and consideration. Ultimately, the Board of Education and the Town of Plainville budgets will be voted upon by Plainville residents in late April through the all-day budget vote. From the initial planning stages for next year’s budget through the final preparations as we bring the proposed school district budget before voters, we remain committed to being thoughtful and mindful in our approach to budgeting. Throughout the budgeting process, we will model the qualities shared within our *PCS Portrait of the Graduate* by remaining *communicative, mindful, resilient, innovative, and collaborative*, while striving to do our very best for the students, families and staff of Plainville Community Schools.