



Columbus Superintendent responds to students' questions following school sit-in

By Dr. Marlene Johnson

Following are questions that Dr. Marlene Johnson fielded from students during the school sit-in held last week. The questions were in regard to potential cut-backs that the school may be facing. Dr. Johnson attempted to answer all of the questions asked, and she also explained the school's position during these financial times. Questions were received anonymously.

If we get rid of the librarian para who will watch the library?

We currently have two district paras and one librarian. We would be going to one para and one librarian. They would alternate buildings. There would always be someone there to assist you.

Why keep a teacher that doesn't teach right, instead of keeping a teacher that cares and explains good?

It isn't up to me who stays or goes. That will be determined by the parameters of the Master Contract. Spots that may come open between now and the beginning of the next school year also will determine it.

Why are we cutting Math and Reading, our lowest test scores?

We are not cutting reading and math. You will still get reading and math. Your class size may be a bit larger, however research states that larger class sizes do not impact student achievement. You will get reading in Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, etc. (all areas support reading) and if you need additional support, we will find ways to provide to you that support.

Why did you guys take over our sit in?

We wanted to help make this opportunity an even greater one for your learning. It is important to know how to have a voice and do so in a respectful manner. We wanted to make this sit-in a positive learning experience for those that wanted to participate and still provide class for those students that didn't want to participate.

Our enrollment is going down in part because people don't trust in our school anymore. It's not because kids are moving to Mexico. Won't getting rid of really good teachers cause more people to leave our school?

When we look at the reason why we lost 75 students this year, it was because students moved to another district in Iowa, moved out of the state, or moved out of the USA. There were also a couple that dropped out and one or two were incarcerated. That data was analyzed to determine if it was because they were staying in Columbus District but not going to school here. People's lives change and the data indicates what is happening. We want the same thing you want in our school. We want high quality teachers in every classroom, as you do. We want teachers who care about you, as you do. We want teachers to push you hard, as you do. That doesn't mean that I can do anything about needing to reduce staff. The Master Contract

will determine which teachers are reduced. Please let your building principal or me know in the future if you feel a teacher is doing a great job or not a great job. While you can't evaluate a teacher, your input can help us make our great school even greater. Thanks, by the way, for letting me know that my words offended you on the newscast. I have changed my wording for answering that question in the future. I sure wasn't intending to hurt or offend any of you. My apologies extended. Some think I said "some". Because that is what the data said. But from now on I will say, some moved out of the USA.

Why was it never an option for the superintendent to resign and be rehired on a lesser pay contract or share a superintendent with another district?

Great question. I have a two-year contract. However, at the end of the two-year contract, I have suggested that the board look at all possibilities at that time and determine what they want to do.

Why don't we fire the bad teachers and leave the good ones?

The evaluation process is in place to help teachers become better at helping you learn. It is not in place so that we "fire people". Everybody has a different opinion on who is "bad". I would like to hear why you feel a teacher is "bad". What you think is bad may actually be good, or visa versa. That is why we have evaluation tools to assist us in not making judgments based on personal opinions. Please communicate with your building principal or me when you feel strongly about a teacher one way or another. That will help us hear how you feel and why.

This is America, keep the Carlson's.

You are right. It is America and so we have rules and regulations and laws to follow when we need to reduce teachers. That is why we don't even know the names of the people we are reducing yet. I have to complete the process following the Master Contract. All the teachers know this process and they expect me to follow it. It is the law.

Why weren't we told these cuts were going to happen?

We have written articles in the paper about our finances and talked about it at board meetings that have been open to the public.

Which teachers are actually for sure leaving?

We don't know yet. I have not worked through the process that is required by the Master Contract. We

also won't know even after that. Sometimes, people move, change jobs, change careers, or opt to do other things besides teach. When that happens, people who may have been told they need to be reduced could have the opportunity to come back to work in our district, according to the Master Contract.

Don't cutbacks have a negative drawback on the attitude of students and teacher relationships?

Anytime a school district needs to reduce spending, it is hard on everyone. But, it also can help us become stronger and closer after the initial feelings calm down.

Why are you doing this?

If I don't, the state could eventually come in and close the school. We can't spend more money than we get.

Has anyone asked why kids are leaving the district? How can we help?

We did send out a survey to those that live here but go somewhere else. The rest moved out of the district, out of the state, or out of the USA, quit, or were incarcerated. We do know the reasons. We published those reasons in the paper this year. How can you help? You can do your part by being the best you can be.

Who can we talk to above you, because even though you let us talk, you are not listening.

You can always contact the Iowa Department of Education.

What do you think the loss of teachers will do to the test scores?

I expect the teachers that remain to work with our students and continue on the quest to raise test scores and raise them. It takes hard work by both the teachers and students. It also takes hard work by administrators, stakeholders, parents, and other staff members. We can and will succeed together.

Why can't Mr. Maeder and/or the Superintendent take a pay cut to pay for the teachers?

The board determines what we are paid.

I honestly think that going with seniority is not the best solution. Are you going to consider "all of it"?

In past history, only seniority has been considered, so it will be different for the district to use "all" the rest. I am planning on using "all".

Who is getting fired?

No one. Reducing staff due to finances is not firing them. Big difference. Firing is done when someone isn't doing his or her job. Reducing just means we have fewer kids so we need fewer teachers and staff. That is why we reduce.

How is laying off 2 of the best

teachers in the school good for the education?

First, we don't know who is getting laid off. Second, it isn't ever fun to reduce staff, ever. But, we can't spend more money than we take in. It makes me sad to lose anyone on our staff.

Is there any other way to save money besides cutting teachers?

80% of the general fund goes to paying staff. Since we are over spending the general fund, we need to reduce staff. We have created a list of many other things to save money as well for the other 20% that is in the general fund. We will be working very hard to save in every way we can.

How many paras do we need? Why don't we cut them?

We are cutting paras that impact the general budget. Most of our paras are paid out of different funds. We still need to look at those, however, for next year. Why? Because we need to ensure that their wages are fully paid by funds that are not from the general fund when possible.

Did the state come up with the packages or the school board or superintendent?

The superintendent created the packages after getting input from stakeholders, staff, and administrators. I never said the state came up with the packages. I did, however, take training at the state level to learn how to do this process to reduce the budget. Maybe that is where the word "state" came in the picture. Plus, we had people from the state look at our budget for a second and third opinion.

Do I lift?

As a coach of 17 years, I know the importance of lifting as my athletes lifted and I trained them to lift. Currently, since I started being Superintendent, I have not had time to lift, but I do plan on getting back to it as it is not only good for sports, it is good for life and being healthy. I also want to make sure I get back to riding my bike and golfing this summer.

Can the evaluations of the teachers be published or made public?

No, those are confidential and it would be against the law to talk about them to the public or publish them.

Dr. Johnson, why was the last time I saw you in this building during school, November?

I've been there, maybe not where you were or where you saw me. I do enjoy coming over to see how things are going. Your concern about this helps me know you like it when I am in the HS/MS and that it is important to you. I hope you "spot" me soon.

Briefly -

Legion Auxiliary to meet

The American Legion Auxiliary will meet Tuesday, February 12th at 7 p.m. Hostesses are Fran Boline and Tammy Martin. Please remember to bring children's gifts to the meeting: stuffed animals, toys, coloring books, crayons, etc. We will be taking these to the Pediatric wing of the University Hospital.

American Legion to hold fish fry

The next Columbus Junction American Legion Fish/Chicken Fry will be held on Saturday evening, February 9th. Also, mark March 9th on your calendar as the final one. Come and enjoy the great food and a fun evening.

Alumni Banquet scheduled

The Columbus area Alumni Banquet will take place at Roundy Elementary School on June 8, 2013. Social Hour will begin at 5:30 p.m., and Dinner will be served at 6:00 p.m. Special recognition will be given to the 50-year (1963) class and the 25-year (1988) class. Put the date on your calendar now! Tickets are \$10 and are available at both Columbus Junction Banks.

Cooks Night Out

Cooks' Night Out will be held Wednesday, February 13, 2013, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Letts United Methodist Church, Letts, Iowa. The public is invited—there is no charge for the supper. Come and visit with your neighbors. The cooks on the Committee are planning a great meal.

Daffodils orders to be taken

Volunteers throughout Louisa County are taking daffodil orders through Friday, February 15. Daffodils will be delivered the week of March 11. Every year, the American Cancer Society Daffodil Days program brings hope to people with cancer, and to their friends and families across the country. Funds raised during Daffodil Days will support services to patients and their families in Louisa County. The most popular items for Daffodil Day 2013 Giving Opportunities are a bunch of 10 daffodils; a vase and bunch of 10 daffodils; potted mini daffodils; or bear with a bunch of daffodils. If you are interested in ordering one of the daffodil opportunities, please feel free to contact Jean Bernel at 319-523-3245 or 563-299-5639.

Half Hour Club to meet

Half Hour Club will meet on Tuesday, February 12, 2013, at 1:30 p.m. at Colonial Estates Assisted Living. Program: Kay Perkins - School Day Experiences. Members are asked to bring school items to show. Hostesses: Judy Chapman, Martha Murry and Janet Pretz.

Iowa Youth Survey

ALL PARENTS of COLUMBUS 9TH-12TH GRADE STUDENTS are invited and ENCOURAGED to complete the Iowa Youth Survey from February 4 - March 1, 2013. The survey can be found on the school's homepage at www.columbuscsd.org under Parent Links. Columbus is participating in the Iowa Safe and Supportive Schools grant and parental completion of the survey is a requirement. Please go to the website and complete the 20 minute survey today. Call Dayle Pretz, Grant Coordinator, at 728-2231 ext. 9403 with questions.

Pleasant Grove Pancake supper

Pleasant Grove Community Church's annual sausage and pancake supper will take place today, Wednesday, February 6th from 4:30-7:00 p.m. Free-will offering will be taken and all are welcome to come and enjoy.

Two Rivers Lodge wine tasting

Two Rivers Lodge, three miles north of Columbus Junction, will hold a wine tasting event on Saturday, February 16th. It will be from 6-9 p.m. and the cost is \$20 per person at the door. Come relax with the Creeping Charlie Band. Sample wine, micro-beers, food and door prizes. Please R.S.V.P. by Wednesday, February 13th so we know how much food to prepare. Call Two Rivers Lodge at 319-725-6180. Leave a message on the recorder or with Fender.

Amateur Radio testing set

The Muscatine Area Volunteer Examiners will be testing for all classes of amateur radio operator licenses on Sunday, February 10, at 1:30 PM at the Flickinger Learning Center, 413 Mulberry Avenue, in Muscatine. (Use the 5th street parking lot and entrance across from Hy-Vee Drugstore.) For more information, visit muscatinehams.org.

Amateur Radio Club to meet

The Muscatine Amateur Radio Club will meet Monday, February 11, at 7:00 pm in the upper-level conference room at the Musser Public Library, 304 Iowa Avenue in Muscatine. All amateur radio operators, and those interested in learning more about amateur radio, are invited to attend. For more information, visit muscatinehams.org.

Keep Columbus Beautiful to meet

Keep Columbus Beautiful meeting Tuesday, February 12 3:30 at the Civic Center. Come to the spring planning meeting to discuss 2013 projects including community gardens, the quilt garden, Keep Columbus Beautiful week, and crosswalks. Fresh ideas and new volunteers are always welcome!

An area hog operation loses over 1,000 pigs in fire

Over 1,000 pigs were killed by fair last Friday in an area hog operation. The operation was owned by Mipa Hog Farms which is located about ten miles west of Columbus Junction. Mipa Hog Farms are owned by the Braun Family in Columbus Junction.

The fire was discovered about 1:00 p.m. Friday, and the Columbus Junction Fire Department responded. There were no human injuries reported.

The hog operation included eight connected buildings which were spread over twenty areas. Two farrowing houses were engulfed by flames when the fire fighters arrived. Officials reported that over 600 sows were killed, with the balance of the pigs being piglets.

No reports of the cause of the fire have been received as of press time.

Louisa County Habitat to dedicate 12th Home

LCHH will hold a dedication and open house of their twelfth habitat home Sunday, February 10 at 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm. The house, located at 2607 Burlington Street, Columbus City, if the future home of the Sophia Torres family. There will be a brief ceremony presenting the keys and a bible to the family. Refreshments will be served. Everyone is invited to attend.

The Torres family was chosen by the LCHH Family Selection Committee to receive the house at a low, interest-free mortgage. In addition, they were required to put

in 350 hours of sweat equity toward the building of the home and other LCHH projects.

The goal of Habitat for Humanity is to eliminate poverty housing in the country and world. LCHH volunteers and supporters recognize the need for decent, affordable housing in Louisa County. Since Louisa County does not have a large industrial base, the project has involved hundreds of donors and volunteers contributing money, materials, and time. Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1976 by Millard Fuller and is headquartered in Americus, Georgia. To date they have built about 450,000 homes worldwide, making Habitat for Humanity the largest homebuilder in the US.

A See-saw Week of Weather

By Mary Masonholder Wilson

Weather change is not new. The dinosaurs became extinct because a cold spell came, and they lost their food source. We know this. And we know weather changes will continue to happen in the future.

But when you have a week like we've had here; it makes one "scratch his/her head." How can it be almost 60 degrees on Tuesday, January 29, and pouring rain by afternoon? Then on Wednesday, January 30th, it is 20 some degrees and snowing (this area got close to 5 inches), and by Thursday, January 31st, the temperature is minus 2 degrees.

It's because we live in Iowa, that's why. You know the old saying, "If you don't like the weather in Iowa, stay 24 hours and it will change."

Columbus Junction and surrounding areas saw a drastic weather

and temperature change. But so did many other parts of the country. Tornadoes and tornado warnings were widespread throughout the southern areas of the US. Much damage was done by these storms.

Flooding was also rampant. In some parts of the country, including Iowa, the ground was so frozen the rain water could not be absorbed, and run-off rain caused many problems. Cars were inundated with water. Homes and basements were flooded.

Many people are suffering hardships due to the weather. With a thin layer of ice underneath the snow, it is particularly treacherous for the elderly and those driving on the roads. Area schools have had to cancel another day (Wednesday) and a late start on Thursday.

One thing we know for sure. Mother Nature is in charge. Whatever comes our way, we'll have to deal with it.

