

Donegal School District
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Superintendent of Schools
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I have been asked to share a little bit about our District, where we were, where we are now, and where we need to go.

Due to a steadily increasing student enrollment, we found ourselves taking a serious look at our aging facilities and the number of students in each. At that time, our high school students had long outgrown the brick and mortar school built in 1954; in fact, over one quarter of the students were housed in modulars behind the main school building. Our elementary student numbers had grown, and we purchased a nearby preschool and turned it into a Kindergarten Center. Some of our other elementary students were receiving their daily instruction in a small community school, part of which had been built when Abraham Lincoln was president.

After much debate and input from multiple stakeholders, we decided that our next step, our next priority, was to build a new high school as well as an athletic complex to better support our students.

We went to a referendum; it failed. We scaled back the proposed project to include just the high school and went to a second referendum; it failed.

What next? This is a frugal District, one that strives consistently to make prudent financial decisions and to spend our taxpayers' dollars wisely. With fresh eyes on our finances, it was determined that we could and would move forward to build a new high school. We are seated in that new school today, despite the fact that one month prior to completion, there was a fire in the auxiliary gymnasium. Although the fire resulted in approximately six million dollars in damages, most of which were covered by insurance, we were able to open on time thanks to the extra efforts of many individuals.

That timely opening was critical as other plans hinged upon it:

1. The Kindergarten Center and the Maytown Elementary School were closed and sold.
2. Students in grades 7 and 8 moved into the now vacant old high school building which became the Donegal Junior High School.
3. An elementary school and an adjacent middle school became one building, the Donegal Intermediate School, and housed students in grades three through six.
4. Our other elementary building became the Donegal Primary School for our youngest children in kindergarten through second grade.

In addition to the building of the high school, we renovated the Donegal Intermediate and the Donegal Junior High Schools; the three building projects totaled 63 million dollars. We entered into each of these, much needed, long-awaited building projects in good faith that the State would honor its financial commitment and obligation through the PlanCon process. As you are well aware, the State failed to do so, unfortunately for us and many other Districts.

Multiple times a year, for several years, we have asked when our PlanCon reimbursements would come to us. This continues to be a timely question, especially as we seek to present a balanced budget each year to our Board of School Directors. It doesn't matter what webinars we watch, what email or telephone answers we receive, or what articles we read, the bottom line answer remains, "We don't know".

Yes, this District has come a long way with our facility improvements, from decades during which we talked about holding things together with duct tape to hosting today's meeting in this beautiful school, but our work doesn't stop here.

Our primary school needs heating and cooling renovations, and the projected cost, depending on the scope, could be one million plus. When can we begin this work?

A free-standing wrestling and physical education area, built decades ago by members of our District and community, has been closed for several years, unable to be used due to structural integrity concerns. When can we address this issue?

Various improvements need to be made to multiple athletic fields. How soon can we begin this process?

We would like to move forward but are hindered by the failure to receive our PlanCon reimbursement, which, at this time, is approximately 1.5 million dollars.

I am pleased that this Committee is taking a serious look at PlanCon, and as you do so, I understand that PlanCon requirements and the related financial support may well change for the future. My concern, however, is for the present, for my District and others that made decisions based in good faith on the established PlanCon protocol.

We need our State to honor its ethical obligation and to promptly deliver the reimbursement that is due to us. It will allow us to move forward to make further improvements to better support our 3000 students. I ask you to move beyond talk. I ask you to act and promptly dispense PlanCon monies to the Donegal School District and others in the PlanCon pipeline.