



PULASKI COUNTY SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of the Superintendent

Friday, August 20, 2010

Dear Parents of the Pulaski County Special School District Learning Community,

I want to thank you all for the numerous e-mails and calls I have received related to your experiences with the new bell schedule. I have not had the opportunity to respond individually to every call or e-mail due to the tremendous volume, but I am reading them as fast as they come in, and I crafted this letter to blanket as many of your concerns as possible. I personally visited about 10 schools yesterday and talked with many who are extremely elated about the schedule and others who shared hardships with me. While I know I can never please everyone with decisions I make as an instructional leader and superintendent, I want to be as responsive as possible to the schools where traffic and other extenuating factors are creating extreme hardships. I hope all of you realize it is never my intention to make your lives difficult as I seek to position this district to provide a world-class experience for every student.

In speaking individually with board members, they have recommended that I immediately reassess our bell schedule with input from all of our school communities, and I am beginning that process immediately. Learning communities are pleased or displeased with the bell schedule for various reasons, and I want to approach solutions individualized to the needs of our school communities. As a first step, I have asked our Executive Director of Communications to coordinate an online survey, which will be available at www.pcassd.org next week, and options for preferred start and end times for each school will be listed for your input. Once I have results from that survey, I will go to our board during my budget session with them in September to discuss possible options related to our current transportation system. Our limitation with our current transportation system is that the same bus and driver transport both the secondary and elementary students, and the window for our bell schedule is determined by the roughly 700 square miles the drivers must complete to get all students to school on time.

The question related to the additional 40 minutes for elementary schools is simply one of aligning our district for federal and state mandates that are looming for either increased instructional minutes during the day or a longer school year. Having been part of a U.S. delegation that met with top education officials in China, I know firsthand that when our students have to compete at a global level with demanding world-class standards we are at an extreme disadvantage. Our current model for the academic

school year in this country is, for the most part, an agricultural model with the shortest school day and year of any industrialized country in the world. The current administration in the White House is holding districts more accountable for bringing districts to world-class standards by lengthening the school year or looking for opportunities within the school day. When I was named your superintendent, we were not honoring the Pulaski Association of Classroom Teachers (PACT) agreement and were awaiting a judge's ruling, yet we needed to begin scheduling. State law requires 40 minutes to be used for teacher plan time within the school day, and our district previously had not been doing that because PACT had negotiated teachers' plan time to be before or after school. Please understand that when we schedule the students' day, we use that 40 minutes for instructional time. Students may be in electives or other classes while teachers plan; they return to their teachers for instruction. Following state law, too, was an important consideration when I made the decision to extend the day.

I deeply believe in the promise of this district. I am a native of this state, a former teacher in this district, and a product of Arkansas' K-12 and college institutions who moved to Oregon and was able to compete at a world-class standard in a global environment. I return as your superintendent with that desire for every student in this district. I want to simply close this letter with the paragraph below that I wrote to you on April 26, 2010, when I was appointed your superintendent:

I know one thing for sure: PCSSD can be the most cutting-edge, progressive and innovative district in this state and country. It will not be easy or painless. In reaching the promise of our potential as a district, it is going to feel uncomfortable, risky, volatile, and threatening for some of you in our learning communities. No school district community, or individual for that matter, reaches a level of desired gain or change without experiencing pain. However, the sense of urgency is now. Our students cannot wait. We are about to embark on a journey as a learning community to reach our promise as a district in which failure is not an option.

Cordially,

Charles L. Hopson, Ph.D.