



Hawk Talk

As the 2010-11 school year comes near an end, this newsletter is intended to provide readers an update on financial forecast information, charter school details, and other positive academic related progress throughout our existing K-12 schools.

Budget Forecast

“Hello, from the River Valley School District Business Office!”

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and share my excitement about my appointment as the new Business Manager for the River Valley School District. I am very proud and feel very fortunate to be back in the River Valley area serving a district I have so much passion and pride for.

Let me share some information about my background and experience. After graduating from River Valley High School in 1995, I received my bachelor’s degree in Business Management from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Shortly thereafter, I earned my teaching certification in Business Education from Concordia University. I began my career in education teaching middle and high school business education for two years in the Cochrane-Fountain City school district. For the past 6.5 years, I taught high school business education in the Monona Grove school district. While at Monona Grove, I earned a masters degree in school business management from UW-Whitewater.

As business manager for our district my office oversees the school district budget and finances, building and grounds, food service, network administration and other auxiliary services. With my “open door” policy, I hope you will find me to be open, honest and compassionate about the River Valley School District.

One of the top priorities for the business office is to develop an annual budget that is built to meet the educational philosophy, goals, and graduate learner outcomes established by our district. The annual budget also needs to be developed based on principals of long-term fiscal planning. This year and in the years to come we will continue to encounter many fiscal challenges. I have included a graph that provides the most updated five-year projection for our district. I look forward to working with the school board,

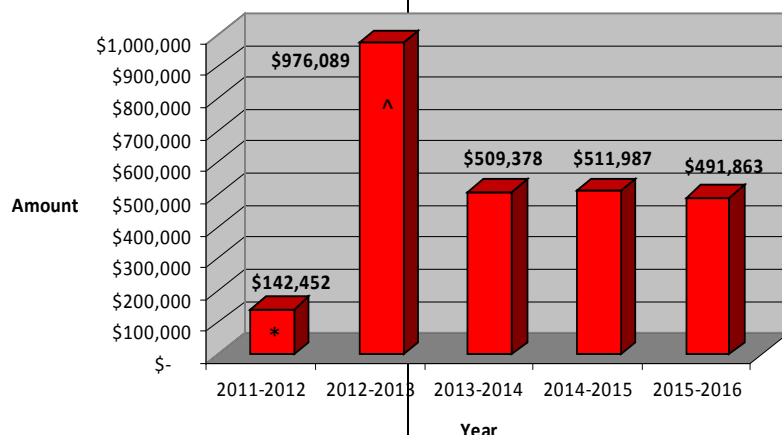
administrative team, staff, and community to resolve these challenges.

The youth of River Valley are very fortunate to have a community that has always been supportive in providing them with a great education. We are also fortunate to have a very dedicated teaching, support and administrative staff that always have our children’s best interest at heart. As our district motto states, we strive to “Dream. Discover. Achieve.”

To date, our Board has cut the budget by over \$400,000 for 2011-12. These cost reductions have resulted in reduced staff positions and retiree cost savings. The Budget Committee and full Board will work with administration in developing a list of future cuts for 2012-13 and beyond.

For further information related to school finance, please contact Business Manager Brian Krey or Superintendent Jamie Benson at 588-2551.

River Valley School District - Projected Annual Deficit



*Includes \$395,000 of one-time Federal Aid (Education Jobs Fund)
^ 2013-2014 assumes state aid per pupil increase of \$200 (per DPI)

Middle School

“What’s Happening at the Middle School These Days?”

The Middle School continues to be a busy place of learning and fun for students! Below is a brief summary of 6th-8th academic activities.

The 6th graders have grown immensely and it’s amazing at how they change from the start of the year. One activity they were all busy with recently was the writing of persuasive letters for Language Arts class. In Reading, the students are creating poems and learning how fun poetry can be! World War II is being explored in their U.S. History class, which is always a student favorite.

7th graders find themselves studying southern Asia in Geography class, while using flowcharts, tables, and symbolic representations in Math 7. Mr. Licht has students using traditional sheet metal tools to build tool trays in Exploring Technology. You’d think you were under the sea while traveling through Ms. York’s Biology room, as there are many student-made sea creatures lurking in the corner as students have fun while learning about life in the ocean. These 7th graders are starting to look (and act) more like 8th graders as June approaches!

When speaking with the 8th grade class, they all agree that they are ready for high school! Solving equations is the current topic of study in all Math classes and mineral identification and characteristics is being studied in Earth Science. Project Citizen has been the focus in Civics class and the students are hoping to repeat a state championship and national finish last year. Mr. Radtke and

the teachers are reminding all 8th graders to finish their school year strongly while enjoying the end of their middle school years!

Another fantastic opportunity for students will take place at the end of May when our students will perform in the school play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, after having in-school learning experiences with actors from American Players Theatre. The year will conclude with class trips, an 8th grade overnight “lock-in” event, and the annual 8th grade recognition ceremony, celebrating another successful year and preparing to transition to the high school.

High School

“New and Improved!”

It’s been an exciting year at River Valley High School with new ideas taking hold and coming to life! It is our belief that these changes will continue to have a positive impact on the academic achievement of our students for years to come.

The Laude System - The class of 2011 is the first class to graduate under the new Laude System. The Laude System replaces the old class rank system and encourages students to challenge themselves by taking honors and/or advanced level courses to better prepare them for the future. The system is based on the student’s GPA multiplied by their honor points (earned by taking designated honor courses) which will then equal their Laude Score. Students can earn honor points in all curricular areas, thus allowing a student to challenge themselves in their area of interest. To earn Laude recognition, a student must earn a minimum of a 3.2 cumulative GPA and must earn a minimum Laude Score of 16. The Laude

system has three levels of recognition:

Cum Laude -
(With honor/distinction)
Laude Score of 16 – 31.99

Magna Cum Laude -
(With great honor/distinction)
Laude Score of 32 – 49.99

Summa Cum Laude -
(With highest honor/distinction)
Laude Score of 50 or higher

Student feedback regarding the change to the Laude System has been positive. Initial data shows correlations between a high Laude Score and a higher ACT score, which in turn leads to better success for college admission.

PLAN Testing – The PLAN is the 10th grade version of the ACT College Admission Test, which students take in their junior or early in their senior year. Data has shown that the PLAN is a strong indicator of success on the ACT and is helpful in postsecondary and future planning. The PLAN will give our counselors pertinent data to assist students with their future decisions. The information gained from this test can help students plan to take courses that will help them strengthen areas of need, prior to taking the ACT test later in high school.

Online Course Registration – This was the first year that the high school used online registration for developing student schedules for the 2011-2012 school year. Overall, this process was a great success and allowed us to make class sections and staffing decisions earlier in the year than in the past. This allowed us to distribute student schedules in early May.

**River Valley Elementary
Studio School – (Charter School)**

***“Arts and Creativity:
Premiering September 1”***

Approximately one year ago, the River Valley School District applied for a charter school planning grant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). Upon being informed that we had received the grant in August of 2010, we organized a governing council comprised of parents, school personnel and community members to determine the process for planning to open this school in September of 2011. Funds from the grant have been utilized to plan for the opening of a K-5 charter school - the River Valley Elementary Studio School. The funds have also been used to explore and learn from other schools in the state and throughout the nation that are implementing project based, arts integrated, community enhanced education for elementary-aged students. After holding a lottery for the 88 students who had applied to enroll in the Studio School, 44 students were selected and will be housed in a “separate school within a school,” occupying two classrooms at Spring Green Elementary School. The school is an “instrumentality” of the River Valley School District, thus is a public school, receiving the same federal, state, and local funding for students in the school as any student in the River Valley.

The Studio School's main instructional model is that of a project based learning approach. We will be utilizing “non-graded” curriculum with a focus on a constructivist approach to how students develop versus “every first grader will..., every second grader will...” Project based learning (PBL) is not new to

education nor to charter schools. An inquiry-based process of teaching and learning, PBL has students focus on a complex issue or question, and then solve the problem through a collaborative process of investigation over an extended period of time. One of the things that is dynamic about PBL is that students have the ability to investigate truly authentic issues and topics that can be found outside of the “four walls” of a school. Students learn content, information, and facts necessary to draw conclusions about the question during this inquiry process. Perhaps even more importantly, PBL has a natural connection to enhancing creativity in the learner.

Through the use of a project based learning approach, the Studio School will be quite unique in that we are incorporating the Kennedy Center's Arts Integration model into all of our projects. We are, in fact, the first school in the state of Wisconsin to do so. We will go far beyond “art for art’s sake” and apply the learning power of the arts across the entire curriculum with the assistance of the rich resources of our River Valley community. Through the belief that arts education is essential for building innovative thinkers who will be our nation’s leaders for tomorrow, it is our hope that we can all work together to expose, enrich and empower our students through the arts.

Additionally, we are incorporating a “place based” model in which we will call upon the rich resources of the Spring Green area in all of our projects. This will include the arts, business, industry, agriculture, etc. Our math curriculum will spiral through the ages of children we will be serving. Our literacy model will be based on current reading research and brain research, utilizing a balanced literacy

approach in which systematic phonics instruction is used while we integrate language arts throughout our program with the use of rich literature, targeted writing approaches, and high-level inquiry models.

The Studio School’s learning opportunities are directly tied to the expertise of our community members and those opportunities will allow students to learn in a unique model. The RVESS will be a very connected multi-age learning community that will rely upon individualized integrated learning plans. Utilizing a true arts integration model – one in which the arts and content are integrated and given equal weight in the curriculum – is truly unique and one in which we will prepare our students for their future as 21st Century Learners.

The process of getting ready to open this school has, and continues to require a great deal of commitment from our stakeholders: parents, community members, students, and interested school personnel. The above information is just a snapshot of what the entire album will contain. We look forward to this journey with all of you.

“Charter School Q and A”

As time brings about change, so do the needs of public education. River Valley School District, in close collaboration and partnership with parents and community members, is developing plans for a new charter school – River Valley Elementary Studio School (RVESS) will open September 2011.

Q: What is a charter school?

A: Charter schools apply new and innovative curriculum and instructional approaches that

are accountable for results yet have more flexibility with state laws and regulations than their more traditional “common” school. They are designed to deliver programs tailored to the needs and interests of the community(s) they serve. Since 1992, charter schools are known to be one of the most successful growing reforms in the country with over 5,000 charter schools nationally serving over 1.5 million students. Local, state, and federal dollars follow the child to a charter school as determined by the common school board. Charter schools allow for everyone to apply for enrollment with no discrimination, no religious association, no vouchers, and no tuition.

Q: What is the River Valley Elementary Studio School (RVESS)?

A: The RVESS will be a K-5 project-based school with a curriculum focus on arts integration. RVESS will also connect learning through “place-based” curriculum to include local heritage, culture, beliefs, and traditions.

Q: How can the River Valley School District possibly be thinking of adding a charter school during this time of fiscal instability and budget cut discussions?

A: The School Board has approved the equivalent of two teachers to transfer from the existing elementary positions; therefore, no new cost to the district because if the 44 charter students were back in our regular/common school(s), we would need two more teachers. In other

words, we have placed two pre-existing teachers from the common school into the charter school at no new cost.

Q: How much will the charter cost?

A: Two elementary positions estimated at \$130,000-\$140,000 will be paid by the district from existing staff that will be transferred based on their interest, skill, and strengths and willingness to engage in future training. An additional \$450,000 in grant monies will be used for staff training, classroom materials/supplies, computers, etc. Some of these resources will be shared with other non-RVESS students in our common school(s). Additionally, regular/common school teachers will attend training sessions paid by the charter grant.

Q: Isn't this just a school focus brought on by a small group of home school parents?

A: The initial grant application (\$150,000 round #1 of funding toward the \$450,000 total) was influenced by two factors: 1) Frequent community suggestions for our district to find creative solutions to address our declining enrollment; and 2) A small group of home school parents were used as an advisory group with the final application written by three school employees (2 administrators and 1 teacher) with the final Executive Summary approved by the School Board. Parent meetings and a public hearing allowed for grant content suggestions and overall support to explore charter school options.

Summer School

“Summer School to Focus on Booster Reading and Math”

Last year the combination of summer booster and enrichment classes resulted in our district's highest summer school attendance. However, due to financial and time constraints, we are not able to offer district-wide enrichment classes. Therefore, this year our district-wide elementary summer school program will strictly serve students recommended for booster reading and math. This booster program will take place at the River Valley Middle School. Classes will run Monday through Thursday beginning July 11th and ending August 4th, with each day beginning at 8:30 a.m. and ending at 11:30 a.m. Busing from Arena, Plain, and Lone Rock will be offered, as pick-up/drop-off points will be at the elementary schools within each community.

Spring Green Elementary

“Where GROWTH Happens”

Growing young minds; **R**espect and responsibility; **O**utstanding well-rounded education; **W**elcoming atmosphere; **T**rue sense of self; **H**ome, school, and community partnership—all are focal points each year at Spring Green Elementary School. What is represented in this acronym is utilized by staff to drive decisions and continually pursue the improvement of the educational opportunities that are provided to our students on an annual basis. This year has been extremely exciting and certainly successful!

The development of a comprehensive literacy program has been a district priority and focal point for the past four years. Spring Green Elementary students

have benefited from countless hours of work from the teaching staff as it relates to the implementation of our Four Blocks approach to literacy. A focal point specific to this year has been the development of individual reading plans for each student that allows teachers to record and track student progress as it relates to established goals. We're confident that the implementation of this process will aid teachers in providing instruction that is tailored to the individual needs of our students.

On a more recent note, Spring Green Elementary students celebrated Earth Day by communicating environmentally friendly messages with the greater Spring Green community. One of the activities utilized was to decorate paper grocery bags, supplied by Hometown Supermarket, with Earth Day symbols and messages. Once the decorations were completed, the bags were given back to Hometown for dispersal. Collectively, students and staff embarked upon a walking field trip to pick-up garbage in various neighborhoods in Spring Green. At school, students created detailed descriptions, ideas, and plans for minimizing the footprints that they would leave on earth. The writing works were in the shape of footprints, and created a trail around the inside of the building. A photo contest was also organized, that involved students bringing a favorite photo that in some way, shape, or form was associated with our environment. Finally, 5th grade students spent time getting our school gardens ready for planting.

With the onset of spring, we are focusing on providing a meaningful end to our school year. There are many activities planned for the benefit of our students.

Our annual 5th grade trip to Bethel Horizons is rapidly approaching and everyone is excited that Lone Rock Elementary is joining the trip this year. Spring Green Elementary is also excited about welcoming the River Valley Elementary Studio School to our building next year.

Plain Elementary

"Plain-ly Speaking . . ."

Looking back, the month of March saw the end of another successful reading incentive program—"Read Across America." The students read, read, . . . and then read some more! They are all great readers and it's great to see them establish a base for a lifetime of reading! The talent show was also held in March, and the students gave wonderful performances for family and community members.

April came and All Fools Day had everyone wondering about the stories in the latest edition of the Cherry Street News. This school newspaper, created by the 5th graders, is a fun way for students to improve their writing skills and also share the school's activities with families. The High School Jazz Band visited and performed some very jazzy music for students and staff alike, providing a great opportunity for older students to model the rich arts integration of our district. Department of Natural Resources Warden John Buss talked with students about the importance of Earth Day and conservation in Wisconsin. Mrs. Straka's 4th grade class toured the state capitol and spent the day experiencing government in action.

May will hopefully bring some warmer, dryer weather for the students and their end of year activities. All students participated in "Shape Up Wisconsin," walking as a school to promote health and

fitness. The 4th graders will tour Taliesin, learning about our local architect, Frank Lloyd Wright and his buildings. The "Lil Hawks Track and Field Day" is an opportunity for our students to display what they've learned in physical education. Students will end their year as a whole school on June 7 with an awards ceremony and yearbook signings. While there is a strong focus on academics, it's wonderful that students can enrich their education through field trips and other experiences. To put it "Plain-ly," Plain Elementary is a great place for students to learn and grow every day!

Arena Elementary

"Fostering a Lifetime Love"

What comes to mind when you think of things you've loved? A person? An activity? A place? An object? Now, think of something you've loved your whole life long. It might be something from the first list, or something else may come to mind. When we find we've loved something for a long time, our lives become richer and deeper. It is a goal we have for ourselves and it is also a goal we have for our students at Arena Elementary School.

We could identify a number of areas in which we hope our students' aspirations turn a lifelong love: friendships, citizenship, curiosity, and learning in general. This school year at Arena, we have chosen to focus on something that we hope our students will love their whole lives. It is something that we also believe we can have a genuine impact on – reading.

Schools, of course, are mandated to teach reading and literacy. However, that, in and of itself, is

not enough for us. We want our students to find delight in reading and we want to teach in such a way that they will continue to be avid readers the rest of their lives. Most of us have experienced this feeling, perhaps when we first imagined what it would be like to travel with the hobbit Bilbo Baggins or help solve a case with young detective Nancy Drew or even just participate in the antics of the Cat in the Hat. A light goes on. A friend is made. And the doorway opens on the millions of possibilities where a book can lead.

How do we encourage this? As we began planning for the current school year, one overriding concern shared by the Arena staff was that we often felt that students came to us with a resistance towards reading. It is very disheartening to hear a five-year-old say that she doesn't like books. We agreed that we would focus the school year on not merely *teaching* reading, but encouraging the *love* of it.

We brainstormed a long list of activities that would reinforce our goal and we have spent the year implementing many of those ideas. At the beginning of the school year every staff member had their photo taken reading a favorite piece in their favorite location. The photos with explanations have been at the centerpiece of our school while staff members have shared their love of reading with students at various student assemblies throughout the year. Students have done the same about their favorite books while families and community members have come in to our assemblies to share their favorites as well. We have shared poems, favorite holiday books, and different genres and have had storytellers come to our schools. Many students have written their own books. The number of books

students have read is astronomical. They can tell you which authors have written specific books, the best mysteries to read, the coolest illustrators, and which books to put on our "wish lists."

In the end, our concern for our students' reading goes beyond the academic into the personal. By sharing our staff's reading habits and interests, we've modeled what we hope our students will discover for themselves. Reading is not just for students; it's for adults as well.

We also hope that the love of reading may expand into a lifelong love of learning itself. For many of us, reading and learning are inextricably linked. If our students end their time at Arena with a love of books, we will have accomplished a very important task for their education and for the good of society at large. Reading, in whatever form, whether it's magazines, web pages, or books, is a virtue, a skill, and a lifelong joy.

Lone Rock Elementary

"Making Progress with Literacy"

The 2010-2011 school year was a success at Lone Rock Elementary School. As our district moves forward with curriculum changes in literacy, the staff at Lone Rock have done a wonderful job implementing these improvements. Our students are scoring very well on the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination annually. In fact, this year, one hundred percent of our fifth graders scored proficient or advanced in both reading and math!

Everyone understands the importance of literacy for all students. The ability to read fluently and comprehend information as it applies to different types of literature and text is crucial for each and every

one of our students as they reach middle school age. One of our goals at Lone Rock is to stress this message to our students, parents, and community members. The old saying of "It takes a village to raise a child" is definitely applicable. At school, we provide experience and instruction that is geared specifically to individual reading levels. Teachers develop yearly literacy goals for the students in their classes, document, and monitor progress to ensure these goals are met. We provide interventions for students who are below expectations for grade/age level and document that progress as well.

This summer, as part of our plan to reach out to parents and community members, we'll be starting a Summer Reading Program at Lone Rock. Students will have an opportunity to come to school during designated hours to have access to our library and select books that are both reading level appropriate and appealing. Our computer lab will be open and available for students to continue to utilize the Accelerated Reader testing program as well. The staff at Lone Rock is hopeful that the majority of our students and their parents plan to take part in this program, as it will be a means for students to continue to make progress in regards to reading ability and developing a love for reading and literature.

If at any time you have questions, concerns, or ideas for how our district can better serve our students, please don't hesitate to call Superintendent Jamie Benson at 588-2551.

Student Performance Indicators Based on Standardized Test Detail

“ACT Test Results”

	English		Math		Reading		Science		Composite	
	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>
2010	21.5	21.0	22.0	22.5	22.3	21.7	22.2	22.4	22.1	22.0

S=State RV=River Valley

ACT test results are considered for student application to colleges and universities. The ACT is optional and is not administered at our district. Rather, juniors are encouraged to take the exam by registering at various test locations and optional dates. Also, juniors and seniors may take the ACT test more than once in an effort to improve their ACT score, thereby improving college admission requirements.

“WKCE Test Results”

	3rd		4th		5th		6 th		7th		8th		10th	
	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>RV</i>
2010-11														
Reading	79.1	89.8	82.1	87.8	83.5	87.6	85.4	85.5	85.7	93.6	85.6	89.4	73.9	69.6
Language			75.1	81.7							61.1	51.0	70.9	72.2
Math	73.0	87.1	78.3	91.5	78.4	91.3	79.0	83.3	78.3	85.2	77.4	79.8	70.1	69.6
Science			76.7	86.5							76.4	85.1	73.2	79.1
Soc Stud			90.6	96.4							80.9	86.2	78.4	78.2

S=State RV=River Valley

(Source: DPI Website using FAY-Students in School for Full Academic Year)

Annually, as part of federal No Child Left Behind legislation, all Wisconsin schools are obligated to have our students complete an annual standardized test. The test, which is known as the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE), covers grades 3-8 and grade 10 in various subject areas. The WKCE table above shows the 2010-11 percent of students scoring proficient or advanced, which is the state established benchmark for desired student achievement.

These WKCE testing snapshots are useful tools for accountability purposes. More importantly, they provide valuable insight into areas in need of revision and/or improvement in the “growth model” of measuring individual student strengths and weaknesses. Essentially, we can drill deeper into this data and identify individual and/or group needs.

We should all be reminded that while snapshots of academic success are useful, by no means does one source of data alone represent success (or failure). Rather there are many areas of instruction that are not tested, such as band, chorus, art, technology education, agriculture, foreign language, etc.

River Valley School District
660 W. Daley St.
Spring Green, WI 53588

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 21
Spring Green, WI

TO: BOXHOLDER

IN THIS ISSUE OF *HAWK TALK* . . .

Budget Forecast	<i>"Hello, from the River Valley School District Business Office!"</i>	Page 1
Middle School	<i>"What's Happening at the Middle School These Days?"</i>	Page 2
High School	<i>"New and Improved!"</i>	Page 2
River Valley Elementary Studio School (Charter School)	<i>"Arts and Creativity: Premiering September 1" and "Charter School Q and A"</i>	Page 3 Page 3
Summer School	<i>"Summer School to Focus on Booster Reading and Math"</i>	Page 4
Spring Green Elementary	<i>"Where GROWTH Happens"</i>	Page 4
Plain Elementary	<i>"Plain-ly Speaking . . ."</i>	Page 5
Arena Elementary	<i>"Fostering a Lifetime Love"</i>	Page 5
Lone Rock Elementary	<i>"Making Progress with Literacy"</i>	Page 6
Student Performance Indicators	<i>"ACT Test Results" and "WKCE Test Results"</i>	Page 7