

## *Superintendent's Statement on the Future of Pleasant View Elementary School*

When discussing possible changes to Pleasant View Elementary School, I find myself in a quandary as to how to best convey my thoughts. As a life-long historian and in deference to my personal hero, Thomas Jefferson, I will attempt to explain this situation as I see it in a way that utilizes that background.

In the spring of 1786, Thomas Jefferson was serving as the Minister to France. He developed a deep friendship with a married artist, Maria Cosway. Recognizing because of her marriage, and his pledge to never remarry following his wife's death, Jefferson was nonetheless deeply troubled at their parting. To better analyze his feeling he wrote his now famous, "Dialogue Between Head and Heart," wherein he allowed his head and his heart to analyze his situation. I propose to do that in regard to Pleasant View Elementary.

My heart tells me that to an educator, closure of any school, at any place, at any time is a painful experience. The school building, buses, playground, and a host of other sights and sounds convey the fact that in this "Temple of Learning"—be it big or small, urban or rural—the act of providing young people with the skills and knowledge to last a lifetime is carried on. School closure, to an educator such as myself, this is tantamount to a death in the family. It is emotional, and I am well aware that there are those in the community that see it the same way. Additionally, the smaller size lends itself to a more personalized style of teaching and learning, and size contributes to more personal interaction to develop friendships and relationships. It is no stretch of fact to identify this school as the center of a rural community that has been a part of daily life for a very long time. There are generational memories tied to the school, and strong ties of support.

My head takes its role in this internal conversation by focusing on the numbers that tell a story as well. Over the last several years, there has been a steady decline in the enrollment in the school. Trend data supports this fact is likely to continue. Services offered such as administrative, counseling, music, art, and others must be shared with other schools. The community that sends children to the school is also shrinking, and it is difficult to justify a school with a building population of less than sixty. I have looked at redistricting to move more children to the school, but bus routes become inordinately long in some cases. I have assisted in trying to institute before and after school care programs, and for a variety of reasons, including again the relative isolation of the school, caused this effort to fail; again, through low interest in participation. Now we find ourselves at a point where to upgrade the HVAC system and replace an aging roof, the school will require over a million dollars of new expenditure. It would appear the time for a decision is now.

Like Mr. Jefferson, I too am conflicted, as a case can be made for both remaining open and closure, but in this particular situation, as with Jefferson, the head must rule. The facts would

support that long term, the school cannot survive. At what number do we agree that the school is too small? At what point do the costs become too great? I will admit again that I am deeply troubled about the loss of this school, but should the decision be made that the school will close, I pledge to do all within my power to make the transition for the children and staff as smooth as possible—always keeping in mind the value of the education they are receiving. I would hope that should that final closure decision be reached there can be an appropriate amount of time to say good-bye to the school and its traditions, and to transition to the future with grace and dignity. I feel this can best be accomplished by making a final decision this school year, and should closure be that decision, it would be set for June 30, 2017. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Nichols". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "N".

Dr. Steven Nichols  
Superintendent

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