Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning
Executive Director Communication

January 30, 2017

Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

The Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning operates within our independent school district, the Expeditionary Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES). As a BOCES, we establish a cooperative agreement with our five partner school districts, which include Denver Public Schools, Cherry Creek Schools, Douglas County Schools, Aurora Public Schools, and Littleton Public Schools. This cooperative agreement is titled the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). Every five years the respective board members and partner districts work cooperatively to revise and renew the IGA. The current IGA was set to expire on June 30, 2017. The process for revision of the IGA began last June 2016 and was completed at our most recent BOCES meeting on Tuesday, January 24, 2017. The revised IGA is now complete and will remain in place for a five-year term from 2017-2022. The process of revision and negotiation took approximately eight months to complete between all member districts. I am fortunate that our team participates in the process of revision once every five years, as it is a testament to the impact of our school district. Each school district independently engages in revision and negotiations in their respective districts each year; our BOCES is composed of five of Colorado’s largest districts serving approximately 250,000 students annually. Five districts that represent a quarter of a million students respectively coming together to operate a K-12 Expeditionary Learning school that represents a model of excellence in our community for over 25 years is a testament to our mission, vision, and program. We are one of only three BOCES that operates a school in the state of Colorado, and continue to showcase the effectiveness of our governance model. I want to extend my appreciation to members of our board, district superintendents, district leadership teams, legal counsel, and all participating members who assisted in the renewal of the Intergovernmental Agreement.

On Monday, January 30, 2017, we conducted the annual lottery for the 2017-2018 school year. We are excited to welcome 61 new families to RMSEL next year. This year we had 426 submitted applications for 61 total openings. Fifty three of our annual openings were in Kindergarten and 6th grade; outside of these two transition points, we had 8 openings for the 2017-2018 school year. Eight openings is equivalent to an annual transition rate of 2%. It is a demonstration of excellence that in a program of choice, 98% of our students elect to return each year. This is a testament to our leadership team, teachers, adventure team, support staff, and all staff members that work to provide an exceptional educational program to students and families. This is one of my favorite weeks of the year in which I call each new family personally and welcome them to RMSEL. The state of shock and resounding shouts of joy are truly amazing. Over the next month, we will complete the annual shadow and Open House process and prepare for next year.

I keep a copy of the Outward Bound 50th Anniversary Book of Readings on the corner of my desk. It is a common practice in our school to begin class, meetings, trips, fieldwork, etc. with a reading. Beginning with a reading grounds us in the work or task before us. As I started the week, Kurt Hahn drew me to a section. In 1943, Hahn wrote the “Six Declines of Modern Youth.” In my last newsletter, I shared recent research and reflection, which relates to Hahn’s vision three quarters of a century ago stating, “decline of self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of
stimulants and tranquilizers.” The accessibility and use of technology and tools such as social media directly relates to the effect of a stimulant and tranquilizers. In addition to this decline, Hahn states, “decline of fitness due to modern methods of locomotion (moving about).” Hahn’s early vision for Expeditionary Learning Schools was to provide opportunities in conjunction with academic content to engage in “ locomotion.” I want to express my gratitude to our Athletic Director, John Stene, and his team of coaches that provide programs for students to engage in locomotion. Last weekend, Coach Pack and the 8th grade Girls Varsity Basketball team competed and won for the second consecutive year the Lightening Girls League Tournament. The girls were resilient in coming back from one loss to defeating the very team that beat them earlier in the weekend and winning the championship. I want to celebrate the teamwork and sportsmanship of our female athletes, coaches, and families in their victory to end the season! In addition to traditional team sports, we have continued to expand our athletic opportunities in Adventure Sports. Coach Marshall started our High School Mountain Bike Team in the fall, which has led to Coach David starting the first RMSEL Ski and Snowboard Club. I could not attend the tournament last weekend as I was assisting the Ski and Snowboard Club at Winter Park. It was a great day at the mountain with over 30 students, staff members, and family members coming together to engage in “locomotion.” During a time in modern society in which we see an increase in obesity as tied to the apathetic response of youth, we represent a community that values movement and adventure in lieu of a virtual reality. I appreciate our students, staff, and community as we continue to respond to Hahn’s vision.

Finally, the local media has been reporting multiple stories related to the Colorado State Budget as related to school finance. In the last week two of the largest districts in Colorado, Jefferson County Schools and Aurora Public Schools, announced the requirement to reduce their annual budget for the 2017-2018 school year by up to 31 million dollars in each district. I have recently received inquiries from parents regarding the larger state budget and the impact to RMSEL and our community. This is a simple question with, unfortunately, a complex answer. The Colorado School Finance Report recently released a report ranking school funding by state. Currently, Colorado ranks 40th in the United States, with a per pupil spending rate of $9,471 per student; this is $2,685 less than the national average of $12,156. As of 2014, Colorado ranked 14th in the nation, as reported by the Federal Commerce Department, for Cost of Living Index. For comparative purposes, if our Cost of Living Index and School Funding were equivalent, our state would receive $14,156 per student, equivalent to that of the State of Delaware, which is currently ranked 14th in school funding. When this is localized to our school, we are currently operating at a deficit of $4,685 per child or $1,827,150 annually.

In short, the cost of living in the State of Colorado continues to increase and has done so substantially since 2014, while our funding for public schools remains in the bottom 20% nationally. As with anything, a logical next question from parents is, “so, what can we do?” Being an informed and engaged citizen is imperative while communicating your concerns to your respective state representatives. This truly should be a bipartisan issue at our state capital; I do believe any representative, no matter party affiliation, can support legislation that properly funds great schools in Colorado. While I am always open to share and answer questions parents have regarding this complex issue facing our state and schools, I encourage families to research and read information released as to possible solutions that may be brought forth in upcoming legislative session.
In closure, at this time we do not forecast a shift to our school program or budget based on per pupil revenue received. It does, however, further limit our ability to grow, renovate, compensate, and remain competitive in a state with a drastic increase to our cost of living. Our leadership team values the principles, mission, and vision of our organization; we will at all times attempt to keep reductions from classroom resources.

Sincerely,

Chad