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Mason County Schools: Meeting the Needs of a Growing Population



Tim Hardesty
Mason County Schools

Tim Hardesty is Superintendent of Mason County Schools. He enters the new role with a varied educational work background that includes former deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, elementary director, principal, assistant principal, and teacher. During his most recent years as Deputy Superintendent in Cabell County, Hardesty oversaw the personnel department, buildings and grounds, transportation, food service, building renovations, new construction, and updated policy for the district. Hardesty has been married for over 35 years, and he and his wife have one son who will be graduating high school this year. Hardesty also serves as a deacon at Milton Baptist Church.

How does a new superintendent move their county school system to a position where the district is the first best choice a parent can make for the education of their child? That is the environment that school districts across the state of West Virginia are facing each year. In Mason County, the answer to that question will be found with the assistance of the economic development currently taking place.

Entering my first endeavor as a public school superintendent, I have the fortune of drawing from several years of experience in a much larger neighboring county as a deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, and principal. However, while the experiences were varied in those positions, the unprecedented economic development taking place in Mason County serves as a support mechanism while presenting both opportunities and challenges.



800 full-time team members once opened. Fidelis New Energy is anticipating a \$2 billion investment in the Mason County project that will also add approximately 2,000 jobs during construction and 800 full-time employees when fully operational. The potential for population growth is clear. Mason County Development Authority's John Musgrave has the expectation of the county's population to double or triple in the next decade. Mason County is beautiful and has a lot to offer families; however, there are some obstacles that will need to be overcome to create the environment needed to support such a growth and for the school district to

"...Mason County has the potential to experience a population explosion over the next few years."

With the groundbreaking at a new Nucor Steel plant, the announcement from Fidelis New Energy, along with the established manufacturing already in the county, a large Toyota Manufacturing plant just a few miles into the next county, and an abundance of developable land throughout the county, Mason County has the potential to experience a population explosion over the next few years.

Nucor Steel is expecting an investment of \$3 billion dollars in the new facility, with approximately 2,000 construction jobs and

attract, retain, and support a similar student population increase.

Housing is a concern when attracting new residents, regardless of the location within the county. Mason County is currently working with Advantage Valley and surrounding counties to determine the housing demand expected from the new job opportunities. The addition of families with school-age students will present a unique set of challenges for the school system. While Mason County Schools has an excellent staff throughout the district



and a well-trained, caring group of teachers, we are facing many of the same issues that school districts throughout West Virginia and across the nation are facing – a shrinking work force, teacher shortages in some academic areas, recovery from the instructional loss during the pandemic, and limited resources to address facility needs and competitive pay for staff. Doubling or tripling our student population will require an investment in personnel and facilities that cannot wait until students are present to address the strains on the education system due to a large influx of students without the appropriate planning and changes taking place. I am hopeful a committee can be formed that will consist of local legislatures, public officials, and the school system to identify expansion needs across the district that will allow us to prepare in advance of such a population increase.

As the new superintendent, I believe we, as a public school system, have been given the task of providing a world class education to our students that will be demonstrated by the opportunities they have and the continual increase in student achievement as measured by the standardized assessment of the day, regardless of what that is. It is imperative that everyone in the school system see the urgency in making Mason County Schools and our students competitive, not only with each other, but with the schools across the region. As families make decisions on where to relocate as they take these newly created positions, school opportunities and achievement will be a major factor in their location selection. Mason County Schools need to answer the call to increase student achievement, increase educational opportunities for our students, attract and retain

qualified and effective educators, and develop programming for adults in the area to support the job market needs.

We are taking the steps necessary to address each of these items. All our administrators have a renewed focus on student achievement. While we own and analyze the current assessment data for all classrooms and schools, we are identifying the specific areas where additional support and training is needed. Our teachers, classroom assistants, and administrators are receiving ongoing professional development on the Science of Reading, both in training sessions and in the classrooms during implementation. We are also using benchmark assessment data to identify needed changes in instructional practices in the classrooms in reading and mathematics. I have also had the opportunity to work with our area higher educational institutions, including Marshall University, Glenville State University, and Mountwest Community and Technical College. In addition to these, conversations and plans are coming together with area hospitals and businesses to assist in developing additional programs that can lead to certifications for our students and potentially adult learners.

As we are experiencing the unprecedented growth across our area, it is an exciting time to be part of a team that consists of school administrators, county officials, area business leaders, higher education institutions, and members of the public to plan and implement the changes taking place. It is certainly an exciting time to be superintendent, and I am thankful for the opportunity to lead Mason County Schools on the path to be the first, best choice a parent can make to educate their children! ▽