New year brings new challenges

By Rusty Bradshaw

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With a new year comes new — and some continuing — challenges, but Surprise’s governing agency officials believe they are up to the task of addressing them successfully.

DUSD

With a failed bond in 2013 and a failed override this year, Dysart Unified School District leaders’ biggest challenge continues to be how to maintain quality education with dwindling funds.

“Without a commitment from our community to continue supporting excellence in our schools, we will not be able to continue the great work being done in this community,” said Gail Pletnick, Ed.E, DUSD superintendent.

District officials and the Governing Board plan to make another attempt in November to get the override renewed. But to get a successful result, they believe they will need to counter some misinformation and rumors to get the job done.

Dysart officials will explore and utilize a number of communication avenues to debunk the rumors, provide the facts about Dysart and help the community understand how the future of this community is tied to the quality of the education offered, according to Dr. Pletnick.

“We must continue our work to prepare our children to be successful in this new century, so we will do all we can to move forward even though our resources are dwindling,” she said.

One of the pieces of misinformation confusing voters is that the federal government, as part of its Common Core initiative, is mandating all-day kindergarten and providing funds for it, according to Dr. Pletnick.

“This is exactly the type of misinformation that people base their decisions on that are not factual,” the superintendent said.

There is no dedicated funding from the federal government coming to pay for all-day kindergarten, she explained. Rather, it is the state that regulates whether districts within that state offers all day kindergarten.

“There are federal grants that a state can apply for to help fund early childhood education initiatives, and in fact Arizona did apply for and was awarded such a grant,” Dr. Pletnick said. “However, that grant cannot support all day kindergarten across the state for all children.”

In addition to salaries, the district must fund maintenance of aging buildings and a large and aging bus fleet. Due to state cuts and the 2013 bond failure, facility maintenance has been deferred and district officials have not purchased a new bus since 2006. The average age of the bus fleet is 8.5 years, according to Dr. Pletnick.
The Willow Canyon High School marching band entertains the crowd before a Wildcats football game. Band and athletics are just two areas facing cuts as Dysart Unified School District officials continue to struggle with dwindling funding.

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Gail Pletnick