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The Eagle

Chequamegon School District Newsletter

“Framework for Our Future” is Solid

At its meeting in February 2014 the Chequamegon School Board approved a plan for moving forward as a school district after the five year consolidation period ended at the end of that school year. The plan approved was presented by District Administrator Dave Anderson and was titled Framework for Our Future. The Framework consisted of four major points:

1. Reliable Budget Projections

In the spring of 2014, Financial Manager Lexi Witt presented a five-year budget forecast that predicted a small budget surplus for the 2014-15 school year and over a million dollar shortfall for the 2015-16 school year. Due to that predicted shortfall, school district administrators and board members lobbied our legislators and Governor Walker about the need to address the financing of consolidated school districts when coming out of the 5 year consolidation. Thanks to the support we received from Republican and Democrat legislators language was added to the last state budget that allowed us to levy adequate funds to support our program without seeing a significant increase in the tax rate.

Following the passage of the 2015-17 state budget our predicted budget shortfall of \$1.1 million for the 2015-16 year and \$2 million for 2016-17 has dramatically improved with a budget surplus for 2015-16 of \$388,138 and a predicted surplus of \$105,718 for the current 2016-17 school year! Our financial condition looks fairly healthy for the next few years with growing budget shortfalls. However, due to the advantages of the consolidation, the District has been able to build the Fund Balance significantly. If budget shortfalls over the next few years are covered through the use of the Fund Balance, there will still be an amount equal to 30% of expenditures in the Fund Balance at the end of the 2020-21 school year. This prediction may turn out even better than predicted as we continue to look at ways to further cut costs.

2. Comprehensive Audit of Possible Operational and Energy Efficiencies

During the 2015-16 school year, the District took advantage of a mechanism created by state law to review and fund maintenance projects that will provide operational and energy efficiencies. With the help of a qualified contractor last year the District identified approximately \$700,000 in projects that would meet the qualifications of the program. In a number of instances, such as roof replacement, these were maintenance items that will need to be addressed in any event in the near future. It should be

by *David G. Anderson, Superintendent*

noted as well that the \$700,000 figure is pretty low when compared to many other school districts. For example, Phillips spent approximately \$2.5 million for the same purpose. This speaks well to the manner in which our staff has stayed on top of needed maintenance over the years.

The projects were completed successfully and the full \$700,000 could have been added to the school district property tax levy. However, because doing so would have resulted in a greater increase in the tax mill rate, the School Board made the decision to only levy about half the needed funds. The rest of needed funds for the projects were paid for out of the Fund Balance.

3. A Comprehensive District Facilities Study

The third leg of the Framework for the Future process consisted of conducting a comprehensive facilities study, which included consideration of declining student population and a review of building utilization and capacities. A primary purpose of the study was to look at whether significant cost savings could be realized by closing the Glidden campus and housing all students at the Park Falls campus.

Architectural Resources, Inc. (ARI) completed the study. In presenting its final report in November 2015, ARI concluded that if the Glidden campus were to be closed today “modest renovations and remodeling” to the Park Falls building would need to take place. ARI presented several Options to accomplish this ranging in cost from \$3,350,000 to \$8,235,000 depending on options chosen.

ARI stated in their recommendations that, “a naturally logical point at which to close the Glidden campus and house all students at the Park Falls Campus would be when the District is at a two section per grade level of enrollment based on the maximum class sizes desired.” At that point the transition to one campus could be made with limited additional cost. Based on the gradual decline of student numbers, ARI’s opinion was that point would be reached around 2030.

At its meeting on November 10, 2015, the School Board accepted the study and directed that it be used as a reference tool in future discussions and strategic planning.

4. Strategic Planning Process

The district began a strategic planning process, the fourth leg of the Framework for the Future, on May 9, 2016. The process is being facilitated by Al Brown, from the Wisconsin Association of School

Boards, and follows a Baldrige Model which has been used by a number of school districts in the past. Initially, Mr. Brown introduced the group to the SOAR process for planning and asked the stakeholders to assess the district using the SOAR process. SOAR is an acronym that stands for:

- Strengths – What are the strengths of our school district?
- Opportunities – What opportunities do we provide the students and community members of our school district?
- Aspirations – What are the aspirations or goals for our students and school district?
- Results – What are the desired results of a Chequamegon School District education?

There have been four meetings thus far and there have consistently been approximately 30-40 stakeholder participants attending the meetings. The stakeholders are comprised of school board members, students, staff, parents and other community members. At the July 11 meeting the group worked on and finalized a community survey to get a reading for areas the community believe are important for the district to address in the next few years. The survey was sent to 4,400 households as well as being placed on the district web site to encourage participation in the process. We received approximately 355 responses to the survey, and on Sept. 26 the stakeholders met again to go over the results of the survey. The group addressed ideas that would be responsive to the areas identified in the survey and ultimately the group agreed to categorize the response to the survey into four very broad goals: Workforce Development, Community and Communication, Social Emotional Well Being of Students, and Academic and Co-curricular Programming. Currently the administrative team is compiling recommended actions to take within the next three years to support these four core strategies. The Stakeholder Steering Committee, at its next meeting on October 24, will review this work. Once the proposed actions are agreed upon we will develop action plans for making progress in each of the core strategies that will include how progress will be measured.

The Framework for the Future process has taken several years to complete. However, it has been a positive method of systematically addressing and responding to the challenges the Chequamegon District has faced since consolidation. It will give the district a roadmap for success over the next three years. Special thanks and recognition to the stakeholders who have regularly attended and participated in this planning process.