

## **West Allis - West Milwaukee School District Advisory Strategic Plan Unveiled**

(West Allis, April 30, 2007) An advisory Strategic Structural Plan designed to improve student academic achievement was presented by the Administrative Staff to the West Allis - West Milwaukee School District Board of Education. Superintendent of Schools Kurt Wachholz presented the plan on April 20, 2007, to the Board for their consideration and further direction. The Board of Education will review the plan and accept, modify, or reject it in the months to come. In the event that the preliminary plan is accepted by the Board, it will be brought to the community for additional input during the 2007 - 08 school year before a final blueprint is developed and implemented.

The Administrative Staff notes that the Strategic Structural Plan is an evolving process and, therefore, recommends that no action be taken during the 2007 - 08 school year that will impact facilities, grade level alignment or attendance boundaries. Planning and curriculum adjustments, however, may occur during the 2007 - 08 school year.

The Strategic Plan is a detailed proposal based on recommendations made by the Strategic Structural Review Committee and accepted by the Board in August of 2006. The committee was comprised of approximately 60 parents, students, residents, teachers, Board members, administrators and others that met on a regular basis from February of 2005 to June of 2006. The following are the committee's recommendations:

1. Program delivery, aligned and focused instructional priorities, and curriculum review and renewal are the most important priorities under any organizational structure to be embraced by the Board of Education.
2. No matter what Intermediate-Level organizational structure is embraced by the Board of Education, it must contain more than two grades.
3. A specialized or "focus" high school should be created by the West Allis - West Milwaukee School District.
4. The West Allis - West Milwaukee School District's alternative high school (and related programs) must be relocated into a more adequate facility.

The heart of the strategic plan is reconfiguring the district from a middle school to an intermediate school model. Since the early 1980s, the district has educated students in grades seven and eight middle schools. The strategic plan recommends that schools be organized primarily around pre-kindergarten through grade five elementary schools, grades six through eight intermediate schools and grades nine through twelve high schools. Wachholz said that this model is age appropriate, provides educational coherence and consistency for students, is easier for parents to navigate, and would allow the district to coordinate programs more easily. Consistent grade configurations from school to school can help improve the transitions of students from one school to another and from one grade level to another.

Research states that grade configuration has little impact on student achievement. What does have a great impact, and the plan includes, is rigorous, relevant curriculum that engages students, as well as the strong transitions that support students socially and academically from school-to-school.

The proposed grade level realignment will require the gradual phasing in of one additional intermediate school and moving approximately 600 sixth graders currently in elementary schools to the two existing middle schools and into the one newly converted intermediate school. The district will make adjustments to the middle school program to ensure parents are confident that the schools are ready to offer high-quality instruction and student support during sixth grade and throughout the intermediate level years.

The re-organization also calls for a third high school to better serve the growing number of students at risk of dropping out of school.

No schools have presently been identified for grade level reconfiguration.

According to Wachholz, "It is suggested that this Strategic Structural Plan for Student Success be an evolving process. It will be with the help of key stake holders, the West Allis - West Milwaukee Board of Education, and the West Allis - West Milwaukee broad educational community, which includes parents, staff, and students, that we will develop more detailed blueprints in this evolving process. Implementing the educational and structural initiatives will be an ongoing process of planning, implementing, evaluating and revising."

Wachholz noted that in today's climate of educational accountability and competition, it is critical that the district maintains its place as the school system of choice for families currently residing in the district, as well as those considering moving to the communities that comprise the School District of West Allis - West Milwaukee, et al. Although residential enrollment is declining, the district is one of the most popular public open enrollment choices in the state.

"We owe it to all the District's residents to make West Allis - West Milwaukee the continued first choice for their children's education. To do this, of course, we have to demonstrate that we can compete successfully with all the other available choices - not only in their quality of academics, but also in terms of facilities and many other factors, such as safety, convenience, and parent involvement." The plan as presented to the Board took into consideration all of these factors, Wachholz said.

In addition to preserving the district as the public education choice of residents, the Strategic Plan was developed in response to eleven other critical challenges and opportunities. They are as follows:

**Bringing children into the system earlier.** Research supports that well-designed and well-implemented early childhood education programs help to prepare children to succeed in schools.

**Serve West Allis - West Milwaukee special education students.** The district will continue to implement an inclusive school approach that is based on high expectations for all students through progress monitoring, differentiated instruction, and learning support systems for students, teachers, and families.

**Focus on basic skills:** Reading and math are essential skills that must be applied and taught across the curriculum. Children who do not master these skills are likely to fail at meeting proficiency on standardized tests and do poorly in many subject areas, and are at risk of dropping out of school. A tiered intervention framework, including differentiation and double- and triple-dosing, will be used and evaluated on a continual basis as part of the plan's recommendations.

**Close achievement gaps.** Achievement gaps continue to exist in reading and mathematics at all grade levels. Closing these gaps and raising achievement in these subjects requires an intensive and well-coordinated effort that begins early in a child's education and transitions and connects across grade levels and subject areas. Under the strategic plan, a system-wide diverse approach will be implemented for all students that will include effective learning assessments, accelerated programs, timely instructional interventions, and social and instructional support programs.

**Expand opportunities for students to excel.** The district is committed to providing opportunities and supportive programs for students to achieve their full potential at every grade level and across the curriculum. Gifted/Creative/Talented programming will be provided at every grade level and across the continuum of student interest and achievement.

**Keep students in school.** Students who leave prior to graduation face a lifetime of economic and social challenges. In an effort to ensure all students successfully graduate, West Allis - West Milwaukee will expand alternative programs to keep students in school. This will require multiple approaches, including coursework and degree-completion options, that meet their individual needs.

**Replicate innovative and successful programs.** The district possess some of the area's most admired schools, programs, and educators. They will serve as a model for the district and provide the foundation for sustained and sustainable system-wide change. The district will continue researching and implementing best practices relevant to advancing student achievement.

**Get focused and define clear roles and accountability for student success.** The responsibility for student success is shared among all stake holders, teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community members. The Strategic Plan will define clear roles for students, families, staff and community leaders to a path of accountability. Success is dependent on a collaborative network of coordinated support addressing children's academic, social and emotional needs.

**Create a culture of partnerships and collaboration.** Achieving excellence for West Allis - West Milwaukee students requires support from all community stakeholders. The strategic plan will include methods to better foster partnerships with parents, businesses, and community members who collaborate to maintain and enhance resources and opportunities that are available to our students.

**Make West Allis - West Milwaukee the workplace of choice for the best teachers, principals, and other staff.** Making West Allis - West Milwaukee the workplace of choice for the best teachers, school administrators, and staff is of paramount importance. In order to provide high quality teaching and learning in every school over the long term, West Allis - West Milwaukee will focus on the recruitment, induction, and retention of highly qualified educators and support staff. The district will also provide support to bridge the transition from research to best practice for all new employees.

**Make good use of West Allis - West Milwaukee school facilities.** School facilities and grounds will continue to be designed, improved, and maintained so that that they support student achievement, student well-being, and meet the needs of staff and the general community.

Wachholz said that the plan brought forward to the board is well-researched, based on best practices, and built upon the district's Mission Statement: "The Mission of the School District of West Allis - West Milwaukee, et al., in partnership with family and community, is to provide challenging curriculum and engaging instruction so that every student may attain academic success."

"This plan is designed to lead us into the 21st Century," he said. "It will benefit our educational system and community for many years to come and retain our place as a great place to educate children at an affordable cost."

For additional information regarding the Strategic Plan, contact Information Specialist Stuart Wilke at 414-604-3007.