



STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE 2011

DISTRICT OVERVIEW

McHenry Community High School provides a comprehensive education to students from a 40-square mile region which includes the communities of Wonder Lake, Lakemoor, Holiday Hills, Bull Valley, McCullom Lake, Island Lake and McHenry. The district's primary feeder schools include McHenry Elementary School District 15 and Wonder Lake School District 36.

McHenry High School District 156 was formed in 1919. East Campus opened in 1924 and served as the only high school in the community until West Campus opened in 1968. McCracken Field was also purchased in 1968. The District Office, originally housed on Main Street, was purchased jointly with District 15 in 1967. In 1996, District 156 constructed what is currently known as the Robert O. Swartzloff Center for Educational Services, located on the same property as West Campus. District 156 and District 15 share transportation and jointly purchased the current transportation facility on West Route 120 in 1981.

During the 2010-2011 school year, according to the "Fall Housing Report", McHenry High School educated 1585 students at West and 912 at East. Additionally, 54 students were educated at off-site locations, bringing the total district population to 2551. In 2010-2011, the district employed nearly 270 people. Employees included teachers, administrators, deans, counselors, school psychologists, social workers, secretaries, clerical aides, instructional aides, media aides, nurse and health care aides, custodians and maintenance workers.

The mission of McHenry High School is to "provide all students with the skills they need to be life-long learners and productive citizens". McHenry High School offers a range of educational services in response to the various learning needs of students. Course selection opportunities for students include Advanced Placement, Industrial Technology, Dual Credit enrollment which provides an opportunity for a student to earn in-district credit while simultaneously earning credit at McHenry County College, a variety of English, Math, Social Science, Science, World Language, Art, Music, Physical Education and Special Education courses.

In addition to academics, McHenry High School offers a wide variety of co-curricular activities and athletics. Students at McHenry High School extend their classroom learning experiences through participation in Student Council, Link Crew/Student Leadership Team, Drama, Chess Club and many more co-curricular opportunities. Athletically, MCHS offers a variety of boys and girls athletics. Among the athletic offerings are Softball, Soccer, Tennis, Water-polo, Boy's and Girl's Basketball and Football. In 1977, MCHS was a charter member of the Fox Valley Conference which originated with eight teams and has grown to include 14 teams in 2011-2012.

Partnering with community members, parents, students and staff, McHenry High School formed a Strategic Planning Task Force in February of 2011 to set five-year goals for the district in the areas of Finance, Curriculum, Communications, Facilities and Technology. The work of this task force will provide recommendations for the 2012 Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

PURPOSE

- To update a cross-section of stakeholders about the district's finances, curriculum, technology, facilities and communication process.
- To provide feedback to the Board of Education regarding decisions pertaining to finance, curriculum, facilities, technology and community relations.
- To strategically plan for approximately five years in the sub-committee areas of finance, curriculum, facilities, technology and communication.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the current reality in each sub-committee area?
- What vision should be created for MCHS by 2016 in each sub-committee area?
- What goals should be set in each sub-committee area?
- What action steps are necessary to move from the current reality to the vision for 2016?
- What goals should be prioritized and recommended to the Board of Education for implementation and inclusion in the 2012 Strategic Plan?

SCHEDULE

Phase One – District Information

February 2, 2011 - Communications
February 16, 2011 - Finance
March 2, 2011 - Curriculum
March 23, 2011 – Facilities / Technology

Phase Two – Goal Setting (sub-committee planning)

April 13, 2011
April 20, 2011
May 4, 2011

Phase Three – Sub-Committee Reports

June 1, 2011 – Communication, Curriculum, Facilities/Technology
August 17, 2011 – Finance

Phase Four – BOE Presentations

September 6, 2011 – Communications, Curriculum
September 20, 2011 – Facilities/Technology, Finance

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Brent Raby	Bill Burke	Jen Eiserman	Ned Quarterman
Vickie Piekarski	Amanda Cohn	Kathy Hying	Katie Ronzio
Dan Koruna	Lisa Curry	Therese Matthys	Robert Rosenberg
Eric Adams	Lori Davisson	Kristi Miller	Roger Schlies
Mellody Ahrens	Michael Eesley	Mark Oglesby	Beth Taylor
Kay Rial Bates	Greg Eiserman	Jim Prault	LeeAnn Taylor
			Brian Weidner

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Teresa Lane	Mike Cohn	Alexa McClaughry	Cathy Rayborn
Bonnie Simon	Ali Coy	Jill McEvoy	Lynn Schnelker
Haley Benson	Denise Gaskell	Russ Micklinghoff	Trish Spengel
Mike Bunting	Peter Keller	Heather Murgatroyd	
Pat Carter	Shannon Keller	Linda Peck	

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Jeff Ehardt	Tim Byers	Walter Korpan	Steve Rankins
Chad Mihevc	Dan Casaletto	Steve Lay	Mike Richartz
Mark Adams	Ray Currie	Lynn Leegard	MaryBeth Varvil
Jim Anderson	Aimee Dabe	Andy Lukas	Gary Waters
David Barrett	John Huff	Scott Miller	Cary Waxler
Steve Buss	Tim Hying	Melanie Orendorff	

FACILITIES/TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Kevin Weisenberger	Michelle DeBarba	Anthony Mertz	Barbara Jo
Joe Zelek	Gracie Holmes	Doug Peterson	Siegel-Holmes
Jeff McCutchan	Michael Holmes	Nick Pignatari	Paul Stevens
Jen Beattie	Scott Mahlebashian	Mike Roberts	Walt Taylor
Jean Benedetto	JoAnn May	Kendra Roth	Todd Trocki

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Mrs. Mellody Ahrens – Vice President
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ADMINISTRATION

Dr. Teresa Lane – Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Gina Swinney – Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Jeff Ehardt – Director of Finance
Mrs. Victoria Piekarski – Director of Special Programs
Dr. Brent Raby – Director of Grants and Learning
Ms. Lynn Schnelker – East Campus Principal
Dr. Michael Roberts – West Campus Principal

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE - CHALLENGES

CURRICULUM

By standards measured through No Child Left Behind legislation, McHenry High School is a district that has a Federal Improvement Status of Corrective Action. Additionally, the State of Illinois identifies the district as being in Academic Watch Status. The district fell into status as a result of students not reaching the 7.5% of expected growth in 2007 when the target was set at 55% of all students meeting or exceeding standards on the Prairie State Achievement Test. McHenry High School had one sub-group that did not meet the target. By 2010, when the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on the PSAE was set at 77.5%, there were three sub-groups that did not meet the target, including the "All" category. The district has implemented many initiatives toward improving student learning and formed the Strategic Planning Task Force to further assist the district in setting a vision in the area of Curriculum and Instruction.

COMMUNICATION

Through a series of community forums conducted during the 2010-2011 school year, it was noted that District 156 needed to improve its communication with the community as a whole. The district's communication with parents has been sufficient, but concerns were raised regarding a lack of information reaching all taxpayers. Consequently, the Strategic Planning Task Force Communications sub-committee was formed.

FINANCE

Like many districts in the State of Illinois, District 156 is facing significant financial difficulties. Operating in FY11 with a projected 4 million dollar deficit, two unsuccessful referendum campaigns were launched. The first, in November 2010, asked voters to approve a sixty-cent limiting-rate tax increase. The second, in April 2011, requested the approval of an eight million dollar working cash bond. Community interest was piqued through a series of informational forums that highlighted possible reductions needed to balance the budget by 2013. As a result of the feedback, the district implemented the Strategic Planning Task Force as part of a long-term plan to inform and seek community input.

FACILITIES

Built in 1924, East Campus served as the only attendance center until 1968 when West Campus opened. The most recent additions and remodeling to the schools was completed in 2003. A demographic study prepared by consulting demographer John D. Kasarda in 2007 suggested that district schools would grow beyond capacity by 2012. Given the age of the buildings and the expected growth, the district included a facilities sub-group as part of the 2011 Strategic Planning Task Force.

TECHNOLOGY

The district mission, "to provide all students with the skills they need to be lifelong learners and productive citizens" applies heavily in the area of technology. Post-high school experiences, whether a student enters the world of work or enters some form of college education, requires knowledge of technology. Additionally, technology is woven into the fiber of the district's finances, curriculum, communications and facilities. Given the rapid changes in technology and the costs associated with keeping current, the district invites input from all stakeholders in determining a five-year plan by including this sub-group in the Strategic Planning Task Force.

SUB-COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1: To develop a schedule that allows for a more effective delivery of curriculum to all students while providing enrichment and remedial opportunities for all levels.

Current Reality: Both East and West Campuses provide flexibility in the courses students may take, but the structure of the day limits the ability to schedule. Some examples of scheduling limitations are split classes, no common plan time for departments and little time for intervention/enrichment with students. An advantage of the current schedule is that it allows an opportunity for the districts to maintain certain classes by offering courses through traveling either students or teachers.

Action Steps:

- Create an extra period in the day to serve as a remediation and enrichment period
- Expand the current “Freshman Team” concept to serve all students in ninth grade
- Empower and train students to be classroom leaders/tutors
- Establish common assessment philosophy to ensure proper RtI interventions
- Hire para-professionals to supervise students where possible
- Investigate other scheduling options such as block, modified block, etc.
- Collapse the current tracking system from 1-1, 1-2, 1-3 to 1-1, 1-2 levels
- Investigate adding elective classes for all levels of learners

Goal 2: To improve and expand methods of articulation to better prepare students for the transitions of entering and leaving high school.

Current Reality: The feeder and high school districts do not have sufficient structures in place to have meaningful dialogue regarding students transitioning from eighth grade to ninth.

Action Steps:

- Improve articulation with feeder districts regarding student abilities and needs in the areas of Math and Reading through articulation days, “teacher swap” days and DC/Team Leader meetings
- Increase dialogue between districts regarding student data (academic and behavioral) and student scores
- Investigate better methods of communicating with feeder district parents regarding student placement in ninth grade
- Improve articulation between freshman students and institutions of higher education
- Expand professional development to include staff from feeder districts
- Improve student exposure to career opportunities through Career Awareness Nights and a Career Awareness data base of local business people who would be interested in being a guest speaker
- Provide opportunities for articulation between grade level teachers to analyze data (academic and behavioral) and student scores

Goal 3: To provide more active student participation and ownership in their education.

Current Reality: Currently, District 156 does not fully utilize resources to engage and motivate students. The district has forged some partnerships with various business and community groups, but all opportunities are not fully utilized.

Action Steps:

- Provide in-service to staff on lesson planning to promote student engagement and motivation
- Conduct survey/focus group to gather information about what students want to learn at all grade levels
- Create structure for alumni to return to their alma mater to describe their post-high school experience
- Increase opportunities for students to job shadow and be exposed to various careers
- Review curriculum to incorporate more Problem-based Learning experiences

COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal: To improve communication with all stakeholder groups including stakeholders who have students currently in high school, stakeholders with elementary students only, stakeholders without students in school and the business community.

Current Reality: Not all District 156 stakeholders are being reached through current methods of communication.

Action Steps:

- Expand media coverage by increasing utilization of the district website and other electronic media including, but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, text-to messaging.
- Expand/Improve Community to district interaction through:
 - Use of student ambassadors for community outreach
 - Student-led tours through the schools
 - Community coffees in the schools
 - Targeting alumni with current school information
 - Targeting local businesses with current school information
 - Advertising available facility space available for rental by community members
 - Surveying constituents to seek community input on school district issues
 - Conducting quarterly community forums to inform community members on school district issues
 - Conducting citizen technology trainings such as opening computer labs and libraries after hours for community use
 - Reaching out to all feeder communities to seek input and provide information concerning school district issues

- Expand/Improve Board of Education interaction and communication with the community through:
 - Videotaping BOE meetings and putting the video on the district’s website
 - Increasing networking with feeder district Boards of Education
 - Expanding details from the agenda that are placed on the website
 - Providing Public Relations training for Board of Education members
 - Hosting two State-of-the District Addresses annually; one presented by the superintendent and one presented by the BOE president
 - Creating and broadcasting webinars and podcasts via the website
- Hire a district Public Relations person

FINANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal: To maintain a sound and sustainable financial foundation through a balanced budget that will ensure strong academic standards into the future.

Current Reality: District 156 has a non-sustainable financial foundation.

New Reality:

- The economic situation we are facing will not get better anytime soon.
- To survive, the District will not be able to “be everything to everyone” or “do everything for everybody”.
- Future solutions will hinge on “brain power” not mega dollar budget increases – it will be the ultimate test of resource management.
- Focus must be on those things that are distinctive to the core mission of educating and benefiting the majority of the students, not in “fringe” programs or “nice to haves”.
- It requires shared responsibility . . . it must not become personal.

Recommendations to Shape the Future Financial Discussions/Decisions:

1. Build trust with the community
 - Good Communication
 - Must be a partnership and requires a more effective outreach program
 - Full financial disclosure
 - Clear, simple to understand budget information/plans
2. Implement budget trend analysis
 - Conduct analysis of both revenues and expenses
 - Examine ‘where we have been and where we are going’; find a sustainable balance over time
 - Establish “trigger points” that will drive immediate action
 - Use to create multi-year budget process

3. Decrease expenditures

- Examine salaries (teachers, staff, District)
 - Must reflect the realities of the economic situation both during the good and bad times
- Analyze benefits – especially health care costs.
 - Consider cafeteria plans
- Seek other efficiencies
 - Pursue greater use of volunteers/part-time staff

4. Increase Revenues

- Big one is a referendum, but not for 3-5 years
 - Lay the game plan / groundwork now
- Consider “out of the box” ideas
 - Competitive grant writer
 - Organizational/academic efficiencies to create economies of scale

5. Prepare for Capital Investments

- Need to have plans in-place for big expenditures (boilers, facilities, etc.)
 - Establish set aside monies as an emergency/rainy day fund

6. Establish Connections with External Constituencies

- Pursue corporate sponsorships / partnerships / endowments
- Pursue partnerships with other schools – share resources
 - Special education program . . . in-house specialized programs and/or sharing of community facilities

Action Steps:

- Pass a Referendum
- Collect outstanding fees from student enrollment
- Increase current fees
- Institute a fee for co-curricular participation
- Create corporate sponsorships and partnerships
- Reduce coaching stipends / increase volunteers for coaching and co-curricular positions
- Reduce or eliminate tuition reimbursement
- Reduce the amount of staff through attrition
- Reduce pay for staff (Teachers, Administration, Classified)
- Consider early retirement buyouts for staff nearing retirement
- Restructure staff benefit program – particularly in regards to insurance
- Build relationships with the community
- Evaluate a “one high school” concept
- Combine District 15/156 Administrative staff into one building to condense space and utilities
- Outsource or hire part-time staff

- Lobby State Representatives. Encourage them to be part of the solution to the school funding problem
- Evaluate offering course options through web-based tutorials / virtual schools
- Reduce outside Special Education placements – offer in-district programs
- Solicit funds as a donation or endowment
- Analyze the effectiveness of programs and teaching
- Long-term trend analysis of top expenses/revenues to determine “trigger points” where action is needed
- Replace retiring positions where needed
- Reward staff for financial suggestions that result in financial savings for the district

FACILITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1: To enhance building/systems to create an energy efficient facility which supports and improves student learning.

Current Reality: The community and staff lack an understanding of the condition and functions of current facility systems required to be able prioritize future building enhancements.

Action Steps:

- Commission building and systems analysis
- Continue to expand energy efficient initiatives
- Upgrade East Campus kitchen
- Conduct a new demographic study
- Reach out to the community through forums
- Upgrade/automation based on systems analysis

Goal 2: To expand existing buildings within the district to meet current and future student and community needs.

Current Reality: Current building utilization is nearing capacity requiring mobile classroom usage due to lack of space.

Action Steps:

- Conduct a new demographic study
- Conduct a building systems and space study
- Redistrict
- Expand common areas
- Build an addition at West
- Replace mobile classrooms at West

Goal 3: District 156 should work closely with the community to meet space and educational needs

Current Reality: The interaction between the district and the community in regards to facilities is limited.

Action Steps:

- Continue to develop inter-governmental agreements
- Expand Cooperative education courses (CO-OP) to include more McHenry businesses
- Conduct joint meetings between the Board of Education and the McHenry City Council
- Discuss sharing additional assets (baseball field, tennis courts, snow removal equipment, for example) with the city of McHenry
- Franchise negotiations with the City of McHenry.
- Regular joint School Board – McHenry City Council Meetings
- Expand co-op programs.

TECHNOLOGY RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1: To leverage the district website and point-of-sale system to automate the athletic, activities and registration process.

Current Reality: Current electronic resources (website, point-of-sale) are not being fully utilized to reduce redundant manual processes regarding fees and services.

Action Steps:

- Convert district paper forms to electronic forms
- Integrate electronic forms with the point-of-sale system
- Provide training to staff on the point-of-sale system
- Expand point-of-sale system and licensing
- Involve students in the web design process
- Form a web design focus group for current users
- Research web designs

Goal 2: To Develop and implement an equipment/upgrade schedule that supports student engagement in learning.

Current Reality: District 156’s inadequate technology funding resulted in existing equipment becoming obsolete.

Action Steps:

- Develop a new Technology Plan
- Increase the Technology Fee and enforce fee collection
- Research alternative technology funding and sources

Goal 3: To enhance technology-training programs.

Current Reality: The lack of technology training opportunities is limiting potential for staff and students.

Action Steps:

- Develop a “train-the-trainer” model to teach technology programs
- Offer online webinar options to staff and students
- Increase class offerings in the area of technology

NEXT STEPS

McHenry High School District 156 would like to thank the members of the Strategic Planning Task Force for dedicating many hours of their time over an eight-month period. Much has been gained by bringing all stakeholders together to plan for the future of the district. The conversations in the sub-groups resulted in over seventy-five recommendations for moving the district forward over the next five years. Their commitment to McHenry High School and the community is appreciated.

The work of the Strategic Planning Task Force concludes with a presentation of the recommendations to the Board of Education. The BOE will prioritize the recommendations and working with district administration will develop a timeline and write the District 156 “Strategic Plan”. It now becomes the responsibility of the Board of Education and school staff to turn stakeholder suggestions into practice.

As we move toward 2016, it becomes even more important to have our community and district working together to ensure the District 156 mission of being able to provide all students with skills they need to be life-long learners and productive citizens.