

ENABLED, ENGAGED, EMPOWERED: A Blueprint for Reinventing Ovid-Elsie Area Schools

Rationale For Change

Today's economic and political climate in Michigan is forcing school systems to make difficult choices regarding how they spend their limited dollars. Over 80% of a school district's budget goes directly to employee pay, benefits and retirement. The Ovid-Elsie Area Schools have reduced staff in all parts of its operation over the past five years and have been able to maintain respectful student-teacher ratios in its classrooms. However, the newest round of reductions and other rising, fixed costs are going to greatly change the district's ability to continue to offer the type of programs and curriculum offerings that it has previously been able to afford.

The school educational delivery process has basically not changed since the first comprehensive K-12 schools were created over 100 years ago. The school year and daily attendance times have little relevance to today's digital world of 24/7 connectivity for students. The creation of quality on-line educational opportunities available to today's families at reasonable costs or no-cost make it imperative that we provide the same or better opportunities or face losing students to this market. Most students in today's schools "unplug" when they enter their buildings and have little chance to use technology in their regular classroom settings. The delivery method still revolves around teacher led lecture and skills review by homework. The actual mastering of content expectations at a high level of success is not required. A student may pass a class or earn credit by receiving a "D" grade or earning 60% of the points. Passing classes or earning credit does not equal proficiency or help produce "college ready" graduates.

Tipping Point

A "tipping point" is defined as a moment when forces change the current status quo. The combination of less dollars, declining enrollment and increasing digital learning options create a tipping point for our school system. When we look at the need to provide students with increased learning opportunities at both the remedial and advanced levels with less resources, it becomes clear that the use of technology is the only affordable way to accomplish this goal.

On-Line Components

High schools in Michigan are now required to provide at least one "on-line" learning opportunity for its students. To date, we have successfully used an on-line curriculum company, PLATO for credit recovery in the high school and for required curriculum in our alternative high school.

This company, as well as Michigan Virtual University, Florida Virtual School, Genessee ISD's GENET and numerous other private companies all offer complete curriculums on-line for students in grades K-12. Nationwide, 30% of students in middle schools and high schools have taken an on-line class. When asked to design their ultimate school, over 50% of high school students requested on-line classes as a feature of their desired school.

In the Speak Up 2009 survey almost 50% of parents said that on-line classes are a good investment for their child's school to make for enhancing student achievement. Seventy percent of the parents are also likely to purchase a mobile device for their child to use at school. Parents also responded at a 58% rate that they would purchase a data plan for their children that supports the mobile devices.

Timing Is Everything

As part of the District's Technology Plan, wireless connectivity or WI-FI has been installed throughout the middle school and high school. This enables staff and students to access the internet and any software that we own anytime and anywhere throughout our buildings. This gives us the ability to use web-based information and support materials without having to be in a specific computer laboratory. This installation helps address the wants, needs and desires of today's digital students. A recent national survey of 13 to 17 year olds revealed the following:

- 88% want more electives, on-line classes and flexible schedules
- Over 50% prefer learning through watching and practice
- Over 33% have to ask for challenges if they are doing well
- 60% feel they have to ask for help if they fall behind
- 90% have technology access but are limited to basics such as on-line research, Power Point, Excel, etc.
- 42% experience boredom daily

The good news:

- Nearly 90% plan to go to college or technical school
- 43% rank college as #1 "want to do" after high school

To meet our current and future students, we must find out what it is that they want. We will survey all of our current grade 7-12 students and review the results to help us craft how we will deliver our curriculum and improve student achievement.

Parameters Of Change

The need to change must be based on the following basic tenets and actions:

- We will seek to maintain and/or expand any viable programs while being programmatically and fiscally agile.

- We will focus on quality, efficiency and best practice in all programming.
- Program development will be considered based on all or more of these factors:
 - o Meets a clearly demonstrated need based on data and is Mission related
 - o Addresses the needs of our students and communities
 - o Demonstrates cost effectiveness while still returning desired results
- We will tell our story in as many ways possible to as many people as possible. In doing so, we will strengthen our relationships with our communities and promote our district to others.
- We will develop brand recognition and actively market our school district to our communities, families and potential families.
- We will seek affiliations with other organizations that can strengthen our district.
- We will build a culture of high expectations for students, parents, staff and communities.
- We will work collaboratively to create a culture of support, consistency and caring that will result in higher student achievement.

New Technology – New Opportunities

To transform education, we must truly personalize learning. This has been a goal of educators for generations. Now with technology, we can achieve significant, fundamental change in our education system that will lead to higher student achievement. The goals to become a technology-transformed school district are:

- Personalize learning for all students by frequent, appropriate use of technology in all classrooms and other learning places.
- Make professional learning and technology training a priority for administrators and teachers.
- Use technologies such as social media, games and simulations to engage students and encourage collaboration.
- Use on-line assessments weekly to gauge student learning and then tailor instruction for personalized learning experiences.
- Use technology applications daily in intervention programs including Special Education, Title I and Response To Intervention.

Next Steps

The basic purpose of schools is to educate all students and prepare them to be contributing members of society. The curriculum is the basis of what is taught where and when. Michigan has now adopted the Common Core curriculum. This is a national curriculum for Language Arts and Mathematics. The Science curriculum will be released during 2012. We have begun aligning these new core curriculums during the summer. This process will continue throughout the school year and will include creating common assessments that will help us measure on-going student success. The purchase of a reading series for the elementary schools that is built

around the new curriculum standards and best practices for teaching will help us reach our goal of having every student read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade. We will continue to work together towards the goal of all students achieving success.

Ultimate Goal

Today's students have never known life without digital technology. They have always used cell phones, texting, social networking and web sites. They use keyboards instead of pencils and spend more time playing games and on social networking sites than they do reading books.

The business world relies on technology for communication, project collaboration, research and product production. We must provide a curriculum delivery system that is technologically rich and utilizes the same type of tools that are used in the global business world. This will help move student learning to a more collaborative and problem solving format. We need to create 21st Century learners that have the following qualities:

- Adaptability and flexibility
- Effective communication skills
- Critical and analytical thinking abilities
- Creativity, innovation, problem solving and assessment skills

We need to help students become:

- Self-starters
- Entrepreneurs
- Risk-takers

To help them become world class workers, they will need to communicate competently in at least one world language, understand diverse cultures, races, religions and beliefs, and learn to collaborate in an international virtual learning or working environment. They will need to learn to access, evaluate and utilize information creatively and effectively to problem solve in unfamiliar areas.

What We Have Been Doing

Over the past several months, the administrative team has researched best practice concepts to raise student achievement. We have talked with successful schools and met with companies, consultants and experts to help us discover how we can help our teachers and students be more productive.

This is a list of some of what we have done to date:

- Pearson Learning Products – The largest school software company in the world – we reviewed writing, reading, math, college-readiness and other products.
- Project RED – Revolutionizing Education – The company works with school districts to implement one to one computing effectively.
- Tutor.com – This company provides on-line tutoring services to students – we have looked at numerous other companies that do the same thing.
- PD360° - An on-line professional development company that provides a large variety of in-service opportunities for staff without having to travel.
- Redesigned Web Presence – We have talked to several companies about building a modern website that will accommodate all of the needs of a 21st century school system and be a marketing tool to attract new families and students.
- Beijing Channel Consulting – We met with a representative from this company to begin a relationship between our school district and the schools that they represent – they have a strong relationship with Michigan State University and the Confucius Institute that provided us our new Chinese teacher.
- University of Phoenix – We met with a representative about potential collaboration concepts and now have another meeting to further pursue this relationship.
- Baker College – We meet with their representatives about adding on-line dual credit courses to our current program.
- Traverse City Area Public Schools and Oxford Community Schools – We met and talked with administrators about their current foreign exchange student programs and their plans for expansion.
- Video – We are creating a new video to showcase the school district.
- New logo – We are rebranding our district with the new logo – as we replace printed materials (letterhead, envelopes, etc.) we will use the new logo.
- Apple Applications Creator – We have met with a program creation team that wants to work collaboratively with Ovid-Elsie Area Schools to create new applications for learning that can be used on Apple iPads.
- We are looking at the current 7-12 schedule and how we can expand learning opportunities with on-line learning, blended learning, evening classes, Saturday classes and a true summer school.
- Sister Schools – We have begun talks to create relationships with schools throughout the world.
- Augmented Reality Products – We have talked with several virtual reality companies that create products using this new technology.
- Gaming/Learning Products – We have reviewed various learning products that use a gaming style delivery system to help students be successful.
- E-Books, Tablets, Mobile Phones – We have studied the research on how schools are successful using these products to increase student achievement.

- Hybrid School Model – We are studying the Rocketship Education elementary school model that combines traditional classroom instruction with individualized instruction using technology and Response To Intervention small groups to better meet the needs of all learners – these schools have had great success with this model.
- Early Elementary Language Immersion Project – We have studied the model used in a Lansing public elementary school where one-half of each school day is taught in Chinese and the other in English – this begins in Kindergarten and adds a grade each year.

We will continue to research and communicate with potential partners that can help us with our goal of raising student achievement. Great school districts are comprised of committed collaborative teams of Boards of Education, administrators, teachers, support staff, communities, parents and students that work towards the goal of having every student be successful academically, socially, emotionally and physically. All stakeholders will have a voice in this process as we create a truly World Class School District for the Ovid-Elsie students of today and tomorrow.