

School Board Retreat, Student Assignment, Collaborative Bargaining Process and Budget By Julie M. Janssen

Earlier this month, I had an opportunity to share information about our strategic plan, "Envision 2014," at the school board retreat. "Envision 2014" serves as the foundation for the work to move us forward in the next five years. This framework is the foundation for building a strategic plan that will help us achieve our goal of 100 percent student success. Essentially, it explains where the district is going and how we are going to get there. I plan to share "Envision 2014" with district and school leaders at the superintendent's meeting on April 8. A PowerPoint and additional information will be available following the meeting.

During the board retreat, staff members shared information and data about a number of district initiatives regarding the graduation rate, drop-out prevention, student discipline, differentiated accountability and charter schools. Board members and district leaders had meaningful and honest dialogue about issues and challenges we face in a number of areas. We came away with a renewed sense of purpose and direction as a leadership team.

In the area of student assignment, we have begun the second phase for the 2009-10 school year – open enrollment. The first of two open enrollment periods began March 16 and ends March 27. This period is only for K-4 students who are in a non-zoned elementary school. Parents have been sent a letter with instructions on how they can request to stay in their current non-zoned school until the highest grade if they agree to provide their own transportation. New student registration for incoming kindergarteners and other new students begins on April 20. Kindergarteners, like those students who will be entering 6th- and 9th-grades, will be assigned to their zoned school. Later this summer, a second open enrollment period will be available for parents who wish to request a change in their child's assigned school. Dates for the summer open enrollment period have not yet been set.

During February, meetings were conducted with the faculty, staff and administration of all of the elementary schools that are closing in 2009-10 as well as the four middle schools scheduled for consolidation into two new fundamental middle schools in the fall. Visitation teams included representatives from human resources, student assignment, facilities, regional associate superintendents, as well as representatives of PCTA/PESPA and SEIU/FPSU. The intent of the meetings was to answer questions and to clarify the process that would be used in addressing the assignment of employees who might be displaced by these changes. The meetings were well received and a commitment was made to maintain a communication process that would allow employees to continue to ask questions and receive answers that will help in making their plans for next year.

The district's collaborative bargaining teams continue to meet to address major issues associated with developing new three-year contracts for all four of the district's labor organizations. Of particular concern is the need to reduce the district budget in light of significant losses in revenue from the state. The Employee Work Systems Committee has redesigned the involuntary and voluntary transfer processes to enable the district to work with employees impacted by the school closings and consolidations for next year. The Employee Well Being and Satisfaction Committee is reviewing issues related to salaries and healthcare benefits for this year and next. The committee also recommended including domestic partners insurance coverage in the Request for Proposal (RFP) going out to carriers for next year's health insurance benefits. The committee also has been discussing the impact of changing the secondary teaching day to 300 minutes and seven courses per semester. This issue has an impact on the overall district budget plan for next year. The Employee Education and Training Committee is discussing the differentiated accountability requirements as well as the concept of school-based (decentralized) decision making. All of the subcommittees are trying to complete their work in

time for contracts to be presented to the membership of each labor organization as well as the School Board before June. The Bargaining Leadership Team (BLT) is reviewing the recommendations of all three subcommittees to determine which ones are viable for next year. BLT is also developing a joint communication to go out to all employees to update them on the local and state financial crisis and hopefully keep everyone informed on our progress in preparing for next year.

At the next school board workshop on March 24, our finance team will give an update on the budget process. As you know, the Florida legislative session is now in progress and some of the information that would affect our district's financial situation will not be finalized until May. The Governor's budget for fiscal year 2009-10 includes a distribution of the new nonrecurring federal stimulus funds estimated to be \$35-million for our district. The Governor's budget assumes that Florida will be granted a waiver and that these funds will be essentially without "strings" attached. As of now, we have not received any information as to how these funds can be used. Our concern is that the time required to clarify these issues will place us into a "time crunch" as we prepare to build a budget for the 2009-10 fiscal year. We will keep you updated as we learn more over the next several weeks.

As we approach the spring holiday break, please know how much I appreciate all that you do for our students and families. Enjoy your time off with family and friends and come back refreshed and ready to continually inspire students and provide great service to families.

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