

# Chippewa Valley unveils new strategic plan

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LaTonya Hudson and Bonna Andrus presented information regarding the cultural goal portion of the Chippewa Valley Schools Strategic Planning report on June 15. (Photo by NICOLE TUTTLE)

A new strategic plan for Chippewa Valley Schools was unveiled to the school board on June 15.

Chippewa Valley Superintendent Ron Roberts said the importance of having a strategic plan relates to direction and priorities.

“We could go off in one million directions if we wanted to and it's obvious we need to have priorities,” he said. “We need to know what it is we want to do well.”

Roberts also said the plan will help simplify decision-making and inform stakeholders about district happenings while creating a common message throughout the district.

“In any school building any place across the district they all have unique cultures, unique ways of going about doing things,” he said. “What this should do is drive alignment – that what is going on in one elementary building needs to be somewhat similar to what is going on in another elementary building. It might be different but your end goal needs to be the same.”

Roberts said that the strategic planning process was particularly important due to the current atmosphere of education.

“I think everyone in this room understands that with what is going on with education and what is expected of schools, it is very important that we think seriously about what it is we need to do well to accomplish our mission and to do it across the district,” he said.

Strategic planning began with reviewing the vision, mission and beliefs, which was done by a committee of district administrators and union officials. The district also hosted a community forum with Dr. Robert Maxfield from Oakland University, a former school superintendent.

“We also did use Survey Monkey and sent all that out to the staff, and we had 579 responses regarding both vision and mission,” Roberts noted.

An additional committee comprising administration, district staff, parents, community members and business leaders decided on goal areas and broke up into goal teams, Roberts said.

“We met with four goal teams,” he explained. “So after those teams did their work and developed what they thought was their goal related to the areas that were identified, then that information was sent out to the community. It was sent out to not only district staff but also all of our parents. And it was sent to 10,000 people and we received 751 responses, which is really a good response rate for something like that.”

The goal teams then made decisions on whether or not they thought their goals needed to be adjusted.

“(We) were very cognizant of the idea that we wanted to involve a lot of people and people that we maybe had not asked about the district in quite some time, and I think we did that with just the response data,” Roberts said.

Information about the strategic plan’s culture goal was presented by Cherokee Elementary teacher Bonna Andrus and parent LaTonya Hudson.

“We began with the question of: how can our goal help all students to improve and decrease the gap between highest and lowest groups of students,” Hudson said. “We came up with a quote, ‘Culture trumps strategies,’ that really stood out to our group. And schools must be safe, warm, and inviting places that we can expect our students to learn.”

Andrus said the committee took all of its ideas and developed three subheadings. According to the strategic planning packet distributed at the board meeting, the committee established areas of focus including: creating an awareness and understanding of diversity, developing a stronger relationship with the community, and improving the school climate. Strategies included educating staff on disabilities, medical problems and mental health issues.

The ultimate culture committee goal was to enhance the community by embracing and celebrating diversity, connecting students, families, staff and community, according to the packet.

The goal is important to Chippewa Valley Schools because it aligns with the district’s vision, mission and beliefs, offering a supportive environment that promotes creativity, growth and individually as well as a collaborative community partnership and allowing all members of the district to feel welcome, engaged and valued, the packet states.

The technology goal of the plan was presented by parent Don Langlands and Cherokee Elementary School principal Lynn Mair. Langlands said the committee comprised 10 members.

“For Chippewa we wanted it to be bigger than just the next generation of technology,” Langlands said. “So what we looked at is what is going to be the game changer: what can we do that is going to change how this district looks and how the technology looks and feels in five years. ... We came up with the goal for technology – that is Chippewa Valley schools will seamlessly integrate technology throughout the district in order to modernize the educational experience.”

Mair said the committee for technology goals began with outcomes, which included six components. The committee looked at what the district has in place and what it is missing.

She said the district should be able to collaborate across departments and embed technology more efficiently

into the classrooms.

“We have the community of very supportive and successful people and that community needs to continue to be engaged and informed in the process and what is going on in the schools,” she added. “We really thought that technology was such an important goal because technology influences everything that we will be doing in the future.”

Mair described Chippewa Valley as a leader in technology and the 21st-century classroom.

“That has been important to who we are as a district,” she said. “What has happened, however, is as times change the way we use technology has also changed; and that is why we are here today.”

Langlands said technology will serve to enable students in the future.

“It is going to enable us to do more with less, with less resources in the same time period. In what I see from the business world when you look at the skill set that people have to have to thrive and to be successful in the future, the world is global. It is fast-paced, it is collaborative,” he said.

Langlands said students will need critical and problem solving skills in the future, as well as collaboration skills.

“Technology is not going to give it to them, but it is going to be an enabler,” he noted. “It is going to help them be so much more successful in the future.”

Professional learning goals were presented by Dakota High School teacher Stacy Comoford and parent Kyle LeFief.

“Every employee from the custodians on up need to have training in their respective fields appropriate to their work and we need to make sure that it was equitable across all levels,” Comoford said.

Goal selection for this area of the strategic plan started with analyzing the current professional development landscape and determining what the most pressing needs of the district are, according to the packet.

“We need to focus on maintaining, not just maintaining but enhancing the educational experience for all students. ... We need to include more than just the teaching and learning. ... We wanted all learning to be research-based to achieve the highest level of impact for the staff. We wanted to include continual training with special emphasis on new staff who often receives less structured instruction,” LeFief said.

The packet outlined the professional learning goals of the technology portion of the plan as having four parts. The overall goal is to advance the culture of professional learning to deliver a good education. The structured goal allows for more consistent and sustainable sharing and implementation time, and becoming goal based to align with the mission of the district. The balanced goal focused on including all employees in the professional learning specific to their role. The high quality goal was meant to be personalized and employee-driven, with expanded professional learning opportunities and allocations for employees.

“In structured, there needs to be consistent and sustainable sharing among all staff. ... It needs to be balanced in that it needs to include all employees specific to their role within the district. Also to focus on things like safety and health and culture and all of these things, everyone needs staff training in all of these areas. And it needs to be high quality and by that it can't be one-size-fits-all. It has to be diversified based on need,” Comoford said.

The importance of this goal to the district is to ensure that students receive an education based on best practices in a safe and secure environment provided by employees who have current training and techniques specific to

their responsibilities, the packet states.

The curriculum goal of the strategic plan was presented by Iroquois Middle School assistant principal Christina Kozouz and parent Sarah Thompson, who is also a counselor in the district. The group was the largest in the strategic planning committee with 22 representatives.

This group brainstormed key topics and attempted to create a realistic goal. Their overall goal was to get each student to demonstrate creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills to succeed in a competitive and changing world.

“We knew we were able to do this in steps and we trust that our district will put together an implementation team that will make it doable so we were really excited after getting through that process,” Kozouz said.

The components of the curriculum goal are to integrate oral and written communications skills in all curricular areas, integrate project-based and cooperative learning in all curricular areas, review non-core classes at all levels and review opportunities for remediation as well as acceleration for students at all learning levels.

“Cooperative learning would be incorporated in all classes and even the idea of a transition project was brought up and people really liked the idea of maybe at each of the levels,” Thompson said.

The next steps for the strategic plan are for the board of education to have adoption of the mission, vision and belief statements as well as the entire strategic plan, according to the packet. After this implementation teams will need to be established, timelines for implementation of the goal strategies will need to be developed, monitoring, evaluation and adjustments would have to take place, and a final report made to the board as well as the community.

In addition, the Chippewa Valley Board of Education also approved the 2015-16 appropriation act for general and special revenue funds on June 15.

“We have general fund projected revenues of just over \$149 million and projected expenditures of about \$148.3 million,” Chippewa Valley Schools Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations Scott Sederlund said.

The district will have an operating surplus of \$676,404.

Also at the June 15 meeting, Dakota High School bowling Coach Kevin Wemyss brought team members of the 2015 State Champion Dakota High School Girls Varsity Bowling team before the Chippewa Valley Board of Education for recognition.

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