

GREAT SCHOOLS, TOGETHER

UNIT 4 LONG RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

FINAL REPORT

2008



GREAT SCHOOLS, TOGETHER
UNIT 4 LONG RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

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Acknowledgments

Listed below are the members of the Vision Committee and the three Working Groups that incorporated the community's feedback into the long-range strategic plan.

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Executive Summary

The Unit 4 School District's initiative Great Schools, Together was conceived by the Unit 4 School Board and supported by the Administration. This initiative brought community members together to share their vision for our schools, now and in the future. The process began in November 2007 and concluded in September 2008.

The goal of Great Schools, Together was to create a cohesive, long-range strategic plan for Unit 4 schools—using as much community input as possible—so that the Unit 4 School Board and Administration could move forward in ways that truly reflect the vision and goals of those they serve.

The plan for Unit 4 includes a vision statement and six strategic goals in the following focus areas:

- I. Student Achievement and Well-being
- II. Stewardship and Accountability
- III. Faculty and Staff Excellence
- IV. Engagement of Parents and the Community
- V. Diversity
- VI. Facilities

Aligned with each goal are short, medium and long-term action steps. The time horizons for implementing and realizing the results of these actions are defined as follows:

Short term: accomplished within 3 years

Medium term: accomplished within 8 years

Long term: accomplished within 15 years

In addition, outcome measures, to track progress towards each of the goals, are defined.

Based on input from the community, **several priorities for Unit 4 emerged**, specifically:

- Establish and sustain effective *two-way communication with the community*
- Establish a *uniform, proactive approach regarding behavior/discipline* in the District that emphasizes positive models, desired behaviors, and family involvement
- Develop a *10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)*, prioritizing well-defined known needs, while preparing for long-term changes
- Optimize *class size* to foster academic achievement
- Increase *time in the school day* and improve *flexibility of class scheduling*
- Hire, support and retain *qualified faculty and staff* by creating excellent teaching environments
- Utilize *evidence-based curriculum and assessment* that incorporates teaching methods appropriate to all students' learning styles
- Offer *choices for special education and gifted students* with regard to program placement, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach

- Prepare students to communicate in a global environment by offering *foreign language as a core component*, by introducing foreign language instruction in K-5, and by increasing the number of languages offered in middle and high school to more non-traditional offerings
- Develop an assessment tool for determining *equity between facilities* and bring each facility up to a consistent base line
- Create a *Location Team* of school staff, City of Champaign, Village of Savoy, Champaign Park District staff, and development community to begin identifying locations for new school facilities
- Create an *Educational Programming Team*, similar to the CIP team that is comprised of educators, staff, facilities managers and educational programming consultants and architects. Both teams will work together to determine what is best for facilities and infrastructure improvements over the long term.

The Unit 4 Board of Education will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of this plan and for engaging the community in an ongoing planning process. The Unit 4 Administration will use this long-range strategic plan to create more detailed action plans and responsibilities to achieve the aims of the Great Schools, Together initiative.

B. *Summary of Planning Process*

Overview

To achieve the aims of the Great Schools, Together initiative, the community was engaged in a variety of ways. Community members served on a Vision Committee, in Working Groups, and as facilitators. All other community members were encouraged to attend one or more of ten community forums to brainstorm and share ideas. Held between March and May of 2008, these forums were scheduled at a variety of times and in various locations throughout the community. The hope was that everyone interested could attend at least one forum. Seven of the forums were theme-based, focusing on: Excellence & Equity, Programs, Infrastructure, and Engaging Community Stakeholders. Three—the first and last two forums—were open for participants to choose the topics they wanted to discuss.

Notes were generated after each of the forums. E-mailed to participants and posted on the Web site, these notes were also sent to members of the Vision Committee and Working Groups. *It was the community's comments, offered during these ten forums, that provided the core content for the long-range plans compiled by the three Working Groups—Programs, Infrastructure, and Engaging Community Stakeholders. The Vision Committee also referred back to these notes as they compiled the three separate plans into a cohesive whole.*

Structure and Roles

Vision Committee

The Unit 4 School Board invited community members to be part of the Vision Committee (VC). This committee was formed with the intention of ensuring—to the best of the Board’s ability—that all main community interests were represented. The VC’s role included: defining the vision of the District, launching and overseeing the planning process, and combining the three plans submitted by the Working Groups into a cohesive whole. The Vision Committee met ten times during the process.

The VC identified three main topic areas for the long-range plan—Programs, Infrastructure, and Engaging Community Stakeholders. Working Groups were created to focus on each of these areas.

Working Groups

Members of the Working Groups (WG) were invited by Board and VC members. The members selected were deemed to have the expertise necessary for each group, and represent all of the community stakeholder groups. The WG’s pored over the community input, meeting either weekly or every other week for a few months to create three separate draft plans which they submitted to the VC.

Community Forums

Ten community forums were scheduled from March to May of 2008. The first and last two forums were open-topic. This started the process with participants sharing those topics that were most important to them, and ended with the opportunity for participants to cover anything they felt had not been shared during the previous forums. The remaining seven forums mirrored the themes of the Working Groups, focusing on Programs, Infrastructure, and Engaging Community Stakeholders. Excellence & Equity was also added as a forum topic, given past challenges that resulted in the Consent Decree.

Over 265 individuals, from a broad cross-section of the community, participated in the forums. Forty community members with facilitation experience volunteered their time to facilitate the forums. Notes from each Forum were typed up and, where possible, compiled into themes. Throughout the process, these notes were posted on the Great Schools, Together Web site and e-mailed to those who attended the forums or requested a copy be sent to them.

C. Vision Statement

In partnership with the community, Unit 4 will be an exemplary school district that promotes each student's opportunity to succeed in a global environment.

To achieve this vision the District is committed to:

- Empowering strong leadership, demanding accountability, and inspiring performance at the highest level
- Operating through a culture of long-range planning implemented through short-term action plans
- Providing world-class, sustainable facilities and technology that support learning
- Providing comprehensive, research-based educational programming that supports student achievement
- Recognizing, embracing and celebrating diversity
- Fostering a safe environment where all students and employees are valued and respected
- Hiring, supporting and retaining faculty and staff known for their excellence in educating students
- Building partnerships with parents, the community, local businesses and higher education to strengthen each student's educational experience
- Acting as a responsible steward of the community's resources

D. Strategic Goals, Actions and Measures

I. Student Achievement and Well-Being

Goal: Foster high academic achievement, wellness and well-being among all learners in a safe, supportive environment

Short-term actions

- A. Establish a uniform, proactive approach regarding behavior/discipline in the District that emphasizes positive models, desired behaviors, and family involvement
- B. Provide more in-depth solutions to recurring and serious behavior problems
- C. Implement a bullying prevention program
- D. Make procedures and criteria for identifying and serving special education and gifted students transparent to professionals and families
- E. Offer choices for special education and gifted students with regard to program placement, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach
- F. Promote engagement and active learning for all students through the use of differentiated instruction, hands-on learning, project based instruction and field trips
- G. Implement programs that teach students practical work and life skills
- H. Expand programming focusing on career and technical exploration
- I. Improve nutrition in breakfast and lunch programs and vending machines
- J. Conduct, analyze, and utilize the data from the graduating senior survey developed at the U of I

Mid-term actions

- A. Offer foreign language as a core component by introducing foreign language instruction in K-5 and increase the number of languages offered in the middle and high schools
- B. Expand after-school enrichment and tutoring programs in all schools
- C. Introduce computer technology and research at earlier grade levels and integrate it into daily activities and lessons K-12
- D. Strengthen programs for gifted and special education children
- E. Increase the number and variety of honors classes at middle and high school levels and establish bridge programs to enable more students to take them
- F. Keep students engaged over the summer with a variety of programs
- G. Increase the number of trained medical professionals
- H. Work with Public Health District to offer students their required immunizations on site
- I. Assist parents in obtaining foundational skills so they can assist their children
- J. Partner with early intervention programs to identify children most at-risk, establish transitions from the 3-5 program, and offer transition planning earlier for those graduating from high school
- K. Optimize class size to foster academic achievement
- L. Adopt an accelerated school community approach which will enhance learning for all children, by incorporating challenging activities into each class
- M. Establish flexible, wrap around services that promote readiness and academic success for all students
- N. Increase funding for and amount of time spent on enrichment activities at all levels
- O. Revise P.E. curriculum to focus on lifelong fitness

- P. Expand cultural and fine arts programming
- Q. Provide curriculum/activities/community events for students during school holidays and in-service days
- R. Offer more counseling/social services for students and parents regarding post secondary educational or training options, including required testing and financial aid options

Long-term actions

- A. Expand middle school sports programs to include 6th graders and expand sports offerings for both boys and girls at middle schools
- B. Offer additional early childhood and Pre-K programs
- C. Institute evidence-based curriculum, which teaches to students' individualized abilities; assess in ways other than standardized testing
- D. Provide ISAT/PSAE accommodations routinely for qualified students

Outcome measures

- Attendance rate
- Class size enrollment
- Community satisfaction
- Discipline referrals and suspensions
- English language standards
- Enrichment program participation
- Extracurricular activity participation
- Graduation rate
- Instructional time by subject
- Outstanding student performance (e.g. how many National Merit Scholars)
- Parental involvement
- Senior class student performance
- Social/emotional learning standards
- Student achievement (measured through multiple programs)
- Student participation in learning activities
- Student progress
- Student retention rate
- Students required to repeat classes or grades
- Support program effectiveness

II. Stewardship and Accountability

Goal: Align the District's priorities and resources through a community-involved planning process implemented through focused action plans with regular progress reports

Short-term actions

- A. Continue to engage in a long-term strategic planning and visioning process
- B. Build an annual reporting process to the School Board that includes public input
- C. Hold bi-annual open forums for the community to participate in upcoming school year plans and assess the previous school year.
- D. Improve the District's efforts to identify and pursue grant proposals
- E. Continue to institute principles of fiscal responsibility
- F. Actively seek private donations to build/maintain facilities

Outcome measures

- Administrator/teacher retention
- Amount of donations, grants, referendum success
- Community satisfaction
- Funding allocation
- Grant funding
- Number of candidate running for school board
- Parental involvement
- Public forum involvement

III. Faculty and Staff Excellence

Goal: Retain, hire, and support highly qualified faculty and staff that reflects our student population

Short-term actions

- A. Develop a plan to hire and retain high quality principals, faculty, and staff, with an emphasis on strong building leadership, through incentives including, but not limited to, competitive pay, good working conditions, excellent professional development, mentoring, performance bonuses, and opportunities for advancement
- B. Create a professional development plan emphasizing effective teaching in culturally and economically diverse environments (e.g. Madison Professional Development School Partnerships)
- C. Develop mechanisms to continually evaluate faculty and staff and tailor training programs based on their development needs
- D. Create pathways for teachers to use evidence-based methodology, support the implementation of those proven methods, and then hold staff accountable for the outcomes by creating alternative assessment methods which measure success

Mid-term actions

- A. Partner with UIUC and Parkland to strengthen professional development and continuing education.
- B. Hire, support and retain qualified staff by creating excellent teaching environments.
- C. Improve communication between teachers and parents around individual student issues such as: transition to kindergarten or a new school, homework, test scores and grades, and behavior

Long-term actions

- A. Support the creation of Professional Learning Communities or other community-centered decision-making models
- B. Increase staff to allow for more offerings in fine arts, special education, physical education, social services, teaching support services and one medical professional in each school

Outcome measures

- Community satisfaction
- Number of highly qualified teachers
- Number of teachers with masters degrees
- Parental involvement
- Teacher and staff accreditation, certificates, awards, and recognitions
- Teacher and staff retention rates

IV. Engagement of Parents and the Community

Goal: Effectively and efficiently engage parents and other community stakeholders resulting in strong partnerships

Short-term actions

- A. Train Administrators District-wide on becoming effective listeners and communicators while displaying professionalism and common courtesy
- B. Create a central point of contact for disseminating information and for identifying, cataloging, recruiting, and maintaining community partnerships
- C. Recruit and coordinate volunteers to support District programs and train teachers on how to use volunteers most effectively
- D. Regularly coordinate meetings with the media to foster a better working relationship and understanding
- E. Build upon programs that are working currently in the schools (e.g., *CU One-to-One Mentoring*, *VEYA*, *AVID*, *TALKS* mentoring and social work programs, *Positive Behavior Facilitation (PBF) Attendance*, *Truancy Education Alternative Opportunity Program*, *Attendance Improvement Team*, *Attendance Outreach Workers*, *Project Graduation*, etc.)
- F. Coordinate with local realtors to provide new members of the community with timely and accurate information about the District
- G. Create community advisory groups in areas such as special education, equity, and discipline to report to School Board at designated times
- H. Take the official school board meeting “on the road” to different schools
- I. Maximize the power of the Internet by re-engineering the District Web site to improve communication between teachers and parents
- J. Establish more partnerships with UIUC and Parkland at academic, cultural and vocational/technical levels
- K. Create and participate in community advisory groups aimed at explaining terms and language revolving around Individualized Education Plans (IEP)
- L. Establish and maintain a consistent District presence in the community
- M. Increase access for disenfranchised community stakeholders by establishing an “Ombudsman” position
- N. Provide a way to get better information out to the parents and community (e.g. Family Information Center)
- O. Create a quick reference which includes District information for parents including key community resources

Mid-term actions

- A. Reconstitute and foster ongoing **two-way** communication between community stakeholders, the administration, and the School Board making sure that the diversity of the community is represented
- B. Train teachers and staff District-wide in service quality which includes communication, customer service, management style, and employee relations
- C. Train District-wide on soliciting and valuing parental and community involvement
- D. Coordinate with the Human Resources departments of local businesses to address their recruiting concerns related to Unit 4
- E. With parents as partners, teach students about appropriate and inappropriate communication between students and teachers to promote awareness of sexual abuse or harassment
- F. Partner with local business and industry to offer non-traditional classes for credit in the workplace
- G. Work with Lincoln Trail Libraries to develop and publicize academic resources for students and families

Outcome Measures

- Community acceptance
- Community involvement
- Community satisfaction
- District enrollment
- Employment rate directly out of high school
- Number of community partnerships
- Number of District volunteers
- Number of hits on the District Web site
- Number of positive media stories
- Parent involvement
- Post secondary placement directly out of high school
- Post-secondary enrollment

V. Diversity

Goal: Leverage the strength of our diverse population to create a rich academic and social environment in each of our schools

Short-term actions

- A. Conduct, analyze, and utilize the data from the District climate survey
- B. Conduct outreach to minority community to assist the District in the attendance and retention of students
- C. Provide mandatory, ongoing diversity training for teachers, administrators and staff that addresses classroom climate, expectations, engagement, learning and assessment, and discipline
- D. Create an official office that will oversee/implement equity programs and initiatives
- E. Address the over-representation of minorities in special education classes
- F. Address the under-representation of minorities in upper level classes
- G. Implement curriculum and programs to embrace and promote understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures, including through art, drama, dance, clubs, and extra curricular activities

Mid-term actions

- A. Ensure that the faculty and staff reflect the racial and cultural composition of the District

Outcome Measures

- Community satisfaction
- Diversity of students within the individual schools
- Graduation and drop out rates of minorities
- Retention rates of students within the District
- Staff diversity
- The results of the climate surveys that the District conducts

VI. Facilities

Goal: Revitalize, build, and maintain facilities that are safe, sustainable and allow equitable access to programming across the District

Short-term actions

- A. Develop a public input process to address capital programming needs and school sizes for all grade levels
- B. Hire a facilities planner and establish a capital improvement planning team to create a ten-year capital improvement plan
- C. Re-evaluate the existing facilities studies and reprioritize the suggested improvements based on the long-term facilities plan
- D. Establish an Educational Programming Team, comprised of educators, staff, facilities managers and educational programming consultants and architects, to work with the capital improvement planning team to ensure programming needs are met
- E. Provide a safe physical environment for learning at all schools
- F. Establish energy efficiency as a priority in all renovation and new construction projects
- G. Establish a criterion that all new construction and renovation projects be built to United States Green Building Council LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards
- H. Quantify and communicate benefits to community for establishing environmental, energy efficient, high performance buildings
- I. Actively apply for grant funding to offset the cost of facility upgrades
- J. Investigate the potential for renovation, reuse or disposition of existing buildings and work with the City to develop a procedure to ensure the best possible reuse of the property
- K. Explore “land banking” or purchasing land for new schools
- L. Develop a waste management plan

Mid-term actions

- A. Develop a cost/benefit analysis tool to assess the usefulness and viability of each facility
- B. Work in partnership with private business, the city of Champaign, the Village of Savoy and residents to secure land for school locations that are determined based on projected community growth
- C. Ensure all facilities have equitable access to and incorporation of technology as appropriate to support student achievement
- D. Actively seek partnerships with other units of government and with private industry to share space, develop programs, fund programs and/or construct facilities

Long-term actions

- A. Negotiate with surrounding school districts to define district boundaries that reflect efficient service areas

Outcome measures

- Amount of waste disposal
- Community satisfaction
- Energy consumption
- Maintenance costs
- Measurable benchmarks from capital improvement plan
- Utility costs