

Aledo Community Unit School District

*2006/2007
State of the District Report*



by Superintendent Alan Boucher

Introduction

It is right and proper for an organization to pause periodically to evaluate itself. As superintendent, I have a unique vantage point to see many of the district programs and activities from a bird's eye view. After being in the superintendency for a year, I have developed ideas about many areas of our district. Following a review of some of the major activities of the 2006/2007 school year, I share my thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of the district, concerns I have about the district, and opportunities I see for our district's future. It is my hope that the reader will be able to gain an understanding of my perceptions and, perhaps, learn a thing or two about the district that he/she may not already know.

2006/2007 School Year in Review

The following is a brief description of some of the programs, activities and changes implemented during the 2006/2007 school year. They are not listed in order of importance.

- A new relationship with an insurance consultant (Bushue Human Resource Management, Inc.) was established.
- New relationships were established with an architectural firm (Kenyon and Associates) and an engineering firm (IEFM Consulting Engineers).
- The consulting firm, Harold Ford and Associates conducted a feasibility study to determine if a consolidation between the Westmer and Aledo School Districts was beneficial to both districts.
- As a part of a strategic planning project, a needs assessment was conducted, the district mission statement was modified and belief statements were established.
- The district website received a major overhaul. Information on the website was updated and kept timely throughout the year.
- Reciprocal reporting agreements were established with the Aledo Police Department and the Mercer County Sheriff's Department.
- Salaries and benefits were negotiated with the Aledo Education Association (AEA).
- A three-year labor agreement covering language, salaries, and benefits was negotiated with the Aledo School Employees Association (ASEA).
- A credit card system was implemented throughout the district to minimize reimbursements. The procurement card program, known simply as "P-Card", will also generate revenue for the district through rebates.
- As a way to save more money on energy costs, all electrical meters in the district that were not already assigned to the Illinois Energy Consortium were added to the program.
- An electronic payroll system for the employees was implemented.

- The substitute calling procedures were streamlined by having one person do all of the calling. The new procedures saved the district money and improved communication.
- A new food service coop agreement was established with area districts to save money on food service program costs. The new coop was necessary because the existing one disbanded.
- The member districts of the ROE established the Incoming Freshman Academy (IFA) as a way to give academically struggling students a boost.
- The high school moved toward an inclusionary model of special education.
- Apollo initiated a new special education strategy called Response to Intervention (RTI) that remediates academic problems soon after they appear.
- An ACT preparation class was implemented in the evenings of the second semester for the high school juniors.
- The district's networking system was completely replaced with new servers.
- The Junior High and Apollo were connected to the high school's internet service by way of a wireless connection to the high school.
- All of the computers at the high school were replaced.
- All of the computers in the Junior High computer lab and the Junior High library were replaced.
- A second computer lab was established at Apollo.
- The district's crisis plan was updated and a corresponding crisis flip chart was created and placed in every classroom.
- A charitable fund called the Care Program was established to meet the needs of students in financial need.
- Significant progress was made toward the establishment of an educational foundation.
- A football cooperative agreement was established with Westmer.
- Cooperative agreements for baseball, softball, and golf were established.
- An online supply ordering system through Office Depot was implemented.
- A \$51,000 grant was secured to retrofit all of the lighting fixtures at Apollo and the Junior High. The project was finished in July.
- A new staff newsletter called "Update" was implemented.
- A program for providing the staff Hepatitis B shots was implemented.
- A bio-terrorism component of the crisis plan was added.
- Began using on-line data analysis software with our standardized testing (Schooldataforall.org).

District Strengths

There are many aspects of the district for which we can be proud. Many dedicated staff members, parents, and community volunteers work selflessly for the children of our community. As district superintendent, I note the following strengths.

- Community support – The Aledo community roots for the district and wants to see it succeed. They support the district by attending events, contributing resources, and offering words of encouragement.

- The booster club and the PTO are active organizations that contribute a lot of money, time and ideas to the schools.
- Junior High Building – The crown jewel of the district is the Junior High facility. The building is well maintained and meets the needs of the students.
- Technology – A year ago, our district’s technology was one of our greatest weaknesses. Now, it is one of our strengths. The computers are powerful, fast, dependable, safe and able to access the World Wide Web in ways that were previously impossible.
- Band/Chorus – Our music programs have a very good reputation outside of the district. The health of the programs is seen through the high number of students who participate. In the spring, Mr. Ruggles was notified that the pep band was selected to perform at the Class A boys state basketball finals. This is considered to be the ultimate compliment to a pep band program.
- Art – Last year, our students dominated the conference art show. We have a lot of talented students who have been able to refine their artistic skills as a result of the art instruction they receive.
- Finances – Our district is just now recovering from the financial vulnerability that was created from building the new Junior High. The State has now given us its highest financial profile rating. *See Table 1*
- Crisis Plan – Last year a significant amount of work was expended in updating our crisis plan. This document and its companion crisis flip chart will help us respond quickly and appropriately during a crisis.
- Policy Manual – The district has been faithful in updating its policy manual. As a result, our district will be able to more effectively weather legal challenges and will be able to implement practices that are appropriate.
- Curriculum Improvement – There have been a host of activities related to curricular improvement in our district. Activities included extensive staff development, expanded tutoring, new courses, curriculum work, and curriculum material purchases.
- Vocational Program – We are very fortunate to have an outstanding vocational program in our district. There are many students who participate in the curricular offerings and the results of their efforts are known regionally.
- Freshman Academy – Some of the students entering high school are not fully prepared to be successful. The Incoming Freshman Academy is a program that has a positive influence on our academic program.
- Website – During this past year, a lot of new information was added to the district website. The information was kept up-to-date throughout the year.
- Landscaping – Having a designated person to work on the district landscaping was a huge improvement. Mrs. Bewley really improved many of the areas in the district that needed attention.
- Counseling – Many times, the emotional issues students have get in the way of learning. Having a counselor at each of the buildings is a proactive way to help students resolve some their issues so they can learn to their full potential.
- Athletics – Several athletic teams were very successful during the past year. In the fall, the girls’ golf team won the regional championship and the football team made it all the way to the state championship game where they lost to Tuscola 35-

20). The wrestling team made it to sectionals and senior wrestler Clayton Rush won his second state title for the 119 lb weight class. The baseball team and softball team both played for regional championships.

District Weaknesses

All organizations have weaknesses and ours is no exception. Some of the weaknesses are resistant to change and others have complicated solutions. Acknowledging weakness is the first step toward improvement. The following is a brief description of some things I perceive to be weaknesses in the district.

- Transportation – Communication is the biggest problem with our transportation program. The supervisor does not return phone calls, waits until the last minute to deal with routing issues, and does not provide adequate routing information in writing.
- High School Test Scores – While the achievement at the lower levels is in the “acceptable” range, it is not at the high school. Significant improvement is needed. *See Table 3.*
- Gifted Education – We have many intelligent students who need to be challenged academically. Right now, the total focus in our district is on the struggling student.
- Air Conditioning – The buildings are too warm in the summer months and it affects learning. Few of us had air conditioning when we were growing up, but most of us have it now. Our 21st century families are used to air conditioning and they aren’t able to function as effectively when the buildings are sweltering. It would be easy to put air conditioning into the Apollo building, but it would require a massive overhaul at the high school.
- High School Track – Our students would benefit from having an all-weather track.
- Staff Salaries – The pay rate for our teachers is so low that we are unable to attract the best teachers available.
- Organized Curriculum – Our curriculum isn’t in terrible shape, but a lot of work is needed to identify the things we want to teach, organize that information, and be able to articulate it to the students, their parents, and new staff members.
- Master’s Degrees – Having well-trained teachers is one of the most important factors for school improvement. While there are many incompetent teachers who have master’s degrees, most people would agree that, overall, obtaining a master’s degree has great benefit. Right now, only 12% of our teachers have master’s degrees. The state average is 50%.
- Facilities – There are certain areas of our facilities that need to be renovated and upgraded.
- Handicap Accessibility – The high school is in need of significant improvement in this area and Apollo has issues as well.

District Concerns

Weaknesses are realities that may or may not have an impact on our educational program. There are concerns, however, that may impact our district in a big way if certain conditions materialize. These concerns may or may not be current weaknesses. The following is a brief description of the concerns I have about the district.

- Cash Reserves – Our district has the ability to last about 3 months if our revenue sources dry up. Our auditor says that this is the minimum amount that is acceptable. I think we should work toward having more in our working cash reserve fund in case something comes along that forces us to use those reserves.
- School Safety – We have developed policies and procedures to address safety concerns, but it is important for us to continue looking for ways to improve our plan to ensure the safety of our students.
- Staff Recruitment – We have had outstanding teacher applicants, but have been unable to hire them because of our low teacher salaries.
- Declining Enrollment – Our enrollment is down by over 100 students in the past five years. Our opportunities are going to be limited if this trend continues. *See Table 2.*
- Bullying – This is a pervasive problem among the students and between the staff and students. We have to take this issue seriously and address it when we become aware of it.
- Property Tax Pressure – Something has to change with the way we fund schools.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Beginning this year, NCLB will affect the way we deliver instruction to students. The government mandated school improvement process will be cumbersome and time-consuming. *See Table 3.*
- Student Homes – So many of our students have dysfunctional homes and homes where abuse takes place. These conditions affect the learning of these students and the other students around them.

District Opportunities

Our weaknesses and concerns can cause us to despair, but we must remind ourselves that we have many opportunities that can help us reach new heights as a district. The following is a brief description of some opportunities I see for our district.

- Consolidation – If crafted properly, we could improve the education for our students and the students at Westmer. We could offer more courses and extra-curricular activities and preserve the ones we currently have.
- Technology – Our world will continue to embrace technology and we have an opportunity to teach our students about how to use it and gain access to things they would have otherwise been unable to experience.

- Academic Improvement – Our staff is already working on ways to improve our curriculum and instructional practices. We will be developing more plans for academic improvement and look forward to seeing tangible evidence of improvement.
- Strategic Plan – We took a great first step with the strategic plan and now we have to take the next step which is to formulate a plan for addressing our needs. The plan can be a vehicle that will propel us to significant improvement in a short amount of time.
- New Assessment Tools – In order to address areas of need, we must have data. The High School is implementing course specific assessments that have been developed by the makers of the ACT test. Apollo is beginning to use a web-based test to monitor the progress of students. The Junior High will be using the Explore test once again to identify students who have academic need.
- Inclusion and RTI – The way we have dealt with special education in the past was based on letting the students fail for a long time before identifying them for special education services and then, once they were identified, we separated them from their peers. Current thinking on the issues of special education is causing us to retool our special education practices, and the best part about it is that our students will be the beneficiaries.
- Community Training – Our new technology will allow us to provide computer training for our community.
- Expansion of Extra-curricular Programs – We have the opportunity to expand our extra-curricular offerings by establishing programs like a Red Cross Club or a Key Club.
- Foundation – The establishment of a foundation will allow us to embark on new projects and activities that we would otherwise be unable to do.

Summary

The Aledo School District has done a fine job of educating the community's children for generations. Overall, I believe the public has a favorable opinion of the district and the students who seek to excel after graduation are able to do so because of the education they received in Aledo.

It is imperative that the district continually identify areas of need and develop plans for addressing those needs. There is no time to delay because the students of today need a great education, not the students of tomorrow.

Over the past ten years or so, I believe the district has coasted in some areas. This lack of progress has limited the district in some of its opportunities and its effectiveness. I also believe that the days of coasting are over and we are making substantial progress to create a district that provides an outstanding education in all areas. The brightest days for our school district are still ahead and I look forward to being a part of the team that embarks upon the journey to excellence.

Table 1
Revenue Vs. Expenditures History

	Revenue	Expenditures	Difference
2003/2004	6,816,166	6,814,086	\$2,080
2004/2005	6,850,308	6,878,132	-\$27,824 (deficit)
2005/2006	7,313,540	6,941,037	\$372,503
2006/2007	7,535,266	7,204,480	\$330,786

Table 2
Enrollment History

1998/1999	1,094
1999/2000	1090
2000/2001	1,033
2001/2002	1,015
2002/2003	1023
2003/2004	1,009
2004/2005	988
2005/2006	966
2006/2007	932
2007/2008	918

Table 3
Illinois State Assessments
Percentage of Students Who Meet/Exceed Standards

	APOLLO			JUNIOR HIGH			HIGH SCHOOL			ACT
	Read	Math	All	Read	Math	All	Read	Math	All	
2006	80.3	95.0	89.1	80.5	88.0	83.8	54.4	58.3	54.4	20.1
2005	81.3	85.4	84.5	81.9	54.2	74.6	54.2	59.7	54.6	20.6
204	70.4	78.8	76.7	60.5	55.3	66.8	58.2	50.7	55.0	19.6
2003	76.9	81.8	73.7	67.5	69.9	69.6	51.4	45.7	50.7	20.9