

May 17, 2005

TO: Roseville Area School Board

FROM: John Thein, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Educational Planning Advisory Committee Recommendations

Peter Drucker stated, “What makes a plan capable of producing results is the commitment of key people to work on specific tasks.” Over the past seventeen months members of the Roseville Educational Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC) have been working, reflecting and planning to prepare the district for changes the future will bring. It is my intent to use the joint thinking of the EPAC Committee and advice from other community members to assist me in laying out an overarching direction for Roseville Area Schools and to ensure the district remains “ahead of the curve” in dealing with the challenges our learning community will face together over the next decade.

There is an old saying that, “None of us is as smart as all of us.” With that in mind, I accept my responsibility as Superintendent of Schools to move Roseville Area Schools toward our district vision and to provide specific recommendations that will lay out a framework to ensure community resources are maximized and plans are in place to prepare our educational community for today and tomorrow. I also recognize that to be successful in this important endeavor, the involvement of our entire professional learning community in this process is an absolute necessity.

In establishing my recommendations for today and tomorrow, it is clear to me that Roseville Area Schools’ vision needs to be out in front as a beacon for the community to follow. As I studied the current and future educational needs of Roseville Area Schools, examined the EPAC recommendations, and reviewed the district vision, it was clear the heart of my recommendations must be centered on the district’s legal responsibilities and its short-term and long-term obligations to the entire learning community.

“Mileposts and Cornerstones”

As Roseville Area Schools travels the road toward the district vision, I propose a number of “mileposts” along the route that will help reassure the community that the district is moving forward and making progress. These “mileposts” will be detailed enough to provide a picture of the future and will be time bound. Arriving at each of the “mileposts” will not mean the district has achieved its vision but will indicate headway toward the ultimate district destination of “Quality Teaching and Learning for All.”

While “mileposts” will mark our path toward our district vision, I believe the mission of Roseville Area Schools needs to be anchored by “cornerstones” that will provide long-term support. Community members, parents, staff and especially students need to be sure the district is committed to building an educational infrastructure that will not only support but sustain the district Purpose, Vision and Values.

Superintendent Recommendations:

Malcolm X stated that, “Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.” In my recommendations to you, I hope it is clear that I do not intend to leave our community unprepared for “tomorrow.” Listed below are my short-term recommendations, or “mileposts,” and my long-term recommendations or, “cornerstones” that will provide concrete steps to prepare Roseville Area Schools for immediate and future challenges. Along with the “mileposts” and “cornerstones,” I have included rationale for my recommendations.

The Mileposts: Six to 18 Months

Milepost #1: Maintain the current building and grade configuration for K-12

Rationale: It is my recommendation to maintain the current building and grade configuration. There is no doubt the district must retain the current high school and middle school options because of the current and projected student enrollment and programming responsibilities in both buildings.

Parkview is the lone district alternative school and one of the few K-8 options available in the entire metropolitan area. Parkview also has a sizeable number of open enrollment families who may not remain in the school district if this option is not available. The site also hosts a significant number of district programs and staff members who service a large cross-section of the school district’s population.

Closing a neighborhood building at the present time would not produce the financial windfall required to make this drastic step worthwhile. The closing of an elementary school would reduce operations and staffing costs by approximately \$300,000, but would necessitate moving the current students to other district buildings and redrawing attendance boundaries. I also believe a number of families from the building closed would make the decision to continue their education in a private school, charter school or a neighboring public school. A loss of only 50 students because of this action would negate any of the savings generated by the closing of a neighborhood school.

Milepost #2: Form “Partner Schools” among the six neighborhood elementary schools to ensure more efficient staffing, access to special programming, curriculum development, staff development and transportation.

Rationale: In order to produce efficient elementary buildings it is my recommendation to “partner” Roseville Area Schools’ six neighborhood buildings for the purpose of staffing, special programming, curriculum development, staff development and other programming where economy of scale is beneficial. In lieu of looking at our neighborhood schools as six independent buildings, I propose looking at them as three neighborhood schools with two campuses. Rather than moving students to larger buildings, it is my recommendation to move the adults (staff), programs, and services and maintain the intimate and cozy learning environment that now exists in our neighborhood schools. I believe “partnering” will produce financial rewards in the long run, maintain high achievement, and also encourage beneficial learning and working partnerships between the buildings’ staff, their families and the students.

I am recommending the following “partner schools”: Brimhall and Falcon Heights, Central Park and E.D. Williams, and Little Canada and Edgerton.

Milepost #3: Establish “user fees” to cover non-K-12 operational costs at Fairview Community Center and other district facilities.

Rationale: As the ability to generate additional funding for K-12 programming becomes more difficult, it is clear to me that programming outside the traditional K-12 structure must be self-sufficient. This will mean that current non-K-12 programs now funded with General Fund Operating dollars will need to generate funding through user fees, grants, special legislation or special levy authority. Examples of programs I recommend must be self-supporting are: swimming programs, gymnasiums, computer labs, and non-K-12 educational enrichment programs.

Milepost #4: Establish a pre-school educational pilot in a neighborhood school with scholarships available for disadvantaged students.

Rationale: Earlier this year, Dr. Latimer presented a proposal to the School Board that mapped out a pilot pre-school education option named, “Jump Start to K”. This exciting educational option allows district families to select a school based learning program for their four-year old child that helps their build a solid foundation for future scholarship. If the pilot project is successful, I will recommend that the Jump Start to K option be expanded to all Roseville elementary buildings.

Milepost #5: Institute Early Childhood Family Education programming in all of the district elementary schools.

Rationale: I believe it is important to provide Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) opportunities in all our district elementary schools. I am well aware that a central ECFE site is necessary, but I strongly recommend that a neighborhood ECFE learning option should be made available. ECFE in neighborhood buildings will promote building and district loyalty and allow for efficient use of district facilities.

Milepost #6: Solicit donations from district residents to support transportation of elementary students.

Rationale: I do not believe any child should pay to ride the bus to school. With that in mind but faced with the realities of current educational funding, I believe the district should solicit donations to reduce the cost of transporting elementary students to school. The funding generated will allow the school district to support lower class size in our elementary schools. The goal will be to collect enough funds to cover the cost of one elementary teacher.

Milepost #7: Set up a special fund for the express purpose of reducing the district debt.

Rationale: A staff member approached me with the idea of setting up a special fund for the express purpose of reducing and ultimately eliminating the district debt. Each fiscal year a portion of the debt must be repaid. If the debt could be repaid by donations, the entire operating budget could be directed to educational programming instead of some portion being used for debt reduction.

Milepost #8: Continue to accept open enrollment students where and when space is available.

Rationale: I recommend that the district continue accepting open enrollment students where space is available, when there is no increase in the indirect costs to the school district, and when the practice remains financially beneficial.

Milepost #9: Continue to partner with district municipalities to share/reduce operational costs.

Rationale: Roseville Area Schools has many unique and beneficial partnerships with the district municipalities. Sharing gymnasiums, outdoor facilities, grounds maintenance, equipment, staffing and programming are some of the many ways the district and its municipalities work together to provide more efficient service to their residents. I recommend that we look at additional ways to do less as individual organizations and more as partners.

Milepost #10: Explore alternative methods of delivering high cost programs and services.

Rationale: Currently, Roseville solicits competitive bids on all its major district expenditures. I am recommending a reexamination and redesign, if feasible, of large budget expenditures such as: employee insurance, in-house printing, activities and athletics, special education, legal services, transportation and other large budget line items. I believe this will reassure the public that the district is purchasing at the lowest cost and receiving the best value.

Milepost #11: Lobby the Minnesota State Legislature for adequate financial support.

Rationale: There is an old saying, “The silent will starve.” I believe it is the responsibility of the school district and its leadership to make the Minnesota State Legislature aware of the financial support necessary to provide an adequate education. The school district must continue to be actively involved in professional organizations (AMSD, MSBA, MASA) that promote the importance of K-12 education and the needs of learners of all ages. Roseville Area Schools and its leadership must not be absent from this activity or silent in requesting adequate financial support from the Minnesota State Legislature.

Milepost #12: Offer before, after and during school educational opportunities utilizing volunteer community experts as tutors and mentors.

Rationale: The Roseville school district is blessed with residents gifted in a great variety of areas. I am recommending the district actively recruit these gifted individuals as tutors and mentors to work with our students at all levels. Many times we look to volunteers to assist students who are struggling in the classroom. Not only do I want to seek assistance for students who are striving to catch up but also establish a support system for the students who are outpacing their classmates. All our students need wise and caring adults to tutor and mentor them. I recommend this project be linked to our building PTA’s and that a special class for tutors and mentors be offered through the district Community Education Program. Once a mentor or tutor is “certified,” they will be selected for placement within the district according to building and student needs.

Milepost #13: Expand the Targeted Services programming for identified students.

Rationale: The achievement gap in Roseville Area Schools is real, and we cannot ignore this fact. What Roseville Area Schools can do is to acknowledge the achievement gap between different groups of students and work to overcome the gap. One of the most effective tools in reducing the achievement gap is the current Targeted Services Program. Under the direction of Dr. Latimer and Peg Kennedy, the Targeted Services Program has assisted hundreds of children who are struggling academically. My proposal is to expand the program, work to secure additional funding to improve the academic performance of all our students and make it possible for Roseville to close the achievement gap identified in the No Child Left Behind Law.

Milepost #14: Expand the alternative educational programming at Roseville Area Middle School and Roseville Area High School.

Rationale: Not every student finds academic success in the traditional secondary school setting. At the present time some of our secondary students are finding academic and social success in the Crossroads Program at RAMS and the Connections Program at RAHS. Both alternative educational options are creating an academic and a social foundation that will enable the participating students an opportunity to complete their secondary education on time and with grade. Lower drop out rates, higher graduation rates, fewer discipline issues and enthusiastic parent support are a few of the data indicators of these successful educational options.

Milepost #15: Offer additional academic offerings during Summer School.

Rationale: One of the strengths of Roseville Area High School is the large and diverse number of exploratory classes available to our students. This large number of options sometimes makes it difficult to balance class sizes and offer all the academic options that families would like to see made available during the regular school term. I believe one method of creating more flexibility and providing additional course options is to make available, for a fee, a number of required academic courses during Summer School. This option may allow students and their families to select classes outside the regular school year in order to increase the number of academic options available to the student during the regular school year.

Milepost #16: Roseville Area Schools will conduct a survey of district residents to assist the district in identifying educational standards and expectations.

Rationale: One of the most powerful recommendations of the Educational Planning Advisory Committee was to survey the district residents in order to gather feedback concerning the educational expectations of our learning community. To assist the Roseville Area School Board and the district administration in ensuring superior district educational standards and expectations, it is important to collect data from the community. It is my recommendation that the school board, district administration, and the district accountability council work in concert with Northeast Metropolitan Intermediate 916 School district to develop a district survey that will provide the foundation for establishing a district body of educational standards and expectations.

The Cornerstones: One to Five Years

Cornerstone #1: Develop a joint planning commission with all district municipalities to:

- a) **Explore options for excess district facilities and land.**
- b) **Study the possibility of a district/municipality community recreation center partnership.**
- c) **Review the options available for expanding cost saving partnerships.**
- d) **Discuss the possibility of shared programming.**

Rationale: It becomes clearer to me as time goes by that the fate of our member cities and Roseville Area Schools are intertwined. It is sometimes unclear which form of local government is responsible for what, when and where. It is my recommendation that Roseville Area Schools, as the common denominator, call together all our member municipalities to form a planning commission that will look at surplus district property, explore opportunities for shared programming and cost savings and study the interest of each form of local government in developing a regional recreational/community center.

I understand that operating, programming and maintaining a regional recreation/community center is not the mission of Roseville Area Schools. I also realize the district has a responsibility to our learning community to create the conditions to allow the conversation to occur. The district has often stated its desire to be an active and integral part of our community. With that desire goes the responsibility to provide the leadership necessary to bring all the members together to discuss all the possibilities.

Cornerstone #2: Request that the City of Roseville assist in planning for the return of the Lake Owasso School to School District control from a long-term lease.

Rationale: On August 1, 2008, the school district will assume control of the Lake Owasso School. The building is now under lease to the local cable company and is also used as the office and production facility for the North Suburban Cable Commission. The grounds of the Lake Owasso School are under a long-term lease to the City of Roseville for athletic and recreational purposes.

I am recommending the school district work with the City of Roseville to plan for the return of this property to the school district and request the professional assistance of the City of Roseville in zoning and developing uses for this property.

Cornerstone #3: Ask the City of Little Canada to assist in planning for the long-term use of the property adjacent to Roseville Area Middle School.

Rationale: The property across the street from Roseville Area Middle School has had minimal use by the school district for a number of years. Since the property is located within the City of Little Canada, it is my recommendation that Roseville Area Schools work with the City of Little Canada and engage in long-term planning concerning the site.

Cornerstone #4: Relocate district programs in the Fairview Community Center to space available in other district facilities.

Rationale: It is my recommendation to relocate district programs currently housed in the Fairview Community Center to other locations within the school district. This will serve two purposes. First, this will allow the school district to use all the space available in district facilities with the exception of Fairview. Second, the space made available in Fairview will allow for additional lease space, potentially increased lease revenue, and reduce the operating cost of Fairview Community Center. Retaining Fairview Community Center will also allow the district to continue to employ the Alternative Facilities Levy Authority until the return of the Lake Owasso School in August of 2008.

Cornerstone #5: Expand full day/every day kindergarten to all students with special emphasis and programming for the students from families where English is a second language.

Rationale: My mother would always remind me to “start the day right.” A good start to a day makes a difference, and a good start in school makes a big difference in student achievement. Data shows that full day/everyday kindergarten improves student achievement in homes where English is the second language. Getting all our students off to a strong academic start in school will pay big dividends in student achievement, assist in closing the learning gap and provide a solid return on our investment.

Cornerstone #6: Present a request for additional General Fund Levy authority to district residents.

Rationale: In the fall of 2007, Roseville Area Schools’ current operating referendum expires. It is my recommendation that the school district approach the district residents in the fall of 2006 to request not only a renewal of the current amount, but also an inflationary increase in the district’s levy authority. Coupled with this request would be a commitment to the district taxpayers to lower the district Alternative Facilities Levy. No other proposal will produce greater positive long-term results than the successful implementation of this recommendation.

Cornerstone #7: Eliminate the district long-term liability for employee retirement programs.

Rationale: The sleeping giant on many public sector balance sheets is the under funding of the long-term liability for employee retirement programs. I believe it is in the best interest of the school district to negotiate the removal of these long-term liabilities from district employee contracts. This will require a pay as you go program with shared responsibility between the employee and the employer.

Cornerstone #8: Develop a strategic plan for recruiting new employees, retaining current employees and providing opportunities for advancement in all employee categories and positions.

Recruiting, retaining and providing advancement opportunities are some of the district’s most important and challenging responsibilities. If Roseville Area Schools is going to thrive as an organization it is a necessity that the district recruit the best employees possible, retain our high quality employees and provide the opportunity for advancement.

Looking and planning ahead in all areas is vital, but providing strong building leadership is the key to current and future district success. It is my recommendation that the district develop a strategic plan for the recruitment of new and diverse employees and for the retention of current employees. This strategic plan must also include a well-defined process for career advancement within the school district. The competition for high quality leaders is very intense, and I believe Roseville Area Schools must continue to “grow” our future leaders. I also recommend investigating the possibility of starting an “aspiring leadership” program within the district.

Cornerstone #9: Sell excess district property and invest the proceeds into district facilities.

Rationale: The ability of the school district to reduce the amount of the Alternative Facilities Bonding Levy to support an increase in the General Fund Operating Levy is directly related to this cornerstone. The proceeds from the sale of excess district property will enable the school district to maintain its investment in district facilities and still reduce the amount of the annual levy for building maintenance. A close working relationship with the municipalities where the facilities are located is a necessary part of this recommendation. See cornerstones 1, 2, and 3.

Cornerstone #10: Expand on the findings of the community survey described in Milepost #16 and explore the addition of alternative educational opportunities.

Rationale: In this day and age of educational choice I believe Roseville Area Schools should examine the possibility of offering alternative educational options to the community. Examples may include: a language immersion school, a year-round elementary school, an IB School, a magnet school(s) with a focus on math, music or the fine arts. This recommendation will require research and funding to ensure that the learning communities that accept the challenge of an alternative educational option realize the responsibilities involved with their school board approved choice.

Cornerstone #11: Actively investigate pairing with neighboring school districts to offer a broader array of services, activities and curriculum options.

Rationale: Faced with declining enrollment, stagnant funding, demands for more and better educational options, I believe it is time for school districts to explore banding together for the benefit of the students, their families and the local taxpayers. Because of small class size or limited interest, it may mean a school district is only able to offer a class such as advanced placement physics once every two years. Bringing together interested students from two school districts would allow the class to be offered every year. Instead of two school districts employing a food service director it may be more cost effective for one district to purchase administrative time from the other district. The same could be true for curriculum and staff development leadership, special education programming and other administrative functions. Pairing may offer the critical mass required to offer some athletics and activities. I am also well aware the word “independent” is included in all Minnesota school district names for a reason. Any working arrangement must be mutually beneficial to all parties involved.

What Now? Action!

“Whoever wants to reach a distant goal must take many small steps.”

Helmut Schmidt

At the beginning of this document I describe the ultimate destination for the Roseville learning community as “Quality Teaching and Learning for All.” It will require many small but important steps to reach this destination. To assist me in planning for this “distant goal,” I have utilized the advice and counsel from an eclectic cross-section of community members. I am especially grateful to the Educational Planning Advisory Committee, under the leadership of Mary Peterson and Bill Knutson, for providing sound advice and creative ideas on which to build my initial concepts. The constructive suggestions I received during open and lively discussions at staff meetings in each of our district facilities allowed me to view our future challenges from a different perspective. Visiting with community leaders in each of our municipalities and receiving testimony at community public forums allowed for the “grassroots” feedback that helped me form many of my recommendations. I appreciate all the community involvement in this process and thank everyone for the valuable contributions.

I realize that I have presented the Roseville School Board with a number of time bound specific recommendations that will, if enacted, bring about significant changes in the way the district serves our learning community. There is no surefire method of reaching Roseville Area Schools’ ultimate destination. It is my belief the above “mileposts and cornerstones” recommendations, built on the communal work of the Education Planning Advisory Committee, the joint thinking of our staff and the open and honest feedback of our district residents, will provide the concrete steps necessary to keep Roseville Area Schools on the path toward our distant goal of “Quality Teaching and Learning for All.”

Superintendent’s Recommendation:

I recommend that the School Board approve a composite recommendation of the above “mileposts and cornerstones” and embed them in the District goals, the building goals and the Superintendent’s yearly and long-term goals.