

**WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**  
**Ypsilanti, Michigan**

**WORK/STUDY SESSION**

**December 14, 2006**

The work/study session opened at 6:00 p.m. at the Willow Run Community Schools Administration Building, 235 Spencer Lane, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

Those present were:

- Claudette Braxton, President
- Andreas Blakita, Vice President
- Brenda Clay, Secretary
- Clifford Smith, Trustee
- Dorothy Stewart, Treasurer
- Scott Wilson, Trustee
- Travis Greer, Student Representative to the Board of Education

Absent: Sheri Washington, Trustee

Members of the Administrative Council Present:

- Ron Ciranna, J.D., Superintendent
- Dr. David M. Houle, Controller
- Laura Lisiscki, Principal, Kaiser Elementary School
- Katie Smith, Director, Technology and Community Services
- Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

President Braxton called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Ms. Braxton said the purpose of the meeting will be to continue the work begun with Kathy Hayes, from the MASB. Mr. Smith asked if the community will also have an opportunity to speak. Ms. Braxton said maybe at the end of the meeting. Mr. Smith said he wants to be sure people are able to speak.

Ms. Hayes introduced Deborah Keys, also from the MASB, who attended the meeting to assist Ms. Hayes. Ms. Keys said she wears many hats in her role at the MASB including conference planning, corporate sponsorships, work with urban districts and more.

Ms. Hayes said the group would be reintroducing the hard work the Task Force did with the Strategic Plan. The goal for this meeting was to reach a consensus on immediate priorities. She said the board sets the direction for the District, along with input from the superintendent, administrators, teachers and the community. In setting the direction she said they need to think about the future, or they could get caught five-10 years from now and they need to prepare for that.

Ms. Hayes said the board and superintendent need to agree to come to a unified decision to support the vision for the District and everyone needs to know the direction the board wants the District to go. Ms. Hayes said there is a need to set and share a vision and at this meeting they would talk about Willow Run's strengths and threats through development of a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. She said things are different since the creation of the Strategic Plan and it may need modifications and adjustments.

Ms. Stewart said it is absolutely essential to talk about the Willow Run School District's assets in doing the Deficit Elimination Plan and we need to build on our assets, not destroy them.

Mr. Wilson asked if Ms. Hayes was given a copy of the Strategic Plan. Ms. Hayes was provided a copy of it. Mr. Wilson said the Strategic Plan was not adopted by the board, but the Core Beliefs were. He said the board looked at the rest of it and liked it. He said the board had some questions about it and when they asked them administration said they would answer them in four-weeks, but never did.

Ms. Hayes said this is a chance to give the new board members the opportunity to have input on the Strategic Plan. She said as the SWOT analysis is developed things may surface that can be incorporated into it.

Mr. Wilson said the Strategic Plan was developed before the District went into crisis and it needs to be looked at in light of that.

Mr. Smith added the board was told they would be reviewing the plan and was looking forward to going through it, but he has not seen it in three-years.

Ms. Braxton said the SP process was different than the board was used to in that not all board members and administrators were present for its development. She said it would be to their advantage to look at the plan again, so everyone can participate and take ownership in it.

Dr. Ciranna said the plan was brought to the board three-times, along with the vision, mission and core beliefs, but that the board was put on alert prior to the adoption of the plan, so they decided to hold off on adoption until everyone knew where finances were.

Ms. Hayes asked if there is buy-in at this point by the board and employees. Dr. Ciranna said it has been promoted with notepads and pens, but as far as the specific action plans no. He said the Curriculum Department has done a lot of work on it, but as far as everyone else no.

Mr. Wilson said if their questions had been answered, he thinks the board would have jumped right on it. Ms. Hayes said they need to identify where to start their work and the community needs to know, as they need to know the board is unified in this.

Ms. Hayes then presented a slide show, which talked about what the future student will need to know and be aware of. After the slide show, the board discussed their thoughts about it.

Ms. Stewart said the show had a lot of data and pointed out when artificial intelligence was being developed it never came to fruition. She said we can't let bits drive us, we need to drive bits. She added computers have changed, but they are not that swift and not that smart.

Mr. Smith said he thinks things are going to change rapidly, it used to be said there would be no need for paper and pencils and it will happen. He said, regarding technology, what happens is people order things and do not know how to use them. He said people have no idea how to use it.

Ms. Braxton said there is a lot of stuff we cannot use, but our kids can. She said a lot of our kids are bored to tears in school and we need to research how we are teaching. In speaking with returning graduates, she said they tell her the homework in high school didn't prepare them for what would be faced in college. She thinks computers are the direction we are heading in.

Ms. Clay said when the presentation talked about 14 different jobs – that is happening and we are not teaching them to do that. She said she does not know if we have the time or the opportunity to, but she knows we do not have the funds to do it.

Ms. Hayes said things change so quickly, not only do we have students who can keep up with this, but teachers have to too.

Mr. Wilson pointed out the changes in his industry, which has swung to technology. Ms. Stewart said those technical people need to know how to think and know math well. She said they need the very basics right away and when they are young we need to transform their minds and to teach them how to think.

Ms. Hayes said this is why the State is making curriculum more rigorous and the board needs to be visionaries to help create a different kind of learning environment. She said there is a need to recognize kids are used to doing many activities at once and this is looking to the future, asking how we need to do things differently.

Ms. Hayes discussed the topics of leadership, vision, assumptions, decision making and vision with the board as presented in the attached hand-out. She used the American Auto Industry of the 1970's as a mirror for what happens when the above topics are ignored or assumptions about them are wrong.

Ms. Hayes then guided the board in a visioning exercise describing how they would like Willow Run to look 10-years from now. Ms. Braxton encouraged the visitors to participate in the exercise too.

The board and visitors shared their visions as follows:

- Due to our educational excellence, there are limited slots available, with a waiting list.
- All students are achieving at the highest level.
- Students are prepared for the workforce.
- The District is financially sound.
- There is a communication system in place that includes all stake-holders.
- Students are well-rounded, highly educated, creative thinkers, who are readily adaptable to a changing environment.
- No such thing as too much homework.
- Year-round schooling.
- Thinking outside of the box is promoted.
- Technology is being used and is up-to-date and state-of-the-art.
- Physical education, foreign languages and art classes are part of the core curriculum for every student, everyday.
- After knowing a subject thoroughly, students explore it widely.
- Staff members and teachers excited about teaching.
- Reduced disrespect, misbehavior.
- Positive educational environment.
- Nurturing environment.
- Students using technology tools effectively to solve global and community issues.
- Community partnerships
- Students are problem-solvers.
- High community involvement.
- 100% graduation rate.
- High standards.
- Safe environment.
- Learning as focus.
- Several classrooms throughout district with one-way mirrored walls for observation.
- Teachers working in groups to develop lesson plans, which they are required to model before other teachers, before teaching to students.
- University classes held here.
- College credits available.

- All senior classes advanced placement or college credit.
- Senior Citizens sharing life-lessons.
- Online or other means of instruction available to Alternative Education students.
- Full reimplementation of community schools concept.

Ms. Hayes then shared the vision statement with everyone and asked if this vision works. Mr. Blakita said it works, because it encompasses what we want as a school district. Mr. Wilson added that this being adopted by the board directly addresses and honors the work put into the Strategic Plan. Ms. Stewart said she finds the vision to be just a little bland; when she sees a vision, she wants to get excited about it. Ms. Braxton said when she thinks about a school district, she thinks about students achieving, so she can live with this vision.

Ms. Hayes then shared the mission statement, pointing out specifically the part stating "Highest quality education for all students." The board then discussed the bullet points of the statement and why they are important.

Next Ms. Hayes explained a SWOT Analysis is a way of looking at the District and then asked the group to identify Willow Run's internal strengths, which follow:

- Best facilities in the county.
- Computer labs in each school.
- Knowledge of instructing minority and economically deprived students.
- Teacher-designed curriculum.
- New report cards for elementary schools.
- Most loving, concerned, organized principals.
- Community.
- Individual culture at each school.
- Middle school – wireless, laptops for every student, whiteboards.
- Nationally recognized Air Force Junior R.O.T.C. program.
- Nationally recognized Robotics team.
- Highly-qualified teachers – teaching in their area of certification.
- NCA accredited at all buildings.
- Virtual learning and K-12 Summer Academy.
- Hard working employees in all departments across the District.
- All elementary schools achieve AYP last year.
- Sound, experienced financial team.
- Media enhancements – interactive white boards.

Next the group explored the District's weaknesses, which follow:

- High school scheduling, class set-up and registration.
- Lack of public and community relations.
- No/little press releases.
- Interim positions.
- Lack of consistency in implementing District policies.
- Lack of accountability and follow-through.
- Changes in leadership positions.
- High student turnover.
- Declining enrollment.
- Budget deficit.
- Lack of resources.
- Negotiations/morale/negativity.
- Better contract negotiation process needed.
- Not always taking advantage of available outside resources.
- Professional development scheduling/teacher training.
- High number of substitutes due to professional development.
- High rate of absenteeism among staff.
- Lack of accountability for evaluation process.
- Low offerings in physical education and art.
- Problems with secondary attendance.

The external opportunities, as follows, were explored next:

- Look at how to be more efficient.
- University and college partnerships and grants.
- Utilization of Senior Citizens as a resource.
- Creation of an Alumni Association.
- Older students tutoring younger students.
- Media
- Business partnerships.
- Business revenue opportunities.
- Superior Township's growth.
- Coordination of services and resources with other local districts.
- Foundation fund raisers, by outside groups.

The external threats, as follows, were explored next:

- Charter schools.
- Transient population.
- Negative perception.
- Schools of Choice.
- State funding.
- Legislature and community unaware of funding crisis.
- Michigan's economy.
- Legislative term limits.

Ms. Hayes thanked the board for their excellent dialogue in looking at the strengths and opportunities of the District. At the next meeting the group will look at how to move the District forward by facing its threats to save this District. Ms. Hayes cautioned these decisions will not be easy and pointed out how difficult this is for board members to have to make the decisions they are facing, in order to keep the doors open.

In concluding the meeting the citizens in attendance were afforded the opportunity to speak. Mr. Stewart asked how much it is costing the District to have Ms. Hayes come in. Dr. Ciranna said the cost is \$2,500 for four-sessions. Mr. Stewart asked if there will be a facilitator at this Saturday's meeting and the cost. Dr. Ciranna said yes, Mike Wilmot will be there at a cost of \$1,500. Mr. Stewart pointed out Mr. Wilmot is the one who brought us Dr. Benit, so the way he sees it Dr. Wilmot owes us \$6,000.

Ms. Cassandra Vaughn said she is concerned with the Deficit Elimination Plan and said there is a need to hold a Town meeting for community input. She said she understands education will look a lot different in the future, but parents need to feel they have some input. She shared a flyer she made announcing a Town Hall meeting, Tuesday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. at Kaiser Elementary School and said she will place an advertisement of it in the paper. Mr. Smith instructed the staff to be sure it gets out to all buildings. Mr. Greer said to be sure the building staff is instructed to send it home to parents. He said it all comes back to community relations and that falls back to accountability.

A Kettering parent asked if this means the Town Hall meetings at the buildings will not be happening. Dr. Ciranna said they will after break.

President Braxton declared the meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.