

Decatur “Journey toward Excellence” Continues with More Community Meetings

March 2002

The Decatur Township School Community is continuing its community-based *Journey toward Excellence* in our schools. Your input is needed to help identify ways we can improve education for our children. There are two important ways you can give input, which are described later in this article.

A “Core Team” was formed in February 2001, by Superintendent Don Stinson with the volunteer help of Indiana University Professor, Charles. Reigeluth. The members of the Core Team include:

- a school board member, Larry Taylor;
- a principal, Janet Larch;
- a PTA leader, Cathy Wiseman;
- the president of the Decatur Education Association, Susan Adams; and
- the superintendent, Don Stinson.

Indiana University Facilitators, Charles Reigeluth and Roberto Joseph, have been donating their time to meet weekly with the Core Team to help them undertake a community-based collaborative change process in the Decatur Township.

From **March to May 2001**, the Core Team worked on identifying core ideas and values that should guide the *process* of improving the Decatur Township Schools’ ability to meet all children’s needs. Those ideas and values place heavy emphasis on *all* stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, staff, administrators, employers, and other community members) reaching consensus on the changes that will benefit our children.

The Core Team was formed as a kind of “starter team” to help get all stakeholders involved in this *Journey toward Excellence* and to help them figure out together how to better meet our children’s needs. The Core Team will soon expand to include a much broader cross-section of all members of our community, and that expanded team will work with all stakeholders to design better learning experiences for all our children.

As the first step to getting all stakeholders involved in this *Journey toward Excellence*, the Core Team held six widely publicized meetings to which all community members were invited. The purpose of those meetings, which took place between January 22 and February 7, was to start to identify the educational needs of our students and community and how they have changed over the past generation or two. Now the Core Team wants your input about the results of those meetings, which are reported later in this article. This is the first way you can give input for improving education for Decatur children and the health of the Decatur Township community.

In April and May the Core Team will hold 10 more community meetings to get your input on the beliefs or values about education that will guide decisions on what changes (if any) should be made in our schools. It is important that you come to these meetings, and not only get involved but actively participate in shaping the future of our School Community. This is the second way you can give input on what our schools should be like in the coming decade.

INFORMATION FROM INITIAL MEETINGS

The Core Team was able to gather valuable input from community members during the initial meetings. Participants responded to four questions aimed at responses on how society, and the Decatur Township in particular, have changed over the past 30 years (for better or for worse), as well as how our community should change over the next decade. The questions went on to ask what skills and personal qualities students must acquire to succeed in the event of both actual and desired future changes, and how Decatur Township schools are doing now in providing those important skills and qualities.

The input from the first round of meetings is shown in the survey in the three boxes on this page. After some discussion, participants concluded that during the past three decades the workplace has changed by having more service jobs that require more teamwork and more use

of technology, and that there are longer commutes, greater workload, more job stress, and less job security, among others. They also concluded that the family has changed by having more single-parent households, two-working-parent homes, more latchkey children, and less family time, and that more parents want to be friends instead of parents to their children.

The community members participating in the first round of meetings also concluded that families are further strained by increasing violence and other crimes such as drug use, less social/community interaction and more exposure to negative influences via the media.

The participants revealed that they hope, in the next 10 years, that the workplace will be more family friendly, offering more flexible hours, more on-site daycare, and more opportunities to work at home, among others. Other desired vocational changes include more teaming and mentoring, better job security, and more employer support for educational opportunities.

Participants also hoped that the family would change by having more family time, communication, and unity, better parenting skills, more collaboration with the schools, and fewer divorces and latchkey children. And they hoped the community would have more interaction among neighbors, more family values, and less crime and violence.

All of these findings provided important insights for participants to identify skills and personal qualities that our children will need to be successful, contributing members of our community. Skills identified include problem solving, time management, teaming, conflict-resolution, communication, and computer skills. Personal qualities include integrity; work ethic; responsibility; creativity; desire to balance family, faith, and work; respect for differences in others; passion for something positive; desire to learn; and service orientation.

All the conclusions of these six community meetings are shown in [the three boxes] {a

survey, which is available in four places}. Please take a few moments to give us your input about those conclusions. If you have Internet access, please find the survey by pointing your browser to <http://intercom.virginia.edu/SurveySuite/Surveys/Decatur>. This option is easiest for the Core Team to process. Otherwise, if you have a child in the Decatur Township schools, the child will bring a copy home to you. It is also available in the *Decatur Communicator* and in the District Office of the MSD Decatur Township Schools, next to the high school.

THE NEXT ROUND OF MEETINGS

You are strongly encouraged to participate in the next round of community meetings, to be held between April 18 and May 23, to help shape the future of the Decatur Township Schools. As mentioned earlier, these meetings will focus on your identifying the values and beliefs that you think should be the standards or criteria that our schools should meet and therefore that any changes should meet.

About half of the upcoming meetings will be held at MSD of Decatur Township schools, while the other half will be conducted at various places throughout the community. The tentative schedule for the 6:00-8:30 p.m. meetings is as follows:

- Thursday, April 18: High School
- Tuesday, April 23: West Newton School
- Thursday, April 25: Middle School
- Monday, April 29: Lynwood School
- Wed., May 1: Stephen Decatur School
- Thursday, May 9: Valley Mills
- Monday, May 13: Early Childhood Center
- Thursday, May 16: TBA
- Tuesday, May 21: TBA
- Thursday, May 23: TBA

Together we can make our schools better than any small group could possibly do alone. Please help make a brighter future for our children and the Decatur Township community.