

# Decatur “Journey toward Excellence” Progress Report

Volume 1, Issue 1, November 2001

The purpose of this progress report is to keep everyone in the Decatur School Community informed about the early explorations for a community-based *Journey toward Excellence* in our schools. 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 PTO 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 understand and undertake a collaborative change process with the Decatur School Community.

From **March to May 2001**, the Core Team worked on identifying core ideas and values that should guide the process of improving the Decatur schools’ ability to meet all children’s needs. Those ideas and values will be proposed to all people who have a stake in the Decatur schools for their revision and adoption. They 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.

In **June 2001**, the Core Team and IU Facilitators held a retreat to learn how to become a productive team, by developing trust, communication skills, and consensus-building skills. Since the retreat, the Core Team meetings have focused on studying Peter Senge’s book, *Schools that Learn*. This work has focused on coming to understand Senge’s five “disciplines”:

Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Shared Vision, Team Learning and Systems Thinking. The Core Team is learning how important it is for us as a community to understand that when we change a very small part of our school system, that change might be incompatible with other parts of the school system. So this understanding is crucial to being able to make successful improvements in our schools.

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. As mentioned earlier, IU facilitators have been working with the Core Team to understand what kind of change process will help the Decatur school community design its future. The Core Team will eventually 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.

In the coming months, the Core Team will work closely with the School Board to develop a plan to analyze the educational needs of the students, community, and school personnel, to determine what sorts of changes (if any) should be made in our schools. The Core Team will hold community meetings in the schools to begin to listen to the needs of the community. We do hope you will come to these meetings, and not only get involved but actively participate in shaping the future of our School Community. This is your opportunity to design what our schools will be tomorrow. If you would like to give us feedback on what we are doing or would like to volunteer to help organize the community meetings, please call Becky at 856-5265.