

# ***Superior-Greenstone District School Board***

## **Progress Report on Strategic Planning Process**

**September – November, 2004**

**By: D. Scott Ferguson, B Com, CA, CMC  
Facilitator**

**Date: December 1, 2004**

# ***Superior Greenstone District School Board***

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### **Origin and Impetus**

With the transition from three school boards to one now complete in the seven years since amalgamation, the board and administration of Superior-Greenstone District School Board believed that the time was right to conduct a district-wide participative strategic planning process to chart the school board's future. No single issue or event signaled this need. Rather, the time seems right for stakeholders across this vast district to develop a common plan to respond to a rapidly changing world in the interests of our students and future students.

### **Participative Approach**

Given the breadth of our vast district, and the broad range of issues and challenges that schools and their students face now and in the future, the board opted for a broadly participative approach to strategic planning.

### **Two Rounds of Consultation**

The strategic planning process invited students, their families, teachers, others who deal directly with our students, school board administrators, trustees, representatives of First Nations communities and members of community organizations from throughout the district to participate in:

- school-based workshops held in September and October, and
- regional workshops that took place in Geraldton, Red Rock, Terrace Bay and Marathon in late October.

Invitations to these events were distributed to the homes of every student and were issued broadly through advertising and media interviews conducted by the Director of Education, Heather Wilson-Boast. In addition, over 350 personal invitations were sent to members of all of these different constituencies in order to encourage and achieve a broad base of participation.

Other input emerged through a principals' workshop held September and student workshops that took place in some of the schools.

In all, over 200 people took part in these activities. They generated nearly 600 pieces of input towards the development of a district-wide school board strategic plan.

### **Summary of Consultation Input and use of an Independent Professional Facilitator**

All of the consultation input was collated independently by Scott Ferguson, a professional facilitator from Progress Consulting, whom the board engaged to design and facilitate this strategic planning process.

Scott Ferguson has 15 years of experience in designing and facilitating school board and business planning processes. Among his credentials, he facilitated the consultation activities of the 2002 Rozanski Task Force on the equity of Ontario school funding and the 2003 Downey Task Force regarding a rural school strategy for Ontario. The Rozanski commission resulted in an immediate injection of additional \$1 billion into Ontario education. Downey's recommendations were used by the Ministry to inject an additional \$50 million into Ontario's rural schools.

## Conversion of Input into a Draft Strategic Plan

Scott Ferguson's collation of constituent input formed the guiding document for a Stakeholders' Retreat. On November 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 48 stakeholders representing all major constituencies and areas of our District gathered to convert this input into a draft Strategic Plan. With Scott Ferguson facilitating, these stakeholders used constituent input to chart out the Mission of the school board going forward, a Vision of the Students and their Schools, an analysis of Challenges to be faced and Strategies for addressing those challenges. The Retreat concluded with some initial action planning to begin the important process of successful implementation.

## Participants in the Stakeholders' Retreat

The following took part in the November 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Stakeholders' Retreat:

<b><i>Participant</i></b>	<b><i>Constituency</i></b>	<b><i>Community</i></b>
Aylward, Les	Trustee	Nipigon
Bartlett, Bette	Trustee	Nipigon
Blanchard, David	Student Trustee	Terrace Bay
Broadhurst, Kevin	Teacher	Red Rock
Carruthers, Alex	Student	Red Rock
Champagne, Guy	Trustee	Marathon
Chaulk, Treena-Ray	Teacher	Longlac
Demers, Linda	Support Staff	Marathon
Draper, Barb	Administration	Marathon
Duke, Joan	Support Staff	Nipigon
Faust, Charles	Community Partner	Nipigon
Faust, Julian	Student	Nipigon
Flett, Alda	Support Staff	Dorion
Friske, Dorothy	Principal	Geraldton
Gibbons, Priscilla	Community Partner	Longlac
Gillingham, Wavey	Community Partner	Longlac
Grebenc, Buzz	Teacher	Marathon
Hancherow, Bob	Agency	Marathon
Hiller, Paula	Community Partner	Schreiber
Hoffman, Joanne	Principal	Longlac
Joanette, Rose-Marie	Administration	Marathon
Johnson, Dawna	Principal	Red Rock
Kelly, Harry	Municipal Leader	Geraldton
MacKenzie, Gord	Community Partner	Nipigon
MacOdrum, Lee	Community Partner	Geraldton
Mannisto, Dick	Agency	Longlac
Mannisto, Mark	Trustee	Longlac
Markwick, Lennie	Teacher	Rosspport

<b><i>Participant</i></b>	<b><i>Constituency</i></b>	<b><i>Community</i></b>
McPherson, James	Community Partner	Red Rock
Molendyk, Lori	Agency	Thunder Bay
Morgan, Shannon	Community Partner	Schreiber
Notwell, Kathie	Trustee	Terrace Bay
Orban, Linda	Teacher	Beardmore
Pella, Patti	Administration	Marathon
Phillips, Lesley	Community Partner	Marathon
Rendell, James	Community Partner	Red Rock
Richardson, Madge	Community Partner	Schreiber
Rousseau, Bruce	Administration	Marathon
Souckey, Leslie	Agency	Marathon
Stewardson, Janet	Agency	Red Rock
Tamblyn, Dave	Principal	Rosspport
Ten Hoeve, Kimberly	Community Partner	Terrace Bay
Ten Hoeve, Maggie	Student	Terrace Bay
Ten Hoeve, Sally	Community Partner	Geraldton
Trembley, Susan	Community Partner	Dorion
Turner, Jim	Trustee	Geraldton
Wilson-Boast, Heather	Administration	Marathon

The fact these 48 people gave up their weekend, and worked so intensively and constructively to ensure that constituent input became transformed into a comprehensive plan, speaks volumes about our community's commitment to public education and to the interests of our students.

### **A Successful Event!**

In their evaluations of the Retreat, 100% of respondents indicated that this event was "very good" or "excellent" in achieving its stated objectives. 73% said "excellent". In addition, 100% said that the event "met" or "exceeded" their expectations. 70% said "exceeded".

### **Diagram of the Overall Process**

Attached is a diagram that outlines the overall strategic planning process including the communication, approval and implementation processes to follow.

### **Documentation Is Underway**

The result of this planning is now being documented by the independent facilitator and is expected be available during the week of December 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **Major Themes**

In the meantime, the following are the major themes that emerged from this planning process and will be prominent in the report.

### **A Rapidly Changing World**

Participants in the consultations talked about exciting new opportunities that our students will face. They are also concerned that today's young people face a less secure future than previous generations. Meanwhile, students, their families, their teachers and other stakeholders in the community are already dealing with the demands of a new, more complex and challenging curriculum and increased student testing. Recent high school reforms mean that the students are leaving high school for employment, college or university at a younger age and face higher costs for post-secondary education. While trades are badly needed, and the benefits of apprenticeships unmistakable, constituents are frustrated by structural barriers to creating a sufficient number of apprenticeship opportunities.

Locally, constituents are concerned about the declining population, which can potentially make their communities less attractive and, in turn, cause fewer young people to choose the Superior-Greenstone area as their future home. They also acknowledge the vastness of the Superior-Greenstone district and its geographic splendor that makes the area attractive as a home and tourist destination but also poses physical barriers to the distribution of education options both "in person" and "electronically".

There is no doubt that globalization and technological advances are providing access to a world full of new opportunities and experiences. The challenge is for the home, school and community to ensure that our young people are properly equipped to survive, and indeed thrive in this rapidly changing world.

### **Role of the School**

When discussing the role or "mission" of the school, constituents talked about the need for the student, home, school and community to work together to ensure that its students are properly prepared. They talked of the need for a broad based education and one that addresses, and indeed honours, students' chosen paths for success, be it in trades and apprenticeships, college, university or entrepreneurial endeavours. They talked of the need to prepare students for life long learning and to help students' progress by honouring the varied learning styles that can be found among students.

### **Vision of the Student**

To respond to the challenges and opportunities that students face, members of the Superior-Greenstone community have a Vision of their students as being young people who are equipped to deal with constant change, increased complexity and higher costs. The Superior-Greenstone graduate is to be a balanced individual with a broad based education and who is a self-confident problem solver, effective communicator, possesses important life skills, is confident with technology and is well prepared for transition to their "next step" along their chosen path of success.

### **Vision of the School and School Board**

Perhaps the most common message that arose in the consultations is the need for Superior-Greenstone District School Board to provide equitable access to a range of programming for all students throughout the district. Constituents also greatly value accountability for student success, excellent and passionate staff, reasonable limits to bussing time, a positive school environment and up-to-date technology. There was a lot of mention of the importance of meeting the needs of the whole student and that all of this requires strong partnerships among students, parents and the community. A particular theme was the need for students to take ownership for their own behaviour, choices and education. Constituents also see the need for improved communication. Many constituents see that communication is already improving and point to this broadly participative planning process as an example.

## **Challenges and Obstacles**

Participants' confidence in the Strategic Plan will depend partly on the extent to which the plan extends beyond broad ideals and comes to grips with the very practical issues and challenges that face Superior-Greenstone students, their families and their school board. These include the declining economics within Superior-Greenstone communities, the geographic uniqueness of our broad district, pressure on educators and families, which can cause people to be reactive rather than proactive, and various pressures that can lead to a bias toward university-based career paths at the expense of legitimate college-based and trades-based options. Another challenge is to strengthen the working relationships among all of the partners in education in order to address this broad range of challenges.

## **Strategic Directions**

To address the challenges and realize our Vision of the Student and the School, constituents indicated that the Superior-Greenstone District School Board should:

- develop character and life skills among students
- improve the many pathways to various forms of post-graduate "success"
- improve schools' and the board's outreach to First Nations
- take a leadership role in multi-stakeholder economic development of the entire Superior-Greenstone district
- strengthen communication and partnerships, and
- make continual refinements to the use of technology to equalize learning opportunities among students across our large district.

In addition, there was considerable recognition of the important social value of school in students' lives. Indeed, another important emerging theme is to continue and strengthen efforts to "Make School Fun"!

## **Documentation and Communication are Underway!**

These are the various themes that will be prominent in the report of the strategic planning process. When it becomes available in mid-December, it will be broadly communicated among our constituents in the lead-up to board approval of the primary themes, which is expected to take place in the board's January meeting.

The report will be accompanied by a complete listing of the nearly 600 ideas, suggestions and concerns that emerged from the various consultation activities that took place in September, October and early November. This will demonstrate the school board's commitment to complete and open communication and to accountability to its constituents, and will provide constituents with a basis for seeing how the strategic planning report appropriately honours the consultation input that went into it.

Once the board approves the strategic themes, the exciting and critical process of implementation can get underway! To honour the recurring theme of "communication", Superior-Greenstone District School Board is committed to keep constituents informed about reaction to the report, the board's approval of the major themes and the implementation activities as they are planned. Once implementation gets started, the board will provide continuous communication of the progress that is being made to transform these strategic ideas into action and into benefits for our students of the present and the future!

## **Questions or Comments?**

If you have any questions or comments about this strategic planning process, please contact Heather Wilson-Boast at 807-229-0436 / 1-888-604-1111.

# Superior-Greenstone District School Board

## Blueprint For Strategic Planning Process

