

State of the ISD 2010

The MOISD continues to be a local, regional and state leader in promoting the concept of service to the local schools: while other ISD and RESAs talk about it, the MOISD lives cooperation. One cannot be a service system without service-minded people. The past six years has seen an almost 100% complete turnover of the administrative team and more than 50% of the staff has also changed. Retirement and job changes have completely modified the MOISD machine from what it was not too long ago. Because of the significant change-over in personnel, the admin team has made an effort to continue to infuse new hires who believe in the mission of service to the local school districts. The end of the 2010 school year was officially named the “year of the clock” based on all of the retirement clocks handed out at the end-of-the-year celebration (21).

The purpose for the “State of the ISD” is to help us reflect upon our past journey and remind us of the connection to current and future work. It also helps us refocus on our mission and recognize how the accomplishments tie to our goals and objectives, an important task with an organization as spread out as an ISD. That being said, one of the dangers of trying to summarize another exciting year is the fear of missing something that needs to be mentioned. Despite the potential pitfalls of a summary document, the exercise is important for continuity of purpose.

One of the most important tasks completed this year was a comprehensive survey of all of the ISD’s “customers.” When an institution such as ours tries to gauge its effectiveness, it is very difficult to look up the answers in a book or count a series of numbers in a table: to get a sense of service to a customer, one must survey all groups that are impacted. The ISD goals for the past five years were centered upon the concepts in the “Good to Great” book written by Jim Collins; the survey was designed to look at the ability of the MOISD programs, administration, staff and services to help meet those goals. The anonymous, electronic survey allowed MOISD and local district staff, administration, Boards of Education, and impacted community groups to give their feedback on the quality of the service-oriented approach from the MOISD. The data couldn’t have been more positive of the MOISD staff, administration, and the “service” direction worked on for the past five years.

The survey data also served another purpose – shape the goals for the next five years for the MOISD. Once the survey reinforced the “service” direction for the past five years, the next step was to build upon providing a better, more efficient service. From the feedback of our customers, the MOISD administration and Board of Education shaped two goals for the 2010-2015 five-year cycle. The focus of the goals can be summed up in two words: 1) communication and 2) epicenter. The first goal reads: “The MOISD staff and Board of Education will enhance the clarity, relevance, and accuracy of internal and external communications to assist local districts in reaching their goals and objectives. By assisting with this endeavor, we will strive to maximize the use of our collective expertise, resources, and experience to improve student learning.” The second goal reads: “The MOISD staff and Board of Education will facilitate successful learning opportunities for local and ISD staff and students. We will strive to be the preferred source of information and collaboration for our local districts in the areas of special education services, vocational training, curriculum and professional development, early childhood programming, data management, and 21st Century learning practices.” These two goals will continue to assist the MOISD in becoming the most cooperative and service-minded ISD in the state.

Most of the services of the MOISD center upon three areas, General, Special, and Vocational Education; everything is usually related to one of these topics. The administration and staff has recognized the importance of working together across these areas, not in separate silos, to most effectively bring about quality service to the local school districts. The new leadership of the General Education division has made an effort to tie all three divisions of the ISD together through more coordination, cooperation, and education of what each can do to assist the other. Coordination of professional development opportunities, renewed focus on the value of technology to assist in decision making, and the focus on the education of the importance of quality data management has improved the value of the three “departments” to the local districts, the community, and each other.

One of the larger physical accomplishments of the year was the completion of the Career Center addition. Not only was the project completed on time and under budget, it also drew positive reviews from the staff, community, and students. The mission of the building expansion was to provide usable, flexible, and modern space for student learning to take place, all while blending into the current architecture. Many staff members contributed to

the successful completion of these objectives in time for the students' arrival in September. Another similar goal was reached to move two special needs programs into the Education Center Annex, which required the movement of itinerant staff out to local district buildings. Not only was the remodeling successful, but the movement, set-up, and transfer of these staff members was completed in a timely manner; the students received a new space and the local districts received closer personnel to assist with their special needs services.

Cooperation within the local districts continues. The Mecosta-Osceola Personnel Cooperative (MOP Co-Op) renewed its appetite for expansion in 2010 to include more work in the business services side and added an additional cooperative partner in the transportation area, the Mecosta-Osceola Transportation Authority. More and more ISDs are adopting the MOP Co-Op model and approach as system presentations continue to be requested throughout the state. The districts also banded together to instruct the MOISD to front, organize, and support a general education 2011 millage for the local districts with a focus upon the classroom.

In regards to the new goals for the MOISD, much was accomplished in the last couple of months of 2010 around improving communication and being the epicenter for educational decisions. Effective communication within the innate design of ISDs can be difficult; organizing effective objectives and delivering upon those tasks reinforces the importance of ISDs to local districts. The MOISD continues to work together by using technology to assist in this area. The Race To The Top, Title, Consolidation, and other numerous state required reports for the local districts are coordinated through the ISD staff and administration to be completed and organized in a cooperative manner. By working together, errors are reduced and a common voice assists in the value of these reports being accepted by the state.

The MOISD continues to improve communication via the worldwide web by adding social networking, website improvement, and three ISD eight-page journals to over 30,000 homes in the two counties to assist in learning more about the ISD and the importance of supporting a local millage. The local newspaper, regional television and print, and participation on statewide committees by MOISD staff and administration all support the mission of improving communication with the local communities and schools on the importance of the ISD's role in improving the educational systems for the

two counties; when exciting things are happening in your neighborhood, others want to know about it.

The MOISD continues to become more of an educational epicenter for the two counties every day. The addition of new classroom and professional development space at the ISD has not reduced the number of space conflicts for professional development, learning, and training room requests by community, local district, and ISD groups; the harder the economics, the more these requests will rise. School districts have been very helpful with each other by requesting the ISD get all parties together to accomplish common goals or state requests. A Common Evaluation Committee, mirroring the union presidents and superintendents' Common Calendar Committee, has been meeting in 2010 to solve common Race To The Top problems. A quality data management committee was formed in 2010, involving all sectors of the local district and ISD, to reinforce the importance of data to make educational decisions. The Career Center continues to work more and more with business partners, advisory councils, and workforce development boards who wish to see the MOISD Career Center become a training facility for their future workforce. We are envied throughout the region and state on our vocational approach to serving local students.

The 2010 year was another very busy year for the MOISD staff, administration and Board of Education. Building projects, streamlining of staff positions and duties, a comprehensive customer service survey, and another large turnover of staff (new MOISD Board members as well) provided many new challenges. All of this change was magnified with the wholesale political changes in Washington and Lansing; this "November" transformation will have a tremendous impact on local districts and ISDs from the economic and reform side more than we can imagine. The good news: ISDs are going to be a major part of the solution to the state's fiscal and educational problems. The more the Michigan Department of Education shrinks, the more educational roles will be taken on by the ISDs. The MOISD "service" structures are in place to support our local districts in what may be their (and our) most financially difficult calendar year in the past ten. Knowing you are prepared for the upcoming year helps get one ready for the journey. Having support structures for success already in place helps provide a sense of stability to local districts and assures them the MOISD will be with them throughout the challenges ahead.