

## State of the MOISD 2007

The purpose of this annual document is to refresh memories of the local school districts, Boards of Education, and staff members of the Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District's (MOISD) commitment to service. As we continue to implement the principles found in Jim Collin's book, "Good to Great", we find more opportunities to make a difference with our surrounding neighbors. An appropriate title for 2007's tumultuous ride could be summated in this phrase, Riding Out the Storm on a "C" of Change.

The fiscal state of Michigan has been correctly called "turbulent" this past year. Our local school districts feel like tiny ships tossed about on the sea. It is the mission of the MOISD to be a lighthouse away from the many rocks that have risen from the bottom. As soon as one hazard is discovered and circumvented, another rises to increase concern. The mission of the MOISD is to ensure all districts make it to port safely. This "C" of hazards has made for a year of: a) **Commitment** to the Mission; b) **Completion** of the tough tasks; c) **Cooperation** with each other; **Cost** Savings together; d) **Construction** to meet the needs; e) increased **Communication**; and f) **Co-Op** expansion. This year's "C" of change has brought many challenges to the MOISD and our locals.

Our **Commitment** of "service" to the local school districts has not changed this year and can be shown in the fruit of our efforts. As we view our mission through the lens of "Good to Great" we notice the importance of consistency and making tough choices for the betterment of the group. This year the administrative team has been reading the book, Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within, by Robert Quinn. The premise of the book centers on the need for a leader to make internal change before one can require external change from others. Once you can find your "moral core" and lead from those principles, the journey becomes clearer and we become agents of change rather than victims of circumstance. The MOISD staff wants to ensure our ability to assist local districts when they request help and not allow the circumstances of State and Federal regulations to take over our mission of "Helping Schools Help Students".

This year saw the **Completion** of several very tough tasks. Some of these tasks took years of planning, work, and community effort; the fruit just

happened to come to bear this past year and will change our ISD for many years to come. The greatest accomplishment for this year was the passage of a 10-year Special Education millage for the local school districts. The \$20 million dollar millage helped offset a portion of the rising costs for the special needs population in our two counties. Local districts were putting more and more General Fund dollars into their Special Education budgets with no end in sight. The millage helped slow the rise in cost and saved many of the districts from even more drastic cuts in their student programming for all students. Many staff members at the MOISD and local districts were instrumental in educating the community about the passage of the millage.

Two Thousand Seven also saw the completion of the Special Education Compliance Plan. This monumental task took a team effort of local and ISD staff and administration to gather the information, find the areas for improvement, meet the training needs of employees, meet deadlines, and complete the two-year process. The Michigan Department of Special Education (MDSE) used the MOISD as a guinea pig for the process and wrote a glowing letter about the abilities of our staff to meet their expectations and the quality of program and process alignment which came out of the plan. The same model is being used throughout the State to improve other ISDs.

Our special education staff of teachers, para-educators, itinerants, staff, and administrators focused this year on reducing the number of overdue Individual Education Plans (IEP). Historically, the MOISD had a problem of late I.E.P.s as noted in the Compliance Plan. The extra effort, attention to detail, and work with the local district programs saw the late I.E.P. rates drop from the high double digits to low single digits in one year. This effort did not go unnoticed by the State or the MOISD Board of Education. The ultimate goal is to have 100% of our I.E.P.s completed on time every year, a tough and monumental task worth reaching for in our ISD.

Also in the area of special education, a waiver on class sizes was again sought and granted by MDSE for our local systems. Our first year of the waiver required a survey of staff and parents on the impact of the changes. Although the survey indicated a higher level of frustration from the teachers and a lower frustration from the parents from the changes, a new waiver was granted for 2008 with a new focus on student achievement data and not on personal preference. The MOISD was charged by the local districts to

complete the process for them and will continue to fill that role until asked otherwise.

Through a series of e-mail volleyball matches, the MOISD had the opportunity to host three State Board of Education members in the fall. Board members, staff, and administrators from the two counties came to the Miller Wing to hear from the Board members on their perceptions of the impact of their work on our students. The State Board members enjoyed touring our multiple buildings and discussing topics with the visitors. This may be the one and only time three State Board members will ever again visit the MOISD, so it was a welcomed event to actually see and hear their philosophies and how it impacts decision making in Lansing.

The Career Center saw the end of their North Central Association cycle come to a close this past year. The purpose of accreditation is to prove to oneself and demonstrate to others a level of quality that is supported by research, data, and practice. Many years of hard work went into the self-evaluation process to get to the point of completion.

Two thousand seven brought in another great year of **Cooperation** with each other. Educational systems cannot survive in today's world on an island; as we work together we can bring more opportunities to integrate our missions into one focus – improved student achievement. Although most district cooperation is on the financial side, the efforts always translate into revenues for the educational side down the road: less money on services, supplies, capital outlay, etc. means more resources for the classroom.

The Pearson D.A.T.A. project continued in its third year to gain momentum. The decision by the MOISD and local districts to take the No Child Left Behind compliance journey together has naturally slowed down the massive project, but the final products will be much more powerful for making quality data-driven decisions in the future. The MOISD assisted local districts on a financial plan to purchase the Skyward student data management system to further streamline our efforts. Since this system is among the industry's finest, it will only be a matter of time when the Pearson project doubles its effectiveness with the local school districts. As the new high school requirements force districts to make educated decisions about program structure and offerings, the MOISD will be a State leader in being able to answer the tough educational questions about our two counties. As more data, training, and systems are put in place, the usability and

effectiveness will continue to increase; the potential is limitless once it begins to be harnessed more effectively. The MOISD is committed to supporting the local efforts to complete the integration of the Pearson D.A.T.A. project into daily decision making at the local level.

Cooperation often has a price: becoming “more common” this year involved many parties and many hours of hard work. The move by all local districts to the trimester system was a HUGE undertaking with multiple opportunities for failure. The cooperation between local districts was a sight to behold and envied throughout the State. The common trimester teaching system, coupled with a common high school start time, and a common calendar, allowed the Career Center to become a more effective educational system for students and will encourage more sharing between local districts in the future. The changes came at the expense of local sacrifice for many of the districts, but made for a better system for all students in the end. Cooperation by the MOISD local school districts has become the norm rather than the exception.

Ferris State, the MOISD, Michigan Works!, Reed City Schools, and the Michigan Department of Adult Education have worked together throughout this past year to allow Michigan Works! branches the ability to give the GED tests. This process is normally not allowed for various reasons and many phone calls, e-mails, and meetings by many people have allowed the process to move forward. Cooperation between the local entities reinforced to the State our commitment to this section of our population and the need to change regulations to meet needs of rural Michigan.

Each year the MOISD looks for ways to achieve **Cost Savings** by working together; this year was no exception. The renegotiation of an additional “no cost” school year of the Pearson D.A.T.A. project saved the districts over \$90,000. Community computer purchasing has also saved local dollars: volume decreases price. The cost savings accounted for by the completion of the Wide Area Network (WAN) will allow more curricula cooperation, safety, and storage in the future. The actual cost savings to the group will be better determined over the 2008 school year as use increases; we are anticipating a reduction of almost two-thirds in cost! The ISD also saved over \$100,000 just from WAN reimbursements for the communications to Ashman and Pineview Schools. The ISD continues to submit for E-Rate funding and helped save the locals and the ISD over \$140,000 this past year. The move to Will Sub saved the group around \$70,000 and brought another

quality product to our system for securing substitutes. Purchasing Skyward together and allowing districts to pay back the ISD over a three-year period also ensured low cost to the districts on pricing and helped to relieve local budget pressure.

Many **Construction** projects were completed at the MOISD to help meet the ever-changing needs of the local districts. With the influx of students from a yearly average of 450 to 600, the facilities had to change to meet the demand. Most of this year's construction happened at the Career Center. The welding area was completed with the addition of new classroom space, offices, booths, and teaching space. More classroom space for the automotive classroom was completed with some rearrangement of the facilities. With the movement of the electronics program to the Resource Center, the Early Success program moved to Big Rapids Middle School. The movement of the Career Center office from the center of the building to the front entrance allowed for better security and a new student computer lab.

Meeting the challenges for 2007 was not an easy task. As local districts feel more pressure from increased regulation through the legislative process and the State's economy, the MOISD had to continue to increase its effectiveness. **Communication** was at the center of the strategy for improving effectiveness. With the monumental task of passing a Special Education millage in 2007, more local communication needed to take place. The ISD circulated over 100,000 MOISD educational "journals" specifically designed to: a) raise the awareness of the MOISD and its schools; b) increase knowledge about the special education needs in our two counties; and c) educate the community about the local General Fund contributions to the rising special education costs of our local districts. Successful passage has had a monumental impact on the schools both from the personnel and financial sides.

Communication within the MOISD has continued to increase. Our website and E-mail systems have reduced our dependence on natural disbursement systems and allowed more employees to be updated on the progress of moving from Good to Great and changes in system operation. Board and administrative news is available for staff to keep informed of the latest news from the leadership team at the MOISD through postings and e-mail notifications.

Informing others at the State of our local needs is a critical role played by the staff and administration of the MOISD. Staff members throughout the system participate on State committees to better keep our neighbors informed of impending changes to the educational climate. We continue to host and attend meetings with influential legislators and State Department officials to carry the concerns of our local districts even before policy is being formed.

Two thousand seven also saw the continued expansion of the newly-formed **Cooperative**. The expansion of the Mecosta-Osceola Personnel Cooperative (MOP Co-Op) has allowed districts to increase their level of expertise, reduce costs, and share resources with each other. It is anticipated 2008 will continue to bring more interest to the group. Communication to other ISDs about the cooperative has been an on-going activity. Since the reception of the MASA Winner's Circle Award, seven different ISDs have inquired for a presentation or access to the documents to form their own mutation of the idea. Presentations have also been given at the State level on Good to Great and the Cooperative at the Governor's, MSBO, MEIM, and the CTE conferences. Two thousand eight will afford the opportunity to spread the Co-Op idea at the National School Board Conference. It is exciting to see a team idea get legs and be useful to others in education.

Two thousand seven was another year of change both at the local and State levels. The economy and new State and National regulations increased the pressure to perform throughout the system. Pressure can cause systems to come apart or build towards working together. Cooperation is not easy as it takes risk and trust between the parties. The MOISD has been a critical component to increased cooperation within the local school Boards, administrators, and staff members as we work together to pilot our way through the rough "C"s of change. We anticipate 2008 to be an equally challenging and rewarding year.