

SMALL SCHOOL UNITS

The Board of Education adopted its Strategic Framework for Continuous Improvement of Student Achievement in March 1995. This framework set forth the District's vision, goals and strategies. In October 1995, the district adopted 29 performance benchmarks, which set specific goals for student achievement and citizenship, safe and supportive schools, community-school partnerships, and district accountability. These benchmarks call for establishing small school units as an important component of the school improvement process.

The Board recognizes that smaller, more intimate learning settings have a positive effect on student academic performance, attendance rates, dropout rates, school safety, and satisfaction with school among students, teachers, parents, and the community.

The development of small school units in Rochester will provide opportunities for reforms in teaching and learning by addressing class size, school governance, school safety, civic values, parent involvement and accountability. Small school units will support an instructional environment that fosters effective student-teacher relationships and high standards for teaching and learning. Small school units will provide opportunities for staff and parents to organize current schools or parts of schools in creative, coherent units of instruction that aim to improve student performance through individualized instruction and reduced student-teacher ratios.

Small school units are characterized by:

- A quality educational program with defined scope and sequence in accordance with district policies, including defined expectations for students achievement;
- Effective teaching strategies which lead to improved student performance;
- An accountability system based upon academic standards and assessments, with exit outcomes for all students,
- Selected, dedicated staff
- Fiscal flexibility
- Small-school-unit planning teams that will adhere to the same governance structure as the School-Based Planning Team model;
- Strong parent involvement
- Partnerships with businesses, colleges and universities, and community organizations;
- Equal access for all students, including students with special needs, students labeled "at-risk", and exceptional, disadvantaged and gifted students; and
- Established evaluation program and procedures.

Small school units must comply with all federal and state laws, regulations, and court orders unless a waiver for innovation to district policies and State regulations is proposed and granted.

The Board, therefore authorizes the Superintendent to establish a broad-based committee (including administration, teaching staff, parents, students, and community partners) to develop administrative guidelines and fiscal guidelines for small school units which will address:

- Governance and structure
- Organizational practice
- Instructional program
- Standards and indicators of student achievement
- Assignment of students and staff
- Flexibility and elements of distinctiveness
- Budget
- Time commitment
- Evaluation and assessment process

The Superintendent will review the administrative and fiscal guidelines as developed by the committee with the Board. Following this review, and contingent upon Board approval, the Superintendent will be authorized to:

1. Develop an application process and issue a request for proposals with a specified timeframe to principals and teachers, inviting them to establish small school units;
2. Establish, within the district's Professional Development Initiative, a bank of successful models and ways of encouraging and fostering small school units and assuring support throughout the administrative structure;
3. Ensure that all Requests for Proposal support District policies (e.g., School District Goals and Objectives (Strategic Framework) Policy, Academic Standards and Assessment, School-Based Planning);
4. Establish an annual application and selection process.

The Superintendent will provide periodic updates to the Board on the success of small school units, and provide school and student assessments on an annual basis.

Cross-ref: 0200, School District Goals and Objectives (Strategic Framework)
2265, School-Based Planning
4000, Instructional Goals (Academic Standards and Assessment)

Note: Small School Units (May 1, 1997)

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