

# Memo

To: Board of Education  
From: Dr. Mary Whitrock, Superintendent  
Date: November 21, 2016  
Re: Charter Enrollment Task Force Report

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## **Background:**

On January 18, 2016, the Board of Education received a joint proposal from Journey and Quest Charter Schools that would, if approved by the Board of Education, allow parents the option to have their child automatically enrolled from Journey to Quest Charter School.

On February 15, 2016 the Board of Education voted unanimously not to approve the requests, but instead moved to establish a Charter Enrollment Task Force. The Charter Enrollment Task Force was charged with preparing a report recommending to the Board of Education options for addressing the enrollment process in the charter schools within the Ripon Area School District. As set out by the Board of Education, in preparing this recommendation, the task force:

- Reviewed the enrollment and lottery history of the charter schools;
- Reviewed the demographics and achievement data on Journey, Quest, Catalyst, and Lumen;
- Reviewed the movement of students between charter and non-charter schools at each level;
- Examined the original purpose of the charter schools;
- Recommended any revisions to the purpose of the charter schools; and
- Considered any existing or emerging federal, state and district policies that impact the charter schools in terms of funding, enrollment and capacity;

## **Timeline:**

The Task Force met four times on the following dates:

- Wednesday, May 17 (6:00-9:00 p.m.)
- Wednesday, September 21 (6:00-9:00 p.m.)
- Wednesday, October 19 (6:00-9:00 p.m.)
- Wednesday, November 2 (6:00-9:00 p.m.)

## **Participants:**

Parents, teachers, students, administrators, Governance Council members and Board members and the public were invited to attend the Charter Enrollment Task Force in May and then asked

to commit to attending three additional meetings in the fall of 2016. Thirty-seven individuals attended two or more meetings. Joe Schroeder, who assisted the District in developing a new mission, vision and strategic direction in the spring of 2015, facilitated the Charter Enrollment Task Force meetings.

### **Task Force Meeting Summary**

The first meeting of the Charter Enrollment Task Force included a view of the recently released documentary entitled *Most Likely to Succeed*. The District was one of a handful of districts to receive a license to host a screening of the documentary featured in over a dozen film festivals last year. The film launched a discussion about what all students need for life in the 21st century.

### **Guiding Principles**

The Charter Enrollment Task Force reviewed the Guiding Principles for Charter School Enrollment dated May 14, 2012. Based on discussion and a review of research, the Charter School Enrollment Task Force recommended revisions for consideration by the RASD Board of Education (See Addendum A). Changes include striking the original #5 which stated Charter schools are not appropriate for all students as this is counter to the reviewed research and district data and adding a note to the document acknowledging the term *charter* has, given the district's history, become equivalent to *project-based learning (PBL)*, though it is a structure that could be used to advance many different types of innovative strategies beyond PBL.

### **Task Force Findings**

The Charter Enrollment Task Force reviewed the enrollment and lottery history of the charter schools; the demographics and achievement data on Journey, Quest, Catalyst, and Lumen; the movement of students between charter and non-charter schools at each level. Based on this review of data, a list of findings was created for use by the task force (See addendum B).

### **Recommendation**

The Charter Enrollment Task Force reviewed seven potential options for addressing the enrollment process and utilized two different means to gather input from task force members regarding their preferences (See Addendum C). The options that gained the most support and are recommended to be implemented together include:

- Continue with 2 sections of charter school per grade level, replicating successful approaches of RASD charter schools within the RASD legacy schools; and
- Implement policy changes as an ongoing part of School Board work where policy updates could address relevant issues impacting charter school enrollment.

### **Other Recommendations Beyond Enrollment**

- Maintain a focus on improving learning for all students;
- Encourage collaboration and communication between schools to build positive relationships between students and staff; and
- As PBL grows in legacy schools, provide substantial training for teachers.

**Charter School Enrollment Guidelines**

The District uses several guiding principles for charter school enrollment:

- 1) Charter schools cannot cost any more than regular schools. For example, class sizes are kept comparable to maintain comparable costs.
- 2) Charter schools cannot take an action that would force the traditional school to change its program. For example, Quest does not have a 3rd/4th split classroom to accommodate everyone because it would require MPES to also have a split classroom.
- 3) Federal law for enrollment will be followed. For example, a lottery is used when there are more applications than seats.
- 4) Charter schools will be separated at the same levels as traditional schools. For example, a 3-5 school requires everyone to reapply for grades 6-8 which keeps students from being locked out of charter schools forever.
- 5) Charter schools are not appropriate for all students. For example, DPI says project-based learning is only appropriate for up to half of students, so no more than half the classrooms in a grade level may be charter.
- 6) Charter schools should reflect the same demographic diversity as the traditional schools. For example, Quest has become lopsided and needs more Special Education, ELL, Title 1, and low socioeconomic status students to reflect the District's entire student population in grades 3-5.

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- 5) Charter schools should reflect the same demographic diversity as the traditional schools. For example, Quest has become lopsided and needs more Special Education, ELL, Title 1, and low socioeconomic status students to reflect the District's entire student population in grades 3-5.

\* Note: Given the district's history, the term *charter* has, understandably, become equivalent to *project-based learning (PBL)* in the minds of many in the community. It is important to note, though, that a charter school is a structure that can be used to advance many different types of innovative strategies beyond PBL. STEM, personalized learning, and multi-age are some fairly common alternative strategies that several other schools in Wisconsin and beyond pursue through the charter school structure.

Revised List Submitted by the Charter Enrollment Task Force November 2, 2016  
(Changes include eliminating the original #5 and adding a note to the document)

**Addendum B**

**--Task Force Findings**

- Both legacy and charter schools at grades 3-5 and at the middle school level are collectively and consistently achieving above the state average in language arts and math.
- Charter schools are consistently scoring higher (some significantly higher) in math and English language arts achievement in comparison to legacy schools at grades 3-5 and at the middle school.
- The district's schools at grades 9-12, when combined, are basically at the state average for ACTs.
- At the high school level, the percentage of students proficient, regardless of the school, was higher than the state average for the percentage of students proficient.
- At times, smaller numbers of students in the three sub-groups analyzed (e.g., economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners) can occasionally skew the data.
- The number of economically disadvantaged students identified is increasing at every level of the school district, and some students are counted more than once in the three noted student sub-groups.
- Generally, there are more economically disadvantaged students and English language learners in the district's legacy schools than in its charter schools.
- The number of economically disadvantaged students identified at the high school level was dramatically lower than the numbers identified at the K-2 level.
- The three student subgroups in the district's grades K-2 schools were consistent across years.
- For grades 3-8, the legacy schools have more students in the noted three sub-groups than the charter schools.
- The difference in the percentage of students from the noted sub-groups enrolled in the legacy school rather than in the charter school is significantly larger at the grade 3-5 level than is the case for the middle school level, where this difference, while existent, is smaller.
- The K-2 schools have similar class sizes across the board, but there is an extra classroom at each level of the legacy schools K-5.
- There are higher class sizes in charter schools earlier in the summer but then these equalize generally with legacy school numbers over time.
- There is more of a wait list now than in the past for the K-2 charter school and less of a wait list than in the past for the grades 3-5 charter school.
- The wait list numbers provided in the documents that were reviewed by the task force showed those remaining on the waitlist once school starts in the fall or into the school year, rather than the (generally higher) numbers of those initially on the waitlist after the enrollment lottery occurs in the spring.
- The number of students going on from the K-2 charter school into the grades 3-5 charter school is generally constant.
- Enrollment has been declining overall in the system (by over 130 fewer students the past five years) although there is a minimal increase (of almost forty students) this year.

- The district has positive open enrollment numbers (i.e., more non-resident students enroll into the district than the number of resident students who enroll outside of the district).
- Overall, the district is graduating larger classes and bringing in smaller kindergarten classes.
- Smaller numbers of kindergarten classes in recent years seem to correspond closely to the economic downturn in recent years.
- 84.9% of Quest students identified as economically disadvantaged were *proficient* or above on the 2014-15 Badger exam. This is in contrast to 53.7% of Murray Park students identified as not economically disadvantaged achieving at the same level. This may suggest that, with the right training and right support, students from any sort of economic status will be successful, including in project-based learning.
- Research findings regarding project-based learning point to the importance of teacher training and support for success in the effort. (“Project-based Learning Research Review” Dec. 2015, *Edutopia* and *Project-based Instruction: A Review of the Literature on Effectiveness in Prekindergarten through 12th Grade Classrooms*. Buck Institute for Education, 2011).
- As displayed in the 8/14/12 district document showing total grant awards, RASD has received \$3.175 million between 2005-15 for implementation and renewal of charters in the district. Receipt of these funds for the existing charters has ended and renewal of such funds does not appear likely.
- The district has lost approximately \$5 million in revenue over the past nine years, which reflects state trends.

### Task Force Input on Potential Options for Addressing Enrollment

The Charter Enrollment Task Force reviewed potential options for addressing the enrollment process and utilized two different means to gather input from task force members regarding their preferences.

Charter School options including:

- Continue with 2 sections of charter school options per grade level;
- Expand to 3 sections of charter school options per grade level where there is demand (and where a minimum of 5 sections exist);
- Continue with current 2 sections of charter school per grade level and explore other options beyond project-based learning that push boundaries of innovation in legacy schools;
- Continue with 2 sections of charter school per grade level, replicating successful approaches of RASD charter schools within the RASD legacy schools;
- Convert charter schools to in-house charter schools, thus eliminating state-imposed enrollment requirements and allowing staff to balance sections demographically through a local contract;
- Combine the K-5 Charter and K-5 Legacy Schools into Journey/Quest and Barlow Park/Murray Park, existing in current buildings; and
- Implement Policy Changes

### Task Force Input Round 1

The Charter Enrollment Task Force provided two distinct rounds of input based on the list of options. The first round identified acceptable/unacceptable options for Board consideration. Compiled input resulted in a pair of numbers for each option where the first shows votes as acceptable option and the second votes as unacceptable option.

- Continue with 2 sections of charter school per grade level, replicating successful approaches of RASD charter schools within the RASD legacy schools **(31-0)**;
- Implement Policy Changes **(24-6)**;
- Continue with 2 sections of charter school options per grade level **(24-7)**;
- Expand to 3 sections of charter school options per grade level where there is demand (and where a minimum of 5 sections exist) **(21-10)**;
- Continue with current 2 sections of charter school per grade level and explore other options beyond project-based learning that push boundaries of innovation in legacy schools **(21-9)**;
- Convert charter schools to in-house charter schools, thus eliminating state-imposed enrollment requirements and allowing staff to balance sections demographically through a local contract **(11-20)**; and

- Combine the K-5 Charter and K-5 Legacy Schools into Journey/Quest and Barlow Park/Murray Park, existing in current buildings **(8-7-16)**.

A second round of input was gathered to note a preferred option through a weighted score. Input provided the following results:

- Continue with 2 sections of charter school per grade level, replicating successful approaches of RASD charter schools within the RASD legacy schools **(237)**;
- Expand to 3 sections of charter school options per grade level where there is demand (and where a minimum of 5 sections exist) **(93)**;
- Continue with 2 sections of charter school options per grade level **(42)**;
- Convert charter schools to in-house charter schools, thus eliminating state-imposed enrollment requirements and allowing staff to balance sections demographically through a local contract **(41)**;
- Continue with current 2 sections of charter school per grade level and explore other options beyond project-based learning that push boundaries of innovation in legacy schools **(40)**; and
- Combine the K-5 Charter and K-5 Legacy Schools into Journey/Quest and Barlow Park/Murray Park, existing in current buildings **(24)**.

\*Note: Given the unique nature of the last option listed (Implement Policy Changes) in comparison to the others and that strong support for consideration of this option existed within the Task Force (as indicated in Round 1 input), Implement Policy Changes was not included within the Round 2 input process with the understanding that policy changes could be combined with any of the other potential options and would be an ongoing part of School Board work where policy updates could address relevant issues impacting charter school enrollment.