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## **CST Student Helps Market Unique Cyrus School**

While many of his classmates were at home working as lifeguards or in retail stores, University of Minnesota, Morris sophomore Joe Basel had the opportunity to spend part of his summer working on a research project with real life consequences.

Basel was involved with helping to put together a marketing strategy for the Cyrus Math, Science and Technology (CMST) magnet school in Cyrus, Minnesota. The school is unique because it focuses on specific areas of education in multi-age classrooms which allow older students to mentor younger students and provide a variety of learning opportunities in each classroom.

The Cyrus area school district applied for Community Assistantship Program (CAP) funding which is part of a program that allows community groups to hire students doing applied research for a specific project. CAP supports student research assistants to carry out community initiated and guided projects for community improvement. The students provide information or answers to questions that a group may need to better accomplish their goals or plans.

The challenge that the district had been facing is one of lowered enrollment. Basel's specific purpose was to explore what the community's education needs were, identify education trends, and draft both short and long-term marketing goals for the district.

To begin, he spent time researching different trends within public education and different types of marketing strategies that are used in the industry with limited budgets. "My first project was to put together a presentation to the staff and parents on the process of creating a marketing plan for their school," Basel explained. "I also provided information about options and feasibility for them," he added.

Basel said that providing parents and members of the school with this information and working with the varying perspectives to create a marketing strategy was one of the biggest challenges of the project. "Marketing is something that many people only connect to the private sector, but it is just as important with public education. Because of open enrollment in Minnesota, public schools need to market to potential students just as much as private schools, perhaps even more" Basel noted.

His research was also focused on how to maximize effectiveness in marketing while still maintaining affordability for public schools that often have tight budgets. To do this the district started to use the focused marketing techniques that many small businesses use. Basel was also involved in helping redesign many of the schools promotional materials including letters, ads, and booths at local fairs.

Basel believes that he will be able to use many of the skills he gained through his research in other real-life applications. In the future he plans to go into business where knowing about this type of marketing will prove useful.

The Center for Small Towns is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, non-profit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. Their Mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Contributed by Kim Ukura, CST Student Administrative Assistant