

Strategic Plan for the Morris Area School District

May 15, 2000

**Gregory Thorson, Ph.D.
University of Minnesota, Morris**

**Jacqueline Edmondson, Ph.D.
University of Minnesota, Morris**

**David Fluegel, Community Program Specialist
Center for Small Towns**

**This project was supported by funding from the Morris Area School District, the
West Central Initiative Fund, The Center for Small Towns, and the Stevens County
Economic Improvement Commission**

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Background and Regional Context	3
Chapter 2: The First Town Meeting: The visioning process	9
Chapter 3: Early Childhood Family Education	12
Chapter 4: Elementary School programming	15
Chapter 5: High School Curricula	19
Chapter 6: Technology	22
Chapter 7: Community	24
Chapter 8: Co-curricular activities	30
Chapter 9: Budget and Infrastructure	37
Chapter 10: Common themes, recommendations, and suggested timeline	43

Chapter 1

Background and Regional Context

Introduction

The Morris Area School District is a large, complex organization. Decisions made by the school district affect thousands of students, teachers, parents, and support staff. Strategic long-range planning is one mechanism used by school districts to help in this complex decision-making process. In the case of the Morris Areas School District's strategic planning process, a wide variety of community and school groups were invited to participate. The process welcomed public participation and response, not just from school organizations but from other community organizations as well. The inclusion of such a wide variety of groups is a response to the belief that the school district is in many ways a cornerstone of a healthy community. Without strong schools, a community is at a serious disadvantage in attracting both businesses and employees to the region. The school is also dependent on the community for its support through both volunteerism and the support provided by local levies.

Budgeting for the school district is a complex task. The Morris Area School District has a multi-million dollar budget that relies on revenue from both state and local sources. Even under normal circumstances, the district's revenues can be difficult to predict, partly because the majority of funding is determined annually by the state legislature, but also because virtually all of the revenues provided by the state are based on student enrollment. As a result, managing the activities of the school district can be very difficult.

This document summarizes the results of the strategic planning process conducted in the Morris Area School District. Morris Area residents met together during a recent community visioning process that occurred between September and December 1999. The facilitators of the process also met frequently with teachers and administrators, as well as continually solicited feedback from the public. The process received a high level of coverage from both the local newspaper and radio stations.

During the planning process, it became evident that the community, while obviously united in the support of their existing school, shared a vision of excellence that would capitalize on the strengths of the school and community. Community members collectively articulated a vision for a school that would ensure excellence for each of its students. This report describes this visioning process and summarizes the recommendations made by various community members and educators during these meetings. Suggestions for the implementation of these recommendations complete the plan.

Background: Quality in the Morris Area School District

By virtually all accounts, the Morris Area School district provides an excellent education for its students. The strong support for the quality of instruction was apparent at each of the public meetings as well as in subsequent discussions with teachers and administrators.

There is also a considerable amount of empirical data that demonstrates both the quality of instruction in Morris Area Schools as well as citizen satisfaction with the school district. Table 1.1 shows that Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment test scores for 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders were all higher in the Morris Area School District than the state averages.

Table 1.1 Test Scores for Students in the Morris Area Schools, 1997-98.

	3rd Grade Reading	3rd Grade Math	5th Grade Reading	5th Grade Math	8th Grade Reading	8th Grade Math
Morris Area Average	1459.3	1438.3	1462.4	1423.0	79.6	82.2
State Average	1410.0	1401.4	1419.3	1395.1	78.0	79.0

Morris Area students also attend school more regularly than other students in the school district. Table 1.2 demonstrates that the attendance and graduation rates in MAHS are higher than the state average, while the annual dropout rate is lower than the state average.

Table 1.2 Attendance, Graduation, and Dropout Rates in the Morris Area Schools, 1997-1998.

	Attendance Rate	Graduation Rate	Annual Dropout Rate
Morris Area Average	96.5%	95.9%	1.3%
State Average	94.5%	78.1%	3.7%

A random telephone survey of Morris residents conducted in late 1998 found strong confidence levels of the citizens of Morris in the teachers and school. Eighty-seven percent of respondents were either very or somewhat satisfied with Morris Area School District teachers.

Table 1.3 Support for Morris Area School District Teachers.

	N	UMM %	Non-UMM %	All %
very satisfied	95	34.7	42.6	40.9
somewhat satisfied	107	55.1	43.7	46.1
somewhat dissatisfied	25	8.2	11.5	10.8
very dissatisfied	5	2.0	2.2	2.2
total	232	49 (N)	183 (N)	

Q: How satisfied are you with the quality of teachers in the Morris Public schools?

Finally, respondents were asked to assess the overall education that Morris Area students receive in their schools. Over 90% were either very or somewhat satisfied with the overall quality of education. Clearly, the school district enjoys strong public support.

Table 1.4 Satisfaction with the Overall Education Students Receive in the Morris Area School District.

	N	UMM %	Non-UMM %	All %
very satisfied	100	34.0	44.0	42.0
somewhat satisfied	116	53.2	47.6	48.7
somewhat dissatisfied	19	10.6	7.3	8.0
very dissatisfied	3	2.1	1.0	1.3
total	238	47 (N)	191 (N)	

Q: How satisfied are you with the overall education children receive in the Morris Public schools?

A Significant Problem: Declining Enrollment and Its Effects

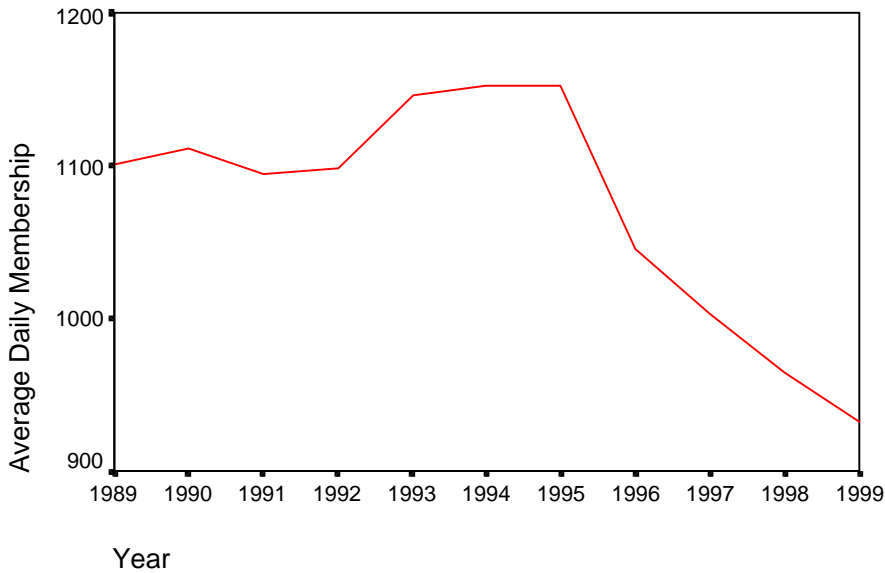
Although the Morris Area School District enjoys broad public support, it nevertheless is facing a severe budget problem due to declining enrollment. Virtually all state revenues are based on enrollment figures, so trends in declining enrollment have significant effects on the financial health of a school district.

One of the defining trends of the 1990s has been the severe economic decline of much of western Minnesota. Most of the economic problems in the region can be attributed to an unusually severe farm crisis that has resulted in an actual decline in the number of farms in western Minnesota. As a result, the Minnesota Planning and State Demographic Center has forecast rather severe population declines for the region between 1995 and 2025. The predicted population decrease is even more notable among young, school-aged residents.

Although much of western Minnesota has seen significant economic problems, Morris has experienced rather steady and substantial economic growth. Because the Morris local economy is rather diversified due in part to presence of a branch of the University of Minnesota as well as significant conveyor belt, tank construction, and ethanol production facilities, Morris has been more prosperous than most of its neighbors during the rest of the decades. The diversified state of the local community makes Morris better positioned to withstand future economic downturns as well.

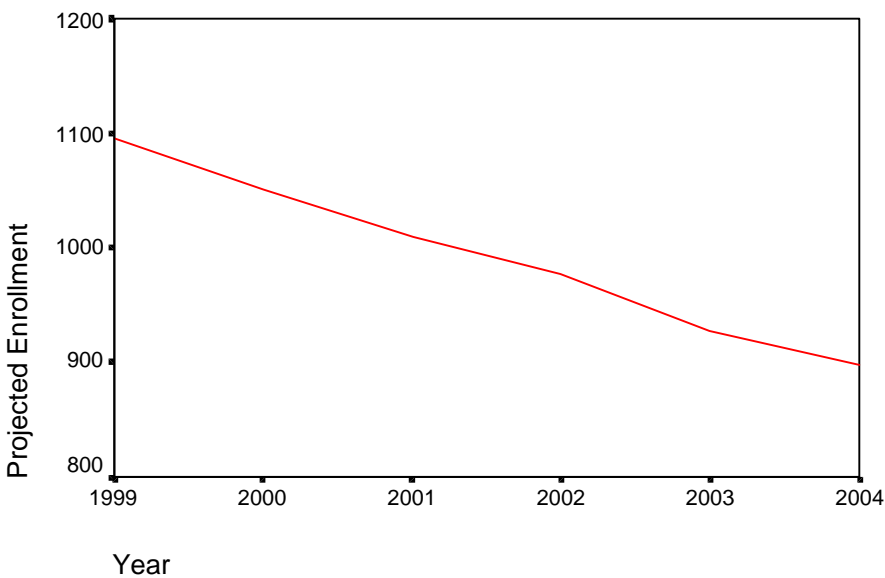
Despite the presence of significant economic growth in the community, the Morris Area School District has nevertheless experienced significant declines in enrollment. Figure 1.1 shows that enrollments have declined significantly since 1989. Between 1989 and 1999, the average daily membership in the Morris Area School District declined over 15%, from 1101 to 933 students.

Figure 1.1 Average Daily Membership
in Morris Area Schools, 1989-1999



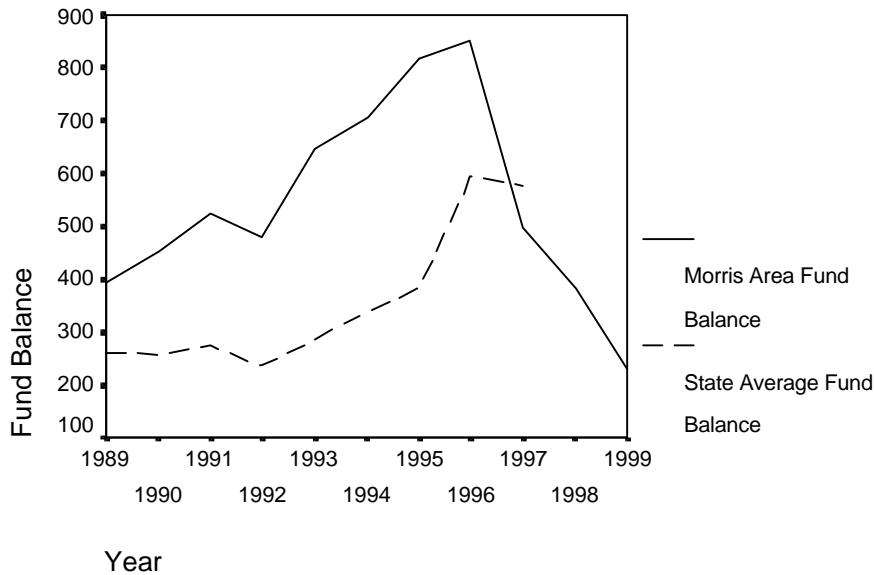
The Superintendent routinely makes projections of future enrollments based on several factors. Figure 1.2 shows that enrollments are projected to decline an additional 18% between 2000 and 2005, from 1096 to 898 students. (Note that these projections differ from those presented in Figure 1.1. Figure 1.2 uses weighted average daily membership rather than average daily membership estimates).

Figure 1.2 Projected Daily Membership
in Morris Area Schools, 2000-2004



The Morris Area School District has had a difficult adjusting its expenditures to match the lower revenue associated with declining student enrollments. Figure 1.3 shows that the fund balance per average daily membership has fallen precipitously since 1996. Between 1996 and 1999, the fund balance dropped more than 70%, from \$852 to \$231 per average daily membership.

Figure 1.3 Fund Balance for
Morris Area Schools, 1989-1999

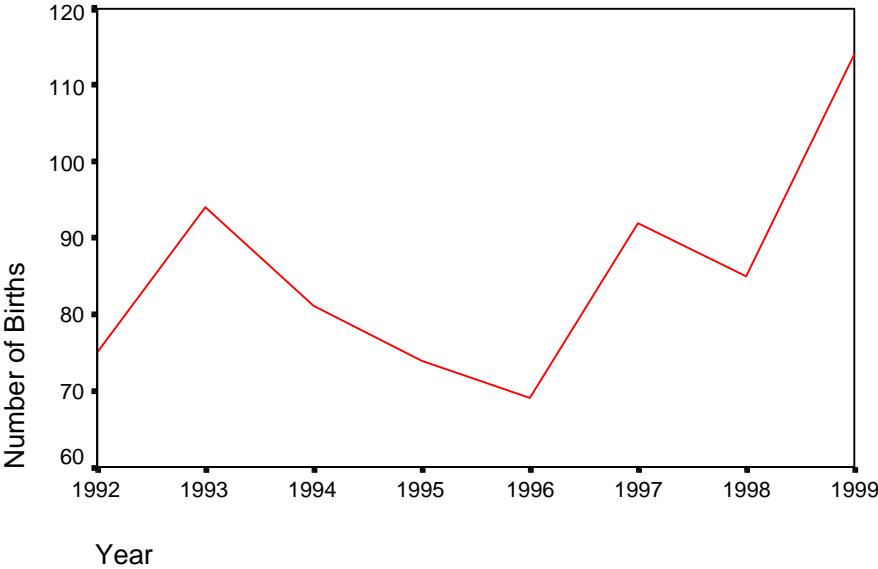


Further discussion of the budget is found in Chapter 9, but it is clear that the Morris Area School District must respond more quickly to the dwindling resources available. The appropriate responses for the district are covered in the policy recommendation section of this report.

Finally, Figure 1.4 shows that there may be some hope for future enrollments. Births in Stevens County were up sharply in 1999, and the school district needs to continue to compete for new students.

Figure 1.4 Births in Stevens County,

1992-1999



With this brief introduction to the regional context and its result on student enrollments, we now turn to descriptions of the public meetings conducted between September and December 1999.

Chapter 2

The First Town Meeting: A visioning process

On September 29, 1999 the Morris community met for the first of six public meetings to develop a comprehensive vision statement as part of its strategic planning process. This first meeting, attended by more than 40 participants, began with an overview of the planning process. Facilitator Greg Thorson explained that, in over 80 years of the district's existence, no public, strategic, long-range planning had ever occurred. However, given factors such as budgetary and enrollment issues, it is both timely and important for the district to engaged in a strategic planning process.

Following Greg's introduction, the participants, working in small groups, were asked to "dream" of an ideal Morris Area School District. They wrote these dreams down and shared them with the other participants. Many of the small groups had similar visions for the school. These "dreams" were then categorized according to common themes and compiled into one vision statement. This vision statement is important because it serves as a guide in future planning for the district.

Based on the vision and goal statements generated during the first public meeting, a series of speakers were invited to discuss their programs and goals with the public. Each meeting was one and one-half hours in length, and included equal time for presentation from the speakers and discussion by the public. Each speaker was asked to present an overview of their program as it currently exists, followed by a "wish list" or set of hopes for the future of their program.

The meetings were well-attended, including a mixture of teachers, administrators, and parents. Approximately 30-40 individuals were present at each town session. Following is a summary of each meeting.

Public dialogue during the first meeting resulted in an initial draft of the vision statement, which was written and presented to the public during the second meeting on October 14, 1999. This same draft appeared in the newspaper, and the public was invited to comment on the draft.

Morris Area School District Vision Statement, 2000

The Morris Area School District is committed to offering a comprehensive curriculum that will meet the individual needs of all of its students. The core curriculum shall include not only the traditional areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also other critical areas such as extensive music, foreign language, the arts, and physical fitness offerings. As a district of excellence, the school will prepare students to meet their challenges as citizens and as members of families and communities, with strong character and a solid sense of personal accountability. Students will graduate from the Morris Area High School as independent learners who are prepared for immediate entry into whatever they should choose, whether that be directly into the job market, vocational and technical training programs, or the nation's finest universities. The school will provide a nurturing educational environment that draws in and values each individual student. The district will provide life-long services to residents, from comprehensive ECFE programming and other P-12 programming through numerous post-secondary options to an extensive set of offerings in community education.

The Morris Area School District will offer a variety of co-curricular activities that will add to the breadth and depth of its students' education. These activities will be rich and diverse, including the arts, theater, music, athletics, leadership development, community service, and a variety of academic clubs and activities.

The Morris Area School District will continue to support excellence in its teachers, staff, and programs, both by retaining the expertise the district currently enjoys and by recruiting skilled and capable teachers and staff in the future. The district will support staff development and professional activities that will continually enhance the knowledge and abilities of the many talented educators in the district.

The Morris Area School District will capitalize on the unique opportunities that a small community can provide, particularly the positive sense of belonging and family that is important in small communities. The school district will enhance connections between the community, including UMM, and the school so the school facilities are open and inviting, not just to Morris residents but to neighboring communities as well. The school will be a safe and accessible place for all who enter the school.

The Morris Area School District will value the use of technology, including computers, ITV, and other technological devices, to enhance and extend the educational opportunities of its students. Students will graduate with technological skills that will enrich their personal and occupational lives.

While moving towards this vision, the Morris Area School District will nevertheless address the budgeting and infrastructure challenges facing the district. To address these challenges, collaboration will be sought with neighboring schools, towns, and other agencies, and strategies will be developed to secure financial stability for the district. Together we will recognize that our school can do many things if we as parents, students, teachers, administrators, and School Board members work together to promote and work for our school district.

The vision statement demonstrates that Morris Area Schools are a district that prides itself in providing a comprehensive and high quality education for its students. This statement reflects a commitment to continuing with quality programming that has characterized the district in the past, and will continue to define it in the future. Morris schools will continue to guide students into productive lives as members of families, communities, and the workforce. Further, the statement reflects a commitment to meeting new challenges.

As difficult funding decisions are made in the school district, it is important to return to this vision statement to ensure that the district is actually moving towards the goals and aspirations stated in it. We encourage decision-makers in the district to print out the vision statement and bring it to each of the future school board meetings. The vision statement is a clear reminder of what the community wants out of its schools, and it has numerous policy implications.

Chapter 3
Early Childhood and Family Education
October 14, 1999

The second public meeting, attended by more than 30 participants, began with a presentation by Tamy Reese, Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) Director. The purpose of this meeting was to better understand the programs available for young children and families in Morris. Tamy presented an overview of the ECFE program as it currently exists, followed by list of goals or visions for the program.

Tamy began by explaining that currently ECFE has many goals. First and foremost, the program is designed to support children's optimal physical, intellectual, social and emotional development during the important first years of life. Further, the program has a goal of promoting informed, realistic attitudes and expectations about raising children. This is achieved by increasing parent involvement in children's learning, development and education, and offering child development information and a variety of parenting techniques. The program both supports parents in their efforts in raising children, and enhances effective communication and healthy parent-child/family relationships. Finally, ECFE provides information on resources that are available to the community.

The Morris ECFE program operates on a FY 1999 budget of approximately \$40,000/year. During the next fiscal year, it is anticipated that this operating budget will be significantly less based on Governor Ventura's budget proposal.

At the present time, ECFE has the following components:

1. Parent/Child Classes: These make up the bulk of the programming. The classes last 1 ½ to 2 hours, and include parent-child interaction time, Circle Time (story telling and singing), and a time for parents to meet with educators. In the Fall of 1999, these classes served 109 children and parents.
2. Preschool Classes – Learning is Fun (LIF): These classes, offered to three and four year olds, or to four and five year olds, are approximately 2 to 2 ½ hours in length and consist of parents dropping their children off for special classes. These classes are popular, and in the Fall of 1999 more classes had to be offered based on the high enrollment (41 children in the 4 – 5 year old group, 23 children in the 3 – 4 year old group).
3. HUG program: This program is the fastest growing of the ECFE classes. They combine ECFE and LIF. This program is especially targeted to Dads and has many collaborations with numerous community agencies.
4. Learning Readiness Kindergarten Connection: This program is targeted for children who are entering kindergarten. The course lasts for approximately 10 weeks and focuses on elementary school preparation. The children meet with school personnel, including the elementary school principal, ride the school bus, and become familiar with the elementary school building.

5. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Inclusion Program: This program is directed toward children with special needs. Offering this program is particularly challenging because the classrooms are not handicap accessible.

ECFE Wish List: A Summary

1. MASD as an E-12 or E 16 district. Currently the district serves kindergarten (K) through grade 12 students. Tamy would like to see this expanded to serve younger children and their families.
2. ECFE courses offered on a year-round basis, including summers.
3. Establishment of a Family School. This would serve families with children of all ages, extending through high school.
4. Expansion of collaborative and outreach efforts, including the provision of parenting classes for high school students.
5. New facility with handicap accessibility is needed.

Tamy reported that she would like to see MASD become an early childhood through grade 12 (or 16) school district. Tamy stressed the point that education begins at birth. She made the point that we can impact most children early, before they enter school. Further, this early education is a long – term benefit to the district, and it is likely to increase parental involvement.

Tamy also noted that classes need to be offered throughout the school year. Currently this is not an option given the limited funding for the program. Learning is Fun (LIF) is offered for approximately 30 weeks. Parent/Child classes are offered for approximately 20 weeks. In the future, Tamy would like to see ECFE provide a Family School. She would like to expand the program to include families with children in kindergarten through grade 12, rather than just families with children before they enter school. She would like to continue and expand collaborative and outreach efforts, and provide parenting classes for high school students.

Tamy emphasized the need for a new facility that would include handicap accessible Early Childhood rooms. Currently, the program is housed in the elementary school building on Columbia Avenue in Morris. This facility was originally built in 1914 and has limited access for handicapped students.

In summary, Tamy’s presentation demonstrated that there is a strong interest in ECFE programs throughout Stevens County. There are more families interested in ECFE than can currently be accommodated. Tamy suggested that the district needs to focus efforts

on expanding ECFE, and to consider ECFE as a means of attracting and retaining new families to the district.

Chapter 4
Elementary Education
October 14, 1999

Brad Korn, Morris Area Elementary School (MAES) Principal, presented a pamphlet that outlined MAES, a comprehensive K-6 program, as a “School of Excellence.” The mission of the school, as stated on the cover of the pamphlet, is to:

help individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward themselves and others, that will enable them to solve problems, think creatively, continue learning, and develop maximum potential for leading productive fulfilling lives in a complex and changing society.

The philosophy of the district stresses that every student can learn, and that educators are responsible for structuring the learning environment, an environment that is meaningful and caring with parents and teachers working closely together. Further, students are expected to be responsible for their own learning as they make appropriate decisions.

Presently, the school enjoys a relatively stable student population, allowing for much family and community involvement. Further, there is a high attendance rate, averaging over 97% per day. The building facility is large and allows for multiple sections of classes at each grade level.

The faculty and staff are experienced and well-trained. Eighteen of the faculty have master’s degrees, and one of the elementary teachers (Pam Solvie) is now National Board Certified in Early Childhood Education. The average years of faculty experience is eighteen. All faculty members exceed the Minnesota basic certification requirements. In addition to the impressive faculty, there are many paraprofessionals at MAES, several of whom have advanced degrees.

The school and faculty at MAES have received numerous awards and honors. Some of these awards include the Minnesota Elementary School Principals School of Excellence Award, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Accreditation, Minnesota Conservation Teacher of the Year (Linda Retzlaff), Minnesota Elementary Science Teacher of the Year (Ken Gagner), Minnesota Teachers of Excellence (Marty Fluegel, Muriel Eggebraaten, Linda Retzlaff), Morris Teachers of the Year (Marty Fluegel, George Graff, Muriel Eggebraaten, Joyce Rentz, Linda Retzlaff), West Central Counselor Association Elementary Counselor of the Year Honorable Mention (Tammy Roth), and World School Japan Award (Pam Solvie), and Fulbright Hays Awards to China and Japan (Pam Solvie).

The curriculum, evaluated on a rotating cycle, is comprehensive and includes daily music and physical education classes, special education, and technology. In addition to the core curriculum, Brad listed “Academic Enrichment Opportunities” available to students at MAES as Geography Bee, Inventors Fair, Math Masters, Science Fair, Spelling Bee, and French classes for third and fourth graders. Band and orchestra are offered to the students.

The school regularly participates in activities outside the school walls, including field trips to local and state sites of interest, and an active involvement in Scandia Wood Environmental Learning Lab (SWELL). MAES also enjoys a strong relationship with the University of Minnesota Morris, which brings in-class tutoring, Homework Help Center, and the Reading Corner, among other programs.

Elementary School Wish List: A Summary

1. Teachers are most important resource of MAES. This needs to be maintained through opportunities for further training of the teachers and adequate planning time.
2. The elementary building has significant and immediate needs.
3. The elementary curriculum and staff have needs in the following areas:
 - (1) gifted education/gifted education specialist
 - (2) foreign language for all grade levels
 - (3) increased time on reading, both in school and at home
 - (4) elementary school technology specialist (full-time)
 - (5) elementary school art specialist (full-time)
4. Programming needs
 - (1) all day every day kindergarten as an option
 - (2) before/after school programs for elementary age students
 - (3) maintain optimal class size of 17-22 students per classroom
5. Maintain and enhance community and parent involvement in elementary school

In order to improve the school, Brad suggested that additional dollars and time are needed for teacher training/planning. The faculty are the greatest resource of the school, and in order to maintain and enhance that resource, there needs to be opportunities for faculty to extend their knowledge and teaching for the benefit of the children. The faculty enjoy great respect among the community, as indicated by a recent survey of the Morris community

Brad also emphasized the need for a new elementary building. The current structure is old and in need of repair. Furthermore, decisions about handicap accessibility need to be addressed in the immediate future. Brad explained that a second elevator could be installed in the building, but that would be at a great expense given the current structure and lay out of the school. Brad also reiterated Tamy's earlier statement about the facility needs of the ECFE program.

Brad promoted several curricular and staffing needs. One area that he felt the district needed to address was gifted education. Brad explained that at various times parents are able to work with children on enrichment activities, but at the present time, there is no

coordinator or teacher for gifted students. On his wish list, Brad included the need for a gifted education specialist or teacher.

In addition to gifted education, Brad emphasized that reading education needed to be a priority, both in school and at home. He suggested that reading time needed to be increased, both in and out of school. He would like to see test scores, which are strong in Morris, improve for all children, particularly those in the bottom 10% according to standardized tests administered in the district.

Brad proposed that he would like to see foreign language become an option from first grade through all elementary grades. At the present time, volunteers from the university teach French to third and fourth grade students. Brad emphasized the importance of foreign language instruction for *all* children.

Brad also explained to the community that there is a need for a technology specialist at the elementary school building. The current technology specialist, Kyle Berget, has shared responsibilities at the elementary school and the high school.

Brad pointed to a need for an art specialist at the elementary school. Currently, art is taught by classroom teachers and integrated into the regular curriculum. Brad explained that having an art specialist on staff would greatly enhance art opportunities for children in the elementary program.

Brad proposed two programming changes, in addition to considerations about class size. One is the need for all-day everyday kindergarten become an option for parents in the district. At the present time, he has received mixed responses from the community about this area. Some parents would like all day every day kindergarten, while others would like to keep the current all day every *other* day structure in place. Brad suggested that perhaps giving parents a choice, and having both options available, might be the best possibility. Currently, parents who want to send their children to kindergarten all day every day are turning to other schools, such as St. Mary's, which results in a loss of revenue for the district. Currently, money is available from the state of Minnesota to pilot all day every day kindergarten programs.

The second programming area is a need for more summer and after school programs targeted directly for elementary school students. He explained that this would be a way to enhance current elementary programming in the district.

Brad included a discussion about class size in his presentation. Many educational research studies have indicated that an optimal class size for elementary grades is 17 students per class. Furthermore, the state of Minnesota is making money available to districts to establish and maintain low class size. Given the fact that Morris is a small district, Brad explained that class size should consistently remain between 17 and 22 students.

Brad noted that increased involvement of parents and community in the school is desirable. He commended the parents and community for their already strong participation in the school, but also expressed the need for this to continue and to be strengthened even more.

Chapter 5 **High school Curricula**

October 28, 1999

High school principal George Morrow presented a comprehensive overview of the Morris Area High School's staff, students, curriculum, special education, administration, extra-curricular activities, and special events.

Presently, there are 48 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) professional staff at the Morris Area High School. Sixteen of those faculty members have a Master's degree or higher. The staff average 13 years of teaching experience, and 27 of these teachers coach 46 activities for the district. There are 19 FTE paraprofessionals working for the district with an average of 8 years' experience. The administration for the high school includes a principal, an athletic director, two counselors, a nurse, and two secretaries.

The high school currently serves 682 students in grades 7 through 12, with seniors as the largest class of students (122 enrolled) and sophomores the smallest (99 enrolled). The high school drop out rate is less than 2%, and there is an average daily attendance of more than 95.5%. Eighty percent of the students go on to post-secondary schooling, and approximately 60% receive some type of local scholarship. The Morris Area High School consistently has between 1 and 3 National Merit Scholars. Further, 75% of 8th grade students pass the math Graduation Standards Test, while 80% pass the reading Graduation Standards Test.

Morris is considered a comprehensive high school. It has 10 Curricular departments (including Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Science, PE/Health, World Languages, Fine Arts, Business/Computers, Vocational, Special Education, and Administration). Extra-curricular activities include athletics, fine arts, as well as clubs and academic contests.

There are strong community connections, special programs, and special events that link the school to the community throughout the year. The community connections include community service by 9th – 12th graders in the spring and fall of each year, an Independent Youth Service (IYS) class, field trips, UMM tutors, Fall Career Day, and open noon hour.

Special programs include an Alternative School, PLUS (Positive Learning, Unlimited Success for 7th graders), School-to-Work, ENABL (Education Now Babies Later), FFA (Future Farmers of America), Science Fair, Riverwatch (a link between Russia and Minnesota), and Iwakta.

Special events include Career Day, College Fair, Fall and Spring Community Service, Homecoming, Prom, and the Arts, Crafts, & Woods Open House.

George's wish list contained three major themes: benefits for teachers, benefits for students, and budgetary/infrastructure needs. The first theme, benefits for teachers, addressed teacher quality. Like elementary principal Brad Korn, George had only praise for the quality faculty that are teaching at MAHS. He likewise noted the need to maintain and support this quality through the provision of time during the year for faculty development and training, as well as increased opportunities for faculty collaboration. He noted that he would like to see a decrease in the teaching/student load that the faculty currently maintain, as well as an increase in the amount of time and resources that are available for faculty and students to travel and gain new and different experiences.

High school wish list: A summary

1. For teachers: increased time and resources for training, collaboration, and travel. Decreased work load.
2. For students: increased time for travel, assistance for at-risk students, continued involvement of parents and community, supervised leisure time, and a 'common area' in the high school. Decreased work time.
3. Budget and infrastructure: need for stability, maintain/increase student enrollment, recruit and advertise programs, eliminate fund raising, establish an Academic Booster Club, maintain technology, maintain building needs.

George suggested that there are many areas in which benefits for students could be improved at MAHS. He suggested that assistance with at-risk students is much needed, and that the continued involvement of parents and the community in the raising of Morris' children is essential. George also pointed to a need for supervised leisure activities for high school students, perhaps through collaboration with the new Regional Fitness Center. George also proposed that students would benefit from the establishment of a "common area" in the high school. This would be a place for students to congregate and socialize. George concluded his discussion of student needs by suggesting that he would like to see fewer teens holding jobs in the community. He felt that working teens often come to school tired and not ready to learn in the classroom because of the number of hours they are working after school and on weekends.

George's wish list also contained budgetary and infrastructure items. He suggested that budget stability is crucial, and that perhaps the way to address this is through the maintenance or increase of student enrollment through recruitment and advertising activities. At the same time, George would like to see the elimination of fund raising activities by teachers and students, coupled with the establishment of an Academic Booster Club to raise money for academic co-curricular activities.

Furthermore, George noted the budgetary need to maintain technology in the school. This is sometimes an expense for the district, but it is of utmost importance given the time in which we live.

George also noted that while the high school is relatively new and in good condition, it is at an age when repairs might be needed. This is also a budgetary issue, and something the district needs to plan for in advance.

Chapter 6
Technology
November 16, 1999

Kyle Berget, the new Technology Coordinator for the Morris Area school district, was the first speaker at this meeting. Kyle was asked to first present information about the resources that the MASD currently has in technology, followed by a wish list or items that he feels will be needed to enhance the technology offerings of the district. After his presentation, Pam Solvie, an elementary school teacher who has been involved with several technology initiatives, and Diane Nelson, a high school business teacher and yearbook coordinator, joined Kyle for the panel discussion.

Kyle began his presentation by explaining that the district currently has three computer labs in the high school (2 PC and 1 Mac) and two in the elementary school. The elementary and high school programs are linked through a Network Administrator that allows them to share software through the computer and to monitor the labs through a type of filter system. Kyle explained that the high school currently uses the following software: Apple Works 5.0, ProQuest, Math Applications, OJ Analysis (Health/Nutrition), and Microsoft Excel. At the elementary school, the following software is currently utilized: Accelerated Reader 5.0, Hyperstudio, Clariswork for Kids, Netscape, and ProQuest. All high school and elementary classrooms have computers in them; however, Kyle noted that most are out of date and only capable of word processing functions. Use of the computer labs is in high demand. Typically, the Mac lab's are full from 7:30 in the morning until 4:00pm at night. The TREC program helps out, running an open lab from 8-10 on Monday night, although there has been limited turnout for this service.

Kyle noted that there is currently a Technology Committee that is trying to remain active. On November 15, 1999 the committee presented an "acceptable use" policy to the school board that will establish guidelines for World Wide Web use and for constructing and maintaining a web site for the district. The committee will directly oversee and design the web site once the school board gives its approval. The committee is also working to establish a 3-year plan that will help establish a rotating schedule for hardware and software in the district. This committee is also considering the possibility of leasing computers from a company such as Dell or Gateway.

Kyle's wish list included an emphasis on staff development for technology integration. He also noted the need for another full time position and a part time paraprofessional to work with teachers and children. Kyle would also like to see "computer coaches" on staff in the district. Kyle also made the point that it is essential for all teachers to have access to the Internet in their homes.

Technology Wish List: A summary

1. *Increased technology training and internet access for teachers.* In order for technology to be used to its fullest potential, teachers need to understand technological innovations and be able to integrate those innovations into their daily teaching. Accomplishing this will require “technology coaches.” Each teacher needs internet access in his/her home.
2. *Hardware needs:*
 1. New high school technology lab (wireless)
 2. 10 new computers for each building
 3. 27” TV/Monitors in each classroom
 4. A new “switch” for internet access
3. *Maintain/support Technology Committee:* This committee will be establishing a schedule for computer maintenance and upgrading. They will also be exploring the possibility of leasing computers from a major provider, such as Dell.

Kyle noted that the High School could utilize another computer lab in the High School (wireless), and that 27" TV/monitors should be installed in all district classrooms. Kyle also stated that a new switch was needed in the High School to help with the speed and access to internet connections

Finally, Kyle suggested that there needs to be a system/schedule for computer maintenance/upgrading, and that this schedule should begin with 10 new computers (G-4's) for each building.

When the presentation was opened for public discussion, the community members voiced strong support for computers in the classroom, as well as strong staff development for teachers to use the technology effectively in their classrooms. There was a general sense that not enough money was invested in the technology resources.

Chapter 7
Community
November 16, 1999

Three speakers, Michael Haynes, the Executive Director of the Stevens County Economic Improvement Commission, Cindy Perkins, the Director of Community Education, and Shoshanna Cogan, the TREC Coordinator presented information on the community resources available in Morris. Also, Carol Wilcox, the mayor of Morris, joined the panel for a discussion of community in relation to the school.

Stevens County Economic Improvement Commission

Mike Haynes, from the Stevens County Economic Improvement Commission, began the discussion by explaining that the mission of SCEIC is to create and sustain jobs in Steven’s County. He presented data about the average wages and employment of the state as compared to Stevens County. He also proposed that manufacturing in Stevens County was strong, and these options should be made known to young people in the Morris Area School. Mike noted that perhaps we have an over-reliance on agriculture, and perhaps should instead turn our attention to manufacturing. Various regional employment and wage statistics presented by Mike can be found in Appendix 1.

Mike listed some of the challenges in the workforce of Stevens County, including stopping the “brain drain” (the out-migration of young people and the “graying” of the population). He felt that the impending retirement of baby boomers would also cause a shift in employment circumstances for the region. Mike noted that there needed to be a diversification of job/career providers in Stevens County, better wages, and adequate and affordable housing.

Mike proposed that the MASD could capitalize on these challenges by providing information to students and parents about the types of skills needed, and the jobs that are available. He emphasized that the district could place less emphasis on 4 year college programs and more on tech school, and that college attendance rates should not be a measure of the success of the district. Mike suggested that Stevens County has a workforce shortage in manufacturing, telecommunications, and medical fields.

SCEIC Wish List: A summary

1. Stronger focus on the value of a trade career. There are workforce needs in Stevens County in the area of manufacturing, and these should be considered worthwhile options for graduates of MASD.
2. Stronger relationships between the community (work force) and school. This could be established through more effective mentorship programs, working partnerships, and support from teachers and parents.
3. Increased emphasis on math and science for *all* students, not just those who are college-bound.

Mike's wish list included placing a stronger focus on the value of a career in the trades (some trade skills pay greater than a college degree, over a life time), perhaps better matching of an individual's skills/aptitude with an education beyond high school.

He also expressed a need for more focus on a strong and vital, two-way relationship between the community (job market) and the school (more than a mentoring program that exposes the student for just a few days in the business community/job market). Mike felt that it would be beneficial to the region to establish working partnerships between businesses/job providers and the school where current job holders could speak at school, tour with students their place of employment, etc.; and, the teachers learn more about the businesses/job providers in the community. In order for this to happen, Mike suggested that there could be stronger internship programs (teachers and students) or apprenticeship programs (a return to the old guild system, modified to fit today's work/social environment) established for students who want to work in the Steven's County region. He also noted that there could be a stronger School-to-Work Program in Morris.

Mike also suggested that there could be more focus on math and science in all tracks of the high school curriculum, whether the student was college bound or not. He thought it was important to demonstrate with real examples how math and science is used in every day work life.

Community Education:

Community Education Director Cindy Perkins began her community presentation by explaining that the school has sponsored the community education program since 1972. Since 1974, the program has enjoyed a joint powers agreement with the city to provide recreation. Everything from community education comes from the community. There is a 10 member advisory council that oversees the operations of the program. The overall mission of Community Education is to identify, develop, and offer a wide variety of balanced programs which meet the needs of all citizens. The three main goals Cindy noted were:

1. provide lifelong learning to community members
2. promote and develop community support for K-12 program
3. build strong communities by allowing community members to achieve their greatest potential.

Cindy explained that 70% of the Morris school district's population does not have children in school. Part of the mission of Community Education then becomes to provide for that 70% in addition to the 30% who do have children in the district.

Each quarter of the year there is a brochure that explains the activities of the Community Education program. However, the program *does* more than is listed in the brochure. The following programs are included under the Community Education umbrella: ECFE, School Readiness, Youth Development/Youth Service, School Volunteer Program, Recreational Services, enrichment opportunities, Adult Basic Education, GED Testing Center, trips for youth and adults to out-of-town destinations, School District Calendar,

Pacer Puppets (child sized multicultural puppets representing a variety of disabilities), Facility use (of the district by school personnel and outside groups), Regional Fitness Center, Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth.

In addition to these key programs, the Community Education program facilitates many opportunities for the Morris Area School District. These include the Science and Math Expos, Waste Reduction Week, Global Awareness, and the Career Fair. Community education also puts MASD students into the community for mentorships (which Cindy noted should be more than just a few days in duration), fall leaf raking, and field trips.

Community education facilitates activities with other agencies in Stevens County (including Senior Fest and Big Day for Young People), as well as with the University of Minnesota, Morris (i.e., volunteers, teaching Girls' Circle, Homework Help Center, Computer Help Center, School Age Child Care, TREC, and more).

Cindy noted that her primary concern for the program is that they are beginning to feel "maxed out." In other words, they need more staff and adequate facilities. Cindy, like ECFE director Tamy Reese, also noted the need for a new school building that would include a Community Education wing – an area for offices, meeting rooms and classrooms for the Adult Basic Education program, the Youth Service program, enrichment programs, and the ECFE program. Cindy also noted that quality equipment and materials to run our program in an efficient and professional manner were essential. This would include computer equipment and internet access for the staff of Community Education.

Community Education Wish List: A summary

1. Facility and staff needs:
 - (1) New building with adequate offices, class rooms, and resources (including computers)
 - (2) Youth Enrichment Coordinator to organize and oversee youth leisure activities in Morris.
 - (3) High school teacher to teach Independent Youth Service Learning component.

2. Increased support for Community Education
 - (1) Support from teachers, community, and district. Community education is a vital component of Morris community AND K-12 education. It needs to be recognized as essential to the area.
 - (2) Support from state legislature. Increases in funding for the program are desperately needed.

Cindy reiterated some of Tamy's concerns about ECFE. Cindy noted that she would like to see ECFE classrooms be accessible to *all* families. Additionally, she would like to see a Family Center concept that would include an area that could also be for adult learners -- a place where adults could perhaps attend an ECFE class (parenting skills) and also receive help with basic living skills (i.e. work on getting their GED, receiving tutoring, learn basic computer skills, job interviewing skills, etc).

Cindy suggested that there should be a Youth Enrichment coordinator. This person would focus solely on planning and conducting supervised leisure and enrichment activities for youth of all ages (elementary, junior high and high school), similar to the person the county has for Senior Citizens!

Cindy would like to see more financial support from our state legislators for Community Education (particularly in small rural communities). In smaller communities, Community Education is usually the only "show" in town and it tries to be all and do all for its community on very limited resources (both dollars and people sources). In spite of this, general Community Education hasn't received an increase in funding from the State in 12 years. Cindy noted, "We are doing more with less and it is catching up with us. It would be great to have the dollars needed so we could operate quality programs with quality people. Too many times we have find a way to just 'get by'."

Most importantly, Cindy would like for Community Education to be seen by all staff in the school district as well as by the community as a great resource. She would like Community Education to be seen as an important player in the education of K-12 students. That families and students in K-12 are happier and more successful because of experiences they had in an ECFE or preschool class, and the K-12 student's life is enriched as a result of a community education class or program they participated in. The lives of these K-12 parents are also enriched as a result of a Community Education program.

Cindy would like to see the Independent Youth Service Learning class include a classroom component taught by one of our High School teachers, and she would also like to see the mentoring program expanded. Further, she suggested that Community Education could implement a parent education program (similar to ECFE) for parents of school age children.

Tutoring, Reading, Enabling Children Program

Shoshana Cogan discussed the Tutoring, Reading Enabling Children (TREC) program that is run by Community Education in conjunction with the University of Minnesota, Morris. She explained that the vision of the TREC program is:

1. That every child will read well and independently by the end of the third grade.
2. Every child will be infused with the love of reading, learning and serving.

TREC began in 1997 under a 3-year Minnesota Campus Compact. Through their ten key project areas there are 80 tutors/mentors from the university working over 300 hours per week. This translates into over 1200 volunteer hours per month during which university students work with Morris Area School District students.

Shoshana noted that the tutors receive training, maintain journals, and engage in reflective activities. Further, there are celebrations and presentations about the program. The biggest concern is that funding for TREC will be depleted at the end of this academic year. New funding sources are being sought out, and Interim Chancellor Sam Schumann of UMM has also pledged funding to maintain the program.

TREC Wish list: A summary

1. Tutoring and service learning throughout all grade levels in MASD. This includes maintaining and expanding current programs, teacher and staff development, and recognition events.
2. Establishment of UMM Service Learning Center. This would strengthen the partnership between the UMM campus and community, increase the potential offerings of TREC, and contain a resource library for tutors.

Shoshana's wish list for the future of TREC included a desire for university tutors and mentors to be available to all Morris Area schoolchildren and classroom teachers. Currently the program is focused primarily on the elementary grades. To accomplish this, a fully staffed, expanded, and sustainable TREC Program needs to be in place by Fall 2000. In addition to the continuation of current 10 TREC programs, Shoshana would like expansions to include: High School Homework Helping Center, America Counts math, science, and technology programs, and other new program developments. Additionally, Shoshana suggested that it is important for older Morris Area school children to tutor and mentor younger children. She suggested that this would be possible with quality Training and Reflection activities in a new K-12 campus building. She would ideally like to see children involved in a progression of service learning experiences throughout the grade levels. Shoshana proposed that this could be further enhanced by service learning inservices for teachers, staff development, and release time for teacher efforts. Furthermore, Shoshana thought that recognition and award ceremonies for service minded K-12 teachers was important.

Shoshana also proposed that a stronger partnership between the UMM campus and community is needed. She suggested that issues of E-Adult Literacy, Diversity Education, Environmental Issues, Intergenerational Links, Citizenship and Civic Responsibility needed to be addressed, and that this endeavor could be facilitated through the establishment of a UMM Service Learning Center (by Fall 2001) that would link

service learning activities to real community needs. Ideally, this Center would also include an age-appropriate Resource Lending Library, specializing in multicultural, mentoring, tutoring, and service learning materials accessible to children and parents, teachers, and tutors.

Chapter 8
Co-curricular activities
November 29, 1999

Mary Holmgren, Athletic Director for MAHS, began the meeting with the suggestion that these activities should be referred to as “co-curricular” rather than “extra-curricular” because they are not really extra and should instead be considered an integral part of the curriculum.

Athletics:

Mary presented an overview of athletic programs currently being offered by MAHS. She reported that there are many benefits when participating in high school activities, including the fact that the activities support the academic mission of the school, and participation fosters interpersonal skills as well as success in later life. Currently, 348 girls and 439 boys participate in athletic teams at the high school, costing approximately 3.84% of the school’s budget. There are 19 athletic programs for grades 7 – 12. Additionally, the district has 60-62 coaches. During the last year, Morris athletes participated in 625 events. There were 285 Morris-hosted events, and 340 which were away.

Mary conducts a survey in the fall and in February of each year to determine interests and participation. The survey data helps to facilitate decisions about the retention of various teams.

Wish list for Athletics: A summary

1. Increased district funding. This would allow the school to eliminate participation fees and fund raising activities for sports teams.
2. Facility needs:
 - (1) Elementary school game gym
 - (2) Two new junior high baseball fields
 - (3) Bathroom facilities for tennis courts

Ideally, Mary would like to see the district fund all the athletic teams entirely, which would allow them to eliminate the participation fees and fund raising. Additionally, she would like to see a game gym built in the elementary school. This gym should have a floor with three practice courts, similar to UMM gymnasium, and curtains to separate

courts when needed. She emphasized that a new gym would allow the district to host more athletic events.

Mary also noted that the district could use two new junior high baseball fields, as well as bathroom facilities for the tennis courts. Mary concluded by stating that Morris offers excellent co-curriculars, excellent coaches, and there is consistently an excellent community following.

Theatre and Arts.

Dave Johnson, the theatre arts instructor for MASD, began his presentation with an overview of events that are currently offered in the school. At the present time, there is one full-time art teacher in high school, and an art curriculum is offered in the elementary by all teachers.

Dave, like elementary principal Brad Korn, expressed a need for an art specialist in the elementary school. Also, he suggested that there needed to be an expansion of gallery visits with the elementary and more field trips needed. Further, Dave suggested that there are more options which need to be explored, such as adding more arts into the curriculum, which means more training for the current staff.

Dave also expressed a need for better quality materials. The present \$2,000 budget has remained unchanged since early 1980's, resulting in the purchase of "cheap" art supplies and materials for the district.

Dave suggested that MASD computer programming in the arts is very strong, and that Morris is on the "cutting" edge in this area. However, he expressed concern about the need for a dark room for photography development. MAHS has only one small dark room in the media center, and it is considered inadequate to benefit an entire class. Dave also felt that the current placement of the drafting/industrial arts classroom is convenient, particularly if one more staff member is added.

In the area of Theatre, MAHS offers three shows. There is a fall musical, a one-act competition, and a spring show. Occasionally Dave opens these shows for participation by elementary students, but there is no creative dramatics with the elementary program except for the Prairie Fire Theater.

Dave offers a Technical Theater class. He has special training in this area, and feels that the ability to design and build shows is beneficial in developing student problem solving and application.

Costs for Drama every year vary widely. Royalties can be high for musicals. Recently, the school earned \$1,000 for "Charlie Brown", and the costumes cost next to nothing. Last year, the school earned about \$5,000 in ticket sales.

The number of students involved in theatre can vary dramatically, often depending on the type of performance. There may be up to 100 students in a musical production, whereas the “one-act performances” have no more than 20 students. Spring performances also have numbers which vary widely, depending on choice of show.

Theater Arts Wish List: A summary

1. Theater program expansion. This would allow the elementary and junior high students to enjoy theater arts, and could involve hiring a theater arts specialist or other creative options.
2. Resources to keep the theater program active. The district needs a new lighting system and new stage curtains, in addition to the resources needed for funding an adequate program.

Goals that Dave cited for improving the current theatre program included giving the opportunity for junior high and elementary school students to enjoy drama. He suggested that there are many low-cost ways to do this, including teaching drama full-time and having a junior high show. Dave would like to have drama opportunities as a regular class offering, as well as an advanced musical theater class. Dave reminded the audience that these classes would all meet the Minnesota Graduation Standards, and they would meet the needs of our students.

Dave also suggested that some resources will be needed to keep the theater running. MASD needs a new light system, which can be a huge investment. Also, approximately \$9,000 is needed for new curtains. Dave reminded the audience that a lot of money is needed to keep a top-notch facility for a top-notch program. An expansion of drama courses into the Jr. High/Elementary areas would allow MASD to have a top-notch program. Dave reminded everyone that Creative Dramatics can use drama as a tool for teaching. Drama doesn't just happen on the stage.

Music:

John Kleinwolterink, a high school music teacher, began his presentation by reminding the audience that music is not *extra* curricular, but rather an integral, core part of the curriculum. The music program at MAHS is facing significant challenges, particularly due to limited space and resources. As an example, John noted that the choir room is too small, resulting in 20 students dropping from the program this year because there was no room for them.

John expressed particular concern about classroom size at MAHS. He explained that the current need to cut programs results in combining classrooms. As a result, what once would have been groups of 20 and 20 students are now being combined into a group of 40. This means that he has 22 minutes to work with 40 kids, and he may have as much as 80 Jr. High students in one room. John would also like to see more flexible scheduling for students in music classes.

John explained that the new Minnesota Graduation Standards require many activities that need more one-on-one time. He suggested that a lower student/teacher ratio should be a priority. More staff is needed.

Music Program Wish List: A summary

1. Decreased class size is essential. Currently, too many students are expected to attend class in a small room. Further, the MN Graduation Standards have requirements that include more individualized instruction.
2. Increased resources. MASD budget needs to reflect the higher costs of music and equipment. Further, the program has needs, including new robes for the students, and new musical instruments, including pianos. These budgetary needs could be supplemented by the establishment of a booster club that would oversee fund raising activities.

John's third area of concern related to facilities. The elementary school is an older building, and an older style, and it poses particular challenges for the music teachers. He recounted a story that retired elementary music teacher Jean Hollen shared with him about plaster from the ceiling falling on her as she played the piano in a music class. Furthermore, the high school building needs more storage for instruments and additional practice rooms. Also, the music program at the high school could use library space.

As far as equipment is concerned, John noted that the music program would benefit greatly from instruments that work properly and are well maintained, particularly orchestra equipment. The district could also use more pianos that work.

John suggested that the district needs to have a more adequate budget for music at both the elementary and high school levels. Music is expensive. He explained that one copy of music for a choir student has increased in price from \$0.85 to \$2.00 in his tenure as a teacher.

Presently, the music program needs to have a supply of better attire. The robes for the choir members are worn out and ill-fitting.

John suggested that the music program would benefit greatly from a Parent Support Group or a Music Booster Club. This club could help with fund raising and organizational needs. Further, John would like to see more course offerings for MASD students, including a 5-6 grade choir, and a women's choir.

Academic co-curricular.

Sue Hauger presented the information to the community about the various academic activities Morris students enjoy. Currently, the academic extra curricular activities of the MASD fall into three broad categories. These include: competition groups, which go from place to place for scholastic events; service project groups; and, special interest groups, which appear and disappear as student interest dictates. Each of these groups are detailed in the following summary.

Competition groups include the Knowledge Bowl. There are presently both Jr. and Sr. high teams that participate in written and oral competitions. The Jr. High team has 32 members. Presently, the Sr. High team is not in session. The teams have been very successful in the past. For example, in 1997, the Jr. High team won the State AA championship. Students participating in these events have expressed a need for more recognition.

Another competition group is Speech. This is offered for students in grades 7-12, who can choose to compete in one of 13 competitions. MAHS fields a medium sized team, and they regularly take home many 1st/2nd place trophies. Additionally, each year they typically have at least one State entrant.

Other competition groups include Math League, which consists primarily of written exams, and Geography Bee/Spelling Bee, which include Jr. High competitions. Participation in these events is voluntary.

Service Organizations at MASD include the National Honor Society. This involves second semester Juniors and all Seniors who are academically eligible. These students need a grade point average of 3.25/4.00, and the recommendation of the faculty council. Additionally, they are expected to show traits of leadership and character.

The Student Council, another service organization, is composed of elected representatives. This group is responsible for special school functions, such as Homecoming. Currently, there is no active Jr. High Council.

TARGET, another service organization, is responsible for raising drug awareness. This group exists based on interest, and therefore is not always in operation.

Special interest groups also vary based on interest. The Spanish/French clubs are examples of special interest groups at Morris. These groups sponsor trips to allow travel and language opportunities for high school students.

Another special interest group is responsible for the yearbook. The yearbook project exists as a class, but it also requires students coming in from outside the classroom to complete the yearbook.

Science Club/Science Olympia is yet another special interest group. This group is designed to get Jr. High students interested in science. The club, which was originally intended to interest girls in science, has expanded to a wide group of students.

One organization that spans all of these, but is often over looked is the Future Farmers of America (FFA) group. There are many misconceptions about this group. In particular, it is not just future farmers anymore. Since 1988, the national FFA organization has expanded, and its roots are found in the goals of premiere leadership, personal growth, and career success.

Presently, dues are paid for 54 students in grades 9-12. Darren Erickson, who spoke about the FFA program, emphasized that he believes Morris serves students in the school population through FFA who don't necessarily "fit" in other places and programs. He believes they come to FFA to do different activities and to belong.

FFA is a place to develop leadership skills. There are typically 28 different contests throughout the year that vary from livestock judging to agri-science projects, sales presentations, and marketing analysis. All of these contests are related to agriculture.

FFA also offers entrepreneurial skill development. Where the program once focused on raising pigs and cattle, it has now moved into job-placement, including skill development and providing opportunities for students to try new things.

Finally, FFA offers service to the community. These students are involved in the Stevens County Fair, the corn drive for Camp Courage, Toys for Tots, and Prairie Pioneer Days in July, among other local events.

The wish list for the FFA group includes more interaction with the classes that are offered in agriculture and more up-to-date technology. They would also like to have more recognition and a better understanding of what FFA is.

Wish list for academic co-curriculars: A summary

1. Recognition of student accomplishments. This includes publicity in the newspaper and on the radio.
2. Access to technology and resources in the district.

As the meeting turned to the panel discussion, an overwhelming suggestion by the community included having a combined Booster Club for all extra curricular activities, including sports, music, theater, and academic programs. The community agreed that more parental involvement in this area would be useful, and that is necessary to move away from a "sports" versus "academic" group mentality when considering these needs. As a community, participants agreed that it is important to give a variety of opportunities for the students.

Community members expressed the belief that it is a strength of the district and programs that coaches are from within the school system. They recognized the tremendous commitment it takes to be a coach, and that as a teacher, it's an "act of love" to become a coach.

Pam Solvie, first grade teacher, noted the need for the district to fund field trips to art galleries for elementary school students.

Roger McCannon, a school board member, commented on the rich offerings of activities. He expressed concern that students, particularly those in academic activities, were not being recognized. It was decided that recognition of all activities, including academics, would become a priority. Mary Holmberg noted that there is an Athletics Banquet, and there could also be a Fine Arts Banquet. It was also noted that the Booster Club could do a lot to recognize and promote student achievement.

There was concern expressed that the district currently offers 19 sports activities, but with a small elementary enrollment, it might be difficult to sustain this variety in 10-15 years. It was decided that time and thought need to be put into this situation by both the faculty and community members. Mary suggested that communication is the key, and that they could creatively "do away" with programs, and replace them with something else that is based upon that very same program.

Chapter 9
Budget and Infrastructure
December 7, 1999

This last of the series of six public meetings was led by Les Norman, superintendent for the Morris Area School District. Norman stated two purposes for the meeting: 1) to give the community a better understanding of how the budget works and what it is about, and 2) to provide a better “feel” of the buildings in the district.

He began the meeting by stating that he was proud of how well the students at MAHS are doing. The test scores for the district are among the top 10% in the state, which is excellent when compared with 360 school districts in Minnesota. “We are doing well” stated Norman.

He then explained that the students drive the budgeting process. This means that the district is paid for the number of students that walk through the door. This is a particularly challenging issue given the declining enrollment situation. He referred to “Appendix 1” in the handout, which outlined the number of staff in the district. Currently there are 4 administrators, 82 faculty, 9 clerical staff, 32 paraprofessionals, 13 community education staff, 11 cafeteria staff, 8 maintenance staff, and 12 transportation staff. Norman noted that 78-79% of the budget pays the salaries for these people, with the remainder of the budget delegated to resources and building costs and maintenance.

Norman also described how several budget categories are used in the district to track revenues and expenditures. Table 9.1 shows the revenues, expenditures, and fund balances of major budget categories in 1998-1999.

Table 9.1 Revenues, Expenditures, and Fund Balances in Major Budget Categories, 1998-1999.

Fund	1998-99 Actual Revenues and Transfers In	1998-99 Actual Expenditures and Transfers Out	June 30, 1999 Actual Fund Balance
General	6,890,054	6,958,059	971,631
Food Service	276,530	281,154	5,324
Community Service	238,342	238,604	(14,263)
Building Construction	32,375	502,000	507,602
Debt Redemption	439,529	431,977	75,281
Trust	8,848	8,787	71,870
Total – All Funds	7,885,678	8,420,581	1,617,455

Norman then discussed how enrollment was key to most revenue categories. Most state aid is granted on a per-pupil basis, so any declines in enrollment will produce reductions in revenues as well. Table 9.2 shows enrollment projections through the 2004-2005 academic year.

Table 9.2 Enrollment Projections in the Morris Area School District, 1999-2005.

Grade Level	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Kinder	44	59	56	50	56	72
1	66	44	59	56	50	56
2	64	66	44	59	56	50
3	52	64	66	44	59	56
4	61	52	64	66	44	59
5	49	61	52	64	66	44
6	84	49	61	52	64	66
7	110	84	49	61	52	64
8	116	110	84	49	61	52
9	120	116	110	84	49	61
10	99	120	116	110	84	49
11	111	99	120	116	110	84
12	120	111	99	120	116	110
Total	1096	1050	1010	976	927	898

Norman noted that in the past the district was budgeted in a “program rich” manner. However, in order to offer the variety of programs, the district needed to subsidize these programs through the “funds balance” or savings account. Norman noted that the district can no longer do this, and that the time has come to take a look at adjustments and doing some things differently. Decisions need to be made about which programs should be kept and if there are any other sources of revenue.

The meeting then turned to a consideration of alternate funding for schools. One proposal Norman mentioned was to go to the tax payers and ask for more money in the form of a levy referendum. Currently, the state of Minnesota has an “equalization” formula, which means that, in Morris the state will pick up 55% of new dollars for a referendum and Morris residents will pay 45% up to \$415 per student. These numbers change based on the enrollment in the district. However, the district can decide to go over the \$415 per student amount, but the local taxpayers need to agree to pay the entire amount of the levy over \$415. Many districts in the area have decided to do this.

Norman noted that the key is that other revenue is available. The board needs to decide if this is what we need to do and if the economy is such that Morris can do this. There also needs to be a consideration of what the burden on local taxpayers will be. Further, Gov. Ventura has proposed that the new cap on the local referendum should be \$465, rather than \$415. This would bring approximately \$181,200 additional dollars for the district.

Norman also noted dollars for a levy can be delegated for specific purposes. This would allow the taxpayers to understand that money will be earmarked for specific areas, such as technology.

One community member asked Norman about the apparently discrepant information reported in the paper about the fund balance. One report suggested that there is \$300,000 available, while another report suggested that the balance is \$900,000. Norman noted that both numbers are correct. Currently the fund balance has some dollars earmarked for specific purposes, while some of the dollars are “open.” Norman clarified that the fund balance is \$900,000, and that \$300,000 is “open” at this time.

Dave Stoffer moved the meeting into a discussion of the current state of the district’s buildings. Currently, the district maintains the high school building, the elementary building, and two transportation garages.

Tables 9.3 and 9.4 shows the various age of various additions to the elementary and high school buildings.

Table 9.3 Facilities Age and Square Footage, Morris Area Elementary School

Morris Elementary School	Building Addition	Calendar Year of Completion	Age of Addition	Square Footage
	Original Building	1914	86	27,590
	Addition 1	1935	65	8,023
	Addition 2	1949	51	54,712
	Addition 3	1955	45	4,109
	Addition 4	1975	25	10,000
	Addition 5	1995	5	2,000

Table 9.4 Facilities Age and Square Footage, Morris Area High School

Morris Area High School	Building Addition	Calendar Year of Completion	Age of Addition	Square Footage
	Original Building	1967	33	98,000
	Addition 1	1976	24	3,686
	Addition 2	1982	18	1,500
	Addition 3	1991	9	28,000
	Addition 4	1992	8	20,000

The high school building was constructed in 1968-1969. Stoffer reported that it is a good, sound building and needs general maintenance and upkeep to retain its good condition.

Stoffer noted that the original structure of the elementary building was constructed in 1914, and that five additions have been constructed since that time. He described the elementary building as “quite somewhat fatigued.” Concerns about the structure included the need for a new roof on some parts of the building, the loose flaky exterior bricks, cracks and repairs that are needed for the interior walls, and poor windows. Additionally the plumbing and water lines are poor, ventilation is a concern, and the boilers are

nearing their life expectancy. Handicap accessibility codes are difficult to meet, particularly in the oldest part of the building, and the tunnel/crawl space under the building has no ventilation and is unsafe for making repairs.

Stoffer reported that the transportation garages are in good shape. There currently are some bricks that need to be replaced, and there are two windows and a heating system in need of repair.

Norman shared with those attending the meeting that he has been working with the University of Minnesota, Morris for two years in an effort to draw up plans for a land exchange. This means that the university would give the district land adjacent to the current high school in exchange for the 17.95 acres of the elementary building site. This site could be used by the university for student housing that will have good access to the downtown area of Morris. The plan is close to being finalized, and then needs approval from Morris School Board, the Twin Cities campus, and the Board of Regents.

Norman noted that one campus for the school should be appealing. Although the high school and elementary students would not intermingle, there would be a sharing of staff (including cafeteria staff, technology staff, and support staff), and the units could be hooked to the UMM heating/cooling plant for shared energy cost. In the long run, one campus would save the district significant money on building repairs and energy.

Norman noted that while it appears that student numbers are currently in a decline, this may not be the case for long. In fact, Norman suggested that in the future, the numbers may increase given the trend toward Morris becoming a “regional center.” With this in mind, Norman suggested that the new building should be designed in such a way that a junior high or middle school could be accommodated.

However, even if numbers do not increase, the notion of a new building will still save the district money in the long run. School Board Chair Mike Schmidgall even noted concerns about areas of the current elementary building that are not being utilized, in addition to concerns about the upkeep and repairs for the old structure.

Norman suggested that a bond issue could be presented to the taxpayers that would provide money for the new building. Before this happens, however, the district needs to form a committee to consider the state of the current bond situation in Morris and a projected time line for such a project.

Budget and Infrastructure Wish List: A summary

1. Budget needs to be increased in order to maintain current programming. This could be done through an increased levy that the public can vote on in November, 2000.
2. Building needs:
 - (1) Elementary school: A land swap is likely to happen with the University. This will allow for the construction of a K-12 campus. An exploratory committee is needed to learn more about demographic trends, bond issues, and possible timelines. Further, recommendations for maintenance of the old elementary building are needed based on this committee's findings.
 - (2) Maintenance and upkeep of the high school and transportation garage should be a high priority.

To summarize, Norman concluded by stating that, given the declining enrollments, the district needed to set priorities for the extra curricular activities and the building needs. He proposed that budget priorities needed to be determined for the next 2 – 3 years.

During the question and answer session of the meeting, community members asked for clarification about the building and bond issues, why the levy hasn't been raised recently, and about the process of raising the levy. During this discussion, it was established that a K-12 campus is a sound concept that is typical in this region. It was also established that the levy situation could be presented to the board, and that educating the community (particularly the 70% of taxpayers who do not have direct involvement in the school) would be essential. Further, it was noted that the legislature is in a position to help alleviate the potential burden on farmers if a new referendum is passed. One community member noted that the school is the "lifeblood" of the community, and that the community should do whatever is needed to make things work. Norman commented that he felt strongly that the community would support a new levy, but that taxpayers needed to know how this money would be used. One community member also noted that she was pleased with the teachers in Morris, many of whom were in attendance at the meeting, and that she was surprised that the teachers could educate the way they do with such limited resources. She noted that she was grateful for the teachers and felt that all the programs in the district needed to be retained. Community members at the meeting voiced strong support for increasing the levy to maintain the current programs, rather than cutting programs. It was noted that the current quality and variety of programs are

an appeal, and that the district should be noted for its broad approach. One community member also noted that residents of Morris have had a taste of what it is like to cut programs, and that most likely, they would not like to see more programs cut from the region.

When the discussion moved to the elementary building issue, elementary school principal Brad Brad also noted that safety was a real concern given the lay out of the current building. He questioned how such a building could be “locked down” for security purposes, as well as how a fire situation could be handled, given all the various rooms and areas of the building. A teacher also noted that technological upgrades and wiring for computers are expensive and difficult to do with the plaster walls. Community members at the meeting unanimously supported the proposal for moving ahead with exploring the bond issue and planning for a new building. It was noted that it may take as much as two to five years for the preliminary work on planning to be completed.

The meeting concluded with the voicing of strong community support for increasing the levy to maintain the current variety and quality of programs in the district, as well as exploring a bond issue to build a new elementary building. Support for accountability and the public need for understanding the processes and implications of both of these were also stated.

Chapter 10

Common themes, recommendations, and suggested timeline

The presentations at the town meetings were both informative and purposeful. Important information was presented to the community regarding the current state of the school district, and allowed for conversations about priorities and possible solutions. Furthermore, the meetings received a great deal of publicity through the Morris Sun-Tribune and the local radio station in Morris. The main points of the meetings reached a broader audience than just those in attendance. Community members were invited to write or call the planning facilitators, Greg Thorson and Jacqueline Edmondson, and many took advantage of this opportunity.

Many of the following recommendations come directly from the public meetings that were held between September and December 1999. Others came from discussions with teachers, administrators, or interested community members.

Recommendations:

The initial stage of the strategic planning process was dedicated to developing a vision statement for the Morris Area School District. The vision statement, found on page 10 of this document, lays out a clear vision for the district. The public, teachers, staff, students, administrators, and school board members all envision a comprehensive curriculum for students from early childhood through the college years and beyond. Community members are also committed to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that compliment the curricular offerings.

It is critical that this vision statement play a central role in the decision-making of the district. The district should evaluate every decision, every meeting, and every budgetary decision as either successful or unsuccessful by determining if their actions brought the district closer to or further away from the district's vision.

We have identified eight major initiatives that are designed to help the district move closer to this vision:

1) *Encourage more volunteerism and parental involvement through the formation of a single, centralized Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA).* Parental involvement is critical to the success of any school. An active, energetic, and productive group of parents is necessary to move the district closer to its vision. The new PTSA will have three primary functions:

a) Volunteerism: The PTSA shall serve as a hub for volunteerism efforts in the Morris Area School District.

b) Fund raising: The PTSA will be responsible for organizing and coordinating fund raising events for all co-curricular activities in Morris.

c) Participation in school board meetings: One representative from the PTSA will regularly participate in school board meetings. This parent representative will be responsible for reporting the activities of the PTSA to the school board, and will also be able to report concerns voiced by parents and students to the board and superintendent.

The group may choose to join the national PTA. Ideas for structure and organization can be obtained by visiting the PTA's website at www.pta.org.

2) *Continue to offer and expand opportunities for faculty innovation.* An energetic, talented faculty is critical to the success of the Morris Area School District. The district employs some of the best teachers in the region. The continued growth of faculty and staff is a very high priority for the district. Therefore, the School Board should dedicate 1% of total revenues to a faculty innovation fund that encourages broad participation for imaginative teaching techniques. Administrators should publish a written call for proposals each year that explicitly states the process for applying for innovation funds as well as dollar limits/recommendations. The administration should encourage faculty to file follow-up reports and publish the outcomes. Each year, the Superintendent shall report to the Board the number of faculty in each school receiving innovation funds, the dollar amounts provided, as well as a list of events attended. Every attempt should be made to increase the number of classroom teachers using innovation funds as possible. In addition, the administration should continue to seek sources of additional staff development revenue, such as that generated for serving as a pilot site for the MN Graduation Standards.

3) *Increase the amount of grant writing in the district.* The monies coming from the state and local levy are not sufficient by themselves to create all of the opportunities envisioned by Morris residents. The district should develop new initiatives to increase both the number of grant applications as well as the number of grants received. To this end, the district should sponsor more grant development workshops, publish and disseminate grant opportunities more widely, establish a system for the regular reporting of grant writing activities, and help faculty identify grants where the costs of administering the grant are reimbursed to the recipient.

4) *Develop strategies to more effectively compete with surrounding schools as a way of addressing the problem of declining enrollment.* The school district should consider implementing some or all of the following solutions to boost enrollment:

- a) Do more to celebrate student and faculty achievement. Not only will acknowledging accomplishments boost morale, but it also gets the word out to prospective families about successful activities in the school district.
- b) Strengthen the relationship between the school district and the ECFE program. The ECFE program can be used as an investment for future enrollment. Needs of the ECFE program include expanding offerings to cover the entire academic year.
- c) Sponsor more events to introduce preschoolers to the Morris Area School District.

- d) Commission the ECFE coordinator to conduct annual surveys to determine parental interest in different scheduling options for kindergartners.

5) *Consider investing some new monies.* Support seemed to be strongest for investments at the elementary level. There was strong support for the notion of hiring staff to offer gifted education, foreign language, art specialists, before and after school programs, as well as to offer more competitive class sizes. Arrange for the supervision of older children at the Regional Fitness Center. Less expensive needs includes increased faculty supply budgets.

6) *Take steps to improve the district's finances.* Currently, the district faces severe budgetary challenges. To meet these challenges, the district should use a balanced approach of levy increases, budget reductions, reallocation of resources, and supporting more grant writing. While expenditure reductions will need to be made, the district's levy must also be adjusted to take advantage of the state's equalized revenue. Just two years ago, the district levied just over \$200 per student. That rate was one of the lowest in the state and obviously contributed to the decline in the fund balance. The district has since increased its levy levels and should continue to adjust them to take full advantage of changes in state equalization. Other specific recommendations include:

- a) Change the way that expenditure reductions are made in the district. In the past, the decision to reduce expenditures has generated widespread public debate, has many times not been implemented, and has had very negative effects on the district. The Board and the Superintendent should agree on the amount that expenditures have to be reduced; the Superintendent should develop a list of proposed programmatic reductions, and circulate this list to the Board, teachers, the PTSA, and the public. Changes to the list shall only be allowed when additional reductions in different areas are approved. The public shall be assigned a fixed amount of time to discuss the proposed reductions during the appropriate school board meeting.
- b) The district should give high priority to rebuilding the fund balance. With a healthy fund balance, the district will not need to pay as much attention to the incremental changes in budgeting forecasts that occur during the academic year.

7) *Accelerate the process of dealing with infrastructure needs.* It was clear from the information presented at the public meetings and with various individuals that a new elementary building is needed, and that the district must do more to emphasize the integration of technology into the curriculum. More emphasis should be placed on teacher training, curriculum development, and the use of technology in classrooms rather than solely in isolated computer labs. Public support for both of these initiatives is high, and the district should move forward with these plans in an expedited manner.

8) *Examine whether residents are interested in any additional student or parent support groups,* such as chemical dependency support groups for students and their families.

Implementation

The implementation of these strategies can begin immediately upon the school board's adoption of the plan. During upcoming school board meetings the following should occur:

1. In June 2000, the Superintendent, with the assistance of the board, will work to forward the need of an increased levy to the general public. A public meeting may be held to help inform residents of Morris about the need and possibilities that come with an increased levy referendum.
2. In September 2000, the Superintendent should articulate to the board a plan for beginning a Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA). Requests for volunteers should be sent out and a club should be assembled by November. At the first club meeting, a president should be elected and plans should be drafted for fund raising activities. The school board should provide the club with a list of the needs of the various co-curricular activities (such as new gowns for the choir, etc.). The club should report to the board on a regular basis.
3. In October or November 2000, the Superintendent shall develop a plan aimed at increasing the amount of grant writing among teachers. The Superintendent shall identify a faculty member in each building who is successful in grant writing and who would be willing to serve as a resource person for other faculty. Administration will forward grant opportunities to faculty in order to help match grants with faculty innovations.
4. In December 2000, the board will name the members of a committee that will work to determine the possibilities for a new elementary building. The committee will estimate current bond levels, and project how and when the district could undertake the construction of a new building.
5. In February 2001, ECFE Director Tamy Reese will report the results of a survey of incoming kindergarten students' parents. This survey will help the board to determine the best options for kindergarten for the fall of 2001.
6. In March 2001, the superintendent will advise the school board of the total amount of necessary adjustments in expenditures. The school board shall either accept or negotiate the amount of the adjustments with the superintendent. After the school board and superintendent have agreed upon the amount of necessary adjustments, the superintendent shall compile a list of either necessary reductions or proposed additions. The superintendent shall circulate this list to both the teachers and the school board members. The superintendent shall recommend that removal of items from any adjustment list be accompanied by new adjustments of the same size.
7. During the 2000-20001 school year, efforts will be made to:

- a. Continue and enhance extensions between ECFE and the elementary school.
- b. Celebrate faculty and student achievements as a regular part of school board meetings.
- c. Have regular reporting of student and faculty accomplishments in the newspaper and radio.
- d. Increase the fund balance through careful and purposeful planning and efforts to market the school.
- e. Initiate discussions with surrounding school districts to seek ways to cooperate and assist one another.

Conclusion

The Morris Area School District employs a very dedicated group of teachers, staff, and administrators. Many of the district's teachers have won awards and have been involved in a very diverse set of extraordinary educational projects. The student body also consistently excels in many areas, including earning honors in a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, while at the same time scoring very highly on state standardized tests.

Morris residents share a common vision of excellence that expects high levels of teacher and student achievement. This plan documents the vision of Morris residents, summarizes and evaluates the school's needs and accomplishments in major areas, and presents an implementable plan for moving the district closer to its vision.

The process used to develop the plan was predominantly public. Community members were invited to participate throughout the process, and many residents attended the open forums. As a result, the district now has a plan that was shaped by a broad cross-section of the community.

We are very optimistic about the future of the Morris Area School District. The district enjoys some very talented teachers, and student achievement is consistently high. The community has a strong commitment to its schools. We believe that the recommendations presented will indeed help the district move closer to the vision shared by its residents.

