

## Still The Best Choice

### A Recruitment and Retention Plan for students and families in Toledo Public Schools

The challenges faced by reduced enrollment in Toledo Public Schools can be blamed on many causes. Many of these factors remain outside our control. Many factors influencing the decisions parents make are directly related to areas where we have the opportunity to provide leadership and direction influence the choices parents make regarding their child's education.

Data provided by our marketing consultant points to several key factors that parents identify as critical to their exercising choice options. Survey responses indicate that the three top reasons for parents leaving TPS are:

- 30.5% - Quality of Education
- 27.5 % - Concerns about Safety and Discipline
- 20.0% - Concerns about Class Size/  
Lack of Individual Attention

It is also important to note that of the parents that were surveyed that have already left the district, nearly 80% plan on remaining in the charter school. This fact is critical in analyzing the emphasis that needs to be placed on retention of students in their current schools.

Parent surveys indicate that the factors that are most influential in swaying parents to return to a TPS school from a charter school include providing their child with more individualized attention and creating a more disciplined environment.

Academy Models such as Grove Patterson, Old West End, Stewart and Lincoln are considered favorable and seen as options that parents would consider for their child. Respondents overwhelmingly supported the academies as a "good idea" and over two thirds of parents indicated some interest in an Academy model.

Using the data that is available it is important to address the recruitment and retention of students from a multi faceted approach.

At the district level there is a need to continue to promote the image and message of the district in providing educational options for all students. Toledo Public Schools must highlight the approach that as a public school system we offer many options for all students to fit their individual needs. We must highlight the educational options that provide choices within our schools and also address the individual needs of students.

There are three approaches to be implemented over the course of the 2006-2007 school year to enhance our current efforts at recruitment and retention.

## Current Activities

Since May the district has been engaged in recruitment and retention activities that are incorporated in some parts of this plan but are also specific to our closed schools.

School visits and open houses were used to demonstrate to parents and students the experience of attending a school other than the closed schools. Parent Meetings, personal phone calls and direct mailing has been undertaken and continued actions throughout the summer will continue to reach out to those families affected by the closings announced for the 2006-2007 school year.

Advertising has been incorporated into the districts overall communications plan with ads running up to four times in the various print media outlets since May. Phone calls and direct mail will continue through July and August to continue to reach out to those families affected by closings and the EdChoice program.

## District Level Campaign

At the district level a marketing and advertising campaign must incorporate the factors that are identified as important including choices available to meet individual needs, academic progress and gains by the district and continued promotion including the slogan, "Still the Best Choice" as a consistent message.

It is important to consistently promote our programs and also send a message to our parents, employees and the community that we are continuing to promote our programs.

The media campaign should include television and radio spots, print ads, yard signs and billboard or bus placards.

Cost estimates of a campaign using all media could cost between \$100,000 and \$120,000 depending on the length of time and the number of ads that are used.

Estimates of a four week campaign strategy:

Television estimates	\$50,000.00
Radio	\$15,000.00
Billboards/busses	\$25,000.00
Print media	\$20,000.00
Production costs	\$20,000.00

The amount of money available will influence the types of advertising and the length of the campaign.

The district has already been active in the printing ads that promote student success, an end of the year report and our recruitment and retention advertising.

A district level recognition of the need to maintain a regular schedule of presence in the media is important for long-term recognition.

Recommendations include a Back to School campaign in August to include involvement in back to school

### School Level Strategies

Each school will be required to develop and implement recruitment and retention plans. These plans will include all elementary, junior high/middle schools and high schools. The plans will be developed by the leadership team in each school with input from parents who serve on the School Improvement Planning team. Goals will be established for each school for enrollment levels that will need to be maintained for both October reporting and February reporting. Reports of enrollment and activities will be monitored on a quarterly basis at a minimum by the appropriate Assistant Superintendent.

The people who have daily contact with our students and families have the greatest impact on the impressions people have toward their school. It is important that all of our employees understand the importance of communicating effectively with the customers they serve.

Parent organizations at each school will be included in discussions to support the need to maintain enrollment levels in order to maintain current school openings.

School strategies will be coordinated with district activities and involve parent involvement coordinators and parent congress involvement. Parent Coordinators have been working on a committee and developed the following suggested list of activities and events:

#### Parent Coordinator Involvement

- Will work closely with Parent Organizations to focus on recruiting families back to TPS
- Will work closely with Parent Congress to focus on recruiting families back to TPS
- Will coordinate “Back to School” activities
- Plan activities for Parent’s Week during the month of September
- Will work with receiving schools by contacting parents to insure their children’s attendance targeting:
  1. Families that left TPS or who may considering leaving our system to attend parochial or charter schools

2. Students who are presently home schooled
  3. Students in the Scott and Woodward feeder patterns who are eligible for vouchers to attend private and parochial schools
- Will create a final report to include a summation of students contacted, along with numbers for students anticipated to remain or return.
  - Will give suggestions for ideas to improve Our customer service based on feedback received from parents contacted

#### Beginning of the Year Activities

- Assistant Superintendents will work with Principal and Assistant Principals in planning year round activities focusing on recruitment and retention
- Suggestions to discuss with bargaining units include a schedule for district wide open houses. Have special open houses, prior to the start of the school year, at all open newly constructed schools and those schools where an appreciable number of students will be returning.

#### Communications and Public Relations

- Work with Athletics: BCSN and other TV spots, special announcements at athletic events
- Will establish relationships with area radio and television stations to promote positive stories about TPS and develop free air opportunities
- Continue relationships with Toledo Blade and weekly publications to promote positive articles about TPS.
- Post large recruitment signs at highly visible locations with the slogan "Enroll NOW – Still the best choice"
- Post this same message during the months of July and August on all school marquis
- Business partners may offer to pay the cost of designing brochures for individual schools
- Billboard advertising may be donated or sponsors obtained

#### Customer Service Initiative

Feedback and survey results indicate a need for a strong effort surrounding customer service and communication as a focus for changing the efforts of the district. This will involve changing approaches and changing the culture of the district through each and every employee. Now, more than ever, there is a need to address our mission and our core values and reemphasize customer service as a priority.

A committee has been formed with input from all bargaining units to develop a set of guidelines and recommendations surrounding customer service. Once this committee has

completed their work it is intended to have a handbook developed and distributed with all employees. Training opportunities will be included in this plan to reach every employee who has contact with our customers, the students and families we serve.

High quality customer service and communication is everyone's job and we must reemphasize this.

### Long Term Initiatives

Academy based options and specialized focus for school programs such as Early College High School continue to be attractive to parents who are seeking choice for their children. Toledo Schools must continue to explore offering choice and creative options for students and parents at all levels.

Long-range initiatives that will be explored include possible academy options, schools with a focused interest in a particular curricular area such as the Toledo Technology Academy, and other school options beyond the traditional school program.

These options will need to be fully explored developed over the course of the next three to five years.

### Conclusion

The strategy in this plan is not meant to limit the opportunities or the creativity at the school level and district or to address every activity. The plan is to emphasize with everyone that every day we are engaged in recruitment and retention activities in the work we do and the way we accomplish our daily activities.

A comprehensive plan will require financial resources and long range planning could include the hiring of a coordinator or consultants to assist in training and implementation and monitoring. Given the financial situation the effort will be maintained with existing personnel and within existing budgets. From a business standpoint the district will have to spend money to get results and the cost-benefit will need to be monitored to estimate the most effective methods for continuation and modification.