

Key Thoughts Noted By Pam...

I talked to many employees, and board members from other districts and left with an overwhelming sense of pride in River Valley. We do many things really well, and many of the struggles others shared I didn't consider an area of weakness for us. I'm thankful we value continuous improvement, and that we always expect better. That enables us to be realistic about what we do well, what we can improve upon, and not be afraid to take the next steps to make the entire education experience better for all our students. A delicate balance of our resources. The convention provided many great ideas, potential pathways, and reinforced important ideas in education today.

Referendum Notes:

- Work to show gratitude to your community in multiple ways consistently, all the time. They want to know what they're paying for, and feel proud of it too.
- Engage the community the best you can throughout the referendum process
- Think of creative ways to present information. Be transparent
- Offer facility tours to show what needs to be done
- Virtual Q&A, as well as in person meetings
- Due diligence in how you are accounting for declining enrollment, as it pertains to operational needs. Link those decisions back to the strategic plan. Carefully manage staffing and responsibilities.
- Remember 18 year olds can vote too.
- Give information to students.
- The Board/Administration has a clear prioritized list of projects to get done. This enables more to get done should a capital referendum pass.

Communication Plan:

- Have a communication plan with the community.
- Feature all grades, all departments.
- Host a monthly community update meeting, separate from the board meeting, to update the community about what is happening around this district. This targets an audience that isn't social media savvy. Invite participants to ask questions. Sometimes you learn about concerns that are being discussed but haven't made it to the admin/board yet. Similar to the student council report. They will not be well attended at first, but invite local organizations to join in. Summarize in the local newspaper. It gives attendees the space to ask, you improve visibility and responsiveness.
- Employers typically have robust training programs for graduates entering into careers, they often mention they want graduates to be proficient in social-emotional learning and soft skills. They were very firm that if you haven't reviewed the social-emotional learning curriculum at the elementary level, it's likely outdated.
- Advertise your course offerings, most of the community doesn't have kids in school, and they don't know what you offer.

- Rhinelander recommended the above steps but the bulk of involving the community was centered around Rhinelander Pie: <https://www.rhinelanderpie.com/>
 - This is very similar to how we work with the Spring Green Chamber of Commerce, and RV Endowment, but on a larger scale.
 - The idea is to provide value to all members, not compete.
 - The idea was to bridge the gap between what the community needs, what the school needs, and what businesses need.
 - Other districts called similar partnerships Business Education Partnership, Inspire Network, etc.

Next Level Thinking:

School Store

- Partner with local businesses for apparel.
- Open during lunch, select event nights for the community to shop apparel, branded items, booster items, bleacher seats, bumper stickers, etc.
- Some schools have a basket/shelf with free items in case a student needs them.
- Mobile store if you don't have a designated space that makes sense.

Reading Nook in every building

- Consider with the referendum.
- Also use space with natural light and partner with construction/building class to build.

Flexible Seating

- Flexible seating is more popular in the classroom, but also consider it in the cafeteria and in the LMC.
- Lounge seating and booth seating are encouraged in cafeteria spaces as well.
- Stationary exercise bike with a book easel in the LMC to promote a lifetime of learning and wellness.

Book Vending Machine

- Excitement for Literacy
- Improved Attendance (earn more tokens)

Improve Your Job Shadows

- It likely is part of ACP in middle or intermediate school, but also should be in high school. Students get a better understanding as they are older
- Virtual and In-Person Career Fairs
- Continue to look for Outreach Opportunities:
<https://uwconnects.wisc.edu/buckys-classroom-2/>

A Warm Welcome for New Teachers

- Include information about local resources and businesses.
- Library, laundry mat, restaurants, who actually delivers the best pizza.

- Information about your district, where they live

Signing Day

- Not just athletics, include internships, school to work, college acceptance, technical programming, etc.

Encourage Lifelong Learning

- What fills your cup?
- What makes you feel alive?
- Ask for help?
- Don't forget that high schoolers need social-emotional support and learning too.

Community Connection:

- The main point here is that parents of kids in school will be well versed in what you do. Grandparents more so, but the majority of your community doesn't have a personal tie to your school. The kids they love most may attend elsewhere, how do you get them to understand the value of your district? By engaging them in your district.
- The more taxpayers you get in your buildings the more they will understand the need. They can say, yeah, that needs to be updated or fixed. Or let's get these kids something better. It creates a sense of ownership, as they can see, and use what they paid for. It may improve referendum support. Using indoor space to bring people together for positivity and happiness just makes you feel good.
- Manage the narrative. If you provide highlights to your local paper, those are what is likely to be published. Be proactive. These provide great opportunities to do so.
- Potentially use Fund 80 for community education programs.
- Partner with other local organizations, or businesses, to host learning opportunities and fun events.
- Start small, build what's logical
- Jigsaw puzzle contests
- Book Club
- River/Lake Safety course
- EMS/First Aid Classes
- Use/Create School Forest Hiking Trail
- Community Wellness
 - Weight Room
 - Update with equipment sponsors (Heights did this)
 - Basic/Advanced Rotation for students
- "Recipes with Grandma" or "Community Recipes"
 - Teach how to make a traditional Snicker's Salad.
 - Sourdough Starters
- Birdwatchers
- Historical Societies
- Cookie Swap

- Host an Art Fair, inviting each art student to share something, have a food service or food science class, create bars and refreshments, or make it fancy and serve appetizers, or a charcuterie board.
- Tour Our...
 - Auto Shop
 - Woodworking
 - Athletic Spaces
 - CTE Spaces
 - Agricultural Spaces

Celebrating Teachers:

The Elmbrook school district facilitated this. When their current district administrator came in he shared that their end of year teacher banquet was celebrating a retiree, and it felt more like a roast. He thought a certificate without the public, students, co-workers and the retirees family didn't do any justice to the years an employee served. He thought they needed to do a much better job at celebrating staff, retirees, and making their staff feel appreciated. They handed out Golden Apples for awards, and certificates for various things, but he thought it needed more intention instead of being a task on a list.

- The administration team should monitor retention and engagement metrics.
- Celebration of Excellence at the top of the board agenda
 - Invite teachers who received a new certification
 - Invite teachers who created a new class
 - Invite students who engaged in something at a high level, or won an award
 - Invite an athletic team who won state
 - Invite a team who helped a student achieve a major milestone
 - Create a criteria if needed
- Thank A Teacher Google Form or Drop Box in the office, allow students and parents to personally thank teachers. Create a system that streamlines the process best for your own district. This is simple and virtually free to do.
- The District Administrator asked his building principals to do 3 thank you notes a day, and provided the branded note cards.
- Digital Employee Spotlights
 - Name/Courses Taught
 - Favorites: Food/Color/Pastime
 - Simple, not revealing, but allowing those on social media to say, "We love Ms./Mr....."
 - Create a sense of family.
- Staff Member of the Week (Digital Spotlight)
- Alumni Spotlight

- Dr. Mark Hansen was fairly passionate about this, he said there are kids doing amazing things. Redefining what success means to previous generations. Their stories, if willing, should be shared as a proud alumni of your school.
- Reimagine & Invigorate the Celebration Ceremony:
 - Open to public and students
 - Celebrate ALL staff on the year's accomplishments, and keep a list all year
 - Celebrate years of service
 - Celebrate retirees
 - Engage in Excellence Awards
 - He said their process would be on their website soon, as they begin that process in February, and usually some part of it coincides with Teacher Appreciation Week. It was great information but it jumped around a bit.
 - They asked the Top 10 Seniors to nominate an influential teacher throughout their academic career, and the Top 5 biggest movers in GPA from Freshmen to Senior year. They were given a handmade gift, a speech by the student, and tangible item.
 - No duplicates
 - Their event is sponsored by their Education Foundation and held in their Performing Arts Center. Their Education Foundation provides scholarships, funding for projects, such as robotics, Thank You Thursdays (lunch, donuts, coffee, drawings for gift cards)
 - Presenters are students, they discuss why this person was nominated. They don't do acceptance speeches, just a photo and an exit to applause. They found most of their teachers didn't want to talk, but that may vary district to district.
 - They found this event created pride in the profession, increased retention and morale.
 - The most popular question was whether this created any animosity between staff members. Many were nervous this would cause issues in their district. Their response was interesting.
 - Essentially they said if you let it, it will
 - Some teachers connect better, it's just a fact. This may actually encourage others to work on connecting better
 - Focus the event as a celebration of all teachers, celebrate departments
 - Work to celebrate all teachers
 - Mentioned they actually found a weakness in that developmentally disabled, and special education teachers weren't adequately represented, as those students may not understand how to nominate, or be able to communicate the impact. They are working to remedy that.
 - They firmly stated these are ideas, and they are truly proud of their event, but it's not a cookie cutter process, each district needs their own way.

