

# Achiever

DYSART UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 89



## Strategic Planning: The next step on a path of excellence

The Dysart Unified School District, under the direction of the Governing Board, has committed itself to the work of identifying a clear and articulated path of excellence to educate students for the new century. To prepare students to compete and excel in the global society, the district must develop a strategic plan that will be the roadmap to success. In the fall of 2007, the Dysart Unified School District partnered with our community, including parents, staff, students, volunteers, government, civic and business leaders to create a framework of skills needed to prepare students for the 21st century. This effort produced the Dysart New Century Learner framework of skills. The next step on the journey of excellence is for the district to take that work and use it as a foundation for designing a strategic plan.

Strategic planning will provide the District with an opportunity to utilize a data driven process that assures this district is focused on the most critical goals. It will allow the gathering of input from all stakeholder groups assuring the Strategic Plan reflects the true needs of our Dysart community. This plan will include action steps and a way to evaluate progress over time. The process and the plan that is produced will bring the Dysart community together working towards critical common goals to support the success of all students. Collaboration and a shared sense of mission will be a cornerstone of the strategic plan.

The first component in Dysart's strategic plan process is assessing our current data and gathering additional information. Part of the information gathering process included Focus Group sessions scheduled for the end of February with representatives from across the district. A second activity was launched as an on line district wide survey available from March 4th through March 21. The district utilized an outside organization to conduct that survey.

As we move from one stage of the planning to the next, the Dysart District will release updates that provide information on findings and next steps in the strategic plan process. In addition, the district will continue to provide information about how interested parents, staff and community members can get involved in this critical planning process.

Dysart's multi-year Strategic Plan will assure our students have the best educational experiences and opportunities to prepare them to meet the challenges and opportunities of the new century and of a global society. Rigor in academics, building relationships to support success, making learning relevant and using data to reflect on progress are the foundation on which the Dysart District will build its future. Preparing students today for the world of tomorrow provides a catalyst for the academic, cultural and economic vitality of our community. This strategic plan process will provide a wonderful opportunity for the Dysart Community to work together to produce a shared vision and plan of excellence for Dysart Unified School District.



## Working together to keep students safe

The saying “April showers bring May flowers” may be true, but when it comes to school safety April often brings rumors of school violence. Historically, the month of April has been associated with violent and negative events and individuals. Adolph Hitler’s birthday is in April; the Columbine High School shooting in 1998 occurred in April; the Virginia Tech University shooting occurred in April. The month of April is also rumored to have a day set aside as “national get high day.”

To appropriately address our fears on school violence, we must first acknowledge where they originate. Because we are aware that rumors of school violence typically surface in the spring, particularly around the month of April, the Dysart Unified School District has put several safety initiatives in place.

- School Emergency Plans – Each Dysart school created an emergency plan that is used to address all types of school emergencies from power failures to chemical spills to neighborhood police situations to a microburst. Schools rehearse their plans by practicing lockdown and fire drills, and all staff members are trained on response protocols.
- Emergency Communication Systems – Our district’s website, found at [www.dysart.org](http://www.dysart.org), includes a parent alert page where up-to-the-minute announcements are posted during an emergency. Parents and the community can sign up to receive email notifications whenever the page is updated with an alert. Dysart also uses an auto-dialer system on a school-specific basis to call parents in emergency situations.
- Emergency Responder Partnerships – Our district works closely with the fire and police departments from El Mirage and Surprise. Both police departments support our high schools with school resource officers (SROs). All four agencies have representatives who serve as integral members on Dysart’s district safety committee. Dysart is working with these agencies to design and conduct combined-agency emergency scenario drills at each and every Dysart school.
- Threat Assessment Process - As is reflected in our district’s discipline procedures, Dysart has a comprehensive process for assessing the circumstances when threats are made at school. Approximately 100 trained staff throughout the district respond to and professionally assess threatening situations.

So, how can you work in partnership with the Dysart Unified School District to address the issue of school violence, not just during the month of April, but all year long?

First and foremost, create and maintain positive communication with your children. Assure them that their school truly cares about their safety, and explain the safety initiatives we have in place.

Second, communicate with your child’s school. The teachers, counselors and administrators at your child’s school are the best and most reliable sources of information when rumors begin to spread. Finally, model for your children a positive and proactive approach when rumors surface; be quick to ascertain what truth there may be to the rumor by communicating with the school, but be cautious about promoting the rumors with children.

We invite you to work closely with our district this spring and as we move ahead. Together, positively impact the future through communication, plans, processes and partnerships focused on school safety.

## Exciting gradebook changes come to Dysart

Recently a committee of parents, teachers and administrators, working to improve communication about student achievement on standards, adopted the Pinnacle Web-based Electronic Gradebook Software and Support Program. This program, by Excelsior Software, will propel Dysart’s classroom data collection and reporting capabilities to new heights!

- New Elementary Report Card - The committee also designed a new report card that provides more information about what students know, understand and can do. The new report card, which is aligned with the Arizona Academic Standards, was designed to provide the maximum amount of information about student progress and achievement in a clear format. In addition to subject letter grades, the report card now details how well students are progressing on the state standards.
- Real-time - The Pinnacle System allows students’ grades, attendance and progress towards Arizona performance standards to be easily tracked and reported at both the school and district levels in a real-time environment. In addition, within the software, teachers are afforded the ability to work on grades and assignments irrespective of location. Because the system is in real time, students’ progress is available 24/7 for teachers, parents, principals, coaches and counselors across the DUSD community.
- Email Notification - In addition, parents will soon have the option

to receive automatic emails regarding grades and attendance for their students. Parents will have the ability to set thresholds for email notification for unexcused absences, progress reports at desired intervals and when a grade drops below a certain level. This is an excellent way for busy parents to stay abreast of their children's progress.

- Pinnacle Internet Viewer - Any data collected in the grade book including schedules, grades, attendance and progress data is supplied to parents and students via the Pinnacle Internet Viewer application. Parents will have the ability to view, down to the assignment level, for each class to view grades on individual assessments.
- Rollout - Dysart is currently piloting the new program at four (4) elementary schools with a District-wide rollout scheduled for the 2008-09 school year. Canyon Ridge, Marley Park, Sonoran Heights and West Point parents and students will be the first in the district to see the new report card. Valley Vista High School is also piloting the grade book and online parent communication.
- Dysart is excited to provide parents the detailed communication and threshold-level progress reporting they require as stakeholders and hope the additional information will help parents better understand how their child is performing.

## Signature programs offer students real-world experience

Since 2006, Dysart has offered Signature Programs at each of our high schools. The programs offer students the opportunity to take courses in a field of study that is of particular interest to the student and relate to specific career paths.

In all 12 Signature programs, high school students are able to apply information learned in core classes like English, math, social studies and science to real world occupations. Signature program teachers use standards-based curricula to reinforce academic standards, demonstrating to students the need to apply academics beyond the classroom.

The Signature Programs offered at Dysart High School include Architectural Design, Automotive Technology, Early Childhood Education, Medical Occupations, Photo Imaging and ROTC.

Valley Vista High School offers Culinary Arts, Fire Science, Law Enforcement and Public Safety.

Willow Canyon High School offers International Baccalaureate, Laboratory Assisting, Small Business Administration.

Because of the amount of equipment and focused curriculum, it is necessary to offer these programs at single high schools. This allows each program to concentrate resources and offer the highest quality program possible.

Enrollment in Signature programs is open to any high school student in the Dysart district. Because each program is offered at one high school only, students enrolled in a Signature program are required to take their full academic coursework at that high school. The district currently offers shuttle transportation between high schools for students attending Signature programs.

Signature programs like culinary arts, medical occupations, and laboratory assisting all lead to national or state certification as well as college majors. Other programs such as International Baccalaureate and ROTC prepare students for challenging post-secondary opportunities.

We will continue to add new Signature Programs in the future to meet the needs of the community as well as state and national interests. We are committed to offer programs that prepare students for the 21st century.

## Parents can help children attain testing success

Each spring, students in grades 2-8 and high school take the state achievement tests (AIMS and Terra Nova). In order to help your children do their best on these tests, we offer the following tips.

### Tips for being physically prepared:

- On the day before the test relax and get a good night's sleep.
- Get up early on the morning of the test to avoid being rushed.
- Be on time.
- Eat a good breakfast and lunch.
- Wear clothing that is comfortable and makes you feel confident

### Tips for being mentally prepared:

- Keep a positive attitude about the test.
- Be confident.
- Make a commitment to do your best.
- Picture yourself doing well on the test. People who think they can do well usually do.
- Realize that test results show what you need to learn as well as what you know.
- Do not let others discourage you about the test.
- Be prepared to deal with anxious feelings should they occur.
- Do not become discouraged because of difficult test items. Continue to do your best throughout the test.
- Treat yourself after the test.

### Common test taking tips:

- Quickly scan all of the questions when you begin a test. This will help you see what the test is about and how many questions you will have to answer.
- Read all DIRECTIONS through twice. Never begin answering questions before you read the directions.
- Be sure to read the entire question before determining the answer.
- Try to answer ALL the test questions. Do the easy ones first. When you come to a hard question, don't spend a lot of time trying to figure it out. Wait until you have finished all the easy questions, then go back and work on the hard ones.
- Listen and watch carefully while instructions are being given.
- Make educated guesses if you are unsure of an answer. First eliminate choices that are obviously incorrect, then logically select from the remaining choices.
- Review your answers when you are finished.
- When using an answer sheet understand the proper way to mark responses.
- Be sure to keep your place on the test and on the answer sheet. If you skip a question on the test, be sure to skip the corresponding space on the answer sheet.
- Watch out for negative words in directions, such as NOT. The word often appears in bold or italic type, or in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.

## Teaching the middle-level learner

A district-wide committee met during the 2005-2006 school year to develop a philosophy for 7th & 8th grade education that meets the needs of middle level learners and to design an action plan for implementing that philosophy in Dysart. Based on the recommendations of the committee, teachers have worked together to develop a program that does its absolute best to meet the needs of students in their early adolescent years. The idea is to provide a bridge between elementary and secondary education using a distinctive schema for middle level students.

An important component of the program is the Middle School Advisory. The Advisory is a scheduled time in which students learn strategies to improve their academic and social skills. The Middle Level Advisory curriculum is designed to provide a framework for teachers to use in developing units of study, individual lesson plans and approaches to instruction that will serve the particular needs of the middle school learner. By personalizing the learning environment the program provides students an adult advisor who is dedicated to helping the student succeed. The curriculum supports the middle school philosophy by providing a program that promotes a safe and supportive environment conducive to the learning needs of the students. It also provides for the social and emotional strengths and needs of the Middle Level Learner. Because many young adolescents suffer from feelings of isolation and loneliness, the Advisory activities are a means for the students to connect with caring adults and other students to help them through the tumultuous adolescent years. Students participate in team building activities that help them build relationships with peers and their teachers. Teachers help students to "Dream Big" and set challenging goals for themselves.

The Middle Level Advisory is built on the premise that "every Student should be well known by at least one adult. Students should be able to rely on that adult to help them learn from their experiences, comprehend physical changes and changing relations with family and peers, act on their behalf to marshal every school and community resource needed for the student to succeed and help fashion a promising vision of the future." (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989)

## Taxpayers support Dysart students

Dysart Unified School District raised more than \$468,032.40 for the 2007 tax year, including \$26,850, which was collected at the second annual Tax Credit Drive-thru on Dec. 31. This year our goal was to increase participation, and a plan was developed to provide extended community outreach. The Valpak community mailer announced the Tax Credit Drive-Thru event. Additional information was sent through the district listserv and website, as well as through local newspapers. "I am pleased with the results and would like to thank everyone who donated in 2007," said Linda Streeter, the district's Director of Community Education who coordinated this effort. Dysart has had tremendous support from the community and the students of this district have benefited from their generosity.



The school tax credit is provided by Arizona Revised Statute 43-1089.01 and allows married couples filing jointly a tax credit of up to \$400 and individual

taxpayers a tax credit of up to \$200 when they contribute to extracurricular activities in public schools. The tax credit donation is different from a deduction because it is a full refund of a taxpayer's money, provided a liability at least equal to that of the donation exists. Contributions are donated directly to Dysart schools and community members making a school tax credit donation do not have to have a child in a Dysart school to take advantage of the opportunity.

Donated funds are used at the discretion of each individual school, but can include the funding for after-school enrichment programs, athletics, fine arts, clubs and field trips. Many of these after-school projects and events may not have been possible without the support of the members of the community. The donations fund several programs and give the opportunity to many students who, without these contributions, could not otherwise participate. Dysart students are very fortunate to be living within a community that is so supportive of education, especially extra curricular activities. Superintendent Gail Pletnick applauded the community support by stating, "This is another example of how our community is having a positive impact on students today and thus a positive impact on our community tomorrow."

Another Tax Credit Drive Thru is planned for the end of April, followed by our third annual event on December 31st. We appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you at the Tax Credit Drive Thru.

**Dysart**  
Unified School District

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