

**School District U-46**

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**A SUMMARY**  
  
of the  
  
2007-08  
**DISTRICT**  
**IMPROVEMENT**  
**PLAN**

## **DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT PLAN – 2007-08**

The first District Improvement Plan was adopted by the Board of Education in 2003. The plan was based on months of staff discussions with district stakeholders, as well as some assistance from national experts provided by the Stupski Foundation.

The District Improvement Plan was designed to establish a foundation for transforming U-46 into “a standards-driven, assessment-based culture that focuses all of its energies and resources on academic success for all students.” The objective was continuous improvement, with a goal of reducing the number of low-performing schools and students. Activities are focused in six “pillars”: Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; High-priority Schools; Fiscal Responsibility; Leadership; Data Management; and Public Trust and Support.

Five years later, there is much evidence that having the plan has made all the difference in the success of the students.

The adoption of a plan each year has helped establish the Annual Planning Cycle which aligns budgeting and staffing and channels all available resources to the students.

In May, 2007, the Board adopted the **2007-08 plan** and set the top priorities:

1. Continue to refine the PreK-12 continuum of services with an initial review of middle school curriculum and programs.
2. Enhance the district’s financial stability by expanding the continuous quality improvement process.

The U-46 community has become more aware of the district’s focus on improving student achievement. The theme of “Academic Success for All” is being communicated in a variety of ways. In May, during the annual organizational assessment conducted by consultants supported by the Stupski Foundation, it was noted that, “The District Improvement Plan continues to drive the work in U-46.”

The District Improvement Plan is on the agenda of every Board of Education meeting. At the first meeting of each month, a staff presentation on curriculum or other activities related to the plan is featured. This year a focus was on secondary school reform. At the last meeting of the month, a written progress report is included in board packets, and at the meeting, the superintendent provides a short summary of the update, along with the opportunity for the board members to ask questions or seek additional information. In January, the Board receives a progress report on the District Improvement Plan as part of the Superintendent’s annual review.

This report is a summary of the major accomplishments of this year’s District Improvement Plan. A brief explanation of key initiatives and accomplishments is provided for each of the six pillars of the plan. Part II of this document contains the monthly updates (August, 2007 - May, 2008), providing a chronological review of some of the work done in each area. All have been posted on the district’s web site and distributed to staff, advisory groups, and other key stakeholders.

## MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The 2007-08 District Improvement Plan includes 17 Areas of Work and 68 specific strategies and activities in the work plan. Staff continues to monitor the progress made on each activity, as the work will continue in the 2008-09 work plan.

As the school year and fiscal year end, Dr. Mary Jayne Broncato and members of the Superintendent's Staff have reviewed the progress made. The following are considered the "Top Accomplishments" of the year.

### **Academic Progress**

The top priority of the district for the past five years has been to support teachers in the implementation of the Curriculum Roadmap. This year, the Roadmap training and follow-up support were expanded. The alignment of curriculum and instruction is yielding positive results.

Just a few years ago, many U-46 schools were on the State's Academic Warning list. Even with increasing benchmarks to pass, the number of schools making AYP has increased each year.

This year:

- 39 of the 40 elementary schools made AYP and
- 5 of the 8 middle schools made AYP.

While the high schools did not make AYP, progress is being made. Six secondary schools now have restructuring plans in place to better address student needs.

This spring, members of the Superintendent's Staff and Board of Education members visited the 43 schools making AYP to acknowledge the specific accomplishments made at each school and to thank staff members for their hard work as the bar is raised each year.

### **Financial Stability**

For the past five years, the district has maintained a balanced budget and is working to have a balance across all funds. More significant are the internal controls and safeguards that have been put into place to prevent future financial crises.

In spring, 2007, Moody's Investors Service upgraded U-46's financial rating of A3 from "stable to positive." By December, Moody's had changed the rating from A3 to A2. According to Moody's, the A2 rating and stable outlook reflect U-46's "continued progress in rebuilding reserves; large and rapidly growing tax base with favorable socioeconomic indicators; and above average amount of moderately retired debt. The stable outlook reflects our expectation that the district's demonstrated ability to restore structural balance through expenditure cuts and careful financial management should allow the district to maintain its improved financial operations."

The May 2008 *Moody's Global U.S. Public Finance* publication highlights the success of U-46: "The district's overall financial trend is particularly impressive given district officials' success in eliminating nearly \$39 million from the deficit balance over the last four fiscal years without an operating rate increase."

☑ **Continued alignment of the school system**

*District goals & priorities → Budgeting / Resources / Staffing / Operations → Classroom / Students*

Five years ago, when district staff began working with the Stupski Foundation on systemic reform, it was noted that U-46 was a “system of schools” more than a school system. With the No Child Left Behind legislation and potential for penalties, there was an urgency to support schools on a much larger scale. In addition, there was a need to prioritize limited resources and target all available funds directly to the classroom.

Today, the Superintendent’s Staff continues to focus on the priorities of the District Improvement Plan throughout the budgeting process which is aligned in the Annual Planning Cycle to match staffing needs and deadlines. Each year the planning process is refined, and School Improvement Plans and department plans are being integrated with the cycle to better align with the district timelines.

The districtwide practice of conducting annual audits and reviews has encouraged transparency and has been the catalyst for the continuous improvement model which fosters alignment. The Operations and other departments have prepared for ISO 9001 certification by performing internal audits which result in refining policies and procedures. There is now a greater employee understanding of the need to align goals, funds, staffing, and the infrastructure to achieve student success—as we have seen the positive results.

☑ **U-46 “Best Practices” Institutionalized**

With the focus on creating processes, procedures, and long-term solutions, there are now *annual* plans and cycles that are being replicated by others—and that have become known as the way U-46 does business. Some of our “best practices” are:

- Annual District Improvement Plan – development, monitoring, and reporting processes.
- Use of audits and reviews for continuous improvement. The use of an external auditor—the expert, objective evaluator—followed by a staff response with recommendations is part of the process. Posting results on the web site fosters transparency.
- Annual Planning Cycle used by the Board and staff; annual calendar / deadlines within cycle.
- Professional growth model for Curriculum Roadmap: all-day sessions with teachers and principals (Regular Ed., Special Ed. and ELL); follow-up support via touchbacks with instructional coaches at the sites; support provided by the U-46 web site, etc. Ongoing support as new content areas are introduced each year.
- Collaborative change process used for curriculum development (i.e. U.S. History) and activities related to reform/ implementation (i.e. development of restructuring plans).
- Use of ESC staff in supporting role(s): Coordinators serving as partners with schools for restructuring; instructional coaches providing support at schools.
- Interest-based bargaining which, this year, resulted in contracts with both the Elgin Teachers Association and District U-46 Transportation Union (DUTU).

Due to the long-time partnership with the Stupski Foundation, U-46 has had the opportunity to be recognized for many of these practices and to share successes with other large, urban districts.

**☑ Redefined Programs/Services - Focus on Secondary School Reform**

A goal each year is to “continue to implement the recommendations of previous audits/program evaluations.” A few years ago, both the English Language Learners and Special Education Programs were audited. Implementation is ongoing. (See Pillar I., Pages 5-9.)

Last year, the Early Learners Program, Pre-K, and All-day Kindergarten programs were refined due to audits and, as a result, the Woodland Heights Early Learning Center opened to serve the east side of U-46 with All-day Kindergarten and a program for four-year-olds at risk of failure.

The focus on secondary school reform was driven by the state’s new high school graduation requirements and supported by a public expectation of increased rigor and accountability, especially due to No Child Left Behind. Last year’s audits/reviews of Gifted Education, the academies, and AP courses increased the focus on “raised expectations” of students.

This year, in addition to conducting the Middle School Review, staff implemented recommendations as a result of both the Gifted Education Program audit and the review of the high school academies. A coordinator was hired for Gifted Education, Honors, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program and the academies. The fifth academy program—the BEACON academy at South Elgin High School also was developed during the year.

Curriculum Roadmap sessions were provided for teachers of these programs with consultants assisting with the development and expansion of the AP courses. Roadmap sessions during 2007-08 were:

Elementary School: Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and Elementary Gifted Education Classes

Middle School: Grade 7 Social Studies; Grade 8 History; Grades 7 and 8: English, ESL, Reading, Math and Gifted Language Arts and Math

High School: Grades 9 and 11 Reading; Grade 11 English; and teachers of courses: Biology 1.5; Algebra 1.5; Geometry with Support; and Advanced Placement Courses

**☑ Districtwide Approach to School Safety**

John Heiderscheidt, the district’s first Safety Coordinator, was hired two years ago to lead efforts to provide a systemwide approach to school safety. Areas of work include:

- A Comprehensive Safety and Crisis Response Plan developed to meet national incident response plan standards (National Incident Management Services or NIMS).
- Increased staff development in drills and training for lockdown and crisis management at the schools; communication to schools/community of new procedures (i.e. weapons check).
- Crisis communications – Plans/procedures for internal and external emergency communications.

Other activities include the coordination of the School Safety Advisory Task Force; a building security policy to control access to schools before, during, and after school; and “proactive crime prevention” which includes the tracking of data/incidents for the purpose of prevention.

Mr. Heiderscheidt works closely with Board and staff in handling school crises and collaborates with the community to prevent incidents and protect staff and students.

**☑ Strategic Communications with Stakeholders**

The web site continues to be the “go to” place for information about U-46. In 2007 (January-December), the district web site had 400,000 unique visitors with 1,270,000 visits to the web site(s) and 7,493,138 pages viewed.

In 2007-08, there were many opportunities for stakeholder involvement and input, and new venues were created to target specific audiences.

In January and February, stakeholders were invited to participate in the process for the Superintendent’s Search. The representatives of PROACT gathered information from 55 group sessions, nine community forums and a survey (online and paper) conducted by the firm; 375 people were included in meetings, and 1,320 responded to the survey.

The district acquired the ConnectED rapid notification system last summer and, by the second day of school, had used it to let parents/guardians know that their children were safe at school during a severe storm. Throughout the year, principals were able to learn more about ConnectED as they called parents about school activities and, in some cases, to alert parents and staff to a crisis situation. During 2007-08, 828,000 calls were made.

In addition to using ConnectED to better inform parents and staff, the Communications Department revamped the employee newsletter, *The Insider*. Another new publication is *Home Pages*, a newsletter specifically for parents and including articles of interest to parents/guardians, those more directly involved with schools on a daily basis.

Both Dr. Mary Jayne Broncato and new superintendent Dr. José Torres have used ConnectED and direct emails to communicate with parents and/or staff.

**☑ Increased use of Data, Standards, and Assessment**

The team of reviewers conducting the Organizational Assessment in May (See P. 5) noted that “U-46 is data rich” and that employees are making progress in becoming data-driven decision-makers.

A few years ago, the district could provide very little student data to schools. There was no data warehouse, no Assessment Office, no MAP tests or local assessments, and no systemwide approach to sharing and interpreting student data.

Today, educators are supported by the Tetradata warehouse; a web site designed for principals and teachers to access data; an Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Office with a staff of five to support schools; financial support for each school to have at least one data interpreter on site; opportunities to share and learn (i.e. Data Dialogues); a coordinated effort to align hardware, software, and training; and districtwide processes to build capacity and procedures to streamline teachers’ access to information.

**☑ Continuous Improvement Model**

For the past few years, the Human Resources Department, Financial Services Department and all operations departments: Transportation, Business Services, Plant Operations, Information Services, and Food and Nutrition have been preparing for ISO 9001 certification. {ISO stands for International Organization for Standardization, an internationally recognized organization which identifies the best practices regarding effectiveness and efficiency.} The district has not yet received the certification; however, many benefits of the work already have resulted. While improved customer service is key, the documentation of processes builds capacity. Today there is better alignment as some departments have been reorganized and positions established.

In addition to the continuous improvement model being embraced by the operations “side of the house,” as an organization, U-46 is using procedures to foster continuous improvement—such as the District Improvement Plan cycle and the annual audit cycle to ensure monitoring and accountability over the years. The ongoing evaluation of programs and departments shows the district’s desire to improve.

**☑ Overall Organizational Improvement**

Five years ago, when representatives of the Stupski Foundation first visited U-46 to determine if the school district was ready and willing to work towards systemic reform, the foundation conducted an Organizational Assessment. The purpose of the assessment is to examine the performance of the district as a “system.” U-46’s scores were in the 1-2 range as an organization (on a 5-point scale).

The fifth annual Organizational Assessment of U-46 was done in May by a team of four reviewers supported by the foundation. The team conducted interviews and focus groups with more than 250 staff, community members, and students. The reviewers visited schools, studied the web site, reviewed files of documents, and reported back to the Superintendent’s Staff. The team reports on strengths as well as “opportunities for improvement” which are typically identified in the next District Improvement Plan to make sure any issues are addressed.

The table below indicates the maturing of U-46 as an organization. And it is significant that the score of 5—the highest—is in the component of “Strategic Planning and Results.”

<b>Component</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
Leadership	2	2	3	4	4
Strategic Planning & Results	2	2	3	4	5
Curriculum and Teaching	1	1	2	3	4
Stakeholder Engagement	2	3	3	4	4
Stellar People	1	2	2	3	4
Effective & Efficient Processes	2	3	3	4	4
Accountability	1	2	3	3	4

KEY  
INITIATIVES  
AND  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## I. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

The work of the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Pillar is mainly a continuation of many of the districtwide reforms previously initiated: the Curriculum Roadmap, professional growth for teachers implementing the Roadmap, Academic Vocabulary K-12, refinement of programs, alignment of the curriculum, and a focus on secondary school reform.

The Curriculum Roadmap was introduced four years ago. The Roadmap is a prioritized, baseline curriculum framework in literacy and math, developed to provide consistency regarding instructional priorities across grade levels and schools. This year, the professional growth related to the Roadmap continued to support all teachers of elementary school (K-6). New content areas and grade levels were added for middle and high school teachers.

In addition, district staff continues to refine services (PreK–12) to better serve special populations: Early Learners, English Language Learners, students in Gifted Education and Special Education, and those eligible for Honors and Advanced Placement courses. The high school academies were evaluated; recommendations are being implemented.

As the new state high school requirements continue to be phased in, educators examine and realign course offerings to ensure students have the courses they need to graduate. This year, a review of middle school curriculum and programs was done to determine the needs of students as they transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school.

### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Sustain support of staff development for the Curriculum Roadmap to ensure a common, standards-based, rigorous curriculum in K-12.
- B. Continue to refine the PreK-12 continuum of services with an initial review of middle school curriculum and programs.
- C. Continue to support secondary school reform, including the implementation of the state high school graduation requirements.

### ◆ Key Activities This Year:

- Expand the system of ongoing, embedded district-wide professional development for teachers to implement the goals in the Curriculum Roadmap:
  - Elementary School: Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and Elementary Gifted Education Classes
  - Middle School: Grade 7 Social Studies; Grade 8 History  
Grades 7 and 8: English, ESL, Reading, Math and Gifted Language Arts and Math
  - High School: Grades 9 and 11 Reading; Grade 11 English; and courses: Biology 1.5; Algebra 1.5, Geometry with Support, and Advanced Placement Courses

*Key Activities Cont'd.*

- Continue the K-12 focus on academic vocabulary by providing systemwide professional growth.
- Continue the Curriculum Roadmap initiatives (i.e. touchbacks) while expanding to new grade levels and content areas.
- Expand the opportunities for differentiation of professional growth in addressing special populations (i.e. ELL, Special Ed., Gifted).
- Develop a plan for expanding the Curriculum Roadmap professional development to other content areas.
- Continue to utilize the U-46 web site(s) to communicate Curriculum Roadmap components, curriculum initiatives, and assessment instruments designed to improve teaching and learning.
- Conduct a comparative study of the middle school educational program with the national research on highly effective middle schools.
- Continue to implement the recommendations of previous audits/program evaluations of: Early Learners and the Early Childhood Program; English Language Learners; Special Education; Gifted Education; and the High School Academy Program.
- Continue to monitor the progress of all NCLB sub-groups (i.e. African-American, Hispanic) and plan appropriate interventions.
- Continue to analyze the differences between the current and new state requirements.
- Continue to implement the new graduation requirements while aligning course content.
- Align the student performance data with the School Improvement Plan(s).
- Identify and support appropriate student interventions aligned with student learning needs.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ MIDDLE SCHOOL REVIEW – TOP PRIORITY

Throughout the 2007-08 school year, Dr. Tom Donausky, Executive Director of Secondary Education, led the many activities resulting in a comparative study of the middle school program. A review team, comprised of stakeholders, worked with the ECRA Group, an educational research firm, to examine national research on highly-effective middle schools, as well as reviewing the current status and needs of the eight middle schools in U-46.

The purpose of the study is to gain information to help the district align and improve the middle school program. Goals are to review current literature and research on highly effective middle schools; research current practice in U-46, relative to the structural components currently in place that support teaching and learning; analyze current practice with best practice; and provide input into final report/recommendations.

A report to the Board of Education is scheduled for June 23.

➤ CURRICULUM ROADMAP PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPANDED

The systemwide Curriculum Roadmap support plan was created in 2005-06 and publicized so that staff knew there was a long-term multi-year commitment to supporting the Curriculum Roadmap. This is the third year of the Curriculum Roadmap sessions supporting teachers in regular education, Special Education and English Language Learners. The Roadmap sessions during 2007-08 were:

Elementary School: Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 and Elementary Gifted Education Classes

Middle School: Grade 7 Social Studies; Grade 8 History; Grades 7 and 8: English, ESL, Reading, Math and Gifted Language Arts and Math

High School: Grades 9 and 11 Reading; Grade 11 English; and teachers of courses: Biology 1.5; Algebra 1.5; Geometry with Support; and Advanced Placement Courses

Monday and Friday sessions were added to provide opportunities for staff development for smaller or more specific groups, yet not requiring a large amount of substitute teachers.

All administrators (of instructional areas) received professional growth upon their return in August and throughout 2007-08. The presentations focused on district priorities, Roadmap, Academic Vocabulary and related initiatives.

Consistent with the collaborative manner in which the Curriculum Roadmap was developed, the teacher evaluations of the staff development sessions were used to modify the presentations. “What’s Next?” conversations were held with all teachers attending the Curriculum Roadmap sessions. In May, booklets including the responses were compiled and sent to all schools.

Also increased this year was the alignment with assessment during the Roadmap sessions. Assessment Office staff participated in the sessions to help teachers better link assessment with curriculum and instruction.

➤ SUPPORT OF ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

This is the second year of systemwide focus on academic vocabulary. All principals, assistant principals and high school divisionals participated in Curriculum Roadmap professional development in August and developed plans focused on accountability, as it relates to the Roadmap and academic vocabulary implementation.

The August 20 Institute Day provided a half-day introductory workshop for all K-12 teachers on academic vocabulary. The district priority was evident as staff gathered at several sites and saw the same video and PowerPoint presentation. Breakout sessions followed the introduction which provided groups from across the district to articulate (i.e. all sixth grade teachers).

Teacher resources for the Roadmap and Academic Vocabulary on the web site continue to increase.

➤ FOCUS ON SECONDARY REFORM

Work continued on phasing in the new high school requirements. The first targeted courses for analysis and alignment were U.S. History, English (sophomore), Biology, and Algebra. With much of the initial work done on those courses, in 2007-08, the focus was English (junior) and the intensive writing required and Algebra 3-4, a new high school graduation requirement. District staff, high school divisionals and teachers in the content areas modified the courses.

During the second semester, at Board of Education meetings, staff presented many informational reports centered on Secondary Reform:

- Intensive Writing Curriculum – Sophomore English
- Math Curriculum in Middle and High School
- U.S. History Curriculum Alignment and Benchmark Development
- Alliance for College Readiness, partnership among high schools in #509 / Elgin Community College
- Instructional coaches' presentation on Academic Vocabulary
- School Improvement Plan (SIP) Review / Intervention Strategies
- Update on staff response to review of High School Academy Program

The last report of 2007-08 will be on the middle school review activities and recommendations.

➤ WEB SITE RESOURCES INCREASED

The U-46 web site(s) provide a variety of information and resources for teachers. In addition, the Curriculum Roadmap site is becoming more strategic, differentiated, and interactive. During Roadmap workshops, educators are familiarized with the resources on the website. New this year, the Roadmap resources are posted under “Workshop Sessions” by grade level, providing more specific information for teachers.

Resources also include online access to curriculum revisions as they are implemented (i.e. U.S. History; Kindergarten) and highlights of good teaching via examples (i.e. videos, Powerpoints) from U-46 classrooms online.

In addition to teaching resources, assessment information is provided on the Curriculum Roadmap web site available to the public (Internet). The U-46 Intranet is now being used by staff to access more specific information from the Assessment Office.

➤ ONGOING REFINEMENT OF PRE-K–12 CURRICULUM

A goal each year is to “continue to implement the recommendations of previous audits/program evaluations.” A few years ago, both the English Language Learners and Special Education Programs were audited. Last year, the Early Learners Program, Pre-K services, and All-day Kindergarten programs were refined as a result of audits or reviews. And this year, in addition to reviewing the middle schools, recommendations were implemented as a result of both the Gifted Education Program audit and the review of the High School Academy Program.

In August, Woodland Heights Early Learning Center opened to serve the east side of the district with All-day Kindergarten and at-risk four-year-old students. In an update on Kindergarten for the Board in October, information was also provided on the two Early Learning Centers: Illinois Park now has 17 classrooms and 526 students; there are 126 full-day kindergarten students and Woodland Heights has 426 students with 126 full-day kindergarten students.

As part of this year's efforts to begin implementing recommendations to improve services to students in Gifted Education and the academies, Ms. Cathleen Hughes was hired to coordinate Gifted Education, Honors, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program and the academies. The fifth academy program—the BEACON academy at South Elgin High School was also developed during the year. Curriculum Roadmap sessions were provided for teachers of these programs with consultants assisting with the development and expansion of the AP courses.

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In 2004-05, external audits were done for both the English Language Learners and Special Education Programs. The following are the third annual (and final) detailed updates provided on progress made in the implementation of the recommendation and program improvements.

**◆ Progress Made to Address the English Language Learners Program Audit Recommendations**

The following reflects progress made to date on the recommendations in the ELL (ESL/Bilingual) Program audit by Dr. Beatriz Arias (spring, 2005). Many of the recommendations made in 2005 have been implemented and are now in a refinement phase.

In 2007-08 the ELL Department was led by a new director and two assistants. Work continued with Dr. Arias to implement the audit recommendations.

- Recommendation #1: Articulate the District's Language Policy with emphasis on the importance of English Language Acquisition for all students.
  - The ELL Department staff regularly conducted professional development sessions with principals and teachers on program components, entrance and exit procedures, and instructional support structures consistent with the District's Language Policy.
  - The ELL Department administrators were assigned as support staff to schools based on enrollment feeder patterns. This continuity in services provided greater program articulation and service to families.
  
- Recommendation #2: Develop and update an English Language Acquisition Services handbook for administrators, teachers, and parents.
  - This recommendation was completed in 2006-2007. New updates to the staff handbook and the parent handbook will be completed and communicated in the 2008-2009 school year.

- Recommendation #3: Adopt and implement a district wide K-12 English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum.
  - Course alignment was focused specifically on the sophomore level writing intensive language arts course.
  - The implementation of the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards was included in Curriculum Roadmap and Touchback sessions.
  - External consultants began initial work to review vertical alignment in the Transitional Program of Instruction and the dual language programs.
  
- Recommendation #4: Provide on-site language acquisition coaches to: assure systematic exposure to English; to support teachers implementing the ESL curriculum; and to assist principals in teacher evaluations.
  - Instructional coaches with specialized ELL training continued on-site support for teachers to insure implementation of the standards-based curriculum for all learners.
  - Vertical articulation sessions were again conducted to assist with student transition from middle to high school programs.
  - ELL program administrators provided consultation services to school administrators for formative and summative teacher evaluations.
  
- Recommendation #5: Increase bilingual program stability by expanding programs from K-4 to K-6 at selected sites, including multi-grade classrooms as necessary.
  - Class sections were added at school sites so all schools with ELL programs have a full strand of classes kindergarten through sixth grades.
  
- Recommendation #6: Institutionalize transitional classrooms at upper elementary grades; establish benchmarks for the transition process; provide staff development for teachers designated as transitional teachers.
  - Local and state assessments along with teacher recommendations are considered when determining program placements. Written procedures which outline benchmark criteria are utilized for transitioning students.
  - Summer learning opportunities are offered to students to ensure maintenance of academic progress.
  
- Recommendation #7: Establish consistent exit criteria for English Language Learners across grade levels, which include multiple measures and follow-up.
  - Exit criteria are clearly established and implemented for all grade levels.
  
- Recommendation #8: Provide content area materials for sheltered content classes in middle and secondary schools.
  - Core instructional materials were purchased for all middle and high school ELL programs.
  - Supplemental instructional materials have been added to the available resources that teachers may use to increase academic progress.

➤ Recommendation #9: Establish educational newcomer centers: one at the elementary grades for new arrivals after second grade; one at the middle school level; and one at the secondary level.

- Newcomers' Classrooms for elementary students (multi-grade) were added in 2005-06 and continued in 2006-07 at Hanover Countryside and Clinton Elementary Schools.
- At the middle and high school levels, course sections were developed based on the five levels of proficiency included in the WIDA framework. New arrivals are typically placed in Level 1 courses.
- Student progress in the newcomer programs is monitored through local assessment data to determine program exit timelines.

➤ Recommendation #10: Establish a District Welcome Center which centralizes new ELL student registration and assessment and offers information and support for parents.

- Established in fall, 2005, the Family Welcome Center (4 South Gifford St.) has been fully operational and supports all schools with language assessments for students new to U-46. Summer services have been increased to serve parents year around.
- The Family Welcome Center offers classes for parents on how to expect high achievement levels from their children and strategies for communication with school level staff.

➤ Recommendation #11: Provide English as a Second Language (ESL) staff development for all teachers and staff development for elementary and secondary teachers who offer sheltered content teaching.

- Professional development is offered to teachers on curriculum standards, instructional strategies, and assessment protocols that will facilitate student learning.
- Teachers are offered many opportunities to attend national and state conferences for professional development engagement.

➤ Recommendation #12: Modify the current Student Information System so that key information on English Language Learners is stored and readily retrievable.

- The district continues to improve student record keeping and has expanded academic information maintained in TetraData, the data warehouse.

#### ◆ **Progress Made to Address the Special Education Recommendations**

In 2004-05, an external audit of Special Education was done by Dr. Rebecca Fries. Dr. Fries has continued to work as a consultant with U-46 staff to implement the recommendations of the audit and staff engagement with continuous improvement.

During 2007-08, Special Education supervisory staff initiated the following:

- Continued work with the Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Department to ensure validity of student, case manager, and school level data.
  - Codes to identify eligibility and program assignment, by building, was changed to reflect different levels of services (e.g. resource, self-contained, MLP, ED).

- Refined delivery of speech services to reduce need for contracted services.
  - Progress was made to hire certified Master’s level Speech and Language Pathologists.
  - Due to the national shortage of certified S/L pathologists, compensatory services plans were developed and implemented (e.g. after school services, Saturday sessions, and summer services were offered).
  - Planning is in process to provide Speech and Language compensatory services throughout the 2008-2009 school year should the shortage in pathologists exist again.
  
- Continued monitoring department systems and structures to increase revenues and decrease expenditures.
  - Residentially placed students are appropriately coded to optimize reimbursement claims.
  - Continued collaboration with the Finance Department established cost centers for the individual special education programs to maximize eligible reimbursements.
  - Continuous monitoring of FACTS forms to ensure accurate and timely completion of records for reimbursement claims.
  - Developed plans to provide a public therapeutic day school to better serve students within district and extend the continuum of services for students with significant emotional disabilities.
  - Expanded the In-School Suspension/Attendance Program to more high schools to increase attendance and reduce failure rates.
  - Increased student attendance in district programs by increasing intensity of interventions (e.g. super para initiative, realignment of building resources).
  
- Continued assignment of related services staff to schools based on student demographics.
- Aligned all special education high school course numbers to general education courses.
- Expanded collab courses at middle and high schools for the core academic areas.
- Continued professional development on utilization of MAP data for monitoring student progress.
- Conducted focus groups at all high schools to determine how student achievement levels could be increased.
- Offered Curriculum Roadmap sessions exclusively for teachers of Exceptional Needs and Modified Learning Programs.
- Included special education administrators in assistant principal meetings to facilitate communication on district initiatives.
- Implemented consistent procedures for determining out of district student placements.
- Maintained student referral data, by school, for related services needs.
- Revised program delivery at the elementary level to include more push-in services.
- Continued to refine Special Education Early Childhood program options at Independence.
- Assessed the program placement and services of Early Childhood students needing only Speech/Language services.

- Studied strategies for implementing Response to Intervention initiatives.
- Implemented Student Initial Referral Log to assist in the assessment of pre-case study process.
- Implemented U-46/internal programming for deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Relocated Center House program to Sherwood Avenue
- Provided professional development on specialized reading strategies for elementary students with severe disabilities to improve academic achievement
- Updated Special Education Procedural Manual to ensure compliance with IDEA, NCLB, and delivery of services to students.

## ◆ SUMMARY

In 2005-06, the Curriculum Roadmap professional growth was initiated with a long-term commitment to support the sessions and to develop additional resources as the model was expanded to more grade levels and content areas. During 2007-08, the model was refined as a response to feedback gathered from participating teachers and administrators. The delivery model has become “institutionalized” as a way to support teachers systemwide.

As programs and departments are audited, continuous improvement is fostered as recommendations are implemented and modified each year. Areas of focus this year were Gifted Education, Advanced Placement, and the High School Academy Programs. Ongoing were the refinements to programs as a result of past audits and the development and alignment of courses, mainly at the secondary level.

Schools continue to make academic progress as evidenced by 39 of the 40 elementary schools and five of the eight middle schools making AYP, even as the bar is raised each year. Looking ahead, the strategies of the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment pillar are to maintain the progress made in 2007-08 with an emphasis on improving progress of the secondary schools.

It is evident that U-46 kept focused on student improvement throughout 2007-08.

## II. HIGH-PRIORITY SCHOOLS

When the first District Improvement Plan was developed, the term “high-priority schools” was selected for one of the six pillars. The intent was to focus resources on those schools on the State Academic Warning List or in School Improvement status (schools not meeting state standards for two years in a row). District resources were dedicated to the schools qualifying, those having the most “at-risk factors” such as high numbers of students from low-income households and those needing additional resources to ensure academic success.

Over the years, the definition of “high-priority schools” has changed. Initially, all schools in need of targeted resources due to being on the State’s Academic Warning List were elementary schools. The U-46 schools now identified as the most at risk of not succeeding are the secondary schools.

With 39 of the 40 elementary schools and five of the eight middle schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2007, efforts continue to keep schools off the State Academic Warning List. Last year 43 of the 53 schools made AYP; this year 44 of the schools did. In May, 2008, four high schools and two middle schools submitted restructuring plans, and district staff worked closely with teachers and school staff to delineate the resources that would help support the targeted students.

### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Support continuous improvement of all schools/students with a focus on those most at risk of not meeting state standards.
- B. Strive to maintain District Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

### ◆ Key Activities This Year:

- Continue to clarify for all principals and leadership teams the resource allocation, criteria, and budget determination process.
- Prioritize the use of resources to assist High-priority Schools.
- Refine the alignment of the School Improvement Plans with the District Improvement Plan.
- Recognize academic growth and successes of schools.
- Continue to focus on academic progress made at each school in content areas and by subgroups.
- Continue to support a continuum of interventions to address the needs of all students with a special emphasis on subgroups, as identified by performance on state assessments.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ PROGRESS ON STATE ASSESSMENTS

Even though the standards for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2007 increased to 55 percent of students in each subgroup meeting or exceeding state standards, up from 47.5 percent, U-46 schools continued to make progress.

The number of U-46 elementary and middle schools making AYP in 2007 has increased by one, from 43 to 44. Of the 40 elementary schools, 39 made AYP – one less than in 2006. Oakhill Elementary did not make AYP due to performance by one subgroup. Ontarioville Elementary, which previously had to offer “choice” to students due to its AYP status, met state standards for two consecutive years and was no longer required to offer school choice. Five middle schools—Abbott, Eastview, Ellis, Kenyon Woods and Tefft—made AYP. This is up from three middle schools making AYP in 2006.

Interim Superintendent Mary Jayne Broncato and members of her staff visited the 43 schools that made AYP in 2007 to recognize them, presenting the schools with framed certificates and all staff members with lapel pins.

➤ LOCAL AND STATE RECOGNITION

Two of the key activities in the 2007-08 District Improvement Plan’s focus on High-priority Schools were to recognize academic growth and successes of schools and to continue to focus on academic progress made at each school in content areas and by subgroups.

Student achievement has been noted by both state and national organizations and reported locally:

- 228 Illinois State Scholars
- 91 Advanced Placement (AP) Scholars
- 3 National Merit Semi-Finalists

More English Language Learners in U-46 are attaining English proficiency according to a recently released report card from the Illinois State Board of Education.

- 94.6% of U-46 English learners are making progress in learning English, in excess of the state target of 85%.
- More than twice the required percent of ELL students are attaining English language proficiency. In 2006, 22.2 percent of U-46 students were proficient while the state standard is 10 percent.
- The district made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students on its 2007 State Report Card.

U-46 schools were recognized by the Illinois Honor Roll, a joint project of the Illinois State Board of Education and Northern Illinois University that acknowledges schools for making significant gains in academic achievement. The 2006 winners were announced late, just a few months before the 2007 winners were announced.

33 U-46 schools were recognized in 2006:

- 11 schools have been designated “Spotlight Schools” and also are recognized with Academic Improvement Awards
- 18 schools received Academic Improvement Awards
- 4 elementary schools have been designated as “Spotlight Schools.”

32 U-46 schools were recognized in 2007:

- 6 schools have been designated “Spotlight Schools” and also are recognized with Academic Improvement Awards
- 12 schools received Academic Improvement Awards
- 14 elementary schools have been designated as “Spotlight Schools.”

➤ INCREASED RESOURCES AND LOWER CLASS SIZES

A top priority of the district for the past few years has been to continue to focus financial resources and staffing on the students and schools most in need of the support. The practice of aligning resources with teaching and learning continued in 2007-08. Fourteen elementary schools benefit from Federal (Title I) funds, district funds, staffing at lower student-teacher ratios, and additional interventions. For a few years, Tier II funds have been allocated to other elementary schools not qualifying for Title I but having needs to support significant numbers of at-risk students. Tier II funds also are provided to all middle and high schools.

The district maintained the staffing ratios established two years ago for Title I and Tier II. The standard allocation for Grades K-2 was lowered from 30:1 to 28:1.

Title I	25:1 at Grades Kindergarten-2 28:1 at Grades 3-6
Tier II	25:1 at Grades Kindergarten-2 30:1 at Grades 3-6
Standard	<u>28:1</u> at Grades Kindergarten-2 30:1 at Grades 3-6

➤ RESTRUCTURING PLANS SUPPORT FOR SIX SCHOOLS

Even though U-46 secondary schools do not receive any federal Title I money, Illinois law requires the school district to develop a restructuring plan which must be approved by the Board of Education. U-46 has two middle schools and four high schools that are required to have plans related to restructuring: Larsen and Kimball Middle Schools; Bartlett, Elgin, Larkin, and Streamwood High Schools.

Prior to writing and submitting the plans, district administrators conducted all-day “listening visits” at each of the schools, in order to provide the opportunity for school staff to learn more about the requirements and options of restructuring. Student focus groups also were held. There is an intense focus on instruction in the restructuring plans; all U-46 schools built their plans around the same four goals:

- To provide instruction that ensures implementation of a common, standards-based, rigorous and relevant curriculum to meet the diverse needs of all students.
- To establish interventions for both students at risk of academic failure as well as gifted students.
- To provide a plan to respond to social and emotional needs of students, including transition to high school for freshmen.
- To provide all staff members with information regarding how to use data to improve instruction and student achievement.

#### ➤ INCREASED SUPPORT FOR STUDENT INTERVENTIONS

The implementation of the tiered allocation process (Title I, Tier II) has provided support for the schools’ SIP initiatives and student interventions throughout the district. Title I and Tier II funding supports a variety of interventions for students such as after-school reading interventions, additional small group support especially focused on reading and math, and additional motivational and instructional materials.

For the past three years, summer intervention programs have been expanded (doubled) to serve more students and those needing targeted interventions, based on specific data provided by the Assessment Office. The district continues to support summer programs, additional staff at high schools to expand support for math and science (Algebra 1.5 and Biology 1.5).

#### ◆ SUMMARY

The main focus of this pillar is to support schools and students to ensure that “Academic Success for All” means all. The requirements and consequences of the No Child Left Behind legislation have kept the spotlight on student performance as demonstrated by state assessment results. Making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a priority for schools and the district.

During the first few years of NCLB testing, U-46 schools were not successful, with only 24 elementary schools making AYP and many “in the pipeline” for Corrective Action. The “high-priority schools” were the elementary schools needing immediate attention, even if the district’s resources were very limited. With district resources such as Tetradata, MAP tests, and an Assessment Office, educators are able to examine the performance of groups of students and even individual students in order to best determine student needs.

This year, 44 schools made AYP; school and district staff took time to recognize the progress made this year and over time. Today, the “high-priority schools” are secondary schools with two middle and four high schools requiring “restructuring plans.” Principals and teachers continue to identify instructional practices and interventions that will help their students be successful. The district continues to provide resources to address the needs of students most in need.

### **III. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

For the past few years, the activities of Pillar III. of the District Improvement Plan have focused on moving the district from crisis management to establishing policies and procedures to ensure the long-term stability of U-46's financial condition. As a result, the district has recovered from the financial crisis of 2002-03 and has received a stronger rating by Moody's Investors Service. U-46 was even highlighted in a recent Moody's publication.

With an emphasis on aligning the work of the District Improvement Plan with the budgeting and staffing processes, district staff continues to prioritize resources to ensure that the support is targeted to the classroom to support teaching and learning.

In addition, the Operations Departments and others involved in the Quality Management System development spent much of the year preparing for an external review which will determine the district's becoming ISO 9001 certified. {ISO stands for International Organization for Standardization, an internationally recognized organization which identifies the best practices regarding effectiveness and efficiency.}

Another priority this year related to continuous improvement was the establishment of a Compensation and Benefits Compliance Office which developed a stronger link between the Financial Services and Human Resources Department in monitoring efficiencies.

#### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Maintain an annual balanced budget in the operational funds while continuing the focus on long-term stability.
- B. Continue to identify and align district resources for schools to support student learning.
- C. Enhance the district's financial stability by expanding the continuous quality Improvement process.

#### ◆ Key Activities This Year

- Continue to increase our capacity for long-term planning and forecasting.
- Continue to refine and articulate the annual planning cycle.
- Continue to enhance internal controls.
- Begin the analysis of Phase II of the 20-year Life Safety Plan.
- Update the strategy for balancing across all funds.
- Expand the use of Age and Obsolescence (A&O) Plans to forecast future capital need.
- Continue to monitor the use of resources to ensure support of the District Improvement Plan.
- Continue the alignment of district processes for staffing and funding.
- Implement communication strategies to build a greater understanding of the budgeting and allocation process among internal stakeholders.

*Key Activities Cont'd.*

- Formalize and articulate the long-term, external audit process/cycle to foster continuous improvement.
- Continue to benchmark U-46 operations with comparable school districts.
- Expand the continuous quality improvement process to the area of contract pay and benefits compliance.
- Continue to develop a plan/process for internal auditing (ISO 9001) for compliance to procedures.
- Move forward on the ISO 9001 certification process.
- Implement a Communication Plan for ISO 9001.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ IMPROVED FINANCIAL CONDITION RESULTS IN UPGRADE BY MOODY'S

In spring, 2007, Moody's Investors Service upgraded U-46's financial rating of A3 from "stable to positive." By December, Moody's had changed the rating from A3 to A2.

According to the Moody's opinion, the A2 rating and stable outlook reflect U-46's "continued progress in rebuilding reserves; large and rapidly growing tax base with favorable socioeconomic indicators; and above average amount of moderately retired debt. The stable outlook reflects our expectation that the district's demonstrated ability to restore structural balance through expenditure cuts and careful financial management should allow the district to maintain its improved financial operations."

In May, U-46 was highlighted in a publication, *Moody's Global U.S. Public Finance*, which analyzed the financial condition of Illinois school districts and noted that U-46's overall financial trend is "particularly impressive given district officials' success in eliminating nearly \$39 million from the deficit balance over the last four fiscal years without an operating rate increase."

➤ BALANCED BUDGET

For the fifth year in a row, a balanced budget was presented to the Board of Education, first in the summer, following by a series of budget hearings, then in September for final approval. The budget reflects the priorities of the district which are concurrently developed as part of the District Improvement Plan's work plan activities. Work continued on balancing across all funds.

➤ ANNUAL PLANNING CYCLE INSTITUTIONALIZED

Three years ago, the Annual Planning Cycle was created and shared by the Superintendent's Staff to articulate the key leadership activities of the Board of Education and administration. The document has helped better communicate deadlines; key annual activities; connections between planning activities of schools, administration, and the Board; and other "systemic" processes and procedures.

The Annual Cycle and annual planning meetings have been documented in monthly District Improvement Plan updates to the Board, the web site, on the district calendar, and through other venues. The alignment process and decision-making can be done objectively with more data being provided each year. There is now a greater understanding that there is an annual process being used in order to strengthen the school district's stability and move from crisis management to the establishment of long-term systemic improvements.

In addition, the amount of staff time spent from November-February in Planning Meetings for staffing and preliminary budgeting for 2008-09 took one-third of the time it took three years ago before the process was refined.

➤ COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS COMPLIANCE OFFICE ESTABLISHED

The Compensation and Benefits Compliance Office was identified in the 2007-08 District Improvement Plan Work Plan as a priority and an important link between the Financial Services and Human Resources Departments. A compliance analyst was hired and charged with monitoring the payroll processes. Activities included refining the employee data, assessing how quickly new employees were entered into the system, and reporting back to department supervisors on any inconsistencies that could be improved. Having the office has enhanced the efficiency among the various procedures in Financial Services and Human Resources and improved customer service to the U-46 employees.

➤ MORE AUDITS DONE / LONG-RANGE AUDIT CYCLE ESTABLISHED

Since 2004-05 the practice of using external audits and reviews of programs and departments has been continued in order to foster continuous improvement across the organization. This year's audits activities include staff responses to a Gifted Education audit and Academy Program review. During 2007-08, an audit of Human Resources was done with a report and staff response forthcoming.

After four years of audits, staff reports, and implemented recommendations, administration has created a long-term plan for audits. Some departments and programs will be audited every five years; others have been identified as needing an internal review to assess progress in specific areas.

➤ CAPITAL PLANNING STUDY INITIATED

For the past few years, district leaders have focused on the need to create and implement long-range plans and strategies to ensure the financial stability of the school district for years to come. Having adequate facilities in the future are top priorities that rely on the district being able to accurately predict future enrollment and potential changes in instructional needs.

In December, district administrators presented a recommendation to the Board to complete a facilities study. The Board approved moving ahead with the study, agreeing with the recommendation that a long-range plan is needed to address the current and future needs of the district. Following the process to identify the consultant/firm to do the study, a recommendation was made in April: Magellan, DMJM, H&N and DeJong. The Board authorized district staff to proceed with securing the firm to do the study which is expected to be completed by December, 2008.

➤ ISO 9001 CERTIFICATION

In March, 2006, the Board heard a presentation from staff on “Creating a High Performance Operation” which captured the activities being done by the Operations, Business, and Human Resources Departments. The department leaders began documenting their processes and procedures and working with a consultant to prepare for seeking ISO 9001 certification.

For the past two years, work has continued on the documentation and preparation for the certification; however, many benefits of the work already have resulted. While improved customer service is key, the documentation of processes leads to building capacity. Today there is better alignment as some departments have been reorganized and positions established: assistant directors for both Information Services and Human Resources Departments; a new position in the Assessment Office; two specialists in Human Resources; and one specialist in Payroll.

This year, an internal auditing team prepared staff to be ready for an external review. In April, three auditors visited U-46 for a week and provided feedback to staff. An announcement of the final results of their visit—which could be certification—is expected in June.

➤ INCREASED UNDERSTANDING OF BUDGETING PROCESS

One of the strategies in the District Improvement Plan this year was to work with principals and other administrators in charge of budgets to increase their understanding of the annual budgeting process and resource allocation procedures. The process initiated in 2004-05 and refined in 2005-06 and 2006-07 laid the groundwork for the development of a systemic process to align building budgets and other resources to initiatives in the School Improvement Plans. The process was initiated through the annual budget-building cycle and is evolving into a specific and articulated process for principals to use in determining their resources. Examples of allocations identified for each school: building budget; Title I, Tier I, Tier II, and standard allocations for schools; entitlement grants (I, III, IV) for each; and professional growth (administrative and building allocations).

This spring, principals, department heads, and other administrators with budget responsibilities were invited to submit budget requests to their supervisors in order to process the requests more as an organization and with consistency. The goal is to provide more information and opportunities for communication across the district while sequential steps are detailed in the process.

In addition, Financial Services staff worked with the administrators of the Early Learners, Special Education and Transportation Departments in a pilot of modified zero-based budgeting. Plans are to increase, over time, the number of departments and programs using the approach to developing the annual budget and/or proposing new projects.

➤ **MAINTENANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE / FACILITIES**

The long-range planning of facilities maintenance has yielded benefits. Now in Phase II of the 20-year Life Safety Plan, the district is investing millions of dollars each year and over time from both the Tort and Life Safety Funds. During the past two summers, nearly \$35 million worth of projects have been completed on fifty buildings, and were supported mainly by Qualified Zone Academy Bonds and Life Safety Funds.

◆ **SUMMARY**

Among the major accomplishments of 2007-08 is the district's improved financial condition. However, the most significant accomplishment is having many processes and procedures in place and "institutionalized" in order to maintain the long-term financial health and stability of the district.

Administrators have worked hard to articulate the lessons learned and best practices followed since 2004: to reject "quick fixes" and trends; to make the best decision even if it's not popular and/or difficult to implement; to become more selective and raise standards; and to remain persistent in problem-solving. The steadfast approach to prioritizing limited resources and targeting them for the classroom has paid off in many ways—academically and financially.

Another accomplishment as a result of both long-range planning and the work done with the Quality Management System/ISO preparation is the reorganization of staff in some departments. An "opportunity for improvement" noted in past Organizational Assessments done by the Stupski Foundation was the need to ensure sustainability—departments having ample staff positions for back-up. Many of those "gaps" have been addressed.

As FY'08 comes to a close, there has been a collective sigh of relief that the district is "back in the black" and financially healthy. However, more significant are the numerous systemic improvements made to keep it that way.

## **IV. LEADERSHIP**

U-46 continues to encourage and support employees to better align their daily work with the priorities of the District Improvement Plan, their School Improvement Plans, and department plans. The activities in Pillar IV. support leadership development and focus on hiring and supporting principals, other administrators, teachers, and others in positions of leadership.

The district's top priority is improving student achievement so, for educators, the centerpiece of professional growth is the U-46 Curriculum Roadmap, as principals and teachers implement effective strategies, assessments, and programs related to teaching and learning. For leaders in departments other than instructional areas, trainings are provided to meet the specific needs of the employees and, in some cases, to comply with state mandates and requirements.

This year, in addition to continuing the activities related to hiring and retaining highly-qualified staff, coaching, and mentoring, the Human Resources Department introduced staff development on cultural competencies for district leaders, teachers, and support staff—sessions designed to build an understanding and foster an appreciation of the unique needs of the district's diverse student population.

### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Continue the alignment of staff development with the district's major initiatives.
- B. Provide ongoing staff development to ensure leadership focused on student achievement.
- C. Expand staff development that is focused on understanding and responding to the unique academic needs of each NCLB subgroup.
- D. Continue to recruit and retain highly-qualified staff.

### ◆ Key Activities This Year:

- Ensure that all administrators' goals support the District Improvement Plan.
- Utilize GNOMON WEB to assist administrators in instructional areas in linking their goals, the Department/School Improvement Plans, and the District Improvement Plans.
- Continue to align all coaching and mentoring programs.
- Continue to monitor the activities of the Leadership Alignment Plan to ensure accountability.
- Implement a staff development plan for all employee groups.
- Utilize the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) trainers and CEC coaches to build the leadership capacity of the district.

*Key Activities Cont'd.*

- Develop a formal structure to provide consistency among the Principals' Professional Learning Communities (PPLC's).
- Continue to work in partnership with the Stupski Foundation, Gates Foundation, the Kane County Regional Office of Education, and other funders/partners to expand opportunities for leaders.
- Develop and initiate a plan for training that focuses on cultural competencies.
- Expand staff development for all administrators on the use of data to drive instruction.
- Provide training for leaders on proven, effective instructional strategies for specific cultural/ethnic (NCLB) subgroups.
- Continue to implement the comprehensive recruitment and staffing plan.
- Continue to enhance university partnerships to recruit prospective staff and to provide support for employees.
- Expand opportunities for leadership, staff development, and special projects for aspiring administrators and teacher leaders.
- Develop an induction plan to meet the needs of new employees transitioning from the private sector / other careers.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ CHANGE IN DISTRICT LEADERSHIP – FOCUS ON STUDENTS MAINTAINED

At the September 24 Board of Education meeting, Board President Ken Kaczynski announced the selection of Dr. Mary Jayne Broncato as Interim Superintendent as Dr. Connie Neale took a medical leave. Dr. Broncato was well-known to many U-46 staff through her work for four years with the Stupski Foundation. She had been a member of the Curriculum and Instruction project team, assisting in the implementation of the Curriculum Roadmap and other initiatives related to the District Improvement Plan. Dr. Neale retired in February.

With Dr. Broncato's leadership throughout the 2007-08 school year, the focus on student achievement was maintained. The Board of Education members clarified that their selection of Dr. Broncato was based on her performance in U-46 and experience as a Superintendent of a large urban school district as well as her tenure with the Illinois State Board of Education. During the school year, Dr. Broncato communicated directly with all employees; encouraged two-way communication with stakeholders, and especially enjoyed interacting with students and the Student Advisory Council. At the completion of her tenure, she was recognized at the end-of-the-year administrators' meeting, by the Board and by community members for her service to U-46 in a period of transition.

➤ LEADERSHIP DAYS SUPPORT ADMINISTRATORS IN INSTRUCTIONAL AREAS

This year, five Leadership Days were scheduled for principals and other administrators in instructional areas, providing time for staff development focused on instructional leadership. Portions of the days were reserved for meetings of groups (i.e. elementary principals) or were dedicated to topics related to district programs or to federal and state mandates. Throughout the year, presenters included staff from the Kane County Regional Office of Education, the Illinois State Board of Education, and national experts consulting with U-46.

➤ STAFF DEVELOPMENT ON CULTURAL COMPETENCIES INITIATED

On September 28, U-46 administrators in instructional areas and other district leaders participated in the first of many sessions facilitated by Dr. J. Q. Adams. The professional growth is related to one of the goals of the District Improvement Plan: “Expand staff development that is focused on understanding and responding to the unique academic needs of each NCLB subgroup.” The NCLB’s identification of subgroups includes ethnic groups (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Multi-racial) as well as English Language Learners, Special Education students, and children from economically-disadvantaged households.

While many administrators and teachers had participated in staff development related to meeting the needs of all students, the goal of providing this staff development focused on NCLB subgroups is to support our staff through a districtwide approach.

The main objectives in providing the sessions are to: increase the understanding of unique learning needs for specific groups of students, continue to enhance the cultural competencies of staff in promoting equity, expand opportunities for staff development at all levels to include a focus on addressing the needs of all students, and assist staff in identifying instructional strategies in the development of School Improvement Plans.

On October 26, Dr. Adams and his associate, Dr. Jim LaPrad, returned to U-46 to continue their work with U-46 administrators and other district leaders. The focus of the second session was on “Deconstructing Race” and provided the opportunity for administrators to share their perceptions in defining race. The team returned to U-46 on February 1 for the Institute Day. On February 29, the Kane County Countywide Institute Day provided another opportunity for Dr. Adams to present. The participants included teachers and members of some classified employee groups from U-46 and other school districts, as the session was open to all in Kane County school districts.

Working with Dr. Adams and his colleagues, the district will continue to encourage an open and ongoing dialogue among educators to help all of us better understand the learning needs and differences among the many cultures, faiths, and races of students in U-46.

➤ **LEADERS SUPPORTED BY COACHING AND MENTORING**

For the past few years, many activities have been initiated to support leaders and specifically principals. The Principals' Professional Learning Communities (PPLC's) continue to provide ongoing support among the principals. New principals are provided mentors and coaches by the Kane County Regional Office of Education and by the district. Programs such as the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) through the Regional Office of Education have supported some principals.

The Leadership Alignment Plan ensures that all administrators' individual goals are based on instructional leadership, demonstration of support for both the District Improvement Plan and the School Improvement Plan, and an overall commitment to students. Administrative staff development is centered on increasing accountability and demonstrating an understanding of data to drive instruction.

➤ **STRATEGIC METHODS USED FOR TEACHER RECRUITMENT**

The District Improvement Plan annually identifies the need to "Continue to recruit and retain highly-qualified staff." U-46 has a history of working collaboratively with universities throughout the country to meet the unique needs of a large school district offering comprehensive and unique programs. Partnerships with private and public Illinois universities have been institutionalized among many of the U-46 elementary, middle, and high schools. In addition, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Plan outlines strategies to conduct timely visits to college campuses to recruit teachers in "high needs" areas.

Lalo Ponce, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services and Tiffiny Bolden, Coordinator of Staffing, Credentials, and Recruitment, participated in many recruitment trips and were frequently joined by other administrators. In addition, teacher-leaders or "aspiring administrators" assisted at job fairs and with university visits. This year, staff attended conferences, multicultural fairs, minority recruitment events, Colleges of Educations with specific and targeted areas (i.e. Speech Language Therapy; Occupational Therapists; Bilingual Education).

District efforts were focused on minority recruitment and on acquiring teachers for English Language Learners. U-46 administrators and teacher-leaders have been to four historically black colleges (Howard University, Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College and Spelman College) for recruitment and to two universities in Texas with large ELL programs. In April, the ELL director visited Spain, an effort supported by the Spanish government.

➤ **SUPPORT FOR TEACHER MENTORING PROGRAM INCREASED**

Each year the district hires more than 250 new teachers, many entering the profession and qualifying for the two-year Teacher Mentoring Program which has supported new teachers for the past nine years. For the past six years, a teacher-leader has facilitated the program. In 2006-07, two positions were added to address the need to mentor teachers of Special Education and English Language Learners. This spring, another position was approved and posted for a second facilitator to begin in 2008-09.

➤ **INTERCONNECT FORUMS CONTINUE**

U-46's "Interconnect Forum" is a way to bring all university partners together with U-46 staff. Each year, at least three forums are held to provide the opportunity for school, district, and university staff to meet. Universities participating include Judson University, National Louis University, Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, Roosevelt University, Aurora University, Western Illinois University, and Wheaton College. In November and February, the Interconnect meetings were hosted by National Louis University in Elgin. In April, the Interconnect was hosted by Judson University and included a presentation by staff of Elgin Community College on college readiness.

◆ **SUMMARY**

The majority of the activities under the Leadership Pillar relate to hiring, supporting, and retaining highly-qualified educators and instructional leaders. In addition to the professional growth provided for principals through the Curriculum Roadmap sessions, opportunities for leadership development are provided throughout the year. Mentoring and coaching of new principals provide additional support. For the district leaders not directly involved in the classroom (i.e. all Operations Departments, Business Services, Human Resources, and Communication Departments), the work this year has involved preparing for ISO 9001 certification. They coordinated efforts to document department processes and procedures in order to better serve colleagues at schools and to support the district's goal "Academic Success for All."

This year, a district priority was to introduce staff development focused on increasing employees' understanding and response to the unique academic needs of each NCLB subgroup. As more student assessment data is available to administrators and teachers to help them determine the specific needs of each student, a districtwide approach and support are needed to help educators identify and meet the needs of students not being successful.

## V. DATA MANAGEMENT

Each year, the school district makes progress in becoming a “standards-driven, assessment-based culture,” one of the long-range goals set in 2002-03 when the district began working in partnership with the Stupski Foundation. A priority is to ensure that student assessment data is accessible to schools.

In order for data to be useful, teachers must have access to technology—hardware, software, and online resources—and to reliable student information. For the past three years, the use of the Measure of Student Performance (MAP) test has increased across the district and has been helpful to teachers in determining how well students are mastering skills and understanding concepts. In addition to the district’s providing technology, the Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Department has expanded and is supporting educators in a variety of ways in order to increase the “data expertise” of the district. The Assessment Office assists staff with “Data Dialogues.” These conversations provide opportunities for administrators and teachers to analyze data, ask questions, discuss their ideas, and apply what they’ve learned. Each school has a teacher identified as a “data interpreter” who can assist other teachers in accessing and understanding test results, identifying student needs, and helping modify instruction.

With support from Educational Services Center staff, teachers are able to interpret data, modify instruction, and select appropriate interventions to support their students.

### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Utilize the data expertise of district and school staff to positively impact student achievement.
- B. Align all district technology—hardware, software, and training—to make data accessible and meaningful.

### ◆ Key Activities This Year:

- Initiate benchmark/interim assessments that correspond to the Curriculum Roadmap implementation.
- Implement the Pre-K - Grade 2 Early Literacy assessment system for use districtwide.
- Continue to host Data Dialogues and to support Data Interpreters at all sites.
- Collect and analyze data for benchmarking, improving student achievement, and long-range planning.
- Develop a plan to better utilize data across the school system.
- Align and integrate other district data systems with the data warehouse (i.e. online attendance system).
- Enhance the district’s capacity to collect, access, and interpret meaningful data.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ USE OF TECHNOLOGY INCREASED

This year, there was an increase in the opportunities for staff, students, and parents to access technology for communication and convenience. Parents could utilize technology for online registration. They could order student lunches and monitor the selections online via the district web site. The ConnectED system was very popular with staff and families.

As students of all ages are exposed to the Internet, safety and prevention sessions were provided by U-46 partners such as the Kane County Regional Office of Education and the Gail Borden Public Library staff which received a grant to work with middle schools.

The Intranet is expanding and can be accessed by employees at work and at home via the U-46 homepage. Several departments have improved services to colleagues by utilizing the Intranet to share news and information. Among the most developed sections are District Safety, which provides internal processes and procedures that are more appropriate for district staff than the public to access, and Plant Operations.

One of the most popular and useful sites for teachers is the Assessment web site. The "Assessment in the Service of Student Learning" site identifies the purpose: to guide educators in becoming wiser decision-makers. Created and maintained by the Assessment Office staff, the site is the "go to" site for teachers. On the home page, administrators and teachers can find the Student Assessment Calendar for 2007-08 as well as the schedules for Data Dialogues, Meetings and Trainings related to data and assessment.

➤ PRE-K – GRADE 2 ASSESSMENTS IMPLEMENTED

In January, representatives of the Pre-K - Grade 2 Assessment Task Force presented to the Board of Education on their work. Assembled in September, 2006, the group's task was to identify appropriately aligned literacy assessments for Grades PreK-2 and recommend a comprehensive, districtwide literacy assessment program. Their recommendations included minimizing the testing of the youngest students and using assessments focused on literacy which will help teachers identify how students learn as well as helping predict scores for the third grade Illinois Standard Achievement Tests. The task force also presented a timeline that included a Phase I for spring, 2008.

In addition, support for principals, teachers, reading coaches, and others working with early learners is being provided on the district's Intranet at the Assessment web site. Ongoing support from the Assessment Office and task force members will continue during the implementation.

➤ SUPPORT FOR INTERPRETING DATA AND SELECTING INTERVENTIONS

For the past four years a district goal is to assist staff in becoming “wiser decision-makers” with regard to guiding instruction, selecting appropriate student interventions, and allocating resources. One of the Areas of Work in this year’s District Improvement Plan is to utilize the data expertise of district and school staff to positively impact student achievement—to enhance the use of data “deeper” into the school system.

Staff members in the Assessment, Research and Evaluation Office and other Educational Services Center (ESC) staff worked closely with school principals, School Improvement teams, and teachers to better connect student assessment information with ongoing efforts to improve instruction.

This year, discussions of data have been expanded in the district by including a data analysis component in all the Curriculum Roadmap professional development sessions, so now the focus is on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In addition the school’s Data Interpreter attends data sessions with his/her principal.

In May, members of the Assessment Department began the first round of Data Dialogues with elementary and middle school staff to prepare for 2008-09. Principals and their schools’ “data interpreters” participated in the dialogues led by district staff. Data interpreters are teachers working with their colleagues to access and interpret student performance data. The sessions provide the opportunity for school staff to review the students’ Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test data, to examine the student interventions used, and to determine the success of the interventions. Participants are asked to look backward—to identify “what worked” with the identified students and to better target specific interventions for each student.

➤ DEVELOPMENT OF BENCHMARK ASSESSMENTS CONTINUES

The MAP tests have been reliable measures of student performance and, last year, were expanded to all schools. The development of local assessments is done in conjunction with curriculum alignment of courses. Students are assessed on the skills and content areas which correspond to the Curriculum Roadmap.

In spring, 2006, a new middle school math textbook was adopted. Pacing guides for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade are aligned to the standards. Last year, the math teachers introduced quarterly benchmark assessments for middle school students. The tests help guide teachers’ instruction as well as prepare students for the state assessments in math.

High school teachers have been working on aligning their courses with the standards and new graduation requirements as well as aligning curriculum across the district before creating the common assessments. In 2007-08, some U.S. History teachers volunteered to pilot assessments first semester as work continues on alignment. Once the assessments are developed and piloted, it is a multi-year process for full implementation.

## ◆ SUMMARY

Just a few years ago, the district could provide very little student data to schools—and seldom in a timely fashion. There was no data warehouse, no Assessment Office, no MAP tests or local assessments, and no systemwide approach to disseminating or interpreting relevant student data.

Today, principals and teachers are supported by the Tetradata warehouse; a web site specifically designed for educators to access data; an Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Office with a staff of five to support schools; financial support for each school to have at least one data interpreter on site; opportunities to share and learn (i.e. Data Dialogues); a coordinated effort to align hardware, software, and training; and districtwide processes to build capacity and procedures to streamline teachers' access to information.

The team of reviewers doing the Organizational Assessment in May noted that U-46 is “data rich” and that data is “available in a timely manner and in useable formats.” The next steps are to prioritize which data is the most significant to the organization and schools and to continue to involve more staff in working with the data.

## VI. PUBLIC TRUST & SUPPORT

U-46 board and staff members continue to identify ways to enhance communication in order to build an understanding of the district's chief priority – “Academic Success for All.”

Opportunities for students are increased when both internal and external stakeholders are engaged in the activities related to the District Improvement Plan. There is a greater awareness of the annual plan, as the strategies and progress are shared with numerous advisory councils, community members, staff and parents.

Some of the activities in Pillar VI. include the work of the Communications Department which uses a variety of strategies and venues to engage stakeholders. This year, parents/guardians were a target audience for new communication venues such as a rapid notification system (ConnectED), a revamped employee newsletter and the *Home Pages* newsletter designed to provide information on topics of interest to parents/guardians such as safety and academic progress of schools.

One of the most successful communication tools is the U-46 web site. In 2007 (January-December), the district web site had 400,000 unique visitors with 1,270,000 visits to the web site(s) and 7,493,138 pages viewed. In addition to providing information, the web site has become an instructional tool for teachers accessing the Curriculum Roadmap and supplementary resources related to the Roadmap.

### ◆ Areas of Work:

- A. Continue to engage stakeholders in the 2007-08 District Improvement Plan goals, strategies, and activities.
- B. Foster an understanding of the challenges and accomplishments related to No Child Left Behind.
- C. Continue the enhancement of the district web site.

### ◆ Key Activities This Year:

- Engage stakeholders to increase two-way communication and gather feedback to develop benchmarks.
- Create and implement a communication plan for the 2007-08 District Improvement Plan and district priorities.
- Utilize the resources of the Communications Department to communicate key messages among internal staff (i.e. Instructional Council and Special Education Communication Committee).
- Continue the use of school visits for the purpose of recognizing the work being done and gathering feedback related to the district priorities.
- Launch the school district educational foundation.

*Key Activities Cont'd.*

- Implement the use of data collected for district/student profile to foster a greater understanding of student performance/needs and to provide longitudinal data for decision-making.
- Enhance the coordination of U-46 and the eleven municipalities regarding school safety procedures in order to maintain a safe environment for all students.
- Develop a communication plan for external stakeholders to explain the expectations of No Child Left Behind and clarify the incremental progress made by schools.
- Enhance internal communication venues to identify the progress made (NCLB).
- Support the use of the Intranet as a key employee resource.
- Continue to expand the use of the web site(s) to communicate information related to teaching and learning (i.e. student and school information; Curriculum Roadmap).
- Communicate the operational quality standards and ISO 9001 procedures via the web site and Intranet.

◆ Some Accomplishments:

➤ COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT REALIGNED

In July, 2007, Tony Sanders was named Chief Communications Officer, replacing Kris Houser whose family moved out of state. In January, Karen Geddeis, Manager of Communications Support, left U-46 to become the CCO of another school district. With the personnel changes, Mr. Sanders worked with staff to reorganize their department. Lynne Huske was named Manager of Communications while retaining her role as web coordinator. Terry Ryan, also Manager of Communications Support, supervises Graphic Services. The department also includes Karla Guzman, Hispanic Outreach Coordinator, and Ken Huske, Program Director of the district's radio station (WEPS).

➤ RAPID NOTIFICATION SYSTEM POPULAR WITH PARENTS

Today, with the capabilities of electronic communication via web sites and emails, it is worth noting that the most effective—and appreciated—venue this year has been the most direct via a phone call. The district acquired the ConnectED rapid notification system last summer and, by the second day of school, had used it to let parents/guardians know that their children were safe at school during a severe storm which went through the area at dismissal time. Throughout the year, principals were able to learn more about ConnectED as they crafted messages for the phone calls about school activities and, in some cases, alerted parents to a crisis situation. Sometimes parents received calls just to let them know of a potential concern (i.e. communicable disease case) and to let them know what the school/district was doing about it. The district also used the system for Snow Day information to staff and students and for an introductory phone call from Dr. José Torres. During 2007-08, a total of 828,000 calls were made.

➤ NEW COMMUNICATION VENUES TO TARGET AUDIENCES

In addition to the new ConnectED system to better inform parents and staff, the Communications Department revamped the employee newsletter, formerly *The Notebook* and now *The Insider*. The newsletter includes features such as the opportunity for staff to identify colleagues for “Unsung Heroes.” Another new publication is *Home Pages*, a newsletter specifically for parents/guardians and including articles of interest specific to parents and those more directly involved with schools on a daily basis.

➤ FOCUS ON THE “GOOD NEWS”

Stakeholders often express their desire to hear more “good news” about U-46—internally and externally. Dr. Broncato and Tony Sanders, Chief Communications Officer, had meetings with local reporters and editors to continue to build positive relationships with the media. In addition, Dr. Broncato periodically sent emails to all staff to share key messages. More news release and advisories on student recognitions at the local and state level were distributed this year.

➤ DISTRICTWIDE APPROACH TO SAFETY

John Heiderscheidt, the district’s first Safety Coordinator, was hired two years ago to lead efforts to provide a systemwide approach to school safety. He has reported progress in the following:

- Comprehensive Safety and Crisis Response Plan – A safety and crisis response plan was developed to meet national incident response plan standards (National Incident Management Services or NIMS). The plan provides for common language with emergency responders, shares resources, and provides a more understandable plan for employees who move to different sites in the district through their career. The plan focuses on prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Staff development – There has been an increase in drills and training for lockdown and crisis management at the schools throughout the district. A new weapons check procedure was introduced at all high schools.
- Crisis communications – Staff members have developed plans for internal and external emergency communications. The emergency phone system has been upgraded at each school. ConnectED, the rapid notification system, has been very useful in communicating with parents/guardians.

Other activities include the coordination of the School Safety Advisory Task Force, all emergency responders serving U-46; a building security policy to control access to schools before, during, and after school; and “proactive crime prevention” which includes the tracking of data/incidents for the purpose of prevention.

Mr. Heiderscheidt has worked closely with Board, Superintendent’s Staff, and the Chief Communications Officer in handling district and school crises and collaborates with the community to prevent incidents and protect staff and students.

➤ SUPERINTENDENT’S SEARCH INVOLVES COMMUNITY

The U-46 Board of Education sought community input in its search for a new superintendent. On January 8, 9, and 10, members of the community and employees were invited to provide input to PROACT, the firm hired by the Board of Education to lead the search for a new superintendent. Nine public forums were held, three each evening at locations across the district to provide accessibility. During the day, meetings were scheduled for stakeholders; representatives from Chambers of Commerce, community groups, legislators, advisory groups, students and district employees were invited to attend the other sessions.

A special Board of Education meeting was held on February 19 for the purpose of hearing a report from PROACT, the consulting firm conducting the search for a new superintendent. The representatives of the firm presented findings gathered from 55 group sessions, nine community forums and a survey (online and paper) conducted by the firm. PROACT representatives reported that 375 people were included in meetings and 1,320 responded to the survey. Of those submitting the survey, 42% were parents, grandparents, or guardians of U-46 students; 36% were employees of the district; 16% were members of the communities served by the school district, including residents active in a number of community-based organizations and businesses; and 6% were students.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information about the greatest perceived strengths of U-46, the most pressing perceived concerns, issues that most need to be addressed by the new superintendent, strategies for supporting the Board in hiring the best superintendent, suggested questions for the candidates, and the opportunity for additional comments.

In May, Dr. José Torres was identified as the top candidate for the position; he signed a contract at the June 3 Board of Education meeting and will join U-46 on July 1.

➤ ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

One of the goals of the District Improvement Plan is to “launch” an educational foundation. For the past two years, staff has researched educational foundations and worked with a group of volunteers to establish the foundation. Organizational meetings have been held, officers have been elected, committees have been identified, and clear guidelines and procedures have been approved. The foundation board members will soon solicit donations to support districtwide projects that enhance opportunities for students.

➤ INTRANET SERVES EMPLOYEES

The U-46 Intranet expanded this year to include more pertinent information for employees. During negotiations between the Elgin Teachers Association and the district, the proposed teacher appraisal system document was posted on the Intranet for staff accessibility; a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s) feature was also posted. The Intranet was also used to “transition” all employees to a new health insurance provider. As of January 1, U-46’s health insurance provider changed to Aetna. Beth Berg, Coordinator of Benefits, and other Human Resources Department staff provided support to employees as they made decisions and met deadlines.

➤ **WEB SITE CONTINUES TO FOSTER COMMUNICATION**

The U-46 web site has drawn attention both locally and nationally for its depth of content. Among the features that make the web site a source of information for teachers, parents and the community are: the Health Services site; the Spanish web site; the Curriculum Roadmap site; Early Learners; Food and Nutrition Services; and a new format for documenting progress in the District Improvement Plan. In 2007 (January-December), the district website had 400,000 unique visitors with 1,270,000 visits to the web site(s) and 7,493,138 pages viewed.

◆ **SUMMARY**

Improving communication and engaging stakeholders in the work of the district are ongoing priorities. When staff, parents, and community members are aware of the District Improvement Plan and invited to share the vision and join in as partners, the opportunities for student success are increased.

U-46 is fortunate to have a diverse community with a variety of advisory councils representing ethnic groups and those with specific perspectives. The Citizens' Advisory Council and other groups continue to align their work with district priorities and the annual plan.

The annual organizational assessment conducted by representatives of the Stupski Foundation in May indicated that stakeholders across U-46 are aware of "Academic Success for All" and the progress made to date. Many are eager for the opportunity to become more involved in the district's mission and their children's education.