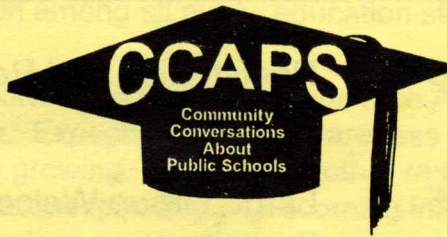


Community Conversations About Public Schools



PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

SOUTH WASHINGTON COUNTY PUBLIC CONVERSATION

**Lake Junior High School
Woodbury, MN**

**October 5, 1999
6:30-9 p.m.**

Community Conversation **Participant's Guide**

Schedule for the Evening:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 6:00 - 6:30 | Registration and Refreshments |
| 6:30 - 6:45 | Large Group Welcome and Overview |
| 6:50 - 8:30 | Small Group Moderated Discussions |
| 8:30 - 9:00 | Large Group Re-CAPs and Action Plans |

INTRODUCTION

The first Community Conversation in this district was held April 13, 1999 and centered on a general education topic: the purposes of public education. A number of topics for future sessions emerged from that first conversation. One topic most often mentioned was a need for improved communication among all public education stakeholders.

Great opportunities and challenges face America's public schools today. Expectations and awareness of quality education are growing. Parents and other residents of communities are responding by becoming informed and involved. People in communities are particularly concerned about improving academic achievement and making sure that expectations are high enough for all children. The schools in your community are implementing academic standards adopted by the Minnesota legislature. Standards, facilities, safety, special needs, transportation, pupil services, and other issues all require clear, accurate, and timely communication across the community.

Therefore, during this second evening of conversations, you and others from the community will be talking together about SCHOOL COMMUNICATION.

What is this all about anyway?

This meeting is one in a series of such conversations taking place in communities throughout the nation. These meetings are part of a multi-year grant project of the National Education Association. The impetus for the South Washington County conversations came from this grant project through Education Minnesota. It is one of nine project sites in eight states around the United States to pilot community conversations about public schools. The national project's goal is to engage Americans in community conversations about their expectations of the public schools. In your materials are copies of articles describing the project in South Washington County and elsewhere in the nation.

We believe you will find this meeting quite different from other public discussions you may have attended, and that the difference will become clear over the course of the evening. You will find on page 6 a list of goals we hope to achieve through tonight's discussion. However, the primary objective is simply this: to provide a setting in which you can engage in productive conversation about an important public issue.

Your role in the discussion:

As you talk, we ask you to keep a few things in mind:

- listen attentively
- express your views freely
- give others' views the same courtesy and respect you expect in return and
- keep an open mind

After some brief words of welcome and introduction, a moderator will guide you through the discussion.

While we cannot predict what the specific outcomes of tonight's discussion will be, we do expect a unique, thought provoking experience that allows you to exchange opinions and ideas and broaden your understanding of the issues. Our hope is that the conversation will also lead to continuing community conversation about improving student's academic achievement and help to increase the participation of families and other community members with the schools.

What we hope to accomplish through these discussions:

- People who normally have little contact with one another will have a chance to interact and work together on an issue affecting the entire community.
- Participants will have an opportunity to examine their personal values, beliefs, and opinions concerning education and the public schools, and to clarify areas where they need further information and more discussion.
- Participants will gain understanding of where they agree and disagree, and will have had a chance to at least begin to bridge their disagreements.
- Participants will begin to think of new ways to improve education in their community.
- Participants will gain understanding of the dynamics of communication within the community.
- Participants will begin to develop an individual plan for active interaction and dialogue with the schools.

How the evening will proceed:

In the course of this meeting, participants will have a chance to talk together about the most frequently mentioned topic at the spring conversation in South Washington County: School Communications. Communication touches all issues related to our public schools, and provides a rich and varied topic for tonight's conversation.

The evening will begin with a brief general session. A model demonstrating various aspects of the topic will be presented (see page 11). It is important to note that the model presented is meant to be a discussion starter. While we shall begin by using the framework of a model, the discussion may open up other options. The large group session will be followed by small group discussions, each led by a moderator. The moderator's job is to encourage people to contribute many points of view to the discussion, and generally keep the conversation moving.

Following the small group discussions we will all gather for final re-cCAPs and some sharing of individual and group action plans, which may have developed, from the discussions. Please join us for this important step in the process of addressing school communications.

We also ask you to complete a survey concerning this conversation, at the conclusion of the session. The results of the survey will be reported to the School Board of ISD 833, and sent to the community conversation planners. Interested participants may receive a copy of the report by contacting Carrie Olson (651-738-7929)..

Discussion:

The education of youth is a responsibility that extends beyond schools. Parents, local business people, teachers, school employees, students, and other community members have responsibilities for the education of the community's youth. They also have the right to be included as partners in important decisions about education.

Participants in the spring conversation expressed keen interest in the issues related to school communication. This is a vast, often nebulous topic. A model has been developed as a guide for the discussions (see page 11). This model can provide a framework for focused and constructive conversations. It is helpful to identify appropriate lines of communication. One way communication is sometimes necessary and appropriate. Some communication is more effective if it is two-way, or if it involves many people in dialogue or discussion.

Defining terms aids in communication. A dictionary definition of communication is:

Com-mu-ni-ca-tion *n.* **1** The act of communicating; exchange of ideas, conveyance of information, etc.; correspondence. **2** That which is communicated: a letter or message. **3** Means of communicating, as a highway or passage; also a telephone, telegraph, or radio system, etc.

Some general communication questions to consider as your small group meets for discussion:

- What information is needed?
- By whom?
- When is it needed?
- In what form is it most needed and best received?
- How does one know the message has been received?
- Who is the sender? What responsibilities does the sender have?
- Who is the receiver?
- What is the receiver's responsibility to use the information?
- What is the receiver's responsibility to respond to the sender?

Other questions which relate to the issues of communication in, and with, our schools:

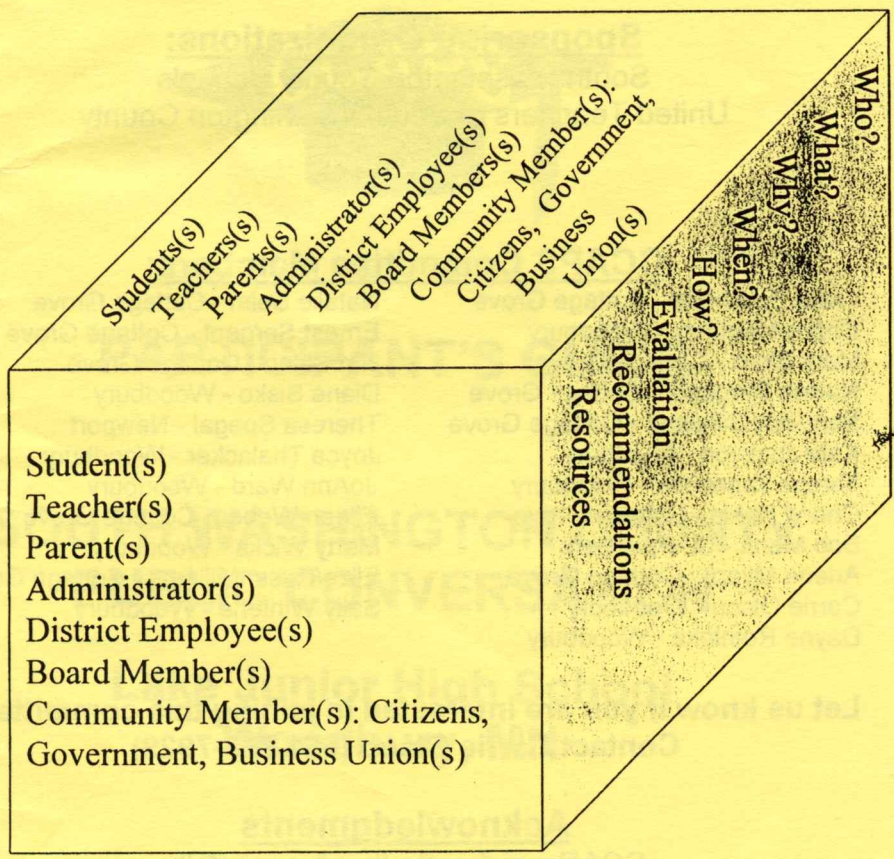
- In what ways is the education of our youth of *immediate* importance to the community?
- In what ways is the education of our community's children important to the *future* of our community?
- For members of the community who do not have, or never have had a student in this district, why is the education of this community's children important?
- For members of the business community, why is public education important?
- For members of other community organizations, why is the education of the children of this district important?

Conclusions:

Three of the most important questions of the evening are:

1. What will I do in response to this evening's conversations?
2. How will I behave and respond differently in communicating with the schools?
3. What responsibilities do I, and the schools have, to listen to and communicate with each other?

A model to use as a guide to discussing communication in our schools.



THANK YOU
FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
in
CCAPS - Community Conversation About
Public Schools

Sponsoring Organizations:

South Washington County Schools
United Teachers of South Washington County

CCAPS Committee Members:

Tracy Brunnette - Cottage Grove	Natalie Seim - Cottage Grove
Charise Council - Woodbury	Ernest Sergent - Cottage Grove
Mary Elrod - Cottage Grove	Jim Shinn - Cottage Grove
Natalie Ferguson, Cottage Grove	Diane Sisko - Woodbury
Beth/Jim Gilleland - Cottage Grove	Theresa Spegal - Newport
Kate Jackson - Woodbury	Joyce Thalacker - Woodbury
Teresa Janecek - Woodbury	JoAnn Ward - Woodbury
Cheryl Kohls - Cottage Grove	Eileen Weber - Cottage Grove
Bob Mann - St. Paul Park	Marty Wicks - Woodbury
Arlene Myers - Cottage Grove	Elize/Russ Williams - Cottage Grove
Carrie Olson - Woodbury	Sally Winterle - Woodbury
Dayne Rethlake - Woodbury	

Let us know if you are interested in joining this committee.
Contact Carrie Olson (651-738-7929)

Acknowledgments

CCAPs wishes to thank especially
the National Education Association and Education Minnesota
without whose financial and active support this evening would
not be possible.