



Schools '96 mission: Just do it

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER
A gaggle of committees and a plethora of plans leave Farmington Public Schools with one mission in 1996:
Just do it.
Since Superintendent Bob Maxfield took charge two years ago, the future in terms of curriculum, facilities, technology and

finances has been largely pinned on the drawing board.
Considerable time has been spent soliciting opinions, building consensus and coopting detractors. Mission 2007, a massive strategic planning initiative involving a web of committees, is finished and on paper.
But what does it all mean?
"To me the most important thing is to continue to clarify the focus and find out what we're about," Maxfield said.
Results would be nice, too.
Maxfield's mantra of excellence and equity is reaching fruition. The district made a concerted effort to improve student performance on Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests after unsatisfactory results the previous year.
Students needing help in grades 1-3 attended a summer intervention program. Curriculum has also been modified.
More fourth and seventh graders scored in the highest range in reading and math portion of the state achievement test than the previous year.
And much to district's pleasure, more students moved up from unsatisfactory to moderate and satisfactory categories.
Fifth and eighth graders still have to take the MEAP science test. Juniors will be taking the

high school proficiency test.
Similarly, finances, facilities and technology will require attention in the coming year.
■ Technology — The district is wiring all of its buildings with a T-1 line that will allow Internet access in every classroom. Central office is being set up for Internet capabilities with secondary buildings to follow by the end of the summer.
The plan is part of an overall \$3.65 million technological upgrade, which includes new computers and telephones in classrooms.
Staff and students will have immediate access to information, Maxfield said.
■ Finances — A 22-member blue ribbon panel is being formed. A portion of the hold harmless millage expires in 1997 and the district will consider going for a renewal.
The panel will make a recom-

mendation to the Board of Education in November on how to proceed. An early start is important, Maxfield said.
"It's complex," he said. "There are a lot of issues to be considered."
"I think a strong message is... any financial decision should have broad-based community involvement."
One charge will be undoubtedly how to maintain support of the 80 percent or so taxpayers who don't have children in the public schools.
Taxpayers approved the district's last renewal request in 1993 by a 4-to-1 margin.
Overall district finances are in good shape, Maxfield said.
The district has two years left in contracts with unions and has been able to implement controls on employee health insurance. A higher-than-expected turnover

rate has several new employees at the lower end of the pay scale, saving the district additional money.
Caps brought on by Proposal A, though, has the superintendent feeling fortuitous.
"We've been awfully lucky," Maxfield said.

■ Facilities — The district halted a second phase of renovations to its buildings, many of which are 30 years or older. All three high schools received an extensive remodeling during the initial phase, which included expanding media center at North Farmington and adding classroom space at the other high schools.
District officials want to wait to see how class enrollment and restructuring develops before proceeding any further.
"We decided if we go through with this, we may be just spending good money after bad," Maxfield said.
Instead, repairs will be dealt with as needed. The district has taken the same approach to overcrowding: adjusting boundaries to send students where space is available.
That will likely continue, Maxfield said.

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CLARKE B. MAXSON,
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