

## Authentic engagement guides North High planning

Written by Bernadeia H. Johnson - Superintendent of Schools  
Friday, 18 March 2011 14:16

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I am incredibly proud and deeply enthused by the partnership that has been cultivated between the community and the district in our first steps to realizing a new North High School. I continue to hear from those in the community that we all have engaged in a transparent process that has resulted in authentic community engagement and a strong partnership that has brought our best thinking to the forefront. Everything from selecting the interview questions for the consultants to organizing the community Q and A session with the consultants was done in collaboration. I am humbled by my experiences in this process and truly believe that we may be turning a new leaf by building trust and a stronger relationship with community members on the North side.

Last week, community members and I had an opportunity to dig deep into the interview process with the three consulting firms that were selected as finalists for the new North design. All three firms had impressive resumes and unique perspectives and experiences to offer us in this journey to create a new North. After much consideration and in-depth discussion on the consulting firms, the interview team partook in a decision making process and came to a consensus in selecting the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), the consultant that we believe best fits the needs of the North Minneapolis community. ISA's strong track record of community engagement, intent to hire a community member as an advisor to the design process, as well as the community's vote of confidence at a public presentation session in February were key components of their selection. Final approval is subject to a contract agreement with ISA.

The Institute for Student Achievement is a nonprofit school turnaround organization based out of New York that partners with districts and communities to transform underperforming high schools into new academically rigorous and personalized schools. ISA works closely with the districts and communities to create school designs that are genuinely reflective of the needs of the community. ISA has partnered with nearly 80 schools serving 20,000 students in five states, including schools in Atlanta, Detroit and New York. An independent study conducted by the Academy for Educational Development found that ISA students have higher attendance, course accumulation, grade promotion and graduation rates than comparison students. ISA students are 49% less likely to drop out of high school than comparison students and by 12th grade, 93%

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of ISA students passed each of the required high stakes exams.

At the Board of Education meeting Tuesday, board members approved my recommendation to extend the deadline from March 31 to April 30, 2011 to recruit 125 ninth graders in order for the school to have a freshman class next fall. The extension will provide an additional four weeks for recruiting efforts to continue and increase the probability of enrolling more 9th grade students for the fall of 2011. Additionally, the extension will allow ISA to have further input into the process and give administration additional time to study the consultant's recommendations regarding the advantages and disadvantages to accepting a small 9th grade in the fall of 2011. The Institute for Student Achievement has stated its commitment to the current North students and will support the district to provide strong academic support to students while the new design process is in motion.

Now, more than ever, we need for individuals to stay engaged in the process of designing the school. We are in the beginning stages of establishing a high quality high school in the North community worthy of the North High School tradition and historic reputation. Thank you for your continued support of the academic ambitions our schools and communities have for Minneapolis youth.