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FOURTH QUARTER BOARD MEETING
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WAKONDA COUNTRY CLUB
GUEST SPEAKER DR. TOM NARAK,
WDMPS SUPERINTENDENT

IS THIS YOU?

Government Research Association's members may be what pollster Mark Penn calls "Long Attention Spanners." Penn has a new book out called *Microtrends*, in which he highlights 75 trends that are small but that already have a million people within each of them. One of those trends is Long Attention Spanners. He says these are the people who are tuning in to longer movies like the 3½-hour "Titanic," the Harry Potter series, Sudoku puzzles, triathlons, and best-selling books that are averaging 100 pages longer than a decade ago. These are the people who read *Foreign Affairs*—a journal of all words and no pictures, yet whose circulation grew almost 13 percent in the last 3 years. And, he says, almost twice as many Americans watch the President's State of the Union address as watch the final baseball game in the World Series. Penn writes, "For every person who decides in a Blink, there is someone who decides only after a serious, intellectual mud-wrestle. And it is the latter type of voter who generally decides elections—the swing voters who go through a process of making real judgments, not snap ones." For GRA organizations, it may be heartening to know that there are people out there that are hungry for our facts, our research, and our depth. *GRA Reporter*

MAKING GOVERNMENT GREEN

Here is a small sample of steps local governments can take to reduce their carbon footprint collected by the ICLEI, an association that serves as a climate-change clearinghouse for localities. Conduct an energy audit of all municipal buildings/facilities.

Install green or reflective roofing.

Use ENERGY STAR office equipment.

Install low-flush toilets.

Institute a lights-out-at-night policy and install occupancy sensors.

Adopt strict residential or commercial energy code requirements.

Help low-income people weatherize their homes.

Install energy-efficient traffic lights and streetlights.
Limit idling of municipal vehicles, transit buses, and school buses.
Purchase fuel-efficient vehicles and retire old/underused ones.
Use alternative fuels such as biodiesel, ethanol, and natural gas.
Improve bicycle lanes and trails, and allow bikes on buses and other mass transit vehicles.
Support car-sharing programs, carpooling, and telecommuting.
Encourage buses and taxi fleets to switch to alternative fuels.

It good to know that many of these ideas are being used in the metro area, but governments still have a long way to go. More and more governments around the country are thinking about switching to four-day workweeks. Future choices will be tougher and may have steep initial costs.

WHO ARE OUR DROPOUTS?

Poverty continues to be the most consistent predictor of academic failure, with the concentration of poverty at the school level exacerbating the problem. In 2003, approximately 12.9 million children under the age of 18, or 17.6% of children, in the US live in poverty. During this same time period, 55% of 4th graders and 43% of 8th graders who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch scored below basic levels in reading achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), compared to 24% of 4th graders and 19% of 8th graders who were ineligible. For mathematics achievement, 38% of 4th graders and 52% of 8th graders who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch scored below the basic level, in comparison to 12% of 4th graders and 21% of 8th graders who were ineligible. This is according to the National Center for Education statistics (NCES). These data reveal a stark and alarming achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers. Furthermore, dropout rates are related to poverty with low-income students **six times more likely** to drop out of high school than higher-income students.

Racial or ethnic minority status is also a risk factor. Approximately 35% of the student population in the US is made up of ethnic or racial minorities, and it is estimated that this percentage will grow dramatically such that by 2020, approximately 56% of students will be ethnic or racial minorities, making the term “minority” obsolete in their identification. In 2003, 60% and 46% of African American 4th and 8th graders, respectively, scored below the basic level in reading achievement on the NEAP, again according to the NCES. In the same year, 56% and 44% of Hispanic 4th and 8th graders, respectively, also scored below the basic level, and the percentage of 4th and 8th grade Native American students was 53% and 43%, respectively. For Asian/Pacific Islander 4th and 8th grade students, the percentages were 30% and 21%, respectively. In contrast, only 25% and 17% of white 4th and 8th grade students, respectively, scored below the basic level in reading. There is also a high school completion gap between most ethnic and minority groups and white students, with African Americans and Hispanics more likely to drop out of high school than whites or Asian/Pacific Islanders.

In the 2001-02 academic year, approximately 4 million limited English proficient (LEP) students attended elementary and secondary schools, representing 8.4% of the US population, a 71.9% increase from a decade ago. In addition, LEP students have increased as a percentage of the overall student population. Over ¾'s of LEP students, or 76.9%, were Spanish speaking. In a 2003 survey by the US Department of Education, school-level LEP coordinators indicated that LEP students commonly scored below grade level in English reading and mathematics.

Urban school students are at greater risk of low academic achievement than their nonurban peers. Urban schools often expose students to greater health and safety risks such as pollution (lead) and crime. In addition, urban schools tend to have higher concentrations of low-income, ethnic or racial minority, and Hispanic, African American, and LEP students, groups already established to at risk of academic failure. The impact of living in an urban area is reflected in the percentage of students scoring below basic levels in the 1994 NEAP reading, 1996 NEAP mathematics, and 1996 NEAP science tests: 57%, 58%, and 62% respectively. Furthermore, students attending urban school were less likely to graduate on time from high school than suburban and rural school students and more likely to live at the poverty level later in life. Only Connecticut and New York provide funding in the form of categorical aid targeted toward urban students.

Low parental education attainment had been identified in research as a predictor of poor student academic performance. On average, students who have reported parents' highest educational level as below that of a high school graduate scored lower in reading, mathematics, and science. Students whose parents did not graduate from high school were themselves **three times** more likely to drop out than students whose parents did graduate (US Dept. of Ed.).

It behooves both state and local policymakers and administrators to carefully and continuously examine education funding systems and expenditure decisions to discern whether they sufficiently target resources to enable at-risk children to succeed academically. From a moral and ethical point of view, a commitment to educational opportunity is the bedrock of social justice in a democracy, and states ultimately bear the fiscal responsibility to ensure that access is a reality.

THE ROLE OF STATES IN FUNDING EDUCATION TO ACHIEVE SOCIAL JUSTICE
JOURNAL OF EDUCATION FINANCE VOL. 34,, NO. 1

Witnessing a Transformation

Over the past two years I have actively participated on the Broadlawns Medical Center Finance Committee. I have had the opportunity to watch closely as Broadlawns began an aggressive transformation from being a "hospital of last resort for the uninsured" to a community medical center operating with greater transparency and accountability to the citizens of Polk County.

Not coincidentally, Broadlawns recently ended another year with a fiscally sound bottom line. The leadership team exceeded the fiscal benchmarks that they established as part of the medical center's Vital Signs Scorecard. Yet, more than just fiscal integrity, the Vital Signs Scorecard also measures the quality of care received, along with patient and employee satisfaction. In these areas, as well, Broadlawns Medical Center exceeded its goals.

Broadlawns measures quality of care using the quality indicators established by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Broadlawns scores outranked the national average in 8 of the 10 indicators. This is an impressive statement in any terms. When you look at it in the context of simultaneously working to deliver high-quality care and cost-effective operations, the feat is remarkable. The result is that Broadlawns is delivering real value in health care services to our community.

For example, last year Broadlawns' leadership team took on patient satisfaction as a focus for improvement. A mystery shopper rated services anonymously and patients were consistently asked to complete a Press Ganey patient satisfaction survey to monitor satisfaction

levels. The results are exciting. When they began utilizing Press Ganey they were in the fifth percentile for inpatient satisfaction among all hospitals in the nation of their classification. In one year, the inpatient satisfaction, “most likely to recommend,” rose to the 72nd percentile. The Broadlawns Medical Center patient satisfaction exceeds 72 percent of patient satisfaction nationally. This is quite an accomplishment, and it reflects solid teamwork and caregiver dedication.

Employee satisfaction levels are measured traditionally by the turnover rate. Broadlawns turnover rate is 11.4 percent, which is well below the national average of 16.8 percent. Often a transformation of the magnitude that Broadlawns is undertaking creates employee unrest accompanied by a rise in turnover. Broadlawns has worked to balance the needs of the employees with the organization’s shift in vision, encouraging employees to embrace this accountability.

Jody Jenner, CEO of Broadlawns Medical Center, is leading the way in moving Broadlawns toward greater accountability and transparency. These objectives demonstrate the first steps toward the bigger goal of remodeling and modernizing the medical center and completing its transformation to a strong, respected and valued community medical center. This progress is, in fact, key to securing the funds needed for its capital campaign.

As with most significant accomplishments, this comes with the price of cultural transformation. Change challenges everyone as Broadlawns makes progress toward the rewards that will benefit patients, employees, employers and the community as a whole. Far-reaching change was needed to ensure that Polk County’s community hospital would be fiscally sound and able to provide high-quality, cost-effective care to all residents of Polk County.