



GDRSD
Think Tank Committee
Task-Force

2009 RECOMMENDATIONS

Report of the GDRSD Think-Tank Committee Task Force

The Think Tank Committee Task Force was organized by the GDRSD School Committee in June 2008 with the objective of brainstorming ideas that might improve district funding or reduce district costs while maintaining or improving school programs and services. The Task Force was originally composed of eleven appointed members from Groton and Dunstable, including both townspeople and town officials.

The Task Force's recommendations comprise a variety of programs that are organized into two broad categories: those that are aimed at generating funding or other donations and those that are aimed at reducing district expenses. Some proposed programs require cooperation with towns in the district; some require cooperation with municipalities outside of the district; and, because salaries and wages represent approximately 70% of the school operating budget, some target headcount in the schools. The relative time-to-revenue or time-to-savings associated with the programs vary significantly, but it is probably fair to say that programs with the greatest financial potential are those with the longest time horizon.

Throughout the past year, the Task Force has met with members of the School Committee and the GDRSD administration to discuss progress and recommendations. As a result of these discussions, the GDRSD has begun to take action in a number of recommended areas.

In the report that follows, the eleven programs presently being recommended by the Task Force are summarized in two Program Recommendations sub-sections, entitled "Revenue/Donation Opportunities" and "Expense Reduction Opportunities." The Task Force has provided its relative ranking of each of its eleven recommended programs – ratings are on a scale from #1 to #11, with the #1 program being most highly recommended in terms of its perceived total future impact on district revenue or expenses. The Task Force has also provided a place for the GDRSD to provide its rankings. The program summary sections are followed by a section that summarizes progress on programs that have been initiated by the GDRSD.

We believe that these programs can make a real difference in the cost of running the schools. Because of the complexity of some of these programs, however, making further progress will require continued support and allocation of staff and resources by the administration. The Task Force looks forward to continuing to work with the GDRSD to bring these programs to fruition.

Respectfully submitted,

The GDRSD Think Tank Committee Task Force
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I. Program Recommendations:

A. Revenue/Donation Opportunities

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
10	

Utilize District Web Site to Acquire Needed Items

Summary:

1. Using the district web site, directly expose needs in the class room so that the generosity of the community can be tapped. For example, elementary school teachers often send home flyers looking for boxes of tissues, markers, etc. This could be expanded on a wider scale and made more accessible via the web. Parents are more likely to donate if they know it is directly affecting their child.
2. Identify specific equipment or material needs in the classroom and get community and/or industry sponsorship for these materials (e.g., furniture, shelving, paper). There are non-profit groups (GDEF, GDSTEM, etc.) that could assist with channeling these outside sources to specific needs.

Estimated Effort:

Low – students may be able to create and maintain the site modifications.

Estimated Cost:

Low. No capital investment.

Revenue:

Unknown, but given that expended effort is relatively low and that results may be very rapid, this may have a high payoff for effort expended.

Issues:

Need to invest in modifying website and put a process in place to identify needs and get them onto the site.

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
7	

User Fees

Summary:

Charge for discretionary services:

1. Parking fees – district pays for school bus seats whether or not students use bus
2. Facilities use fees by outside organizations
3. Survey of fees charged by schools in other towns
4. Sports participation and/or entry fees; privatization of some or all of sports complex

Estimated Effort:

Low

Estimated Cost:

Essentially no cost; no capital investment.

Revenue:

Dependent upon nature of fees and amounts charged. Revenue is essentially immediate.

Issues:

1. Fees may be controversial
2. Collection of some fees (e.g. sports entry fees) may require part-time personnel.

I. Program Recommendations:
A. Revenue/Donation Opportunities

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
11	

Hire Fundraiser and/or Grant Writer

Summary:

1. Hire permanent part-time fundraiser or hire fundraiser on commission/percentage-of-revenue basis. Coordinates 1-2 large events per year, don't get in the way of other organizations major fundraisers.
 - a. Use volunteers from PTA's, High School groups, etc.?
 - b. Create incentive based/reward based volunteer staff?
 - c. Plan adult evening; family carnival?
 - d. Teen movie nights, concerts, entertainment?
2. Grants – Hire a part time grant writer who does nothing but searches for grants.

Estimated Effort:

Low to medium – school district would have to recruit personnel and may need to provide workspace.

Estimated Cost:

Dependent on how compensation is structured. Commission or percentage-of-revenue compensation would require no funding. No significant capital investment.

Revenue:

Unknown and dependent upon compensation scheme.

Issues:

1. May require up-front funding
2. Up-front investment may not pay off.

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
8	

Business Sponsorship

Summary:

District allows businesses to advertise via school newsletters, uniforms, flyers, etc.

Estimated Effort:

Low to medium. District would have to recruit sponsors and maintain sponsorships.

Estimated Cost:

Dependent on how compensation is structured. Commission or percentage-of-revenue compensation would require no funding. No capital investment.

Revenue:

Unknown and dependent upon district advertising policies.

Issues:

May require changes to district advertising policies.

I. Program Recommendations:

A. Revenue/Donation Opportunities

Alumni Endowment Program

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
3	

Summary:

Create an alumni database and update the database annually with new GDRSD graduates. Tap into this resource through periodic fundraisers and an endowment program.

Estimated Effort:

Low – students may be able to create and maintain the site modifications.

Estimated Cost:

Low

Revenue:

Unknown, but given that expended effort is relatively low this may have a high payoff relative to effort expended. This is not likely to produce significant short-term revenue, but may become a growing source of funds in the future.

Issues:

1. Difficulty of assembling database of past alumni
2. Long term project; payoff may take time

School Supply Sales

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
9	

Summary:

The district would arrange to make grade-specific school supplies available to parents at competitive pricing, eliminating the need for parents to shop for supplies every year. Possible ways to implement this program include: making arrangements with an office supply retailer (e.g., Staples, Office Depot) to make the supplies available at their stores or on-line; acquiring supplies in bulk and assembling “grade specific” packages of supplies that parents or students can pick up at school.

Estimated Effort:

Low to medium depending on how implemented. The district would have to make arrangements with supply vendors and negotiate prices and delivery.

Estimated Cost:

Low

Revenue:

Unknown, but this may be popular with parents because it provides “one stop shopping” for school supplies at competitive pricing.

Issues:

Structuring and implementing the program

I. Program Recommendations:

A. Revenue/Donation Opportunities

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
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Exploit Internet Revenue Opportunities: GDRSD.com; Loyalty Programs

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Summary:

1. Create a commercial site to sell supplies, clothing, GDRSD logo'ed items, computers, etc.; sell donated items via eBay and others.
2. Capture revenue via “click through” loyalty programs on major websites, such as Amazon.com; survey parents to establish which sites are most frequently used

Estimated Effort:

Very dependent on how these programs are implemented. Setting up and running a commercial web site might be a significant undertaking, but an option might be to have an outside entity handle the project, the downside being that the district would realize less revenue. A combination of local (possibly paid) "management" of the site, combined with "free" labor from high school students, may be a compelling alternative model.

Estimated Cost:

Dependent on which programs are implemented. Implementing “click through” programs is essentially free; implementing a commercial website might entail initial and ongoing costs.

Revenue:

Unknown, but any revenue derived from “click through” programs comes essentially for free.

Issues:

Structuring and implementing the program

I. Program Recommendations:
B. Expense Reduction Opportunities

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
2	

Energy Savings

Summary:

A comprehensive energy audit of the district buildings and consideration of switching to different sources of energy. The district depends on fuel oil for space heating in many of the buildings. Most/all of the district's oil storage is in 20 year old underground tanks. The age of these tanks represent a financial and environmental liability. Since they require replacement soon, it would be useful to research alternatives for the district's space heating needs. It would also be useful to explore additional conservation through better insulation, etc. There may also be alternative energy sources (solar, wind, etc.) which could be utilized that could be partially funded by grants and also serve an educational role.

Estimated Effort:

Medium. District would have to organize and plan energy auditing efforts and study alternative energy sources; would likely require some expert help. This is a multi-faceted problem that will take time to properly evaluate – the potential payoff, however, is large.

Estimated Cost:

Dependent on how much can be done by current personnel vs. outside consultants and or service providers and how those consultants and service providers are paid (hourly, percentage-of-savings, etc.).

Savings:

Potentially large and recurring. Possible savings of 10% or more in annual energy costs.

Issues:

Organizing an effective process and bringing it to completion

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
5	

District Employee Incentive Program

Summary:

Establish a reward program for district employees who identify and help implement cost savings initiatives. A percentage of the first year cost savings up to a maximum would be the reward for verifiable cost savings.

Estimated Effort:

Low to Medium. District would have to organize and plan the program and track results of selected ideas.

Estimated Cost:

Low

Savings:

Dependent upon management of incentive system and quality of ideas

Issues:

1. Objective tracking of results
2. Personnel issues

I. Program Recommendations:
B. Expense Reduction Opportunities

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
1	

Extra-Regional Municipal Cooperative Arrangements; Outsourcing

Summary:

1. Staffing and costs of certain administrative activities, such as curriculum development, can be reduced by entering into cooperative arrangements with neighboring towns and/or districts.
2. Outsource non-academic activities: cafeterias; maintenance; IT; janitorial
3. Regionalize or virtualize specialty classes, such as electives or AP.
4. Regionalize SPED transportation

Estimated Effort:

Medium to High. Requires district administration to foster constructive discussions with neighboring towns and school districts and obtain support and cooperation of Groton and Dunstable townspeople and officials. Virtualization would require implementation of IT infrastructure in cooperating towns and plans for associated re-organization and cost-sharing.

Estimated Cost:

Dependent on scope. Initial costs may be low if first steps focus on cost-sharing cooperative arrangements and outsourcing; costs will be higher to implement virtualization.

Savings:

Dependent on scope. However, this is one of the few initiatives that focuses directly on reducing staff while maintaining or improving academic and/or administrative services.

Issues:

1. Affects staffing, with all the attendant issues
2. Long term project; payoff may take time

Think Tank Ranking	School Comm. Ranking
4	

Intra-Regional Cooperative Arrangements

Summary:

School administration works cooperatively with towns of Groton and Dunstable to obtain the best prices on commodity purchases, such as paper, fuel oil, gasoline, etc.

Estimated Effort:

Low. Requires GDRSD administration to enter into discussions with Groton and Dunstable municipal governments.

Estimated Cost:

Low

Savings:

Dependent on scope and absolute and relative quantities of commodities being purchased.

Issues:

May require modification of existing contracts

II. Progress Summaries

A. Revenue/Donation Opportunities

User Fees

The parking at the High School, currently \$25.00, has been raised to \$100.00. The district must pay for school bus seats for all students (approximately \$300 per-seat) whether or not the student uses the bus.

User fees have also been instituted for after-school use of school facilities by clubs and other organizations. The fees are intended to offset the costs of utilities and other services.

High School students currently pay \$250 to play a sport. While there are higher fees in other districts, it is felt that increases in fees should be commensurate with the level of expenditure associated with the sport. Another possibility would be to consider privatizing the whole sports complex.

Alumni Endowment

This was ranked number 3 in potential importance by the Task Force.

The schools have written records of students that attended the Groton schools prior to 2000 and a computer database of students who attended after 2000. Converting this information into a useful database may be challenging, both because of the work that may be involved and because of the difficulty of determining current contact information for past graduates.

It will be much easier to build and maintain a contact database for future graduates. For this reason, the Task Force believes that an endowment fund might become a significant source of revenue to the schools as years go by.

School Supply Sales

A member of the Task Force contacted an office supply firm (Staples); they do engage in this type of business and there are a variety of ways of structuring the program. It was beyond the authority and scope of the Task Force to go any further. This program will need further support on the part of the school administration (purchasing, finance) to decide on the structure and details of the program and to identify, negotiate with and select a vendor, or vendors.

B. Expense Reduction Opportunities

Energy Savings

Energy Savings was ranked number 2 in potential importance by the Task Force.

This program has been initiated and is in the study phase. A model of the various district buildings has been built. Each building's heating and electrical usage has been compared to national averages to highlight the facilities most in need of attention. Furthermore, trend data over the past 5 years has been gathered and analyzed to confirm the initial findings. This data will also be "degree-day"

II. Progress Summaries

normalized to be useful in quantifying future energy saving measures implemented. This program is transitioning to the energy audit phase by working with a combination of National Grid and a template audit performed on the High School by Environ Corp. The district's business manager, Tim Sheehan, and others are involved with this effort with a longer term goal to apply what is learned to all municipal buildings.

The district has initiated a number of programs aimed at reducing energy consumption, including shutting down computers when schools are not in session and installing motion detecting light switches to turn lights off when people are not present.

There will be capital costs associated with realizing the ultimate potential of this endeavor. The initial approach will be to get the maximum bang for the minimum expenditure, by, for example, installing weatherstripping in buildings, but deeper savings will require varying expenditure levels. The initial goal is to only consider projects that have a 3-5 year payback and minimal capital needs.

B. Expense Reduction Opportunities (continued)

District Employee Incentive Program

Work has been started by the administration on this program, which may be formally initiated in the fall.

Intra-Regional Cooperative Arrangements; Outsourcing

The administration is working with Groton officials on combining district and town purchases of commodities, including natural gas, fuel oil and paper.

Extra-Regional Cooperative Arrangements

Extra-Regional Cooperative Arrangements was ranked number 1 in potential importance by the Task Force.

Arrangements of this kind, in which relatively high-cost activities, such as administration, transportation and curriculum development, are performed cooperatively among several towns with costs being shared accordingly, could have very significant impact in the overall cost of the schools.

C. Other Initiatives

Internal Reorganization

The administration is engaged in a reorganization and redesign of the Curriculum Development process, which has been a significant cost item in the GDRSD budget (approximately \$705,000 every year). It is not clear at this time whether this had brought about a cost savings.