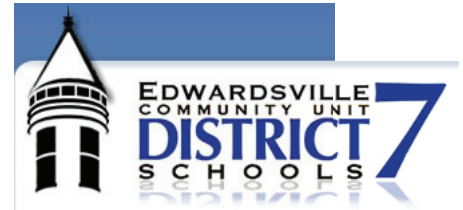


Independent Research conducted by
Ronda Sauget, D.Mgt, MBA - Webster University
Marv Finkelstein, Ph.D. - Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE)



BUSINESS CASE 4: EDWARDSVILLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY DISTRICT 7 SCHOOLS



Nearly twenty years ago the Edwardsville School District experienced many problems as it embarked on plans to build a new high school and then spend millions more to meet the educational needs of a growing community. “There were hard feelings, delays, immobilizing differences and opposition to the school district from the community,” said **Dr. Ed Hightower**, as he reflected on the first days of his tenure as superintendent. “What is your vision?” he asked all of those involved in new construction planning. And he soon found out that there was little shared vision and consequently, a great deal of misunderstanding and hard feelings. It was hard to admit that the Edwardsville community had lost faith in its school district. The community was down on everyone.

“Never again,” said Hightower, as he explained how the school district proceeded to pick itself up and build a foundation of relationships in which trust and communication would path the way for bringing the community together and doing what needed to be done. In order to move forward, there was a need for transparency and openness if all involved were to work collaboratively. It was clear that with Southern

Illinois University Edwardsville in its backyard, the public school district needed to be high quality particularly if the SIUE faculty and staff along with a growing bedroom community were going to send their children to its schools.

The cost of the new high school alone would amount to some \$38 million. But even before the high school project could begin, there was the need to renovate existing buildings – which by itself would cost \$16 million. Dr. Hightower was keenly aware of the magnitude of these costs, and he was determined to show the tax payers of the community that they could depend on their school district to make them proud of the results. The renovation, known as the Life-Safety Renovation project, was the first test of this claim. It set the tone for all the building to come and a new sense of collaboration and trust was cemented when members of the school board, the superintendent and the assistant superintendent became a team and signed a Project Labor Agreement with the Southwestern Illinois Building Trades, represented by Executive Secretary, Dale Stewart.

The agreement meant that many of the issues surrounding the construction in the past would be resolved- everything from disagreements that existed between the trades to questions about the diversity of the workforce, were addressed before any ground was broken. Make no mistake, these were thorny issues. There were difficult moments, but unlike the past, there was a framework in place to deal with them. Demands were transformed into compromises, anger and frustration were voiced “behind closed doors” but because all the major parties had a chance to voice their serious concerns, trust and communication were forged in the long term.

“So strong was the trust and good feelings that these successes spawned, that smaller projects- maintenance buildings, booths for the athletic stadium, and storage facilities, were all done with volunteers including union members who donated their time and effort, reducing costs and allowing the school district to advance its ambitious plan further.”

- Ed Hightower, Edwardsville School District

Dale Stewart and Ed Hightower built more than a working relationship allowed them to solve problems and move on to complete projects successfully. All told, over \$60 million would be spent based on a \$58.3 million bond referendum and an additional \$10 million was raised from “health, life and safety” bonds. These expenditures helped cover the expansion of the new kindergarten through second grade elementary school located next to Liberty Middle School, an expansion at Worden for third through fifth grades, the Glen Crossing elementary school, the expansion of the Glen Carbon elementary school, and the renovation and expansion of the Edwardsville High School

which would become the district’s alternative school. Remarkably, there was no outside project manager who would typically coordinate such an undertaking. Stewart and Hightower worked together to help complete these projects at budget and on schedule, with few of the problems and distractions that were so evident at an earlier time. It was a “win-win” for labor and management and a proud accomplishment for the entire community.

Dr. Hightower said, “So strong was the trust and good feelings that these successes spawned, that smaller projects- maintenance buildings, booths for the athletic stadium, and storage facilities, were all done with volunteers including union members who donated their time and effort, reducing costs and allowing the school district to advance its ambitious plan further. Just a few years earlier, few people could have imagined that such things were possible. It appears as if the Edwardsville school district built more than new buildings.” According to Dale Stewart, “We worked extremely hard as a team to overcome any challenges and promote an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. It was clear from the start that open communication and working through tough issues would create a sense of community faith in the projects and overall pride that everyone was working to make the right decisions for the school district and children.” The “shared vision” that gave birth to improved and cooperative labor-management relations has flourished and the community has learned important lessons for the future.