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Doing More With Less

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Have you ever wondered what an intermediate school district (ISD) is or what it does? ISDs were created by state lawmakers in 1962 to help schools become more cost-effective and reduce duplication. The Muskegon Area ISD helps schools realize lower prices by cooperatively purchasing everything from hand soap to laptops. We provide the technology services schools need to manage data for report cards, employee records, pay checks and deposit slips. In times of dwindling resources, local school districts are required to do more with less. Intermediate school districts assist in this process.

Many cost-saving projects would not be possible without community and school-ISD partnerships. In 2007, Muskegon County, Muskegon Central Dispatch 9-1-1, and the MAISD completed a 130-mile fiber optic network that connects schools, colleges, fire departments, police stations, and other governmental entities. The countywide network delivers faster online connections, increased capacity, and lower telecommunications costs for all sites.

Because ISDs are regional, they are successful in bringing new grant dollars into local schools and communities. While a third of the ISD's revenues come from local property taxes, the rest is generated from outside sources including federal and state grants. Each year a federal Head Start grant provides free preschool programs to 924 children in Muskegon and Oceana Counties.

Grants also fund training to help teachers learn new ways to teach history, science, mathematics, career preparation, reading, and writing. Grants, paired with private and corporate donations, have funded a program to supply expensive high-tech laboratory equipment that rotates through our local district high school science labs. The MAISD Regional Mathematics and Science Center that serves all Muskegon and Newaygo County K-12 students provides the necessary training and staff for this program and many others.

Schools are also served by ISDs through regional facilities. Students with the most severe cognitive and/or physical impairments receive highly specialized services and support through Wesley School. These services are mandated by state and federal laws. A daily living program allows older students to learn and practice critical skills like working, shopping, and cooking. This helps them become independent adults. The ISD serves as the fiscal agent for these students to obtain supportive employment services from the Michigan Department of Career Development.

A second ISD regional facility is the Muskegon Area Career Tech Center (MACTC). Nearly 800 high school juniors and seniors from 16 public and non-public high schools attend the MACTC. They are taught by expert staff using costly technical equipment similar to that found in today's work places. This equipment is not affordable on an individual district basis. Nearly 70 percent of all MACTC students continue their education after high school. Employers often seek out and hire our students for their skills and experience.

Another cost-cutting service is the local, low-cost training Muskegon ISD offers to assist educators. Over 1,000 educators attend over 100 workshops each year on topics like creating online courses, using technology in the classroom, and using innovative teaching strategies. The ISD offers curriculum development, school improvement services, and support to local educators. In addition, the ISD coordinates direct countywide student programs that focus on careers, math, science, art, music, and advanced and accelerated learning.

Throughout the past 47 years public schools and the ISDs that support them have pulled together to do more with less. Today's economic challenges make us even more passionate about helping our schools, and ultimately our children, succeed.