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### District partnering with ESCCO on long-term goals

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Big Walnut Local Schools and The Educational Service Center of Central Ohio (ESCCO) are working in partnership to develop a long range strategic plan based on district goals established by members of the community over the past several years.

One the primary functions of the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio is to support the efforts of the 24 districts under the ESCCO umbrella, and ESCCO is providing its assistance to Big Walnut at no cost to the district.

Recently, Big Walnut assistant superintendent Gary Barber and Dr. Ted Knapke, ESCCO Director of Leadership and Planning Services, have been meeting to draft indicators to support and measure district goals.

Those goals, culled from several years of annual district survey results, relate to improving academic achievement, maintaining fiscal responsibility through resource management, improving communications and public engagement opportunities, and ensuring a safe and welcoming learning environment for the students that the district serves.

"Traditionally, both public and private attempts at strategic planning have resulted in so many goals and strategies that it became almost impossible to effectively focus the attention and efforts of the organization," said Dr. Knapke during a recent interview.

Dr. Knapke said using the tighter framework outlined in the Ohio Department of Education's Ohio Improvement Process will forces the school district to focus on four goal areas that members of the Big Walnut community have said repeatedly are important to them.

The Ohio Improvement Process, originally created for at-risk schools and school district, is an approach to improving districts and schools not just for the short-term but by changing fundamental structures and processes that will lead to sustainable long-term improvement.

The Ohio Improvement Process involves four stages across which processes, structures, tools and people are connected, all with the intent of helping districts: use data to identify areas of greatest need; develop a focused plan with a limited number of goals and strategies targeted at instructional practice and student performance; implement and monitor the process; and evaluate the effectiveness of the improvement process in changing instructional practice and student performance.

Barber said while the Ohio Improvement Process is required for school districts at risk, the process is so sound and beneficial that school districts operating at any level could use the model for strategic planning.

"Once we formulate a strategic plan draft we will ask members of our community for input regarding those indicators and outcomes to ensure their relevance to our goals," Barber said. "In late May, we will ask members of the community to complete a survey, seeking information vital to the success of the district goal planning and

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accountability process.

"We are excited about the opportunity to use this accountability process as a means to communicate," Barber continued. "Making our goals and indicators transparent is a way for us to engage our parents and members of the Big Walnut community in our core business, educating students."

Barber also said the first goal is in place; a District Leadership Team made up of 25 members, including teachers, parents and administrators, are currently developing academic-related goals to support improving academic achievement.

Dr. Knapke said even though the 24 school districts served by ESCCO share many similarities, education is not one size fits all; that each school district is unique, demanding input from every segment of school district staff, and from throughout the greater community when establishing long-term strategic goals.

"As a participant in this process, I have been very impressed with the energy and insight of each member of the District Leadership Team," Dr. Knapke said. "All of their conversations have been focused on academic rigor and improving student learning. I'm confident their level of enthusiasm will carry over into the development and implementation of the district's long-term strategic plan."

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