

Executive Summary

Strategic Plan Year Seven

2012-13

After seven years, the strategic planning process is truly part of the Rogers Public Schools' culture. The process of setting priorities through objectives, establishing timelines, and measuring progress has produced a system of accountability and continuous improvement. This year's executive summary will highlight progress in each of those objectives and foreshadow the challenges in the next few years.

The report is organized month by month to provide a better sense of the practical implementation of continuous improvement and the month to month breadth of topics discussed and reports delivered. The focus of this report will be on the Leadership Cabinet, but the management of our district requires several meetings and groups working together. While Leadership Cabinet tends to be the primary decision-making body, much of the dissemination of information and input is conducted through other groups and committees such as our service directors, principals, assistant principals and directors. These regularly scheduled meetings provide an infrastructure that has minimized communication issues and created a more cohesive organization. The report that follows includes a summary of the monthly discussions, issues and reports addressed. This format reflects how our Strategic Plan *truly* works.

June

The End-Of the Year Administrative meeting is the beginning of next year's Strategic Plan. As administrators wind down the previous year, they are given an opportunity to suggest objectives and priorities for the next year's plan. Administrators suggested forty-six objectives to be considered for the Strategic Plan for Year Seven. Common themes for those objectives included Dr. Pollock's work, infusing technology into instruction and improving access and interpretation of student data.

July

By July, the Benchmark test scores have been received and the data has been analyzed. These scores are then compared to previous year's scores to identify trends. Scores are reviewed school by school, grade level by grade level and through the lens of the district as a whole. From this analysis, objectives are discussed and action steps are developed. This process is repeated over and over again with each domain and each objective. Over the course of three weeks in July, the leadership cabinet considers survey results, test scores and feedback from stakeholders. Objectives are then crafted, action steps aligned to accomplish that objective, a person(s) are assigned the responsibility to complete the action steps and finally evidence or a measurement is determined and a date for the report is scheduled.

Standing practice in the district is the sharing of information garnered at national conferences. This practice creates accountability and keeps members of the Leadership Cabinet abreast of the latest educational trends. This July conference reports included New Technology High, a public relations conference, and a linguistic conference.

Leadership Cabinet also discussed how best to prepare for changes in the state accountability system, the impact of graduation rates, and preparation for the beginning of the year meeting, and improving the orientation process for new teachers. Other management tasks included attendance at the state

administrators' conference, teacher fair, professional development calendars, and the opening of school.

August

August is the time to review data from the previous year and finalize action steps for the next year. This past year, on-time graduation rates became a primary indicator on the state's new accountability system and the calculation changed to reflect a cohort graduation rate. This became a priority in this year's Strategic Plan. Action steps in the Year Seven plan include, monitoring "D's" and "F" at the high school, improving articulation between schools to monitor at-risk students, and building better relationships with students through Link Crew and the WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) pilot program for Lingle Middle School. The district also expanded opportunities for students to recover credits through NovaNet and Odyssey software programs.

In August, the New Technology High process began in earnest. Several members of the district office began to write the district's conversion charter and plan for a site visit from the New Tech Network. The Strategic Plan also called for a review for technology usage in other buildings. The Leadership cabinet established a calendar for classroom audits of technology hardware and software use. Leadership Cabinet discussed the adequacy of the FileMaker database and teacher access to student data. The group decided to continue to use this as our primary source of data for our classroom teachers.

The summer professional development report was delivered to the Leadership Cabinet in August. Almost three hundred staff members participated in summer curriculum development activities and the group discussed how to implement this work in the district. Leadership Cabinet also discussed the work of Dr. Pollock which began in August and how to sustain her concepts in the years to come. New processes for new teacher orientation were reviewed and scheduled.

September

September is the month for finalizing plans at the school level. Principals are scheduled to meet with the appropriate central office personnel and complete their Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plans. This process involves a deep, student by student analysis of the previous year's test scores. Principals identify weakness in test scores and discuss their plans to improve student achievement. This is the first of two meetings done with each principal to monitor student achievement at the building level.

High student achievement was monitored. The results of the Advanced Placement (AP) exams and the status of the district's participation in the Arkansas Initiative for the Math and Science were discussed at Leadership Cabinet. AP results are scrutinized for participation and pass rates in each course.

Leadership Cabinet also reviewed a report on the Link Crew freshman orientation. This is only the second year to use upper classmen as orientation leaders to assimilate freshman into high school. Participation improved this year and seminar time at both high schools will allow Link Crew Leaders to connect with their orientation groups. Lingle Middle School piloted a similar process using mentors from their WEB program for their new 6th graders.

Leadership Cabinet also discussed NovaNet licensing, set up My Learning Plan to track professional development in the district and discussed a timeline and process to establish new boundaries for Darr Elementary.

October

The first report to the leadership Cabinet in October reviewed the new calculation used to determine the Graduation Rate used by the state under the new accountability system. The cabinet reviewed some of the factors that may impact our graduation rate; the number of credits necessary to earn a diploma in Rogers, the use of NovaNet to recover credits, and the practice of reclassifying students at the end of the year. The drop-out rate has been improving over the past couple of years through the support of the ATT grant. The cabinet discussed the impact of losing these funds for this year, and discussed the importance of early intervention to prevent any sense of hopelessness for struggling students. The group also discussed the importance of the Crossroads and the Extended Day program to help some students who were not successful in the regular high school setting.

Annually, the cabinet compares test results from Rogers Public Schools to the “Big Five” districts in Northwest Arkansas. The results indicated that our Limited English Proficient (LEP) students were outperforming the other districts in most grades in literacy. The results also showed promise for special education students in the early grades in literacy. In math, our students did not perform as well as the neighboring districts in Geometry and in 8th grade math. There was concern that the enrollment in remediation classes in college for Rogers’ graduates was the highest of the “Big Five”.

October Leadership Cabinet was packed with annual reports. The group examined enrollment projections, demographics of enrollment in Advance Placement classes, remedial courses at the high schools, discipline referrals for the previous year and the quarterly reports from both ESOL and Special Education departments. This year’s professional development plan was reviewed and it emphasized the work of Dr. Pollock and new math strategies in both the elementary and middle school levels.

November

Leadership Cabinet only met twice in November. Reports on the first quarter list of failing students and the impact and interpretation of the district homework policy were discussed at length. The list of failing students is generated after each grading period to help buildings provide early interventions. In the past three years it has been the practice of our district to have national conference attendees report back to the cabinet. In November, Dr. Hill reported on the national school personnel conference. The superintendents also met after leadership cabinet to establish an open and consensus-building process for establishing boundaries for the new elementary school. The first meetings were to begin on November 7.

December

During the final days of November and into December, the boundary committees began their work. Each committee was to present a proposal in January. Those proposals would then be consolidated into a final proposal to be presented by administration to the school board.

Each December the Leadership Cabinet receives a report from National Student Clearinghouse. This report tracks district graduates enrolled in post secondary institutions. Recent trends indicate an increase in student attending NWACC. The report also noted that 96% of graduates returned for a second year of college. In 2005 31% of our graduates enrolled in post secondary schools, that percent has increased to 54% in 2013.

Debbie Atwell and Dr. Hill share information in December about the new evaluation system adopted by the State of Arkansas. This evaluation process will impact all certified employees and the training is to be completed by August of 2013. New elements of the system were shared with Leadership Cabinet and the timeline was discussed.

January

In light of events at Sandy Hook Elementary school, Leadership Cabinet reviewed safety procedures and measures in our buildings. The group analyzed the effectiveness and cost of such things as retrofitting classroom locks, increased video surveillance and “buzz-in” systems for entrances. These ideas and a review of the safety measures all ready in place were discussed with principals as well.

In January a delegation from Rogers presented the New Tech School charter at the state school board meeting. Later in the month we were notified that our charter had been approved and Rogers New Technology High school would receive some start up funding for the 2013-14 school year.

Leadership Cabinet reviewed data on the co-teach program. The co-teach model has been in use in Rogers for several years with varying results. Under this model, the special education students and teachers are scheduled with regular education students. Both teachers are to accept responsibility for the progress of all students. Classroom management, lesson planning and delivery are to be shared equally. The same model is applied to ESOL students. The theory is that all students in the class would benefit. This is an annual report. The results have been mixed over the years and tend to be teacher dependent. This year’s results indicate that the co-teach model continues to work well in some classrooms, but many times the special education students and ESOL students in a pull out model outperformed the co-taught students. The data used in the reports were the scaled scores on the STAR Reading and Math tests. These tests have their limitations but are commonly used in our district as an interim measure of academic progress. The group will re-evaluate co-teaching when benchmark results are available in June.

Twice a year for the past six years, a report on informal classroom walk-through observations is compiled. Central office administrators make scheduled weekly visits to schools. These short classroom observations are done with a building administrator. A variety of indicators are recorded during each observation. There are approximately 6000 visits recorded each semester. The results are analyzed for trends in instruction and teacher /student behaviors. While indicators tend to remain stable, it was reported that more students (4%) are interacting with the lesson objective than before. This was attributed to the work of Dr. Pollock.

The Technology committee presented recommendations to the cabinet in January. It was decided to open up the firewall for student and teacher access to social media. The use of personal devices was discussed and it was decided establish a “bring you own device” (BYOD) policy.

February

Leadership Cabinet was very busy in February. The process for 360 degree feedback for administrative personnel was established and would continue through April. A monthly report on the progress of New Technology High School was scheduled. It was reported that 175 students have tentatively signed up to attend. Dr. Arbuckle was given permission to begin hiring staff to help with recruitment and parent meetings.

The cabinet discussed two issues related to common core; the impact of common core curriculum standards on ESOL students and the continuation of a contract with The Learning Institute. The Learning Institute has provided the district with formative tests for the previous six years. The tests gave teachers and administrators information used to improve instruction and monitor curriculum delivery. The tests served the district well, but are aligned with the Arkansas Frameworks, but are not aligned with the Common Core curriculum emerging in Rogers. It was decided to investigate the use of similar tests provided by the Northwest Education Association (NWEA).

February is also the time to begin allocating personnel to the secondary schools. Using projected enrollments and a consistent student- teacher ratio, principals are provided preliminary personnel allotments. However this year, with cuts in Federal spending and issues related to new school boundaries postponed allotments until March. Enrollment scenarios were developed as the boundary committee recommendations were used as a model.

Three technology related reports were presented. Guidelines for allowing students to bring their own devices (i.e. iphones, tablets) were established. The use and effectiveness of the software program FastForWord was reviewed. This program is designed to improve reading fluency for nonreaders at the high schools and at Crossroads. Finally, the use of the math program HELP was analyzed during the quarterly ESOL report.

March

Special Education quarterly report was delivered in March. This report updated the cabinet on special education projections for the fall. As of March, there were 148 new referrals to special education and an additional 83 students entering kindergarten with special needs. There were also 65 students dismissed from special education during the school year. The cabinet also discussed the number of special education students participating in the Benchmark testing program.

The budget for 2013-14 was presented to the cabinet in March. As a result of a potential decrease in Federal funding and increasing personnel costs, the decision was made to look at cost saving measures. This included the reduction in stipends, reducing contract days and staffing buildings efficiently. Those decisions would have to be made prior to issuing contracts on May the 1st. The Federal Funds were also discussed. Cabinet asked that we investigate the allocation of federal dollars to see if there were any possibilities for savings. Leadership Cabinet agreed to meet several times over the next few weeks and set priorities for these funds.

The conclusion of Dr. Pollock's work in our district prompted a discussion at cabinet sustaining her work. Leadership Cabinet asked that each principal present a plan on how to build capacity in their respective buildings to acculturate new staff in the terminology and practices espoused by Dr. Pollock. The expectation to infuse research-based instructional practices would be non-negotiable for 2013-14. A timeline and expectations for the elements of the plans was established and then communicated to principals at the March Principals' Meeting.

Dr. Hill and Debbie Atwell, presented the new evaluation system adopted by the Arkansas Department of Education. Deadlines for completing training for evaluators and teachers were shared and training dates were established. The process for completing this required training was discussed at length because of the impact on district professional development and contract restrictions. Dr. Hill and

Debbie Atwell worked on a plan to compensate teachers for this required training through flex days and after school meetings. Evaluators such as principals and assistant principals would be required to complete the training and pass a competency test before being allowed to evaluate staff. The group also discussed the value of having a data-driven evaluation system for teachers and administrators and some concerns about those teachers not assigned to a tested content.

April

There were numerous reports delivered at the April Leadership Cabinet meetings as well as follow-up items continued from March. The follow-up discussions included a decision to use the formative testing program provided by NWEA and to withdraw from "The Learning Institute". A personnel budget was established and a goal of an additional 13 certified staff was set as a target for 2013-14. The timeline and district plan to roll out the evaluation system was finalized. The Leadership Cabinet provided input on summer professional development, summer school site and dates and the meal program locations.

April reports included a review of the remediation rate for 2012 graduates who enrolled in college. Those students who scored 19 or below on a subtest of the ACT are required to enroll in a remediation course without credit in college. The percent of graduates enrolled in a remediation course is down 45% in 2012 from the graduating class of 2005.

The third quarter failing list was reviewed by the cabinet in April. The number of failing grades and the distribution of those failures were analyzed for trends. The cabinet discussed the relationship between grading practices, relationships and student achievement. The cabinet also asked for a future report on the effectiveness of remediation and other programs in middle school and at the high schools. The group expressed concern that those students failing to earn credits at some point will develop a sense of hopelessness and become dropouts. Later in the month, the cabinet received the academy report from both high school principals. The principals shared their plans to improve relationships with students and keeping students interested in school. Future improvements in the Link Crew program at the high schools and the "Where Everybody Belongs" (WEB) program at the middle school were shared.

May

May began with the presentation of the Technology Committee plan. The cabinet was allowed two weeks to review the plan and provide input. Comments on the plan included preparation for online testing in 2014, increased bandwidth and the effectiveness and structure of the Technology committee. After a year of declining attendance, the cabinet suggested that the committee seek input from the members of the committee and look to reorganize and repurpose for 2013-14.

The cabinet was also busy planning the End-of-the-Year administrators meetings. Responsibilities were distributed and the agenda was established. The group set some priorities for 2013-14 including revisiting leadership development through a book study. Pollock sustainability plans were due and will be used as part of building professional development.

Special Education department delivered their final quarterly report in May. The cabinet was updated on requirements to offer students the least restrictive environment, the continuation of a content mastery class at the high schools and plans for extended year services for special needs students in the summer.

Strategic Plan Year Eight

Throughout the course of each year, themes emerge and opportunities for improvement are identified. True to our commitment to continuous improvement, those themes and opportunities become part of the Strategic Plan for the next year. Below are the opportunities and themes that will guide the development of objectives and action plans for Strategic Plan Year Eight.

The work of Dr. Pollock over the previous three years was an investment instruction. During the next year of the strategic plan, it will be critical for the district to maintain the principles of good instruction she has shared with 528 of our staff. We believe that this is enough staff to sustain her work as long as there is a concerted effort to implement her Instructional Strategies that Work. In order to reap the benefits of this investment in professional development, Year Eight must hold us accountable for full implementation.

A second theme for Year Eight evolved from our goal to improve on time graduation. Several years ago when the district established feeder patterns and reduced the number of buildings students would have to attend, the purpose was to improve articulation. In recent years the district has improved transitions, the ability to move records and share information, but the real challenge lies in creating a seamless educational experience for all. Access to data has made this possible. As students move through our system, the interventions, supports and modifications necessary for each student to be successful must be accurately and fully communicated, student by student. This has become increasingly important as more students matriculate through our schools with greater educational needs.

The migration away from formative curriculum-based test provided by The Learning Institute and the adoption of Common Core will challenge our ability to manage our curriculum. NWEA testing we have will provide detailed information on the skill development of our students, but may lack the ability to monitor the curriculum as well as we have in the past. These tests are not specific to Arkansas curriculum. This will make curriculum work extremely important. Each teacher will need to know what is to be taught and when. The role of the building administrators will be vital to guarantee every child has access to what is to be learned. We will need to monitor curriculum to deliver on this guarantee.

Two years ago, two of our middle schools went through a curriculum audit. The lesson learned in that experience is the profound impact of school culture on student achievement. With this in mind, Year Eight will include two main leadership themes. First, there will be a year-long leadership development activity for building administrators. Administrators have chosen two books to study during the next school year, John Maxell's The 360 Degree Leader and Learning from Lincoln by Harvey Alva and Pam Robbins. This professional learning activity is designed to clarify the values of school administration and turn leadership into a set of behaviors, theory into practice. Secondly, with the focus away from teaching and more on learning, we will need to meet our students where they are. We will need to mitigate the impact of poverty and language on student achievement. We will need to put technology in the hands of our students as a learning tool. We will need to find ways to build relationships and to make our big district seem small.

The structures and processes in our Strategic Plan have allowed our organization to continuously improve and adapt. Leadership Cabinet accommodated the opening of Rogers New Technology High School, a new elementary school, a forum to create new elementary boundaries, to a process to adopt a new staff evaluation system, maintain quality test results and a vehicle to shift to the Common Core

curriculum. Every year presents a new challenge, but our Strategic Plan has proven to be an effective vehicle to deliver our theory of action; “a well-defined curriculum, delivered with best instructional practices and supported by professional development will result in improved student achievement”. As the district prepares for the next year, we are confident that we can make the most of future opportunities.