

**Rogers Public Schools
Strategic Plan
Executive Summary
2009-2010**

The development of Year Four of the Strategic Plan began by prioritizing and sequencing the numerous recommendations from the Curriculum Audit of 2008-09. The next step was to set objectives in our plan to accomplish a reasonable number of recommendations to move from “good to great to extraordinary.”

We continued to organize our Strategic Plan around five domains. We expanded the scope of the Curriculum domain this year to include Curriculum and Instruction. This was to help clarify the separation of the role of the district (curriculum) and the role of the teacher or local school (instruction). The other four domains; Leadership, Data, Professional Development, and Communication remained unchanged from previous years.

Leadership

A reoccurring theme in the recommendations from the Curriculum Audit was the need to establish clear and concise policies that would provide a foundation for curriculum management. The auditors noted several policies that needed to be updated and were “inadequate to direct curriculum management and establish control of the educational program” (Curriculum Management Audit, p.18). This emphasis on policy prompted one of the most important objectives of this year’s plan, to establish expectations and system guidance through updated and new board policies. To accomplish this objective, a policy review committee was established and began the task of reviewing all 385 board policies. Ninety-two policies have been revisited through May 2010.

A second leadership objective for Year Four was to expand input opportunities for stakeholders in our district. This objective included the continued and expanded use of committees and the restructuring of Leadership Cabinet. This year, Leadership Cabinet was expanded to include nine-week rotating terms for principals. One elementary and one secondary principal were invited to serve on Leadership Cabinet during each nine weeks.

Opportunities for input were provided through numerous committees. The Annex-Use, Data, Technology, Professional Development and the Dropout/Graduation Committees continued their work in 2009-10. Other committees were added this year to address a variety of topics including our administrative evaluation instrument, the instructional processes in our district, roles and responsibilities for administrators, feasibility of a conversion charter school and the rigor and relevance of curriculum for our students. A variety of stakeholders participated in the work of these committees including building administrators, teachers, board representatives and district administrators.

Classroom walkthroughs are part of the leadership routine. Each week, district administrators visit schools and observe classroom instruction. This practice provides opportunities for building administrators and district personnel to observe our classrooms and discuss current instructional initiatives. Approximately 5500 classroom observations are conducted each year. The data from those observations are entered into *Teachscape* software. A summary of that data is then shared with teachers and administrators to note trends in instructional practices and to stimulate conversations among staff about best instructional practices.

Last year, we re-organized the Special Education department to improve the availability of special resources at the building level. Qualitative feedback from administrators and the reduction of district-level issues supported that reorganization. This year we replicated that organization with our ESOL department. Curriculum specialists from ESOL schedule a day each week to be available for this challenging subgroup in support of student achievement.

Another practice which continued in Year Four was the interim Adequate Yearly Progress meetings. Each principal meets twice yearly with the superintendent, deputy superintendent and the appropriate assistant superintendent to discuss student achievement. These meetings focus on progress made toward state accountability targets by using formative test data and prediction models to determine which, if any, additional interventions need to be put in place.

Finally we have completed another year of the Leadership Academy. This was the fifth leadership class in four years. Fifteen more teachers and administrators volunteered to be a part of this program. This project-based experience continues to build a cadre of staff with expertise that is useful as our district moves forward.

Data

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed in 2001, increased accountability has required all staff to make data-driven decisions. While NCLB would like to simplify the educational process to a singular test, we understand that real improvement in student achievement will require a greater breadth and depth of information on every student. We also understand that data will never be definitive, but will only be evidence to be used to guide our decisions. Consequently, the appetite for data in schools and school districts continues to rise.

The interim AYP meetings are a leadership initiative, but they are also watershed data meetings. The first of two meetings is conducted in the fall to insure that each building administrator had finished analyzing his/her previous year's results and had put in place a plan for the upcoming school year. The second meeting is scheduled for the middle of the school year and is a progress check on the effectiveness of each building's plan. Both of these meetings are comprehensive and completely data driven. Building administrators have developed the ability to drill down in their data to the individual student. These meetings are an integral part of our continuous improvement process.

To support the data-driven decisions within our district, monthly data trainings are held for building administrators and directors. These trainings are designed to enhance an administrator's

ability to access and interpret data. This process has supported the district's ability to make sound educational and data-driven decisions.

Data are collected for program and intervention evaluations. We have moved well beyond test scores and attendance, and now look at participation rates, remediation demographics, longitudinal performance of our graduates and pre-k programs, and fidelity of implementation for interventions. These reports are then presented regularly at Leadership Cabinet for discussion and action when appropriate. While it is difficult to correlate a program or intervention definitively with a change in student progress, we are getting better at triangulating information and data, therefore, enhance our chances to make good decisions.

Curriculum and Instruction

The major accomplishment in the area of curriculum and instruction was the development of a Curriculum Management Plan. The Curriculum Management Plan was developed in October to create a framework in which to move the district's theory of action, "*a well-defined curriculum delivered with best instructional practice supported by targeted professional development will lead to high student achievement*" into practice. The plan delineates organizational responsibilities and long range processes to create a centralized consistent curriculum guaranteed to all students.

A lot of time and resources were committed to the improvement and development of curriculum and instruction this year. Stimulus funds allowed us to install two software programs in most of our elementary schools. These two programs, Waterford and SuccessMaker, were implemented as part of the district's effort to standardize curriculum; therefore, reducing inconsistency and fragmentation across the buildings. Both programs are being monitored for gains in student achievement and show promise.

Extensive work was done on our Total Instructional Alignment (TIA) documents at the secondary level during this school year. Several days were spent completing the components of TIA documents. This process insures that all students have access to the Arkansas Standard of Learning Expectations. The purpose of our work is to clarify the objectives so that each teacher clearly understands what the student is to learn, identify and align resources, define prerequisite skills necessary to learn an objective, and provide teachers with ways to assess each objective. The TIA documents are in various stages of development and refinement. However, TIA is not just a document, but rather an ongoing process. Many courses still have significant work to complete, but there is now a minimum and standardized structure for our curriculum.

There were two major initiatives in the area of instruction in Year Four. The first initiative, co-teaching began in the summer of 2009. Co-teaching targeted ESOL and Special Education students. Wherever possible and economically feasible, these students were scheduled in a regular education classroom with their peers. This structure meant that a special teacher and a regular education teacher were placed in the same room, but unlike inclusion models of the past, both teachers were equally responsible for all students. Consequently, ESOL and Special Education students were exposed to the same curriculum at the same pace as their classmates, but were supported by their special teacher. Qualitative feedback suggests that the students

benefitted from the experience, but the teachers gained a greater understanding of grade level expectations that transferred to their non co-teaching classes.

A second instructional effort was begun in Year Four, but will begin in earnest throughout the next school year. With the guidance of Dr. Jane Pollock, a nationally known researcher and author, Rogers Public Schools will move toward a standard instructional schema. Dr. Pollock calls this schema GANAG. GANAG is an acronym for **G**oal, **A**ccess, **N**ew information, **A**pply, and **G**eneralize. Based on research and practice, the use of this schema will enhance student learning in every lesson taught at every grade level and content area. The long range goal is to create an expectation that this schema becomes standard practice in the district.

Other efforts to improve curriculum and instruction in Year Four include the installation of 60 Smart Boards in elementary classrooms. This technology enhances student engagement by bringing the 21st Century to the classroom. An additional 150 Smart Boards are scheduled to be installed in 2010-11. Several *netbooks* were also purchased to provide portable access to online resources as wireless access was increased in our buildings. Rogers Public Schools also benefitted from participation in two grants this past year. The AAIMS grant supports the district initiative to improve participation and performance in Advance Placement courses. Rogers High School also benefitted from a grant secured from AT&T. This grant has been in place for two years, but included a new “jump start” program for at-risk rising 9th graders. Data is being collected to determine the effectiveness of each of these innovations.

Professional Development

Professional Development is the vehicle to create meaningful improvement in the classrooms of our district. The district has made a concerted effort to offer meaningful professional development that will directly impact instruction and improve student achievement.

Last summer, we committed to the co-teaching model in an effort to improve student achievement for special education students and English language learners (ELL). The initial training included an administrator, a regular education teacher matched with either a special education or ELL teacher. In total, 190 staff members were trained and 20 classrooms used the co-teaching model this school year. This model uses the expertise of both teachers in the classroom. Both teachers are equally responsible for the achievement of all students. This meant that students normally removed for small group instruction were exposed to the same rigor and pace of instruction as their classmates, but with continuous support from two teachers instead of one.

Our district participated in the Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science (AAIMS) during Year Four. This grant funded program seeks to increase the academic rigor in our district by increasing the number of students enrolled and successfully completing Advanced Placement courses (AP). The grant includes “Laying the Foundation” training for high school and middle school teachers. This training helps teachers build prerequisite skills so more students can take advantage of Advanced Placement courses. Elementary teachers were introduced to a new approach to teaching mathematical thinking through Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) professional development. This instructional strategy encourages students to explain how they

got their answer. Subsequently, teachers have the opportunity to correct inaccurate reasoning and also model correct reasoning. This focus on thinking moves elementary students to a higher level of problem solving to support their emerging computation and calculation skills.

Elementary teachers were also given Debbie Diller training. This training was designed to increase the effectiveness of small group work in elementary classrooms. Teachers were instructed on how to make independent work time more productive. This classroom structure is common when teachers organize small group learning.

Communication

Communication has a new look in our district this year. For the past few years the Strategic Plan has emphasized the need to effectively communicate with our stakeholders. One of the most visible signs of that commitment has been the updating of our website. This has been a year in the making and culminated in the transition to our new website in December of 2009. Our website is visited as many as 500,000 times a week. In many cases, we recognize that this is our first impression and we think it now makes a better first impression. Other features on the new website designed to enhance communication include a *Facebook* page for public comment, visible contact numbers and email addresses, user-friendly menus and the ability to easily update information. These changes have improved access to our district. We now receive between and 5 and 10 messages a day.

Another exciting communication initiative this year was the development of a DVD, “Preparing for Kindergarten.” This DVD was distributed to all parents when they registered their student for Kindergarten. The DVD explained to parents the skills their child needed to enter school and also provided instruction by local teachers on learning colors, shapes, numbers, etc.

Reaching out to parents is always an important part of the communication objectives in the Strategic Plan. In Year Four, a new program called “Parents Advancing Readiness for Educational Studies” (Padres) was begun to provide Spanish-speaking parents with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for them to support their students in the educational process. The program was piloted at Jones and Grimes elementary schools this year. Twelve parents completed the 5 session program and will become trainers as the program expands.

The school district continued other communication efforts begun in previous years. The newspaper supplement was compiled and distributed in our community. We have improved our accessibility to local realtors and have met with prospective families and provided tours of our schools. Minutes of all of our meetings are distributed electronically to internal stakeholders and monthly meetings with principals, assistant principals, and directors continue to provide a forum for discussions.

Next Steps

There are some exciting developments in process for next year. Teachers will begin their work with nationally renowned author and researcher, Dr. Jane Pollock. Instruction in our classrooms

will begin to take a more standardized expectation that will provide better opportunities for all students in our district to be successful. The district has committed to 23 days of training for 60 regular education teachers and 30 special education teachers. Dr. Pollock will follow this training with classroom visits to refine and hone these teachers' skills as she helps us improve "one teacher at a time."

Another emphasis for next year will be our efforts to improve the vertical alignment of our schools. This will include coordination and standardization of processes and curriculum – getting the arrows pointing in the same direction. There are plans to allow more opportunities for administrators to meet and discuss challenges they share. They will also coordinate their efforts to improve parental involvement, the transition of students from one building to the next and continue to support staff as they help define our curriculum at each grade level. This work will be complicated, but will also give greater direction when the State of Arkansas adopts the National Curriculum Standards.

Nothing will be more important to the development of leadership for the future of our district. Nurturing existing staff that presently hold leadership positions and developing emerging leaders will need to be a priority for our district. The role of school administrators continues to change. Demographics, federal and state legislation, and societal expectations make the job of school administration ever more challenging. In order to successfully meet those challenges, we must prepare leaders with the skills and abilities to perpetuate our commitment to student achievement.

None of the work outlined in the Strategic Plan can be completed without teachers. We will continue our efforts to create meaningful professional development that will support our staff to meet the challenges they face in their classrooms. The efforts begun with Dr. Pollock with regular education and special education teachers and a focused support for teachers of English Language Learners will all target the instruction.

Overall, the district continues to implement our theory of action developed in Year One, *a clearly defined curriculum and best instructional practices supported by targeted professional development will lead to the desired student achievement for all students.* We are invested in turning this theory into a reality by developing a system of schools that will realize our mission that "all belong, all learn, and all succeed."