

**Rogers Public Schools
Strategic Plan
Executive Summary
2007-08**

Two years have passed since Rogers Public Schools committed to a strategic plan to move from “good to great to extraordinary”. In year two, the strategic plan took roots. Many of the objectives from year one became routine, long-term initiatives still have momentum, and a commitment to continuous improvement remains strong.

The format of the strategic plan did not change from year one to year two. The plan is still organized around five critical domains in education: leadership, communication, professional development, data and curriculum. This year’s plan included 44 objectives across these domains. The purpose of this summary is to describe the progress made in each of these domains and to preview future opportunities for improvement.

Leadership

Leadership is the key to sustaining the strategic plan. In year two, many leadership objectives were continued from year one. The Leadership Cabinet continues to function as the forum for discussion for district-wide issues. Standing members of the leadership cabinet includes the superintendent, deputy superintendent, the three assistant superintendents, director of communication, and the treasurer. Other administrators are included when appropriate. Leadership Cabinet agendas are driven by the strategic plan and include annual reports, program evaluations, management topics and pending district programs. Minutes are published after each meeting and distributed electronically to administrators. The Leadership Cabinet serves as the accountability vehicle for completion of the strategic plan objectives.

Throughout the 2007-08 school year, Principals’ Roundtable and Administrative Council meetings included leadership development. Building administrators shared their expertise through presentations on a variety of leadership topics selected at the end of the 2006-07 school year. Topics included; distributive leadership, peer coaching, leading change, and administrators as learning leaders.

Leadership development continued in our Leadership Academy and a new class for assistant principals was added in year two. The Leadership Academy was open to all certified employees and this year included 16 teachers and administrators. The assistant principal class was designed for aspiring principals. This syllabus included presentations on school improvement and personal leadership skills. The assistant principal class focused on more practical aspects of school administration such as interviewing, teacher evaluation and a review of the assistant principal evaluation instrument. Both classes culminated with K-12 projects that were presented to the Leadership Cabinet. In the two-year history of our leadership development, one participant has accepted a role as principal, three have become assistant principals, and three have accepted leadership roles as academic coaches.

Other leadership efforts included the restructuring of curriculum delivery, technology and special education. With the advent of two high schools and four middle schools a new organizational structure was necessary to maintain a well-defined, vertically aligned curriculum. Members of the leadership cabinet spent several days evaluating our curriculum structure and established a new position for 6-12 curriculum supervision. Existing curriculum roles were also reviewed and a school-based, principal led curriculum organization will be implemented in 2008-09. This structure will enhance the principal's position as instructional leader and provide more support to teachers through academic coaches in math and literacy. This structure will also empower department and academy chair positions at the secondary level. More lead teachers will provide additional curriculum support at both the elementary and secondary levels.

Technology leadership was addressed in year two. The technology committee was reactivated and a new user-friendly technology plan was developed. The technology department was restructured to include a system administrator responsible for the maintenance and operation of the district's infrastructure.. A Chief Information Officer position was also created to provide administrative leadership and improve coordination between technology and the district. The district also acquired E-rate funding to provide for improvements in performance and connectivity in our technology infrastructure.

The special education department was re-evaluated in the spring of 2008. A consultant was asked to review the department and examine district leadership responsibilities. Consequently, responsibilities will be redistributed to encourage more interaction and communication to improve student achievement for students with disabilities. This reorganization will mean that special education administrative responsibilities will be more clearly delineated next year. Para-professional and instructional aides were also reassigned to provide more clerical support for special education teachers in the buildings. This will alleviate clerical and administrative duties such as coordinating meetings and data entry, which will allow special education teachers more time to focus on instruction.

Another new leadership objective was the interim Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) meetings. This year each principal participated in an interim meeting with the appropriate assistant superintendent, the deputy superintendent, the superintendent and the directors of special education, federal programs and English language learners. The purpose of this meeting was to review student achievement in each building and to provide support to improve student achievement. These meetings were informal and centered on the Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (ACSIP) submitted by each building. This kept those plans "alive" and ensured that building initiatives were in place and were being supported.

Data

Data use continues to drive decision-making in our district. Summative state assessments serve as the final grade for our district. However, more teachers and principals are using a

variety of sources of information to improve student achievement, identify at-risk students, determine the effectiveness of their programs, and research new initiatives.

The use of data was evident during the Interim AYP meetings held in January. Principals brought test scores, reports generated by intervention software in their buildings, The Learning Institute usage reports, and any other data they had used in making decisions about improving instruction in their building. A greater understanding of data and increased reliance on quantitative information indicated that more data-driven decisions were being made to improve instruction and track student progress.

This reliance on data for decision-making was affirmed by increased interest and attendance at data-team meetings. Once a month, the Director of Data and Accountability trained building administrators and directors to access, collect, compile and manipulate data. These voluntary meetings have been well attended as building administrators and teachers work to improve their skills and understanding of data. The feedback on this professional development has been positive and valuable.

This is our second year as a member of The Learning Institute (TLI). This organization provides us with formative assessments throughout the school year. These tests give teachers feedback on what it is that students have learned and what it is that students need more help in understanding. We can generate a report to determine how often the results are being accessed. This report is an indication that teachers are increasingly finding this information valuable in planning instruction. It has allowed a growing number of teachers and our academic coaches to pinpoint the content and skills students have learned, those skills that need re-teaching and those skills that have been mastered. The result is improved instruction and will lead to improved performance on our state tests.

Over the past couple of years, we have gathered data on the various intervention programs such as software to improve reading, reading programs, and math skill building programs. It is often difficult to determine the effectiveness of any individual intervention program because at-risk students often receive multiple and varied support in each building. The result of our investigation indicates that complete implementation and commitment to these programs is the key to effectiveness. Therefore, when supporting new initiatives, we will ask that there be a full commitment and will ask that if program is to continue, enough time and resources are put in place to maximize effectiveness.

The Graduate Profile service is a new source of data for us in year two that will provide valuable data. If our goal is to prepare students for college and/or the world of work, then this data will be a vital piece of information to measure our progress toward that goal. To date, we have received incomplete information, but we will use other sources to make that information more comprehensive. This data will be invaluable in the future.

While not directly associated with the Strategic Plan, the opening of a second high school required the development of a comprehensive personnel and student database. This information was used in the process of reallocating personnel, establishing enrollments, making efficient hiring decisions, and controlling budget.

Communication

Communication in a large school district and growing community can be a challenge. To meet this challenge, more and more vehicles of communication have been formalized. We continued to publish minutes of important meetings including each Leadership Cabinet meeting and the Principals' Roundtable meetings. These minutes have kept leadership in our district informed on topics and decisions that have been addressed throughout the year.

New initiatives for this year included meetings with community groups. There was a series of meetings with real estate companies in Rogers to promote our district. Presentations have also been made to the local chamber of commerce and we are participating in discussions with a local task force to promote Rogers with new arrivals to Northwest Arkansas. A new parent-friendly brochure was printed this year. This brochure celebrates the accomplishments of our district and was made available to businesses, real estate offices and our chamber of commerce. This was popular with the area businesses and additional copies will be printed when test scores arrive this summer.

Software was used to improve communication as well. *Edulog* is bus routing software that allows our parents and students to access bus information through our webpage. This software became fully functional in the summer of 2007 and facilitated the best opening day of school thus far for our district. Another software that was fully implemented was *School Dude*. This software tracks district work orders from submission to completion and has improved accountability and response time for work orders. The ESOL department introduced *Traducelo Ahora* this year. This software provides automated translation of emails between Spanish-speaking parents and school staff. Data on the effectiveness and usage of this software will be collected in 2008-09.

The Special Education department formed a parent communication committee in year two. The committee met monthly to discuss special education issues and share pertinent information with parents of students with disabilities. They also published a monthly newsletter for their membership.

Other efforts to improve internal communication for staff were completed this year. A directory of services was published to make it easier for employees to contact the appropriate central office administrators when they have questions that need to be addressed. Secondly, a procedures manual was published in the spring of 2008. This manual is a compilation of district procedures for building administrators. This will be a work in progress and can be updated as new processes are developed. This manual is available online to administrators and will help standardize routines and management procedures. An internal newsletter titled the *Deputy's Bulletin* was published this year. Three issues were sent electronically to update progress on the strategic plan and to celebrate successes of programs and the accomplishments of personnel.

Curriculum

Curriculum was a focus in year two of the strategic plan. With the strong belief that a well-defined curriculum is the cornerstone for improving student achievement, the district focused on the development of our curriculum. Many professional development days and Monday afternoons were spent articulating what is expected for each student to learn in each content area and grade level. This work has been invaluable. Using the Total Instructional Alignment process, teachers have been engaged in ongoing conversations about their curriculum. Math and literacy teachers led the way, but each content area has been involved. This is a process that will continue for years. The result will not be a document, but rather a culture of continuous re-evaluation and clarification of what is to be taught.

With the full understanding that our curriculum is a process, we have contracted for a comprehensive audit of our curriculum for November of 2008. Phi Delta Kappa will conduct the audit. This will include a visit from several trained auditors from around the country. Their feedback will help our district move forward by identifying any existing barriers in our system. The audit report will be used as a road map for future curriculum work.

Instruction is the delivery of curriculum. Using effective instructional practices to deliver a well-defined curriculum will maximize our student achievement. As our demographic profile continues to change, our instructional practices must respond accordingly. This year, administrators spent every Thursday in classrooms around the district. Each administrator had been trained to collect data on instructional practices employed by our teachers. These walkthrough observations were recorded using *Teachscape* software. This software categorizes instruction into the key components of best practices. The data collected this year will be used at the building level to set professional development priorities in year three. Each building will then further focus their walkthroughs to ensure that the identified practices are being implemented.

Grade reconfiguration required a review of our curriculum processes. In order to ensure building accountability and maintain district consistency, roles and responsibilities needed to be reconsidered, particularly at the secondary level. These circumstances led to a reallocation of resources. Additional math and literacy coaches were added at the middle school level. Lead teachers were added to both feeder patterns. A single district curriculum specialist position for secondary and one for elementary was put in place to oversee district curriculum initiatives. The department and academy chair positions were given additional time and resources. These employees will be a key to our curriculum process, instructional best practices and communicating with teachers. This will mean the building principal will become more important as an instructional leader as they will supervise and facilitate the curriculum work in their respective buildings through these positions. This building level focus will create a system that will be responsive to individual building needs and empower each staff to meet the curricular and instructional needs of their students.

Special populations were also a focus in year two of our strategic plan. Student achievement for English language learners and students with disabilities remain a challenge for our district. Students with disabilities are under the care of our special education department. This department has two major responsibilities, compliance with federal regulations and student achievement for special education. To better meet these responsibilities, the special education department was reviewed this spring and a reorganization plan for the next school year was developed. Reorganization should lead to additional resources placed at the building level to more closely monitor student achievement. The special education district administrative staff will commit more time to the buildings and teachers. This change will support staff by making district expertise more accessible to meet the needs of their students while improving communication between the district office and each building's special education staff.

The English Speakers of Other Languages department began a long-term effort to improve student achievement in our district. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training began in August with one day training for 60 administrators. The plan is to train all staff members over the course of the next five years. SIOP is designed to improve language comprehension while supporting the acquisition of content standards techniques useful for all teachers. During the second year of the strategic plan, all certified staff in five buildings went through SIOP training and approximately 30 other individuals are enrolled or have completed the training.

Professional Development

Professional Development is fundamental to meeting the goal of the strategic plan. All staff must have the prerequisite skills necessary to improve instruction and thereby raise student achievement in Rogers. Professional development must be emphasized in years to come as we build instructional capacity. These efforts must be coupled with implementation and accountability systems. Effective professional development is the key to improving student achievement in the coming years.

Beginning in August 2007, training on the Total Instructional Alignment (TIA) process set our commitment to curriculum. We needed a process that could be adapted to all content areas. TIA training was provided by our area cooperative to key staff throughout the spring and summer of 2007. At that time it was decided that this was the process Rogers Public Schools would use to better define our curriculum. Trained staff then provided instruction to the rest of our certified staff in August 2007. The district professional development days and many Mondays were then used to work on curriculum. These collaborative meetings were invaluable as teachers discussed curriculum and clarified what was to be taught at each grade level and in each content area. This effort will continue in years to come. The commitment to TIA mirrors our effort to provide a seamless curriculum for all students.

As mentioned, the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training was part of the professional development plan for year two. Training was provided in a variety of

ways: through building professional development, summer course work, and online activities. These options will be offered again next year as the district continues to work to meet the instructional needs of our English Language Learners.

Other less formal but not less valuable professional development took place in year two. The academic coaches provided opportunities to allow modeling and the sharing of best instructional practices with buildings. During the interim meetings, principals commented on the value of academic coaches and their impact on improving instruction. This information was used when deciding to reorganize our curriculum structure.

Theory of Action

Each year our theory of action evolves and as those next steps come into focus, the next steps for our strategic plan become clearer. Last year the necessity to clarify the curriculum and provide the best possible instructional practices were the basis for setting priorities and professional development. This year the grade reconfiguration, the establishment of feeder patterns, and the reassignment of secondary personnel have led to a redesigned curriculum organization and the realization that in order to move the district forward, our theory of action will need to be visible in each building. This will require instructional leadership from each building administrator with district support. District and building leadership will need to work in concert to improve student achievement. The district must be flexible to meet the needs of our diverse building demographics, yet this flexibility must be balanced with a consistent and uniform curriculum. As the consultants stated, many powerful levers have been put in place in our district in the first two years of the strategic plan. These levers will need to be exercised in year three to accomplish our goals.

Opportunities

The strategic plan remains a living document. Our district is on a continuous improvement path, which means we are on the way from *good to great to extraordinary*. Year three will require us to consolidate our efforts into a coherent system to improve curriculum and instruction. There will be much work ahead in the area of curriculum as we clarify learning expectations in literacy and math. The Total Instructional Alignment process will also be continued in all other content areas. Best instructional practices will be needed to effectively deliver our curriculum. We will need leadership at the building level from principals, assistant principals, academic coaches and department chairs to carry this process to our classrooms.

As the consultants noted, there have been many powerful levers put in place in our district in the last two years. The combination of these levers and hard work will move Rogers Public Schools one step closer to becoming an extraordinary district.