

**Rogers Public Schools
Strategic Plan
Executive Summary
2006-07**

In the spring of 2006, the Rogers Public Schools committed to developing a strategic plan to help the district move from “good to great to extraordinary.” Rapid growth, changing demographics and a community commitment to education were catalysts for a thorough introspection of the district’s efforts to improve student achievement. The consulting firm of Croft and Joftus was hired to facilitate the development of our strategic plan. The consultants sought input from the district stakeholders and formed a representative committee to draft a strategic plan. The resulting plan included a set of guiding principles and comprehensive recommendations to help our district achieve its mission of “...all belong, all learn and all succeed.” The strategic plan was finalized and presented to all Rogers schools and the school board. After discussions, presentations and a special study session, the plan was adopted with an addendum for special education on September 19, 2006. (Appendix A)

Prior to the official adoption of the strategic plan, steps were taken to prepare for implementation. The board committed to the addition of a deputy superintendent to implement the plan. The recommendations in the strategic plan were reviewed, organized and prioritized by district leadership. The result of this work was a *Year One Action Plan* (Appendix B) that included 71 proposed objectives. These objectives were organized into five interactive domains: Leadership, Data, Curriculum, Professional Development, and Communication. Each action step included a timeline, measurement, person or person(s) responsible, and a description of the action to be taken. The strategic plan is a continuous improvement plan. Many actions described in the plan for year one will be multi-year endeavors and will be re-evaluated annually.

Leadership

The first domain crucial to the successful implementation of the recommendations in the strategic plan was effective leadership. In August, the Leadership Cabinet was established as a forum to discuss, share progress on implementation and make decisions related to the plan. The standing members of the cabinet include the superintendent, the deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent for secondary, assistant superintendent for elementary, assistant superintendent for human resources and director of communication. Other administrators and district personnel are invited and / or are scheduled to attend when issues before the cabinet require their expertise. The action steps associated with the strategic plan drive the Leadership Cabinet’s agenda. Each action step was placed on the calendar. The weekly agenda for the Leadership Cabinet consisted of strategic plan action steps, reports and district leadership issues. The agenda created accountability for action steps in the strategic plan. Notes from these meetings were shared with all district administrators.

The Leadership Cabinet was a new forum designed to keep the strategic plan as a driving force for the district. The second vehicle to improve leadership was the Administrative Council. The purpose of this group was revamped in 2007-08 to accommodate the strategic plan. The monthly Administrative Council meetings became a forum to improve district cohesiveness. Attendees at Administrative Council include all directors and department chairs, principals, assistant principals and central office administrators. Agendas at these meetings included leadership presentations by central office personnel, departmental reports and announcements.

Each department was assigned a month to present at Administrative Council. This was designed to build district cohesiveness and understanding. Each department shared information on their organization, initiatives and contributions to the district. This fostered a greater transparency and appreciation among district departments and building administrators.

In September all members of the Administrative Council were trained in a classroom walkthrough technique designed to monitor classroom climate and student engagement. Classroom visits were brief but focused. Each administrator was required to make a minimum of five visits during each monitoring period. During the school year, there were over 2000 classroom visits conducted by the members of the Administrative Council. A summary of the results was shared after each monitoring period.

A third leadership initiative in year one was the establishment of monthly meetings for directors. The district directors were divided into two groups, those who provide district support services (technology, transportation, communication, etc.) and directors who support the curriculum (music, gifted and talented, special education, media services, etc). Each month these directors met to share with their colleagues. These meetings improved coordination among the departments and improved communication between the central office and each department.

A fourth leadership initiative in year one was the establishment of the Leadership Academy. This was an effort to grow leadership skills among district employees. Principals offered applications to staff that had demonstrated an interest or possessed leadership abilities. The academy was based on Stephen Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The academy met once a month from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. beginning in October and concluding in May. Each meeting was focused around one of Covey's "habits" and also included guest presenters. There were 28 participants in two classes and each participant selected a culminating K-12 project and made a presentation to the Leadership Cabinet.

Another leadership action step addressed in year one was the performance-based incentive plan for teachers. The district pursued grant and private funds to support incentives for teachers based upon performance on standardized test scores. The Teacher Incentive Fund grants were available through the U.S. Department of Education. A

committee of teachers structured the grant proposal with support from the University of Arkansas. Rogers Public Schools was not awarded the funds for the 2007-08 school year.

To determine leadership action steps for next year, input was gathered from district stakeholders. Each administrator participated in a 360-degree evaluation. Feedback was collected from district employees on job performance. This information will be used to improve performance. At the end of the year administrator meeting, district administrators were asked to provide input on setting priorities for year two of the strategic plan. This process will be repeated with other stakeholders prior to setting year two action steps.

Communication

Communication was the second domain in the strategic plan that was a priority in year one. As the district has grown, the infrastructure and procedures to communicate have been stretched. Successful implementation of the strategic plan would mean the development of processes and procedures to improve communication internally and externally. This would require improved communication with all stakeholders. Routines and processes were established to distribute notes from Leadership Cabinet and principal meetings. The strategic plan was presented to civic groups, service clubs and every faculty in the district. The strategic plan was also presented to area legislators. Central office personnel attended a series of meetings during the legislative session to provide input and obtain feedback on proposed legislation.

An integral part of improving communication in the district was the establishment of processes and procedures. Throughout the year, processes were formalized and written. The resultant procedures manual will be distributed to administrators. This is a work in progress and will be updated as the need arises but will create routines and procedures for many administrative tasks.

Each year the district revises its communication plan. This plan was updated in the fall. An emphasis was placed on improving communication with our Hispanic population. Action steps in year one included the addition of a bilingual central office staff member, increased Hispanic television and radio programs, adjustments to the plan to increase the availability of interpreters during conferences, the translation of more school information into Spanish, arranging translators and Spanish session for public meetings, and the formation of an Hispanic Action Committee which included Hispanic employees, parents and students. Input from this group will be used to improve communication and service to our Hispanic stakeholders in year two.

A Special Education advisory committee was also formed in the spring of 2007. This committee provided a vehicle for dialogue between the Special Education department and parents of students with special needs.

Efforts were made in year one to improve the transparency of district processes. This was evident in the work done by the boundary committee in the spring of 2007. A technology committee was formed to prioritize budget, develop a technology plan and discuss the need for a Chief Information Officer. This provided transparency to employees on the decision-making and budget process for the technology department. Secondly, two presentations were made to the Administrative Council on the district budget. These presentations improved understanding of school finances among administrators. The district organizational chart was updated and job descriptions were completed for central office administrators. Both of these action steps were designed to improve clarity and delineate responsibilities for stakeholders.

Technology was also a part of improving communication in the transportation department. The Edulog computerized routing system will provide easier access to school patrons on bus routes and school attendance zones. Technology also supported the district's work order process through a program called "School Dude" and the process for scheduling field trips through the program "Trip Direct."

The monthly Administrative Council meetings were dedicated to communication. Each month's agenda featured a district department and their contributions and role in support of Rogers Public Schools. The monthly directors' meetings were an invaluable part of improving communication. These meetings kept each department informed and created better coordination of services and improvement efforts.

Data

The third domain in the strategic plan was data. Measurement of progress required an increased use of data. This meant that data collection and analysis would be a significant part of the strategic plan to benchmark progress. The plan requires data beyond state test results. Each action step in the plan for year one is tied to a measurement or evidence. If it is not measured it is not done. Data is the yardstick of accountability for the strategic plan.

Annual test results served as the district's summative source of data. District tests results were analyzed in-depth. Building principals met with their respective assistant superintendents and went through a "gap analysis." This analysis was designed to reveal gaps in performance by various subgroups and then discuss efforts and programs for next year to close those gaps. Additional data such as ethnic enrollment in remedial course work, allocation of time in core curriculum, ethnicity enrollment in Advance Placement courses, and improvement in student achievement by participants in a variety of intervention programs was collected. Existing practices and decisions are now squared against available data.

Data will also be used this year to evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs and interventions. Before the year began, principals were asked to keep a log of students that were enrolled in a variety of programs such as Reading Recovery, Fast ForWord, math

remediation classes, and after school tutorial programs. These programs will be reviewed and decisions will be made concerning the level of district support based upon improvement on state tests and the cost per student. After analysis is complete, interventions and programs can more effectively targeted to subgroups.

Enrollment projections were an important part of strategic planning this year. The boundary committee used these projections during presentations. Projections were used in the development of the ten-year facilities plan and the personnel allocations for 2007-08. This information ensured that personnel resources were fairly allotted to buildings to minimize forced transfers at the elementary level and eliminate non-essential electives at the secondary level.

Surveys were another source of data in year one. A computer-based survey software, SNAP, was purchased. This tool provided feedback on such topics as job performance and professional development. Other survey data collected in year one included Hispanic parent feedback and data usage in schools.

The strategic plan in year one created a culture of data for our district. Data driven decision-making has been an essential evaluation part of the continuous improvement process in year one. The data in the strategic plan has created accountability and a propensity for more data to answer questions such as: What is working and for whom? What data will we need to collect? Why is there a gap in student achievement? What other sources of evidence can we collect?

Professional Development

No other domain in the strategic plan will directly impact student achievement more than the fourth domain, professional development. Increasing instructional skills of classroom teachers means improved student achievement. Several action steps in the strategic plan address professional development, including assigning the responsibility for K-12 professional development to a central office administrator.

A new professional development committee was formed in August 2006. The purpose of the committee was to take a deep look into our existing professional development and prepare a professional development plan for 2007-08 aligned with student outcome data. Tools were put in place to support these changes. Software called "My Learning Plan" will track individual professional development. A new process for requesting flex days for teachers was developed.

A professional development survey was administered in December 2006. The results were shared with the Leadership Cabinet. This information and research were used to shape the professional development plan for 2007-08. Changes will include more job-embedded training, building-based staff development, and collaborative coaching.

Professional development in 2006-07 included Total Instructional Alignment (TIA) as a prelude to the district focus in 2007-08. Several administrators, curriculum specialists, curriculum coaches and teachers were trained to serve as facilitators. These facilitators will provide training to all certified staff at the beginning of the school year. Training for all administrators began in the summer of 2007. Total Instructional Alignment will be the process used to better define the curriculum in the district. The focus on curriculum is reflected in the professional development calendar and budget for 2007-08.

In the fall of 2006, district administrators were trained in a classroom walk-through technique. The purpose of the walk through was to observe classroom climate and student engagement. This put administrators in classrooms and served as a prelude to the more intensive walk-through process that will be used in 2007-08. To support TIA implementation, administrators will be trained in the Arkansas model classroom walk-through instrument. This technique will be used to monitor instructional practices and curriculum throughout the district. Several administrators were trained in this process in the spring and summer of 2007. This group will be responsible for training district administrators on September 13th and 14th. Classroom walk-throughs will be conducted on Thursdays throughout the school year and will involve all administrative personnel associated with instruction.

There are other professional development initiatives that were introduced in year one. Administrators were updated on the new re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). A new process to support teachers finding appropriate interventions for struggling students was introduced. This Response to Intervention (RTI) process will support early and appropriate interventions for students having difficulty in the classroom. Another intervention that was introduced was Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol. This instructional technique can be applied to all students, but is especially effective with English language learners. There is currently a five-year plan to train every administrator and provide the opportunity for every teacher to be trained.

There will continue to be training related to software purchases and regulations. However, the alignment of professional development to the district focus will result in careful scrutiny of expenditures related to presenters and travel. Time and money spent for professional development will support the district curriculum efforts in 2007-08.

Curriculum

No domain will have more impact on the goals in the strategic plan than the third domain, curriculum. According to Robert J. Marzano in What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action, "A guaranteed (aligned) and viable (time and pacing) curriculum has the most impact on student achievement." Year one began with an evaluation of time spent on core curriculum. Each building reviewed their master schedules to ensure that adequate time was spent on math, science and literacy as prescribed in the guiding

principles of the strategic plan. This analysis combined with the allocation of personnel at the secondary level reduced course offerings for marginal courses in the curriculum.

Beginning in August 2006, the district became a part of The Learning Institute. This organization provides formative feedback on student progress in math and literacy at all grade levels. In August, teachers, academic coaches, and administrators organized the Standard Learning Expectations (SLE) to represent the scope and sequence for all grade levels. This process led to a series of formative tests that provided timely feedback to teachers on student achievement. The formative assessments mirrored the state benchmark exams in form and format. Results were shared with teachers after each assessment and were then used to adjust instruction.

In year one, curriculum was addressed in specialty areas. There was a concerted effort to define curriculum in the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. This work set criteria and aligned appropriate intensity of services for ESOL students. Special Education curriculum was also addressed. In August of 2006, special education teachers met to discuss student achievement. The development of skills was set as a priority in 2006-07.

Another proposed action step in year one was a curriculum audit. Preliminary arrangements were made to have the Phi Delta Kappa organization conduct a curriculum audit in 2007-08. An interim visit in February of 2007 by our consultants indicated that the district would need to engage in more curriculum work before the district could maximize the benefits of an audit. This feedback resulted in a series of curriculum meetings by the superintendent, deputy superintendent and assistant superintendents for curriculum. The results of these meetings and a discussion with principals led to commitment to develop a two-year curriculum plan to create *a seamless K-12 curriculum that will allow all students to maximize their student achievement*. A curriculum audit was subsequently postponed until this work is completed.

Theory of Action

The strategic plan served as the road map for many changes in year one. Many of the actions taken during the first twelve months were designed to address immediate concerns and the development of processes and procedures to create a continuous improvement cycle for the district. There is much work to be done in all domains and many changes will require time. At the end of year one, a *theory of action* began to take shape. The strategic plan included guiding principles, but a theory of action is necessary to help define the focus of action steps for the future. This will focus not just the concepts in the strategic plan, but also the actions. After a year in the work, Rogers Public Schools' theory of action to support the strategic plan is that *a clearly defined curriculum and best instructional practices supported by targeted professional development will lead to the desired student achievement for all students in Rogers, Arkansas*.

Opportunities

While much was done in year one, there is much to do. Year one laid the foundation for continuous improvement. There has been a change in the administrative culture but there will need to be more work in all domains of the action plan. There will need to be more focus on curriculum and instruction. The strategic plan and the action steps need to be better communicated to all stakeholders. Professional development, instructional practices and curriculum will need to be more closely aligned. Leadership development must continue to meet future needs. The strategic plan has become the catalyst for Rogers Public Schools as we move from “good to great to extraordinary.” The work has just begun, but there are unlimited possibilities and opportunities for year two.