

**Rogers Public Schools  
Strategic Plan  
Executive Summary  
2008-09**

The highlight of Year Three of the Strategic Plan was the Curriculum Management Audit. When our district embarked on the road to continuous improvement, a curriculum audit was one of the recommendations. In many ways, the audit has been three years in the making. The subsequent report will prove invaluable as we move forward with our Strategic Plan.

Our Strategic Plan is alive and well. The 2008-09 school year was another step on the road from “good to great to extraordinary”. This year’s plan included 40 objectives in the five domains: Leadership, Data, Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Development and Communication. This summary is organized around the progress made in each of these domains in the past school year with the strong intent to promote our action plan... *a seamless K-12 curriculum that will allow all students to maximize their student achievement.*

**Leadership**

Leadership encompasses all aspects of our Strategic Plan. The primary vehicle for setting priorities, maintaining accountability and management of our plan is the Leadership Cabinet. Agendas for each Monday morning meeting include reports on Strategic Plan objectives and long-term and short-term management issues. There are several standing members from the central office, but other directors and administrators are asked to attend when relevant issues are being discussed. These meetings have become the hub of district leadership.

The Leadership Academy was continued in year three. The 16 participants this year completed the study of Stephen Covey’s The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. The Leadership Academy is a project-based experience. The projects this year included charter schools, at-risk students, 90-90-90 schools, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Alternative Learning Environment. This experience creates a pool of employees whose expertise is then used on various committees and presentations. To date, we have about 70 employees that have completed the Leadership Academy and are receiving requests for next year’s cohort.

Three committees were formed this school year to address district issues. The first committee examined the dropout issue in Rogers Public Schools. This is a national concern that has impacted all of the nation’s high schools. The committee made several recommendations including policy revisions, additional professional development to increase staff awareness of the characteristics of students from poverty and the need to address the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning styles. A second committee reviewed the administrative forms used in our district. They eliminated old forms, consolidated several forms that met the same criteria and identified forms and publications that could be printed by our copy center. Their work resulted in a savings of about \$40,000. The third committee addressed the use of our The Annex. This group researched

programming and opportunities that could enhance the use of this facility. The committee shared its findings with the school board and is in the process of developing a plan with interested staff during the 2009-10 school year.

After three years, classroom walkthroughs have become part of the leadership culture. These weekly classroom visits have provided insight into the instructional practices in our district. With this data we will leverage professional development in the next school year to proliferate best instructional techniques in our classrooms.

In the 2008-09 school year, a variety of other activities were completed in the leadership domain. The leadership team was represented at all legislative forums during the legislative session. A procedures manual was updated and attached to the district webpage as a reference for building administrators, and the Response to Intervention process to support teachers with struggling students was reviewed and standardized. This will improve consistency in the identification of students referred to special education.

Special education was restructured for the school year. Special education administrators were given weekly schedules to visit buildings and special education teachers. The qualitative feedback for this change has been very positive. Many special education issues were resolved at the building level creating more efficiency and improved communication between the department and the buildings. This reduced management issues for the department and provided opportunities for more leadership in special education. This model will be replicated with the ESOL department in 2009-10.

## **Data**

Data is the yardstick of the Strategic Plan. Each year various reports are presented in leadership cabinet to monitor the progress of each objective. Reports include dropout rate, graduation rate, remediation course enrollment of district graduates, instructional practices in classrooms, and in depth analysis of all subgroup performance on state tests. After three years of the Strategic Plan, nearly all decisions and initiatives are data-driven. If data is not available, we are beginning to ask the important question “How will we know if this is working?”

This increased use of data has prompted more and more building administrators to develop data analysis skills. Monthly data trainings were scheduled to improve these skills. Buildings were invited to send teams of administrators and teachers to improve skills in data analysis, accessing data and building reports. This has improved the district capacity for data usage. A better understanding of data translates to better decisions in the district and in the classroom. Building principals are now required to meet throughout the year to update the district on student achievement in their respective buildings. This has improved accountability. Elementary principals are required to complete a data notebook.

## **Curriculum and Instruction**

Year three of the Strategic Plan was committed to curriculum and instruction. The district underwent a curriculum management audit conducted by Phi Delta Kappa. The audit included a document review of over 10,000 pages of information and an intensive site visit in November. The audit report was received in March. The 190-page report included many specific recommendations that will shape future strategic plans. The next steps will be to prioritize the findings from the audit and then incorporate the recommendations into next year's plan. Generally, control of the curriculum will need to be consolidated in the district office while instruction will be the responsibility of the local building administrator. Curriculum-related processes and procedures need to become more centralized as the district standardizes "what" will be taught.

The audit examined the work to create curriculum documents used to clarify expectations for our instructional staff. These documents were created through the Total Instructional Alignment process in the areas of math and literacy two years ago. While the documents still need additional components, the foundation is in place. Most of the elementary documents are in good shape, but there is more work needed on the secondary curriculum. Expectations laid out in the audit will provide a blueprint to complete this work.

The number of academic coaches was expanded this year at the elementary and middle school levels. Coaches will model best practices and share instructional techniques among certified staff in our buildings. Building administrators have requested the addition of more academic coaches for the next school year as they have found this to be a key position for improving instruction and interpreting the curriculum.

Our district has already benefited from two grants received in this past year. Our AT&T grant funded computer software for credit recovery and remediation. To date, forty-six students have recovered credits through the NovaNet program. These students worked on their own time through the winter and spring breaks to complete rigorous course work so that they may stay on track for graduation.

A second grant, the Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science (AAIMS) has the potential to improve student achievement in our district. This grant sets performance goals for students in Advance Placement classes and offers incentives their teachers. The impact of this effort will trickle down to middle schools as they increase focus on rigorous academic skills needed for students to be in advance placement courses at our high schools. Increasing enrollment in Advance Placement course work should translate to improved student achievement for our district.

## **Communication**

Communication with the district stakeholders is vital to getting the message and creating the culture of continuous improvement. Publications such as the Deputy Bulletin,

newspaper supplement and a district brochure, continue to deliver our message. Meeting schedules for administrators were adjusted in 2008-09. Assistant principals met each month this year to improve their understanding of district initiatives and opportunities. Monthly meetings were continued with principals, curriculum directors and service directors. Other mediums of communication were initiated in year three to enhance our message and reach new audiences.

This year there were several meetings with local realtors to showcase our district. Dr. Darr addressed the local board of realtors in the spring and invited the group to tour our facilities. After a brief reception, more than 50 realtors toured some of our schools.

With the hiring of a new Chief Information Officer, the district began to enhance communication through technology. The first phase in the effort was to upgrade our email system. Our new web-based email now allows staff to access their email from any computer. Next will be an upgrade to our web pages. The district is moving to a content management system that will create a user friendly and consistent look to the district and school web pages. This will allow staff to keep web pages current and give the district a new look to an ever-increasing number of cyber-visitors. The district will also upgrade to Microsoft 2007 in the summer of 2009. This will standardize our software and improve sharing of information within our district.

This year new DVD has been created to introduce Spanish-speaking patrons to our district. This DVD briefly explains the American school system requirements and expectations to newcomers. The purpose of the DVD is to enhance parent participation and support for our district and improve access to services for our students.

In year three, meetings were conducted in Spanish with high school Hispanic students and their parents. These students had performed well on state tests and had demonstrated academic promise. They were informed about the importance of pursuing a post secondary education. The meetings culminated a help session where over 40 students were registered for the ACT tests given in the spring and early summer. The meetings will continue and be expanded in the 2009-10 school year. There will be a follow-up meeting with high school students to help them navigate the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms so that they may attend college.

The plan is to begin working with 8<sup>th</sup> grade Hispanic students and their parents to encourage enrollment in a rigorous college prep course of study (Smart Core) and to emphasize the importance of completing a high school education.

### **Professional Development**

While the work on curriculum is not yet complete, the training to develop curriculum through the Total Instructional Alignment process is in place. Much of the professional development time in this year was focused on clarifying what is to be taught in each of the content areas. The process and the resultant dialogues among teachers is vital to standardizing content in our district and ensuring that every student has access to the same curriculum.

Instruction is the process of delivering the curriculum. Over the past two years and throughout this year, there has been a focus on improving instructional techniques for our teachers. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training was expanded this year. These instructional strategies were designed to improve student achievement among the English Language Learners, but the strategies benefit all students by ensuring an understanding of essential vocabulary, the addition of visual clues and aids, and a process for clarifying the learning expectation for each lesson.

The previously mentioned data team trainings were continued in year three. These meetings were scheduled to provide timely support to administrators and teachers as they learn to use and analyze data from a variety of sources. The ability to use and understand large amounts of data has become an increasingly important skill for educators. The district is investigating the purchase of software that will create a “dashboard” for administrators. This will put pertinent data on the desktop for a school administrator and improve the opportunity for immediate intervention with students when there is an emerging concern over attendance, behavior or student achievement.

The focus on improving instructional practices was the theme for the professional development this summer. Many of our teachers will continue or begin training in programs designed to improve reading instruction such as ELL, ELF and Literacy Lab. Groups of teachers will also be participating in Co-teaching training. This training is designed for teams of teachers and administrators. The training will help improve instruction for at-risk students in regular education classrooms while raising expectations for students that had been previously pulled out of those classes. Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) is professional development focused on improving student achievement in math. These proven techniques enhance a teacher’s questioning skills and requires students to articulate their thought processes as they solve math problems.

Administrators were also provided training in the classroom walkthrough process. This process provides the district and building administrators important information on what is going on in our classrooms. Training will continue in the fall of 2009 to teach administrators how to use an updated version of the software and to build consistency about expectations for instruction.

### **Opportunities**

The Curriculum Management Audit used a deficit model and provided us with numerous opportunities. As stated in the audit, Rogers Public Schools are at “an ideal time to request external review.” The challenge in year four of the Strategic Plan will be to take advantage of the opportunity to develop the foundation to accomplish as many audit recommendations as possible over the next few years. The Curriculum Management Audit affirmed many of the process that have been put in place, but revealed the necessity to enhance district control of our curriculum. The first challenge will be to set priorities for year four of the Strategic Plan that will allow our district to continue to support

processes in place while enhancing our opportunities to achieve recommendations in our audit.

Curriculum documents will continue to be part of the next strategic plan. While the documents are in various stages of completion, others are just being developed. The development of curriculum documents is a long process. Rather than attempt to complete the curriculum for every course offered, priority will be given to the most common and core courses.

The curriculum audit recommended that we develop a stronger connection between evaluation and professional development. To that end, we will need to clarify expectations in our personnel evaluation instruments. We have begun this process with our academic coaches and will expand this effort to building administrators this year. You measure what you value; therefore we will have the opportunity improve the connection between evaluation and professional development by creating exemplars to set high expectations and define the evidence needed to support an administrator's rating.

The road from "good to great to extraordinary" will take time and much effort. The strategic planning process has given us our footing and the curriculum audit has given us our roadmap. It is time to begin the journey. Year four promises to be exciting and challenging.