

Strategic Plan Year Five Executive Summary

The end of the 2010-2011 school year marks the fifth year of our district's Strategic Plan. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of progress made in 2010-2011 toward accomplishing goals set in the original findings by Cross and Joftus in 2005-06. Since that year, the following action plan for the district has evolved; *a well defined curriculum, delivered with best instructional practices and supported by professional development*. This action plan set a true course for improved student achievement in our district. The purpose of each year's strategic plan is to move us one step closer on our journey from good to great to extraordinary.

We continue to organize the Strategic Plan around five domains; Leadership, Data, Curriculum and Instruction, Professional Development, and Communication. There were 40 objectives in our plan, many of which were carried over from previous years. This report summarizes the progress made in each of those domains.

Leadership

While the impact of leadership is often difficult to measure, in the spring of this year we had a culture survey administered to all employees in our district. The 20 question survey was offered to certified teachers and non-certified support staff. The results were very encouraging and positive about our organization. Using a Zoomerang survey tool, 672 employees responded to questions related to job satisfaction, confidence in district leadership, job performance, etc. The complete results are attached to this report, but some of the highlights include: *job satisfaction* rated good to excellent by 88% of respondents, *knowledge of the district mission* rated good to excellent by 91%, *motivation to do your work* rated good to excellent by 94% . While further analysis is necessary, the results were generally very positive, but indicate that there are still opportunities to improve.

Leadership at all levels set the culture for the organization. The ability to unify employees and initiatives around the district mission is based on the consistency and commitment of our organization to continuous improvement. Armed with the findings of the PDK Curriculum Audit of 2009, we have worked to become a "school system instead of a system of schools". The foundation of that work began last year as we updated board policies to align governance and our district mission and vision. The work on updating and aligning policies continued in 2010-11 as 49 additional policies were addressed. The systematic review and update of board policies has supported and will continue to support district initiatives set in the strategic plan.

Another responsibility of leadership is to create a structure conducive to carrying out our mission. In 2010-11 we added principals to our leadership cabinet. Their presence has proven to be a win-win proposition. Principals have provided insight and an important perspective as

various issues and reports are presented and decisions are made. They have also served as great communicators with their colleagues. On the other hand, principals have gained a deeper understanding of the complexity and nature of district operations. The result has been a more consistent and collaborative culture.

The final piece of the administrative puzzle was put in place this spring. The addition of a full-time Director of Professional Development was recommended in the original work of Cross and Joftus. This year through administrative realignment, we were able to afford this position. This addition comes at a critical time. Our action plan requires support through professional development. The effectiveness of professional development necessitates ongoing vigilance beyond initial training. This requires someone's full attention and will be crucial to sustain efforts such as Dr. Pollock's work shared with the school board in the spring of 2011. Secondly, the emergence of a Common Core Curriculum in Arkansas will require planning, preparation and a significant amount of work over the next couple of years. This position will help us make the most out of these critical opportunities.

The need to develop leadership in our district was never more evident than it was this year. The buy-out of experienced personnel enacted in the spring created many administrative opportunities for our district. There were 17 administrative openings for the 2011-12 school year, three central office positions, six principals, six assistant principals and two part-time administrative assistants at the high schools. To date, eight of those positions have been filled internally, five externally and three are still vacant. Another group of 13 emerging leaders participated in the leadership academy this year. From 2006-07 to the end of 2010-11 we have had 84 leadership academy graduates. While this has been helpful in meeting administrative needs, we are seeking additional leadership training for administrative candidates. In order for organization to thrive, we will need good leadership in the present and in the future. School administration is a changing career. The advent of accountability, emerging technologies and a diverse student population make it necessary for all school leaders to continue to increase their skills. It is part of our obligation to the future of Rogers Public Schools to prepare leaders to guarantee our future.

In this year's plan, three departments were given specific objectives in order to improve services to students. Last year we restructured some of the duties and responsibilities of the curriculum specialists in Special Education and English Speakers of Other Languages. We also asked that there be increased participation by principals in supporting the student achievement in these subpopulations. While final test results are not in, preliminary results for high school students indicate that this had a positive impact. Other qualitative information supports this claim. Both departments appear to have improved services at the building level and are being more actively supported by the principals. Having department representatives and building administrators work collaboratively has benefitted students.

The other department identified in this year's plan was the technology department. The technology department received the results of their audit conducted in the spring of 2010. Several recommendations were made in the final report and many of those have been initiated.

The technology committee was restructured to include more teachers and budget allocations have been adjusted between buildings and the district office to improve uniformity in technological resources. Monthly presentations were scheduled at administrative meetings to keep building leaders abreast of available technologies district –supported technologies. Most importantly, a long-term philosophical approach to the use of technology in education is evolving based on 21st century skills, the work of Bernajean Porter and Grappling’s Technology and Learning Spectrum. Simply put, technology must become more than a set of skills but rather an intuitive part of thinking and learning.

Data

Since the inception of our first Strategic Plan, no area has made as much improvement as the use of data in our district. The appetite for student information among district and building administrators has increased dramatically over the past few years. This has been encouraged by regular data trainings and expectations from the central office. Principals are now very adept at identifying at-risk students and placing them in appropriate interventions or programs. A regular data meeting between principals and their respective assistant superintendent insures that buildings are collecting, analyzing and making decisions based on multiple sources of information.

It is that appetite for data converged from multiple sources that fueled the search for a data dashboard. Primarily due to cost, the district has not been able to procure a dashboard that would meet our needs. However, with the support of the technology department, we have developed a dashboard that is being piloted this spring. This will provide teachers and administrators access to a comprehensive record of formative and summative test scores, basic student information, and individualized educational needs. The dashboard will also allow administrators to sort groups of students in meaningful ways to identify any deficient curriculum issues and / or the impact of targeted instructional practices. We expect full implementation in the Fall of 2011.

We continue to monitor the implementation of various interventions and programs. We tracked progress on 31 programs and interventions in 2010-11. Data was presented to the leadership cabinet for every program. These reports include information on various after-school programs, graduation and dropout rates, Sheltered Inclusion Observation Protocol, co-teaching, NovaNet credit recovery software, reading recovery, discipline, attendance, Advanced Placement scores and participation, and a variety of other intervention programs. In addition to these annual reports, there were quarterly reports from the ESOL and Special Education departments on academic progress. We now have multiple years of consistent data that has improved our decision making.

One of the critical pieces of data used each year is the Classroom Walk-Through report. This report is reviewed twice a year to monitor classroom practices in our district. This year there were over 6600 classroom visits conducted by building administrators and central office staff. These visits were short but targeted observation of teacher and student behavior. The

classroom is where the impact of all programs, initiatives, and interventions are implemented. Therefore classroom visits are essential. This is where investment in professional development and technology can make a difference, but only if they are implemented. In 2011-12 we will look at methods to improve feedback to staff using the walk-through data.

Curriculum and Instruction

There were two major developments in this domain in 2010-11. The first development that has begun to impact our teachers and will continue to do so in the future is the Common Core Curriculum. When the Arkansas joined this national effort to improve curriculum, it meant additional work for our district. The Common Core Curriculum will be phased-in beginning next fall when the standards will be used in kindergarten through second grade. Additional grade spans are to be added in the next two years. This means that we will need to use district expertise to “unpack” these new standards to greater understand the learning expectations. This will cause some significant changes in our curriculum including what is taught and when it is taught. Subsequently, there will also be a new assessment system for accountability. At the present time, the new assessment system is designed to be computer based and monitor student progress through multiple assessments throughout the school year.

The second major development was the commitment to Dr. Jane Pollock’s work to improve instruction in our district. In 2010-11, Dr Pollock trained approximately 150 teachers on how to improve their instruction by using research-based strategies and actively engage students in learning. The plan is to create an instructional model that can be applied to any grade level and any content. In order to insure the implementation of our investment, principals and assistant principals will be a bigger part of training in 2011-12. There is an expectation that each building will have an administrator from their building present during the training and then for a short follow-up with Dr. Pollock. Over 200 teachers trained next year bringing the total number of trained teachers to more than 350. Dr. Pollock has stated that this initiative can be maintained by our staff at the end of another year’s training. Instruction is the conduit through which our curriculum will be delivered. We are committed to improving instruction because we know that it is a key element to our future success.

Instructional practices for our subpopulations have been a target of many strategic plan objectives over the past several years. We monitor the progress of these students closely. We are in our third year of the co-teaching model and have become much better at identifying students best suited for this intervention. End-of-Course exams in literacy indicate that we have seven ESOL students who scored proficient this year. This is a significant improvement. Only six ESOL students scored proficient since 2007. We hypothesize that this is due to increased exposure to the regular education curriculum and expectations. The co-teach model has recalibrated our staff to serve these critical populations.

Technology has improved to support instruction this year. Last year we invested in about 68 smart boards for our classrooms. In 2010-11 we added an additional 178 smart boards in our

classrooms. This instructional tool improves student engagement and allows teachers to access valuable resources to improve lesson planning and delivery. We are in our second year of implementing Waterford and Successmaker, two software programs designed to build reading and math skills. These programs tap into today's learning styles and excite young learners with color, action, while building essential skills.

The results of the technology audit expressed concern about student access to computers. To address this concern, netbooks have been purchased for many schools. These serve as portable labs and improve availability and economize space. Prior to last year we had about 500 netbooks in the district, we added 240 in 2010-11. As more computers are used to support learning, the need to have portable access has increased.

This is our second year as a participant in the Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science (AAIMS) grant . This grant challenges more students to enroll in Advanced Placement classes and gives incentives to teachers and students to achieve passing scores. Participation has been a goal for in our district since 2007. In that year, 483 students took 781 exams and the passing rate was 49%. Last year 619 students took 1087 exams and the passing rate was 52%. The AAIMS grant attracted 839 students into the AP program and those students took 1691 exams. The passing rate fell slightly to 47%.

Communication

Technology enhanced our ability to communicate with our stakeholders last year. We took advantage of technology to improve our parent notification system in the middle of this year. This system was used for the first time for weather related closings in January and February. The first notifications had a few glitches, but as a communication tool, the system will prove to be invaluable for mass notifications.

Rogers Public Schools are now part of the social network. We have established both a Facebook and a Twitter account for our patrons. To date we have approximately 3000 fans on Facebook and another 1000 Twitter followers. This is done through the new webpage we launched last year. Many of our teachers have tapped into this service and we now have links to help keep parents informed about sports, clubs, activities and classrooms. In athletics alone, parents can keep up with 78 different teams in our buildings.

We understand the importance of parental involvement as a part of our district's effort to move from "good to great." Last year we developed a Parental Involvement Survey and posted that survey on our website. We had 338 respondents and the results were very positive. However, we also got feedback on some areas that can become opportunities to improve. In response, we will develop customer service training for our front office personnel. This training will be done in the late summer before school begins.

Technology was also used to improve parent involvement. In the Fall of 2010, DVD's were distributed to all incoming kindergarten students and their parents. These DVD's provided mini-lessons and a small supply packet for parents to use in helping prepare their student for school. The parents who used the DVD's with their student helped increase their skills from the time of preregistration.

DVD's are also being prepared this spring to encourage parental involvement and support. These DVD's will show parent how they can support their student's educational progress and local school. They will be distributed in the Fall of 2011 and the content will also be posted on our website. We also started summer reading programs in all of our schools for selected elementary students. We made books available for student in the summer months and supported this effort with some parental training.

Internal communication is always a priority. We try to share important information in a timely manner with the appropriate audience. The importance of technology requires a long-term plan. The technology committee has outlined a plan that will help guide future decisions. The speed of technological change makes it important that we make strategic decisions about investments in hardware and software. To help building administrators with these decisions, we have added a technology agenda item to our monthly meetings. This has helped to keep principals informed about new district supported software options and other technologies that are available to support and enhance instruction. All this is done inside the parameters of our technology plan. That plan was shared with principals in our end of the year meeting.

Professional Development

Since June of last year, we have made a concerted effort to improve professional development. We understand that to improve student achievement we will need to equip our staff with the skills necessary to meet the challenges of an ever-diverse group of students. Adequate Yearly Progress standards under No Child Left Behind have increased accountability for certain subpopulations of students. These students come to school with special needs and challenges. We have focused professional development for teachers responsible for the academic progress of these students. All special education teachers and directors were included in the Dr. Pollock training this year. All English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) directors and curriculum specialists were also included in Dr. Pollock's training. An ESOL teacher from every building will be trained next year.

We trained elementary and middle school math teachers last summer in an instructional strategy called Cognitively Guided Instruction. That training will continue again this summer. This researched based approach to math instruction has been an emphasis for the past two years as 184 teachers will be participating in training this June.

No group of students presents a greater challenge to our staff than special education students. There have been several initiatives aimed at helping those students and teachers. We have

continued to train teachers in the co-teaching instructional delivery model. This is when the special education teacher and their assigned students participate in regular classroom instruction. This is our third year of this training the model has many benefits when implemented properly. Unfortunately, placing two teachers in one classroom is expensive. Therefore, we use this whenever possible and reasonable. We have also supported special education teachers of students diagnosed with Autism. This is a growing and challenging group. Last year we trained 34 teachers and administrators in special techniques to serve this population. We also had a consultant from Arkansas Department of Education examine our program and offer practical recommendations.

A larger effort to improve instruction has been ongoing for several years. Nearly all of our teaching staff interact with ESOL students on a daily basis. We began to train teachers in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) in 2007. This collection of strategies helps our limited English students grasp content related material through the use of visual clues and language objectives. Last year we trained an additional 121 teachers. We have supported this training with regular observations by the ESOL department. Our ability to be successful with ESOL students will require the skills embedded in these strategies. Our goal is to have 100% of our staff trained by the end of 2011-12.

Next Steps

There is never a definitive set of action steps for the succeeding year of the strategic plan. We can anticipate some external influences that will challenge our district. The requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress will need some attention as we work on ways to improve student achievement for subpopulations and disengaged students. However, the district is poised for these challenges. We are confident that we have an organization that can succeed. The addition of new leadership in the central office and at many buildings will help energize our district. We will offer six action priorities for 2011-12. These will be part of many continuing objectives, but will receive special attention in 2011-12. We believe that these action steps will further refine our efforts to improve student achievement and support implementation of several key components of our Year Six plan. The suggested action steps are 1) improving building and district level support for Dr. Pollock's work on improving instruction, 2) improve the abilities of all administrators in the area of instructional leadership, 3) improve preparation of future district leaders, 4) improve customer service, 5) enhance the evaluation process for teachers and administrators to support student achievement, and 6) more effectively provide feedback to teachers using classroom walk-through data as a means to improve instruction.

The majority of the plan in Year Six will focus on our established long range goals and objectives. We will work to live out our mission through deliberate and focused actions. We plan to continue emphasis on leadership, instruction and professional development while sustaining a good communication process and an environment rich in data.

Conclusion

Year Five saw a continuation of the work in the previous years' plans. The results of our culture survey indicate a healthy organization committed to its mission and vision. This level of confidence by our stakeholders has given us the greatest opportunity to be successful. There is much to look forward to in the year ahead. We have consolidated many of our efforts, established a functioning infrastructure, and improved communication. We have aligned policy and purpose, are in the process of consolidating our curriculum and instructional expectations, and are working on improving leadership. We are confident that our district can achieve its mission. It is exciting to be a part of the journey from "good to great to extraordinary."