



Strategic Framework

Shaker Heights City School District

Strategic Framework for Excellence With Equity in the Shaker Heights City School District

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Strategic Framework for Excellence With Equity in the Shaker Heights City School District

Overview

DRAFT 8-6-08

Following is a draft of a *Strategic Framework for Excellence With Equity in the Shaker Heights City School District*. This is very much a work in progress. The draft is based upon many sources of information, including indicators of student performance; surveys of students, faculty members, and parents; research on best instructional practices; and literature on the skills students will need for success in the 21st century.

The plan will be revised and refined over the course of several months. Feedback on drafts will continue to help shape future iterations.

Introduction

As the Shaker Heights City School District approaches its Centennial in 2012, a fresh look at priorities is in order. The accompanying draft *Strategic Framework for Excellence with Equity in the Shaker Heights City Schools* lays out a 21st-century iteration of the District's ongoing planning process.

The framework is driven by the District's Mission Statement, which was adopted in 1985 and has special resonance today:

The District will nurture, educate, and graduate students who are civic-minded and prepared to make ethical decisions; who are confident, competent communicators, skillful in problem solving, capable of creative thinking; who have a career motivation and knowledge of our global and multicultural society.

The District's Mission Statement presaged much of the current literature on the "21st-century skills" that students need: mastery of core subjects, problem solving, critical thinking, cross-cultural and social skills, technological competence, collaboration, global-mindedness, adaptability, and well-developed communication skills.

The plan reflects priorities established by the Board of Education in its annual evaluation of the Superintendent, in its recent retreat, and in other public documents and discussions. These include, but are not limited to:

- Graduate students who are, at minimum, college-ready (even if they choose not to pursue postsecondary education immediately)
- Strengthen teaching and curricular coherence
- Improve school climate
- Maintain a stable and highly effective organization with the capacity to support changing needs
- Keep Shaker a school district of choice in a highly competitive environment to help attract and retain residents from all over the United States and world who value high-quality public education

The plan is further informed by the District's collaboration with Dr. Ronald Ferguson of Harvard University, a nationally recognized expert on improving student achievement; by data from tests, surveys, and external sources; by curricular and instructional principles embodied in the International Baccalaureate program; by current research on effective instructional practices and 21st century skills; by state and federal requirements; and by recommendations of the instructional staff.

Although the Mission Statement remains powerful, the environment has changed dramatically since 1985. Schools are subject to thousands of state and federal mandates that did not exist 20 years ago. These mandates, taken together with financial pressures (which in turn are in large part a consequence of the mandates), are limiting the autonomy of schools and districts.

In Shaker Heights and many other districts, where teachers and buildings historically enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, this is a significant shift. A shared vision is critical to supporting the staff's creativity and channeling our collective efforts to best result.

The end product is intended to be a cohesive and comprehensive strategy for addressing two of the most pressing issues in American education: (1) the need to provide students with a rigorous curriculum that will equip them to understand and compete in a global economy, and (2) the chronic underachievement of many students, particularly but not only those in poverty.

It should be noted that this strategic framework incorporates many of the improvement efforts already under way in the Shaker schools. The framework helps to clarify goals and gives them structure, context, and logical organization under the headings of Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction, Technology, Climate, Parent Involvement, and Community Involvement. The International Baccalaureate program is a vehicle that will help the District address many of the goals related to instructional rigor, world-class standards, critical thinking, technology, school climate, and attraction and retention of residents.

The attached draft framework identifies themes, directions, and immediate action steps for the 2008-09 school year. Even as implementation begins in fall 2008, the plan will continue to undergo additions and adjustments. Experience and research suggest that it will take three to five years to implement fully.

This document does not address other important types of long-range planning that occur in the District, such as the ongoing financial planning by the Treasurer's department and the facilities plans that guide repairs and improvements to the District's physical plant. These planning efforts are recorded elsewhere.

Note: This document will have many audiences: the Board of Education; parents, civic leaders, and other residents; teachers and other members of the instructional staff; and members of the support staff. In an effort to communicate with all of these constituencies, the authors have necessarily included some terminology that may not be familiar to the layperson. In such cases, every effort has been made to provide a definition or sufficient context clues for the layperson.

Principles of Planning

Michael Fullan, an international authority on educational reform, studied thousands of schools and concluded that high performing districts have three distinguishing characteristics:

1. commitment to a clear, compelling **mission statement**
2. establishment of a **professional learning community** that responds to changing student needs
3. adoption of an **assessment system** that effectively monitors students' learning

(Fullan, Lecture on *New Meaning of Educational Change*, 1999)

The other component found in high performing districts appears as the first goal (**Leadership**) of the draft Strategic Framework. However, this emphasis is not new. Each year, the District's Continuous Improvement Plans have stressed the use of multiple assessments along with the development of professional learning communities that engage all staff in high quality instruction to promote maximum achievement among all students. Moreover, the practices of our Professional Learning Communities are consistent with the Board-adopted Instructional Goals and Objectives (see Appendix A).

Another important set of research-based criteria was compiled by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in conjunction with Drs. TheodoreSizer (*Horace's School* and Chairman of the Coalition of Essential Schools) and Fred Newmann (school improvement expert at the University of Wisconsin). After an exhaustive review, the joint committee published a list of eight essential factors for successful district planning:

1. focus on learning
2. focus on all learners
3. strong professional learning communities
4. stakeholder involvement
5. focus on a clear mission monitored by data collection
6. integrated strategies
7. leverage of resources
8. changing practices that impede achievement.

During the period of 1994-98, the state of Ohio instituted a Venture Capital grant program, based on these factors, to encourage school improvement. Lomond, Mercer, and Fernway Elementary Schools each received \$25,000 annually to implement innovative programming in the areas of teaching and learning. Evaluative studies of the 561 Ohio Venture Capital schools further validated the use of the eight previously noted factors as barometers of progress. These elements are embedded throughout the *Strategic Framework for Excellence with Equity in the Shaker Heights City Schools*.

Past Planning Activities in the District

Planning documents from the past twenty-five years have been reviewed and are included as appendices to this document. Over this period, the Board of Education and staff have periodically revisited policies and developed priorities. Certain strong themes run consistently through the Board's instructional policies and District planning documents: the need to develop students' critical thinking, judgment, sense of responsibility, creativity, global-mindedness, and communication skills, through a rigorous and relevant curriculum aimed at producing success for all.

The District's Educational Philosophy was first adopted in 1963, revised in 1987 and 1997, and reviewed and affirmed in 2008.

Educational Philosophy

Education is the means by which we are prepared to fulfill our roles as free individuals and as responsible members of society.

Education, beginning at birth and continuing throughout life, is our participation in experiences which enable us to improve our intellect, maintain our physical and mental health, develop and increase our wisdom and judgment, establish and raise our moral and esthetic values, acquire and appreciate practical skills, and prepare for responsible citizenship. The purpose of public schools in Shaker Heights is to provide each individual child with such experiences.

This requires not only the imparting of knowledge but also the stimulating of a sense of responsibility, aspiration, and determination. We aim at vital creativeness; but we must provide enough routine to develop patience, power of adjustment, and habits of social cooperation. We should develop and stimulate the habit of searching out what is the burden of the world's wisdom and judgment with reference to the main issues of life, and an awareness of the relevance of a vibrant understanding of the sciences-social and natural-the arts and the exact disciplines to this search. To question and to critically and constructively examine accepted beliefs should become second nature.

To these ends we shall further develop, maintain and support that professional staff which is capable of, and dedicated to, encouraging each child to perform to his utmost capacity.

All of these objectives have a special significance in our school system where the great majority of our students look forward to even more demanding and self-directed educational development in a society where there is an ever greater emphasis upon, and dedication to, achieving intellectual excellence.

Shaker Heights Board of Education Policy ADA
Adopted 1963, revised 1987, affirmed 2008

Relevance to the 21st Century

Many of these same themes recur in numerous research-based school reform initiatives from organizations such as the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the Goldman Sachs Foundation, and the 21st Century Workforce Commission. Essential skills identified by this body of research include not only mastery of core subjects, but also problem solving, critical thinking, cross-cultural and social skills, technological competence, collaboration, global-mindedness, adaptability, and well-developed communication skills.

Peter Senge, a senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of the influential management book *The Fifth Discipline*, sums up students' needs as follows:

Globalization and advancements in technology are driving changes in the social, technological, economic, environmental and political landscapes at a rate and magnitude too great, too multiple to ignore. Learners equipped with skills and perspectives designed to help them anticipate change and plan accordingly will be better prepared to thrive in a world characterized by rapid continuous change.

Because of its solid research base, compatibility with the longstanding instructional philosophy of the District, and global emphasis, the International Baccalaureate program emerges as a unifying instructional delivery system well suited to the Shaker Heights City School District. Learning based on inquiry encourages students to ask probing questions and

engage in active investigation using the scientific method. Project-based learning fosters in-depth understanding of various disciplines in a manner that is most relevant and consistent with their learning profiles. Differentiation requires teachers to design classroom activities that are appropriate for students' skill levels, learning styles, and interests.

Empowering students to meet ambitious, long-term goals requires ongoing development of a thoughtfully constructed strategic framework that utilizes **best practices** and **measurable outcomes**.

In this connection, the District has been developing a three-tiered model of instruction and academic support called Response to Intervention. The tiers represent the intensity of instructional attention necessary to meet individual students' needs (e.g., small group instruction, working in pairs or individual tutoring). This system focuses on early research-based remediation for struggling children whose learning and behavioral needs are identified and monitored through ongoing, strategic data collection. It can be used with any student population and any curriculum. On the basis of evaluation studies, The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities strongly endorses this instructional approach.

Curricular Content

To a significant degree, the Shaker Courses of Study are governed by the academic content standards mandated by the State of Ohio in the disciplines of mathematics, English/language arts, social studies, science, technology, and world languages. The Shaker Courses of Study at the High School level are also influenced by college admissions requirements and by the prescribed curricula for Advanced Placement courses.

Through the initiative and expertise of Shaker faculty members, the curriculum is based upon mastery of the basic subjects and enriched to go beyond the externally imposed standards. The International Baccalaureate program will present further opportunities and structures to deepen and enrich the curriculum in the traditional subject areas.

Ongoing Collaboration with National Experts

For at least 50 years, Shaker Heights has benefited from the expertise of nationally recognized scholars who have studied and visited the District, including Kenneth Clark, James Comer, Jonathan Kozol, James Coleman, Asa Hilliard, John Ogbu, Renee Rodriguez, Robert Marzano, and Carol Ann Tomlinson. For the past decade, the District has been involved in a research-to-practice partnership with Dr. Ferguson. This association has provided a unique perspective that has enriched our planning.

Much of Dr. Ferguson's work was conducted in Shaker Heights, permitting comparisons of his findings to trends and patterns in similar districts of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). To address the academic needs of Shaker's diverse student population, the District has implemented components of Dr. Ferguson's *Tripod Project*. His key research principles have also been used to improve student-teacher relationships and classroom instruction. Dr. Ferguson's national and local research supports the following Board policy:

Psychological Principles for Learning

WE BELIEVE that the primary methods employed by teachers in achieving our educational goals with students should rest on the following psychological and educational principles (not all inclusive):

A STUDENT LEARNS best when he/she is motivated to learn by an interest or need, which he/she perceives as realistic, meaningful and useful. These interests and needs can and should be stimulated and nurtured by the teacher.

THE LEARNING PROCESS is most effective when it involves the student's experiencing, doing, and reacting in situations in which practice and principle are combined.

LEARNING IS MOST EFFECTIVE when the processes, materials, and anticipated results are appropriate to the maturity, abilities, and experiential background of the learner. Learning tasks should be within a reasonable range of challenge for each learner.

THE LEARNING PROCESS proceeds best under instructional guidance which stimulates without dominating, which consistently provides for more successes than failures, and which encourages rather than discourages.

LEARNINGS AND BEHAVIORS which are reinforced (rewarded) immediately after the desired behavior are most likely to recur. The best planned learning provides for a steady, cumulative sequence of successful and rewarded behaviors. (Reward in a psychological sense is intended.)

THE INNER SENSE of satisfaction that follows successful attainment of purposes, with a resultant improvement in the self-concept of the learner is the type of reinforcement (reward) which is most lasting and has the greatest transfer value to other learning situations.

MOTIVES for the most human learning reside in the inter-personal relationships (pupil-parent, pupil-teacher and pupil-peer).

Conclusion

The philosophy statement of the Board of Education, the statement of educational objectives, and the statement of psychological principles for efficient learning determine the curriculum and the central purpose of this school district. They were initially adopted by The Board of Education on October 8, 1963. Shaker Heights Board of Education Policy AEA

Adopted 1963, revised 1987, affirmed 2008

Review of Earlier Documents

The District must focus on the present and future simultaneously, but in doing so must build on past planning, experience, successes, and shortcomings.

It should be noted that Shaker Heights has a history of strategic planning prior to 1983. However, in that year, the District developed *Goals and Objectives: A Comprehensive Planning Document* (Appendix B), which embodied approaches to goal setting that remain highly endorsed by planning experts today. Then, as now, goals were set based upon an analysis of data. Information about existing conditions led to the formulation of assessed needs. Objectives were developed with accompanying benchmarks to ensure that tasks were completed within established time parameters.

As indicated in the examples below, the 1983 document attended to fundamentals of effective strategic planning:

1. “K-12 curriculum development that is product-oriented and emphasizes grade level orientation” (p.3 in Appendix B)
2. “piloting a curriculum development process which will address students’ academic needs and construct a system of evaluation to determine how well those needs are being met” (p.3 in Appendix B)
3. “fostering a positive climate having as its ultimate aim better learning for students and continuous responsible self-renewal for educators and schools” (p.5 in Appendix B)
4. “disseminating positive information to the community” (p.14 in Appendix B)
5. “informing and consulting with the community regarding operation and policies” (p.12 in Appendix B)

These five important elements of **leadership, curriculum/instruction, technology, climate** and **parent/community involvement** have consistently appeared in planning documents for the Shaker Heights City School District over the past three decades.

Documents written in 1993, 1998 and 1999 further typify the pattern of Plan/Do/Study/Act (PDSA) that has been evident in the District since 1983. First, *A Dozen Thoughts* (1993; Appendix C) lists specific goals and various areas of potential investigation that grew from Superintendent Freeman’s review of educational research and discussions with administrators, faculty, and community members. Topics ranged from underperforming students, interdisciplinary teams, and technology use to shared decision making, client/customer focus and ungraded primary instruction. This document generated both collegial and community discussions about the need to explore innovative ways to structure teaching and learning in order to enable all children to reach their full potential and perform to their utmost capacity (p. 6 in Appendix C). This modeling of professional reflection about promising research-based practices is a District tradition.

Professional reflection is also evident in *Selected Goals, Planning and Activities in the Shaker Heights Schools: 1987-Present* (1998; Appendix D). The document delineates implemented programs and activities involving parents and community, student achievement initiatives, curriculum, technology, leadership development, professional development, recruitment of minority personnel, bond issue improvements, and community-oriented initiatives. In addition to summative statements about cultural diversity, data-based decisions, collaborative decision making, measurement and evaluation (p. 7 in Appendix D), the synthesis also cites numerous studies which provided data to guide planning in all areas. A statement about change best expresses our administrative approach to dynamic leadership and professional renewal: “The identification of problems is the first step toward constructive change” (p.7 in Appendix D).

Mission Statement and District Goals (1999; Appendix E) reiterated that the paramount goal of the Shaker Heights City School District, as underscored by the mission statement, is **student achievement**. The document also highlights the District's commitment to maximizing the academic success of each Shaker student by:

- applying research on effective teaching practices to enhance our students' educational experiences,
- evaluating our educational offerings and practices, and
- changing and/or developing new programming to meet the needs of our students.

In addition, each year, as part of the Superintendent's evaluation process, the Shaker Heights Board of Education has consistently set clear, often recurring priorities for the upcoming school year. For example, in the past eight years the following instructional goals were established:

1. Identify long-term strategies for improving teacher quality and performance, and for improving student achievement and conduct (2000-01).
2. Continue to identify and implement strategies to:
 - a) improve teaching quality
 - b) improve student achievement and citizenship
 - c) graduate students who are college-ready, and
 - d) employ data to design, evaluate, and improve programs and instruction (2001-08).
3. Continue to identify and implement strategies to assess and upgrade the quality of our offerings to keep our District's programs top notch, competitive, and relevant to the needs of our increasingly global society (2005-06).

4. Improve student achievement and citizenship while improving the quality of teaching and other staff/student interactions (2007-08).
5. Offer courses that will allow the District to remain competitive with curricula offered by other superior quality school districts (2007-08).
6. Identify and implement strategies to upgrade the District's communications with prospective and current residents as to the quality and assets of our schools (2007-08).

The practice of repetition in the goal setting process is consistent with research demonstrating that academic transformation requires a five-to-seven year change process.

The District's leadership team responds to these timely goal-setting themes through two significant planning tools. First, the goals have been integrated into a series of data-responsive Continuous Improvement Plans that are detailed in the 2007-08 document (Appendix F).

Second, the key action steps in the strategic framework correspond to previously mentioned Board of Education goals. These comprehensive goals will be reached by building on a firm foundation of research-based practices and measurable outcomes. We fully understand that adding programs, structures, and procedures will not provide a long-term solution to achievement unless we adapt appropriate norms about teaching for understanding, assessment, and professional accountability.

At this time, the draft plan does not address the important question of resources – the facilities, staffing patterns, equipment, and professional development time needed to implement the goals. Without question, existing resources can be redirected in many cases to target the priorities identified in the plan. For instance, the existing professional development budget can be concentrated on training for International Baccalaureate, research-based instructional and

assessment practices, and the expanded use of instructional technology. Resources may also be redirected through the identification and elimination or modification of some existing programs that do not effectively address the priorities stated in the strategic framework.

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