

Strategic Planning: Innovative Ideas Start Here

Introduction

According to Kim and Parashar (2016) philosophers, merchants, generals, politicians, and academics have worked for centuries to create well-crafted approaches to help navigate a complex world in order to achieve success (2016, p. 12). Many organizations world-wide view strategic planning as an essential element in their ability to move forward. Almost all public school districts in the United States, regardless of size, geography, or demographics, have a strategic plan. With rising expectations, mounting student needs, tightening budgets, and increasing regulation, strategic planning is more critical than ever to navigate these challenges amid the competing interests of a wide variety of stakeholders (Kim and Parashar, 2016, p. 13). The authors purport that a district's strategic plan needs to articulate priorities, initiatives, and actions that will achieve the long-term vision while balancing the reasonable and appropriate allocation of the district's resources.

During the 2015- 2016 school year, the Hillsborough Township Public School District embarked on a Strategic Planning process designed to identify our priorities for the following five years. Five stakeholder meetings were held between September and December 2015, wherein a professional facilitator led members of the community including teachers, administrators, board members, parents, community members, and students through various activities to surface broadly held views concerning the district's priorities for the near future. Over 50 specific ideas emerged from the various meetings; however the ideas fell, for the most

part, into three distinct categories: College / Career Readiness, Early Childhood Education, and Student Life.

Specific areas of focus were further outlined for each of the three distinct categories. In the area of College / Career Readiness, redesigning the high school, including researching the feasibility of block scheduling, vocational training, and unique academies focusing on specific themes was identified. Additionally, the concept of building a new high school with a focus on supporting vocational / technical and STEM programs, high school redesign concepts, and improving athletic and fine/performing arts facilities was identified as a priority.

Two main broadly held areas of interest in the category of Early Childhood Education includes preschool for all and implementation of a full day kindergarten program. The Student Life category included many areas essential to enhancing the learning experience for students in both academic and non-academic areas. This included mental health resources, internships / partnerships with the community, STEM in younger grades, class size reduction, gifted and talented programs, and overall curriculum innovations.

Providing the Board of Education with information to make well-informed decisions regarding what and how to pursue the ideas identified in the stakeholder meetings provided an opportunity to embark upon a year of deep study and planning. The 2016 - 2017 school year became a “year of study” whereby work groups researched each of the three categories with specific deliverables from each group most assuredly resulting in recommendations to increase the educational investment made by the community supporting the building of a new high school and / or additional classrooms. Expectations of the work groups were clearly identified. A chairperson was identified for each committee and members of the Hillsborough school

community were solicited and recruited via a survey. Approximately 50 subcommittee members included teachers, administrators, and community members. Six meetings were scheduled between November 2016 and May 2017 with agendas and presentations developed for each. Moreover, a strategic planning subcommittee preliminary report was presented to the Board Governance committee in June 2017 and again in October 2017. The responsibilities for each subcommittee included submitting a report to the Board of Education which summarized the research supporting and refuting the value of each area, as well as the recommendations made by the committee including a rationale for the value each would add to the educational program for Hillsborough Township Public Schools.

Upon the Boards' decision about that which they choose to pursue, the balance of the Strategic Planning work for the 2017 - 2018 school year will focus on developing and verifying the logistics. Inviting the voters to pass a referendum to fund the Strategic Plan will be scheduled for 2018. The completion of the identified projects and the implementation of the Strategic Plan will follow over the course of several years. The tax impact of a building referendum will be decreased by the retiring of significant debt during the 2021-2022 school year thereby increasing the attractiveness of the recommendations outlined in this report.

In planning for the development of the 2017 - 2022 Strategic Planning process, the Hillsborough Township Board of Education identified their vision, mission, and purposes as follows:

Vision: Learning empowers life beyond Hillsborough School District;

Mission: To provide a superior education for all students so they will lead us successfully and responsibly into the future; and

Purposes: Financial Independence - Equal Opportunity - Self- Actualization

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of the review of research conducted by each of the subcommittees of the larger Strategic Planning committee and to offer recommendations to the Board of Education in preparation for the development and implementation of the next Hillsborough Township School District Strategic Plan. While the charge of the subcommittee was clearly not one of advocacy but rather to provide high quality research resulting in a well informed Board of Education, the following report seeks to provide a myriad of research and information to support the recommendations outlined from the year-long work of each sub-committee.

A note of heartfelt gratitude goes out to all members of the Hillsborough Township school community who participated in the strategic planning sub-committees. The hours of tireless research, discussion, and debate sparked innovation, creative thinking, and reflection.

The members of the Early Childhood Subcommittee led by Mary Ann Mullady are Robyn Becker, Bethany Bossio, Debra Caldes-Mink, Sheila Cooper, Jessica Hagood, Lisa Heisel, Jodi Howe, Tammy Jenkins, Scott Jensen, Mary Beth Jordan, Keri Krawski, Donna Landon, and Amy MacCrea.

The members of the Strategic Planning College and Career Readiness Subcommittee led by Karen Bingert are Michael Callahan, Christopher Carey, Rose Cavaliere, Nicholas Clipperton, Michael Davis, Michael Fanizzi, Kim Feltre, Steven Jablonski, Tracey Knerr, Julianna LoBiondo, Kim Losch, Eric Rosenthal Michael Simborski, Jessica Smedley, Barbara Szabo, and Joseph Trybulski.

The members of the Student Life Subcommittee led by Lisa Antunes are Cynthia Assini, Lorraine Borek, Michael Callahan, Melissa Callen, Rebecca Cordisco, Susan Eckstein, Kim Feltre, Ashley Griffith, Mary Elizabeth Hughes, Leigh Anne Johnson, Scott Kallens, Steven Kerrigan, Barbara Parker, Nancy Patrick, Enrique Pincay, Debra Porowski, Suzan Radwan, Jessica Smedley, and Alyson Williams.

Administrators who offered overall support in the process include Joel Handler and Michael Volpe.