



EASTON, REDDING, AND REGION 9 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Executive Summary of the 2004 ER9 Strategic Planning Process

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July 2010

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide historical context with background information related to the development and implementation of the 2004 ER9 Strategic Plan; to provide an update on the status of the plan to date; and to provide a timeline for revisions to the Plan during August 2010.

Historical Context/Background Information

Developing the Plan: In the spring of 2004, then Superintendent of Schools Dr. Allen Fossbender took the lead in a new initiative to successfully plan and implement change efforts in the educational setting and to embark on developing a tri-district strategic plan. The Easton, Redding and Region 9 Boards of Education approved the strategic planning process that spring. The overall goal of the process - continuous school improvement - was complemented by objectives to establish systematic and comprehensive approaches to improve curriculum and instruction in the three school districts and to enhance school-related programs and services. The strategic planning process was founded on a dedication to the best interest of students, sustained commitment to high academic standards, and active involvement of community members in school improvement. Although the five schools in Easton and Redding had been recognized often for their overall excellence, members of the two communities and school-district staff were deeply committed to making them even better.

During August 2004, the Easton, Redding and Region 9 School Districts convened three all-day work sessions during which the districts' strategic planning process was initiated. The goal of the strategic planning process was to develop action plans that would guide the continuous improvement of the K-12 schools in Easton and Redding. Dr. Fossbender and Ms. E. Marie Mas, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, hosted the work sessions.

A thirty-member ad-hoc committee composed of individuals from various constituencies in the towns of Easton and Redding participated in the work sessions. The Strategic Planning Group included representatives from the boards of finance, boards of selectmen, boards of education, local parent-teacher associations, police department (Easton), the Redding Education Foundation, and the senior center (Redding). The group also included school administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

The Strategic Planning Group developed written statements that identified the perceptions, convictions, and recommendations that were discussed and debated during the three days of the initial work sessions. These statements provided the context for future strategic planning activities.

They include a belief statement; lists of perceived strengths and weaknesses of the Easton, Redding and Region 9 Schools; a mission statement; three objectives; lists of related critical issues and operating parameters; and the prioritization of four strategies. The draft plan was subsequently reviewed, revised, and approved by the three Boards of Education in the fall of 2004.

Establishing Action Teams: The next step in the strategic planning process was to establish action teams, with committee membership comparable to the initial Strategic Planning Group. Committee membership included a broader group of constituents, including some members who did not participate in the initial strategic planning but were very interested in participating on an action team specific to one of the four strategy strands. The teams developed action plans that addressed four identified strategies: 1) Curriculum Alignment; 2) Personalized Learning; 3) Character Attributes; and 4) Communications/Partnerships. Each action plan outlined specific expectancies, or results, following the initial implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Under the Curriculum Alignment and the Personalized Learning strands there were several specific results identified in the action plans that focused primarily on the use of student performance data to inform curriculum, guide personalized instruction, provide focused professional development in differentiating instruction, and meaningful use of assessment tools. Additionally, there was considerable work to develop a systematic and comprehensive ER9 assessment plan consistent with state standards and aligned vertically through the grades and horizontally across district classrooms K-8; to maximize instructional time; to systematize a protocol for looking at student work to improve instructional practices; and to revise curriculum documents to align with new state standards. Overall, most of the expectancies were achieved: the development of an ER9 Master Assessment Plan K-8 with identified benchmarks; the use of data, student work, and the alignment of state standards to improve instruction and curriculum implementation; and professional development focused on improving student achievement to exceed state and school-district standards. A continuation of this work should provide a starting point for the new Strategic Plan.

The Character Attribute strand action plan focused on designing and implementing plans for identifying, modeling, and assessing character attributes that demonstrate personal integrity and civic responsibility. Although the specific results identified in this action plan were met overall, character development and civic responsibility remain a strong focus in the development of the whole child. Strong partnerships with community organizations and families will continue to be an important priority for the three districts.

Lastly, the Communications and Partnerships strand action plan included the establishment of a series of public forums to discuss education issues ranging from budgets to curricula. Board of Education Curriculum Committees in both K-8 districts were formed to facilitate curriculum conversations. Both public libraries held community-wide reading events and discussion forums. The ER9 Web site was redesigned to include links for information related to a variety of school topics. An online master calendar is available for parents to review throughout the year. There has been a stronger effort to establish inter-school activities among K-8 students in Easton and Redding, although this has been achieved more at the middle school level.

Some of the anticipated identified results were not accomplished and included writing and publishing in the local media with a regular column focused on education; identifying and publicizing community service projects for all grade clusters; and reinvigorating and expanding the summer academy throughout the ER9 system.

Current Status of the ER9 Strategic Plan

The process to develop the current Strategic Plan was effective and efficient. Dr. Howard Feddema, a senior associate of The Cambridge Group, was a seasoned facilitator of the process and the related discussions. In retrospect, however, the disadvantage was that the three Boards did not have the opportunity to articulate, in consultation with school-district and school-based administrators, their overall vision of the school districts' future in order to create focus and momentum for the development of the Strategic Plan during the initial stages of the ad-hoc committee's work. The Boards did not have an opportunity to be more dominant in the initial process. Although each Board was represented during the ad-hoc committee meetings, a tri-board vision of the school districts' future would have enriched the process.

Overall, the Strategic Plan has been a very important factor in the continuous improvement of the school districts. Among the plan's many advantages is its influence on sustaining focus on the most essential work in ER9, thereby limiting, if not eliminating, the inclination for Central Office administrators, school-based administrators, and Board members to initiate new objectives and different reform initiatives before established objectives and initiatives are achieved. The four strategies have remained the primary focus of the plan for the past six years.

In August of 2009 fifteen ER9 administrators participated in a three-day strategic planning session to update the existing plan. Fifteen teachers joined the administrators on the third day of the planning session. The participants identified the strengths and weaknesses of the tri-district. Additionally, the original Strategic Plan and the action plans related to personalized learning and curriculum alignment were reviewed. Realizing that the strand for personalized learning was never fully developed over the initial implementation period, the focus shifted to re-defining how the concept of personalized learning could become more evident and effective in the classroom. The document that resulted from the planning session defines the *District-Based Theory of Action* and includes three specific sections titled *School-Based Theories of Action* focused on supporting teaching and learning through the implementation of effective instructional practice; the monitoring of students' academic progress through data collection and review; and the importance of opportunities for students to discuss and understand the purpose and responsibilities for learning, as well as the academic standards and expectations to become self-directed, active learners. The process of reflection by the educators as related to instructional planning, as well as reflection by the students as related to the purpose of becoming an active learner, became major focus points of discussion. Results of the planning session included development of the *Addendum to the Strategic Plan* and thorough communication that followed to all certified staff at the beginning of the 2009-10 academic year. The *Addendum to the Strategic Plan* was referenced during the superintendent's convocation speech and at presentations made at faculty meetings prior to the opening of school. School Improvement Plans were linked to the revised Plan with an ongoing theme to improve student achievement.

Renewal of the Strategic Plan

It has been six years since the full Strategic Plan was conceived, developed, and implemented. The tri-district has come a long way in creating change, specifically in the alignment between three separate districts as a result of the original plan and the more recent *Theories of Action Plans*; however, there is still work to be done. An initial Strategic Planning Session took place on June 10, 2010. Led by Superintendent Dr. Michael Cicchetti, the eleven-member ad-hoc committee, comprised of Board members and administrators, met to plan and prepare for the August Strategic Planning session dates. During the meeting, the Strategic Planning process and timeline were presented as well as a list of proposed participants. Dr. Howard Feddema, facilitator of the original ER9 Strategic Plan, will conduct the planning sessions scheduled for August 23, 24, and 25.

Dr. Cicchetti will act as the Internal Facilitator and Ms. Mas will host the sessions. Updated information will be posted on the district Web site (www.er9.org). Press releases and listserv announcements to parents and staff will be prepared to keep the greater school communities informed of the Strategic Planning process.

End of Report