

## November 2023 Superintendent Beacon column

### Suggested headline: A year and some change

About this time last year, the school district launched its first strategic plan in about 20 years. After over a year of gathering feedback from students, staff, families and community members, and after several iterations and input efforts, we published “the plan.” As we shared it with staff, families and community groups last year, I heard a common question: “This sounds great, but what are the concrete actions and how will we know if they are working?”

Behind the four goals outlined in the district’s Strategic Plan are layers of specific activities to support reaching those goals. There are also milestones and details about who does what and when. Over the past year since the plan’s launch, we’ve been refining those timelines and metrics and have begun implementing several strategies. We can see some progress already in areas in which we already have tools or data to review. In other areas, part of the work includes identifying data sources so that work can feel slower.

Just as families receive progress reports about their students’ learning throughout the year, it’s important to share with you the progress we are making towards our goals. We review our progress and challenges quarterly, and here are just a few of the highlights of recent successes:

- **School Improvement Plan** – Each school is required to have a School Improvement Plan. Those plans identify areas of need and report on what is working well. Staff have created a consistent template for all school improvement plans so schools are comparing the same things. We also implemented a data-driven improvement process to provide academic and social-emotional supports for students which is used in developing school improvement plans.
- **Improved crisis response and mental health supports for students** – We’ve provided training for all elementary certificated staff about supporting students with challenging behaviors. We have also provided training and collaboration opportunities for counselors to better support students.
- **Increased family engagement** – Last spring we offered a Natural Leaders training and about 100 parents and guardians participated. We are building on that training and growing the Natural Leaders program in our schools. We are also exploring ways for more family involvement during the school day for positive role modeling and additional adults on campus to encourage positive behavior.
- **Increased student engagement** – We’ve expanded upon our existing student input opportunities and leadership roles by including students on the Instructional Materials Selection Committee, engaging students in curriculum reviews and launching a Superintendent’s Student Cabinet which represents each middle and high school in the district.
- **Language Access Plan** – The board adopted a Language Access Plan to make the translation and interpretation services available to families more transparent. The plan included a staff guide and training video to ensure that all staff know when and how to support families with the appropriate language service.

While we are celebrating progress in the above areas, they are also ongoing efforts that will continue to improve and be repeated for new staff and as new needs arise.

As with any large organization, change can take time and the challenges to progress can be complex. Here are a few challenges that we are working through:

- **Identifying and synthesizing data** – Baseline and ongoing progress data can be hard to find. In some cases, we have the data, but it is not known or accessible by various audiences trying to measure progress. We are working to identify and synthesize what we already have and what we may still need to measure progress.
- **Doing more with fewer resources** – With the recent budget reductions, staff are sometimes covering more tasks with fewer people or financial resources. This has affected several activities by slowing the process down due to time constraints and fewer staff to lead the work. It has also limited choices in the tools, software platforms and instructional materials.
- **Capacity of audiences** – We are also mindful to coordinate efforts to streamline feedback opportunities to avoid bombarding families or staff who also have limited capacity to respond to surveys, attend meetings, etc. While some data may take longer to gather, it will be more streamlined through coordinating these efforts.

The above successes and challenges are initial steps in this five-year plan. We still have a long way to go, but we're making progress! We'll continue to update you from time to time and likely ask for your feedback in the future. Thanks for your continued support as our district adapts to better meet the needs of our students and families.