



Excellence For All

STRATEGIC PLAN | JUNE 2008

FULL PLAN



SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SUMMARY

Our Vision

At Seattle Public Schools (SPS), we see a city where:

- All students achieve at high levels, receive the support they need and leave high school prepared for college, career and life;
- Every school is a high quality school;
- District leadership and staff model excellence and accountability; and
- The whole community is engaged as partners in supporting and strengthening the school system.

Our Goals

To realize this vision we must be clear about what success looks like: success is *all* students achieving. With this Strategic Plan, we will hold ourselves accountable for achievement and growth at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade. We will judge our success at both closing the achievement gap and accelerating learning for all students. Our work is aimed at creating a system that supports all our students in meeting or exceeding expectations, so that all students graduate prepared for college, career and life.

Over the next five years¹, we will work to ensure that:

- 88 percent of third grade students meet or exceed reading standards (up from 72 percent in 2006-07);
- 80 percent of seventh grade students meet or exceed math standards (up from 53 percent in 2006-07); and
- 75 percent of students graduate from high school in four years (up from 62 percent in 2006-07).

This Strategic Plan is our road map to achieving this vision and meeting these goals. Over the next two years we will move forward with a set of foundational strategies that will help us focus our work.

¹ Data are generally one year behind. These goals are based on 2006-07 baseline data and the five-year goals are for the five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13.

Strategies for Action

Ensure Excellence in Every Classroom

- Strengthen our teaching of math and science and build on our success with reading and writing
- Develop assessment tools to consistently track student progress and use data to drive improvements
- Create a system that recognizes high performing schools and helps struggling schools

Strengthen Leaders System-wide

- Retain and hire the best teachers and principals
- Hold all employees to high expectations and support them in meeting those expectations
- Implement effective performance evaluations at all levels

Build an Infrastructure that Works Well

- Adopt and adapt technologies to allow for more efficient student assignment
- Develop budget protocols and evaluation tools to ensure efficiency and efficacy

SETTING THE CONTEXT

A Foundation for Success

At Seattle Public Schools, it is our responsibility to ensure that every student in every school has the opportunity to excel, regardless of race, ethnicity or income level. This Strategic Plan, *“Excellence for All,”* provides our road map to meet that responsibility. It is built on the foundation of work accomplished by past School Boards, Superintendents and community advisory groups. The Plan outlines a set of foundational strategies that must be undertaken immediately and accomplished within the next few years to ensure equal access to excellence for every student in Seattle’s schools.

This Strategic Plan has been developed with input from thousands of teachers, principals, School District staff, families, students and community stakeholders. It has been informed by national peer review audits of many of our programs, and a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation of the School District’s finances and operations. And it has been scoped to work within current budget constraints.

Leading up to the final presentation of this Strategic Plan we have received much constructive feedback from parents, community groups, business leaders, principals, teachers and other district staff. A number of common issues have emerged from these conversations:

- Special Education
- Bilingual Services
- Arts and a rich curriculum
- Transparency of data and accountability
- District-community relations and communications
- Teaching quality
- Student-level supports
- Details and timelines for each strategy

We have tried to address each of these issues in this Plan and will continue to be transparent and timely with updates of our work on these issues. We appreciate the time that community members and SPS staff gave us as they reviewed this Plan and offered feedback; dozens of schools devoted staff meetings to the plan and provided detailed feedback, most of which we have tried to address . And while, by its very design, the Strategic Plan cannot address every concern or every aspect of District operations, this Plan is stronger because of the input we received. It addresses critical needs and gaps while ensuring the continuation of high quality programs that work well.

This approach will help ensure that our goals are achievable, our progress is measurable and we are accountable to those who place their trust in Seattle’s schools. As such, we make the following commitments:

- **We will do what is best for our children.** We will assess every strategy by how it will help our students succeed.
- **We will be prioritized and focused.** We will focus our attention on issues that must be addressed now, and we will apply the proper resources and time to be successful.
- **We will work within our means.** We will only commit to those things for which we have resources. We will identify funding gaps and propose solutions to address them.
- **We will measure our progress and report back frequently to the community.** Each strategy we propose is based on clear, specific goals so that we can measure our progress. We will commit to clear and timely communication so that staff, families and community members are informed of our plans and have the opportunity to share their suggestions for the future.

Great Opportunities, Many Challenges

Seattle Public Schools is the largest district in Washington, with more than 45,000 students in 93 schools.

Seattle is more educated and wealthier than many comparable cities. We also serve a very economically and ethnically diverse population. Approximately 40 percent of Seattle students qualify for the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (FRL). The proportion of students in poverty varies widely from school to school, ranging from none to 95 percent in any given school building. Students and families come to Seattle from countries all over the world. Approximately 11 percent of SPS students speak a language other than English at home, with more than 100 languages spoken around the District. Seattle's schools are as diverse racially as they are linguistically.

SPS TODAY

- Largest district in the state
- 45,000 students
- \$500 million annual budget
- 7,000 staff
- 93 schools
- More than 100 languages

The Environment

Seattle's schools reflect the environment in which they operate. Several factors, in particular, have shaped SPS in recent years and must be considered as new strategies are undertaken:

- **Declining enrollment.** Between the 1960s and the 1980s, enrollment in Seattle's public schools declined from more than 100,000 to about half that. Enrollment has hovered around 45,000 students during the last decade, although SPS' demographers predict a gradual decline over the next several years (due to a declining number of school-age children in the city as a whole, not to a decrease in the District's market share). Declining enrollment led to school closures in the 1980s and in 2006.
- **Limited budgets.** SPS is funded from a number of sources: state general purpose and special purpose funds; local levy funds; federal funds; and other sources of funding.

Although the District has recovered from the budget crisis of the early part of this decade, and has built strong financial reserves, revenues have not kept up with increasing costs, meaning that budget cuts will be needed.

- **Strong staff relations.** SPS has had strong relationships with the labor organizations that represent its staff, and will continue to work with staff associations to help keep the District solvent, focused and achieving. With this Strategic Plan and the work we are undertaking to respond to the peer review audits we commissioned, we are working to strengthen relationships that may have been damaged by operational challenges.
- **Community support.** Support from families and stakeholders is vital. Over the last year, SPS has engaged thousands of internal and external partners and neutral observers to evaluate school needs. Continued outreach and involvement from throughout the community will be vital to the District's long-term success. Although many households in Seattle do not have children in the public schools, recent school levies have passed by large margins.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS – ADDRESSING OUR CHALLENGES

A Legacy of Past Planning Efforts

SPS has undertaken a number of evaluations over the last several years to identify what the District is doing well and to determine how we can improve.

This set of evaluations began with the **Moss Adams** report in 2003, which was commissioned to evaluate SPS financial systems after the financial crisis in 2001-02 and identify a strategy to rebuild the District's reserves.

SPS staff built on the financial study with the **Five-Year Plan**, which was finalized in May 2005. This plan outlined a number of areas for improvement and analysis, including student achievement, District finances and leadership.

In 2005, former Superintendent Raj Manhas commissioned the **Community Advisory Committee on Investing in Educational Excellence (CACIEE)**, to develop a short- and long-term financial strategy for the District. Following the CACIEE recommendations, an internal SPS **Strategic Implementation Team** worked to develop systemic strategies for change.

In 2007 and 2008, SPS commissioned a series of **peer review audits** by national experts to provide a more structured analysis of a number of key areas that had been identified in the CACIEE effort or by the Strategic Implementation Team. The peer reviews included studies on:

- Academic Safety Net
- Accelerated Progress Program
- Bilingual Programs (to be completed, summer 2008)
- Communications
- Curriculum
- Operations (Human Resources, Finance, Information Technology)
- Special Education

Comprehensive reports and a summary of each of these peer review audits can be found on the District's Web site. A discussion of how the recommendations from these peer reviews are associated with the Strategic Plan can be found in the Appendices.

SPS has commissioned three additional peer reviews, beginning with Transportation, which will all be complete by fall 2008.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the strategic planning process, thousands of people—staff members, families, experts and community members—were interviewed for their thoughts, input and ideas about improving Seattle Public Schools.

Their passion has shaped our work; their wisdom has informed our direction; their commitment will ensure our success.

In late 2007, a team of researchers from **McKinsey and Company** was asked to complete a District-wide diagnostic evaluation, using information from all the studies completed to date, as well as comparative information from national literature and other school districts, and interviews with hundreds of community members and District staff. The diagnostic was designed to identify key areas of strength, areas in need of improvement and potential strategies that could be implemented over the next several years. The diagnostic work included a survey of school leaders conducted by McKinsey and Company and a survey of instructional staff by Pyramid Communications.

This work has been the base on which we've developed this Strategic Plan, including the identification of the District's strengths and challenges and the recommendation of specific strategies to pursue over the next two years. In particular, the financial elements from the Moss Adams and CACIEE studies helped inform the strategies around financial analysis; the 2005 five-year plan helped identify key areas for academic improvement, evaluation and accountability; the academic and operational peer review audits helped make our strategies specific and focused; and the surveys, along with the community engagement activities, helped us gain new insights into our strengths and challenges and develop proposals to communicate better in the future.

Identifying Strengths

This work has helped identify areas of strength on which we will build and improve. These strengths include:

- **Fiscal prudence and discipline.** In accordance with state requirements, SPS has balanced its budget each year since 2002, and has planned carefully to ensure that rising costs will be addressed carefully. Following the financial crisis of 2001-02, SPS carefully evaluated internal financial management policies and practices. Since then, the District has built a strong reserve that has earned the highest ranking from Standard & Poors and Moody's. A fundamental commitment in this Strategic Plan is that it includes only strategies that can be achieved within our budget or with additional resources that have been identified and targeted.
- **Solid growth in student performance.** Seattle student performance has steadily improved. Today, our students outperform the state average on the fourth grade math, reading and writing Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) and on the fifth grade science WASL. Our focus on literacy has supported gains in elementary level reading proficiency.
- **Strong programs that can be taken to scale.** SPS has a number of school-specific programs that are serving students well. Continuing to expand successful programs to serve more students, as we have recently done with international schools and plan to do with our Readers Writers Workshop, will help improve student performance throughout the District.

- **High quality, hard working staff.** Each review that has been conducted has called special attention to the quality of the District’s staff. Staff in schools and in the Central Office are committed to providing the best education possible to Seattle’s students.

Addressing Challenges

SPS has made some gains over the last several years. However, we must continue to improve. There are still many challenges that lead to unacceptable outcomes for our students:

- **Math and science performance lags.** Middle and high school students perform below the statewide average on the WASL. Nearly half our seventh graders are not able to meet math standards.
- **Tools for tracking progress are absent or insufficient.** We currently do not have good ways to track how students are learning or how teachers, principals or other school staff members are performing.
- **Struggling schools and students receive inconsistent and inadequate support.** We have developed a number of programs to provide support to underserved or underperforming schools. But we do not have a comprehensive, District-wide way to assess how schools are performing and then provide support.
- **Teachers and principals receive little guidance or support from the hiring process through their careers.** Our hiring process is confusing and lengthy and must be streamlined. Once staff members are hired, we have mentoring and professional development opportunities built into our agreement with the teachers’ and principals’ associations. But these training opportunities do not meet the demand and are not consistently well-implemented, leaving teachers, principals and other school staff without sufficient support.
- **Outdated human resources and information technology systems hamper progress.** Our 1970s-era VAX computer system has limited our ability to implement new programs. We must modernize and upgrade our basic Central Office systems.

SPS has many excellent schools and a top-notch instructional staff. But we also have many challenges, and it is our responsibility to address them.

OUR VISION AND GOALS

At Seattle Public Schools, we believe that every child deserves the opportunity to succeed. Furthermore, we believe that, given the right support, every child can achieve.

In our vision for our schools:

- All students achieve at high levels, receive the support they need and graduate from high school prepared for college, career and life.
- Every school is a high quality school.
- District leaders and staff model excellence for our students.
- The entire community is engaged in supporting and strengthening our schools.

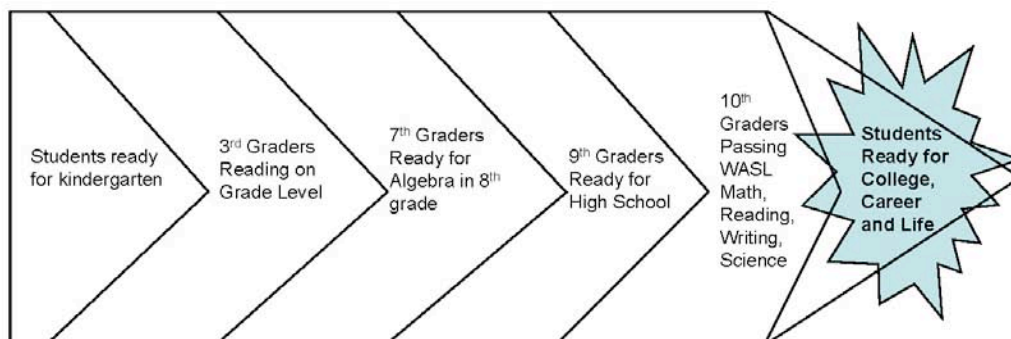
Measurable Goals for Student Improvement

Our vision for the future cannot be realized unless we have a clear and specific idea of exactly what it will mean to succeed. Thus, as we began working to identify specific areas for improvement, we outlined a set of very specific goals for Seattle students.

We will hold ourselves accountable for achievement and growth at all levels from kindergarten through 12th grade. We will judge our success at both closing the achievement gap and accelerating learning for all students.

We began setting goals for this strategic planning process by examining the District's academic milestones, the key points at which we must ensure that students are achieving. These milestones were derived from best practice research that shows where students need to be performing at different points to ensure they are on track to graduate prepared for college, career and life. These milestones provide a focus to our efforts but they are not meant to be an exhaustive list. We recognize the importance of improved access to art, music, and world languages and will continue our work in those areas.

Academic Milestones



Helping families prepare their children for kindergarten is particularly important, given what researchers have learned about the importance of early learning to students' future success. The District currently provides high quality pre-kindergarten programs through Head Start and through preschools for students who need special education services. We are working with the City of Seattle, State agencies and local community-based organizations to ensure high-quality preschool for *all* four-year-olds. Through these partnerships, the District plans to develop a way to assess kindergarten readiness within the next several years.

Between kindergarten and 12th grade, the District has developed a number of specific achievement goals for the next five years. These goals, which are listed on the following page, show our most recent performance (2006-07) along with our expectations for what we should be able to help students achieve over the next five years (2008-2013). These goals will inform school-level goals to help each child. The strategies we have developed as part of this Strategic Plan will help us meet these goals.

SPS Goals: 2008-2013

Milestone	Academic Achievement Metric	2006-07 Results	2012-13 Goal	Rate of Growth		Achievement Gap in 2006-07 (percent pts)
				Last 5 yrs	5-yr Goal	
Students Ready for Kindergarten	To be determined					
3 rd -Graders Reading on Grade Level	3 rd -graders meeting or exceeding standard on the Reading WASL (%)	72%	88%	N/A	22%	12 to 38
	3 rd -graders exceeding standard on the Reading WASL (%)	38%	50%	N/A	32%	18 to 39
7 th -Graders Ready for Algebra in 8 th Grade	7 th -graders meeting or exceeding standard on the Math WASL (%)	53%	80%	57%	50%	13 to 49
	7 th -graders exceeding standard on the Math WASL (%)	28%	50%	34%	81%	10 to 36
9 th -Graders Ready for High School	On-time 9 th -graders earning at least five credits (%)	82%	90%	-1%	10%	7 to 22
10 th -Graders Passing WASL	Meeting or exceeding standard on the Reading WASL (%)	78%	95%	46%	22%	7 to 27
	Meeting or exceeding standard on the Math WASL (%)	50%	82%	44%	63%	19 to 51
	Meeting or exceeding standard on the Writing WASL (%)	81%	95%	54%	18%	5 to 21
	Meeting or exceeding standard on the Science WASL (%)	33%	80%	28%	146%	19 to 44
Students Ready for College and Career	Graduates earning credit in classes eligible for CTE Tech Prep Credit (%)	69%	80%	-3%	16%	0 to 10
	High school students taking an advanced placement exam (%)	16%	40%	31%	151%	N/A
	Graduates meeting high school credit requirement for four-year college (%)	17%	40%	40%	139%	6 to 21
	Four-year graduation rate (%)	62%	75%	3%	22%	0 to 33
	Five-year graduation rate (%)	66%	80%	5%	21%	0 to 33
	Graduates enrolling in a post-secondary educational program (%)	68%	80%	19%	18%	0 to 23

These are five-year goals from the time of adoption of the Strategic Plan. For the most part, data from the 2006-7 school year was used to develop the 2012-13 goals and the 2007-8 school year will be considered year zero with the five year goals beginning with the 2008-9 school year. Most data are available by the fall after the end of the school year, with the exception of post-secondary enrollment, which has almost a two-year lag. Detailed notes and explanations for these data are included in the Appendices.

SETTING PRIORITIES

How Action will Lead to Results

To ensure the success of this Strategic Plan and long-term, system-wide improvement, we began our work by studying the successes and struggles of the past decade. We examined the reviews and research that had been conducted to determine how we could best meet our student-level performance goals. We then developed a “theory of action,” a set of beliefs around what system-level actions will lead to the greatest change in student outcomes. This theory of action is three-fold:

- **High quality instruction.** The quality of teaching and learning is our most important measure of success. We must focus our attention on strategies that will provide the greatest and most direct contribution to instruction.
- **High quality leadership.** Our District staff model learning. They make our schools places of community and excitement. They are our heart and soul. To succeed, SPS must have high quality leadership in each classroom, in each school and at the District overall. Our leaders must be supported and guided by the Superintendent and School Board and by our policies and strategies. We must ensure that we attract high-quality talent and that we nurture staff to help them grow and develop in their positions.
- **First things first.** We have many needs. However, we must focus our attention first on those things that will strengthen our foundation and directly improve student learning.

By focusing on these three areas, and with effective outreach to and engagement with staff, families and community members, we will be able to move forward in a careful and intentional way, with a clear understanding of how our work today will lead to results tomorrow.

Setting Priorities

The peer reviews and consultant recommendations presented many more priorities than we can address successfully at any one time. We evaluated each possible strategy to identify those that are most fundamental to student success. In addition, we asked whether we would be able to carefully and faithfully implement each strategy, to ensure that we could keep the promises we have made. For every strategy considered, we asked if that strategy would:

- Directly contribute to improved student achievement in both closing the achievement gap and accelerating learning for all (and have evidence that demonstrates as much);
- Need to happen first, so that other important and urgent efforts, which would depend on that strategy for success, could move forward;
- Be fundamental to the District’s ability to meet its fiscal and legal requirements;

- Increase the District's effectiveness and efficiency;
- Be sustainable through available financial resources; and
- Be feasible given current conditions.

Setting priorities led us to focus on a manageable number of basic, foundational strategies. Many of these strategies might seem like just good common sense, obvious as the sort of thing a school district must do. And the package of work as a whole might not seem grand or far-reaching enough.

We took the approach, after studying years' worth of efforts and initiatives and examining success as well as failure that it was crucial that we begin with the basics: with strategies that allow us to build a strong foundation and stay focused on improving student achievement.

Foundational Strategies: First Things First

We have developed clear goals for our students and staff. We have developed a theory of action that will help us understand how we will achieve our goals. From this theory of action we developed a set of strategies that define what we will do that will lead to improvement.

These strategies outline the efforts we will undertake over the next several years. This report, and the description of the strategies, however, does not describe in great detail all of the work that will occur to accomplish each effort. Over the coming six months, we will develop a full scope of work for each strategy, identify all the work that must be done, down to the small details, and set timelines and budgets for each. The following pages provide short summaries of each strategy. Additional information will be shared with staff, families and community stakeholders as each strategy moves forward.

Ensure Excellence in Every Classroom

Strengthen our teaching of math and science and build on our success with reading and writing

Develop assessment tools to consistently track student progress and use data to drive improvements

Create a system that recognizes high performing schools and helps struggling schools

Strengthen Leaders System-wide

Retain and hire the best teachers and principals

Hold all employees to high expectations and support them in meeting those expectations

Implement effective performance evaluations at all levels

Build an Infrastructure that Works Well

Adopt and adapt technologies to allow for more efficient student assignment

Develop budget protocols and evaluation tools to ensure efficiency and efficacy

ENSURE EXCELLENCE IN EVERY CLASSROOM

Strengthen our teaching of math and science and build on our success with reading and writing

Background

We are making great gains in helping students learn. Overall, SPS students outperform their statewide peers on the WASL. Our reading scores show particularly dramatic improvement. Our focus on literacy – through programs such as the Readers Writers Workshop – has helped us support elementary students’ gains in reading proficiency. And partnerships such as our math coach program have begun to raise achievement in this critical learning area.

SPS recognizes that core academic subjects are strengthened and that students are more fully engaged when arts are integrated into the curriculum. Our Arts Department has a plan that moves the District firmly in that direction. While not explicitly addressed here (as this Plan addresses gaps and challenges), SPS’ commitment to the arts remains strong.²

However, we have room for improvement. Nearly one out of three students begins sixth grade unable to meet grade-level reading standards. Nearly half our seventh grade students are unable to meet grade-level math standards. Nearly four out of ten students do not graduate from high school. And students of color and those living in poverty continue to lag behind other students – as much as 50 percent in some schools.

We must align the curriculum used in our schools so that students at every school are held to the same high expectations. And we must increase the rigor of the courses our students take, as we are doing with our new Partnership with the College Board. This partnership will allow SPS to greatly expand Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings available to all students and ensure that teachers and students are prepared for success in these classes.

“On the surface, it seems great for everyone to be able to do whatever they want to. But when it comes to the rigorous studies of science and math it is structure and continuity that support real growth and excellence. Our students deserve the opportunity to be excellent.”
- Seattle high school teacher

² For the first time in over 20 years we have a centrally-staffed music coach to support our schools and we have received funding from the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs to complete a comprehensive, K-12 survey of arts offerings in each of our schools. This survey will help us identify the gaps in arts education and will result in a multi-year plan to strengthen arts education in each of our schools. In addition to these efforts, we will be hiring a Community Arts Liaison to help us improve our relationships with our local arts partners and leverage external support.

The Need

During 2007 and early 2008, a team of reviewers from the International Curriculum Management Audit Center at Phi Delta Kappa International completed a comprehensive audit of SPS' management of its curriculum. Review team members interviewed nearly 180 teachers, principals, District leaders, students, family members and community leaders; visited 92 schools, making 1,000 classroom observations; and reviewed thousands of curriculum materials and other documents. Their comprehensive report and a summary of their findings are available on the SPS Web site; a discussion of the linkages between their recommendations and this Strategic Plan can be found in the Appendices.

The reviewers called particular attention to the fact that in Seattle each school develops and plans its own curriculum. The reviewers acknowledged the strengths of this school-based management in developing curriculum that is specifically tailored for each school and its students. However, they recommended that the District develop an overall plan to ensure that students are expected to learn the same content and skills at each grade level, no matter what programs they are involved in or what school they attend. Science and math, in particular, must be managed across schools to ensure that all students are able to meet standards at all grade levels.

The leadership survey conducted as part of the McKinsey diagnostic followed up on this recommendation. When principals were asked to rank the top five needs of schools, they identified an "aligned curriculum" as the greatest need. An aligned curriculum is consistent with the goals of the strategic planning process as a crucial way to accelerate student learning, and will help us address our most crucial need, improving student performance in math and science.

Recommended Work

SPS will adopt an aligned curriculum for all grades in math and science. An aligned curriculum means that students in any one grade in the District are held to the same high expectations (with the same high-quality materials) and that those expectations build on one another as students advance from one grade level to the next. An aligned curriculum will allow the District to provide targeted support for teachers and schools, and a common set of expectations across the District will allow us to better focus our professional development offerings. All SPS curricula will be designed to meet cultural relevance and accessibility standards, and will incorporate methods for teaching all students, including those receiving Special Education, bilingual or advanced learning services.

SPS will write a scope and sequence for math and science and will adopt common grade level instructional materials where these are not already in existence.

Math

- Grades K-5 Everyday Math and Singapore Math (implemented 2007-08)
- Grades 6-8 CMP2 (implemented 2006-07)
- Grades 9-12 (to be developed Fall 2008)

Science

- Grades K-5 STC/Foss/Insights (implemented 1996)
- Grades 6-8 STC/Foss/SEPUP (implemented 2002)
- Grade 10 BSCS (implemented 2001)
- Grades 9, 11, 12 (to be developed fall 2008)

As curricula are aligned, SPS will ensure there is coherence (no unnecessary overlap and no gaps) and will address the following components: curriculum/instructional guides; pacing guides; identified best practices or high leverage practices; common understanding on use of manipulatives, equipment, and technology; common understanding on use of grading; identified mastery/core standards for PK-12 in math and science; common assessments and pre-post assessments; exemplary lessons for each grade; use of rubrics; and modifications for Special Education, English Language Learners and Advanced Learning students.

SPS will support this math/science alignment through an integrated effort. The school performance framework (referenced later in this plan) will help identify which schools are struggling and in what areas, and then provide targeted professional development that will directly support teachers in building the skills they need to effectively deliver content. That framework will also allow SPS to provide targeted student-level supports.

Measuring Impact

Success in this work is about products and processes as well as outcomes. The products and processes that will result from the math and science curriculum alignment include a curriculum guide that can be used (and differentiated) for all students with grade-level targets, exemplary lessons and assessments. Students and their families will have a clear understanding of what students need to know at each grade level and how they will learn it. Most importantly, we expect to see significant growth in math and science scores at all levels (both on the WASL and on District assessments). We also expect to see more students taking and succeeding in AP, International Baccalaureate (IB) and other college-preparatory courses.

Immediate Actions

- **Math:** A Math Project Team will develop an implementation plan and timeline for action during summer 2008. Alignment of the elementary and middle school instructional materials to the new State Performance Expectations will be completed this summer. Teacher leaders from each elementary, middle and high school will be trained during the summer of 2008 to facilitate professional development sessions for their schools around the mathematics content and the pedagogy needed to support implementation of an aligned program. Every math teacher will be provided up to four days of professional development to learn to use the online resources included with the Curriculum Guide.
- **Science:** A Science Project Team will develop a detailed timeline and implementation plan for action by the end of August 2008. Over the coming year, the team will align the kindergarten through eighth grade and 10th grade instructional materials to the new state standards (available in January 2009). The team will implement a pilot of instructional

materials in grades nine, 11 and 12 during this time. Ongoing professional development will be offered and will include the new instructional curriculum guides.

Longer-term Actions

Project teams will outline the full scope of work for development and implementation of key materials and related support for both math and science and will have detailed timelines complete by fall 2008.

Develop assessment tools to consistently track student progress and use data to drive improvements

Background

In best practice districts, effective assessments measure and track student growth and provide timely and useful insights to educators.

The Need

Common District-wide assessments are a critical component of an aligned curriculum. Although the WASL is a valuable assessment, it is not designed to track student growth and the results are not available in a timely fashion. In the leadership survey that was part of the McKinsey diagnostic, assessment of student performance was identified by principals as their schools' second greatest need.

"The curriculum effectively supports student learning, instruction provides extensive opportunities for student learning, frequent assessments are used to inform instructional decisions and the cultural climate appropriately supports learning for all."
- McKinsey diagnostic, 2008

In the curriculum management audit that was conducted, the auditors found that the District has parts of a comprehensive student assessment and program evaluation plan, but that assessment mechanisms are fragmented and don't allow District staff to take a coordinated approach to evaluating student achievement. They noted that, "the district primarily uses the state WASL tests in reading, writing, mathematics, and science to assess its curriculum. The district has developed benchmark tests in mathematics and reading, but these are not required for all grade levels." They recommended that the District take a more systematic approach to assessment.

Recommended Work

SPS will design, develop and implement common District-wide "formative" (ongoing, in the classroom) and "summative" (specific, point-in-time) assessments in math and reading from kindergarten through grade 12 with full implementation beginning in 2009-10. These assessments will inform instructional practice, provide an additional measure of student achievement, track student growth and inform District-level decision-making.

For high school students, SPS will work with the College Board to ensure that each student has the opportunity to take and succeed in at least one AP class (that can qualify students for college credit) and that all students take the PSAT as preparation for college entrance and as another indicator of students' strengths and weaknesses.

For the last two school years, school-based Data Teams have been working with District support to analyze their student data and make adjustments to instructional practice. This work has

focused principals and teachers on continuous improvement and built analytical capacity in the schools. The new assessments will provide another data point for these teams and further connect their work to Strategic Plan strategies (the school performance model, evaluations, professional development, etc.). In addition, regular assessments of student performance will further the District's commitment to transparency.

Measuring Impact

We will measure our success by using data about student strengths and weaknesses to inform and shape the District's curriculum, and by providing teachers tools so that they can use assessment data to help them differentiate and personalize their instruction for each student. Each grade level should include regular assessments of student progress in math and reading. SPS will use our regular surveys of instructional staff and principals to determine both how well assessments are being administered and the perceived effectiveness of the assessment system in informing instructional practice. Data from these assessments will inform how the District tracks its progress against clear student-level goals.

Immediate Actions

A project plan will be completed by summer 2008, with an immediate focus on refining current assessments, specifically redesigning math benchmark assessments in grades three through eight. SPS will develop improved assessment reports and provide training to instructional coaches. For the 2008-09 school year, the District will pilot the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment system, which incorporates a growth model that will allow teachers and principals to more effectively measure student growth over time.

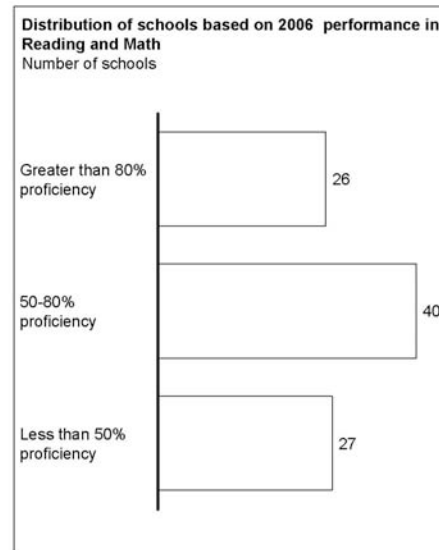
Longer-term Actions

A comprehensive assessment system will be developed during 2008-09 and implemented beginning in the 2009-10 school year.

Background

The McKinsey diagnostic identified significant variation in performance across schools, as this chart from the report's Appendix shows. But the District does not have a process or protocol for providing differentiated support based on school performance. Most states and many districts use school performance models to organize the kind of assistance they provide to schools. However, no such system currently exists either in Washington state or in Seattle Public Schools.

A school performance framework will allow the District to group schools according to a set of academic and non-academic performance targets (based on growth as well as absolute performance) and outline interventions, assistance, and autonomies and flexibilities for schools depending on their performance. With this tool we will be better able to hold ourselves accountable for performance and target our assistance to schools in a more coherent and consistent fashion.



The Need

The District does not have a consistent way to set clear goals for all of our schools (based on growth and absolute performance). Without clear performance targets, we cannot identify the support and assistance individual schools need, and we cannot hold schools accountable for meeting goals. With a school performance framework, SPS will be able to provide high-performing schools with more autonomy and lower-performing schools with the targeted assistance they need to improve. Every school will have clear goals, making us more accountable to students and families. Knowing where schools are struggling will help us design targeted professional development opportunities that meet the specific needs of school staff. All of this will help us create a system based on continuous improvement.

Recommended Work

Developing this framework will be a collaborative process with key internal stakeholders playing a crucial role. Over the next six months, two teams will work on developing this framework. One team will identify the academic and non-academic performance metrics that will be used to group schools. The District is currently determining looking at how we can incorporate a growth model to account for student progress and not simply just student placement relative to a

target (this work is reflected in the assessment strategy outlined in this plan). The other team will outline the different types of supports and flexibilities schools along the continuum will receive. These will include staff and student level interventions and supports.

We will look at best practices across the country and engage outside experts as appropriate. This framework will build on the District's current method of allocating resources and support – the Weighted Staffing Standards. It will also be informed by the accountability targets developed for the Southeast Education Initiative as a potential starting point for the performance metrics.

The initial framework will be developed by December 2008 and baseline data will be collected during that year (from the 2007-08 school year). Every school will have clear performance goals and beginning with the 2009-10 school year we will measure progress toward those goals.

Measuring Impact

This strategy will result in: (1) increased transparency about the performance expectations for every school; (2) consistent, targeted student- and staff-level support; and (3) fewer low-performing schools as every school builds its own improvement capacity and receives the support needed to make improvements. Ultimately the best indicator of this strategy's success will be our students' performance.

Immediate Actions

We will form two teams to implement this strategy, engage outside help, survey best state and district practices, and begin outlining a school performance framework for SPS. The framework will be completed by December 2008.

School performance is part of a larger performance management system that will be fully scoped by fall 2008.

Longer-term Actions

The performance management system, including the school performance model, will be operational across the District by the 2009-10 school year.

STRENGTHEN LEADERS SYSTEM-WIDE

Retain and hire the best teachers and principals

Background

Because of Seattle's history with site-based management, hiring of school staff – particularly teachers – has become decentralized over time. The District's process and timeline are outdated and no longer reflect the marketplace. Recruitment and hiring of principals and instructional staff must be updated and streamlined. In addition, the District must nurture existing talent to develop our own good teachers and principals from within.

The Need

A review team from the Council of the Great City Schools recently evaluated District Central Office operations. The reviewers concluded that the decentralized hiring process is inefficient and may cause SPS to lose qualified teacher candidates to other districts.

The McKinsey team reiterated this finding during the diagnostic they conducted. They noted that the lack of a clear hiring process results in up to 40 to 50 percent of open positions remaining vacant at the beginning of the school year to be filled by short-term substitutes. The researchers noted that while substitute teachers may be as accomplished as contracted instructional staff, the nature of the substitute role is temporary and results in inconsistent teaching relationships with students. Members of both review teams recommended that SPS streamline its hiring process.

Recommended Work

A cross-functional team will review and redesign the District's hiring processes. The team's work is organized into three phases.

- **Phase 1.** The first phase is devoted to this year's (2008) spring staffing work for hiring teachers for the 2008-09 school year. A new electronic system for recruiting and processing new applicants was being developed, but was not successful. Applicants were not able to use the system and principals expressed a tremendous amount of concern as to whether they would be able to hire teachers for the fall using the new system. The team decided that the new system would not meet our needs. Therefore the first phase of the team's work was designed to create a temporary hiring process for this year's teacher recruitment. This temporary process is working well.
- **Phase 2.** In the second phase, the team will design a single hiring process to encompass the needs of all classifications of District personnel. The work in this phase will focus on improving the mechanics and workflow of the hiring processes. The team will address the

needs of the primary customer groups: applicants, schools, Central Office hiring managers, and the Human Resources Department. After the new workflows and processes are established the team will select and implement an electronic applicant hiring and tracking system to fit the newly redesigned processes.

- **Phase 3.** In the final phase, the team will evaluate ways to improve the broader recruiting process. The work in this phase will strive to make the District a strong regional competitor in the recruiting and retention of teachers and other District employees.

Measuring Impact

We will measure our success by the quality of the applicants the department recruits and by the service our staff provides to every principal and applicant (tracked through surveys and interviews). We will also hold ourselves accountable for performing routine support services, such as payroll, with efficiency and accuracy.

Immediate Actions

The first phase, the temporary hiring process for 2008-09, is almost complete. Before starting the second and third phases, we are designing an overall District-wide approach to process redesign. This will result in a District-wide methodology.

Longer-term Actions

A new hiring process will be implemented beginning in 2009.

Background

Effective districts support and evaluate instructional staff to help strengthen their performance. Support is particularly needed for new teachers and principals. While educators continually work on their own to improve their skills, real improvement in the classroom, and associated gains in student achievement, require collective and sustained District-wide efforts. Professional development programs for educators should be closely aligned with instructional goals for students.

The Need

The McKinsey diagnostic noted that SPS is well positioned to provide promotion and performance support to teachers and principals. It also stated that mechanisms for support exist within the collective bargaining agreements the District has with both the teachers' and principals' associations. However, the diagnostic noted that these processes are not widely used.

Although teachers and principals can improve throughout their careers, generally most gains are made in the first year.

- University of Texas at Dallas, 2004

For new teachers, the Staff Training, Assistance, and Review (STAR) mentor program is not meeting demand: of the 200 to 400 new teachers who begin work at SPS each year, only 72 received a mentor in 2007-08 and 18 were placed on a waitlist.

Current professional development programs at SPS are not aligned to state, District or building goals. The McKinsey diagnostic also found that there is no clear professional development schedule across the year, teacher and principal participation in these programs is tracked manually (limiting the ability for follow-up or analysis), and there are few options for staff who want additional support beyond the standard program.

Recommended Work

Teacher Mentoring

SPS will develop and/or strengthen programs to support new teachers with less than five years in the system (prior to ProCert³).⁴ STAR, the current teacher mentoring program, is not meeting demand. The District is committed to working with the Seattle Education Association (SEA) to

³ Professional Certification

⁴ SPS also recognizes the importance of mentoring new principals and will look for ways to strengthen those programs as well.

identify ways in which mentoring programs, including STAR, can serve more teachers, while also being cost-effective and sustainable.

Professional Development

SPS will strengthen professional development around three priority areas, math, science and literacy, that are central to students' success and to the success of this Strategic Plan:

- **Math:** All teachers will receive professional development on the new K-12 math standards. This will involve training on the new math content and materials.

Professional development for elementary teachers will include integration of literacy standards in mathematics, best practices and grade-level support in collaborative inquiry groups to strengthen their uses of the Everyday Math materials. At the elementary level, a teacher leader will be identified from each building. Six buildings will be clustered to form collaborative inquiry groups.

Middle school teachers will participate in studio lesson cycles in which they will complete collaborative lesson planning, watch demonstration lessons and work on high leverage practices.

High school teachers will identify instructional materials for adoption and begin to align these materials and develop exemplary lessons and assessments. These teachers will receive training on best practices and group-work. Training for high school teachers will involve four after-school two-hour sessions.

- **Science:** Professional development will focus on the District's Inquiry-Based Science Program, which follows current national and local research, best practice and data. We will continue to refine and improve our support for assessment (WASL support and formative assessments), expository writing in science, content, community environmental applications, lesson study and leadership courses. Alignment adjustments will be incorporated seamlessly into these courses with a focus on core and rigorous standards. There will be a special focus on strengthening physical science and physics at all grade levels.
- **Literacy:** Professional development will focus on the District's Balanced Literacy Program and will train teachers in both qualitative and quantitative research in reading and writing instruction and oral language development. Training will be offered in using running records to assess students' reading progress; interactive read-alouds; and Writers' Workshop as a pilot in four elementary schools.

Professional development in all content areas will include a focus on cultural relevance, service to English Language Learners, Special Education students, advanced learning and differentiation. Ongoing focused professional development has been a recommendation in every programmatic review; as we move to implement those recommendations we will ensure that all staff members are trained in appropriate techniques to support all of our learners.

Measuring Impact

Professional development programs will reflect the District's priorities and the needs of SPS staff. We will measure the success of our teacher-focused professional development by tracking how the offerings improve teacher practice and performance as reflected in teacher evaluations (see next section). The mentoring program will be evaluated based on teacher and principal retention rates as well as on performance evaluations.

Immediate Actions

Mentoring

- For new teachers, SPS will refocus its 15-credit ProCert courses to more closely align with the state requirements for certification.
- For new principals, SPS will develop a New Principal Induction program that will match each new principal with a coach and provide monthly support meetings.

Professional Development

SPS, through its collaborative Joint Professional Development Steering Committee, will develop a detailed professional development plan by fall 2008, including a clear calendar, a timeline for moving to electronic scheduling, and a plan for evaluating the impact of the professional development offerings.

Longer-term Actions

Expanded professional development programs will be implemented beginning in fall 2008.

Implement effective performance evaluations at all levels

Background

Effective districts support and evaluate all staff, understanding that a strong and efficient administrative structure is necessary to support successful schools. Individuals and departments must be held accountable for results.

The Need

According to the McKinsey diagnostic, SPS has developed accountability mechanisms but often does not use them, and has not created incentives for meeting targets or completing tasks. The diagnostic noted that few groups, if any, are held accountable for District results. The Operations peer review audit conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools noted that the District's Human Resources, Technology Services and Finance Departments all suffer from high levels of turnover, conflicting priorities and projects and a lack of accountability measures. Continuous improvement comes from clear expectations, frequent feedback and formal evaluation tools. SPS needs to develop these for the Central Office staff and strengthen them for building level staff.

Recommended Work

As part of a reinvigorated Human Resources Department, SPS will develop a comprehensive evaluation system with three areas of focus: teacher evaluations, principal evaluations and Central Office evaluations. Over the coming months, we will work with our partners to develop these evaluations, set baseline performance targets and plan for effective performance reviews at the end of the 2008-09 school year.

Teacher Evaluations

There is a good evaluation pilot outlined in the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between SPS and SEA. This new procedure evaluates teachers differently depending on where they are in their careers. The procedure provides newer, less experienced teachers with more frequent monitoring and guided goal-setting, and gives more experienced teachers who have proven their abilities in the classroom with additional autonomy and more opportunities for self-directed goal-setting. In all cases, classroom data are used to inform individual teacher performance evaluations.

This program was piloted in 2006-07 in eight schools. The staffs of all eight schools voted to continue the new evaluation procedure in their schools for 2007-08, with principals saying that the feedback teachers received seemed to be making a positive difference in teaching practice.

The District is committed to completing the second year of the pilot during 2008-09 and working with SEA during the contract negotiations that will occur in spring 2009 to ensure that a high-quality evaluation process for the entire system is included in the next contract.

Principal Evaluations

Just as relevant evaluations are important for teachers, they are also important for principals and assistant principals. SPS and representatives from the Principals' Association of Seattle Schools (PASS) are currently developing a new evaluation process for principals.

Central Office Evaluations

The District will restructure the performance evaluations for non-represented Central Office staff. We will outline expected core competencies, establish goal-setting protocols and provide training to managers on how to conduct effective reviews. We will also look at including 360-degree reviews in these evaluations (feedback from people across the system who work with a specific individual instead of only from the direct supervisor), as well as merit pay to recognize those high performers.

Measuring Impact

We will measure our success both by the quality of the evaluation tools we develop as well as by how the use of these tools drives culture change to one that is performance-driven, with staff striving to do their best and getting recognized and rewarded when they do.

Immediate Actions

The Superintendent will work with department leaders to determine clear goals and targets that connect to District-wide priorities for schools and the Central Office.

For teacher evaluation, the District will fund the second year of the teacher evaluation pilot program, and will work to formalize ongoing evaluation processes for the start of the 2009 school year.

For principal evaluation, the District will ensure that the evaluation is strong and connected to the school performance framework as well as to school-specific goals.

For Central Office staff evaluations, the District will develop a new performance evaluation system beginning with non-represented Central Office staff.

For all of these we will look at best practices and engage outside experts where appropriate.

Longer-term Actions

The programs will be implemented beginning in 2009.

BUILD AN INFRASTRUCTURE THAT WORKS WELL

Adopt and adapt technologies to allow for more efficient student assignment

Background

In addition to providing general technical support and basic information technology utilities to schools throughout the District, SPS' Department of Technology Services also provides several central services, including student assignment, student information system and academic systems data. Many of these services operate on a 1970s-era VAX computer system. To attempt major reprogramming on the VAX system would run the risk of crashing the entire system, thus putting critical functions at risk. Instead, District staff have been working to "migrate" data and applications off the VAX and onto modern computer systems.

Student assignment has been a particular area of concern. In 2007 the School Board adopted a framework to guide revisions to the District's student assignment plan. The goals stated in the framework include offering families predictability and continuity in their children's school careers, along with maintaining the option of choice. In addition to the specific assignment plan elements, the framework directed staff to develop an intensive intervention in Southeast Seattle, called the Southeast Education Initiative.

In the overarching framework adopted by the School Board, all students would have a guaranteed assignment to a nearby school, based on their home address or feeder school. Students would still be able to choose to attend alternative schools or other comprehensive high schools on a space-available basis, as they can now. As the plan is implemented, students would be "grandfathered" into their current schools to provide stability for their families.

The Need

In order to make the changes contemplated by the Board-approved framework, we must complete a number of tasks. First, we must develop projections about the expected number of students in each neighborhood. Next, we must complete a capacity analysis of each school. And third, District decision makers must determine how space will be allocated, how students will be transported and how all students will be served.

Originally the District intended to implement the initial assignment plan changes for fall 2008. However, due to the challenges noted above with reprogramming the VAX computer system, staff determined that the VAX system must be replaced, and all data migrated, before a new assignment plan could be developed.

Recommended Work

SPS will implement the migration of remaining applications off the legacy VAX platform:

- Student Assignment
- Student Information System
- Academic Systems data
- Utilities

Measuring Impact

We will measure our success in three areas: (1) our ability to move these applications to modern systems while continuing with District operations; (2) our ability reduce operational costs on the new platform; and (3) the ease with which the new platform and technologies support key District functions, such as student assignment and student information systems.

Immediate Actions

Student Assignment: The student assignment application cannot be moved until a new student assignment plan is adopted. SPS will begin a project plan during summer 2008.

eSIS Enhancements: Student information applications – such as special education, bilingual and immunization – will be moved to the eSIS application. A project plan will be developed during summer 2008.

Academic Systems data: Student information is located in a number of places. SPS will continue to migrate all remaining academic data off the VAX system. Academic data must be coordinated with eSIS (Student Information Systems) data.

Utilities: SPS will determine how to convert remaining utility applications (such as label printing, scheduling and historical data archiving) off the VAX. The project will include an electronic archival strategy. Project work will begin during summer 2008 and is expected to be completed by early 2009.

Longer-term Actions

Student Assignment: The work described above is ongoing, and we anticipate that the initial implementation of a new assignment plan will go into effect in fall 2010. This date, however, is dependent upon the implementation of appropriate technologies that can support the assignment plan.

eSIS Enhancements: Migration will be complete by summer 2009.

Academic Systems data: Migration will be complete by summer 2009.

Background

The SPS Financial Services Department is responsible for budgeting, financial management, purchasing and accounting, as well as related financial and operational services.

The Need

Both the McKinsey and the Council of the Great City Schools review teams praised SPS for its healthy financial reserves and strong attention to financial management. However, both reviews noted that the SPS budget process is complex, takes longer than peer districts and is not clearly aligned with District goals and strategies. The reviewers also noted that the lack of a tracking system in the Central Office makes it difficult to identify overspending and hold budget owners accountable to their projections. SPS needs a budget process to help the District better allocate resources in line with strategic planning priorities. The process would increase accountability within the District and with the public.

Recommended Work

A Budget Process Reengineering Team is serving as a prototype to help departments throughout the District learn to map out cross-organizational processes. The use of process mapping has been identified as a key strategy (along with Project Management training) to help departments work together, improve efficiency and yield improved outcomes.

Budget development was identified as the first area of focus due to concerns about implementation of the new Weighted Staffing Standards funding model. The team initially focused on one time-sensitive and high risk-component of the budget process, the allocation of resources to schools and the development of school budgets. This process is time-sensitive since personnel decisions hinge on final approval of school budgets. If deadlines are not met, employee morale and organizational flexibility are compromised.

The process was high risk since it involved implementing a new school-funding model, and because tools that had previously been used to manage staffing were no longer available due to the organization's conversion to new financial and personnel software last summer.

The multi-departmental team developed a process and timeline which resulted in successful and timely completion of the school budgeting process. Next, the team moved on to develop a year-round budget process sequence and schedule, identifying the tasks to be completed by each department and the related tasks that would need to be completed at each stage for the budget process to continue. This work has brought to light contradictory work flow and processes between departments that must be resolved so the organization can function effectively as a system.

Organizational capacity is simultaneously being enhanced by training and mentoring of District staff who can provide leadership to other such efforts on an ongoing basis.

Measuring Impact

We will measure our success by ensuring that the District's budget process clearly aligns with strategic planning priorities while preserving and protecting overall financial health. We will also survey staff and principals on the ease and efficacy of the new budget process.

Immediate Actions

To improve the budget process, SPS has established several teams that are developing the budgeting process for 2009-10.

Longer-term Actions

The new budget process will be fully implemented beginning in fall 2009 for the 2010-11 budget.

IMPROVE OUR SYSTEMS

Core Systems

Because of the importance of a well-functioning Central Office to school success and student performance, our strategic planning process focused on a number of our basic systems, specifically budgeting and finance, human resources and information technology. As we move forward, we will continue to examine all of our administrative systems to ensure that they effectively serve the District and efficiently support the needs of students, teachers and schools.

Several systems issues that will be addressed over the next several years include:

- **Budgeting and Finance.** The Strategic Plan focuses on the work we need to do to align our budget process with our priorities and ensure we are intentional and careful about the use of District resources. However, both the McKinsey diagnostic and the Operations peer review audit identified a number of organizational and operational issues that must be addressed in our Financial Services Department. As we implement our immediate Strategic Plan priorities, we will develop a longer-term plan to address these needs, including strengthening our financial analysis capabilities to better track and report spending and adopting modern purchasing strategies to improve efficiency and save money.
- **Information Technology.** The Strategic Plan focuses on the urgent need of migrating District applications off the 1970s-era VAX system. However, both the McKinsey diagnostic and the Operations peer review identified other issues that must be addressed. These issues include developing a District-wide governance and decision-making structure for IT planning and purchases to ensure that IT decisions support academic goals; reviewing purchasing decisions, and decisions about whether to purchase ready-made software or develop custom-built applications, to reduce costs and increase efficiency.
- **Human Resources.** The Strategic Plan identifies a number of priorities that must be addressed to improve the recruitment, hiring, mentoring and evaluation of District staff.. As we move forward, we will complete the process improvement of the District's teacher application and hiring, complete a pilot project on teacher performance evaluation in collaboration with the Seattle Education Association, and develop a business plan that is focused on recruiting staff in areas of need and teachers who come from non-traditional training and backgrounds to provide quality instruction in all of our schools and raise student achievement.

Performance Management

We have begun to identify performance measures for the strategies recommended as part of this Strategic Plan. These performance measures will become more specific over the next several months. To sustain our efforts and operate more efficiently over the long term, however, we must do more than simply develop performance measures for specific strategies.

Instead, we must develop a District-wide **performance management effort** that is focused on continuous improvement and that helps us track our success and address our shortcomings in all areas of our work.

As the McKinsey diagnostic noted, although SPS has set targets at the District, school, and individual level, these targets are not robust enough to serve as a foundation for effective performance management. Progress against targets is rarely measured, and measurements that do exist are vague. Moreover, these measurements do not consistently link to the District's strategic priorities.

To address these concerns and become more strategic about our progress, we will begin work on a performance management system during summer 2008. We will seek help in designing the system and launching it over the next three years. Performance management connects to many of our other strategies, including evaluations, professional development, assessment and hiring. Our performance management system will include:

- **Project management:** How the District selects and manages individual projects and initiatives (including protocols, accountability targets, etc.).
- **Effective data use:** Our ability to use data to inform performance evaluations and spending choices.
- **Product and tool development for ongoing management:** New tools to help with goal-setting and creating a District dashboard (including benchmarking against Key Performance Indicators), a Central Office dashboard, a Superintendent dashboard, a school performance framework and new evaluations for non-represented staff that address performance pay.
- **Business process redesign:** Systems improvement to help the District become more effective and efficient with its processes.
- **Capacity building:** Strengthening our human capacity through project management skills, cross-functional teams and outlining an overall approach to developing District talent.

ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Overview

The diversity and commitment of Seattle Public Schools' many stakeholders is the envy of the nation. We want to build confidence and strengthen relationships with all of our stakeholders so that together we make Seattle's public schools the best in the nation.

More than 3,000 people have participated in the SPS strategic planning process through the development of our diagnostic evaluation, peer review audits or community meetings.

The Stakeholder Engagement section of the Strategic Plan will be developed after extensive outreach with the community over the coming months. When complete and submitted to the School Board this fall, it will build on recommendations presented in the Engagement Discovery report and a Communications peer review audit conducted early in the strategic planning process. This work will provide the framework for an updated District strategic communications plan for internal and external engagement.

There are examples of excellent stakeholder engagement underway at Seattle Public Schools. The recent Engagement Discovery report completed by Pyramid Communications noted that there are tools and practices at SPS that are equal to or better than those in any other school district. Now we must expand what works and continue to improve so that we truly serve all community members.

Engagement Process

More than 3,000 people participated in the SPS strategic planning process through the development of our diagnostic, peer review audits or community engagement process. These have included:

- 79 principals who completed a qualitative and quantitative survey examining practices and improvement opportunities in the District;
- 54 individuals from the SPS management and executive leadership;
- 1,385 instructional staff who participated in an Instructional Staff survey;
- SPS students and their families;
- Members of Principal Association of Seattle Schools (PASS);
- Members of the Seattle Education Association (SEA);
- International Union of Operating Engineers (Local 609);
- Education faculty from the University of Washington and Western Washington University;
- The Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA);
- The City of Seattle, the State Office of Education, and the State Legislature, as well as representatives from other community organizations, foundations, and government groups;

- 28 education experts; and
- Community & Parents for Public Schools (CPPS).

With their help, we have begun to develop plans to improve a number of our communications and engagement practices. We will prioritize five areas:

- Upgrade SPS Web site;
- Engage families more often and more effectively;
- Conduct effective outreach and engage community leaders;
- Engage staff as key stakeholders; and
- Be focused and collaborative in partnerships.

All of these efforts are designed to strengthen public confidence. We know we need frequent, clear communication with all of our stakeholders and that we need to better utilize technology and existing channels to get information out to the community. And we know that trust and confidence come from having transparency and accountability. We are committed to holding Seattle Public Schools accountable to the community for improving student achievement for all students.

Background

The SPS Web site should be one of our most powerful tools to convey who we are. It should allow users to discover information easily and provide helpful content for a variety of audiences. The Web site should be known for relevant, appealing and highly accessible information for all.

The Need

While the last upgrade to the District Web site was a vast improvement in appearance, virtually all stakeholder input on engagement highlighted the need for improvements in navigation and appearance, as well as a focus on updated content that is clearly written and visually appealing.

Recommended Work

SPS engaged Pyramid Communications to conduct a detailed review of the Web site. That report is attached in the Appendices. Technology Services and Communications staff members are working to assess the functionality of our site from the perspective of different audiences. Serving the many people who rely on us for information will be our top priority. In addition, we are evaluating options to improve and modernize the site, including tracking statistics so that we can determine which pages are most in demand, allowing users to subscribe to newsletters and simplifying navigation.

Measuring Impact

Communications staff members are working with Technology Services to develop Web tracking tools to understand more about which pages are useful and to whom. Survey data will also inform us about customer satisfaction with improvements made over time.

Immediate Actions

The Superintendent has approved a Technology Governance model for SPS. It includes a charter for a Web Content Advisory Committee. Communications will appoint members in 2008 and lead that committee's work. The committee's starting point will be to evaluate the Web report completed by Pyramid Communications as part of the Engagement Discovery process.

Longer-term Actions

A proposal for a major Web site overhaul will be complete by spring 2009. Once funding is identified, we expect the actual work to take up to one year.

Background

Informed and engaged families are vital to student achievement. All families, but especially those who experience isolation from schools due to barriers associated with language, race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, deserve to be treated with respect and welcomed by SPS staff as partners in delivering excellence for every student.

The Need

There are examples of excellent family engagement in the District, both at individual schools and in programs such as the Flight Initiative. Families support expanded use of tools such as *The Source* and the provision of interpretation and translation services. Yet feedback from recent outreach also confirms that many families do not feel well-informed about school or District decisions and events. Families report feeling intimidated or unwelcome at schools and at the Central Office. Whether or not families have the ability to visit or participate in activities at school during the day, SPS must do more to improve the consistency, timeliness, relevance and convenience of communication to all families. For families whose circumstances require more support in order for their children to remain in school and be successful, SPS must increase its efforts to partner with the community to provide necessary services.

Recommended Work

SPS, like all urban school districts, must be creative and relentless in its commitment to engage all families. We have a strong, research-based model for family involvement in the School-Family Partnership Plan, which we plan to implement district-wide. Higher quality communication is needed in every contact between families and SPS staff, particularly classroom teachers, instructional assistants and school support staff. Strengthened relationships with established community, faith and cultural organizations will help SPS cross cultural barriers and increase trust.

Measuring Impact

SPS currently collects annual data from families and staff. Collaboration between Communications and Research staff will result in instruments that include more measures relevant to family engagement and methods that are more representative of our families. Survey data and information from families through other methods, such as focus groups and informal conversations, will help us monitor our progress toward the desired outcome of all families feeling respected and engaged.

Immediate Actions

The feedback sought from stakeholders in the engagement process will inform a set of strategies (in addition to those already in place) to improve and expand stakeholder engagement. We will pay particular attention to ideas for improving efforts to reach families where they gather in the community and in ways that are convenient and effective for them. The Communications team will work closely with the Family Engagement staff and the School Family Partnership Advisory Committee to evaluate what we learn in the engagement process for the Strategic Plan and propose recommended changes.

While engagement is underway, specific actions are being taken to improve family involvement.

The District is implementing a new **automated notification system** that will enable SPS to reach thousands of homes simultaneously, providing personal contact with families. We will have the ability to record and deliver messages in a variety of languages, and through this tool we will have increased ability to reach families who may not be literate in their native language. A pilot is underway now, with data updating and system-wide testing to occur in summer 2008. Full implementation is scheduled for 2008-09. We will use the system to communicate with families in emergency situations and will expand its use over time. Examples of future uses include messages to families about opportunities for engagement, reminders of important school dates and information about attendance, transportation and nutrition services.

We will work to establish a more meaningful communication channel between the superintendent and the School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee for the 2008-09 school year.

We will accelerate District-wide training for all staff in cultural relevance and inclusiveness (including disability status) for our work with a wide range of families and students.

Longer-term Actions

A commitment to improved engagement with families must extend throughout the District. Outreach activities will inform implementation strategies to help us:

- Dedicate more resources to family engagement at the school level, both from the District and in partnership with the community;
- Develop and regularly update tools for families, such as Web-based information and printed materials, including a handbook in multiple languages with useful information for families; and
- Increase use of *The Source* with better support and training for teachers, including plans for making computers available at schools and in the community for families without Internet access at home.

Background

Community members expect to be informed of our progress and want meaningful opportunities to shape our actions. Stakeholders should know what to expect in terms of methods and timeframes for influencing important decisions.

The Need

Communications staff established a set of draft principles and protocols for public engagement on major policy decisions and initiatives. These policies have been reviewed by SPS senior leaders, local public affairs firms and community leaders. Outreach activities conducted for the Strategic Plan offer lessons in themselves about what is effective. Focused discussions about how stakeholders want to be engaged were a part of each of our public meetings on the Strategic Plan, as well as in stakeholder meetings.

Recommended Work

SPS will revise the working draft engagement protocol based on feedback from stakeholders. A final protocol will be established and publicized widely, both internally and externally.

Measuring Impact

Increased numbers and more representative participation in engagement activities will be one measure of success. Less tangible but essential outcomes of more authentic engagement include higher quality decisions, smoother implementation and increased public confidence.

Immediate Actions

Our protocol for community engagement will be finalized by fall 2008 based on input from community members. While the protocol is under review, we will continue to reach out to our many stakeholders. With respect to community leaders, we will build on the community channel that was expanded during the strategic planning process to reach more community, business and civic leaders. We will also collaborate with the Alliance for Education to convene periodic gatherings of leaders to share our progress and discuss challenges.

Longer-term Actions

Stakeholder engagement requires time, resources and training. Based on the final engagement protocol, staff will develop specific plans to implement a District-wide improvement in how we engage people in decision making and inform them of our progress.

Background

Our teachers, principals and staff are trusted messengers within the District, to our families and in the community. Their input is critical to good decisions, and their capacity to inform and inspire each other and our families is a valuable asset.

The Need

SPS employs thousands of people, all of whom contribute to the overall workforce morale as well as to the impression families and community members have of our schools. Through surveys, stakeholder interviews and informal conversations with District leaders, staff expressed the need for improved communication within the District. Teachers and instructional staff asked for more direct regular contact with the Superintendent, both to get information and to offer input. Staff also expressed appreciation for being informed of important reports and sensitive information before it was released externally and reported by media.

Ensuring that staff members understand what is expected of them in terms of communication is also vital to a complex public organization. All staff must know about and adhere to protocols for communicating in an emergency and communicating about sensitive information. Expertise must be developed throughout the District and communication plans need to be routinely created and executed for major announcements and projects. In accordance with new project management guidelines, communication plans need to be developed and executed to report progress to stakeholders on the District's Strategic Plan and other major projects.

Recommended Work

In the last year, considerable effort has been devoted to communicating more effectively with internal audiences at the school and central staff level. We have developed tools and practices to help keep all SPS employees well-informed and prepared to deliver key messages both on the job and in their communities. We will continue our efforts to treat staff as key internal stakeholders, informing them of District decisions prior to broad publication. We will commit to high-quality communication between and among staff. We will increase opportunities for staff to know about and offer their input on decisions. We will implement project management practices that include communication plans for informing our stakeholders, both internal and external.

Measuring Impact

In addition to ongoing direct feedback from staff to District leaders, SPS also collects annual survey data. Analysis of these data as well as periodic surveys and focus groups among staff will help us understand how we are doing and where we need to improve. We seek to measure improvement not just in how well-informed staff feel, but also whether efforts to involve them in

shaping decisions was effective for them. Project management reports will also inform us of our success and ongoing problems in communicating well with stakeholders.

Immediate Actions

We will expand awareness of our regular electronic communications, including *Classroom Connection* for instructional staff, *Principal Communicator* for principals and *School Beat* for all staff and subscribing community members.

We will maintain regular direct contact between the Superintendent and SPS educators and professionals. Tools include periodic emails and in-person meetings. We will continue the Superintendent's informal meetings with instructional staff in the schools and expand that practice to Central Office staff gatherings.

The Communications team created a crisis communications plan called the Critical Facts Communications Plan to describe how we handle communication around sensitive issues. School leaders and senior staff at the Central Office have been trained in this protocol and are regularly reminded of it. It is posted on the SPS intranet and is regularly referred to in staff e-newsletters and meetings. We will include training on communications protocols in the upcoming Summer Institute.

Safety and Security staff members are collaborating with Communications staff to develop an emergency communications plan, describing reporting structures, roles and responsibilities during a major emergency such as a natural disaster or civil emergency. A draft is now undergoing internal review. When that is complete, we will collaborate with local officials to ensure any necessary compliance and increase awareness of our respective roles in the event of a disaster or civil emergency.

Teams throughout the District are receiving training in project management, including how to develop and deliver effective communications plans.

Longer-term Actions

We need to develop plans to support professional development opportunities for staff to enhance their skills in communications, including writing, oral communication, group dynamics and design of printed and electronic tools. This includes training in the rapidly evolving field of electronic communications so that our staff know how to develop and use new tools effectively.

Background

We have many valuable partners who support our students, teachers, schools and District leaders. Being more focused and strategic in how we work with partners will enable us to put our efforts where they matter most for our students. We have a particularly powerful opportunity to collaborate more closely with the Alliance for Education to advance our shared goals. The Mayor's Office of Education is another strategic partnership that we will continue to leverage and strengthen.

The Need

Partner organizations want to play a more integral role in supporting our schools. In particular, the re-energized Alliance is eager to partner with SPS in a more focused and collaborative way.

Recommended Work

SPS can collaborate with the Alliance to support and facilitate ongoing dialogue with the community. A closer partnership will allow for more strategic direction for organizations seeking to support SPS. Effort must also be devoted to developing strategic partnerships with other independent organizations and businesses that contribute to making progress on the Strategic Plan and improving education outcomes for all students.

Measuring Impact

Successful partnerships can be measured both by people and resources committed to SPS priorities as well as by the leveraged impact the District is able to have because of partnerships. We will track the expanded reach and scale that partners afford us along with the student-level outcomes that result from focused partnerships..

Immediate Actions

A new staff position has been created and includes the responsibility to map and assess current partners. An evaluation will be conducted of how well partners help us focus our efforts according to strategic priorities.

Longer-term Actions

A long-range plan will be developed following the necessary mapping and evaluation process outlined above.

OUR CULTURE

We have the ability to become a world-class school district offering excellence and opportunity to every student. To do that, though, we must infuse new life into our culture, joining with staff, students, families and community members to undertake a new approach to our work.

We are committed to ensuring that all students excel. For students who have fallen behind, it is our responsibility to help them reach grade level and meet standard. For students who are already excelling, we must offer them the opportunity to do more. For students needing specialized academic supports, it is our responsibility to ensure they receive the services they need to succeed.

We believe in individual responsibility and collective accountability. Each person in Seattle's schools – students and staff alike – is an important part of our community. We must all contribute to the well-being of our schools, and we must all be accountable for our own work and progress. The District has prepared many plans in the past. Some of them have succeeded; others have not. This Plan's success will depend on our actions, on our willingness to stay prioritized and focused on what is achievable, to measure our strategies and to share our progress in a transparent fashion.

We will provide exemplary customer-service to families and community members. We must improve the level of customer service we provide families and community members so that all people feel welcome in our schools and so that families have a good experience with the District. We must commit to meaningful, broad-based community engagement to better share our work and solicit thoughts, opinions and comments.

We are proud to serve Seattle's families. We must show this in everything we do.

Immediate actions:

- By fall 2008, we will develop a customer service protocol, including a measurement tool, and will send two groups through training (beginning with Transportation).
- The Superintendent will continue visiting schools to hold conversations with building staff, students and families. She will commit to at least 40 school visits during 2008-09.
- The Superintendent will schedule monthly walk-throughs within the Central Office, and will hold quarterly conversations with District departments on a rotating basis to ensure regular channels of communication within the District.
- By fall 2008, we will develop and share a District dashboard to track our progress on each of the strategies outlined in the plan.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The strategic planning process, with its comprehensive diagnostic, academic and operations peer review audits and public engagement process, helped identify a number of areas in which the District could improve its performance by streamlining or by reorganizing its structure. SPS began a Central Office reorganization in spring 2008 based on the recommendations that came from the strategic planning process.

We will have an organizational structure that:

- **Aligns our work** with the goals we've developed through the strategic planning process, ensuring that we have the staff and resources to focus on what is most important;
- **Eliminates silos**, or the barriers that can isolate departments or functions, to ensure that we operate in a careful and integrated fashion;
- **Infuses equity and cultural competency throughout the District** to ensure that we serve all members of our community equitably and well; and
- **Adopts effective business and operational models** based on national models and best practices.

RESOURCES & FACILITIES

Resources

A key part of the Strategic Plan depends on our ability to align the District's budget with our goals and priorities. Developing a priority-based budget process and developing performance management measures to assess and evaluate budget proposals is one of the strategies we must address first so that we can effect broader changes.

Declining revenues and increasing costs will require us to find budget savings. This will make a priority-based budget even more important: we will focus on savings from reallocating or combining work efforts or by stopping unnecessary projects. In addition, our focus on Central Office operations will allow us to save funds by becoming more efficient.

For each of the identified strategies there are planning costs and implementation costs. During the planning period, the total scope of work is detailed and costs are estimated across a timeline. This includes design and development needs, milestones and an execution plan. Planning costs for many of these strategies are accounted for in both the current budget year as well as the upcoming proposed 2008-09 budget. There are some efforts, however, such as developing a performance management system, that will require outside experts. For these more complicated strategies that are not already budgeted, we are seeking outside assistance to cover the design and development costs.

Implementation costs for the strategies will vary depending on the complexity, timeline and nature of work. Those strategies that have already been fully scoped (most of the IT work, for example) have also outlined their implementation costs and accounted for them in next year's budget. For those strategies that require outside help in the design and development phase, we are not able yet to outline specific implementation costs. In these cases we will do two things to address any unaccounted for costs that are identified:

1. Reallocate existing funds against these priorities; and
2. Seek outside assistance where possible.

The District's annual operating budget is the budget for the Strategic Plan, for all of our work must be focused and aligned toward the goals set forth in the Plan. The Fiscal Year 2009 (FY 09) budget that will be presented to the School Board in June will encompass a majority of the costs for year one of the Strategic Plan, and we feel confident in our ability to identify partners to cover the unfunded one-time or transitional activities that will increase our capacity to continue this work internally in the future.

We are continuing to develop and refine the project plans for each strategy, including potentially reducing the scope of projects to ensure that they are fully included in the FY 09 budget. To-date, the proposed FY 09 budget comprises many of the strategies in the Plan, including:

- **Academic Strategies**
 - Continuation of the elementary and middle school math implementation and the beginning of the high school math implementation
 - Funding of the year one science strategy, within the existing budget
 - Full funding of the K-12 assessment pilots that will occur in 2008-09
 - School performance model
 - Full funding for using existing staff to develop the model is included in FY 09 budget
 - Implementation of the model has not been scoped at this point; costs for this will occur for FY 10
 - Funding for 75 percent of the Southeast Education Initiative for FY 09; scoping for years beyond FY 09 is being completed and outside funding may be needed to support this strategy
- **HR/District Talent Strategies**
 - Full funding using existing staff for redesigning the hiring process, developing quality professional development offerings and developing effective evaluations
 - Implementation of the recommendations in these three areas may include additional costs in FY 10 that are not currently funded
- **IT/Finance Infrastructure Strategies**
 - Adapting and adopting technologies to support student migration is fully funded through the completion of the project
 - Development of budget protocols and evaluation tools is fully funded in FY 09
 - Implementation costs for the recommended protocols and tools, including a new budget development tool will be identified; some may be unfunded for FY 09 and outside funding may be required to complete this strategy
- **Performance Management Strategies**
 - Building system-wide project management capacity
 - Training in project management is funded for FY 09
 - The Information Technology Project Management Office (IT PMO) is fully funded for FY 09
 - Additional staff for a complete Project Management Office has not been identified; outside funding will be required to complete this strategy
 - Developing products and tools for ongoing performance management
 - Staff to develop the products and tools are fully funded for FY 09
 - Consultant assistance will be necessary and outside funding will be required to complete this strategy in FY 09
 - Costs associated with purchase and implementation of new products and tools have not been identified and outside resources will likely be required for FY 09 and FY10
 - Redesign business processes
 - Process to establish the methodology and train three staff is fully funded for year one but additional training and support will likely be required

- **Outreach and Communications Strategies**

- Creating a plan to overhaul the Web site is fully funded using existing staff, the Web Content Advisory Committee and consultation with outside advisors. Funding to implement the plan has not been identified as of yet; costs will be identified in the planning process and may require outside funding.
- Designing a District-wide customer service training program is fully funded with existing staff including customer service and professional development; implementation of a training program for all District employees may require outside partners and/or funding
- Outlining next steps to implement the School Family Partnership model
 - Existing staff are fully funded and will work with the School-Family Partnership Parent Advisory Committee to evaluate recommendations of the model and develop implementation plans; implementation of the model is not fully funded for FY 09.

Facilities

The District must consistently evaluate our use of facilities, including potential re-use of currently closed buildings, in light of the adequacy of our current facilities and our current and projected enrollment demographics.

Districts typically conduct an evaluation of their facilities and enrollment and demographic shifts every few years, to ensure that facility location and structure types are appropriate for students.

In 2006, the District undertook a round of school closures, and SPS staff members are currently working to update the student assignment plan, which is expected to be implemented for the 2010-11 school year. While no facilities changes are anticipated for the 2008-09 year, we acknowledge that if enrollment continues to shrink in some parts of the city, while growing in others, we will be required to address those demographic shifts. In addition, the very age and stability of our buildings will require evaluation as we move forward.

NEXT STEPS

Building on the Foundation

These strategies set a logical foundation for our efforts. Accomplishing them will help us move on to broader and more ambitious strategies in the future, including:

- Continued work aligning curricula so that students receive consistently high quality instruction, and have consistent expectations for their progress in every subject in every school;
- Early learning partnerships with the City of Seattle and community-based agencies and organizations to ensure that every child begins kindergarten prepared for school and ready to succeed; and
- Postsecondary partnerships to create a seamless educational system that will help our students begin school ready to learn, transition easily between grade levels and move successfully from high school to college and career.

With the School Board's adoption of this plan on June 4, 2008, the work will begin. During summer 2008, we will develop more detailed work plans for each of the foundational strategies, seeking community input as we do so, and being careful to link our work to overall District needs and goals.

Each strategy will be developed with a detailed timeline that will include milestones and performance measurements so that we can assess our success.

We will schedule regular School Board reviews of our progress.

To honor our commitment to transparency, all materials will be posted on the SPS Web site.

LIST OF APPENDICES

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