

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
Participants	3
Board Membership	
USD #373 Membership	
Community Visioning Team	
Introduction	4
Process	4
Discovering the Mantra	4
Establishing the Fields of Inquiry.....	6
Engaging the Public and Setting the Goals	8
Results	8
Relationships	9
Inspirational.....	9
Responsive	9
Teaching & Learning	9
Relevant	9
Rigorous.....	10
Outcomes.....	10
Assets & Resources	10
Stewarded.....	10
Exceptional	10
Accessible.....	10
Conclusion	11
Attachments	

PARTICIPANTS

2015-2016 Board Membership

Dick Koontz, President
Barbara Bunting
Renee Erickson
Carol Sue Stayrook Hobbs
Tim Hodge
Steve Richards
Matt Treaster

USD #373 Administration

Dr. Deborah Hamm, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Russell Miller, Assistant Superintendent for Human & Fiscal Services
Sheila Wendling, Director of Instructional Services
Joni Jantz, Executive Secretary / Board Secretary

Community Visioning Team

Rosa Barrera
Barb Burns
Jaime Cazares
Patricia Diaz
Daagya Dick
Laura Dungan
Heather Esau
Carol Flickinger
Bill Hake
Tricia Lopez
Eric Lujano
Jason Mitchell
Stacey Musser
Marc Rhoades
Sylvia Sandoval
Elizabeth Schmidt
Doug Siemens
Zandra Sawatzky
Maria Velazco

Perry White
Tom Williams

INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2015, the Board of Education determined the need for a guiding document that would help focus future work toward a set of common goals and vision. The decision was made to create a Strategic Plan prior to the onset of efforts to craft a twenty-year comprehensive plan for all aspects of education delivery in the Newton Unified School District #373.

The efforts regarding the strategic plan differed from the comprehensive plan in three ways: 1) the strategic plan is designed to provide a philosophical direction for the current and future board members around which to direct and prioritize their more concrete actions, 2) the strategic plan is designed to address a myriad of educational delivery avenues without focusing solely on one area, and 3) the strategic plan is designed to gain community input and feedback so as to be a document that is authored by the Board and the community it serves.

PROCESS

The organizational approach to this process was to begin with an overarching statement that would set the tone of the work to follow. Following the establishment of a new vision statement, the Board would define areas of importance called Fields of Inquiry. Inside each Field of Inquiry, they would further define the goals to guide future implementation items in each field. With the inclusion of a group of community residents called the Community Visioning Team, the Board would finalize their work by producing a Strategic Plan that would be later be populated by action items to be implemented over the lifespan of their future Comprehensive Plan.

Discovering the Mantra

The process introduced began with a hybrid Appreciative Inquiry approach. The Appreciative Inquiry method follows a circular path moving through the intellectual concepts Discover, Dream, Design, and Deliver. While it was developed as a corporate management tool, it has since been hybridized by many circumstances with the goal of participating in a purposively positive process that builds upon what works well, rather than focusing on what does not work and trying to strategize and eventually implement from a position of weakness rather than strength. It takes the place of the dated SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

In step one, the Board was invited to think of all the positive attributes, programs, and reputation the district currently enjoys. They were given no specific parameters in which to couch their comments, only to brainstorm those elements they thought were positive and that they could build upon. The list included:

- Career and Technical Education
- Academies
- Blended Early Childhood Education
- Many Foreign Language Offerings and Foreign Exchange Student Opportunities
- Range of Scholastic Opportunities in the District
- High Quality, Diverse Relationships the District, Staff, and Students Enjoy
- Cum Laude Program
- High Advanced Placement Participations
- Fine Arts Program Availability
- Educational Partnerships with Higher Education Including Dual Credit Programs
- Hard Working Staff with Longevity and Experience
- Good Facilities Provided Through Continued Bond Support of the Community
- Reputation as a District with Good Fiscal Stewardship
- Plentiful Special Education Programs
- Innovative 5th/6th Grade Center Program

Programs at the Walton Rural Life Learning Center

Safety and Security

Generational Pride in Newton Schools

Plentiful Enrichment Activities

Community Business Support of Student Internships and
Shadowing Opportunities

Community Support by Civic Clubs, Chamber of Commerce, and
the Newton Medical Center Partnership

Not-for-Profit Partnership and Communication

Benefitting from Newton's Social Service Infrastructure

Relationship With and Support from Newton's First Responders

Unique and Friendly Professional Relationship Between the
District and local Private Educational Institutions

The Continual Quality Leadership and Ownership of the Individual
Classroom Teachers and Education Providers

The next question asked was, "What core concepts or ideas are responsible for all this success?" Five words emerged as being responsible: Relationships, Curriculum, Staff Development, Community Values, and Service Ethic.

In step two, the Board was challenged to dig deeper and describe the essence of what motivated them to come up with those five thoughts. What emerged after some good discussion was:

- Communication that has a value
- Example by action
- Responsive leadership with vision
- Servant leadership
- Pursuit of joy
- Compassion

The goal of the exercise was to open the Board's minds with positive strengths and then define in a three- to five-word phrase what they had been thinking about during two hours of discussion. There were several good phrases but the group coalesced around a simple, essential phrase: ***The Place to Be***. This phrase is to become the reminder of the direction of all future efforts. The board, the administration, and everyone involved in delivering education to the students and families of USD #373 will strive to always create ***the place to be***.

Establishing the Fields of Inquiry

After working toward a philosophical direction, the Board turned its attention to defining the most important areas where efforts are to be concentrated. These would become known as the "fields of inquiry." Fields of inquiry are broad areas under which to categorize more detailed work. There are other organizational methods currently being used or evaluated at the state and federal levels for data collection and accreditation, including the 5 R's and the Rose Capacities. The Board could easily use one of these predetermined methods. The Board studied each one and decided that education in USD #373 should be a product of the children, families, and staff that comprise its ranks,

and that education is unique to each community and the culture in which it resides.

After an exercise where a multitude of possible fields of inquiry were defined, debated, and discussed, many were merged to bring participants to the conclusion that there should be three main areas where all efforts could be categorized: Relationships, Teaching and Learning, and Assets and Resources. The goal was to make the categories easy to understand, easy to categorize, and easy for everyone in the district to understand how they impact education.

Relationships speaks to the essential action of creating bonds between all sorts of members. It is one of the soft-skills that we want our students to learn, just as it is a critical bond between teacher and student. Relationships form the core of our communication and it is these connections that can be leveraged into resources for the District and for the Community.

Teaching and Learning speaks to a number of different and diverse topics; for example, curriculum and curriculum development fall easily under this category, but so too does staff development, materials, environments, strategies, goals, finance, etc. It is also broad enough to encompass students, parents, educators, and district staff.

Assets and Resources speaks to the larger notion that the District has a means to accomplish its goals and missions through those tangible things that we have, and those intangibles that we can draw upon. Some assets are controlled and other are not, but both are critical to delivery and success.

The final exercise of the evening was focused on creating a list of “goal” or “quality” words that describe the intent of each of the Fields of Inquiry. These are words that create a feeling or provoke a thought when considering the Field. Participants used these words to generate a sentence that describes the overall goal of the Field against which we will test each sub-field and the consequent

implementation Items that are generated. The final step after the list generation was a dot-voting process. The voting represented a consented group of words to include as main “goal bubbles.”

Under the field **Relationships**, the following words were selected from the list: Inspirational, Reciprocal, Empowering, Responsive, Nurturing, Respect, Healthy, Responsible, Stimulating, Relevant, Professional, Graceful, Trusting, Helpful, Mentoring, and Accountable.

Under the field **Teaching and Learning**, the following words were selected from the list: Rigor, Relevance, Communication, Exploratory, Responsive, Results, Diversity, Individualized, Creativity, Compassion, Joy, Lifetime, and Adaptability.

Under the field **Assets and Resources**, the following words were selected from the list: Accessible, Equitable, Responsibly Used, Adequate, Efficient, Appreciated, Valued, Creative, Effective, Abundant, Relevant, Modern, Responsive, Appropriate, Useful, and Flexible.

Emerging under Teaching and Learning, as seen on the attached graphics, were the goal bubbles Rigorous, Relevant, and Results. Under Relationships were the goal bubbles Inspirational, Responsible, and Reciprocal. And finally, under Assets and Resources were the goal bubbles Stewarded, Adequate, Equitable, and Accessible. It is inside these goal bubbles and all existing action items fall and new action items are generated. These areas were determined to be the most important to the USD #373 community for the delivery of education to our students.

Engaging the Public and Setting the Goals

After this organizational structure was established, the Board sought the input and involvement of the community. Each Board member was asked to

recognize and invite two or three community members they thought would be not only interested in participating in and examining the work being done, but would also represent a broad cross-section of the population of the district. Over thirty people were contacted and of those, twenty-one represented the community. In two sessions, they were introduced to the previous work of the Board and asked to engage in a conversation regarding the district, schools, teachers, students, households, and the community. Board members asked priming questions regarding the goal bubbles and whether participants thought they had been thorough in their inquiries.

RESULTS

The result of the session was the establishment of a mantra for the district to rally their thoughts and efforts around; a tangible reminder that all their work will lead to USD #373 being the place to be!

The second result was the defining of three main areas of inquiry where work of all types is vitally important to pursue in our educational community. These are pursuing and developing strong, endearing, and authentic **Relationships** both in and out of the classrooms, among peers, between students and teachers, between teachers and administrations, between the schools and the community, and between schools and households; **Teaching and Learning** and all that entails from daily classroom interactions, to long term strategies creating successful interactions in all student experiences; and **Assets and Resources**, where using what the district has and who the district knows, gives us the ability to provide meaningful, relevant experiences to our students, and where stewardship is more than a goal, but a call to constant action.

The third result is the establishment of key areas of focus inside each of our areas of inquiry. When we work on Relationships, it is important to create **Inspirational** environments in which to work together, and that we are purposively **Responsive** in all our communication, and at all levels of interaction. When we work on Teaching and Learning, it is important to focus our efforts on producing work that is **Relevant** for our students in the world they find themselves in, producing **Rigor** in our curriculum and delivery, and ensuring our **Outcomes** are meaningful at every level of inspection. And finally, when we think of our Assets and Resources, whether tangible or intangible, that we remind ourselves of our **Stewardship** responsibilities, that we strive to ensure that they are **Outstanding** places and relationships for educational opportunities, and that facilities, opportunities, and choices are **Accessible** to everyone in the district.

Finally, it was time to test the results of the Board's work by inviting comments and prioritization by members of the community through the formation and engagement of the Community Visioning Team.

Under the heading of **Inspirational Relationships**, the community responded by asking the Board to create educational environments that inspire success and excellence by building on the strengths of the individual classroom; create caring and supportive classroom environments; ensure connections are made between administration and teachers, teachers and households, and teachers and students; that the connections made are empowering and accountable; and that a culture of empathy and respect exists in all aspects of education.

Under the heading of **Responsive Relationships**, the community responded by asking the Board to develop communication that is responsive, reciprocal, and adaptive by building peer relationships between students and among the staff; including the community, households, educators, and students

in their plan implementation; and to ensure, through regular contact, that households are a valuable part of the communication network.

Under the heading of **Relevant Teaching and Learning**, the community responded by asking the Board to develop relevant opportunities and topics including pragmatic conflict resolution skills; providing students with diverse cultural awareness; encouraging our Great Plains work ethic in the classrooms; providing opportunities for the community to continue making investments in the district; teaching students to develop and implement useful and adaptable skills; stress the importance of self-motivation and goal setting as methods of future self-improvement; teach solid, pragmatic life skills to students as they begin making life-changing decisions for themselves; be aware of new and upcoming 21st century learning techniques; and developing in students both hard and soft life-skills that will carry them throughout their lives as productive and responsible adults.

Under the heading of **Rigorous Teaching and Learning**, the community responded by asking the Board to be persistent in developing rigor in each aspect of educational life by looking forward to, and planning for, growth in the future; inspiring a love of lifelong learning by building excitement for the classroom experience and the process of learning; by using clear, crisp communication-based approaches to curriculum delivery, and by focusing on topics rather than approaches to education delivery.

Under the heading of **Teaching and Learning Outcomes**, the community responded by asking the Board to deliver positive outcomes in all education experiences by being successful enough to establish credibility in the state as a quality district, enjoying success long enough to establish a state-wide reputation as a district with solid, consistent student results; where attention is paid to creating students who are prepared for the future; where students are

able to see opportunity during challenging and changing life experiences; that students leave their secondary school experience with an appreciation for the role education plays in their lives; where students appreciate the investment their community made in their success by bestowing quality facilities and infrastructure for them to study; where administration provides many different and diverse measures of success for the varied demographics of our population; and where the right measurement tools are designed, developed, and used to demonstrate the success of USD #373.

Under the heading of **Stewarded Assets and Resources**, the community responded by asking the Board to protect the gifts provided by our community by providing transparency in decisions and plans for future use of existing and new facilities; by prioritizing preventative maintenance of existing investments before building new; by affirming and supporting the human resources that are an essential part of our delivery; by trusting our existing professionals to use their education, training, and expertise to make informed choices and decisions; and by providing community awareness and opportunities for advocacy of the practices of the district through regular and varied engagement opportunities.

Under the heading of **Exceptional Assets and Resources**, the community responded by asking the Board to support our students in exceptional ways by providing exceptional facilities that foster and support their success; by taking every opportunity to create 21st century learning environments; and by fostering and providing the use of leading edge technology use.

Under the heading of **Accessible Assets and Resources**, the community responded by asking the Board to provide an opportunity for student choice in education by establishing long-lasting relationships in the community among business and institutions that can provide relevant and rewarding opportunities; by providing opportunities in education that give choices in theme-based

classrooms and curriculums; by ensuring each student's opportunities are equitable; and by providing multi-cultural opportunities for all members of the district, from student to educator, to ensure all households are represented appropriately.

CONCLUSION

The insights and work produced by the Board of Education and the Community of the district demonstrated that education should grow from the culture and community where it exists. It can and will be measured by government institutions to ensure equity across our county, but the delivery and investment in teaching and learning are planted and grown in the soils of the community in which they reside. They are not, nor should they be, standardized across the spectrum of locations. Each district should build upon strengths in their local connections; they should foster the creative human resources that are unique in their districts.

This document depicts what is important in USD #373, and that it is unique in its story. While it shares a similarity with other districts, its focus is singular.