



Something Good is Happening in Olmsted Falls City Schools



By: Jim Lloyd, Superintendent, Olmsted Falls City Schools

Like all of your districts, we are very busy in the Olmsted Falls School District as well. Some of the “busy” is related to the innovation of our own initiatives, whereas other groups have continued to created quite a punch list for us all; but alas...I digress.

Our district engaged in a strategic planning process that began last school year and concluded with the Board of Education adopting the plan at the October Board

meeting. There are quite a few things that resonated with me throughout this process and I wanted to share some of our lessons learned.

Why Strategic Planning?

Whether you use the Ohio Improvement Process or some other mechanism or framework to more thoroughly structure “the work,” it is critical to have the Board, the staff and most importantly the students and community understand that school districts are indeed organizations that require a great deal of intelligent planning to shape and grow. In short, strategic planning shouldn’t be an improvement tool reserved for districts that need rescued, but rather a mechanism to help all make the leap—from where we are, to where we want to be. The strategic plan serves as a rally point to channel our district energy and resources to improve our core business—teaching and learning. A written record more formally sets the agenda.

Should We Get a Consultant to Assist?

My experience with strategic planning has led me to believe that a “critical friend” can go a long way. While superintendents certainly have the capacity to facilitate organizational planning and development, an external facilitator has many advantages. First, a facilitator can say things that you cannot or if you said them they may cost you far too many cultural chips. In addition, using someone who has extensive experience with strategic planning will not only add additional credibility, but will allow you to relax and be participative. I’ve found that an outside facilitator can have a tremendous impact on the process and, make no mistake about it; a successful strategic planning process is as important as the plan itself. While the plan does serve as your plotted course through the troubled waters during the tsunami of change, your discussions and stories along the way are what will breathe life into the plan and a thorough process has the potential to create the cultural momentum that will increase your probability of success.

Our Refined & Redefined Commitment to Excellence

Throughout the strategic planning process we asked the question, “how can we increase the excellence...make the jump...dream a little dream and push ourselves towards something greater?” As we considered those questions it became apparent that we needed to consider a broader and more robust set of success conditions. While we recognized that student achievement scores are not to be discounted, our district grew weary of having success defined by state and federal tests. We felt we needed to regain local control of the agenda.

We believe that our charge in Olmsted Falls is to empower and inspire our students, and that if you were to ask a student, they would tell you that they don’t feel very inspired or empowered when they take high stakes, state-mandated assessments. So...our challenge is to determine how to meet our charge within the “legislative policy box” that we have been forced into, when *the way* or *the path* to lead the charge and meet the challenge set before us is, currently and largely, undefined.

Our Moonshot Thinking (note—you should YouTube this phrase if you haven’t heard of it) is to work with our colleagues and community to try and figure out how we can be *inspiring* and *empowering* to students; foster *innovation* and *creativity* within the instructional environment and provide full- child education within a milieu of accountability.

The strategic planning process helped us redefine our mission and vision and it grounded us in a conscious effort to create a greater sense of purpose as to why we do what we do. After receiving feedback from those that work inside and outside of our organization, our steering committee defined our focus within four broad categories: **Student Success, Technology Enabled, Aligned Funding & Resources, and Community Partnerships.**

We are currently trying to redefine student success in the areas of academics, arts and athletics with more meaningful metrics by looking at student outcome data that extends well beyond the high school graduation rate. We believe that the interest and career exploration processes for students needs to start in the middle school. By revising our Program of Studies we have begun to define flexible, career pathways for students that will show greater connectivity to why students need to take certain middle and high school courses. In addition, we are gathering data through the National Student Clearinghouse to determine the post-secondary and work successes of our students for the purpose of using it to improve what we do K-12.

Our new organizational plan represented a major shift in thinking from previous plans.

<i>Traditional Perspective</i>	<i>New Perspective</i>
College or trade ready upon graduation	Career Pathways—means all students have a flexible plan for a career that may or may not require college
Technology as an optional tool for convenience or engagement	Technology is meaningfully integrated into curriculum and instruction to support future career success
Community Relations and Vol-unteerism	Community Engagement such that the school district supports having an effective workforce
Success is measured at 18	Success is measured by successful transition to adulthood; early to mid 20's
Traditional forms of communica-tion	Ongoing two way dialogue
Measurement of state criteria and standards	Holistic score cards tracking success of career pathways, outcomes extending pas graduation and other organiza-tional efficiencies

Finally, we are exploring other organizational efficiency metrics by using a program called Enlit™ to help us track and manage what was formerly evasive data (e.g. food service, transportation, HR, etc.). Our goal with this data resource is to combine it with the Lean Six Sigma expertise we’ve developed so that we can capture and improve upon the efficiencies within the operational side of our organization. We believe that a robust and more focused data emphasis can serve as the common thread that serves to weave our organization together. We do not claim ourselves as experts and recognize that we certainly have a long way to go. If these are things that interest you please let me know as we are always looking to exchange ideas with others.