Roles & Responsibilities

Goals

Having clear goals, and putting a high priority on meeting the goals, is one characteristic of a highly effective school committee. Establishing district goals is also a legal responsibility of the school committee. Goal setting is done most successfully when it is accomplished in concert with the superintendent. At goal setting time, the school committee represents the vision and values of the community in the discussion and the superintendent identifies what is needed to get the job done. These two elements come together at the committee table to establish a vision and goals for the district.

Before goals are determined, the school committee must establish a clear mission and vision. A mission defines why the organization exists. This is why many district mission statements look very similar – in essence, districts all exist for the same reason – to educate the students in the district. A vision describes the future you want to create. Vision statements vary from district to district, reflecting differing community values. Once a vision and mission are established, goals become the path to realizing the vision.

The former practice of a detailed strategic plan that articulates a very rigid set of goals has faded in popularity. These plans were often not flexible enough to adapt to changes and contained too many goals to be realistic. Instead, many districts now develop a "District Strategy." In different places, this may be called a District Improvement Plan or even the Strategic Plan. The District Strategy still may extend out several years. However, it is much more flexible to take into consideration changing needs and changing circumstances.

The District Strategy is developed with input from many different stakeholders on what they see as the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities the school district is facing. It also requires a thorough look at data to understand what areas need improvement and what the issues might be that are standing in the way of improving. Exactly how the District Strategy is created differs from district to district. In some, the superintendent might take the lead and keep the committee informed of progress. In others, the school committee leads the process. The process should be determined as planning begins so that the school committee is assured that its voice is reflected as the plan develops. No matter what process is uses to draft the Strategy, ultimately it is the school committee that would formally vote to adopt the plan and goals to be implemented.

Once a District Strategy is developed and approved, several elements must be in place to help assure success. First, the goals must be aligned throughout the district. This means that the superintendent's goals, the administrator goals, school improvement goals and teachers goals all support the District Strategy.

In addition, goals must be monitored to ensure progress. Goals put a frame around and give structure to the school committee's work. The committee has the responsibility to establish goals. Once established, a major focus of the committee's work becomes monitoring progress toward the goals through presentations at school committee meetings. The school committee holds the superintendent accountable for progress through the superintendent evaluation process. The superintendent is also monitoring goals and is better able to make or recommend changes in the implementation if the goal is not being met through the defined actions.

Once a broad District Strategy is defined and implementation begins, the school committee and superintendent can develop a cycle to make sure the plan is being implemented, monitored, evaluated, and adjusted as necessary.

Goal Setting Cycle

A District Strategy generally extends out three to five years and contains a relatively small number, usual three to five broad, integrated goals. Each year, more specific goals are set describing actions in more detail that will bring the district closer, in that year, to realizing the broad goals in the Strategy. There are referred to as SMART goals (Specific, Strategic, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, Results-oriented, and Timed and Tracked). SMART goals also have key actions and benchmarks – what will happen and while it will happen. This makes the monitoring function much easier because the committee can hear presentations thought the goal implementation cycle to monitor progress based on benchmarks.

Many school committees and superintendents plan for the next school year's SMART goals sometime in the late spring or summer. Often, a workshop or retreat – at least annually – will allow time for the school committee and superintendent to have these in-depth discussions and for everyone to have ample into to reach consensus. A workshop often takes place in a less forma setting than a regular business meeting, allowing for a more free-flowing dialogue. While it is a posted public meeting, it need not be a time when decisions are finalized, but rather where information is exchanged that will lead to a formal decision at a later time.

While having the discussion on SMART goals, one important factor to consider is the desired outcome. Making sure everyone is clear on the positive change that will occur when the goal is

realized will help everyone understand how to determine when the goal has been reached. It will help inform the data to collect and the presentations that will be beneficial in measuring progress. Perhaps most importantly, a good discussion on desired outcomes will help ensure that everyone has the same understanding of what the goal is intended to achieve.

Once goals are finalized, a year-long agenda can be developed. Developing a year-long agenda gives the school committee and superintendent the opportunity to decide what presentations they would like to schedule that would help the committee and the community understand how the goals are being implemented and the resulting progress. It can also help the committee be aware of the developing next steps to implement the District Strategy and understand the resources and support that will be needed to do so. A year-long agenda would include presentations that help the school committee monitor both progress and results.

As the end of the cycle approaches, it is time to summarize the progress and start planning for the next cycle. Most often, the superintendent's evaluation is part of this process. This is a time for the superintendent and committee to assess the progress made on the goals and establish a new set of SMART goals for the upcoming cycle.

Below are some sample District Strategies and SMART goals. You will also find some questions to help guide the development of a SMART goal.

Sample District Strategies

Canton Public Schools:

http://www.cantonma.org/files/_sOGNj_/65b73b28311c0ac13745a49013852ec4/Strategic_Framework_2018_2023_FINAL_180906.pdf

Melrose Public Schools:

https://www.melroseschools.com/sites/melrosemaps/files/uploads/school_strategy_overview_2017-18.pdf

North Andover Public Schools:

http://www.northandoverpublicschools.com/departments/superintendent-s-office/strategic-plan

Sample School Committee SMART Goals

1. By June of 20XX, the School Committee will have reviewed and approved district policies in order to articulate support for a rigorous, challenging and innovative learning

environment aligned with community standards as measured by agenda items, meeting minutes and policy revisions:

- Identify policies related to teaching and learning by September and set out a plan for their review.
- Review and revise teaching and learning policies by June.

2. By June 20XX, the School Committee will review, fund and adopt the district's professional development plan so that the district can continue to develop highly qualified educators, as well as expand professional development offerings that are aligned with both the district Strategy Overview and the identified needs of staff as measured by agenda items, meeting minutes and budget documents.
   - The SC will continuously review the Strategy Overview to understand the needs of the district by June, October and April.
   - The SC will assign a liaison to the PD Committee by July.
   - The SC liaison to the PD Committee will work with the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning to develop a report showing how the efficiency and effectiveness of professional development can be evaluated in the district by December.
   - The SC will evaluate the use of PD resources based on the report of efficiency and effectiveness by March.

3. By June, the School Committee will have developed and implemented a proactive communication plan that celebrates the successes of the district and that engages the public in open conversations regarding the district's challenges as measured by agenda items, meeting minutes and increased attendance of liaisons at district and city events.
   - The SC will establish a Communications subcommittee by September.
   - The Communications subcommittee will report back to the committee with an action plan by December.
   - The SC will review the use of liaisons and their role in communications by September.

4. By June, the School Committee will have developed, approved and advocated for a sound budget that will support the goals of the district to improve teaching and learning and raise student achievement as measured by agenda items, meeting minutes and budget documents
   - The SC will engage in public discussion regarding the anticipated needs of the district by December.
   - The SC will review the budget setting process and approve changes as needed by December.
   - The SC will develop an FYXX budget that advocates for appropriate funding to meet the future resources necessary for strategic, long range planning of the district by April.
   - The SC will advocate with the community, the Board of Selectmen and State Representatives for the support of improved funding for the schools.

Questions to Answer in Developing a SMART Goal

1. Why is this topic/focus important? (STRATEGIC/RELEVANT)

2. What/who will benefit and how? (SPECIFIC, RIGOROUS, RESULTS-FOCUSED)

3. How will we know the goal has been achieved? (MEASURABLE)

4. How will I demonstrate progress toward this goal? (ACTION-ORIENTED, TRACKED)