

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, May, 2022

Strategic Planning is an essential exercise that supports the success and viability of any business, organization, or entity, including Plainville Community Schools. Through the act of strategic planning, we are able to develop and refine the elements that comprise the fundamental framework that guides our collective work and focus on students, teaching and learning. This spring, we as a school district community began our next iteration of strategic planning, blending both historical strategic planning practices and new approaches to this critical initiative. Our strategic planning efforts this time acknowledge the impact of the COVID pandemic and associated opportunities, challenges, and requirements. One positive outcome of the pandemic for our school district was the appropriation of the CARES Act ESSER funding to support several areas of our school district operations. Consideration of, and planning for, the use of this funding is incorporated into our strategic planning process so that we can most effectively and efficiently utilize this additional short-term financial support.

Central to the success of our strategic planning efforts is the focus on engaging our stakeholders to share their thoughts, insights and feedback throughout the process. As such, last August and this March we launched surveys to gather information from students, faculty, staff, parents, business and organizational partners and the community at large. The surveys were created with our district's five cornerstone areas of focus in mind: *Mastery, Equity, Social Emotional Learning, Systems & Building Operations, and Community Connections*. The August survey focused on gathering feedback relative to the use of the COVID related ESSER funding in these areas as we move forward, and the March survey focused on gathering information and feedback about what is exceptional relative to Plainville Community Schools, and identifying areas in need of improvement. On February 15th, I hosted a virtual "strategic planning" kick off meeting open to all stakeholders.

At that time, I provided a brief overview of our five core areas of focus, and solicited additional feedback from attendees regarding what is working well in our school district, and areas in need of improvement. This feedback together with the survey data collected previously, served as the focus for our first in person large group strategic planning meeting held on May 3rd. During that meeting, approximately 50 stakeholders, representing parents, faculty, staff, students, businesses, town leaders and community members, joined our strategic planning leadership team to share their insights and review the survey results relative to the district's five primary areas of focus. The group accomplished this work with the following guiding question in mind; "***How can we transform Plainville Community Schools into THE model district within Connecticut?***" The meeting began with a short overview about our core focus areas, highlighting several projects and initiatives currently being planned, in progress, or recently completed. Strategic planning meeting participants then engaged in small group dialogue and a hands-on activity focused on reviewing suggestions for new and improved projects and initiatives in the five core areas. Finally, attendees were able to share any additional thoughts, ideas, and feedback for consideration, and were invited to continue forward with strategic planning in whichever focus areas they are interested in supporting.

As we move forward with strategic planning, we will do so with an emphasis on continuous improvement through a rolling process over the next several years. This ongoing planning approach is a new strategy we are utilizing in an effort to further connect stakeholders to our district areas of focus, projects and initiatives on a regular basis, replacing the former model of a finite number of strategic planning meetings over the course of a defined period of time. In the short term, our next steps in the strategic planning process will include reviewing the data and information collected at the large group meeting, and planning for subsequent stakeholder group meetings aligned with our focus areas over the coming months. Additionally, we will follow the rolling improvement process for additional work to be done over the next several years. Our goal is for this process to continue, to evolve, and to

include all those who are interested in being a part of making Plainville Community Schools THE model school district in Connecticut. We can only achieve that aim with the collective involvement of our stakeholders. We are grateful for those who have participated to date and those who will join us going forward, because that is the heart of what makes Plainville special. I know that our work together will make a significant difference to the children in our community.