Tantasqua Regional/Union 61 School Districts

Engaging Community and Enhancing Teaching Practice

A Strategic Plan for Tantasqua and Union 61

Adopted May 2011

I.
Overview

The Tantasqua Regional and Union 61 School Districts convened a strategic planning group for the purpose of exploring new ideas and a strategic direction for the districts. Membership on the Strategic Planning Group was open to citizens of all five communities. Under the leadership of Superintendent Daniel Durgin, a broadly comprised group of volunteer stakeholders met over many months to develop the ideas that are set forth in this strategic plan. Drawing heavily on the available research base from the fields of education, business, and leadership studies, the group selected two main focus areas, community connections, and teaching and learning, as the foundation upon which the goals and action plans presented in this document were developed. This plan is intended to guide the districts through the next five years. The members of the Strategic Planning Group are:

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee

Tina Anderson, Sturbridge
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Dottie Booth, Brookfield
Ed Boyce, Wales
James Cooke, Brookfield
Daniel Durgin, Administration
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Mark Wood, Administration
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MISSION AND GOALS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Mission

Tantasqua Regional and Union 61 School Districts are committed to providing programs that promote students' academic, civic, social, emotional, and physical development.

Goals

To increase students' reading, writing, and mathematical skills.

To foster skills that enable all students to locate, evaluate, synthesize, apply, and present information effectively.

To foster respect for good citizenship and to help prepare citizens to become contributing members of a democratic society.

To foster collegiality, collaboration, and communication among educators as a means of improving student achievement.

To promote educational excellence through ongoing review of curriculum and enhancement of instruction.

To use student performance data to address improvement of student achievement.

To promote accountability in all areas of school operations.

FOCUS AREAS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. Community Connections

a. To develop afterschool programs at all grade levels
b. To develop resources and tools that support student learning and can be accessed by parents including the use of emerging technology
c. To support cross-generational opportunities for involvement within the schools

2. Teaching and Learning

a. To elevate student proficiency in writing across all content areas
b. To continue to refine our common curriculum and teaching practice, encouraging and sharing innovation in practice
c. To embrace new technologies that enhance learning and improve our students' ability to compete in a global society

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Strategic Goal 1A

TO DEVELOP AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS AT ALL SCHOOLS FOR ALL GRADE LEVELS.

RATIONALE:

We must adopt a tactical, strategic, and intentional approach to scaling up our afterschool enrichment activities. Students benefit the most from programs that have strong leadership, work in a collaborative matter with the community, and link school day learning and standards with enriching hands-on activities. Well-structured afterschool programs allow the adults and students involved to develop positive educational and personal relationships, which provide motivation for students to expand their learning and do well in school. In a recent survey, nine in ten Americans want all children and teens to have some organized activity or safe place afterschool. An analysis of afterschool studies concluded that afterschool programs were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth, including improvements in children's personal, social and academic skills as well as their self-esteem. (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Building and Managing Quality Afterschool Programs 2009).

> *26% of all children are alone and unsupervised after 3pm. The hours between 3 and 6 pm are the peak hours for juvenile crime, experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex.*
>
> *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2009*

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Encourage the involvement of community groups and individuals in the process of developing afterschool programs. These groups/individuals can provide programs with financial assistance, supplies, materials, or services. Community members can also support afterschool programs through providing mentoring and tutoring. The participation of community members with students can bring about a greater understanding of the issues facing schools today.
- Build community partnerships that enhance the academic content of afterschool programs. Such partnerships will provide organized learning opportunities with museums, universities, science centers, agricultural centers, and local boards and nonprofit organizations.
- Expand the current service-learning programs to the afterschool hours. This would allow students to have opportunities to identify and associate with community role models and become more immersed in their community.
- Work towards securing funding (state, local, national and private) to support the start-up and continued operation of such programs in each of the Tantasqua communities.

Strategic Goal 1B
TO DEVELOP RESOURCES AND TOOLS THAT SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING AND CAN BE ACCESSED BY PARENTS INCLUDING THE USE OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGY.

RATIONALE:

Significant money has been invested in our schools. It is important for our school district to share information in a way that is supportive of parent involvement and prepares our students for life beyond high school. Access to technology is a fact of life for students and families today. In October 2009, 73.5% of all U.S. homes had Internet access. Within Massachusetts the number was 81.5% according to U.S. census figures. This goal would support the 5 arenas critical to student success in higher education and in the workplace—to be able to communicate effectively, to analyze and interpret data, to understand computational modeling, to manage and prioritize tasks and to engage in problem solving (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005).

> *"The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change"*
>
> *Carl Rogers, American Psychologist*

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Support the sharing of student attendance and course marks with parents and guardians through iPass.
- Use ConnectEd to advertise school website resource availability via calls home.
- Utilize website capabilities to link school and district information presenting a unified look at the Union 61 school environment; Maintain a calendar of current events and topical information updates on a streaming message on the main district page to ensure frequent visits from faculty, parents and students.
- Encourage classroom teachers to maintain teacher and classroom web pages. Provide appropriate professional development opportunities and page templates.

Strategic Goal 1C
TO SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES FOR CROSS-GENERATIONAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE SCHOOLS.

RATIONALE:

Families, schools, and community members or community groups all contribute to student achievement and well-being. The best results come when all work together. A key difference between high- and low-achieving children is how they spend their time outside of school. Community members of all ages offer important resources for students and families, and schools can provide a critical link. (A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory 2002 Henderson and Mapp)

"Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another"

Gilbert Chesterton
Psychologist

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Explore the feasibility of beginning a Partners in Education or School Volunteer Program for Union 61. Engage a Vista or Americorps volunteer to coordinate and build this effort.
- Actively encourage the involvement of parents and community members in all programs sponsored by the schools through good communication and an ongoing dialogue.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Strategic Goal 2A
TO ELEVATE STUDENT PROFICIENCY IN WRITING ACROSS ALL CONTENT AREAS.

RATIONALE:

"Just as the nature of and expectation for literacy has changed in the past century and a half, so has the nature of writing. Much of that change has been due to technological developments, from pen and paper, to typewriter, to word processor, to networked computer, to design software capable of composing words, images and sounds. With full recognition that writing is an increasingly multi-faceted activity we believe that everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers. Writing instruction must include ample in-class and out-of-class opportunities for writing and should include writing for a variety of purposes and audiences."

Excerpt from: National Council of Teachers of English - Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing—an NCTE guideline
www.ncte.org

We believe that writing is a powerful academic tool, an aid to learning, and a lifelong pursuit. Developing this skill in every area of the curriculum allows students to shape their own future. Writing is an essential skill which students need as they enter adult life. Writing, reading and listening skills are interrelated and should be taught in an integrated manner and as a set of tools for learning in all content areas. Curriculum must reflect this goal and be developed to encourage collaboration. Helping students learn to express themselves with confidence in all subject areas can also contribute to improvements in behavior and self esteem. The Massachusetts standards for writing are very clear that students will learn to write with clear form, coherent organization and detail, and for a variety of audiences and purposes.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Faculty will complete the new "Writing Across the Curriculum" initiative with input from staff, students, parents, and teachers.

- Teachers will model the collaborative approach as fellow authors by demonstrating the writing process.

- Student-driven writing workshops will be formed to help students notice the variety of writing in the world around them, using the shared events of students' lives to inspire their writing. These workshops may also connect to the proposed Senior/Freshman mentoring project or to Community Service Learning initiatives.

- Teachers and students will continue to use a variety of technological and information resources to synthesize information and will write about their findings.

- Through writing, students will be encouraged to develop an understanding and respect for diversity in all its forms.

Strategic Goal 2B
TO CONTINUE TO REFINE OUR COMMON CURRICULUM AND TEACHING PRACTICES, ENCOURAGING AND SHARING INNOVATION IN PRACTICE.

RATIONALE:

Changes in the economy have created a need for a high school graduate with different and better skills. Studies show that students who succeed in the global economy will not only be able to read, write, and do mathematics at a college-ready level, but they will also be able to solve problems where hypothesis needs to be formed and tested. They will work in groups with persons of various backgrounds, communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, and use technology proficiently.

Good teaching matters. Studies show significant differences in achievement between students taught by teachers of differing quality. (Haycock, Kati, "Good Teaching Matters... A Lot," (2009). Education Trust, Inc., 1725 K Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, DC. 20006.) Our intention is to ensure that we provide consistency in offering quality instruction to every student. There is rare agreement in the field of education that the following combination of practices are most supportive of helping all students to achieve:

- Identifying essential and valued student learning standards

- Developing common formative assessments

- Analyzing current levels of achievement

- Setting achievement goals

- Creating and sharing lessons which improve student learning

- Aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to provide a clear path for measuring progress in learning.

- Ensuring that all children to experience the best of what our district has to offer

In order to make progress in achieving this set of practices, we favor the creation of "professional learning communities", which have the following typical outcomes for teachers:

- Reduction of isolation of teachers

- Increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission

- Shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for their success

- Powerful learning that refines ideas about good teaching and about classroom practices which results in new and beneficial beliefs about teaching and learning

- Increased meaning and understanding of subject matter content the role the teacher plays in helping all students learn that content

- A higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students

- More satisfaction, higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism

Students also benefit in schools where professional learning communities thrive. These schools typically see outcomes for students such as decreases in the dropout rate and fewer skipped classes, lower rates of absenteeism, greater academic gains, and smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Adhere to a seven year curriculum review cycle for all content areas – publish curriculum documents as they are updated.

- Encourage members of the Tantasqua community to become involved in curriculum development at the state and local levels.

- Establish and support professional learning communities, both virtual and school based, to support learning goals.

- Establish a Teacher Leadership Institute for teachers interested in professional growth, enhancing and adding to their repertoire of teaching and facilitation skills and encouraging innovation in practice.

- Provide principals with ongoing training in supervision and evaluation of teaching.

Strategic Goal 2C
TO EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGIES THAT ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING AND IMPROVE OUR STUDENTS' ABILITY TO COMPETE IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY.

RATIONALE:

In schools, technology must be kept safe and appropriate but it must also be accessible to all students and staff without discrimination. Interactive and meaningful technological applications should be used in all classrooms to facilitate learning. Students should be afforded many opportunities to use a range of technological tools during their schooling to promote their own learning and creativity. We envision classrooms where each student becomes a savvy consumer of all that technology has to offer, a classroom where they are guided to discover those tools that enhance their own efforts to learn and to use technological applications to showcase their learning.

"In times of change the learners will inherit the earth while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

Eric Hoffer

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES:

- Expand the use of Use Blackboard Connect (Connect ED) to provide access to learning resources and course information.

- Promote the use of appropriate technologies and communication tools that enhance communication, facilitate life-long learning, and expand a student's worldview.

- Ensure effective practice in the teaching of technology and its infusion across the curriculum by promoting responsible instructional innovation and subsequent sharing and collaboration.

- Create a plan to develop digital-age learning experiences and assessments and to implement them in an organized and equitable manner across the district/union.

- Develop a plan to establish, scrutinize, and assess plans for curriculum of digital media.