

## District Planning Case Studies: *Planning for Success* 2015 Pilot Projects

How a diverse set of districts:

- Created or redesigned their **district improvement plans**, and
- Created **action plans** for implementation and progress monitoring

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*Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*  
**Malden Public Schools Creates a Plan and Implements the  
Gateway Cities Vision as a Community**

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When Superintendent Dave DeRuosi was ready to move forward in creating a district improvement plan for the Malden Public Schools, the focus of that plan for him was clear. Malden is a Gateway City, one of 26 such cities defined by Massachusetts law (MassINC, 2013, p. 7). Malden city and school leaders have been active participants in the state's Gateway City Initiative since its inception, and were among the city leaders that participated in creating the Gateway Cities Vision, which was the result of "the hard work, ideas, and aspirations of more than one hundred leaders" (MassINC, 2013, p. 2). This vision identified four domains for policy development in support of Gateway Cities: early education, social/emotional growth, pathways to college and career, and support for newcomers (MassINC, 2013, p. 10). Implementing this vision would be the focus of Malden's planning process.

With these four domains serving as the plan's four strategic objectives, Malden launched a planning process that extended into the community, made use of critical district partnerships, and built the capacity of the District Leadership Team. The *Planning for Success* process resulted in a plan that Dave described as "concrete, easy to read, and easy to understand. If you're a teacher, principal social worker, you can see yourself somewhere in this document." In addition, the impact of the planning process itself was "positive," according to Dave: "It helped me bring community partners together with district members and built a solid bridge between the community and the school. This was the first time community partners were invited to work on such a big school project. The power of Gateway Cities is you're trying to merge the schools and the city for the common good. We can't do this without the community; the community's voice is big in the plan itself."

**Partnering with MassINC and DSAC:** As Dave recalled, when he learned of the *Planning for Success* model, "We were taking on a really large project: trying to align a district strategic plan to the Gateway Cities Initiative." Dave created a partnership to support this ambitious project, convening a meeting of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Planning, Research, and Delivery Systems, home of *Planning for Success*; the Greater Boston DSAC, which provided support to Malden as a Level 3 district and recommended the *Planning for Success* model to the district; and the MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute, which had led the collaborative work that resulted in the Gateway Cities Vision. Working together, these partners provided targeted support to the district as it created its district plan.

Under the leadership of Associate Commissioner Carrie Conaway, the *Planning for Success* facilitator Lori Likis designed and facilitated a planning process that shared leadership across both the District

Leadership Team and an inclusive Planning Team, and identified clear roles for the partners engaged in the process. Under the leadership of Regional Director Mary Ann Jackman, the Greater Boston DSAC provided data and data analysis support to the district, first conducting root cause analyses with the District Leadership Team at the start of the planning process and then supporting that team in setting specific measurable outcomes for the final district plan. Ben Forman, Executive Director of the MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute, joined the Planning Team to share best practices and successful innovations of other Gateway Cities districts.

DSAC's data work with the district was a critical contribution to the planning process and was, according to Dave, "tremendous." DSAC's root cause analysis work helped build the capacity of the District Leadership Team. "We drilled right down to look at the data—my administrators were able to really identify key aspects of what based on the data we would need to do differently to move this work forward. This work gave them time to sit in a room and focus on different aspects [of planning]. [They thought through] what to change, for whom, how much, and when—'we can impact change here and this is how we can do it.'"

**The Planning Team:** Malden's Planning Team was an inclusive and representative team composed of approximately 20-25 members. Membership was open, and new members were welcomed at every meeting. The Planning Team represented a range of stakeholders including teachers, principals, assistant principals, district directors, social workers and guidance counselors, students, School Committee members, a Councillor at Large, and a range of community partners, such as members of the Chinese Cultural Connection and Cambridge Health Alliance.

**The Planning Process:** Malden's planning process was approximately seven months, beginning in December and concluding in June. The planning process was shared between the District Leadership and Planning Teams, often using these two teams as reviewers of one another's work. This shared leadership structure made use of the District Leadership Team's expertise and built their ownership of the plan while providing leadership in the development of the plan to an inclusive Planning Team that brought the perspectives and voices of staff, students, and the larger Malden community to the planning process.

The process began with a meeting of the MassINC, DSAC, and *Planning for Success* partners in December, followed by a presentation to the School Committee of the Gateway Cities model and planning process in January. The Superintendent and district leaders then conducted visioning sessions, based on the four domains of the Gateway Cities Vision, in the community and with the District Leadership Team in February. This visioning centered on the question: What will excellent [early education, social/emotional support, newcomers' support, college and career pathway] look like for our students?

The District Leadership Team met for four 3.5 hour sessions between March and June to participate in district planning work, a total of 14 hours. The team conducted root cause analyses with the Greater Boston DSAC in March; identified strategic initiatives for the four objectives with the *Planning for Success* facilitator in May; identified outcomes for the plan with the Greater Boston DSAC in June; and joined the Planning Team for a final review and revision of the district plan with the *Planning for Success* facilitator in June.

The Planning Team met for six 2 hour retreats between April and June to develop the plan, a total of 12 hours. Planning Team meetings were held after school, between 2:45 and 4:45 p.m. The team participated in visioning for the future; identified common vision themes across results from all community visioning sessions, which informed the identification of strategic initiatives; finalized strategic initiatives drafted by the District Leadership Team; created a vision and mission statement for the district; created a community engagement and roll-out plan for the district plan; and reviewed the outcomes proposed by the District Leadership Team and the final plan.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this inclusive planning process.

**Planning Team and District Leadership Team Feedback on the Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* process at the conclusion of that process, members of Malden’s Planning Team and District Leadership teams offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this planning work for the Malden community, the *Planning for Success* process itself, and team members’ own learning. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|---|---|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted the Malden Public Schools?</i>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great plan.</li> <li>• Will bring greater vertical alignment K-12.</li> <li>• We have goals driven by clear student needs that we must now work toward.</li> <li>• A clear, all encompassing mission statement and vision will make our purpose clear to all.</li> <li>• Identified key needs and encourages community involvement.</li> <li>• This work is a great start which will benefit not only Malden Public Schools but our community.</li> <li>• Yes, if we really are able to put everything into action and flexible enough to revise as it moves along.</li> <li>• Brought together stakeholders to allow for frank positive discussion.</li> <li>• Creates a single voice.</li> <li>• Increased collaboration and vision planning.</li> <li>• It’s work that is encompassing teachers whose voices aren’t always heard.</li> <li>• By creating a dialogue, openness, and transparency that allows input from many stakeholders.</li> <li>• Optimism, hope.</li> </ul> |
| <i>Would you recommend this planning process and Planning Team approach to other districts? Why or why not?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. Well organized.</li> <li>• Yes. It was chunked nicely and took a daunting task and made it manageable.</li> <li>• Most definitely—many voices heard but moves quickly and purposefully.</li> <li>• Yes, productive process respectful of all parties.</li> <li>• Yes. Easy to understand for all participants.</li> <li>• Yes, all parties had the opportunity to share issues, concerns, ideas.</li> <li>• Yes, getting all stakeholders in the meeting room.</li> <li>• Yes, it’s inclusive and brings together various points of view and creates a dialogue that brings the process into sharper focus.</li> <li>• Yes I would because it allows people from all different backgrounds to talk about district-wide goals that need to be achieved.</li> </ul>   |
| <i>What, if anything, did you learn through this experience? Would you</i>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We learned to work together for a common purpose.</li> <li>• The experience exposed me to a well-organized, inclusive process that identified district needs. I would volunteer.</li> </ul>  |

| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|---|---|
| <p><i>volunteer to participate in such a process again?</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to structure a goal—what do you need to get there, how will you do it, and what will the outcome be. This process can be used in developing all types of plans.</li> <li>• I would volunteer to participate and I have learned how to pull out what is most important. “Less is more.”</li> <li>• Yes, I would volunteer—great way of creating SMART goals.</li> <li>• Learned about buildings outside of my own. Yes, I’d do it again!</li> <li>• The shared struggles at other district schools. Yes, I’d get involved.</li> <li>• Ideas about bringing schools and community together.</li> <li>• How to step back and look at not just the larger district but the community. I learned a lot about community engagement.</li> <li>• Yes. It helps embed all of us in the community in which we work.</li> <li>• I would. It was good to collaborate with all stakeholders.</li> <li>• Teamwork rules! Yes!</li> </ul> |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When asked if he would recommend the *Planning for Success* model to other Superintendents, Dave said, “Yes I would. I like the model; if the state is trying to get to a strategic district plan, this is the right model to use.” As Dave observed, “I see a shift from the days of bullets and long School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that people might not read or adhere to, to a living document.”

The coherence promoted by *Planning for Success* matched Dave’s own vision, and he voiced his plan to create that coherence across the district as a next step in the planning process: “I will also shift my schools. Each school’s SIP should mirror this document and address what they’re doing to address each objective. It becomes a simpler, more concrete document. Now that we’re in the world of SMART goals, I can link this to my own goals. My job becomes linked to the plan and then my principals can jump on that; this becomes their goals.”

When asked about the potential impact of this plan on student achievement, Dave asserted, “It’s going to have high impact. We can’t do it alone—so if you’re looking at, for example, early childhood and kids coming into K with no preschool experience—if [the initiative on exploring preschool partnerships] becomes a district initiative, I need partners for that so I’ll reach out to [the community] and use Title I funds toward this and . . . if that actually becomes practice, think of the impact. I can tap into the community because now it’s in the plan.”

## References

MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute (2013). *The Gateway Cities vision for dynamic community-wide learning systems*, Retrieved from [http://www.massinc.org/~media/Files/Mass%20Inc/Research/Full%20Report%20PDF%20files/The\\_Gateway\\_Cities\\_Vision.ashx](http://www.massinc.org/~media/Files/Mass%20Inc/Research/Full%20Report%20PDF%20files/The_Gateway_Cities_Vision.ashx)

### Appendix: Malden Case Study

The following table identifies what the District Leadership Team (DLT) and Planning Team (PT) did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities. Retreats are listed in chronological order.

|                      | Meeting Agenda   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|----------------------|--|---|
| <b>DLT Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning process overview</li> <li>• Data and root cause analysis</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very well organized.</li> <li>• Enjoyed strategic planning opportunity, wondering how our time and ideas will impact the process.</li> <li>• It's important that district leaders look at data, questions, root causes, solutions together and not in isolation.</li> <li>• Truly one of the best PD sessions—great how we all now have a common goal and plan in place to create our District Plan.</li> <li>• Productive, informative, great lead into next steps (data and findings will help with next steps).</li> <li>• Loved it—really enjoyed the time to think and process with colleagues and partners about real issues that will move us forward.</li> <li>• Very interested in seeing where today's work leads us in the future district planning.</li> </ul> |
| <b>PT Retreat 1</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning for the future</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organized—informal.</li> <li>• Loved that all stakeholders were present.</li> <li>• Good mix of all different backgrounds/ experience.</li> <li>• Good learning and collaboration among unique combination of stakeholders.</li> <li>• A great activity to allow all stakeholders to provide input.</li> <li>• Great opportunity to work with a wider audience. The visioning work helped me to better understand and appreciate other viewpoints and ideas.</li> <li>• I like the way that this process is being broken down, piece by piece, to create the whole.</li> <li>• Good start. Much to cover in such a short time.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>PT Retreat 2</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying common vision themes (to inform strategic initiatives)</li> <li>• Community engagement process</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I thought that today's session provided an environment of open discussion. People of different backgrounds or education were able to work together to create common goals.</li> <li>• Very useful. Breaking into groups allowed us to get a great deal done.</li> <li>• Broad and ambitious charge. Not enough of the voice of different cultures (except Chinese).</li> <li>• Well done, has a direction.</li> <li>• Great collaboration.</li> <li>• Today's session was more focused and understandable.</li> <li>• I think it's one step closer to the actionable plan.</li> <li>• Very organized and on task.</li> <li>• It went together amazingly well.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>DLT Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying strategic initiatives (using common themes identified by PT in Retreat 2)</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very effective—truly connecting the DLT with the PT.</li> <li>• Really nice and positive meeting. Clearly articulated goals and great opportunity to work together.</li> <li>• Very well organized—able to see the big picture.</li> <li>• The graphic organizer was supportive of the process to identify strategic initiatives.</li> </ul>   |

|                               | Meeting Agenda   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
|                               |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was thoughtful team work.</li> <li>• Excellent, informative, and productive. Great collaboration, brainstorming, and support.</li> <li>• Everybody is moving in the right direction.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>PT Retreat 3</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing/finalizing strategic initiatives (drafted by DLT in Retreat 2)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great way of starting the much needed discussion.</li> <li>• Thank you for the opportunity to review and amend work that was done by district leadership.</li> <li>• I find it exciting to be addressing this vision and these initiatives. Great conversation!</li> <li>• Enjoyed sharing ideas about social/emotional health with people that are equally as concerned and passionate.</li> <li>• Strategies seem so broad.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>PT Retreat 4</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision statement</li> <li>• Community engagement process</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great work being done.</li> <li>• Roll out is looking good.</li> <li>• I'm impressed with the ideas generated and ease of coming to consensus.</li> <li>• Good. Was challenging to have a larger group try to create a small document that captures what we want to say.</li> <li>• Always impressive what we can accomplish with a focused hour or two!</li> </ul>  |
| <b>PT Retreat 5</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission statement</li> <li>• Plan review/revision</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great to see a plan come together.</li> <li>• Exciting to see what has come together.</li> <li>• Nice summary of what we have been working on. Short and sweet with a lot of good information.</li> <li>• Very focused—a lot accomplished in a short amount of time.</li> <li>• Great opportunity to revise the mission statement.</li> <li>• Today's session was informative and all groups were able to come together and determine how the district plan will be communicated to each group.</li> <li>• Dialogue is good—communication is key.</li> </ul>               |
| <b>DLT Retreat 4</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcome measures</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No evaluation administered.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Joint Mtg PT &amp; DLT</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final plan review and revision</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very beneficial to meet with all members that have worked on the document.</li> <li>• Helpful to review the draft plan and have everyone together.</li> <li>• It's great to see the process is getting narrower, and the picture is getting more clear.</li> <li>• Worthwhile.</li> <li>• Very effective.</li> <li>• All good dialogue.</li> <li>• Great leadership focus.</li> <li>• Specific and productive. I love knowing the big picture.</li> <li>• Great opportunity to glean out outcomes and benchmarks with both community and district participants.</li> </ul> |



*Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*

**Whitman-Hanson Regional Public Schools Creates a Plan and Builds  
Community Support to Achieve Its Vision for Students**

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When Superintendent Ruth Gilbert-Whitner was planning to move forward with creating a district improvement plan, she knew she was looking for a different type of planning process for her district. “I’ve been through strategic planning in districts a half dozen times. I’ve seen it work well in some instances and not in others.” As Ruth concluded, “I knew I didn’t want to do what we did before...The last thing I wanted to do was to bring in 45 people over three days to develop a strategic plan.”

When Ruth learned about *Planning for Success* at the MASS/MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents/Massachusetts Association of School Committees) Conference in the fall of 2014, she recalled, “I was taken by the organized system for district planning.” Ruth observed that she was “impressed by the clarity of the *Planning for Success* model—it seemed less bogged down in paperwork and jargon [than some other approaches to planning]; it seemed to focus on what we’re trying to do here.” As she observed, “We’re not a well-funded district, so it’s extremely important for us to communicate our needs.”

Whitman-Hanson’s planning process is still underway at this time, as district leaders prepare to advance the process by taking a draft plan back to staff and into the Whitman and Hanson communities.

**The Planning Team:** Whitman-Hanson’s planning process thus far has engaged both the District Leadership Team and the district’s larger Administrative Team. The District Leadership Team consists of approximately 10 members, including principals and district academic administrators. The Administrative Team consists of approximately 35 members, including principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, and all district administrators.

**The Planning Process:** Due to weather and other extenuating circumstances, Whitman-Hanson’s planning pilot spanned eight months, beginning in March 2014 and concluding in October 2015. The district will continue its work on the plan—engaging the Whitman and Hanson communities and staff members, setting outcomes, and identifying priorities for implementation—through the fall of 2015.

The planning process was shared between the District Leadership and Administrative Teams. The District Leadership Team met for three 2 hour sessions between March and early June, a total of 6 hours. The District Leadership Team launched the planning process and sessions to envision the district’s future. District leaders conducted visioning sessions with all schools and departments between April and June 2015.

The Administrative Team met for one 3 hour retreat at the end of June, and two 2 hour retreats in September and October, a total of 7 hours. The Administrative Team led the identification of strategic



objectives and initiatives, building the district plan in response to staff members’ visioning work. The team also closely examined which improvement issues were within district control and which were dependent on increased funding, and created a staff and community engagement process.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this inclusive planning process.

**District Leadership Team and Administrative Team Feedback on the Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* process at the conclusion of the pilot project, members of Whitman-Hanson’s leadership teams offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this planning work for the community, the *Planning for Success* process itself, and team members’ own learning. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|--|---|
| <p><i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted the Whitman-Hanson public schools?</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a draft district plan.</li> <li>• Amazing, established district strategic plan.</li> <li>• Given us a chance to establish our values and articulate what matters to us.</li> <li>• Provides us with a framework to organize our next steps.</li> <li>• A roadmap for growth and success.</li> <li>• Helped us focus our priorities.</li> <li>• Shared vision.</li> <li>• Refocused on the priorities, needs, and hopefully positive outcomes for our district.</li> <li>• Provided more defined focus on the direction of the entire district.</li> <li>• I believe it helped us find a common set of goals for the future.</li> <li>• Everyone is on the same page. Discussion was thought provoking.</li> <li>• I believe that all stakeholders were given an opportunity to be heard and to give feedback in all areas making this a true team effort.</li> <li>• This has enabled great conversations to occur among administration.</li> <li>• It has brought the whole admin team closer together.</li> <li>• It allowed input from many different levels.</li> <li>• We have tackled difficult and long standing questions/issues through our discussions.</li> <li>• Brought all leaders to be in support of one plan.</li> <li>• It has been a comprehensive inclusive process involving staff and administrators.</li> <li>• Kept it focused.</li> <li>• In the end, all the small pieces over the different meetings have been brought together for a comprehensive and well thought out plan.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Would you recommend this planning process and approach to other districts? Why or why not?</i></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes—it made people think about what is important.</li> <li>• Yes—methodical and well done.</li> <li>• Yes—it helps organize thinking and puts objectives in a priority based design.</li> <li>• Yes, the step by step approach made for a very clear objective.</li> <li>• Yes, streamlines the entire process.</li> <li>• Yes—streamlines the process and is inclusive (teachers, admin, leaders, etc.)</li> <li>• Yes. Because it offers other opinions.</li> <li>• Yes. All of the administration should have a say and share ideas on district policies.</li> <li>• Absolutely. I especially liked the self-select structure.</li> <li>• Yes. It seemed to be a comprehensive approach and brought a structure to the process.</li> <li>• Yes—valuable experience. Well focused.</li> <li>• Yes. Broke the process down into effective chunks.</li> <li>• This type of exercise is helpful for all organizations.</li> </ul>   |

| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments   |
|---|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the organization model was well worth the time.</li> <li>• I would recommend the complete process.</li> <li>• Yes, I would recommend this because of the approach taken to get to the end result.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>What, if anything, did you learn through this experience? Would you volunteer to participate in such a process again?</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very reflective and multi-layered process.</li> <li>• Yes.</li> <li>• I would volunteer again. I think it was important to have an outside consultant.</li> <li>• Perhaps.</li> <li>• Show template at beginning of process, will align participants sooner and streamline focus/conversations.</li> <li>• Yes.</li> <li>• Sure. A positive process.</li> <li>• No—time commitment.</li> <li>• Yes. Importance of using protocols.</li> <li>• I learned the perspectives of different stakeholders.</li> <li>• I learned many things about putting together a strategic plan.</li> <li>• Take little steps and build all into big picture.</li> </ul> |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When asked if she would recommend the *Planning for Success* model to other Superintendents, Ruth said, “I would—time has been well spent.” Ruth cited the value her leadership team found in the *Planning for Success* process, noting that “we have a diverse leadership team that was all willing to participate” because of that value.

District leaders’ participation was particularly noteworthy at the end of the last school year, as the team considered how to engage the greater school community in the planning process. As Ruth recalled, “we were trying to discern a way to gather stakeholder feedback. But we knew gathering a lot of people would be problematic at that point in the year.” So principals agreed to conduct a visioning protocol, which had been modeled for them during the planning process, with their faculties. As Ruth recalled, “seven different people, with different styles, did it [the visioning protocol] and did it well . . . And now everyone [in the district] knows what we’re talking about.” As Ruth reflected, “The fact that principals did this speaks to the power of the model.”

Ruth also commented on what she believed to be the value of learning about the *Planning for Success* process from colleagues who have experienced it: “You need people like me to be able to tell others: this is worth the time.” While appreciating the development of the *Planning for Success* resources that districts may use to facilitate their own planning process, Ruth also cited the value of an external facilitator for her. She observed, “People are overwhelmed by online resources; they don’t know where to start.”

As she reflected on her district’s *Planning for Success* experience, Ruth found that it has “been [even] better than expected.” She observed that the “tone was positive. People opened up and discussed issues and frustrations. And this has only gotten better over time.” Most importantly, Ruth found that the *Planning for Success* process “has been flexible enough to let me as a Superintendent do what our district needs.”

## Appendix: Whitman-Hanson Regional Public Schools Case Study

The following table identifies what the District Leadership Team (DLT) and Administrator Team (AT) did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities. Retreats are listed in chronological order.

|                      | Meeting Agenda  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <b>DLT Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Planning for Success</i> model</li> <li>• Analyzing current district planning practices and culture (SWOT)</li> <li>• Designing the planning process</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive viewpoint of planning. The information at the beginning provides a good mindset of the process. Backwards design being the goal.</li> <li>• Organized and on task. Useful, thought provoking.</li> <li>• Cohesive, coherent, well planned, well paced. Excellent. Clear direction of where we need to go.</li> <li>• Gave time to reflect/share as a team and dialogue about what process could help WH. Good to think about “solutions” from this planning process.</li> <li>• It was better than expected. I wasn’t sure what to expect or where it was going.</li> <li>• The session was well organized. The objectives were explained clearly and the session stayed to the agenda. It was beneficial sharing the SWOT results with the Leadership Team. The SWOT activities were designed to evoke active and thoughtful responses.</li> <li>• Once we spoke about DRT (District Review Team) visit, group saw how we can take what we know to be good and work with that for something better.</li> </ul> |
| <b>DLT Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning the future of the district</li> <li>• Review of SWOT results</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helpful, informative, and good discussion.</li> <li>• Very useful. Helped to create a focus of where to go. Hard to vision 3 years out knowing today’s realities.</li> <li>• Produced some ideas of engaging communities in a way I hadn’t thought of before.</li> <li>• Great activity for fostering conversation. Provided good format for open conversation. Provided the team with a foundation for future discussions at multiple levels and with a variety of stakeholders.</li> <li>• Good ideas, especially regarding how to include community members in planning.</li> <li>• Very useful. Super discussion. Good use of time. Felt great to respond and put real issues on the table for discussion.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>DLT Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflections on the community visioning process (which DLT members led with staff after Retreat 2)</li> <li>• Synthesizing visioning results and identifying common themes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Today’s session was valuable. Great process. Discussions provided common goals.</li> <li>• Good opportunity to see all school results to get a better picture of WH. Good discussion around measures. Excellent.</li> <li>• Great to see all individuals’ input come together as one group of vision.</li> <li>• Important to synthesize district staff responses. A lot of district-wide info was produced today. How to address all of it. What’s priority—what’s first?</li> <li>• Well organized. A good use of time in collecting and analyzing data. The protocol format provides structure to our conversations and data for future decision making.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>AT Retreat 1</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Planning for Success</i> model</li> <li>• Process to date</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productive, well organized, and specific to our district.</li> <li>• Very informative. Excellent group exercises. Helped to think</li> </ul>   |

|                 | Meeting Agenda  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments   |
|-----------------|---|--|
|                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of common themes from community visioning (identified by DLT in Retreat 3)</li> <li>Applying the Authority Bulls-eye to the common themes</li> <li>Themes within our control</li> <li>Planning workshops               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 1: Strategic objectives</li> <li>Group 2: Funding</li> <li>Group 3: Community outreach</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p>about district as a whole.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organized and goal oriented.</li> <li>Today's session was a step of bridging the current state/practices of the district with the needs/wants of change within our control.</li> <li>I have found each step of this process to be beneficial.</li> <li>When I see the activities as written, it is hard to imagine how valuable each one is. In moving forward, I think it will be important to other districts not to "water down" the process. Each step brings us closer to a final process.</li> <li>It was helpful to brainstorm in groups and hear what others in the district thought about the state of the district and how to move forward.</li> <li>Good collaboration and creative thinking across district levels of administration.</li> <li>Great, highly focused group exercises. Thought we accomplished quite a bit. Bulls eye was quality endeavor.</li> </ul> |
| AT<br>Retreat 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of the process to date</li> <li>Planning workshop: Strategic objectives</li> <li>Planning workshop: Strategic initiatives</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Productive start to the creation of the plan.</li> <li>Great conversations—helped me to begin to "see" the larger plan.</li> <li>Becoming more detailed and "visible" as we get deeper into the process.</li> <li>Very productive. Great interactions and input. Excellent use of time. A great deal accomplished in 2 hours.</li> <li>I do think the overall goal is good. The amount of steps/time it is taking to get there is difficult at times to keep focused.</li> <li>Once common languages and thoughts applicable to WH were established, things went well. Believe the "structure" of the plan has been built.</li> <li>We were able to accomplish our overall objectives for moving forward and change the language to be more user friendly for the community.</li> <li>Very valuable to think specifically about the words chosen and the stakeholders impacted by these decisions.</li> </ul>       |
| AT<br>Retreat 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft plan review and revision</li> <li>Next steps in the planning process:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging community</li> <li>Engaging staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>Planning for data and root cause analysis work</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Productive and worthwhile.</li> <li>Clear and concise.</li> <li>Very useful—great conversations.</li> <li>Outstanding.</li> <li>Productive, important, timely. A roadmap for growth.</li> <li>Session was informative, collaborative, and great use of our time.</li> <li>Today's session was productive and I appreciated being part of the process.</li> <li>This was the best of the workshops.</li> <li>I felt that this was an opportunity for everyone to engage in conversation on equal turf.</li> <li>It was well organized. A lot of us contributed great feedback and took ownership.</li> <li>Went very well. All workshops that have been done have tied nicely into steps of plan.</li> </ul>   |

## *Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*

### **Valley Collaborative Creates a Plan, Builds Community Support, and Professionalizes Its Culture**

**Superintendent:** Chris Scott, [cscott@valleycollaborative.org](mailto:cscott@valleycollaborative.org)

**Planning for Success Facilitator and Case Study Author:** Lori Likis, [lorilikis@ccoaching.com](mailto:lorilikis@ccoaching.com)

**Associate Commissioner, Office of Planning & Research:** Carrie Conaway, [cconaway@doe.mass.edu](mailto:cconaway@doe.mass.edu)

Valley Collaborative is an educational collaborative that provides special education services to students referred by the Collaborative's nine member districts. The Collaborative consists of an elementary school, a middle school, and a transitional high school, and provides adult programs and transitional job placement services. Formerly known as the Merrimack Special Education Collaborative, Valley Collaborative has been redefining and rebuilding itself under the leadership of Superintendent Chris Scott. As Chris observed, "We were in a unique position to create something brand new that comes out of a rich history of doing good work for kids and adults with special needs. We had a blank slate and could start again, start fresh."

Through the *Planning for Success* process, the Valley community created the district's first five-year improvement plan. While creating this plan for the future, Chris seized on the planning process itself as an opportunity to build broader community support, inviting parents, Special Education Directors, and School Committee representatives from member districts to participate. As Chris observed, Valley's inclusive planning process brought a "deeper level of understanding for the leadership team as we traditionally know it but also in a broader community. It helped gel the work, gave it legitimacy. Now that people are so clear on what the mission is, it helps to get buy-in."

Chris also saw the planning process as an opportunity to build the capacity of her team: "Our mission is all about high-quality programming for students and adults. It was helpful for people to articulate the vision and it unites the team; it makes people more conscious of the work and why we do what we do." Chris found the *Planning for Success* process "helpful as a tool to professionalize the culture of the organization," noting that "you have to spend a lot of time thinking about processes and procedures so you can develop a smart plan." As Chris observed, a good plan is the result of "a good process and a good way to think about the work."

**The Planning Team:** Valley Collaborative's Planning Team was an inclusive team composed of approximately 25 members, representing all Collaborative stakeholders—staff, parents, School Committee members, community partners, and several Special Education Directors from the Collaborative's nine member districts. As Chris observed, "For those Directors that committed to the process with us—they're part of the Leadership Team indirectly. This process gave us an opportunity to get to know each other and understand where we've been and why certain decisions were made."

**The Planning Process:** Valley Collaborative's planning process was approximately six months, beginning in January and concluding in June. The process began with an introductory meeting during which the Planning Team reviewed the *Planning for Success* model and process, and discussed some of the unique issues the Collaborative faced in developing a district plan. The Planning Team then met for five 3 hour retreats between March and June to develop the plan, a total of 15 hours. Planning

Team meetings were held between 9:00 a.m and 12:00 p.m., followed by lunch. The Planning Team presented the school’s final district plan to Valley Collaborative’s Board in June.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this inclusive planning process.

**Planning Team Feedback on the Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* process at the conclusion of that process, Valley Collaborative Planning Team members offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this planning work for the Valley community, the *Planning for Success* process itself, and team members’ own learning. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|--|---|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted Valley Collaborative?</i>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused the work.</li> <li>• Invaluable to our growth.</li> <li>• This work gives us a tangible document to work from.</li> <li>• New vision statement.</li> <li>• We now have a plan of action.</li> <li>• Communication among the Valley Collaborative community solidifies common goals, aspirations, and plans. The group bonded in our commitment to the students and adults!</li> <li>• United community members to identify common vision and identify joint problems. Given Valley a clear plan moving forward.</li> </ul> |
| <i>Would you recommend this planning process and Planning Team approach to other districts? Why or why not?</i>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. Creative and productive.</li> <li>• Yes. Gets all the neurons firing and great ideas result.</li> <li>• Yes—very helpful to have such a diverse group.</li> <li>• Yes—it’s very organized and streamlines the process.</li> <li>• Yes—effective, varied exercises.</li> <li>• Yes. Open ideas without prying!!</li> </ul>   |
| <i>What, if anything, did you learn through this experience? Would you volunteer to participate in such a process again?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes—great partnership and collaboration.</li> <li>• Yes—collaboration works.</li> <li>• I would volunteer to participate in a similar experience again. I learned the value in a slow and methodical planning process.</li> <li>• I learned about my school and its dedicated staff; the challenges they face and their resilience, and overarching commitment to students/adults in the various programs.</li> <li>• Valley is on a very successful path. I sure would.</li> </ul>  |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When reflecting on her district’s *Planning for Success* experience and the *Planning for Success* effort to provide DIY resources for district use, Superintendent Chris Scott shared her belief that an external facilitator can help increase the likelihood of planning success. Citing the “difficult conversations” that are part of a planning process, Chris observed that it is difficult to lead some conversations “if I’m in the mix; I need to be a colleague in this process.”

With a keen appreciation for the importance of implementation in the planning process, Chris has committed Valley’s Planning Team to continue working together to create an annual action plan. As Chris observed, “Getting these plans to work isn’t an academic process.” Her belief is that successful implementation requires both leadership and changes in culture. Chris asserted that to implement successfully, leaders need to ask, “What are the political, financial obstacles? Who will be responsible

for removing them? It's the glue that holds it all together—takes master strokes of understanding where your strengths and weaknesses are in the organization.”

When asked if she would recommend the *Planning for Success* model to other Superintendents, Chris said “yes.” “The process definitely met my expectations. I’d give it a 10/10.” Chris found the *Planning for Success* process to be “very streamlined, organized. There are different methodologies for planning; this one was easy, straightforward, not overly complicated or convoluted. It helped to focus people on what was manageable.” In terms of time efficiency, Chris also observed that the *Planning for Success* process “is very time-consuming and labor intensive, but compared to other processes it’s not. It didn’t take an inordinate amount of time.”



## Appendix: Valley Collaborative Case Study

The following table identifies what the Planning Team did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities.

|                  | Meeting Agenda  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments   |
|------------------|---|--|
| <b>Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visioning for the future (in small groups)</li> <li>• Identifying common themes and relevant data (across small group visioning results)</li> <li>• Designing the planning process: a preliminary discussion about communication and stakeholder engagement in the planning process</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoyable, informative, encouraging.</li> <li>• Very relevant, positive, and effective.</li> <li>• Touching on things we never would have!</li> <li>• I felt invigorated and encouraged.</li> <li>• Significant amount of work completed; beneficial to have so many points of view from various stakeholders.</li> <li>• I very much enjoyed working backwards from a goal. I actually implement the same technique when post-secondary planning with my students.</li> <li>• Great sharing of ideas; productive exercises; good use of time and effort to focus vision.</li> <li>• I particularly enjoyed the Back to the Future protocol as it helped me mentally visualize where I believe the Collaborative should/could be at the end of this process.</li> <li>• The structure of the activities allowed for strong input from all.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing an inclusive planning process</li> <li>• Planning Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Group 1: Setting outcomes</li> <li>Group 2: Future program development</li> <li>Group 3: Communication</li> <li>Group 4: Stakeholder engagement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Cross-group review and revision of Planning Workshop results</li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productive and creative.</li> <li>• Interactive—enjoyed breakout sessions.</li> <li>• It was great to dig into the issues in more depth.</li> <li>• The format was nice as it allowed for different topics to be addressed in a timely manner.</li> <li>• A lot of information seemed to get digested. More importantly, recorded.</li> <li>• Today's session was very productive as discussion went off on tangents which actually added substance to the planned discussions.</li> <li>• A feeling of "the wheels are in motion."</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of work to date</li> <li>• Planning Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groups 1-3: Strategic objectives</li> <li>Group 4: Drafting the vision statement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Next steps in stakeholder engagement: a discussion about how members of the Planning Team would communicate and gather stakeholder visioning feedback</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very productive, open exchange.</li> <li>• Great! It is always difficult work getting the perspective from many passionate, invested stakeholders but so IMPORTANT!</li> <li>• It felt like we were more focused—it was exciting to take next step in this process.</li> <li>• Long for sure. We could do it in shorter time.</li> <li>• Went well—I enjoyed having an outcome to the work.</li> <li>• Looks like the team is working in the same direction—shared vision.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Retreat 4</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of work to date</li> <li>• Update on stakeholder engagement: discussion of stakeholder feedback process and incorporation of vision feedback gathered from community after Retreat 3</li> <li>• Planning Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groups 1-3: Identifying strategic initiatives</li> <li>Group 4: Identifying outcomes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No evaluation administered</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Retreat 5</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of work to date</li> <li>• Quality review of the draft plan, including theory of action</li> <li>• Final revision of draft plan</li> <li>• Overview of the next step: action planning</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy work!!</li> <li>• Exciting conversation. Left me with a lot to think about.</li> <li>• Very involved. Fantastic give and take.</li> <li>• Very thorough—in depth—could have been shorter.</li> </ul>  |

*Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*  
**Cape Cod Regional Technical High School Creates a Plan,  
Shares Leadership, and Changes Culture**

**Superintendent:** Bob Sanborn, [bsanborn@capetech.us](mailto:bsanborn@capetech.us)

**Planning for Success Facilitator and Case Study Author:** Lori Likis, [lorilikis@ccoaching.com](mailto:lorilikis@ccoaching.com)

**Associate Commissioner, Office of Planning & Research:** Carrie Conaway, [cconaway@doe.mass.edu](mailto:cconaway@doe.mass.edu)

When it was time to create a new improvement plan for Cape Cod Regional Technical High School, a single-school district, Superintendent Bob Sanborn knew he wanted a different approach. As Bob recalled, “We weren’t just trying to come up with a plan; we were trying to change culture at the same time.” When Bob learned about *Planning for Success*, he thought it might be the right model for his district: “I saw this presented in November at MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees). I was hoping to have a more focused, measurable strategic plan. At the same time, we were hoping to accomplish a far more collaborative process. We just didn’t do that the first time; [CCT’s previous plan was] administratively developed.”

CCT’s *Planning for Success* process yielded both a new district plan and a new focus on shared leadership at Cape Cod Tech. Encouraged by the successful work of the school’s inclusive Planning Team and the engagement of all school staff in this work, CCT created a new shared leadership structure at the school as a result of the planning process itself. The development of this shared leadership body, CCT’s Strategic Council, emerged as one of the district plan’s strategic initiatives that supported the new district plan objective, “Empower, develop, and retain staff.”

CCT’s Strategic Council, an outgrowth of the Planning Team, is a cross-functional team of teachers and staff members responsible for overseeing implementation of the district improvement plan. The Strategic Council will partner with the school’s Administrative Team, which consists of all administrators, to oversee the school’s annual action planning process and to monitor action plan implementation. At their first joint meeting, held at the conclusion of the planning process, the Strategic Council and Administrative Team established the norms, meeting structures, and decision-making processes that will guide these teams’ collaborative leadership work into the future.

**The Planning Team:** CCT’s Planning Team was an inclusive and representative one. The team included 16 members in total: two students, two parents, two administrators, two support staff members, three academic teachers, three vocational teachers, one guidance representative, and one school committee member.

**The Planning Process:** CCT’s planning process was approximately seven months, beginning in December and concluding in June. The process began with the Administrative Team, which met twice between December and January, for a total of 4 hours, vetting the *Planning for Success* model and process and participating in visioning about the future of the school. The Administrative Team then created the representative Planning Team and led visioning sessions with all staff of the school using the same protocol the *Planning for Success* facilitator had modeled with them.

The Planning Team, which was responsible for leading the development of the district plan and communicating with and engaging all stakeholders in that development, met four times over three months, between March and May. Planning Team meetings were held between 8:00 a.m and 2:00 p.m. with lunch, for a total of 20 working hours.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this inclusive planning process.

**Planning Team Feedback on the Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* process at the conclusion of that process, CCT Planning Team members offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this planning work for the CCT community, the *Planning for Success* process itself, and team members’ own learning. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|--|---|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted CCT?</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It gave an open forum to all stakeholders.</li> <li>• I believe it will add cohesion to the staff.</li> <li>• The process began the work of collaboration and empowerment.</li> <li>• It sets a foundation for future planning.</li> <li>• Gave the various constituencies a chance to voice opinions/concerns.</li> <li>• I think this process allowed staff to voice concerns, commendations, and objectives for the future. Staff feel part of this process and are helping to “drive the bus!”</li> <li>• I believe it gave some folks “back” their voice.</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Would you recommend this planning process and Planning Team approach to other districts? Why or why not?</i>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As long as all voices would be heard and encouraged...YES!</li> <li>• Yes. I believe it is simple to learn and difficult to go through.</li> <li>• Yes – it took a gigantic process and broke it down.</li> <li>• It is time consuming but can be beneficial to a district needing to reinvent itself.</li> <li>• Absolutely, largely due to inclusive nature of the process</li> <li>• Process is OK, but it needs (at least at CCT) another component that prepares the way for strategic planning.</li> <li>• Yes. It has helped to rebuild trust and faith in the process of collaboration between admin and staff.</li> </ul> |
| <i>What, if anything, did you learn through this experience? Would you volunteer to participate in such a process again?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, I learned the power of a group to set a better course.</li> <li>• How to work in a strong diverse group and maintain an active voice. Yes I would do it again.</li> <li>• Again Yes! I learned much about teacher leadership and its importance.</li> <li>• Perhaps.</li> <li>• HOW to facilitate this process...which has been very interesting but complex!</li> <li>• Not ALL educational processes are pointless acts of futility. Yes – I’d volunteer again.</li> <li>• It is worth the hard work for the outcome.</li> <li>• I learned I do not need to “go it alone.” Yes, I would volunteer.</li> </ul>               |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When asked to reflect on his district’s *Planning for Success* experience and the *Planning for Success* effort to make its DIY resources available for district use, Superintendent Bob Sanborn noted both his appreciation for that effort as well as his preference for an external facilitator leading this work. For Bob, having an external facilitator was critical and working with one as part of the piloting process had been an incentive for participation. “Someone from the outside to

help facilitate the process. Big selling point. Gives it some validity; in our case we had six teachers, support personnel, parents, students, administrators [all working on the planning]. To have another

person up there rather than the administration was very symbolic. It puts everyone on the same playing field in the development process.”

When asked if he would recommend the *Planning for Success* model and process to other Superintendents, Bob said: “yes.” Bob described *Planning for Success* as a “very no-nonsense, intuitive way to go about it [district planning].” He described the plan CCT developed through its pilot project as “potentially the best one [plan] we’ve had. It wouldn’t have been the plan that came out of a meeting of the admin team. But that’s good.” When asked about the potential for impact of this district plan on student achievement, Bob commented, “I’m very, very hopeful that it will have high impact.” As Bob concluded, “In terms of quality—it hits all the areas we need to hit; now the devil is in the details.” Bob chose to continue the *Planning for Success* process at CCT by working with his staff to create the action plan that will guide implementation.

## Appendix: Cape Cod Regional Technical High School Case Study

The following table identifies what the Planning Team did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities.

|                  | Meeting Agenda   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection on an inclusive planning process</li> <li>• The <i>Planning for Success</i> model</li> <li>• Planning process, team role, and schedule</li> <li>• Visioning</li> <li>• Synthesizing community visioning results to identify common themes</li> <li>• School data presentation (by Superintendent)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I thought it was valuable work. I like how your step-by-step approach formulated the process seamlessly. I feel it gave focus to our work and made the process powerful and effective.</li> <li>• We are starting to hone in on the big issues facing our school through this process.</li> <li>• I thought it was very informative and really enjoyed hearing what everyone had to say. It is good to have voice and be heard.</li> <li>• It was much better than I had expected. I enjoyed the friendly conflict.</li> <li>• Open honest dialogue.</li> <li>• Extremely eye opening.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Root cause analysis of selected school data</li> <li>• Identifying strategic objectives from the community's feedback to the common themes identified in Retreat 1</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tough but needed.</li> <li>• Overwhelming. The process was excellent but nerve racking, but I hope it turns into a great plan.</li> <li>• I loved the collaborative nature of the day. The insight and respect everyone displayed evolved into 5 powerful objectives.</li> <li>• It was a great process to be a part of. Lots of great work done today getting to the five. Everybody had great input!</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debrief of the community engagement process conducted by the Planning Team after Retreat 2</li> <li>• Identifying strategic initiatives from the community's feedback</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard work, hard talk, but good day.</li> <li>• It's apparent that there have been more issues to discuss than were appreciated.</li> <li>• Happy with the results! More work is needed though!</li> <li>• Great – a lot of work in a small amount of time.</li> <li>• Today could have been more productive.</li> <li>• It was extremely productive.</li> <li>• A lot of honesty was shared and a lot of details were discussed.</li> <li>• Good "safe" place to talk.</li> <li>• The conversation regarding what perceptions exist in this school was very important. Until we start being honest with each other, we will have difficulty moving forward.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Retreat 4</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review/revision of draft strategic initiatives</li> <li>• Quality review of the emerging plan draft</li> <li>• Drafting the vision statement</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was a large amount of work that requires a greater amount of feedback. It was good work!</li> <li>• Covered a lot of territory.</li> <li>• Productive and overwhelming.</li> <li>• Productive but unclear of next step.</li> <li>• Very positive.</li> </ul>  |

*Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*  
**Webster Public Schools Redesigns its District Plan, Streamlines its Focus,  
and Reenergizes its Leadership Team**

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**Planning for Success Facilitator and Case Study Author:** Lori Likis, [lorilikis@ccoaching.com](mailto:lorilikis@ccoaching.com)

**Associate Commissioner, Office of Planning & Research:** Carrie Conaway, [cconaway@doe.mass.edu](mailto:cconaway@doe.mass.edu)

**Central District and School Assistance Center (DSAC) Support Facilitator:** Tom Lamey

When Webster Superintendent Barbara Malkas learned about *Planning for Success* and the pilot opportunities available to districts, she was one of the first to sign up. The Webster Public Schools already had a district improvement plan but Barbara was interested in using the *Planning for Success* process to revise and redesign that plan with her District Leadership Team. As Barbara recalled, “This was truly revising the plan based on where the district is right now, without losing sight of the work we need to do.” As Barbara observed, “Revision is harder than starting from scratch; we’ve gotten some momentum to this point [with our original plan], but this [*Planning for Success* process] is about sustaining and getting the kind of traction that closes gaps.”

Barbara found that the *Planning for Success* process “served as a great way for the District Leadership Team (DLT) to have the opportunity to reflect on the work and to really think about the magnitude of the work they have accomplished as they decide what’s next, what’s the best way to service our students.” The redesign process resulted in a revised district plan that Barbara described as, “more streamlined; the conversation we’ve had so far has taken our strategic objectives and our indicators and really focused them. Instead of trying to do everything, we’re trying to create some focus.” The original plan’s five strategic objectives were redesigned to three.

In addition, Barbara found that the *Planning for Success* process not only helped streamline district focus but also helped build the capacity and morale of the District Leadership Team. When describing the impact of the plan redesign project on her district, Barbara recalled, “We were at a place where morale...it’s a lot of work. The district is in status, has higher levels of poverty. Hard and continuous work. We celebrate incremental progress but it doesn’t feel like you’re getting far enough fast enough.” In this context, Barbara found that the *Planning for Success* redesign process, “really reenergized the DLT, so we get away from the feeling of being a bureaucrat and checking things off the list.” As Barbara concluded “the *Planning for Success* model—diving into the data, really looking at where you’ve been and where you want to go—it taps into that passion for education. That goes a long way toward helping us with morale.”

In addition, Barbara observed that the planning process had her team “thinking in a different way,” and that “having the opportunity to think about the work in a different way has caused some growth and created some autonomy for decision making.” Barbara believes that the *Planning for Success* process impacted members of her team by prompting “an energy to want to learn how to apply the plan, according to the specific context of each school.”

**Partnering with DSAC:** A key partner in Webster’s redesign process was the Central DSAC, which provided support to Webster as a Level 3 district. Central DSAC’s Support Facilitator Tom Lamey

partnered with Webster’s Assistant Superintendent Andrew Kelley and the *Planning for Success* facilitator Lori Likis to organize and present a review of district data, and conduct root cause analysis of key data points with the District Leadership Team.

**The Plan Redesign Process:** Webster’s District Leadership Team, consisting of lead administrators, was the group charged with redesigning the district plan. The plan redesign process was approximately three months, beginning in March and concluding in May. The District Leadership Team met for three 3 hour retreats during this time to revise and redesign the existing district plan, a total of 9 hours. Additional work on the plan will continue in the 2015-16 school year.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this planning process.

**District Leadership Team Feedback on the Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* revision process, District Leadership Team members offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this planning work for the district and team members’ own learning. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|---|---|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted your district?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides a clearer path and next steps.</li> <li>• Much more organized.</li> <li>• I feel like the sessions helped us to better identify gaps that have been really hard for us to address.</li> <li>• It has helped us refocus and redefine what we think is important and how to get there. Our reconfigured model—the “stool”—feels much more doable and much clearer.</li> <li>• The work we did on this pilot gave us the time to rethink our work of the past. I feel we are reenergized to continue this hard work.</li> <li>• Re-evaluating some of the programs/policies we have had in place to talk about their effectiveness.</li> <li>• The time together provided us with the time we don’t often get to brainstorm our successes, failures, and challenges.</li> <li>• Time will tell.</li> </ul> |
| <i>What, if anything, did you learn through this experience?</i>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust the process and your colleagues.</li> <li>• Streamline and focus on community.</li> <li>• This DLT group is ready to tackle this project!</li> <li>• Our Admin Team still has it!</li> <li>• That issues and obstacles and challenges we face are not unique to any one school or one district.</li> </ul>   |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When reflecting on her district’s *Planning for Success* experience and the *Planning for Success* effort to provide DIY resources for district use, Superintendent Barbara Malkas commented on the benefits she experienced in working with an external facilitator: “Sometimes it’s easier to do that work with a facilitator who’s not from the district—that frees up people to be participants as opposed to being a facilitator. As a superintendent, I evaluate everyone who’s sitting in the room. So their ability to speak freely and push back on anything I might say is dependent on the relationship.” As she concluded, “Having a TA facilitator/provider allowed me to release the outcome. That meant it’s not ‘Barbara’s plan’—it’s the district plan and weaves together a



lot of voices. So I was definitely looking for some support that would allow me to be an equal participant instead of a facilitator of the improvement planning.”

As Barbara stressed, district improvement “can’t just be ‘how will we improve achievement to get us out of accountability status’—it really needs to be about the environment you create in your district.” She appreciated the way in which the *Planning for Success* process tapped into the passions of her school leaders, noting, “Education is bigger than what level your district is.”

Barbara stressed the importance of the *Planning for Success* focus on “what matters” rather than compliance:

This isn’t my first time being involved in a planning process, but my experience has been that other processes were exercises in task completion instead of an opportunity to identify and specify what we are going to be about. That’s what *Planning for Success* has been able to do for us—say what is the MEANINGFUL work that’s going to get us where we want to be? As opposed to what we should be doing, which became about compliance as opposed to engagement. Compliance vs. engagement isn’t just about the kids; it’s about the adults, too!

When asked if she would recommend the *Planning for Success* model to other Superintendents, Barbara said, “Definitely. I would say it is a process for school Superintendents to develop district plans that will energize and focus their work for their entire district on what matters.”

## Appendix: Webster Public Schools Case Study

The following table identifies what the District Leadership Team did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities. Retreats are listed in chronological order.

|                  | <b>Meeting Agenda</b>  | <b>Selected Participant Evaluation Comments</b>  |
|------------------|--|--|
| <b>Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of current district planning practices and culture (SWOT Analysis)</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoted good conversation.</li> <li>Good conversation facilitated with opportunities for agreement/disagreement of questions.</li> <li>Great conversations—what next?</li> <li>It made me look differently at our decision making practices.</li> <li>Well spoken concerns, opportunities, threats not voiced frequently.</li> <li>The revision of work in progress may be more difficult than developing from scratch!</li> <li>It is tough looking at the Improvement Plan—reminds us of all the work that needs to be done.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>District data presentation</li> <li>Root cause analysis</li> <li>Inventorizing the district’s current work</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brain stretchers.</li> <li>Informative, eye opening.</li> <li>Insightful, meaningful, reflective.</li> <li>Good discussions driven by data and very effective protocols.</li> <li>I think it was a reality check and helped to re-focus attention to our areas of need in the district plan.</li> <li>The data analysis was confusing.</li> <li>We did great work!</li> <li>Loved it!</li> <li>I feel that it went well—it is good to get out the initiatives we work so hard on every day and see where they would land in the strategic plan.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of root cause analyses</li> <li>Revising the plan’s strategic objectives and strategic initiatives</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Productive, reflective.</li> <li>Inspired.</li> <li>It provided us an opportunity to dig deeper into the challenges that are ahead of us.</li> <li>The group was open and honest in collaborating about redesign plan.</li> <li>The day’s focus and opportunity for collaboration was not only excellent and appreciated—but also well overdue and needed.</li> <li>I thought the format and organization of the afternoon was conducive to expanding our thinking about the strategic planning process and revision.</li> <li>It was difficult to figure out how to get started but we landed in a great place.</li> <li>Slow start, great finish! Blueprint has been accomplished.</li> </ul> |

## Planning for Success 2015 Case Study

### Reading Public Schools Creates An Action Plan, Builds District Focus and Coherence, Leadership Capacity, and Public Understanding

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When Superintendent John Doherty learned about the opportunity to engage in a *Planning for Success* action plan pilot, he immediately expressed interest for his district. “I saw the presentation last November at the MASS/MASC [Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents/ Massachusetts Association of School Committees] Conference. I had been creating district goals every year using the process I had learned in NSIP [New Superintendent Induction Program], so I was very intrigued by how we could streamline that process and make it more focused on the areas we felt were important to the district.”

John said he chose the *Planning for Success* model because it was simple and accessible, engaged stakeholders, and supported alignment across district, school, and teacher goals. “It was simpler [than other approaches]. It allowed us to get a lot of input and feedback from the stakeholders, particularly our administrators, who were very involved in this process. The format was very easy to use and easy to communicate to others when it was done. It was very much aligned to what we had been doing in the goal setting process. There was alignment to teacher evaluation, our SIP [School Improvement Plan] process, and the district goal-setting process that I was using through NSIP.”

**The Action Planning Process:** Reading’s action planning process spanned six months, January to July 2015, as a result of Superintendent Doherty’s decision to hold development of the action plan until summer, as preparation for the 2015-16 school year. Action planning was conducted by the District Leadership Team, which met for three 3 hour retreats and one 7.5 hour retreat over this period to develop the district action plan and begin work on the district’s monitoring and public reporting system, a total of 16.5 hours. The team then met again in August to put finishing touches on the plan. The final district action plan was composed of action plans for three district objectives.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this action planning process.

**District Leadership Team Feedback on the Action Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* action planning process, Reading’s District Leadership Team members offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this work both for their district and for others. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments   |
|--|--|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted your district and/or leadership team?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This work allowed us, as a DLT, to have candid conversations about what is working and what is not working. It then allowed us to create action plans for five areas.</li> <li>• There was a great deal of openness in communication, which led to great discussion, problem solving, and moving ahead with action plans. I feel that the steps we have outlined will guide us to achieving our goals.</li> </ul> |

| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall, this pilot did a really nice job of taking our desire to work in the more abstract and theoretical and forced us to ground our work in specific time frames and action steps.</li> <li>• Provided us with a foundation/springboard to plan for the upcoming school year/all on the same page.</li> <li>• The idea is good—much harder to try to work off an existing plan—and there was a lot of time off topic—no monitoring systems identified due to lack of time. Good to get us to narrow down to specific steps.</li> <li>• It will help me to shape my School Improvement Plan and also work on my school vision that I had planned.</li> <li>• Forced us to look concretely at the volume of goals and the ambiguous description which was causing confusion.</li> <li>• This work will help us to be more focused as a team and hopefully more focused as leaders. This was a positive experience. It helped us to discuss priorities we have and make connections to all the work we are doing.</li> <li>• We have our district goals for the next couple of years and have clarified the focus of our work together.</li> <li>• Helped create clear benchmarks/actions.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Would you recommend this planning process to other districts? Why or why not?</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absolutely, I would recommend the process. It provides a structure and a way to have meaningful conversations.</li> <li>• Yes. It brought up a great many considerations that I would not have come up with on my own. The process was very effective.</li> <li>• Yes, it really helps to ground the work.</li> <li>• Yes. Got all stakeholders to share a common vision for school year plans.</li> <li>• Depends on where they are in their district goal/action plan process.</li> <li>• Yes—the timing of which to be refined. It makes for great summer work and didn't mesh as well during the school year.</li> <li>• Yes. It is helpful for setting priorities and focusing teams.</li> <li>• Try to ensure connections from one meeting to another continues to happen. Sometimes I felt we created a product but never saw work in subsequent meeting.</li> <li>• Yes, though the timing is important. Having completed the action plan in the summer prior to the start of the year was great. Doing the other work during the school year was more challenging.</li> </ul>   |

**Superintendent's Reflection:** When reflecting on his district's *Planning for Success* experience, Superintendent John Doherty said, "Now that we've gone through it, it definitely has met our expectations. It helped streamline what we needed to focus on as a district. The process put clarity to what we felt was important." As he observed, "[The process] generated a lot of good discussion on 'what are the things we are going to prioritize this year?'" John then observed that "Now we can refer to these action plans [for prioritized objectives] and say 'no, this is what we need to be focused on. We can't be doing that right now because these are the things we're focused on.'"

While John commented that the *Planning for Success* handouts "were very easy to use; I like the template—simple but effective," he still stressed the value of an external facilitator for this process. "I do a lot of facilitation of our DLT meetings; I think it was beneficial that I was not facilitating and someone from the outside was." As John observed, "when the Superintendent or someone else from the district is facilitating, it doesn't allow everyone's voice to be heard. I'd never want anyone on the team to think I'm pushing an agenda, and if I or someone else from the district was facilitating, there

might be that perception. By having an outside facilitator, I'm part of the team that's doing this [work]."

John offered two specific recommendations to support the effectiveness of the *Planning for Success* action plan work. First, John observed the importance of engaging in this work with a high functioning leadership team: "You do need to have a functioning team to make this work. I think we do. If you don't have a functioning team it might be more difficult for this process to happen. Make sure you have a team that's not afraid to speak up, that everyone is there for the right reasons, that there are no hidden agendas, that everyone is invested in the mission and vision of the district; that helps the process." As John stressed, "make sure you have norms, and use protocols effectively, and allow for everyone's voice to be heard—these are all important pieces."

John also offered this suggestion on the timing of the action plan work: "One suggestion—which we sort of stumbled into—the summer was a critical part of this for it to all come together. We didn't start the process until Nov/Dec, and we could have pushed it so we finished by June, but having the summer really helped us because we weren't distracted by everything else going on during the school year. Using the beginning and end of summer was very helpful."

When asked if the action planning process had impacted the capacity and culture of his leadership team, John said, "Yes, it definitely did. We included in this process all of our principals, assistant principals, team chairs, and central office administrators. There were probably about 25 people involved in developing our action plans." As John observed, action planning with this group "really built capacity and understanding among everyone in the group that this is what we would focus on this year. So yes, it did have a positive effect on the leadership team."

In addition, John found the *Planning for Success* process valuable professional development for his team: "We've been working on teambuilding for the last couple years, but [the process] allowed us to create a space where people felt they could give their thoughts and opinions. There was a lot of conversation about the goals—were they manageable? Were we taking on too much? What did we need to take off our plate? [The process] allowed open and honest dialogue."

In terms of the action plans' potential impact on student achievement, John asserted, "I think they have potential for high impact, if implemented correctly." John observed that, "the plans are really strong and high-quality; people are invested in them and have ownership because they were part of the process. The plans are simpler to understand and use than previous plans, which is good. It's a much more public document, so the public can understand it. These [plans] will be shared with the community and the school committee; the school committee will be approving them. They're easier to read and understand than what we had before, because of the format."

When asked if he would recommend the *Planning for Success* process to other Superintendents, John said: "I absolutely would. If it's a superintendent that's looking for a way to develop some coherence in their goal setting process in aligning district, school, and teacher goals, this is definitely the way to go." John noted that Reading's principals and school councils were using the template to develop their school improvement plans. "We all agreed after we went through the process that this was a perfect template for SIPs [School improvement Plans]."

## Appendix: Reading Public Schools Case Study

The following table identifies what the District Leadership Team did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities.

|                  | Meeting Agenda   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|------------------|--|---|
| <b>Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Planning for Success</i> model</li> <li>• Personal reflection</li> <li>• Analysis of current district planning practices and culture (SWOT Analysis)</li> <li>• Early evidence of change benchmarks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good foundation set for perhaps some big changes we need to make.</li> <li>• It was an excellent starting point for the work we need to do. Overall, it was a very positive day.</li> <li>• I wasn't sure where we were heading at first but felt better by the end of the session. The "task" itself (developing a district action plan) seems a bit lot overwhelming.</li> <li>• The personal reflection was a good activity to jumpstart our focus. The conversations were open and honest.</li> <li>• Early evidence of change was very eye opening. We could use more examples to help guide this conversation and development.</li> <li>• I enjoyed the conversation and passionate voices.</li> <li>• I wonder if the de-privatization of leadership practice will help develop the culture throughout the system.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review SWOT results from Retreat 1</li> <li>• Designing the monitoring and reporting process</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The monitoring process led to many conversations that were helpful in thinking about action planning.</li> <li>• Activity seemed unclear or unhelpful at first, but ended up yielding some very good discussion and reflection.</li> <li>• A good start...the group works best with real work, i.e. refining an initiative or goal that is in play. As cited above, going from theory to practical work is the challenge.</li> <li>• Very good workshop with a lot of reflection and discussion about where we are as a DLT and where we need to go. I think today was necessary to build a good foundation for the next workshop, which is to develop an action plan. The discussion was rich and important.</li> <li>• In the beginning, a bit too much talking/listening. When we got into "the work," I found great value in the process and discussion. We are an action-focused/hands-on group—we like to be engaged!</li> <li>• It was well structured and organized—we appreciate that! Information was helpful though I'm still not sure what this "plan" should look like.</li> <li>• Good start, but a lot of time spent on revisiting some topics—not much action taken. Whole group talk tends to derail work.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digging deeper: early evidence of change</li> <li>• Monitoring system characteristics</li> <li>• Action planning workshop</li> <li>• Action plan review and revision</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small groups were very helpful. It was good to break down information and have someone outside the group look our work over.</li> <li>• The protocol was a nice format for feedback. The Digging Deeper conversation was not as focused. It might be helpful to complete a reading or text-based protocol to increase learning.</li> <li>• The review of the action plan was very helpful in the sense that it allowed us to see how well these plans could communicate to people who had not been part of the process.</li> <li>• It was an excellent session where there was a lot of dialogue. The group was very receptive to the work. The process worked well. From the development of the draft action plan to the implementation of the protocol, the discussion was excellent.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Retreat 4</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of work to date</li> <li>• Successes and challenges of SY14-15</li> <li>• Action planning workshop</li> <li>• Action Plan review and revision</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful, responsive.</li> <li>• Last part of the day was most productive of all our time together.</li> <li>• A great deal was accomplished. Terrific sharing of ideas.</li> <li>• Productive, collaborative. We are a group who likes to get things done!</li> <li>• Overwhelmed at first but by the end I felt confident we created an action plan that was appropriate for our schools.</li> <li>• Today we were much more focused. Working in smaller groups really helped us stay focused.</li> <li>• I enjoyed the action planning work. I appreciate the feeling of getting things done.</li> </ul>  |

*Planning for Success 2015 Case Study*  
**North Andover Public Schools Creates an Action Plan and  
 Builds Leaders’ Capacity for Monitoring and Publicly Reporting Progress**

**Former Superintendent:** Kevin Hutchinson (retired)

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When Superintendent Kevin Hutchinson first learned about *Planning for Success*, he was one of the first Superintendents to sign up for a pilot project. As a Superintendent who valued cohesive district planning, Hutch was interested in further developing his leadership team’s capacity to successfully implement North Andover’s existing district plan. Superintendent Hutchinson and his team used the *Planning for Success* process to develop an annual action plan for the district, and the monitoring and public reporting system that would support it. As Superintendent Hutchinson observed, “Our leadership team was looking for a better way to document our work and to improve monitoring action planning. We found it with these tools and with our workshop facilitator, Lori Likis.”

At the conclusion of the action planning process, Superintendent Hutchinson asserted his belief that “the action plan has the potential for high impact on our district’s improvement. First of all, it improves the documentation of our focus by actually providing ways to focus even more. Secondly, it improves our measureable outcome documentation. Thirdly, it provides us with better tools for making our work public and understandable.” For Superintendent Hutchinson, the *Planning for Success* process also built the capacity and culture of the District Leadership Team: “As we gained knowledge, we thought of other applications to our work which pushed our thinking—no better way to build capacity and culture.”

**The Action Planning Process:** North Andover’s action planning process was approximately four months, beginning in November 2014 and concluding in February 2015. Action planning was conducted by the District Leadership Team, which met for three 3.5 hour retreats over this period to develop the district action plan and monitoring and public reporting system, a total of 10.5 hours.

See the appendix to review the agendas for each retreat and participants’ reactions to the work at each stage—as well as their insights about the value and challenges of this action planning process.

**District Leadership Team Feedback on the Action Planning Process:** In reflecting on the *Planning for Success* action planning process, North Andover’s District Leadership Team members offered a range of insightful comments about the benefits of this work both for their district and for others. A snapshot of these comments is included in the table below.

| Evaluation Question  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments   |
|--|--|
| <i>In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted your district and/or leadership team?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This pilot has put us on the path to success and increased achievement. Makes us all collectively more accountable.</li> <li>• Helped us to narrow our focus and clearly articulate our process and product.</li> <li>• It worked in helping us relating as a preK-12 district.</li> <li>• The monitoring and reporting process revision was excellent. I believe we can use this.</li> </ul> |



| Evaluation Question   | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|---|---|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was helpful in finalizing plans that in the past were only half completed, and making it likely the plan will be acted on rather than “shelved.” We will be more likely to implement initiatives, and will better monitor progress as well as our effectiveness as a team.</li> <li>• Very much—collaborative process increased our practical knowledge. Focus on action items, process benchmarks, and early evidence is critical to impact.</li> <li>• Gave us a better idea of the process required to stay focused.</li> <li>• This work brought our team together as a group in a very beneficial way to improve both our practice and our culture.</li> <li>• This benefitted our district team by encouraging collaborative work as a team and the importance of each stakeholder.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Would you recommend this planning process to other districts? Why or why not?</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes! Some of the best Admin PD we have experienced that connects with our strategic plan work.</li> <li>• Yes—gave us structure, process, and product.</li> <li>• Yes. Helps focus efforts on a concrete plan and tie all initiatives together.</li> <li>• Yes—helps develop a clearer and more consistent focus.</li> <li>• Highly! Engaging, focused, and worthwhile.</li> <li>• I would. It helped me clarify what I need to do.</li> <li>• I would recommend—if for nothing more than bringing team together around how goals are written and met!</li> <li>• Without hesitation or reservation.</li> </ul>  |

**Superintendent’s Reflection:** When reflecting on his district’s *Planning for Success* experience, Superintendent Kevin Hutchinson said that he and his team “had hoped to benefit from a format that would better enable us to set measureable targets and to use the format to improve our documentation and discussions with all stakeholders.” According to Hutch, “all expectations were met and we have a better direction in which to improve our strategic planning work.” When asked how the monitoring process his team developed changed the way they worked together, he observed, “What we’ve found is that the improved monitoring process helps our team follow up with better focus and documentation.”

Superintendent Hutchinson’s offered one suggestion for improvement to the action planning process he and his team participated in: an extended time period. As Hutch noted, “My only suggestion would be to increase the amount of meetings to improve follow-up over the course of the entire year. Perhaps the district meetings could be the same amount but smaller teams could meet with the facilitator and other district teams to share/critique work.”

When asked if he would recommend the *Planning for Success* action planning process to other Superintendents, Superintendent Hutchinson said “yes.” He said that he would recommend *Planning for Success* to other Superintendents by asking: “Want to improve the focus and effectiveness of your strategic planning? Then, get involved in this work.”

## Appendix: North Andover Public Schools Case Study

The following table identifies what the District Leadership Team did in each retreat and what some team members said about this work and specific activities.

|                  | Meeting Agenda  | Selected Participant Evaluation Comments  |
|------------------|---|---|
| <b>Retreat 1</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of current district planning practices and culture (SWOT Analysis)</li> <li>Early evidence of change benchmarks</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PRODUCTIVE conversation with other administrators in similar roles. Format in the groups led to very effective and reflective discussion around practice, culture, and early evidence of change.</li> <li>Well organized and purposeful presentation and group work. Helped us reflect personally and collectively on application to our strategic plan.</li> <li>Productive conversations. Appreciated the SWOT analysis—great to see common trends.</li> <li>Good honest conversation and feedback—enjoyed the group work—got us out of our comfort zone.</li> <li>Great to be with the entire leadership team to all get on the same page. Great discussions.</li> <li>Useful to our purpose.</li> <li>This was a good start to beginning to understand the “evidence of change” concept. I’m hoping that this new information will be valuable to our action planning.</li> <li>The activities helped me get closer to my work partners. During the school day it is hard to leave as principal but the time was well spent.</li> <li>My general impression confirmed that I need to have more clarity on how district planning transfers in my role as A.P.</li> <li>I was much more engaged after the initial 45 min presentation. The day went well after.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Retreat 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing the monitoring process</li> <li>Digging deeper into early evidence of change benchmarks</li> <li>Action planning workshop</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MUCH more productive than the first session. I felt that we left with a product and better understanding of the process. Action planning workshop was a great exercise!</li> <li>Excellent and productive.</li> <li>I think this was a great opportunity to continue our work!</li> <li>It felt good to have honesty in knowing each other’s strengths and weaknesses—through strong dialogue. Affinity protocol was interesting—I’d like to try it with my teachers!</li> <li>Very helpful to my thinking and enjoyed the ability of our team to focus.</li> <li>Group feeling like progress is being made, which is always a good indicator. Time allowed for group work was very effective.</li> <li>Within each of these activities it was very beneficial to have conversations to better my understanding and to hear different perspectives.</li> <li>Somewhat confused with initial introduction and activity but good support with team.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Retreat 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refining the monitoring and public reporting processes</li> <li>Refining the action plan</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive and productive.</li> <li>Well organized and structured.</li> <li>Affirming and enlightening—we are improving our collective understanding—focused well to get us there.</li> <li>Well structured time—organized around useful activities that resulted in productive work!</li> <li>Today was worthwhile in helping to build greater communication around goals and feedback.</li> <li>The session got our leadership team to focus and re-assess the strategic plan and our goals.</li> <li>I felt like today was actually more concrete and now clearer how we move forward—I also liked the protocol.</li> <li>Today helped me to put all the pieces together to see the interrelatedness of all of our work. This set the structure for all future work and it was done in a thoughtful and complete manner.</li> </ul>   |