

Envisioning the Future

Working With the Community to Create a Vision of the Future;
Using the Results in the Planning Process

What is the Vision? The vision, as defined by the Massachusetts Planning and Implementation Framework, articulates the district's aspirations for students: what you value and why, and what future success will look like. The district's vision, mission, and core values are the foundation of the district plan.

Why This Step is Important: Envisioning the future with members of the community is a powerful and effective first step in the planning process. The visioning process offers the opportunity to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in the district's planning work and ensure that many voices are heard. Diverse perspectives in the planning process will strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the resulting plan, and inviting participation in the planning process will build ownership and advocacy for the resulting plan among both educators and the community. An inclusive approach will also contribute to a positive district culture, helping to build a shared understanding of the work required to serve all students as well as the relationships and trust among stakeholders that will support that work.

Visioning Protocols: A number of visioning protocols and processes exist, and districts may choose to create their own process as well. One visioning protocol that is commonly used, easily adapted, and readily available is the Back to the Future Protocol. This protocol, which includes guidelines for facilitators in how to work with groups to conduct the visioning process, was originally developed by Scott Murphy and is available from:

- The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), at <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/system/files/protocols/future.pdf>
- The School Reform Initiative (SRI), at <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>

Using Visioning Results: Results from the visioning process are useful in two ways: they provide guidance for creating the plan's vision statement, and more importantly, they are data a planning team can use to identify strategic objectives, the overarching goals and key levers for improvement. Synthesizing community visioning feedback to identify common themes is important work and a valuable service that can be conducted by the planning team. These common themes can then serve as a starting point for the team's development of strategic objectives.

The Visioning Process: Designing and conducting the visioning process is an important first step in the district planning process. District leaders will want to consider: *How can we design an inclusive planning process that creates a shared vision for all students while strengthening community understanding and support?* The district should identify a visioning protocol and a process for using this protocol to conduct visioning sessions with educators (for example, during school faculty or departmental meetings) and with families, students, and community members (for example, during family meetings or high school student government meetings).

It is helpful if district leadership and planning teams are the first to participate in the visioning process. Their participation in visioning is, of course, essential to the planning process. These participants can also vet the protocol and the district's design for conducting visioning sessions across the community. In addition, having experienced the protocol and the effective facilitation of it, these participants will have some preparation should they choose to facilitate the protocol themselves in future sessions as part of the district's visioning process.

The process below describes facilitation of an adapted Back to the Future Protocol.

1. Organize into small groups of 5 to 6 participants each. If possible, ensure that each group includes members of different stakeholder groups. The Back to the Future Protocol consists of three questions. Allow approximately 15 minutes for small groups to discuss and record answers to each of these questions. Small group work may take approximately 45 minutes to complete.
2. Reconvene as a whole group. Ask the facilitators of all small groups to share (and post, if on chart paper) their group's work.
3. Debrief as a whole group, identifying common themes across small group work.
4. Collect the charts/documented work from the recorders of all small groups. Type up and distribute results of the visioning process to team members.

Time Required: A visioning session based on the adapted Back to the Future Protocol described above requires approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete, depending on the number of participants and the number of small groups that will report out.

Note to Facilitators: If using the Back to the Future Protocol, you will find that all three of the protocol's questions can serve as useful starting points in developing strategic objectives and initiatives. Themes identified for Back to the Future's first two questions, about the future and present state, can serve as useful starting points in identifying strategic objectives. Themes identified for the protocol's third question, about actions that helped the district to move from the present to future state, can serve as a useful starting point in identifying strategic initiatives.

Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides: Some suggested text for presentation slides for the adapted Back to the Future Protocol is included below.

Slide 1: Envision the Future

- We will imagine that the future is the present, and that we are looking back on the change process that has moved the district from where it was in the past (today) to what it has become.
- Through this process, we will describe what the district is today, what we would like it to become in the future, and the strategies we imagine will take it there.

Slide 2: Using the Back to the Future Protocol

- Organize into [X] working groups
- Identify a group facilitator, recorder, presenter
- Conduct the Back to the Future Protocol
 - Adapted from Scott Murphy, SRI,
<http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>
- The recorder charts group responses
- The presenter shares group responses with the whole group

Slide 3: Back to the Future Protocol

- Project into the future; imagine it is [X] years later.
 - *What does the district look like, sound like, feel like today?*
 - *Use the present tense!*
 - From the projected present, look back into the past (today).
 - *What did the district look like before?*
 - *Use the past tense!*
 - From the projected present, continue looking back into the past (today).
 - *How did the district become what it is today?*
 - *Describe as specifically and concretely as possible. Use the past tense!*
- Adapted from Scott Murphy, SRI,
<http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>