*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** |
| --- | --- |
| *In what ways, if any, do you believe this work benefitted the Malden Public Schools?* | * Great plan. * Will bring greater vertical alignment K-12. * We have goals driven by clear student needs that we must now work toward. * A clear, all encompassing mission statement and vision will make our purpose clear to all. * Identified key needs and encourages community involvement. * This work is a great start which will benefit not only Malden Public Schools but our community. * Yes, if we really are able to put everything into action and flexible enough to revise as it moves along. * Brought together stakeholders to allow for frank positive discussion. * Creates a single voice. * Increased collaboration and vision planning. * It’s work that is encompassing teachers whose voices aren’t always heard. * By creating a dialogue, openness, and transparency that allows input from many stakeholders. * Optimism, hope. |
| *Would you recommend this planning process and Planning Team approach to other districts? Why or why not?* | * Yes. Well organized. * Yes. It was chunked nicely and took a daunting task and made it manageable. * Most definitely—many voices heard but moves quickly and purposefully. * Yes, productive process respectful of all parties. * Yes. Easy to understand for all participants. * Yes, all parties had the opportunity to share issues, concerns, ideas. * Yes, getting all stakeholders in the meeting room. * Yes, it’s inclusive and brings together various points of view and creates a dialogue that brings the process into sharper focus. * Yes I would because it allows people from all different backgrounds to talk about district-wide goals that need to be achieved. |
| *What, if anything, did you learn through this experience? Would you volunteer to participate in such a process again?* | * We learned to work together for a common purpose. * The experience exposed me to a well-organized, inclusive process that identified district needs. I would volunteer. * 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. * I would volunteer to participate and I have learned how to pull out what is most important. “Less is more.” * Yes, I would volunteer—great way of creating SMART goals. * Learned about buildings outside of my own. Yes, I’d do it again! * The shared struggles at other district schools. Yes, I’d get involved. * Ideas about bringing schools and community together. * How to step back and look at not just the larger district but the community. I learned a lot about community engagement. * Yes. It helps embed all of us in the community in which we work. * I would. It was good to collaborate with all stakeholders. * Teamwork rules! Yes! |

**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>

**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** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DLT Retreat 1** | * Planning process overview * Data and root cause analysis | * Very well organized. * Enjoyed strategic planning opportunity, wondering how our time and ideas will impact the process. * It’s important that district leaders look at data, questions, root causes, solutions together and not in isolation. * 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. * Productive, informative, great lead into next steps (data and findings will help with next steps). * Loved it—really enjoyed the time to think and process with colleagues and partners about real issues that will move us forward. * Very interested in seeing where today’s work leads us in the future district planning. |
| **PT**  **Retreat 1** | * Visioning for the future | * Organized—informal. * Loved that all stakeholders were present. * Good mix of all different backgrounds/ experience. * Good learning and collaboration among unique combination of stakeholders. * A great activity to allow all stakeholders to provide input. * Great opportunity to work with a wider audience. The visioning work helped me to better understand and appreciate other viewpoints and ideas. * I like the way that this process is being broken down, piece by piece, to create the whole. * Good start. Much to cover in such a short time. |
| **PT**  **Retreat 2** | * Identifying common vision themes (to inform strategic initiatives) * Community engagement process | * 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. * Very useful. Breaking into groups allowed us to get a great deal done. * Broad and ambitious charge. Not enough of the voice of different cultures (except Chinese). * Well done, has a direction. * Great collaboration. * Today’s session was more focused and understandable. * I think it’s one step closer to the actionable plan. * Very organized and on task. * It went together amazingly well. |
| **DLT**  **Retreat 2** | * Identifying strategic initiatives (using common themes identified by PT in Retreat 2) | * Very effective—truly connecting the DLT with the PT. * Really nice and positive meeting. Clearly articulated goals and great opportunity to work together. * Very well organized—able to see the big picture. * The graphic organizer was supportive of the process to identify strategic initiatives. * It was thoughtful team work. * Excellent, informative, and productive. Great collaboration, brainstorming, and support. * Everybody is moving in the right direction. |
| **PT**  **Retreat 3** | * Reviewing/finalizing strategic initiatives (drafted by DLT in Retreat 2) | * Great way of starting the much needed discussion. * Thank you for the opportunity to review and amend work that was done by district leadership. * I find it exciting to be addressing this vision and these initiatives. Great conversation! * Enjoyed sharing ideas about social/emotional health with people that are equally as concerned and passionate. * Strategies seem so broad. |
| **PT**  **Retreat 4** | * Vision statement * Community engagement process | * Great work being done. * Roll out is looking good. * I’m impressed with the ideas generated and ease of coming to consensus. * Good. Was challenging to have a larger group try to create a small document that captures what we want to say. * Always impressive what we can accomplish with a focused hour or two! |
| **PT**  **Retreat 5** | * Mission statement * Plan review/revision | * Great to see a plan come together. * Exciting to see what has come together. * Nice summary of what we have been working on. Short and sweet with a lot of good information. * Very focused—a lot accomplished in a short amount of time. * Great opportunity to revise the mission statement. * 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. * Dialogue is good—communication is key. |
| **DLT**  **Retreat 4** | * Outcome measures | * No evaluation administered. |
| **Joint Mtg**  **PT & DLT** | * Final plan review and revision | * Very beneficial to meet with all members that have worked on the document. * Helpful to review the draft plan and have everyone together. * It’s great to see the process is getting narrower, and the picture is getting more clear. * Worthwhile. * Very effective. * All good dialogue. * Great leadership focus. * Specific and productive. I love knowing the big picture. * Great opportunity to gleen out outcomes and benchmarks with both community and district participants. |