

The Benefits of Integrating AdvancEd Performance Standards into a Strategic Plan

William F. Truby, PhD

Valdosta State University

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This paper contains a summary of a Strategic Planning experience that used the AdvancEd Performance Standards as its overarching basis for structure and implementation. The intended goal of the school district involved with this activity was to create one document from which all required reports for agencies of accountability could be addressed. A review of Strategic Planning, AdvancEd and State Standards, and some details about the district's plan and success are included in this paper.

The target audience for this paper includes leaders in education, especially those employed in the central office and school buildings. School boards, superintendents, principals, and others entrusted with the vision, direction and future of educational organizations. Because of the fundamental aspects of the material covered, leaders in other fields of work may find the information helpful and applicable to their career choices.

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School districts across the country, no matter the student population or the location, aspire to meet the requirements of the AdvancEd Performance Standards. This is a critical part of the accreditation process. In the past, this accreditation process was an isolated experience that satisfied the needs of the moment. Today this process can be integrated as a part of a school district's Strategic Planning.

It was this writer's experience to study the work done in a local school system that went through the Strategic Planning process, based on the AdvancEd Standards. The goal of the district was to make sure that the final product was an acceptable document for AdvancEd and any other agency requiring any of the components of its strategic planning.

It was vitally important for everyone involved in the planning to have a common vocabulary and a solid background in the philosophy pertaining to strategic planning. Workshops and presentations paved the way for this critical aspect of the process. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the teaching/learning in which the participants took part.

A popular and working definition of Strategic Planning is "the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future". In a more practical sense, the tasks of a strategic plan are to determine where the organization is going, analyze the environment, and develop the steps to get there. Sorting out this concept even further, one can plainly see that there is a planning process, a plan document, and a plan for implementation.

There are underlying principles of a Strategic Plan. Quality leaders in the field of education have espoused these principles and utilized them as part of best practices in their organizations. These foundational concepts of strategic planning are:

- 1.) Efforts of a group are more productive if everyone knows the desired outcome.
- 2.) Efforts of a group are more productive if everyone knows his/her individual role.
- 3.) Good people, with good information, have good ideas.
- 4.) Groups have better ideas than individuals.
- 5.) Empowerment motivates individuals and groups.

Of course, experience might teach us that not everyone believes in strategic planning. And, perhaps, there are good reasons for it, like these:

- 1.) Some organizations ignore plans after the planning process is done (plan on shelf...).
- 2.) Some plans are developed without sufficient stakeholder involvement.
- 3.) Plan contents are dictated or pre-determined ("the plan must contain.....").
- 4.) Planning process is sometimes shortened to save time or too long to maintain focus.

There are at least two important bodies that have established criteria regarding Strategic Planning for schools. These are the aforementioned AdvancEd and the Georgia State Board of Education. AdvancEd's perspective is as follows. Standard 1: Purpose and Direction – The system maintains and communicates at all levels of the organization a purpose and direction for continuous improvement that commit to high expectations for learning as well as shared values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Further, AdvancEd provides an anatomy of these standards under the scope of three domains: Leadership Capacity and its eleven standards, Learning Capacity and its twelve standards, and its eight standards Resource Capacity. (See the capacities and their standards-- attachment.)

The State Board Standards for Local Boards of Education establishes this perspective in Domain II: Strategic Planning – The governance leadership team in collaboration with the community adopts and enacts a planning process that results in an adopted system strategic plan designed to improve student achievement and organizational effectiveness.

What becomes important to the organization and the participants in the Strategic Planning process are the many benefits derived from it. Summarily, a quality and effective plan and process will:

- 1.) Clarify direction for all to understand
- 2.) Create ownership: Those who must carry out the work determine the work
- 3.) Define direction of the organization
- 4.) Replace random acts with focused work
- 5.) Improve efficiency of work
- 6.) Minimize wasted effort

Most school districts find these components of a Strategic Plan to be important, useful, and applicable to other aspects of their required reporting: Mission Statement; Vision Statement; Belief Statements; Needs Assessment (Strengths & Weaknesses); Target Areas; Performance Goals (Long-term Goals); Interim Goals (Measurable Objectives); Strategies (Specific Action Steps); Funding/Resources; and Evaluation. The more of these components present in a plan, the more detail and applicability are available to the organization.

The central effect of a comprehensive and detailed Strategic Plan is the ability to take its components and apply them to such required documents and actions as School Improvement Plans (SIP); Specialized Plans; Administrator Goals; Management Decisions; Personnel Decisions; Budgets; Administrative Decisions; Board Decisions; and Professional Learning.

Like any good decision, a Strategic Plan will be evaluated by its follow through and implementation. How well and for how long is it in action? Its staying power will be enhanced by following these simple suggestions:

- 1.) Make everyone aware of the plan
- 2.) Justify your actions by the plan
- 3.) Ask how actions support the plan

- 4.) Make decisions by considering the plan
- 5.) Relate agenda items to the plan

The premise of this paper began with the rationale for the integration of AdvancEd's Standards and its relationship to the Strategic Plan. Further, the district was to be able to apply the components of the plan to other measures of accountability and required reports. Because of the thorough nature of the domains and their standards, the Strategic Plan in this district was able to select only a few standards from each domain and still meet the goals of the Strategic Plan and any required reports. Akin to the standards were target areas, goals, objectives, and action steps. Working diligently, The Strategic Plan was developed over several months by a team of over 20 stakeholders. For each of the three (3) target areas, the committees analyzed data to determine areas for growth on which to write goals. After agreement was reached on the goals, each team wrote measurable objectives and determined actions for each with timelines, funding, persons responsible, and means of evaluation. The plan on which the Super Team came to consensus includes ten (10) goals and sixteen (16) objectives with sixty-three (63) action steps. The total number of items put in place was 88.

Action steps are scheduled over a five-year period with most being initially implemented within the first two years of the cycle. The measurable objectives and accompanying actions are to be reviewed annually using the suggested means of evaluation. This review of progress may result in revisions with action steps being modified or added.

As a follow-up to the initial study, conversations with the leaders in the district revealed a great deal of success. The document was readable, applicable, and transferable to each of the district's other required reports. One of the reports formerly required months of work and editing. This time around it took only days to get final approval from a government agency.

The broad spectrum of Strategic Planning needs to take into account the reporting documents for which a district will be using it. In this case, AdvancEd's Performance Standards integrated with a well written and highly interactive Strategic Plan has provided a school district with a highly utilitarian plan.

2017-2018 Advance Ed Standards

Standard 1.1: The system commits to a purpose statement that defines beliefs about teaching and learning, including the expectations for learners.

Standard 1.2: Stakeholders collectively demonstrate actions to ensure the achievement of the system's purpose and desired outcomes for learners.

Standard 1.3: The system engages in a continuous improvement process that produces evidence, including measurable results of improving student learning and professional practice.

Standard 1.4: The governing authority establishes and ensures adherence to policies that are designed to support system effectiveness.

Standard 1.5: The governing authority adheres to a code of ethics and functions within defined roles and responsibilities.

Standard 1.6: Leaders implement staff supervision and evaluation processes to improve professional practice and organizational effectiveness.

Standard 1.7: Leaders implement operational processes and procedures to ensure organizational effectiveness in support of teaching and learning.

Standard 1.8: Leaders engage stakeholders to support the achievement of the system's purpose and direction.

Standard 1.9: The system provides experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness.

Standard 1.10: Leaders collect and analyze a range of feedback data from multiple stakeholder groups to inform decision-making that results in improvement.

Standard 1.11: Leaders implement a quality assurance process for its institutions to ensure system effectiveness and consistency.

Standard 2.1: Learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities established by the system.

Standard 2.2: The learning culture promotes creativity, innovation and collaborative problem-solving.

Standard 2.3: The learning culture develops learners' attitudes, beliefs and skills needed for success.

Standard 2.4: The system has a formal structure to ensure learners develop positive relationships with and have adults/peers that support their educational experiences.

Standard 2.5: Educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels.

Standard 2.6: The system implements a process to ensure the curriculum is aligned to standards and best practices.

Standard 2.7: Instruction is monitored and adjusted to meet individual learners' needs and the system's learning expectations.

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Standard 2.8: The system provides programs and services for learners' educational future and career planning

Standard 2.9: The system implements processes to identify and address the specialized needs of learners.

Standard 2.10: learning progress is reliably assessed and consistently and clearly communicated.

Standard 2.11: Educators gather, analyze, and use formative and summative data that lead to demonstrable improvement of student learning.

Standard 2.12: The system implements a process to continuously assess its programs and organizational conditions to improve student learning

Standard 3.1: The system plans and delivers professional learning to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the system's effectiveness.

Standard 3.2: The system's professional learning structure and expectations promote collaboration and collegiality to improve learner performance and organizational effectiveness.

Standard 3.3: The system provides induction, mentoring, and coaching programs that ensure all staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness

Standard 3.4: The system attracts and retains qualified personnel who support the system's purpose and direction.

Standard 3.5: The system integrates digital resources into teaching, learning, and operations to improve professional practice, student performance, and organizational effectiveness

Standard 3.6: The system provides access to information resources and materials to support the curriculum, programs, and needs of students, staff, and the system.

Standard 3.7: The system demonstrates strategic resource management that includes long-range planning and use of resources in support of the system's purpose and direction.

Standard 3.8: The system allocates human, material, and fiscal resources in alignment with the system's identified needs and priorities to improve student performance and organizational effectiveness

<http://www.advanc-ed.org/services/advanced-standards-quality>