

The History of Strategic Planning in the Bellingham School District

In 1994, following a process of community input, the Board of Directors adopted the first Bellingham School District strategic plan. Since then, the district has made significant gains in student achievement by using district and school strategic plans as roadmaps to set priorities, allocate resources and manage work.

The strategic plan was updated in 1998 by a team of community members, families of students in the Bellingham schools, students and staff members. They created “Pathway for the 21st Century” with a focus on literacy, personalization and connecting with families.

In 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recognized the Bellingham School District as a model of achievement and awarded the district a \$4.49 million grant to be used over a five-year period to accelerate the work of reaching the following three goals:

1. Having 90 percent of students meeting literacy standards by 2005;
2. Creating personal, individualized support for all students; and
3. Using technology to enhance parent-teacher communication and collaboration.

Through the leadership of the Board of Directors and administration, the dedicated work of staff and continued support from the community, Bellingham was selected as one of the 10 highest performing districts in the state. The successes that helped the district earn that recognition include:

- Significant gains in student achievement, including two elementary schools that have met the 90 percent target of students meeting state standards in reading. Many other schools are closing in on that target;
- Extensive professional development with a focus on instructional coaching and the development of Essential Strategies for Powerful Teaching and Learning (see Addendum), leadership development and organization alignment; and
- Implementation of school strategic plans that target specific ways to improve student learning.

While we have made substantial gains as a result of the two previous strategic plans, we now face new challenges. We must answer the following questions:

- How do we support *all* students in achieving state standards in reading, writing, math and science by 2014, as federally mandated?
- How do we ensure that *all* students in the class of 2008 and beyond earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement, and meet standard in required state assessments required for graduation?
- How do we effectively support *all* students in preparing for and meeting their graduation requirements, including completion of a high-quality culminating project that reflects their passions, stretches their learning and benefits the community?

Answering these questions requires reshaping “Pathway for the 21st Century” into a new strategic plan. In the new plan, we progress from a school system in which many students are successful to a school system that supports *all* students achieving at high levels so that they are well prepared for college, career and citizenship. This new strategic plan is designed to support, honor and guide the school strategic plans, and to provide alignment for all of the Bellingham School District’s work in the next five years.