

RAISING THE BAR

Strategic Vision for the Canton Public Schools



CANTON, CONNECTICUT
JUNE 2005

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Canton Public Schools

Strategic Planning Committee Members

Frank Byus	Board of Education
Susan Crowe	Board of Education
Stephen Cadieux	Canton Chamber of Commerce
Ike Eickenhorst	Board of Finance, Chair
Jordan Grossman	Canton High School, Assistant Principal
Olga Jacobs	Canton Resident
Kathy Magarian	Canton Teacher
Roger Manternach	Canton Resident
Larry Minichiello	Board of Education, Chair
Joanne Pierce	Canton Resident
Sue Saidel	Board of Education
Anthony Serio	Canton Superintendent of Schools
Mary Tomolonius	Board of Selectmen, First Selectman
Peter Zagorsky	Planning Commission

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2004, the Canton Board of Education, its administration, and a cross-section of the community became members of a Strategic Planning Committee charged with developing a Strategic Vision and Recommendations for the Canton Public Schools. The Strategic Planning Committee held a series of 14 meetings over a six month period.

- **The task** was to examine the challenges, realities, and needs that Canton students and the Canton Public Schools will confront in the next 5 years.
- **The purpose** was to develop a management tool that would guide the Canton Public Schools as it responds to needs in a rapidly changing environment.
- **The effort** was focused on the future rather than maintaining the status quo.

The strength of the Strategic Plan is that it involved parents, a teacher, and administrators, elected officials, Canton residents, and members of the business community.

The intention of the process was to align stakeholders of the school system in their understanding of Canton Public Schools' purpose, priorities, practices, and principles.

The Committee's discussions revealed both points of pride and frustration with current practices. Additional feedback regarding challenges and opportunities for the Canton Schools was gathered from Focus Groups made up of Stakeholders, including students, parents, retired citizens, staff, and administrators. This feedback guided and informed our decisions.

The following questions and concerns were raised and discussed:

- As societal pressures mount and the schools are called upon by State and Federal mandates to respond with more support services, will Canton be able to react effectively and with definite influence?
- Given increased attention to student outcomes and the effort to assess those outcomes in authentic and accurate ways, what changes will be required of our school organization, our programs, our methods of instruction, and our staff support planning?
- What changes in our academic programs and our methods of instruction are necessary to ensure that all Canton students are equipped to face the requirements of post secondary education and the world of work?
- What model of collaboration and communication will enable all stakeholders to share in decisions that affect the educational outcomes of Canton's students?
- How can we promote community awareness of our schools, their role in preparing the next generation of young people, and the need for our community to accept that challenge and responsibility as critical to everyone's future?

The Planning Committee's responses to these questions are addressed in the Goals and Recommendations contained in this document. Six Strategic Issues have been identified as focal points for the District's Strategic Plan.

They are:

1. Student Achievement and Teacher Performance
2. Rigorous and Relevant Programs
3. Management of Resources: Human and Financial
4. Facilities
5. Stakeholder Relationships and Public Outreach
6. State and Federal Mandates

This plan will serve as a blueprint to focus the direction of planning and decision making for the Board of Education, the Administration, and the Staff. The next step requires the Board of Education, Administrators, and Staff to continue to develop additional strategies, action plans, and budget impact and accountability indicators that will set measurable targets for improvement.

The ultimate goal of this Strategic Plan is to engage all members of the School Community as partners in the process of establishing an outstanding educational experience for all students.

Strategic Planning is as much a mindset as it is a report. It says that the community welcomes the energy and the power that comes from the drive toward a preferred future rather than staying with the status quo. It will help the Canton Public Schools move into the next five years in a pro-active rather than a reactive way.

Successes and Challenges: As viewed by our Stakeholders

Successes:

- Small school district with a dedicated, student-centered staff that cares and tries to make a difference in children's lives from birth to young adulthood
- Caring parents and a community that provides time and talents to make every student's educational experience successful
- Despite declining State funding, a continued focus of resources on sustaining excellence in the classroom by maintaining highly qualified staff and cutting-edge curriculum development and instructional practices
- Academic opportunities for students at all levels and areas of interest including Advanced Placement courses, extracurricular activities, field trips, special education, and enrichment programs
- Outstanding Fine Arts programs that bring Canton recognition in Music and Art
- Competitive sports programs that provide students with leadership and team cooperation opportunities and bring entertainment and pride to the community
- Intergenerational relationships that bring supportive community groups and students together in service to one another
- Character education provided at every grade level through various programs such as Character Counts, Responsive Classroom, T.R.A.K., and Esteem
- Investment in facilities to upgrade for education in the Twenty-First Century
- Renewal and flexibility in staff relationships that allow opportunities for growth in curriculum and instruction through professional development
- Our outstanding students and their families, in cooperation with staff and the Canton Board of Education, make our schools a hallmark of the community from early childhood through successful graduates who enter the world of work, military service, and /or institutions of higher learning

Challenges:

- Declining standardized test scores affect community trust in the education system and erode support for budget
- Reliance on local property taxes places the District at risk for further budget limitations in implementing academic initiatives, developing more athletic and extracurricular activities for students, and maintaining both current service level programs and a highly qualified staff
- Federal and State mandates impact the District's resources to meet its own priority goals and current service level programs due to the reallocation of budgeted funds to meet the guidelines in these statutes
- Alignment of the district curriculum Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade must include rigor and continuity in expectations, skills, and knowledge acquisition
- Space limitations impacting the delivery of our educational programs need to be addressed at all building levels with renovation of all core facilities and supportive infrastructure
- The Board of Education and Administration need to create multiple modes of communication with the Town to tell the story of education in Canton and advocate for needed improvements
- Communication and education of the community to understand the effects of mandates, budget, and declining resources on student achievement and accountability for student success as measured by standardized tests and multiple assessments

RAISING THE BAR

Strategic Vision for Canton Public Schools

Our Vision

Our vision is to make the Canton School System among the best schools in Connecticut and for it to be a source of pride to the community.

Our Framework

We commit ourselves to

- promoting high student achievement
- exhibiting focused educational leadership
- making sound financial choices

We challenge our students, school system, and our community to transform this vision into reality.

CORE VALUES

Individually and collectively the Community, the Canton Board of Education, the Parents, and the Faculty hold these values for themselves and for the children they serve.

We care about.....

- *Our children, our community, and the best education we can provide*
- *Making sure our resources are used most effectively to deliver opportunities for a great education*

We believe all children deserve to....

- *Be treated with respect and dignity in the classroom*
- *Have a well-rounded curriculum and first class resources*
- *Have supportive adults who share the responsibility for their achievement and well-being*
- *Be encouraged to reach their highest potential*

We believe all children are entitled to....

- *Equal opportunities to experience a high quality educational program*
- *An education that is supportive, challenging, and rewarding*
- *A learning environment that is safe and secure and supports their individual growth*
- *A comprehensive education that meets their needs*
- *The best efforts of the entire community*

We believe all children shall have the benefit of...

- *Challenges that stretch them as individuals*
- *Quality programs that will prepare them for life after graduation*
- *An informed, caring staff who will provide them with a motivating, enriching curriculum*
- *A caring community*

MISSION

The purpose of the Canton School System, in partnership with the staff, parents, and community, is to provide challenging educational experiences and opportunities for every student, Pre-K through 12, regardless of ability.

What We Do

- We provide a rigorous and relevant program of studies based on a foundation of
Language Arts and Literature
Fine Arts and Humanities
Social Science and History
World Languages
Mathematics, Science, and Technology
Physical and Health Education
Family and Consumer Science

We hold, and act upon, high expectations for all students

How We Do It

- Our curriculum and programs are aligned with local, state, and national standards and reflect research-based best practices
- Our classes are implemented by skillful and highly qualified teachers
- Our programs are continuously assessed through a variety of measures
- Our classrooms are socially and emotionally safe environments where all students can take advantage of a variety of educational opportunities and support services

Why We Do It

- To develop students who are able to think and solve problems on their own with the tools learned in school
- To expose students to a variety of experiences and to provide opportunities for enrichment as a means of encouraging them to become lifelong learners with a thirst for knowledge
- To prepare students to be productive, tolerant, and responsible citizens who are aware of how they can enrich the world and how the world can enrich them
- To encourage students to be self-reliant and to take responsibility for their choices

FOCUSING THE AGENDA

GOALS

Student Achievement and Excellence in Teaching and Learning

1. Set high achievement standards and expectations for students and teachers. Maximize student achievement by engaging each student in a clearly coordinated curriculum that is intellectually challenging, aligned with district, state, and federal mandates, and recognizes each student's diverse talents.
2. Recruit, support, and retain a highly qualified and diverse staff
3. Continue to provide and monitor a Five-Year Professional Development Plan for the increased proficiency of the staff in instructional practices which are aligned with district-wide curriculum initiatives and which promote student achievement.

Rigorous and Relevant Programs

4. Develop and adopt a rigorous curriculum that demands excellence from teachers and students at every grade level, K through 12.

Management of Resources: Human and Financial

5. Evaluate the structure of revenues and allocation of expenses to fund education and general town services. Identify key financial metrics and cost drivers to guide decisions required to manage those resources in a responsible manner.
6. Build a foundation for the future by forecasting a three-year financial plan that includes personnel, curriculum, infrastructure, and technology requirements necessary to support continuing enrollment and academic growth.

Facilities

7. Complete current building initiatives and ensure that buildings are properly appointed with the agreed upon furnishing and finishes.
8. Identify facility enhancements and requirements needed to address current and future needs. (Note: Cherry Brook is not part of the current school building project.)
9. Determine criteria and establish priorities for the maintenance of all facilities, technology requirements, and athletic fields to preserve the community's investment.

Stakeholder Relationships and Public Outreach

10. Establish, maintain, and expand meaningful communication among students, parents, families, businesses, and community in order to achieve collaboration and trust.

11. Promote cooperation, the sharing of resources, and an understanding of other Board functions and needs by and among the Boards of Education, Finance, and Selectmen.

State and Federal Mandates

12. Catalogue and assess all educational State and Federal Mandates that impact the Canton Public Schools.
13. Lobby State and Federal government officials and agencies, advocating for the mandates considered valuable and contesting mandates detrimental to the District's operation.
14. Create an environment in which the citizens of Canton can react to legislation.

Strategic Issue: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Rationale: Given the increased attention to student achievement and the effort to assess those outcomes accurately, Canton must accept the challenge that requires the systematic and data-driven review of programs, staff, and methods of instruction to produce the expected results of high student achievement and excellence in teaching.

Goal I Set high achievement standards and expectations for students and teachers. Maximize student achievement by engaging each student in a curriculum that is intellectually challenging, aligned with district, state, and federal mandates, and recognizes each student's diverse talents.

Recommendations:

- Continue "Curriculum Mapping" initiative to track district-wide standards for the educational program. Provide support, planning, and integration with all curriculum areas to ensure consistency in each student's instructional experience.
- Continue to maintain and update School Improvement Plans with accountability indicators to measure educational outcomes ensuring all local, state, and federal learning standards are achieved or exceeded.
- Review and update all district-wide standards for student achievement to emphasize high expectations.
- Use a variety of data in addition to test scores as a tool to drive instruction and provide accountability for teaching and learning.

Goal II Recruit, support and retain a highly qualified and diverse staff

Recommendations:

- Explore / expand Peer Mentoring opportunities that build internal capacity for replicating outstanding examples of teaching practices

Goal III Continue to provide and monitor a Five-Year Professional Development Plan for the increased proficiency of the staff in instructional practices that align with district, state, and federal curriculum initiatives which promote student achievement.

Recommendations:

- Provide quality training focused on targeted instructional strategies
- Create easy-to-understand instruments that are judged to be successful measures of certified employee performance. Use data to identify the correlation between professional development and improved student achievement.

Strategic Issue: RIGOROUS AND RELEVANT PROGRAMS

Rationale: A common concern expressed during Committee discussions and Focus Groups centered on the need to challenge all students with programs that improved their proficiency at every grade level, K to 12. Achieving higher levels of competency requires raising the bar of expectations for students and teachers.

Goal I Develop and adopt rigorous and relevant programs at every grade level, from K to 12.

Recommendations:

- Continue to support the research, development, and implementation of rigorous programming and instruction underway at the high school.
- Support a similar process at the elementary, intermediate, and middle levels.
- Instill the expectation of achievement, proficiency, and accountability as part of the culture of all schools.

Strategic Issue: MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES / Human and Financial

Rationale: Canton is being challenged to provide the financial resources to respond to issues of growth and development. Canton schools are also confronted by the acceleration of “cost drivers” in sustaining the level of educational services currently provided. State and Federal mandates further burden the appropriation of funds that compete directly with many of the Canton Public Schools’ local educational initiatives.

The financial stability of the Canton Public Schools is vitally important to the existence of all facets of the educational program. Achieving this stability is critical to the planning process and is viewed as a primary concern for both the school district and the community.

Goal I Evaluate the structure of revenues and allocation of expenses to fund education and general town services by identifying key financial metrics and cost drivers to guide decisions required to manage those resources in a responsible manner.

Recommendations:

- Engage in an annual process with the Board of Finance that evaluates the per capita tax burden, income, spending, and education data. Review revenue projections and assumptions for growth.
- Construct an impact analysis on the changing demographics and student enrollment increases.
- Report findings of the data and its history to the community.

Goal II Build the foundation for the future by forecasting a three-year financial plan that includes personnel, curriculum, infrastructure, and technology requirements necessary to support continuing enrollment and academic growth.

Recommendations:

- Identify the “cost drivers” of the district’s education budget and establish criteria for projecting actual costs going forward three years. (Examples of cost drivers are: operating expenses, contractual obligations, State and Federal mandates, enrollment, policy, staffing, and curriculum.)
- Review projected costs with projected sources of funding to determine the sustainability of cost drivers in the near term.
- Identify the funding surplus or gap and assess impact on strategic plan. Explore and apply financial targets that “reach, maintain, or contain costs,” to ensure the long-term stability of programs.
- Seek alternative and innovative non-property-tax-based sources of revenue.

Strategic Issue: MANAGEMENT OF FACILITIES

Rationale: To create an effective educational program, it is necessary to provide clean, professional, and secure facilities with the appropriate amount of instructional space to accommodate students and employees of all needs.

Goal I Complete current building initiatives and ensure that buildings are properly appointed with the furnishings and finishes identified in the current school building plan.

Recommendations:

- Identify and assess existing furniture, fixture, and equipment inventory, as well as our Building Initiative’s final tenant finishes/punch list. Address any needed compensations.

Goal II Identify current and future facility enhancements and requirements. Facilities include athletic fields and technological requirements. (Please Note: Cherry Brook Primary School is not part of the current school building project.)

Recommendations:

- Assess and prioritize security needs at each site.
- Assess the Cherry Brook Primary School’s ability to support and accommodate “best practice” for students with special needs.
- Develop a plan to address increasing enrollment.
- Determine the needs and establish priorities for development and maintenance of athletic fields.
- Prepare cost analysis, determine budget impact, and prioritize and expedite identified priorities.

Goal III Determine criteria and establish priorities for maintenance of facilities, including athletic fields and technological requirements, to preserve the community’s investment.

Recommendations:

- Identify facility, field, and technology requirements at each site. Prepare cost analysis and determine budget impact.

Strategic Issue: STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Rationale: Central to the success of any organization or institution is its ability to sustain the support of the constituencies that it serves. It is vital to encourage interactive communication that supports an understanding that the schools serve the entire community.

Attention to stakeholder concerns is essential for the successful formulation and implementation of the goals of the Canton Public Schools. Critical to the success of the schools is the satisfaction of its key stakeholders. That satisfaction depends upon effective communication amongst the broad range of people impacted by those goals. All of Canton's citizens are stakeholders in its public school system.

Goal I Establish, maintain, and expand meaningful communication among students, parents, teachers, administrators and staff, businesses, and community in order to achieve collaboration and trust.

Recommendations:

- Develop an ongoing method of informing stakeholders about the successes and challenges in public education.
- Use focus groups and surveys to gather information and perspectives from students, recent graduates, parents, and members of the community to ensure continuous improvement of the school system.
- Continue to support Quality Councils and PTO's. Consider establishing other advisory-type groups for sharing information and getting feedback.

Goal II Promote cooperation, the sharing of resources, and an understanding of other Board functions and needs by and among the Boards of Education, Finance, and Selectmen.

Recommendations:

- Explore and implement policies and programs for greater sharing and cooperation.
- Assess the effectiveness of current practices and create additional mechanisms or structures for inter-Board communication and cooperation.

Strategic Issue: STATE AND FEDERAL MANDATES

Rationale: When the Board of Education accepts funds from State and Federal agencies, it also accepts the funds' attached provisos, generally defined as mandates. As the number of mandates continue to increase, the ancillary cost of accepting funding with its attached mandates needs to be assessed in order to determine the value of accepting governmental funds for the Canton Public Schools. The Canton Public Schools' derives less than 20% of its funding from State and Federal agencies.

Goal I Catalogue and assess all educational State and Federal Mandates that impact the Canton Public Schools.

Recommendations:

- Investigate any cataloguing already completed by local, State, or Federal governments or other entities.
- Attach a cost to each mandate.
- Prioritize the mandates from a cost and value perspective.
- Communicate the mandates, their value, and their costs to the citizens of Canton and other local governmental boards.

Goal II Lobby State and Federal government officials and agencies, advocating for the mandates considered valuable and contesting mandates detrimental to the district's operation.

Recommendations:

- Identify and establish working relationships with politicians, governmental agencies, and other Boards of Education, and associated organizations for the purpose of resolving the issues of cost and relative value.
- Create a report for State and Federal politicians, governmental agencies, and other organizations to demonstrate that the "one size fits all" mandate theory for public schools does not work.

Goal III Create an environment in which the citizens of Canton can react to legislation.

Recommendations:

- Use the District website to link the Board of Education with its citizens to provide additional opportunities for citizens to communicate with their elected officials regarding legislation that impacts the Canton Public Schools.
- Educate and encourage citizens to take part in lobbying activities that go beyond their elected officials and that occur outside the Canton voting district.
- Encourage citizens to become more proactive by actively reminding them that their voices and actions are important to resolving this issue.

Glossary

Canton Board of Education website – www.cantonschools.org

Five-Year Professional Development Plan – a plan summarizing the activities to be implemented by the school district and individual buildings to address the goals and objectives of instructional and curriculum initiatives. The plan must cover the Continuing Education Units (CEUs) mandated by the State for teacher certification. The district must offer eighteen hours of professional development to certified staff annually.

Permanent Municipal Building Committee – an appointed committee of the Board of Selectman. The committee is charged with oversight responsibility for municipal building projects, assessment of municipal building maintenance, and needs to address Town services. The Permanent Municipal Building Committee is a standing committee, but it may have additional members added to address specific projects, such as a school building project.

Quality Council – a team of eight to eighteen people brought together to address the education needs of a school. The Council is made up of Stakeholders who represent cross constituents who either work in the school or are customers of the district's services. Staff, parents, community members and students, where appropriate, research and develop action plans to address school and district goals and objectives. The Quality Council is a standing committee of the school and may appoint subcommittees and ad hoc committees to address action plans as developed by the school and district.

Rigorous Curriculum – a rigorous curriculum provides students with a solid knowledge base. The material requires students to understand and use complex and challenging content.

School Improvement Plans – a plan that addresses district goals through objectives established by the school staff and/or its Quality Council with action items, timelines, baselines, benchmarks, and responsible parties to carry out the activities. The plan can act as a road map for continuous improvement.

Stakeholder – any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention resources or output or is affected by that output.

Standards – set criteria established by an organization, governing body, or association to be met by individuals in service to, or served by, the group. Various professional organizations have set standards for disciplines like Math or Language Arts. State education agencies set standards for educating students in major disciplines and technology. School districts must align their curriculum to these standards that are often the focus of state standardized assessments, such as the Connecticut Mastery Test. The term "standards-driven curriculum and assessment" refers to the alignment of district curriculum and tests of performance with Local, State, and National standards.

State and Federal Mandates – these statutes regulations govern various policies established by State and local education agencies. Boards of Education and administration must abide by these mandates in governance of the schools. Examples of mandates include special education codified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which set standards that all students will reach levels of proficiency in Math and Language Arts by 2014. This 100% proficiency standard must be attained no matter the challenges faced by the students or the school population regarding educational disability, socioeconomic status, and/or language acquisition. Professional standards are also addressed through the Highly Qualified Teacher requirements of NCLB to assure that teachers who teach students in a specific discipline hold that certification. States must also establish a testing program for students in grades three through ten and include Sciences and Technology in the assessment program. Mandates are often expensive to implement and do not come with full funding to the State or Local level from the federal government or to the local level when mandated by the State.

Strategic Issue – fundamental policy questions or critical challenges that affect student learning or service level, staff, and administration, taxpayers, cost, financing, facilities, leadership, and management.

Strategic School Profiles – a statistical analysis of the district and schools available at the Connecticut State Department of Education website www.csde.state.ct.us
The profile provides demographic data including assessment results, time on task, staffing patterns, and narratives regarding reducing racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic isolation, sustained student achievement, and equitable allocation of district resources.

Adequate Yearly Progress – the suggested standard by the federal government that states must address with local school districts to assure that all students will be able to reach proficient levels in Math and Language Arts by 2014. Districts that do not reach adequate yearly progress benchmarks for students in the general population or in specific subgroups are placed on warning. Failure to make adequate yearly progress can place a school or district on the ‘failing schools’ list. Inability of a school district to move off the failing list may cause the State Department of Education to take over governance of the school, replacing the school administration. Parents have the choice of moving their children out of the failing school to another school in the district that is making adequate yearly progress.