

Our Next Steps

The next steps for our district include the formation of a representative committee—drawn from interested focus group members and district and school staff—to reaffirm the composite mission statement, review and revise the mission objectives, and make recommendations to the school board concerning specific implementation strategies. At this time, their emphasis will also be on restructuring our district's organization to more directly support the school sites where most of the requisite activities must take place.

We will then present the completed plan to the community in a series of town hall meetings prior to final approval by the school board. Part of the planning process will include accountability measures to ensure that progress toward the mission objectives is monitored and reported regularly. A "watchdog" group, pulled from the representative committee, will oversee the plan's implementation from an outside perspective. This kind of community oversight worked well in our district during a recent school construction bond issue; we plan to continue it in our planning effort.

The Leon County School District now believes that using the strategic planning model can help us focus on making our community better, while at the same time providing a framework for specific action planning for improving the school district management. Though it is time-consuming to involve many representative groups, the community support has been heartening. With a clear vision and mission approved by the school board, specific outcomes, and a realistic action plan, we can better deal with our current needs and future opportunities. □

¹Leon County Schools serve over 30,000 students in 37 school sites in a mixed urban and suburban community, with an annual operating budget of more than \$125 million. All schools are fully accredited and have parent/teacher organizations and active school volunteer programs. Partners for Excellence and the B.E.S.T. (Better Education for Our Students Tomorrow)

row) Fund, co-sponsored with the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, provide business/school matches and additional funds for enhancement activities.

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Superintendent, he was the Executive Director of the Center for Career Development, an agency of the Florida Department of Education. **James M. Croteau** is the Executive Director for Planning and Policy for the Leon County Schools. He has worked previously with the district as Deputy Superintendent and Director of Staff Development.

A School Board Member's Perspective

Emily Millett

Everyone can learn. We learn in different ways and at differing rates. Our schools as they are presently structured are probably doing the best job they can, and *it is not enough*. Many of our students are not learning. The public is demanding a change in education, but without direction, and the educational community is hanging on to traditional ways of doing things with fingernails firmly dug in. In looking at the years ahead, we on the school board face a formidable task.

As a veteran board member who has survived numerous restructuring efforts under many names, I did not want to do more of the same. It was my desire to go back to the drawing board and find out what we really want to accomplish. We must have a vision with measurable outcomes and a good evaluation process. Enter strategic planning—Leon County, Florida, style.

Round One: First, we identified some key change agents in our district. Six areas were targeted: school board, superintendent, planning, public relations, technology, and staff development.

Round Two: Our first few meetings with the representative individuals in these positions were chaotic. We brainstormed, jockeyed for position, and each of us thought we had the answer—and it was in his or her area. Eventually, we agreed upon a shared objective: we wanted to make our students and school district more successful, and to do so we must have a long-range vision and indicators to know we were on the right road.

Round Three: Next we looked for a consultant with the knowledge and skill to get us where we wanted to be. A chance meeting with the chair of Florida State University's Educational Systems Department, also a parent in our school system, put us on the right track. He joined our group and recommended Roger Kaufman's strategic planning model. (See p. 4, this issue.) We saw it and we liked it.

Round Four: Discussions with Kaufman about his model led to more chaos. But we survived, with the original model almost intact. Representatives from the schools and the community then proceeded to develop a first draft of a workable vision.

At this point, the planning process has not worked extremely well, but, given the difficulty in creating a climate for change, maybe it has done better than we could reasonably expect. Everyone in the system and many in the community now acknowledge the necessity for a common vision, and many of the original participants want to stay involved.

Individuals who are committed to strategic planning know we have to start with the big picture. It will take time to agree on a definitive vision and to identify outcomes and action plans. Our commitment must be for the long term.

To complicate our problems, Florida is in the midst of a severe financial crisis; cutbacks in funding have already been made, with more expected. Our ability to produce a fiscally sound budget for the next few years depends on our ability to strategically plan for our future. As a board member, I am excited, scared, and optimistic. For learners, I think the best is yet to come.

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