

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR YOUR DISTRICT OR SCHOOL LIBRARY

by Lisa Anderson

In this era of school improvement plans, the school library or those in the district are also being asked to develop a strategy for long-term planning. Sometimes having a long term planning strategy is also a requirement for grant funding. This type of long-term planning will help school media personnel determine where their program is and where it should be headed in the immediate future.

Planning is necessary to determine where you are presently, where you want to go, and how to get there in the near future. At the foundation of strategic planning for a school media center is the school library program and how it engages the school curriculum and student learning.

Other reasons to engage in strategic planning include providing

- accountability,
- a sense of purpose,
- a plan for future considerations,
- help with budget development,
- correlation with the school's mission,
- identification of weaknesses, strengths, and goals,
- and an explanation of your programs.

Those who should be involved in the long-term planning process include individuals, the school district, and groups of schools within a region or district. Involving this many stakeholders takes at least three to six months or more, but is well worth the effort. By involving stakeholders from the beginning, you will gain more buy-in from those who are involved with making and carrying through plans.

There is a difference between a *strategic* versus an *operational* plan. An operational plan is more detailed with specific school goals described on a year-by-year basis and which contains staffing configurations and who will meet them. These result in program objectives and goals statements within a certain time frame. The strategic plan, on the other hand, defines your school library over a longer period of time and tells why, not just what, you are carrying forward a particular set of goals. Both plans provide a way to pinpoint

and describe the major goals you intend to achieve within one to five years and how you will accomplish the task. The school library plan can provide a district-wide program framework. Individual schools' plans can flow from the district-wide strategy with different goals and objectives.

Preliminary steps include securing permission, putting a committee together, determining directions and work to be accomplished, deciding how communication will be conducted, and establishing a timetable. Those involved also need to assess where the program is currently and its effectiveness, what local, state, regional, national documents need to be examined for required inclusions, the service role to all those served, and the impact the school library has on learning and teaching. Vision and mission statements also need to be developed that support the school's mission as well as say who is affected.

The difference between the goals and objectives is that goals are broad statements that tell the desired outcome of the library media program and where it will go over the course of the plan. The goals should flow from the vision and mission statements. The objectives tell the specific steps personnel will take to reach the goals. The action planning process should include an annual update and guide that tells step-by-step how the school library or district is progressing towards its goals/objectives. Evaluation assessments should include questioning the progress made to date, what still needs to be done, and ways to move forward.

You might wish to start with a patron/student/staff survey with questions particular to your school library situation. This will help to determine goals as well as provide feedback as to what patrons are satisfied with and what they would like to have. A needs assessment is also helpful for each school library involved. Leaders of this process can include the school library media specialist, district library coordinator, and assistant superintendent or other administrator at the central office level. The planning committee may include only library personnel or also teachers, parents, library volunteers, technology personnel, students, curriculum supervisors, or department heads. Ideally, those

selected should have knowledge of the school and its library program or be willing to learn it and commit to the process, as well as interest in long-term planning and time to devote to the planning process. It is important that those involved take ownership of the plan through the planning phase and also once it is completed. Planning templates may be obtained from *Strategic Planning for School Library Media Centers* by May Francis Zilonis, et.al. You will need to review and perhaps study the district's technology and any other related plans already in place to determine how your needs will correlate or fit in.

Once you have administered any related surveys and the results, you can begin meeting to develop your Strategic Plan. The first step is to write mission and vision statements if they are not already in place. Once these are completed or reviewed, it is helpful for a leader of the process to develop a working outline of broad categories that are to be included. The planning committee should be provided copies to list their ideas as to what specific goals should be within each of the categories. Plan to meet as often as necessary to establish these. Once your goals are determined, list as step-by-step objectives how they will be accomplished. You may want to include the exact timeframe within the total years of the Plan itself. There are other templates in the previously mentioned book for the total process that are quite helpful. This will also assist in maintaining harmony within the committee throughout the planning process.

If desired, individual and district demographic information along with the most recent standardized test scores can be included with the overall Plan. A description of each school involved in the Strategic Plan can be included. A page for signatures of the committee members, administrators, and school board can be added once the Plan is officially adopted.

The last part of the Strategic or Operational Plan should include a summary stating the time frame for review within the years the Plan is to be in effect. Any goals and objectives not accomplished at the end can be continued and necessary updates made.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Anderson is currently media specialist at Hartford City Middle School and Director of Media Services at Hartford City, Indiana. She has served as media specialist at the elementary level multiple times as well as held other positions at various east central Indiana school corporations in addition to two public libraries for brief periods. She holds a Bachelor degree in Elementary Education with an endorsement in School Library/AV, a Master of Library Science, and a Master in School Administration/Supervision from Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.