

HANCOCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Engaging Our Future

A Vision for Hancock Schools in the 21st Century

Submitted by the Hancock School Visioning Council

July 20, 2009

In September 2008, the Hancock School Board authorized the formation of a special "visioning council". This eleven person council of parents, students, teachers, staff, and school board members, was commissioned to create a fresh new written vision for the Hancock School District. This summary report tells the story of their work.

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Table of Contents

Background.....	1
Visioning Process.....	1
<i>Phase One – Gathering Information</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Phase Two – Creating the Vision.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Adopting the School Vision	2
Appendix	
<i>Hancock Schools Visioning Document.....</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Visioning Council Members</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Building Engaged Schools: Key Information.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Visioning Council Discussion: College Round Table (selected topics).....</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Visioning Council Discussion: Informal Survey of Council Members</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Framework for 21st Century Learning</i>	

Background

In 2008, the Hancock School Strategic Planning Committee, a sub-committee of the School Board, conducted a survey of district leaders seeking to identify perceptions regarding the level of engagement that exists among people within the Hancock School District. Notably, questions on the survey that dealt with support of a school vision received particularly low ratings. As a result, the strategic planning committee took note that there was no common vision for Hancock Schools that all stakeholders (*faculty, staff, parents, students*) could understand, support, and work toward. In their discussions, the planning committee members realized that each person had a different vision for the direction of the school and did not have a common language for measuring progress.

The committee determined that a written vision would provide long-term direction for the school district and serve as a catalyst to moving the district forward with a clear sense of purpose. A common vision, partnered with a mission statement and implementation strategies, would also provide a reference point for both long and short term planning throughout the district. Together, these would give the school district concrete goals for achievement and would empower the School Board and others to measure how well the district is fulfilling the school's vision.

In light of this identified need, the School Board commissioned the formation of a "visioning council" tasked to develop a written vision statement for the school district. This eleven-person council included a healthy cross-section of school faculty & staff, School Board members, students, and parents. The School Board also agreed to contract Philip Drown of Morris, Minnesota, to serve as facilitator and coordinator of the process, though the overall planning direction and monthly agendas were directed by the Visioning Council.

Visioning Process

The visioning council spent ten months engaged in a process of information gathering and discussion. The basic structure of the planning process was designed to keep things moving in a focused direction, while building in flexibility to allow for adjustments in the process as discussion and information needs demanded. The process was broken into two phases:

Phase One - Gather Information: After identifying informational needs at the first meeting, the council went through a process of learning. Between September 2008 and March 2009, the council gathered information on the following:

- *Fundamentals of planning.* The council reviewed the basics of the planning process, including definition of key components: mission, vision, and goals. They also engaged in preliminary discussion of their individual perceptions regarding how a successful school district would look.
- *School curriculum and finances.* The council went through a primer on state and federal requirements for school curricula and academic achievement. In addition, they listened to a "How Schools Are Funded" overview, which identified the numerous funding streams for public schools. Incorporated into this overview was information on how Hancock School's finances are managed.

Engaging Our Future

A Vision for Hancock Schools in the 21st Century

- **Hancock School Foundation.** This presentation included the history of the Foundation, successful projects it has funded that have helped the school, and how it may serve as a resource in the future as the new vision is adopted and implemented.
- **College Round Table.** The council met with representatives from three area colleges for a round table discussion: Alexandria Technical College, St. Cloud State, and the University of Minnesota, Morris. Discussion emphasized the changing face of education in the 21st century and how to best prepare students for diverse life paths.
- **Building Engaged Schools.** This presentation and discussion focused on information and resources from a variety of sources that provided perspective on best practices of the most engaged schools in America and overseas.

Phase one of the planning process enabled the committee to have informed opinions on key issues when it came time for phase two activities, which involved creating a written vision statement.

Phase Two – Creating the Vision: Following phase one, the committee discussed school and community values that would form the foundation of any written vision for the school district. They prioritized these values and identified common themes among them. Uniting these values together with information learned, the council drafted several versions of a vision statement.

While drafting the written vision statement, the visioning council felt it was necessary to broaden their final product to include a mission statement, values statement, and list of strategies.

On June 16, 2009, the Visioning Council approved their final product, a one page "Visioning Document" (see Appendix) that incorporated the essence of the months of learning and discussion. Selected information items which factored into the final document are also included in the appendix. These provide a snapshot of the logic and thinking behind the final product that was produced.

Adopting the School Vision

The visioning council recognized immediately that this new vision must be understood and embraced by the school district and community members if it is to be effective. They discussed the necessary actions that must be taken to ensure the visioning document receives input from district stakeholders in order to be fully accepted and implemented.

To that end, the following schedule of activities was outlined by the committee:

July 2009: Seek preliminary acceptance of the visioning document by the Hancock School Board. The visioning committee will attend the July 20th School Board meeting to present the results of the visioning process and will be available to answer questions.

August 2009: Seek faculty input / acceptance at the August Faculty workshop. This may include brainstorming sessions with the teachers. These sessions may include faculty identifying specific objectives for each of the strategies.

Engaging Our Future

A Vision for Hancock Schools in the 21st Century

August / September 2009: Present the final visioning document to the general public (*specific venue to be determined*). Once all input has been gathered, the council will seek official acceptance / adoption of the visioning document by the Hancock School Board and begin steps to implement.

For further Information

All meetings of the visioning council were documented with detailed notes, which illustrate the progression of the visioning process. These notes will be made available upon request to:

Hancock Public School District
371 Hancock Ave
Hancock, MN 56244-9773
(320) 392-5621

Appendix

Supporting Materials

Hancock Schools Visioning Document

Mission (*Why we exist*)

Hancock Public School exists to develop in all students the skills, knowledge, and passion to be life long learners.

Vision (*Where we want to be*)

Our vision is to see.....

students committed to the learning process through engaged teachers, parents, staff and community...

students who learn and demonstrate 21st Century skills and knowledge.....

students who identify and apply their individual strengths.

We value.....

- Effective and innovative instruction
- Developing and teaching healthy relationships
- Parent and community involvement
- Personal responsibility and accountability
- Honesty and hard work
- Giving back to our community

Strategies (*What we will do to get there*)

- A) Create an environment for students to be committed to the learning process
- B) Incorporate 21st Century skills and knowledge into the curriculum
- C) Create an environment that identifies individual strengths and applications

Visioning Council Members

In Alphabetical Order

Amy Dougherty

Joel Flaten

Ken Feuchtenberger

Jerry Martinson

Sandy Nelson

Harrison Newhouse

Lori Razink

Jason Schaefer

Tim Schaefer

Andrew Steiner

Andrea Wink

Building Engaged Schools

Key Information

Seven Skills Students Desperately Need

from Harvard's Tony Wagner

1. Problem-solving and critical thinking
2. Collaboration across networks and leading by influence
3. Agility and adaptability
4. Initiative and entrepreneurship
5. Effective written and oral communication
6. Accessing and analyzing information
7. Curiosity and imagination

Three "R's" - Recommendations for American Schools

from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Relationships

- Small schools foster an environment in which teachers know their students' emotional, academic and social needs, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, and use their knowledge to tailor instruction
- Small schools of the new millennium would keep standards high, push students to prepare for college, and allow students to progress at speeds appropriate for their strengths and weaknesses

Rigor

- High schools of the new millennium would set expectations for learning that demand a lot from all students and the school.
- High school standards are a mile wide and an inch deep. Because we are not focusing on in-depth study of a topic (i.e. Great Depression) students fail to develop important skills such as writing, research and problem solving
- Research and common sense tell us that we learn best by focusing on fewer topics and grappling with their subtleties

Relevance

- In great schools, students are given the time to explore important topics and apply their learning to new problems in a variety of settings
- The best schools tap into their intimate setting to bring the curriculum to life by developing a focus or organizing principle, that helps teachers and students engage in academic material
- Students in schools of the new millennium will have to demonstrate their learning constantly and in a variety of ways

Building Engaged Schools

Key Information

Characteristics of Schools in Finland

Notes from a variety of articles

Finnish schools are some of the top rated schools in the world. The following are notes from various articles that indicate key characteristics and values represented in these schools.

- Learning is a lifelong process
- Teachers and professionals are revered
- Literacy and numeracy are considered virtues
- Lessons are 90 minutes in length
- Pupils determine weekly lessons with the teacher and their pace
- Learning by doing and community orientation
- Those that are slower or faster than average are given tasks that suit their needs
- The responsibility of educating the children is shared by all (staff) and unnecessary hierarchical structures are avoided among the staff
- Parents' expertise is utilized in workshops and evening school sessions. Parents are always welcomed to the classroom
- Students have chores in the school

Visioning Council Discussions

College Round Table (selected topics)

Where should schools focus their energy and resources to help students be successful in post secondary education? If you could reinvent a high school, what would that high school do?

Overall, the emphasis toward education should be wholistic. Student success in college and in life is encouraged when local schools have and emphasize the following foundation stones:

- Basics (reading, writing, math)
- Basic reasoning and problem solving skills
- Learning to learn
- Communication (oral and written)
- Cross-curricular learning (it's OK for a math class to incorporate a written paper assignment, or for a literature class to incorporate logical thinking processes as a learning exercise)
- Students challenging themselves and leaving their comfort zone (a student who gets a few lower grades in tougher, higher level courses may impress a college more than a student with high GPA in lower level courses).
- Student persistence (a student with dozens of activities and extra-curriculars on their resume is not as impressive as one who sticks with a few, develops deeper skill, and contributes meaningfully)
- A high school with a cohesive vision and culture of where they want to go. (Schools that struggle tend to have "arrows going in all directions". This culture permeates the school atmosphere and trickles down to the students.)
- Teaching Citizenship
- Engaging parents in the process
- Relationship development and management
- Identification of individual interests and talents of students and helping them turn those interests into productive outlets

What life skills do you see incoming students lacking?

- Dealing with stress and pressure (coping with social aspects, technology, information, academics, etc.). Maybe this is not a responsibility of a school district – it is rooted in families – but it is a noticeable deficit.
- Ability to access reliable resources and information rather than just receiving input from peers
- Sense of accountability for individual choices and actions
- The ability to gracefully disagree with someone (especially an authority) or effectively manage interpersonal conflict

Visioning Council Discussions

Survey of Visioning Council

The following are the results of an informal survey given to the members of the visioning council during the April 2009 meeting. Bolded questions indicate the lowest scoring results that were considered important to address in the school vision.

The survey was taken from the book *Building Engaged Schools: Getting the Most Out of America's Classrooms* by Gary Gordon.

Question	Rating
1. Finding the right person for each position is a top priority	8/9
2. This school hires teachers and principals with the knowledge, skills, and talents for their jobs	5/9
3. It is a point of distinction to be selected for a job in this school district	3/9
4. The community has high regard for the teachers in this school	8/10
5. Teachers and principals talk about students' talents	4/10
6. Teachers and the principle focus on building strengths	5/10
7. Students are encouraged to explore their talents	2/10
8. Teachers use a common language to describe talents	1/10
9. This school is managed well; things work	8/10
10. The principal talks often about the vision for this school	2/10
11. I believe in the vision for this school	5/10
12. I have an emotional commitment to what is being done in this school	10/10
13. The school's environment is positive and supportive of students and teachers	8/10
14. The principle and teachers work together to create a productive work environment in this school	7/10
15. Teachers and parents work together for student success in this school	8/10
16. This school's teachers and support staff are appreciated by the community	9/10
17. Students are committed to learning in this school	0/10
18. Students understand a reason for doing the work in their classes	3/10
19. Students believe that teachers care about them in this school	4/10
20. Students feel safe in this school	8/10

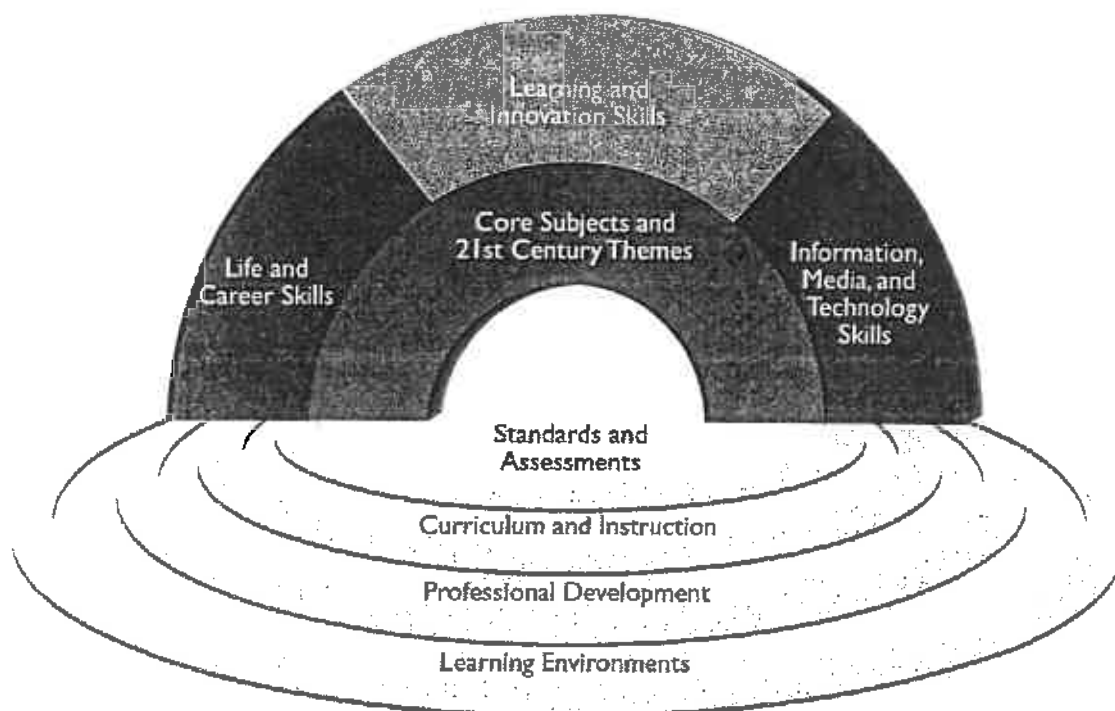


Partnership for 21st Century Skills

Framework for 21st Century Learning

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed a vision for 21st century student success in the new global economy.

214 Student Outcomes and Support Systems



21ST CENTURY STUDENT OUTCOMES

The elements described in this section as “21st century student outcomes” (represented by the rainbow) are the skills, knowledge and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21st century.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has developed a unified, collective vision for 21st century learning that will strengthen American education. The Partnership created the Framework for 21st Century Learning, which describes the skills, knowledge and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life. Only when a school or district combines the Framework with 21st century professional development, assessments and standards, can the American public be sure that high school graduates are prepared to thrive in today's global economy.

21st century skills represent the necessary student outcomes for the 21st century, i.e. students need to obtain Learning and Innovation Skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, etc.), Information, Media and Technology Skills, Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes (global awareness, financial literacy, etc.) and Life and Career Skills (initiative and self-direction, among others) – the colored parts of the rainbow.

Core Subjects and 21st Century Themes

Mastery of core subjects and 21st century themes is essential for students in the 21st century. Core subjects include English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government and civics.

We believe schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects:

- Global Awareness
- Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- Civic Literacy
- Health Literacy

Learning and Innovation Skills

Learning and innovation skills are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in the 21st century and those who are not. They include:

- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Communication and Collaboration

Information, Media and Technology Skills

People in the 21st century live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by access to an abundance of information, rapid changes in technology tools and the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills, such as:

- Information Literacy
- Media Literacy
- ICT (Information, Communications and Technology) Literacy

Life and Career Skills

Today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skills, such as:

- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- Productivity and Accountability
- Leadership and Responsibility

21ST CENTURY SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Developing a comprehensive framework for 21st century learning requires more than identifying specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies. An innovative support system must be created to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century. The Partnership has identified five critical support systems that ensure student mastery of 21st century skills:

- 21st Century Standards
- Assessments of 21st Century Skills
- 21st Century Curriculum and Instruction
- 21st Century Professional Development
- 21st Century Learning Environments

Member Organizations

- Adobe System, Inc.
- American Association of School Librarians
- Apple
- ASCD
- Atomic Learning
- Blackboard, Inc.
- Cable in the Classroom
- Cisco Systems Inc.
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- Dell, Inc.
- EF Education
- Education Networks of America
- Educational Testing Service
- Ford Motor Company Fund
- Gale, Cengage Learning
- Hewlett Packard
- Intel Corporation
- JAWorldwide®
- K12
- KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- Learning.com
- Learning Point Associates
- LEGO Group
- Lenovo
- McGraw-Hill
- Measured Progress
- Microsoft Corporation
- National Education Association
- Oracle Education Foundation
- Pearson
- PolyVision
- Querasan!
- Scholastic Education
- Sesame Workshop
- Sun Microsystems, Inc.
- THINKronize
- Verizon
- Wireless Generation

For more information, visit the Partnership's website at www.21stcenturyskills.org.



PARTNERSHIP FOR
21ST CENTURY SKILLS