



# **LITERATURE SYNTHESIS OF BEST PRACTICES IN STRATEGIC PLANNING**

**Scarsdale Union Free School District**

**Presented to  
The Scarsdale Board of Education**

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## PURPOSE

As an educational organization embarks on a strategic planning process, one critical preliminary step is the study, analysis, and synthesis of the various views and research of strategic planning literature. This literature review of best practices in educational strategic planning offers information from a variety of sources and fields of study, both in and out of educational settings. Ultimately, a strategic planning process allows an organization to develop a vision, focus its work, establish goals, and define a set of measurable outcomes. The purpose of this literature review is to ensure that Scarsdale Public Schools uses current research and best practices to develop a strategic planning methodology to address our District's unique needs while connecting values to the District's vision of the future.

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of scholarly literature available on the topic of K–12 strategic planning begins in the early 1990s and spans the next twenty years to the present. Dolence (2004) offers an historical account of general strategic planning beginning during the Industrial Revolution with Taylor's (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Later, the Harvard Policy Model (described by Mintzberg, 1994, 36) introduced the SWOT analysis—an assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—which is still in use today. Following World War II, Ansoff began to develop a sophisticated model for strategic planning which he later described in his 1968 book, *Corporate Strategy*.

Dolence (2004) reports that contemporary models of strategic planning were “simplified and further popularized by George A. Steiner in his 1969 book *Strategic Planning: What Every Manager Must Know*. Michael E. Porter turned the focus of strategic planning to the five forces of competitiveness in the 1980s.” Mintzberg authored a critical review of strategic planning methods still cited today in his 1994 book *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. Despite Mintzberg's purported “rise and fall,” strategic planning remains a widely practiced process in educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and the business sector.

During the research and analysis of this collection of writings, four broad topics emerged that serve to organize this literature review. The writings fall into the following four categories:

- Descriptions and Definitions of Strategic Planning
- Strategic Planning Models
- Lessons Learned during Strategic Planning
- Strategic Planning Effectiveness

## DESCRIPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

Much of the literature about the study of strategic planning includes descriptions by researchers about the strategic planning process. In some cases, authors offer their own philosophical views, while in other cases authors describe a process they have observed. As a part of their study, Hambright and Diamantes (2004) collect definitions of strategic planning. Other researchers

offer characteristics and methodologies for strategic planning. Peterson (1989) provides a description of strategic planning based upon several K–12 models.

Brandt (1994) discusses the types of strategies used in educational settings: teaching strategies, learning strategies, and strategic planning. He offers a definition of “strategic” as “examining alternatives and thoughtfully choosing a course of action most likely to achieve your objectives” (p. 3). Hambright and Diamantes (2004) collect the definitions of strategic planning from several researchers:

“...a process that is designed to move an educational organization through the steps of understanding changes in the external environment, assessing the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, developing a vision of the desired future for the organization and some ways to achieve that mission, developing specific plans to get the organization where it is to where it wants to be, implementing these plans and monitoring that implementation so that necessary changes or modifications can be made” (Brown & Marshall, 1987).

“...a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and why it does it. To deliver the best results, strategic planning requires broad yet effective information gathering, development and exploration of strategic alternatives, and an emphasis on future implications of present decisions” (Bryson, 1995).

“...a process deliberately designed to help leaders conceive of the kind of institution they would like to create to serve their students” (Caweiti, 1987).

“...the means by which an organization continually re-creates itself toward extraordinary purpose” (Cook, 1995).

“...the method by which an organization identifies relevant trends in its environment, analyzes their potential implications, and projects an integrated strategy to address these future events and their contingencies” (Cooper, 1985).

“...a community-based and on-going process of imagining a preferred future and then developing the strategic and operational actions required to make that future a reality” (Cordell & Waters, 1993).

“...in its most powerful form [strategic planning] starts with society as the primary client and beneficiary and then rolls-down from that to identify what any organization commits to deliver. This approach assures the linkages among what organizations use, do, produce, and deliver, and external consequences” (Kaufman, 1996).

“...a process for organizational renewal and transformation...[which] provides a framework for improvement and restructuring of programs, management, collaborations, and evaluation of the organization’s progress” (McCune, 1986).

“By using information about emerging trends and developments gleaned through a process of environmental scanning, the [strategic planning process]...allows district planners to anticipate plausible alternative futures from which to derive appropriate strategic goals” (Mecca & Adams, 1991).

“[Strategic planning’s] purpose is to move the organization from being a pawn to changing events to being a proactive participant, making decisions about and acting to create its own future. It requires organizational flexibility to adapt and revise as conditions change, and a willingness to move beyond obsolete paradigms” (Romney, 1996).

“...a series of planned steps to move a school district from its current state to a desired future state” (Strategic Planning Roundtable, 1993).

“...a process that draws together the thinking of the community and gives stakeholders an opportunity to articulate their hopes for the future of the school, address issues that need attention, and come to agreement on priorities” (Wincek & O’Malley, 1997).

Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones (2005) offer an extended definition of strategic planning that includes many similarities to the definitions above:

“A strategic plan establishes a vision, mission, and beliefs for the school district; the plan establishes the path to accomplish its desired future; the plan provides for a path which allows the community to work together to accomplish these goals, objectives, and activities that constitute the strategic plan; it allows for an understanding of how a school district works, how finances are spent, and identifies the needs of the school district; and allows the school district to set specific data-driven priorities” (p. 198).

Valentine (1991) offers a list of general characteristics inherent in strategic planning. She believes that strategic planning:

- Assumes an open system in which organizations are dynamic and constantly changing as they integrate information from shifting environmental factors.
- Focuses on the process.
- Is rational because it incorporates the reality of the irrational.
- Focuses on the external environment, on qualitative information and intuitive decisions regarding resource commitments, and on integrated, participatory involvement.
- Uses current and future trends to make current, not future, decisions.
- Emphasizes creativity, innovativeness, and intuition—the art of planning, management, and decision making.
- Asks what decision is appropriate today based on a projection of critical external variables five years from now.

As part of their study, Hambricht and Diamantes (2004) determine the characteristics that distinguish educational strategic planning from other planning approaches. They found that

educational strategic planning is conducted as a “grass roots” effort by a variety of stakeholders that tend to embrace participatory management. Clay, Lake, and Tremain (1989) found that when implementing a strategic plan, administration maintains responsibility for overall direction, while the planning team includes a broad representation of stakeholder groups involved in realizing the vision.

During the formulation of a strategic plan, Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones (2005) believe that the strategic planning process requires a qualitative methodology to gain a more complete understanding of the behavior and feelings of the stakeholders involved. They also suggest using multi-method data collection including observation, document collection, and informal interviewing.

Peterson (1989) reports that Cook (1988) believes that an effective strategic plan considers an organization’s resources and purpose and leads to “mutually predetermined measurable outcomes.” The plan should be comprehensive, but not long or complex, with a focus on anticipating future trends, such as demographics, finances, curricular needs, staffing, and technology. A strategic plan begins with a mission statement that summarizes the organization’s purpose, operations, and aims for accomplishment. Cooper (1985) recommends beginning with the identification of major trends affecting the school district. Cook (1988) believes that the best strategic plans are based upon the “collective intuition of the planning team” rather than solely relying on quantitative data.

The initial planning stages, according to Hart (1988), should be comprised of several small groups. Cook (1988) recommends that the overall planning team should consist of one-third to one-half administrators. Johnson (1989) offers an example breakdown of a twenty-five member strategic planning team: two school Board members, the superintendent, six district-level administrators, nine parents, two teachers, two principals, one support staff, one teacher association president, and one community advisory group president.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING MODELS**

Many models for strategic planning can be found in the literature and some authors and researchers have offered analyses of the various processes available at any given time in history. Certain terminology appears throughout the body of strategic planning literature. In the best cases, authors have defined their terminology in the context of their planning processes, but in other cases terms are left for the planners to interpret. The purpose of this section is to present a variety of strategic planning methods that may be useful in the formulation of an educational strategic plan.

The idea of “environmental scanning” is used by several authors across the strategic planning field of study. Poole (1991) defines environmental scanning as “gathering information about the social, economic, political, and technological environment in which the school system operates.” The author cites two primary questions schools must answer that pertain to environmental scanning:

1. How does environmental scanning differ from what we are doing now?
2. How can a school system develop or expand environmental scanning without large expenditures of time, money, and personnel?

Poole believes that environmental scanning differs from other forms of data collection in four ways:

1. Anticipates the future rather than describes the past.
2. Assumes that major impacts on a school system may come from unexpected sources.
3. Focuses on the interaction of events and trends.
4. Integrates into the entire strategic planning process and occurs continuously.

Poole concludes by stating that through the use of environmental scanning, stakeholders in a school district become “more aware of external issues” and “the district can make greater and more regular use of the resulting insights” (p. 41).

Written from a context of homeowner associations, the Foundation for Community Association Research (2001) provides several strategic planning models useful for a variety of organizations. The report states that strategic planning models originate from two primary sources: a business model derived from hierarchical, top-down control, and a community planning model that is built upon bottom-up consensus building.

The Foundation for Community Association Research reports that Barry (1994) created a strategic planning model for non-profit organizations that works well for smaller groups with all stakeholders represented. This non-profit organization strategic planning process includes recruiting all stakeholders; reviewing an organization’s history; reviewing, revising, or developing a mission statement; identifying an organization’s opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses; setting goals and selecting strategies to empower leadership; reviewing the plan; and revising goals as appropriate.

The Foundation for Community Association Research outlines the Applied Strategic Planning Approach by Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer (1993). This model is a problem-solving approach that is quantitative, top-down, and forward-looking. The process includes identifying “players;” garnering the support of leadership and stakeholders; scanning values, philosophy, and culture; defining or redefining a mission statement; identifying new opportunities; auditing threats, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses; identifying gaps between present and future needs; identifying strategies to close the gaps; implementing the strategies; and monitoring and restarting the cycle as appropriate.

The Foundation for Community Association Research outlines a narrow strategic planning approach devoted to economic development by the International City/County Management Association. The process involves identifying and evaluating several elements including: community conditions, resources, business activities, agencies, and programs. The plan then calls to develop and describe multiple future visions, goals, objectives, and resources. The process

recycles itself as it monitors, reports, updates, reallocates, and restarts with new environmental scans.

The Foundation for Community Association Research advocates the use of their three components of strategic planning: Development, Execution, and Review. Development includes an assessment of history and accomplishments; a determination of current status; an evaluation of governance structure; the development of a mission statement; the determination of operating values; administration of a needs assessment; an assessment of critical issues through a SWOT analysis; the definition of key player roles; the communication of the plan; a commitment to listening and note taking; the development and prioritization of long-range goals, short-term goals, and action plans; and progress monitoring. Execution involves the development of programs, procedures, and budgets to implement the plan that was developed in the first phase. The Review should be scheduled in advance and its effectiveness based upon the meeting of the community's identified goals.

In the educational realm, Blum and Kneidek (1991) outline a process called "Creating the Future" (CTF) that involves classroom teachers, students, school administrators, classified personnel, school Board members, local merchants, central office administrators, and community representatives with the singular purpose of improving student outcomes. The CTF process uses the tenets of productivity and achievement to focus on student performance by setting values, vision, and a mission; District-level planning, priorities, direction, and action planning; a spirit of collegial action; local data to set ongoing improvement; and research. In this model, schools are accountable for their results while districts provide expectations, support, and monitoring. Student learning goals are central to all improvement efforts over a two-year period during which ten to fifteen leadership group members guide buildings to establish values, beliefs, vision, and student learning goals. The initial CTF process takes three years and then the process is "renewed, revised, reviewed, and strengthened." Blum and Kneidek also report that frequent two-way communication is essential to this process and that the level of communication required is time consuming.

The Center for Strategic Planning (2001) asserts that education strategic planning efforts generally do not vary in terms of content and components, but the strategic planning process will vary widely among schools. The core elements offered by the Center for Strategic Planning include:

1. Vision statement that presents a desired future state in words.
2. Mission statement congruent with the vision that identifies purpose.
3. Core values that articulate the motivation of the community.
4. Statement of critical issues.
5. Goals that "close the gap between the institution's current state and its future vision."
6. Strategies to achieve each goal.
7. Objectives for each strategy.
8. Measurable indicators of success.

The process continues to define the five steps of this model:

1. Define, research, and assess current status.
2. Create a shared vision and overarching goals.
3. Build the institutional strategic plan.
4. Launch the strategic plan.
5. Begin implementation.

Dolence (2004) describes his Curriculum-Centered Strategic Planning Model as a method of planning that can integrate program review with overall institutional planning in a continuous review and evaluation cycle. The plan is designed for higher education and includes five primary activities:

1. Identify and define key performance indicators. These measures can originate from governmental policy or local measures (enrollment, budget, learning outcomes, etc.).
2. Design a learner-centered curriculum framework that provides a structure for curriculum design, development, and deployment focused on the learner.
3. Conduct an external environmental scan through a SWOT analysis.
4. Conduct continuous self-study with a focus on performance.
5. Develop an action plan process and implement the plan. Action plans can include plans such as a technology plan, financial plan, marketing plan, assessment plan, etc.

Kaufman and Herman (1991) advocate a strategic planning model that operates on a “Mega-level” scale that seeks to define a vision that will improve society as a whole, rather than focusing on current district or school issues such as courses, content, and resources. They believe that their plan is proactive (rather than reactive) and benefits three societal groups: the community/society in which graduates will live and work, the educational system, and individuals.

Kaufman and Herman (1991) propose a three-part holistic process using the steps of scoping; data collecting; planning; and implementation and evaluation. Scoping involves selecting a “Mega-level” scope over the less- encompassing “Macro-level” and “Micro-level” scopes. Data collection includes defining an ideal vision (regardless of practicality); stating educational and life philosophies including beliefs, values, and wishes; identifying missions and writing them as measurable results; and identifying needs in terms of an analysis of gaps between current and ideal status. Planning involves identifying “matches and mismatches among the vision, beliefs, needs, and current mission;” selecting long- and short- term missions; prioritizing strategic objectives with measurable criteria; developing action plans based upon a SWOT analysis; and finally setting milestones for monitoring implementation. The final implementation and evaluation stage is comprised of designing the response, implementing the plan, conducting formative evaluations, and revising the implementation as necessary.

Mittenthal (2003) offers ten “keys” for successful strategic planning for non-profit organizations:

1. Provide a clear and comprehensive grasp of external opportunities and challenges.



2. Offer a realistic and comprehensive assessment of the organization's strengths and limitations.
3. Use an inclusive approach that, at a minimum, includes staff, current and incoming Board members, clients, funders, and partner organizations.
4. Assign core work to an empowered planning committee with sufficient decision-making authority.
5. Involve the senior leadership.
6. Share responsibility among Board and staff members.
7. Learn from best practices.
8. Develop clear priorities and an implementation plan.
9. Proceed with patience.
10. Foster a commitment to change.

In addition, Mittenenthal advocates that strategic plans must include a vision statement. "A strategic plan cannot succeed unless it is derived from a clear vision of what the organization will look like at a specific point in the future. This vision is encapsulated in a written description of the organization's desired future state in terms of budget size, client base, staffing levels and program areas and other parameters."

Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones (2005) describe twenty detailed steps to create a five-year strategic plan:

1. Plan to plan by identifying the resources, purposes, and political environment of the school district.
2. Gain and sustain commitment of all stakeholders.
3. Explain to the school district the nature of the planning.
4. Define strategic planning for the school district.
5. Present the implications of strategic planning.
6. Explain how a strategic plan will benefit the school district.
7. State the questions that strategic planning will answer.
8. Explain the meaning of strategic planning terms.
9. Explain "Internal and External scanning." Internal scanning examines the current state of affairs within the organization (i.e., written assessment of personnel, costs, operations, and processes, etc.). External scanning examines the current state of affairs regarding things outside of the organization (i.e., laws, mandates, funding, community attitudes, demographics, etc.).
10. Establish strategic direction.
11. Conduct a SWOT analysis.
12. Develop planning areas.
13. Explain the term "Goals" to stakeholders.
14. Create "SMART" goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-Bound.
15. Create activities to accomplish goals.
16. Develop timelines.
17. Determine fiscal considerations.

18. Conduct Internal scanning.
19. Conduct External scanning.
20. Finally, during implementation, the strategic plan should be drafted, vetted by stakeholder groups, and revised as necessary. When the document is approved, it should be publicized and presented to the school Board and, pending approval, the community-at-large.

Williams (1993) devotes the first part of a two-part series to introducing his construct of an outcome-based strategic plan. An outcome-based plan is based on “the good it does an organization” and differs from traditional strategic plans that focus on product and process. Williams begins by posing four fundamental choices an organization must decide before planning: plan structural or non-structural change; work with existing people or hire new people; engage in short- or long-term planning; and decide if planning is remedial or strength-driven.

Williams describes his process beginning with the creation of an outcome- based plan he calls “The Charter.” The Charter begins with an environmental scan that involves collecting data about the operations of an organization and then formulating a vision that suggests a gap in the way things are now and the way they should be. Next, The Charter defines an organization’s primary activities in terms of what you are, what you do, and/or what you achieve. Williams specifies the importance of setting targets, by stating “Outcome-based strategic planning suggests that by having targets to hold constant, organizations are more encouraged to change their activity, and yes, their strategy.” Finally, The Charter defines an organization’s sustained Key Beliefs.

Williams then prescribes a four-part framework for conducting an environmental scan. First, identify patterns and “surprises” in the categories of customers and results; finances; and culture and management. “Surprise” findings should be documented with as much description as possible. Second, identify environmental shifts in the areas of demographics and socio-economics; technology; public policy; market and customer disposition; and problems. Third, an organization should identify competing or comparable organizations. Finally, the environmental scan should result in creating benchmarks for the purpose of analyzing effectiveness.

Williams (1994) devotes the second part of his two-part series to identifying the purpose of a strategic plan. He believes that “plans that are driven by the need to achieve specific performance targets will invariably do better than plans oriented to aspirations, goals, values and other good deeds.”

Williams asserts that the point of developing strategies is to provide insight and that “labored wordsmithing” does not enhance strategies. Effective strategies provide the connection between aspirations and actions, allow organizations to use time to advantage, connect to performance targets, and exclude by giving organizations the permission to stop doing something. The two main types of strategies involve Looking In—“a focus on what the organization can do better or differently in its own operations”—and Looking Out—a focus on the external elements of customers, products, and the customer/ product connection. Williams concludes by stating that

“Strategic planning is not about writing an ideal document called a strategic plan. It is about shaping and crafting strategies that achieve intended results.”

Hambright and Diamantes (2004) conclude that “From the review of the literature, we feel that there exists no common conceptual framework for K–12 educational strategic planning. Each planning model exhibits its own particular components and terminologies” (p. 237).

## **LESSONS LEARNED DURING STRATEGIC PLANNING**

Chiarelott, Reed, and Russell (1991); Kaufman and Herman (1991); Williams (1994); and Nebgen (1991) offer their views regarding possible problems when creating or implementing strategic plans. Chiarelott, Reed, and Russell (1991) report very specific issues they encountered along with their possible solutions so others might learn from their mistakes. Kaufman and Herman (1991) and Williams (1994) offer some general strategic planning issues and possible points of contention specific to their own processes. Nebgen (1991) reports on the positive and negative communication issues experienced by her district when designing, implementing, and sustaining the district’s strategic plan.

Chiarelott, Reed, and Russell (1991) report three lessons they learned “the hard way” when engaging in strategic planning for their institution. Lesson one, “Watch Your Language,” cautions against using corporate metaphors and business language to attempt to describe the goals of an educational institution. “Images of profit and loss, quantitative measures of success, and mechanistic performance directed toward the creation of a specific product prevented many faculty members from even considering the plan itself” (p. 37). They instead advise education strategic planners to consider other metaphorical models to frame language for strategic plans. Lesson two, “Anticipate Undesirable Side Effects,” describes the complicated and multi-layered structure of various groups in their organization while drafting components of their plan to attempt to include individuals and groups in the planning. Chiarelott, Reed, and Russell believe that this inclusion made them trade “substance and credibility for consensus” (p. 38). They instead advocate an approach in which their administration is more involved with creating the plan. Lesson three, “Create a Need to Know,” describes how their decision making process included many groups focusing on narrow perspectives, rather than a single group considering a wider perspective that stemmed from “identification and evaluation of important trends and issues” (Cooper, 1985). To overcome this issue, they suggest that organizations educate as many constituencies as possible and use a variety of forecasting and analytical tools to identify and evaluate issues.

Kaufman and Herman (1991) outline seven possible mistakes that might be encountered in planning. These possible problem areas include:

1. Planning at “Micro-” or “Macro-” levels instead of the “Mega-” level.
2. Preparing objectives as a means rather than results.
3. Developing a plan without representative partners.
4. Selecting solutions before identifying destinations.
5. Setting objectives based upon perceptions rather than realities.
6. Skipping strategic planning steps.

7. Assuming that all strategic planning approaches are the same and/or based on common sense or intuition.

Williams (1994) offers seven signs of trouble in the strategic planning process:

1. The organization waits to implement anything until the full plan is completed.
2. A consultant is hired to write the plan.
3. The plan is developed piecemeal by separate groups.
4. Planners and leaders are far more enthusiastic about the plan than others.
5. Most people in the organization can't think of anything to do differently as a result of the plan.
6. New resources or structural changes are required to carry out key elements of the plan.
7. The plan is developed separately by separate groups.

Nebgen (1991) provides a description of the importance of communication in the strategic planning process. Following strategic planning methods described by Cook (1990), Nebgen reports that explanations of the process were provided to the following groups in the learning community: district administration team, school staff, parents, school Board, PTA Executive Council, PTA memberships, and the local media (radio and newspaper). Some groups received inadequate communication that resulted in later problems, including the various Unions connected with the district, the local business community, and citizens without children in school. She recommends soliciting community groups when selecting planning team members.

For Nebgen's school district, the primary communication of the strategic plan began with planning team members personally communicating initial belief statements to schools, service clubs, business groups, the school Board, retired teachers, and other willing community groups. Continuing progress of action teams was reported through staff bulletins, school Board presentations, school parent newsletters, and in-district meetings. To address the need for more frequent communication during the implementation process, Nebgen reports that each individual Action Plan is subject to a quarterly review published in a staff bulletin. The community receives implementation communication through an Annual Report, a staff newsletter, and a community newsletter. The communication is ongoing as the plan is revised.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFECTIVENESS**

Since Mintzberg's (1994) *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, various opinions regarding the perceived effectiveness of strategic planning efforts in education and other settings have been offered by a variety of authors and researchers. For example, Hambright and Diamantes (2004) present a balanced approach to the topic, while authors such as Schmoker (2004) go out of their way to criticize all aspects of educational strategic planning and educational reform in general. This report presents pro-, anti-, and neutral views of strategic planning.

Hambright and Diamantes (2004) found that the literature tends to focus on negative aspects of strategic planning while not necessarily substantiating positive outcomes of effective strategic plans. The Strategic Planning Roundtable (1993) warned that "strategic planning models tend to

be weak in provisions for evaluating the implementation of plans” (p. 4). Bryson and Alston (1996) and Valentine (1991) cite inadequate funding of strategic planning initiatives as a problem. Bryson (1995), Bryson and Alston (1996), and Romney (1996), warn that if there is no internal commitment to a strategic plan, the process will amount to “a waste of time and energy” (Romney, 1996, 17). Bryson (1995) and the Strategic Planning Roundtable (1993) caution that over-reliance on a strategic plan can lead to inflexibility in an organization.

Schmoker (2004) provides an extended, unabashed, and research- supported case against large-scale strategic planning efforts concluding that strategic plans ultimately provide no improvement for districts that undertake the process. Instead, Schmoker believes that district and school improvement comes from short-term and targeted efforts by individual teachers engaging in activities that improve teaching practice.

Schmoker describes the strategic planning process as an “abundance of goals, action steps, and objectives...transferred into fat, published plans, replete with columns and boxes for each term and category” that lead to “committing to far more activities and initiatives than anyone could possibly monitor, much less successfully implement.” Schmoker proposes that typical strategic plans use such terms as “goals,” “action steps,” “objectives,” “evaluation,” and “results” interchangeably and that plans identify an impossible number of these to complete.

Schmoker offers a litany of authors and researchers who agree with his notion that strategic planning does not work. Fullan (1996) states, “we still do not know how to achieve comprehensive reform on a wide scale.” Kouzes and Posner (1995) conclude that “strategic planning doesn’t work” and that strategic planning “separates thought from action.” Hamel (in Reeves, 2002) describes planning meetings as “semi-sacramental” while Reeves (2002) believes that “some of the strategies are just plain bad.” Mintzberg (1994) reveals the findings of his meta-analysis in his report’s title: *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*.

Schmoker (2004) believes that short-term, rather than annual or multi-year plans, provide the best model for improving core processes. “It is all about short- term team wins, followed by fairly systematic recognition and celebration of each tangible breakthrough.” Schmoker, along with Mintzberg (1994), believes that strategic planning is destructive because it discourages creativity, reduces enthusiasm, and lowers morale.

Schmoker turns to Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) who quote Judith Warren Little’s research: “school improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice...adequate to the complexities of teaching, capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtue from another.” In addition, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) offer a list from Little of solutions to pursue in place of strategic planning. They advocate:

- Higher-quality solutions to instructional problems.
- Increased confidence among faculty.
- Increased ability to support one another’s strengths and to accommodate weaknesses.
- More systematic assistance to beginning teachers.

- The ability to examine an expanded pool of ideas, methods, and materials.

Jasparro (2006) conducted a literature review and interviewed eight superintendents in urban and suburban districts to create a set of recommendations for effectively using strategic planning in schools. All participants in this study felt strategic planning was worth the effort and agreed that the process improved communication between school and community, provided school Board direction, aligned other processes to the district strategic plan, created a staff willingness for school improvement priorities, established goal priority among staff, and aligned the budget process to strategic plan goals and objectives. The superintendents also reported specific improvements, including higher scores on standardized achievement tests, curriculum planning initiative improvements, professional development planning improvements, better use of technology integration by teachers, better communication in and out of the district, development of benchmark assessments, and improved curriculum alignment. Finally, Jasparro offers five recommendations from his study: communicate a clear purpose for strategic planning, establish commitment among key stakeholder groups, build capacity for designing and implementing the plan, hire a neutral outside facilitator to create the plan, and use the plan.

## CONCLUSIONS

This literature review has focused on various descriptions and definitions of strategic planning, strategic planning models, lessons learned during strategic planning, and strategic planning effectiveness from the perspectives of researchers and authors working in the fields of education, non-profit, and business. Several common threads were observed among the various sources, each contributing to a set of recommendations for strategic planning presented here. These conclusions include a succinct working definition of an educational strategic plan, a description of the involvement of a wide stakeholder group, a discussion about data gathering processes, and set of suggestions regarding the overall process.

Based upon the many descriptions offered of strategic planning (using the definition provided by Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones, 2005, as a starting point), the following working definition is offered for an educational strategic plan:

*A school district strategic plan establishes a path to accomplish a district's desired future through vision, mission, and core values. The process allows the district to define and understand its curriculum, instruction, assessment, finances, and other needs. The plan defines specific priorities and allows the district to work together to establish and accomplish goals, objectives, and activities.*

In the strategic planning literature, the term “stakeholders” is often used in discussions regarding involvement in the planning process. For example, Clay, Lake, and Tremain (1989) advise that administration maintains responsibility for overall direction of a strategic plan, while the planning team includes a broad representation of stakeholder groups. Mittenenthal (2003) also believes that the plan should involve the senior leadership in a shared responsibility among Board and staff members. Blum and Kneidek (1991) offer a stakeholder list including classroom teachers, students, school administrators, classified personnel, school Board members, local

merchants, central office administrators, and community representatives with the singular purpose of improving student outcomes. In short, every school district stakeholder should have an opportunity for input in a strategic plan with the administration team providing primary leadership during the implementation.

Data gathering processes are integral in the development of a strategic plan. The environmental scanning process is one often-used data collection method, defined by Poole (1991) as “gathering information about the social, economic, political, and technological environment in which the school system operates.” This process allows a district to gather the necessary information to define vision, mission, and core values. Poole also recommends that a district anticipates the future rather than describes the past, assumes that major impacts on a school system may come from unexpected sources, and focuses on the interaction of events and trends in an integrated and continuous process. Further, Dolence (2004) recommends that a district identify and define key performance indicators, design a learner-centered curriculum framework, and conduct environmental scanning with a focus on performance through the development of multiple action plans.

Following the recommendations of Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones (2005), the strategic planning process should use multi-method data collection using a qualitative methodology. This type of data can be collected from small groups through surveys and focus groups.

While the strategic planning process proceeds with fidelity and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, authors and researchers offer suggestions regarding the process itself. Mittenthal (2003) believes districts should learn from best practices, proceed with patience, and foster a commitment to change. Williams (1994) believes that effective strategies provide the connection between aspirations and actions allowing organizations to use time to advantage to connect to performance targets. Further, a strategic plan should lead to conclusions that give organizations the permission to stop doing things that do not relate to the future plans of the organization. The final document, as recommended by Cook (1988) should be comprehensive, but not long or complex, with a focus on anticipating future trends.

Williams (1994) offers some compelling closing words that underscore the notion that the benefits of strategic planning are not about the printed words, but about the action that an effective plan inspires and initiates:

*“Strategic planning is not about writing an ideal document called a strategic plan. It is about shaping and crafting strategies that achieve intended results... strategy, like innovation, is not about what you say or believe. It is about what you do.”*

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