

The Ross School District Strategic Plan Update

Focus 2027

Preparing Ross School Learners to Thrive in a Future in Flux

Introduction

In the fall of 2019, the Ross School District embarked on a strategic planning process. On the eve of adopting a new strategic plan, a world wide pandemic stalled our efforts to look into the future and instead concentrate on the health and safety of staff, students, and the community. Over the next 18 months, the strategic planning process was shelved and the basic operations of a school district in crises became the central priority.

In the fall of 2021, the Ross School District, the Board of Trustees called upon the school district to take the plan off of the shelf and review its relevance, determine the key learning from the COVID-19 pandemic (to date), and identify if any new outcomes are necessary for the District as a new plan is drafted, adopted and then implemented.

The following document provides a description of the new plan.

Introduction

Over the past few years, Ross School has been visited by communities from all over the world seeking ways to improve and enhance their educational systems. Educators and parents alike are simply amazed by our ability to yield high test scores while providing students with a breadth of rich programs in art, technology, music, physical education, and science. They also remark on the powerful confidence that students have in their own learning. We are truly one of only a handful of schools that yield the results we have.

We see these conversations as our responsibility to share our impact while also receiving feedback on how we can improve. In fact, we believe that our collective motivation and coordinated action to constantly improve has lead us to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School, a California Distinguished School, a California Exemplary District, noted as the best public school in Marin by Niche.com, and employing a National Board Certified Teachers and the Marin County Teacher of the year.

On the eve of our new strategic plan, let's look at where we have been, where we are, and what's next.

Where have we been?

Approximately eight years ago, parents, staff, students and Trustees came together to develop our school's mantra: "heart, mind and action." This mantra became the focus for our decision-making and how we operated each day. Heart signaled the critical importance of always starting from a place of seeking empathy and developing and maintaining relationships. Mind was a statement of priority for developing student academic acuity and flexibility. Action signified the proactive nature of our community to get work done to ensure our learning, our school, and our world is in a better place tomorrow.

This mantra served as criteria for our school to appraise current and develop new programs, policies, and practices that enabled the school to effectively serve every child. This was a time of massive expansion of new programs including the creation of a "maker space", cyber cafe, and STEM.

Three year later we invested in mathematics, writing, and assessing student progress and proficiency. Furthermore, we created key outcomes that we aspired for our students to learn. These outcomes included:

Outcomes	Description
Confidence	A student's ability to handle setbacks, establish goals, measure progress, and give and receive feedback to move learning forward.
Compassion	A student's ability to understand the perspectives of others, develop a shared understanding of problems and situations, and use communication skills to demonstrate respect and empathy for others.
Content Literacy	A student's development of knowledge and skills within and across academic disciplines.
Collaboration	A student's ability to understand and manage social situations

Creative Problem Solving	A student’s ability to solve a wide variety of problems using a myriad of methods and tools.
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To meet these outcomes, the District streamlined systems for assessing and reporting on student learning and invested significantly in teacher professional development, evaluation, and retention.

During the 2019–2020 school year, we introduced middle school Spanish, hired a full time psychologist and additional learning center staff to support learners. Additionally, a new middle school schedule was introduced to ease the burden of homework as well as to develop a stronger culture and climate. We have also enhanced our systems for measuring and responding to student learning.

Unfortunately, the District entered into an 18 month crises related to the COVID-19 pandemic. From March of 2019 through May of 2021, the District shifted away from strategic planning priorities and focused all energy and effort on safety, security, and staffing.

Where are we now?

While the pandemic caused a pause in the work of the District, the 2021-2022 school year recenters the District on a learning agenda. NWEA data illustrates that students showed strong academic resilience throughout the pandemic and that the school provided outstanding services to students. In fact, the District was recognized as a Blue Ribbon School for services provided to accelerate student learning. Interestingly, many students in the high achievement category also did not illustrate the level of progress that we desire. This is an area of focus for the school district.

Anecdotal data indicates that student and staff mental health and well-being is a critical area of required service. Over the past two years the District has increased FTE in the area of wellness including psychologists and instructional aides. Moreover, the District has established full mental health days for faculty, invested in curriculum and instruction in the area of social-emotional learning, and centered professional development on topics related to mental health and well-being. The District has also deployed a new survey to analyze student attitudes and perceptions on belonging, dignity, and overall emotional well-being.

The District is also navigating the world-wide context of manipulative social networking algorithms, the ubiquitous fear of viruses, instability in the political landscape in which we live, and the renewed need to have the social awareness and social management skills in an omnipresent world of constant change.

The trends and patterns of accelerating learning, navigating the new quasi post-COVID landscape, and ensuring high quality mental health for our staff and students are critical guideposts for our future as a school district.

What's next?

After 18 months of navigating the dynamics of a global pandemic, the Ross School District re-engaged in finalizing a strategic plan for guiding the District over the next five years. The Board of Trustees met in October to discuss the trends and patterns illustrated in the student learning data, the input from staff, and previous documents and resources from earlier iterations of the strategic plan.

The Board believes that the learning profile is critical to the future success of Ross School students. Moreover, the Board believes that a key focus on collaboration, compassion, and creative problem solving are needed for all children and should be a place of intensive investment. The Board desires significant work to to enhance and deepen our current service offerings. For instance, a focus on acceleration services for students who need additional support after they have met core academic standards is a key priority. Additionally, completing a world language program is a key priority along with evaluating our facility and determine ways to best serve student wellness, focus on creative problem solving, and evaluate our means for teaching and assessing tackling misinformation and enhancing student critical thinking. Finally, the Board sees an opportunity to present real-world challenging problems that require students to transfer knowledge across core content areas, collaborate with peers, seek information out from people in the “real world” and present on their findings to experts in the field.

Furthermore, as we embark on a new strategic plan, we look to continue the great work we have implemented together. Simultaneously, we will begin investing curriculum and instruction that allows students to tackle real world problems, solidify our learning center programs for all students, invest in ways to build students' knowledge and skills in cross cultural communication and continue our investment in student social and emotional wellbeing and physical health.

The Board views this work as an opportunity and a continuation of the wonderful work that this staff has invested in for the past several years. This plan allows the District to stay small and stay focused while also innovate and explore.

RESOURCES

The following documents illustrate the Strategic Plan and supplemental resources to support the District in messaging, planning, and implementing the strategic plan.

[Strategic Plan](#) - This is the strategic plan that will be up for discussion and action by the Board of Trustees during the fall semester of 2021.

[Focus Areas](#) - This document outlines the key objectives that the District will be focusing on with staff and students and will be the central criteria for determining the allocation of resources and the means of assessing District progress and proficiency.

[Snap-Shot](#) - This document provides a detailed description of each area of the strategic plan.

[Annual Action Plan for 2021-2022](#) - This document provides a detailed description of the work the school district is focusing on for the 2021-2022 school year.

[Draft Memo to the Parents on Strategic Plan](#) - This document serves as a draft for the impact the new strategic plan.

Closing

When I look back, I'm incredibly proud of our collective accomplishments. I'm thankful to everyone working together to do what's best for children. Our future is bright and I'm looking forward to working with each of you over the next five years with our learners.

Board Approved: November 10, 2021