WATERFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
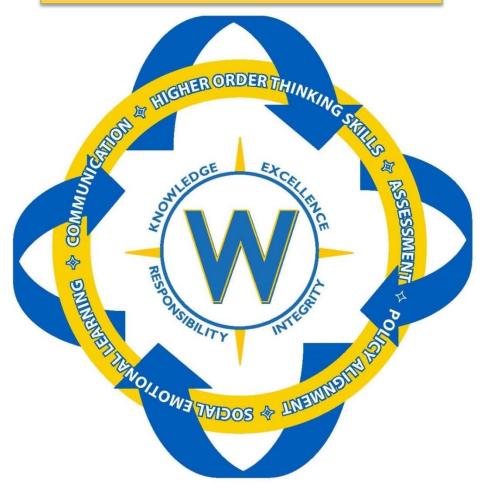
Strategic Coherence Plan

2017 - 2022

August 2017
Waterford Board of Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world we are preparing our children to live in is rapidly changing. With the advent of the digital age and the interconnected global economy, the definition of what it means to appropriately prepare a student for life learning and work beyond school has been transformed. Content knowledge and high test scores are no longer the only variables that indicate student success; we know now that students also need to develop a sophisticated set of skills to ensure they can navigate the challenges we know they will encounter. In Waterford, we believe the priorities among those required skills include the ability to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences, acquire, understand, evaluate, synthesize and apply information, use critical and creative thinking to find and solve authentic problems, construct and defend arguments based on evidence, and demonstrate digital fluency and purposeful application of tools for learning. Without these skills, we know students will have limited choices and will not have the ability to appropriately adjust and learn as circumstances and opportunities change throughout their lives. This planning process was designed to determine to what degree a Waterford Public School education make certain that a student who graduates from here will leave with these skills and the content knowledge needed to succeed regardless of their future path of choice. The actions identified by the plan outline what needs to happen to realize that vision.

Unlike traditional strategic planning which seeks to collect data and set goals related to numerous and frequently unrelated topics, this Strategic Coherence Plan was totally focused on just those elements of work that support the development and improvement of skill-based student success. How are PK-12 teaching and classroom experiences facilitating student practice of Waterford's key academic skills? How are we measuring our success and using that PK-12 data to create accountability and the continuous improvement of student performance in those areas? How do we budget, plan, and make sure that all our PK-12 work is designed to increase the number of children who leave Waterford ready to perform these skills at a high level? By asking these questions and building the answers based on the good things that

are already happening in Waterford, the members of the Strategic Coherence Planning team have identified the steps that need to be taken over the next five years to help every student build their skills.

This notion of building on past success and redefining our focus is a key theme. Over the last decade, mandates from Washington and Hartford have encroached on Waterford's decision making, creating policy distractions that can make it more difficult to achieve our mission. This plan seeks to reverse that trend, creating a unified focus around student success that will accelerate Waterford's unified vision of successful preparation of all students. On a day to day basis, as the plan is rolled out and the proposed actions are implemented, the district-wide focus will increasingly spotlight how students can demonstrate the degree to which they have mastered the practice of independent and critical thinking. Students will encounter lessons and projects where specific feedback on how well they are applying their skills and what they need to do to improve in all their classes throughout their Waterford educational experience. Parents will be hearing more about what kinds of work students are doing that support these skills and they will be learning the language that the Waterford schools use to measure and evaluate how well they are doing them. Over time, they will see the evidence that their children can apply the district's foundational skills effectively and they will be reported on so all are accountable for their acquisition.

As we work to improve practice and build student capacity for communicating effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences, acquire, understand, evaluate, synthesize and apply information, use critical and creative thinking to find and solve authentic problems, construct and defend arguments based on evidence, and demonstrate digital fluency and purposeful application of tools for learning, we intend to maintain the successful aligned practices that Waterford is currently engaged in. However, we will also build on them so that teachers have the instructional space and resources they need to do quality work at a reasonable pace focused on those things that the Waterford community values most.

This report is designed to tell the story and results of the entire planning process – from the "vital few" rationale and assumptions that guided it, through the data collection and analysis activities, and then to the priority strategies and specific actions that will guide the first 12-18 months of work to be done. Those strategies are the start of a multi-year effort to reframe the public school experience so that the district's Mission to engage students in authentic learning experiences allows Waterford to empower all students to thrive as global citizens.

WATERFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mission and goals

MISSION

> *Waterford Public Schools is a community of learners that fosters and supports high aspirations, ensuring every student acquires the skills and knowledge necessary to be a responsible citizen, prepared to contribute and succeed in an ever-changing world.*

In support of this Mission, we believe:

- ❑ Education is a collaborative responsibility requiring a partnership among the individual, family, school system, and community.

- ❑ Safety, integrity, and respect are critical to support success for all learners.

- ❑ The greatest potential for learning occurs when an individual's social, emotional, and academic needs are met.

- ❑ Student growth and achievement are enhanced when curiosity, creativity, and continuous improvement are valued by all members of the learning community.

- ❑ Evidence and information are the foundation of sound decision-making.

ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND CIVIC SKILLS

ACADEMIC

- Communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Acquire, understand, evaluate, synthesize and apply information.
- Use critical and creative thinking to find and solve authentic problems.
- Construct and defend arguments based on evidence.
- Demonstrate digital fluency and purposeful application of tools for learning.

SOCIAL

- Demonstrate behavior that adheres to established standards of conduct and reflects integrity and fairness.
- Recognize, respect, and value individual, cultural, and racial diversity.
- Engage productively in self-directed independent and collaborative endeavors.

CIVIC

- Participate in activities that foster citizenship, the democratic process, and community awareness.
- Share in the responsibility for the mental and physical safety of themselves and others.

GOALS

1 **COMMUNICATION & ALIGNMENT**

The district is committed to a clearly communicated and purposeful vision, shaped by our mission and defined, prioritized goals, which will ensure student progress and success.

2 **HIGHER ORDER THINKING**

The district is committed to creating a unified district focus on Higher Order Thinking Skills.

3 **ASSESSMENT**

The district is committed to assessing progress in a consistent, accurate, and timely manner and will use the assessment results to identify needs, guide changes in instruction, and inform conversations about needs and goals of both students and staff.

4 **POLICY ALIGNMENT**

The district has committed to aligning policies and processes that support the mission of the district and further the goals of the Strategic Plan.

5 **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

The district is committed to supporting the social and emotional needs of all students.

The district is committed to a clearly communicated and purposeful vision, shaped by our mission and defined, prioritized goals, which will ensure student progress and success.

Components:

A. Establish a clear connection between the district's Mission and Vision; that is transmitted through administrators, coaches, department heads, curriculum leaders and teachers.

B. Communicate school and district goals on a consistent and regular basis.

C. Increase focus on mission-driven work within existing structures.

D. Enhance communication on how goals were selected, what the goals are and why these goals are vital to the mission.

E. Align clear, concise goals with student outcomes.

F. Measure definitively the degree to which goals are being met.

G. Communicate with and engage all stakeholders to understand the alignment of district goals with the Mission and Vision of a successful graduate.

H. Engage parents so they can participate in discussions of district goals.

Component A:

Establish a clear connection between the district's Mission and Vision; that is transmitted through administrators, coaches, department heads, curriculum leaders and teachers.

Present State:

- Mission and Vision exist but are not widely, strategically, nor purposefully communicated.

Beginning:

- Mission and Vision are finalized and initial presentations, such as convocation, are delivered.

Progressing:

- Mission and Vision are consistently presented to staff and community through a variety of means and media.

Accomplishing:

- The Mission and Vision of the district are regularly communicated to and known and referenced by all stakeholders.

Component B:

Communicate school and district goals on a consistent and regular basis.

Present State:

- Mission and Vision are used intermittently in goal development and in guiding decision-making.

Beginning:

- Mission and Vision are generally used to help inform and formulate administrator, school, department, grade level, and teacher goals.

Progressing:

- Mission and Vision are consistently used in the decision-making process as well as to inform and formulate district, administrator, school, department, grade level, and teacher goals.

Accomplishing:

- The district's Mission and Vision are explicitly identified in goal development and decision-making.

Component C:

Increase focus on mission-driven work within existing structures.

Present State:

- Existing educational structures and systems are being used for a variety of purposes that are not all necessarily focused on clear, mission-oriented goals.

Beginning:

- An evaluation of existing structures and systems and their purposes is conducted. Their relationship to the mission are defined.

Progressing:

- Initial work, infusing newly designed and newly purposed structures and systems, is developed and work has begun to implement them in day-to-day operations.

Accomplishing:

- Existing structures/systems are strategically used to focus on mission-driven work to achieve defined goals.

Component D:

Enhance communication on how goals were selected, what the goals are and why these goals are vital to the mission.

Present State:

- All stakeholders may not be fully engaged in understanding, shaping, and prioritizing goals.

Beginning:

- The role of stakeholders and processes in understanding, shaping, and prioritizing goals is studied.

Progressing:

- There is an initial process established and outlined to include stakeholders in relation to formulation of goals.

Accomplishing:

- There is a clear, inclusive process as to how goals are selected, prioritized and an understanding of the rationale behind district goals. Goals are aligned to the Mission and Vision.

Component E:

Align clear, concise goals with student outcomes.

Present State:

- Goals, strategies, and initiatives are not consistently aligned between individual schools or stakeholders.

Beginning:

- A re-evaluation of alignment and efficacy of goals, strategies and initiatives has occurred while respecting the needs of individual schools.

Progressing:

- There is a common set of priorities and agreed upon goals that are aligned to Mission, Vision, and student outcomes.

Accomplishing:

- Goals are clear, concise, and aligned with student success and able to be measured for their efficacy.

Component F:

Measure definitively the degree to which goals are being met.

Present State:

- While there are multiple sources of data, there is not a clear data driven process and structure for measuring progress towards the district's goals.

Beginning:

- A process and structure for monitoring progress on district goals is defined. Potential data sources for progress monitoring are identified.

Progressing:

- A district improvement team is formed. Roles, responsibilities, and processes are formed. The team begins to meet regularly.

Accomplishing:

- There is a clear data driven process and structure for measuring progress towards district's goals. District goals are monitored, adjusted, and revised by a standing district improvement team. Progress is communicated to all stakeholders on a "regular" basis.

Component G:

Communicate with and engage all stakeholders to understand the alignment of district goals with the Mission and Vision of a successful graduate.

Present State:

- Limited communication and engagement among stakeholders regarding the alignment of the Vision, Mission, and district goals with the attributes of a successful graduate.

Beginning:

- Emerging consensus among stakeholders regarding the attributes of a successful graduate that will allow them to be successful in life, learning, and work beyond school.

Progressing:

- Clear alignment and consensus of the Vision, Mission, and district goals to produce a successful and productive college or career adult.

Accomplishing:

- Robust communication to all stakeholders of our Vision, Mission, and district goals on the attributes of a successful graduate.

Component H:

Engage parents so they can participate in discussions of district goals.

Present State:

- Limited engagement with parents who participate in discussions of issues and goals.

Beginning:

- Emerging consensus among parents regarding effective involvement in understanding district goals.

Progressing:

- Schools operationalize all the ways for parents to be engaged in the issues and goals surrounding their children.

Accomplishing:

- Evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the robust parent engagement strategies and structures.

The district is committed to creating a unified district focus on Higher Order Thinking Skills.

Present State:

- The district has not formally articulated a commonly used, universally agreed upon definition of higher order thinking skills (HOT) and how to promote student engagement in these skill areas.

Beginning:

- Emerging consensus among the instructional staff regarding what will be the universally agreed upon definition of what HOT skills are.

Progressing:

- Clear and supported consensus among the instructional staff regarding what the HOT skills are and sufficient professional learning for all instructional staff to instruct and evaluate students.

Accomplishing:

- Clear and supported consensus among the instructional staff regarding HOT skills instruction and clear articulation of students means to demonstrate these skills and ways to communicate their attainment.
- Student work represents students' utilization of our identified HOT skills.

The district is committed to assessing progress in a consistent, accurate, and timely manner and will use the assessment results to identify needs, guide changes in instruction, and inform conversations about needs and goals of both students and staff.

Components:

A. Define a district framework for assessment of student learning and develop an associated measurement tool.

B. Train staff in the creation and calibration of rubrics to ensure consistency.

C. Utilize data regularly and appropriately to enhance instructional practice.

D. Develop a stronger alignment between district goals and the teacher/administrator evaluation process.

Component A:

Define a district framework for assessment of student learning and develop an associated measurement tool.

Present State:

- A multitude of assessments are used regularly in the district, with no clearly defined district-wide framework of assessment.
- Rubrics exist for some skill and content areas, but may not be district-wide.

Beginning:

- Consensus and understanding of a district-wide framework of assessment is emerging.
- Examine existing rubrics and identify gaps and assess district-wide alignment with our mission and academic expectations.

Progressing:

- A district-wide framework has been developed and faculty is learning how to use the framework to guide classroom practice.
- Develop rubrics for all gap areas and scale them in age appropriate ways for use across the district.

Accomplishing:

- There is a well-defined and clearly understood district-wide framework of assessment that guides classroom practice.
- There are rubrics in use that measure all academic expectations. These rubrics are scaled in age-appropriate ways for use across all grade levels.

Component B:

Train staff in the creation and calibration of rubrics to ensure consistency.

Present State:

- Calibration of rubrics is done at some levels but is not consistent across the district.

Beginning:

- Teachers are being trained in the use and calibration of rubrics and a timeline for that process is being developed.

Progressing:

- Grades and departments are required to calibrate their rubric usage on an ongoing basis.

Accomplishing:

- Teachers consistently use appropriate rubrics and participate in calibration activities with enough frequency to ensure consistent assessment of student work across the district.

Component C:

Utilize data regularly and appropriately to enhance instructional practice.

Present State:

- A variety of assessment tools are in use in different ways at different levels and departments.
- Assessment results are stored in a variety of locations that may or may not be transferred from level to level.

Beginning:

- A clear plan is being developed to determine which assessment tools we want to use and how best to use them.
- Data is being compiled about where and how assessment results are stored. Research is being done on the most effective, user friendly options for data storage.

Progressing:

- Teachers are trained in the use of assessment tools and there is a clear plan developed for their use.
- Assessment results are being stored in a central location and faculty are being trained in how to input and access information.

Accomplishing:

- Faculty members adhere to a clear plan for the use of the results of various formative and summative assessments to guide instruction.
- There is a central, easily accessible, user friendly location which all stakeholders can access assessment results.

Component D:

Develop a stronger alignment between district goals and the teacher/administrator evaluation process.

Present State:

- Consistent protocols or training in how to use data to improve practice or give student feedback does not currently exist.

Beginning:

- Protocols for using data to improve practice and give student feedback are being developed.

Progressing:

- Staff has been trained and understands how to use data to provide feedback and to improve practice.

Accomplishing:

- Faculty members know how and why to use assessment data and consistently use it to guide instruction and to give feedback to students.

The district has committed to aligning policies and processes that support the mission of the district and further the goals of the Strategic Plan.

Components:

A. Ensure that policy barriers are removed, update existing policies, and identify new policies that will enhance our ability to achieve the district's Mission, Vision, and goals for student learning.

B. Make certain classroom practices reflect current policies.

Component A:

Ensure that policy barriers are removed, update existing policies, and identify new policies that will enhance our ability to achieve the district's Mission, Vision, and goals for student learning.

Present State:

- The district has a policy manual that complies with laws and supports the educational program of the district.
- The rationale for adoption of policies and the link to the district's mission is not always strongly articulated nor widely understood.

Beginning:

- Review existing policies to ensure that any policy barriers to implementation of the district's goals are identified and addressed.
- Identify new policies and policy updates required to support implementation of the district's goals.
- When reviewing existing policies or considering adoption of new policies, determine whether a strong link exists between the rationale for the policy and the district mission.

Progressing:

- As part of development of new policies, review policies used in other districts and other model policies.
- When policy is developed or updated, a strong link between the rationale for the policy and the district mission must be articulated.

Accomplishing:

- New policies that support the implementation of the district's goals will be developed, adopted, and shared with staff.
- Policies will support the mission of the district's Mission and Goals.

Component B:

Make certain classroom practices reflect current policies.

Present State:

- In some cases, current classroom practices may be inconsistent with policies.
- Some policies may contradict one another.

Beginning:

- Identify inconsistencies between practices and adopted policies. Identify instances where policies may be outdated. Determine appropriate action, such as revising policy or discuss needed changes in practice.

Progressing:

- Solicit stakeholder feedback in development of policies to ensure that policy development and classroom practices are aligned.

Accomplishing:

- Policies and current practices will be consistent. New or revised policies will be shared with stakeholders.

The district is committed to supporting the social and emotional needs of all students.

Components:

A. Develop a consistent, systemic, and coordinated program that both proactively and responsively supports the social and emotional needs of all students.

B. Implement a comprehensive PK-12 Counseling Curriculum.

C. Communicate the district's continuum of supports and resources to families.

D. Provide an environment where students may develop a positive personal connection with at least one or more adult(s) in the school.

Component A:

Develop a consistent, systemic and coordinated program that both proactively and responsively supports the social and emotional needs of all students.

Present State:

- There are many supports and programs for students identified as "in need" but more limited proactive/ generalized supports for social and emotional learning for all students.

Beginning:

- Schools continue to increase proactive/ generalized supports for the social and emotional learning of all students.

Progressing:

- Schools continue to increase proactive/ generalized supports for the social and emotional learning of all students and articulate a school and district continuum of supports.

Accomplishing:

- At each developmental level, schools have a consistent, systemic and coordinated program that both proactively and responsively supports the social and emotional needs of all students.

Component B:

Implement a comprehensive PK-12 Counseling Curriculum.

Present State:

- A PK-12 counseling curriculum has been adopted.

Beginning:

- Staff are developing an understanding of the PK-12 counseling curriculum and their role in its implementation.

Progressing:

- Staff are beginning the implementation of the PK-12 counseling curriculum aligned with their role.

Accomplishing:

- Counselors and classroom teachers are collaboratively implementing the PK-12 counseling curriculum.

Component C:

Communicate the district's continuum of supports and resources to families.

Present State:

- Parents and families have a general awareness of the social and emotional supports offered.

Beginning:

- A plan that uses multiple methods of communicating the social and emotional supports offered is developed.

Progressing:

- A plan for communicating the supports offered to parents and families is implemented.

Accomplishing:

- Parents and families appropriately access social and emotional supports.

Component D:

Provide an environment where students may develop a positive personal connection with at least one or more adult(s) in the school.

Present State:

- At all grade levels, systems and programs are in place to provide opportunities for students to have a personal connection with at least one adult in the school who may serve as a role model of positive social and emotional health.

Beginning:

- At all grade levels, systems and programs will be implemented to provide opportunities for students to have a personal connection with at least one adult in the school.

Progressing:

- At all grade levels, systems and programs will be implemented and monitored to provide opportunities for students to have a personal connection with at least one adult in the school.

Accomplishing:

- At all grade levels, there are multiple opportunities in place so that all students may develop a positive personal connection with at least one or more adult(s) in the school.

APPENDIX

Glossary of Terms

Curriculum and instructional alignment – degree to which the materials and teaching used to educate students are focused on the same things from grade level to grade level, year to year, and school to school.

Differentiation – A strategy of providing different teaching strategies for different children – in essence trying to match instruction to the interests or learning styles of individual students.

DOK – Depth of Knowledge

Formative Assessment – an assessment of student progress that is done as part of a regular lesson so that it does not interrupt instruction and can guide teacher action in the moment to improve student performance.

HOT – Higher order thinking – typically referring to the highest levels of Blooms Taxonomy of learning – including the skills of synthesis, analysis, evaluation and creativity.

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation.

IEP – Individualized Academic Plan – A written and legal document that describes the services that are designated for students with disabilities. An IEP is required by Federal Law for identified students with disabilities.

Indicators of Success: The data or measures that will be used as evidence that the plan has been successfully implemented.

LEP – Limited English Proficiency – The study of the English language by students with a different native language.

Mission – a statement of who we are, what we do and why.

Multiple Measures – When gauging a student's performance in an important area, more than indicator or measure are used to ensure that the report is fair and representative of what the student is actually doing.

PD – Professional development – the workshops and learning opportunities provided for professional staff.

Rubrics – descriptors that show students and parents how well a skill must be performed to meet the district's expectations

Summative Assessment – a measurement of learning that is designed to gauge where a group of students are in comparison to other students. These assessments are completed apart from instruction and serve as accountability measures for both students and teachers.

Vision – a description of what it would be like if the district mastered its' Mission