

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, October 2021

Every five years, Plainville Community Schools undergoes a process to update our Vision and Strategic Plan. This process typically includes district-wide surveying of constituent groups (students, family, staff and community members) and typically involves a series of evening meetings. Through this process, a large and representative group of stakeholders share their thoughts and ideas that outline our core values and beliefs as a community school district. Once these high-level belief statements are determined, we develop the vision and outline goals and action steps to help us achieve our goals during the following five-year period.

Our school leaders and district staff use this guiding Vision and Strategic Planning document to develop School Improvement Plans and aligned individual goals. The ultimate objective is to produce coherence and alignment across the district, from the Board of Education, Superintendent and Central Office leadership team, to the school leadership, and every member of our district faculty and staff. Therefore, these plans are incredibly important in charting a course by which we all follow the agreed upon true north of the district.

At the start of this year, I shared my intention to begin this process of strategic planning and a review of our current district vision and goals in the fall. However, when considering several complicating factors we are currently facing as a community and as a school district, it was decided that this would not be the best time to undergo our typical strategic planning process described earlier. There are a number of reasons we believe this to be true.

First, we are facing a very unusual situation, with a significant influx of federal and state grant funds available to our schools, and to the Town of Plainville. These funds have come in waves, initially

intended to help districts and individuals to survive and mitigate the initial impacts of the COVID-19 related difficulties we were facing, then to safely reopen our schools during a pandemic. Subsequent ESSER grants were designated to be used for: learning acceleration, improving family and community connections, strategically improving use of technology and staff development to bridge the digital divide, promoting social and emotional learning (SEL), supporting the mental health of students and staff, and promoting safe and healthy schools. In summary, our task went from using funds to survive, to helping students to thrive and currently to transforming how we educate and support children across Plainville, and beyond.

With every dollar the district received, a plan had to be created to ensure appropriate, effective and efficient use in alignment with district needs and goals. In total, our district team has created strategic plans to focus efforts on a number of projects (67 at this point) that are aimed at improving district systems and operations, student preparedness and skill mastery, equitable programs for all students, and social and emotional learning. In essence, we needed to create a strategic plan in order to submit these grant applications. A tremendous amount of planning was done, with community insight sought to ensure that we complied with grant requirements and incorporated this critical feedback. While this form of strategic planning didn't follow the typical process, we ensured that our stakeholders were able to share their thoughts through surveys and forums, and that this information was incorporated into our planning process.

With upcoming local elections and anticipated changes to our Board of Education and Town Council membership, coupled with the announcement of Town Manager Lee retiring in January, we believe that waiting to start a more formal strategic planning process will be best for our district. As this process is intended to ensure community and stakeholder engagement and feedback, it makes better sense to delay beginning the process of developing a new district vision and shared strategic plan. We will continue to seek community input and involvement over the coming months, as we prepare for what

we hope to be a process that builds community relationships, capacity for change and shared voice in the future of Plainville Community Schools. We remain grateful for the support and involvement of our community members in this outstanding Plainville community.