

RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227



RAISING THE BAR TOWARD A FUTURE OF EXCELLENCE
The District 227 Vision and Strategic Plan

AUGUST 2009



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I. INTRODUCTION

Rich Township High School District 227 serves the educational needs of over 4,300 students across three campuses, Rich Central, Rich South and Rich East High Schools. Students live in the communities of Chicago Heights, County Club Hills, Matteson, Park Forest, Olympia Fields, Richton Park, University Park and Tinley Park and come from a wide array of ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds.

District 227 schools have a higher than state average graduation rate with students moving on to college or careers. Career bound students have opportunities to learn in the areas of computer programming, journalism, photography, nursing and forensics while attending District 227 high schools. District 227 also works to accommodate students with evening classes and a School-Within-a-School program.

District 227 lives by the mantra, “Failure is not an option. Success is everyone’s opportunity.” District 227 stakeholders – including the Board of Education, administrators, faculty and staff members, parents, community members and the students themselves – are dedicated to the education of their high school students and want to see continued improvement within their schools.

In order to create the best plan for success, educational leaders in District 227 partnered with ECRA Group, Inc., in the spring of 2009, to conduct a comprehensive strategic planning process. With information gathered and analyzed, decision makers will have the tools they need to adapt and create a comprehensive working curriculum and allow District 227 to continue to help students achieve educational success in the future.

An extensive amount of information was obtained throughout the six-month study, which engaged the entire community. The result of this input is a future vision for the district and strategic plan.

Contained in this report are the findings, goals and strategic initiatives upon which the District 227 Strategic Plan was built. Extensive data and evidence to support these findings are contained in the accompanying Research Findings Report, in addition to information about ECRA Group, the principal investigators and the sophisticated methodology used in the study.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The Vision / Strategic Plan document, “Raising the Bar Toward A Future of Excellence,” contains the fundamental goals and initiatives that were derived from the key findings of the strategic planning process. Findings are also included as a point of reference. One should understand that all of the goal areas and initiatives are part of a holistic structure that is interrelated and interdependent. The intent of any initiative is to create new processes and new structures that will carry the district forward, not to concentrate on existing structures and problem-solving that will constrain the district from reaching its potential. By focusing on the underlying mechanisms behind challenges, the district will find that many of the more symptomatic problems will be eliminated. In the medical field, leaders refer to this as treating the disease, not the symptoms. By staying ahead of the curve, the district will meet challenges head-on to prevent them from becoming incurable problems.

Findings, goals and initiatives within this report fall under one of the following clusters:

- Holistic Finding: Overall Quality of Education
- Mission, Vision and Values
- Academic Standards and Expectations
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Alignment
- Student Achievement
- Technology
- Assessment, Research and Information
- Leadership and Staff
- Administrative Structure
- Staff Development
- Equity and Resources
- School Climate and Culture
- Parent Involvement
- Communication and Outreach

Each goal is original and has been customized to the needs of School District 227 as they relate to the findings. In turn, the initiatives have been developed to help District 227 meet its goals. **Please note that ECRA has also connected strategic plan goals to the existing Board Goals, and this is indicated under each goal area.** This report is supplemented by a comprehensive findings report, which contains extensive data to support each finding.

II. THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The most important foundation of any organization is its people. The Board of Education, administration, faculty, staff, parents and community members are the cohesive groups that endeavor to transform the vision, values and beliefs into feasible and achievable outcomes. The primary source of learning and knowledge lies in the creative thinking, evaluation, follow-up plans and policies determined by stakeholder groups. Effective education of District 227 students requires a commitment from all stakeholder groups.

To this end, the District 227 strategic planning process engaged hundreds of district stakeholders in developing the future vision for District 227 and a plan to achieve it. ECRA Group, in cooperation with District 227, successfully reached out and solicited input from the following stakeholder groups:

- The Board of Education
- District-level and building-level administrators
- Faculty members
- Staff members
- Students
- Parents
- Community members who do not have children in District 227 schools

Collectively, the data documents the aspirations of District 227, its current state of reality, its future challenges, and other important considerations in the development of an effective strategic plan.

This page summarizes all the data sources and methods used for data acquisition that were used throughout the process.

FOCUS GROUPS CONDUCTED

Stakeholder Group	Number Conducted
District 227 Board of Education	1
District- and building-level administrators	1
Students from each school	3
Parents and community members without children in District 227 schools	1

SURVEYS CONDUCTED

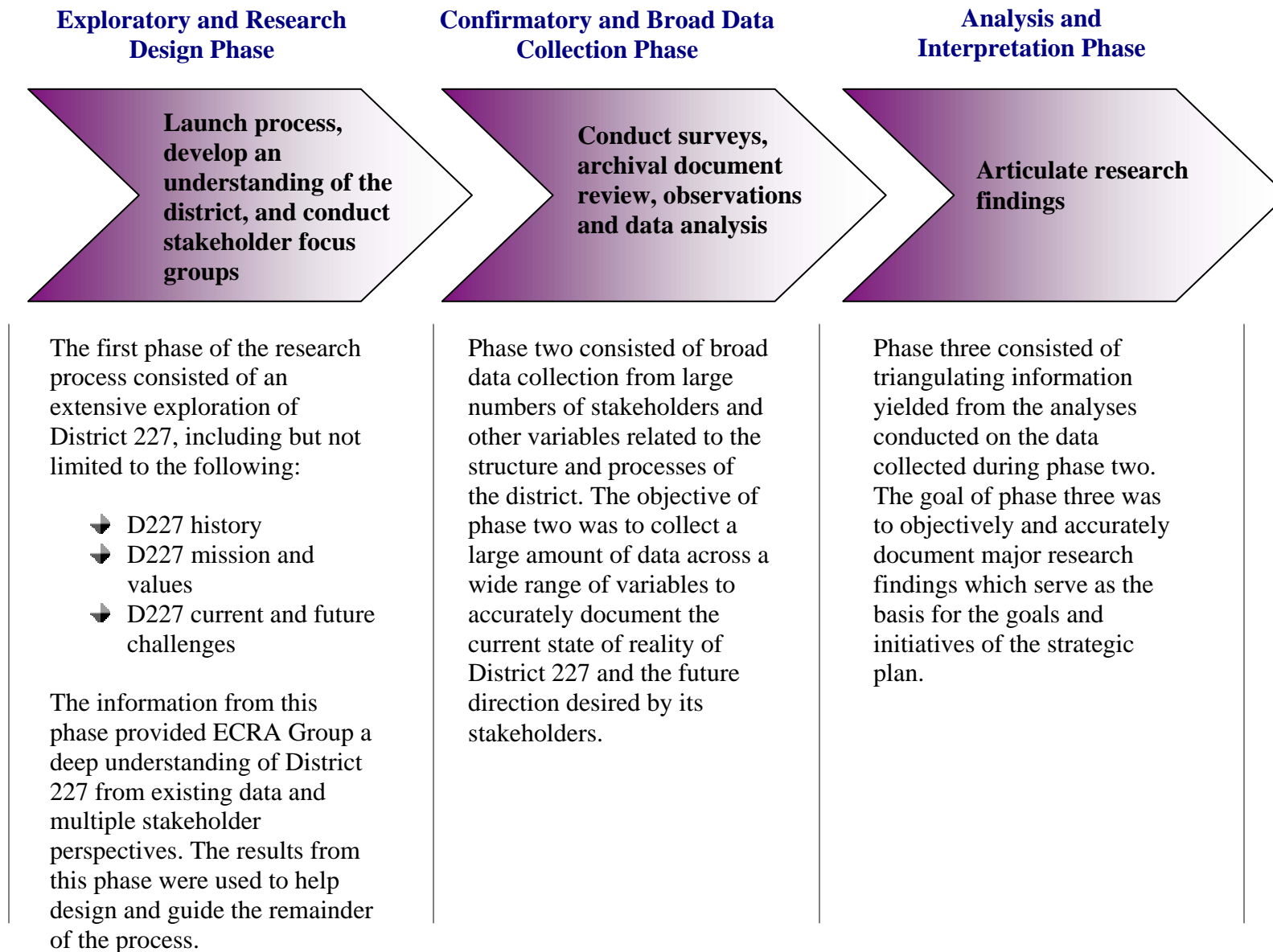
Stakeholder Group	Method	Valid Responses
District 227 Board of Education	Online	5
Administrators, faculty and staff	Online and paper	225
Parents	Online and paper by mail	277
Community members	Telephone and online	644

ARCHIVAL AND EXISTING DATA

Including but not limited to the following:
District achievement data
Prior strategic planning and survey documents
District and school profiles
Mission, vision and core beliefs statements
Community demographic information
Curriculum documentation

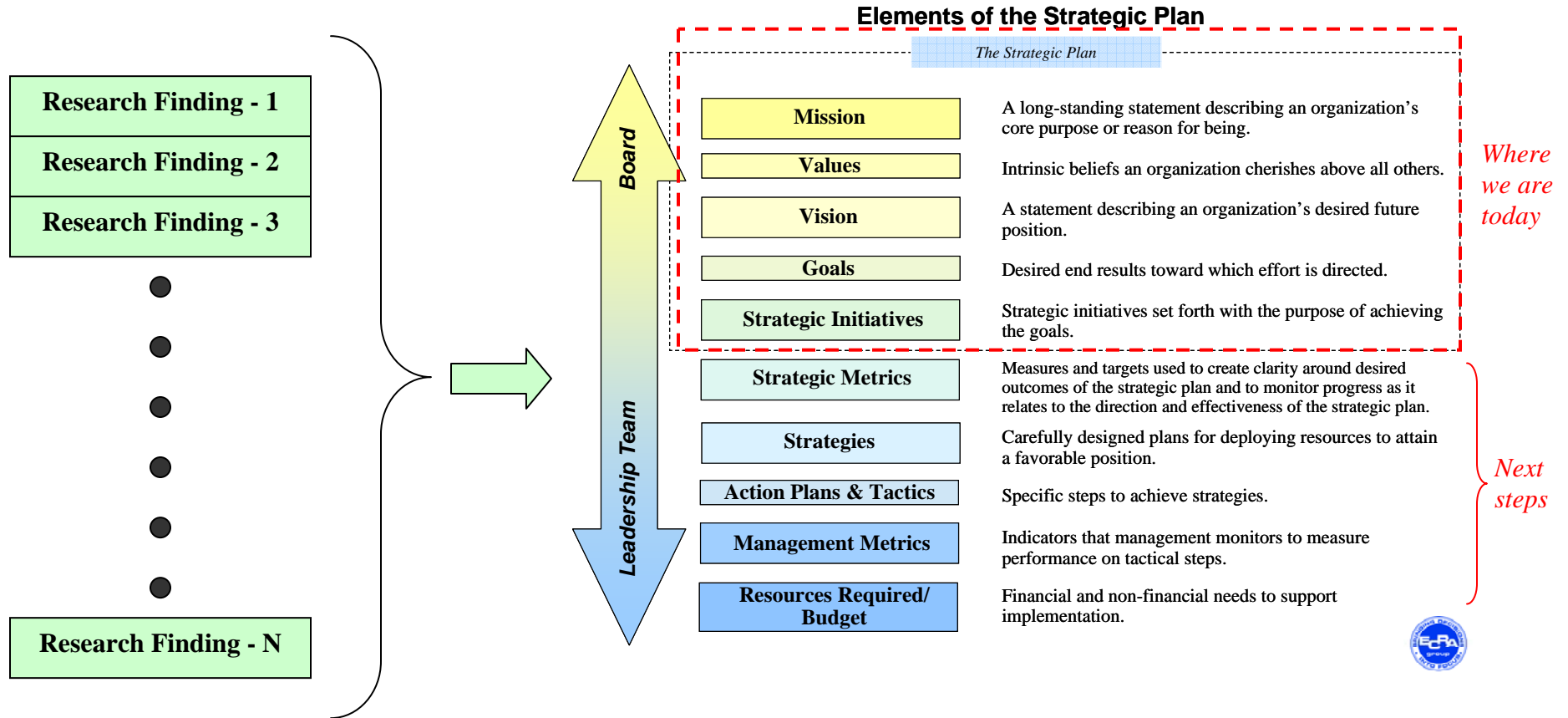
ECRA also conducted a comprehensive curriculum audit of the English/Language Arts and Mathematics programs as part of the Strategic Planning Process.

The following diagram illustrates the design and logic of the research process that was implemented.



ELEMENTS OF THE DISTRICT 227 STRATEGIC PLAN

The following illustration shows the relationship between the research findings (presented as a separate document) and the strategic plan. The findings in this report served as the foundation of all elements of the final strategic plan.



III. METHODS

DATA COLLECTION, ACQUISITION & ANALYSIS

From January to July 2009, a vast amount of quantitative and qualitative data was collected through the following methods:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Archival documents provided by District 227, including achievement data, curriculum documents, prior strategic plans, district policy manuals, etc.
- Observations
- Additional information, such as the Organizational Structure Analysis conducted by ECRA in the fall of 2007, as well as information from outside sources

Quantitative data refers to numerical data that resulted from forced-choice survey responses. Qualitative data refers to unstructured text data that resulted from focus groups, open-ended survey questions and observations.

Focus Groups

The focus groups served as the exploratory phase of the research process, and helped guide the development of the survey instruments and many of the subsequent analyses which followed. Focus group qualitative data were analyzed via grounded theory methods. Grounded theory methods are well-established within the qualitative research literature and are considered best practice for research within a wide range of social contexts. Grounded theory is based on inductive logic that builds theory directly from data.

Surveys

Surveys provided both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data produced from the surveys were analyzed using advanced survey methodology similar to that used by major government agencies, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Education. Stratification and weighting techniques were used to ensure that major subpopulations were appropriately represented in the data. Such methods help to ensure that all inferences drawn from the sample data are valid and represent the entire population of interest. The qualitative data from the surveys were analyzed via grounded theory under a mixed methods framework. Qualitative data were used to provide richer inferences and substantiate quantitative findings.

Archival Documents, Observations and Additional Information

Archival documents involve all available formal and informal documentation including, but not limited to, district achievement data, district curricula, prior planning documents, historical information, mission and values statements and the district web site. ECRA also conducted observational research and analysis on District 227 site visits and in general interactions with district stakeholders. Additionally, ECRA referred to the Organizational Structure Analysis conducted in the fall of 2007 separate from the strategic planning process, and other data obtained from outside sources when appropriate.

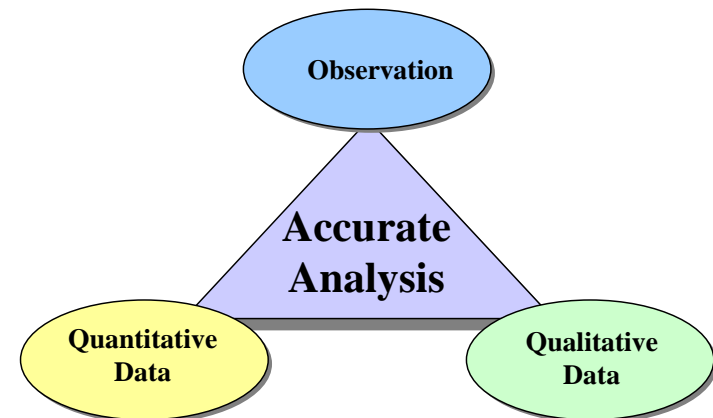
TRIANGULATION

ECRA used the process of triangulation to arrive at all findings contained in this report. It is important to understand that triangulation eliminates bias and single-agenda purposes to ensure that the initiatives presented in the plan are truly strategic and supported by district stakeholders.

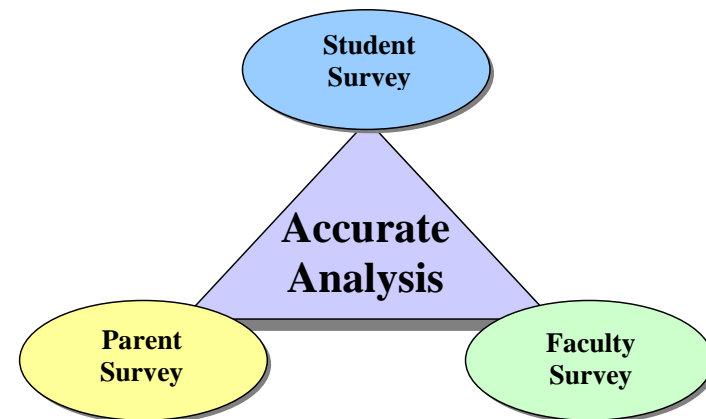
Triangulation yields accurate findings because it only considers those findings emerging from multiple parts of the study. Triangulation comes in various forms, two of which are explained below.

Triangulation can refer to findings that surface through multiple data types as depicted in figure *Triangulation 1*. An example of this would be if findings related to a quantitative analysis of the community survey agreed with findings related to the community focus groups.

Triangulation can also refer to findings from different data sources and populations agreeing with each other as depicted in the figure labeled *Triangulation 2*. An example of this would be if a particular finding related to the student survey also surfaced through the parent survey and faculty survey.



Triangulation 1



Triangulation 2

IV. GOALS, FINDINGS & STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

When collecting data, ECRA started with a big-picture approach, asking stakeholders to provide input related to their overall perception of the quality of District 227. A major theme emerged from all sources of data and all stakeholder groups throughout the strategic process. ECRA has developed this theme into an umbrella finding to serve as the basis for the strategic plan.

HOLISTIC FINDING

FINDINGS

A: Overall Quality of Education and Perception of District 227

Rich Township High School District 227 can take pride in its strengths, including students who want to learn, dedicated teachers, involved parents and a community which cares about the education of its children. District 227 is making strides in its curricular and extracurricular offerings for students, and is working to prepare them for future success in college and in life. At the same time, there are areas for improvement. Currently, the majority of district stakeholders believe that the schools provide an average education, and compare marginally to other schools throughout the region. However, they also believe that the district has great potential, and 20 years from now, with hard work on the part of *all* stakeholders, envision top quality schools that prepare students for future success on a global level. By embracing the ongoing strategic planning process, District 227 has illustrated its commitment to improvement and, in 2009, is poised to build upon the progress made since the 2005 strategic plan to continue toward its vision of excellence in education.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

- 1) Challenge the organization to continually improve its quality, preparing students to compete on a global level and be productive citizens in a global society.

Mission, vision and values are at the essence of what makes any organization function and succeed. Without them, organizations have no focus, sense of direction, or way of knowing when they have grown or diminished in their effectiveness. It is through these fundamentals that strategic initiatives and goals for the district vision are formulated. Clear findings emerged, which demonstrate how the various stakeholder groups view District 227 as a whole. Findings are also supported by archival documents, observation and additional information, all contained in the accompanying Research Findings Report.

In discussing the mission and vision, it should first be noted that the District 227 Board of Education has existing goals under which they have been focusing their efforts.

They are as follows:

Board Goal #1: Student Achievement Goal

The district's primary responsibility is to educate the students and assist them in meeting their personal learning goals as well as meeting/exceeding the Illinois State Learning Standards. This year, the district is working to improve the literacy of the students, with an emphasis on reading and math, insuring achievement for all students (prevention and intervention strategies). The district will be using data as a guide as it works to make the best educational decisions for all students.


Board Goal #3: External Learning Community Goal

The Board will focus on improving the communication, relationship, and visibility of the school district with the outside community, engaging families and communities. The district is also creating an educational foundation that will operate as a separate entity from the district, with the purpose of generating and distributing resources that will enhance the educational experiences of Rich Township High School students.

Board Goal #2: Internal Learning Community Goal

The Board and the district are focusing on improving the culture and climate of the district, its staff, and the school communities, providing a collaborative/teaming culture focused on teaching and learning.

As part of the strategic planning process, it was necessary for ECRA to develop specific new goals related to the strategic initiatives; however, each of these goals are aligned to an extant board goal and this has been indicated in the report.



The mission statement of District 227 addresses the instructional goals of the Rich Township high schools:

Rich Township High School District 227, in partnership with our communities, is committed to the highest level of academic achievement by providing diverse educational opportunities in a nurturing environment that maximizes every student's potential.

The vision statement addresses who the district wants its students to become:

Rich Township High School District 227 is committed to creating a community of life-long learners who will be responsible citizens in a global and information-intensive society.

The next finding, which relates to the future vision for the district, will set the tone for the entire strategic plan and its implementation.

GOAL: MISSION, VISION AND CORE BELIEFS

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 stakeholders will embrace a mission, vision and core beliefs which promote high academic achievement and nurturing of character and citizenship with global implications.

FINDINGS

B: Mission, Vision and Core Beliefs

The district's current mission and vision statements are fairly well aligned to what district leaders want to accomplish, and its core beliefs are mostly aligned with stakeholder values. However, district leaders want to ensure that the mission and vision contain a global focus with an emphasis on producing productive, responsible citizens. In addition, the core beliefs could be updated to include statements in relation to the following areas: Academic Standards and Expectations, Curriculum and Instruction, Technology, School Climate, Human Resources and Staff Development, Research and Assessment and Communication. Before moving forward with the strategic plan, it may be necessary to review and revise the mission, vision and core beliefs statements to ensure that they are aligned with all the district wants to accomplish.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

- 2) The strategic plan is intended to serve as the district's vision for the future. As a first step to launching the strategic plan, the District 227 Board of Education should engage in a generative discussion involving the district's mission, values and vision statements. The district should consider updating the statements to ensure that they align to the strategic plan, are globally focused, and encourage students to achieve academic success and become productive, responsible citizens.
- 3) Update core beliefs statements to integrate redundant statements and add statements to address the following:
 - Academic Standards and Expectations
 - Curriculum and Instruction
 - Technology
 - School Climate
 - Human Resources and Staff Development
 - Research and Assessment
 - Communication

GOAL: ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 will uphold high standards and expectations for all stakeholders, challenging students of all ability levels to achieve to their full potential, faculty and staff to teach to mastery, and parents and community members to actively engage in the successful education of their children.

FINDINGS

C: Raising the Bar

“Failure is not an Option” has long been the stated philosophy in District 227 high schools. However, District 227 stakeholders strongly believe that standards and expectations need to be raised – not only for students, but for all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the community as a whole. Students of all ability levels want to be challenged, and are not being pushed to their full potential. The culture of the district appears to promote advancing students to the next level when they have not mastered the academic content set forth by the curriculum. Part of this stems from the perception on the part of faculty members that their jobs depend on a successful student passing rate. In an educational environment with globally competitive implications, District 227 cannot afford to languish in the status quo if it wants its graduates to succeed in life. The bar must be raised in all areas for students of all abilities, and teachers must be encouraged to push their students to their full potential. This will require consequences for not performing up to par. At the same time, students must embrace new challenges and parents and community members must be willing to offer support to ensure that indeed failure does not become an option for any student.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 4) Increase the academic standards for Rich Township high schools beyond state and national standards to the point of challenging students of all ability levels to achieve to their full potential.
- 5) Transform district culture to encourage teachers to hold students accountable for achieving mastery of academic content by deemphasizing faculty retention based on failure rates and eliminating pass-through culture.

GOAL: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

The District 227 curriculum and instructional program will ambitiously prepare students for a successful future in education, work and life after high school. The instructional program will focus on strong fundamental academic skills, as well as rich elective offerings, engaging and motivating students of all ability levels to achieve to their full potential.

FINDINGS

D: Curriculum

The District 227 curriculum has some strengths and a good foundation on which to build. The ECRA Audit Team found that the Mathematics curriculum, in particular, in that it is lean, ambitious, and is designed to address deficiencies at the freshman level. However, its implementation is being hindered by teacher perceptions that they must pass students through to have successful passing rates for students. In addition, alignment of the language arts curriculum across the schools has also been a positive change in the district.

At the same time, stakeholder perceptions of the curriculum are mixed, and there is an opportunity for improvement in most curricular areas. Each school has unique strengths and areas for improvement. Targets need to be addressed on an individual basis for each school but must be aligned across the district.

Evidence indicates that the greatest areas of the curriculum in need of improvement are: writing and speaking skills, advanced coursework in mathematics (students should enter high school having completed algebra), improved preparation for college, the 21st century workforce, and a global and technological world. There is also a need for improved emphasis on multicultural education and addressing the individual needs of students. Some stress the need for more courses to be developed for non-college-bound students. Some also feel there need to be more advanced classes offered for students who are academically talented, and that more students need to be encouraged and placed into advanced courses to improve district achievement as a whole. They do not feel that students are being pushed to their full potential.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 6) Refine the English/Language Arts curriculum to continue to stress fundamental skills with an increased emphasis on writing and speaking.
- 7) Continue to build upon the strong mathematics curriculum with an emphasis on ensuring a larger percentage of students are pushed toward advanced coursework in mathematics by the time they reach sophomore year.
- 8) Increase vocational offerings for non-college bound students with an emphasis on preparing students for the 21st century work force.
- 9) Integrate multicultural educational components throughout the curriculum in all subject areas to be relevant to the diverse District 227 student population and promote preparation for living in a global society.

GOAL: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION *(continued)*

FINDINGS

E: Instruction

Stakeholders feel there are high quality educational opportunities available to students, but they need the motivation to take advantage of these opportunities to their full potential. It is the responsibility of the instructional program to achieve this with engaging classes, innovative teaching methodologies and hands-on learning. Classes in the district tend to be systematic and respectful, for the most part. However, there is a greater need for a variety of stimulating instructional methodologies that promote various types of interaction, as well as higher order cognitive thinking. Students need to consistently see a connection between what is studied and everyday life.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 10) Increase student motivation by promoting innovative, engaging, hands-on teaching methodologies through instructional techniques that connect subject matter to students' lives.
- 11) Continue to foster respectful, organized learning environments while increasing the level of stimulation and variety in classroom activities and diversity in classroom interactions.

GOAL: ALIGNMENT

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 will ensure uniformity and continuity in learning opportunities through vertical and horizontal alignment throughout District 227 classrooms, grade levels and schools, as well as with District 227 feeder schools.

FINDINGS

F: Vertical and Horizontal Alignment and the Relationship with Feeder Schools

The District 227 curriculum appears to be well-aligned with local, state and national standards. However, as has already been identified, the implementation of these standards in the schools needs to be better executed. Stakeholders and the ECRA Audit Team have identified alignment as a key to improving the educational program in District 227. This will involve working more closely with the feeder schools to ensure that teachers, administrators, parents, and students at the middle schools are aware of the expectations at the high school level and are following through on achievement so that students are better prepared. District 227 must then work to place students appropriately, and offer appropriate transitional programs to bring students up to speed who may still have deficiencies upon entering the district.

In addition, District 227 must work to improve vertical and horizontal alignment across schools, grade levels and classrooms within the district to address inequities in the implementation of the curriculum.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 12) Align the curriculum and instructional program vertically and horizontally across schools, grade levels and classrooms in District 227 to ensure an equitable implementation of the curriculum.
- 13) Implement a structure of more focused, consistent collaboration with feeder schools to ensure students are entering District 227 prepared to meet the newly articulated standards and expectations for achievement.
- 14) Offer freshman transitional programs where needed for entering students who need additional remediation to be brought up to the level of their peers.

GOAL: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 students of all ability levels will achieve to their full potential, meeting or exceeding standards in all subject areas and exemplifying this through consistent strong performance on standardized tests and college entrance exams.

FINDINGS

G: Student Achievement and Performance on Standardized Tests

District 227 students are not making adequate gains when compared to their peers at that state and national level. Less than half of District 227 students are meeting or exceeding standards on state tests, and are not showing strong performances on college entrance exams. All district stakeholder groups have identified student achievement as one of the most important issues facing the district and see the need for significant improvement in this area. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a major concern, and stakeholders also feel that test scores need to be improved for students to be competitive at the college level and successful in life.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 15) Set incremental achievement targets over a five-year period to ensure that 75 percent of students are meeting or exceeding state standards by the year 2015, and systematically implement specific curriculum and instructional initiatives to accomplish these targets.
- 16) Increase the number of specific educational activities that better prepare students for college entrance exams with an emphasis on ACT preparation.

GOAL: TECHNOLOGY

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 students will enjoy an abundance of rich technology resources that are used daily in the classroom for unique teaching modalities to enhance learning and prepare them for success in an advanced technological world.

FINDINGS

H: Technology Integration into the Classroom

District 227 has made great strides in putting in place a technology infrastructure to support the curriculum. However, the ECRA Audit Team as well as district stakeholders have identified a need to improve integration of technology use into the classroom. This will mean using technology to promote unique teaching modalities that will enhance student learning and prepare them for competence in an increasingly technological world. Stakeholders would like to see District 227 take a proactive approach to technology integration based on future implications and technological developments. The district also must ensure that adequate training is in place for staff when new technologies are introduced, as well as professional development which emphasizes technology used for innovative learning. The district also must allocate technological resources equitably among schools and classrooms throughout the district.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 17)** Increase use of technology for unique teaching modalities in the classroom which enhance student learning.
- 18)** Incorporate additional training in advanced use of teaching technologies into the district's staff development program.
- 19)** Review technology resource allocation throughout District 227 and upgrade deficient areas first when making future technology decisions for the district.

GOAL: ASSESSMENT, RESEARCH AND INFORMATION

(Existing Board Goal: Student Achievement)

District 227 will rely on proactive research that includes an information infrastructure and comprehensive internal assessment system to improve the instructional program and increase student achievement.

FINDINGS

I: Assessment

District stakeholders place a high value on assessment and are aware of the importance of high student performance on standardized tests and college entrance exams. District 227 has a variety of assessments in place. However, the district's assessment system does not translate into student achievement on state and national tests, nor is it used effectively to improve the instructional program. The assessment finding is closely related to the curriculum and student achievement findings in that teachers must use assessment to identify areas for improvement and act upon them, rather than adjusting tests so that students are able to pass them without mastering the content. This will involve developing content that is uniquely aligned to the curriculum and instructional program while at the same time addressing state and national standards, as well as aligning the assessment program across all grade levels, classrooms and schools.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 20) Review and revise internal district assessments to address specific goals aimed at improving achievement on standardized tests in reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.
- 21) Ensure District 227 assessments are used to improve the instructional program by encouraging teachers to hold students accountable for mastering content.

GOAL: ASSESSMENT, RESEARCH AND INFORMATION *(continued)*

FINDINGS

J: Using Research and Information to Make Decisions

District 227 leaders want to be information-driven when making decisions, and place a high value on quality research with a forward-thinking attitude in order to determine future direction. They feel the district needs to take a proactive approach to research to extract information that will project them into the future, and then follow up on achieving initiatives based on the results of research findings. They also stress the importance of using assessment more effectively to improve the district's curriculum and instructional program.

Stakeholders want to see district leaders research the implications of decisions before they are made, and create a system of making decisions based on best practices. They also suggest researching other quality education systems and successful school districts throughout the region, and including input from all stakeholders when making important decisions. They feel that decisions need to be more proactive, rather than reactive, and research can be used to accomplish this.

To accomplish all of this, District 227 must ensure that there are structures in place to collect and manipulate relevant data and turn it into productive information to improve decision-making and student achievement.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 22) Implement a district-wide research and information infrastructure to empower leadership and other stakeholders with accurate information for decision support.

GOAL: LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

(Existing Board Goal: Internal Learning Community)

District 227 leaders will be active and visible in the community and work collaboratively with the highest quality teachers, parents, students and community members toward a common cause of educational excellence for students.

FINDINGS

K: Leadership and Staff

The district has some impressive and important strengths in its leaders, teachers and staff. Stakeholders recognize that teachers and administrators are dedicated, hard working and caring. Like many school districts, they also recognize a lack of consistency in teacher performance and want to ensure that the district works to hire and retain the highest quality teachers for the education of their students. The Board of Education shares this vision and believes that accountability is the key to success in this area. In addition, board members realize they must take a visionary approach to their role as district leaders, while stepping back from management duties so that administrators and faculty members are allowed to do their jobs in a collaborative environment. At the same time, district stakeholders would also like to see the board more visible and making an effort to actively listen to and follow through on their concerns.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 23) Increase Board of Education visibility at District programs and activities and promote additional collaboration between the Board of Education and the community.
- 24) Establish human resource standards and protocols that promote hiring and retention of high quality administrators, teachers and staff, and reward high performing staff members for their efforts.

GOAL: ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

(Existing Board Goal: Internal Learning Community)

The District 227 administrative structure will facilitate clear communication paths and lines of authority with administrators who are experts in their fields to ensure a district leadership structure that promotes success.

FINDINGS

L: Administrative Structure and Special Implications for English/Language Arts

District 227 has a very unusual administrative structure that has strong ramifications for the English / Language Arts program. Communication among administrators lacks a clear structure and pathway. This finding is relatively simple to improve. There should be regular meetings of an administrative council-type based upon curriculum that include the Superintendent, the Assistant Principal for Teaching and Learning, all building Principals, and all building Assistant Principals. This ensures that plans can be coordinated at every level to focus concentrated energy and effort upon improving student learning. In addition, some administrators who are responsible for English / Language Arts programs do not have specialized backgrounds in this curricular and instructional area. The district must work to ensure that leaders are qualified in the curricular areas they direct so faculty members have adequate support and organization in their areas of expertise. The solution will involve realignment of administrative structure at the building and department levels.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 25) Revise and realign the district and building administrative structure to establish and articulate clear pathways of communication and authority for specified positions and roles, and articulate and ensure awareness of this structure to all faculty and staff throughout the district.
- 26) Ensure that all administrators possess appropriate qualifications for their specialized professional and/or curricular areas.

GOAL: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

(Existing Board Goal: Internal Learning Community)

District 227 will promote lifelong learning for all of its educators through professional development opportunities that produce motivated students who are prepared to enter a global society with competence and character.

FINDINGS

M: Staff Development

District 227 makes an effort to provide meaningful professional development opportunities to its administrators, faculty and staff members, and stakeholders recognize these efforts. They believe that staff development is a priority for the district. Hence, they must find a way to translate this belief into a comprehensive staff development program that is based on best practices in education, is aligned to the curriculum and instructional program – especially in the area of technology integration into the classroom, and is effective in promoting innovative, engaging, student-centered teaching methodologies that motivate students to achieve.

In addition, a focus on cultural competence and diversity issues for a multicultural student population and increasingly global society must be universally inherent in staff development activities.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

27) Build upon the current quality staff development program to include the following enhanced components:

- a. Training in more innovative, engaging, student-centered teaching methodologies that motivate students to achieve.
- b. Additional training in technology integration of unique teaching modalities.
- c. Diversity initiatives to promote cultural competence focusing on a global outlook. I

GOAL: EQUITY AND RESOURCES

(Existing Board Goal: Internal Learning Community)

District 227 will ensure equitable curricular and extracurricular opportunities through fair, fiscally responsible instructional programming and resource allocation among schools.

FINDINGS

N: Equity Among High Schools

All stakeholder groups have identified inequities among schools in District 227 in terms of the quality of education provided to students in addition to resources allocated. Whether this is a perception or reality is not relevant. There is an undefined ranking order in the district as Rich Central – Rich South – Rich East in the perception that Rich East is the most underserved of the three. However, evidence shows that the Rich East students and parents take the most pride in their school of the three school groups. The district must work to correct these inequities and/or the perceptions thereof.

O: Resource Allocation

Like school systems nationwide, the changing economic times pose unique challenges to District 227. District leaders are well aware that they need to address these challenges head-on by maximizing the resources they have to provide the best quality education, facilities and resources possible for their students. This requires strategic planning when making decisions along with efficient operations when following through. It is also important to ensure that resources are allocated equitably among the schools in District 227, and that areas which are lacking are brought up to par before allocating new resources to areas with existing advantages.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 28) Determine what is real and what is perceived about the differences among the three high schools in District 227, and then work to ensure that resources and opportunities are equitably distributed and provided within the three high schools to ensure that needs of all students are being met.
- 29) Create positive perceptions of all schools based on individual strengths while promoting district unity.

GOAL: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

(Existing Board Goal: Internal Learning Community)

District 227 will provide a safe, respectful, nurturing learning environment for students and teaching environment for educators that allows all to achieve to their full potential.

FINDINGS

P: Safety and School Climate

Stakeholders view school climate as one of the most important issues to the future of the school – especially in terms of keeping the students, schools and the community safe. They feel that the police liaison is very important to District 227, and that the district should continue to work with local law enforcement to ensure a safe environment. In addition, stakeholders must work to facilitate an environment of respect among administrators, faculty, staff members and students in order to create more positive learning environments. For this to happen, the district must ensure that effective discipline policies are put in place, procedures must be equitably enforced, and they must *make sense* to the benefit of the students involved and the greater school community as a whole. Some current discipline policies, such as attendance and tardiness, need to be reviewed to determine if they are effective. In addition, stakeholders would like to see additional mentoring that addresses the root of discipline problems, as well as a community service component to discipline strategies.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 30) Continue to utilize police liaison to ensure safe schools and school grounds throughout District 227.
- 31) Review and revise discipline procedures and protocols to effectively foster an environment of respect and obedience, while ensuring these policies are in the best interest of the students and are equitably enforced.

GOAL: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE *(continued)*

FINDINGS

Q: Organizational Culture

Administrators, faculty and staff members are complacent in their feelings regarding job satisfaction. The district should make efforts to improve organizational culture so that district personnel are excited to come to work and motivated to teach. One way to do this is to promote more open collaboration between administrators and faculty, and inclusion of faculty members in making important decisions. They want to feel valued for their expertise. Facilitating a positive outlook among staff will promote an improved culture and motivation among District 227 students.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 32) Improve employee satisfaction by increasing collaboration between administrators and faculty on decision-making and outwardly demonstrating support for employees and the value they bring to the district.

GOAL: PARENT INVOLVEMENT

(Existing Board Goal: External Learning Community)

District 227 parents will be actively involved in the education of their children both in school and at home, leading to greater achievement and an enhanced high school experience.

FINDINGS

R: Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in District 227 is weak and sporadic at best. District leaders, teachers, staff, students, parents and community members agree that families must become involved in the education of their children. There are some dedicated parents, and parents say they want to be involved, but their engagement in the District 227 learning community needs to be greatly increased. Part of the problem lies in that parents are unsure of what it is the district wants from them and need more clearly defined roles.

District leaders feel that the guiding principles and philosophy of District 227 should include a parent involvement component, and that district leaders, faculty and staff members must involve parents by reaching out to them and going into the community with a grass roots effort. They stress that personal contact with clearly defined objectives is going to be the key to a successful parent involvement initiative. A measure of success will be how many parents they can move from the “occasionally involved” category to “actively involved”, and eliminating the “rarely involved” category all-together.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 33) Implement a grass-roots effort to increase the number of parents who are actively involved in District 227 by articulating and communicating their desired roles within the schools and at home to enhance student learning and social growth.

GOAL: COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

(Existing Board Goal: External Learning Community)

District 227 will be a true community school system with all stakeholders participating in the successful education of children and all students giving back through community stewardship.

FINDINGS

S: Communication

The district has been working to improve its communication efforts and has made some progress since the 2005 strategic plan. Teachers are doing a good job of being responsive and communicative with parents. However, all district stakeholders including district leaders see a need for improved transparency and open communication throughout and outside of the district.

T: Outreach

The district has improved its public relations activities significantly since the 2005 strategic plan, and is attempting to communicate with stakeholders in a wide variety of media and methods. Stakeholders have identified additional community involvement as a key to increased achievement and success for District 227 students. Like the parent initiative, this will involve a grass roots effort to engage the community – including community leaders, businesses, institutions of higher learning and community members in taking a vested interest in the education of their children. The district needs to clearly define the roles it wants community constituents to take, and then go out into the community to enlist volunteers to achieve these goals.

Finally, stakeholders would also like to see students give back to their community through stewardship and volunteerism as part of the curriculum and instructional program.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

- 34)** Continue to build upon effective public relations efforts and positively brand District 227 using transparent external communication that emphasizes district strengths and accomplishments as well as problem-solving efforts.
- 35)** Engage the community in the successful education of District 227 students by defining roles and reaching out to local leaders, businesses and community members who do not have children in the district.
- 36)** Enhance visibility of students in the community by requiring curricular and/or extracurricular service activities as part of the District 227 educational program.

V. NEXT STEPS

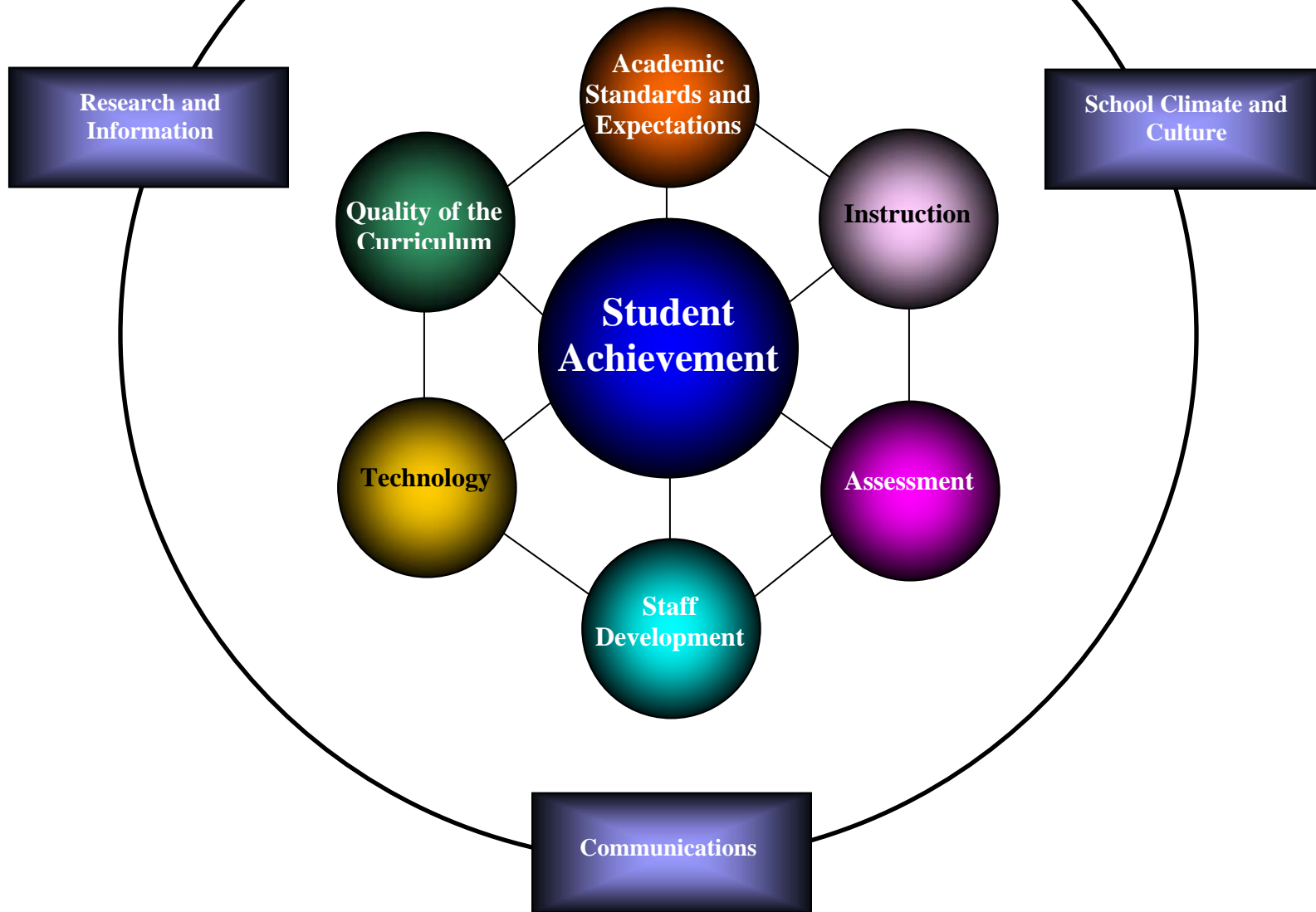
The strategic plan document has presented current realities, goals and initiatives that will help solidify a foundation upon which District 227 can move forward. The strategic planning process is a future-directed process aimed at ensuring District 227 will thrive and improve its effectiveness. The next steps include developing a comprehensive three- to five-year implementation plan in accomplish the initiatives and achieve district goals.

The district should form an implementation team, which will first work to develop the following:

- Several well-thought out strategies that envelop all initiatives
- Tactics to accomplish each initiative
- Timeline and resources required to complete tactics
- Management metrics to provide accountability for tactics
- Execution indicators to monitor strategies

The implementation model on the following page illustrates a sample design for the implementation plan. The district should first establish a central goal area (in this case, the ultimate goal might be improved student achievement), followed by goal areas that feed into the central learning plan. (e.g. quality of the curriculum, instruction, academic standards, etc.) In addition, there will be outlying goal areas that encompass all aspects of the implementation plan (e.g. research and information, school climate and culture, and communication). Each strategy will fall under a goal area. The strategies and goal areas will be unique to District 227 based on the logical grouping of interconnected initiatives. The following model is simply meant to serve as an example.

Example Implementation Model



VI. CONCLUSION

District 227 has made progress in response to the 2005 Strategic Plan by moving forth with the initiatives, and is to be commended in its hard work. As with any continuous quality improvement effort, the District has acted wisely in reviewing this progress, again documenting the current state of reality through important, proactive research, and updating the plan to move forward into the next cycle. While the initiatives may at first seem broad and overwhelming, several well thought-out strategies and an action plan that engages the talent within the district will enable and empower District 227 to accomplish its goals.