

MNSAA

SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Accreditation within MNSAA goes beyond simply demonstrating that a school complies with a particular set of quality standards. It is also a statement of a school's commitment to ongoing improvement. This commitment is practically demonstrated by the development of a School Strategic Plan for improvement.

The self-study report provides an opportunity to reflect on the current state of the school – *where the school is at now*. It also provides a way for the school to clarify and affirm its Mission and Philosophy statements. The portrait that emerges from a self-study identifies both areas of strength, as well as challenges for the future. How a school decides to actively respond to these strengths and challenges is the basis for a School Strategic Plan.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a School Strategic Plan?

A School Strategic Plan (SSP) sets the course and direction for all development and growth within the school. At its core, the plan identifies *where the school wants to be* and *how the school plans to get there*. It defines a practical vision and a path for the school. Any and all specific planning activities should be consolidated in the School Strategic Plan.

How do we know what direction the School Strategic Plan should take?

The goals established within a School Strategic Plan can result from *analyzing real school data* or through self-evaluation (i.e. self-study). Addendums to this plan may come from external sources (i.e. visitation team findings or state/federal legal guidelines). The School Strategic Plan should be driven by the mission of the school.

Can the SSP change as new opportunities and challenges arise?

A School Strategic Plan will identify clear direction and steps for improving, but still operates as *a living document*. Plans will evolve as circumstances change within the school. Plans also grow and extend as further detailed action is developed.

How will we know if process is being made or the plan needs adjustment?

As the School Strategic Plan is implemented, *periodic review* should be incorporated into the school's calendar. The MNSAA Annual Progress Report provides one such opportunity. Such review allows the school to make appropriate revisions to its plan, and provides opportunities for recognizing success.

What format should our School Strategic Plan take?

Though there are many viable forms and styles for strategic plans, the school should design its School Strategic Plans with the following three components: *Objectives, Strategies, and Action Steps*. MNSAA requires a common format for all Strategic Plans, unless other arrangements have been agreed upon with Executive Director.



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OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL STRATEGIC PLAN

The combination of objectives, strategies and action steps is what creates a School Strategic Plan. The plan not only identifies *where the school wants to be*, but *how the school plans to get there*.

Format of the School Strategic Plan

Though there are many various forms that a School Strategic Plan for an organization can take, MNSAA requires a particular format that meets the following criteria:

- Built with an *objective / strategy / action step* framework;
- Readable and understandable for all school community stakeholders;
- Ability to provide progress updates within the plan for annual reporting requirements;
- Ease of adjusting and further developing the plan; and
- Consistent format with other MNSAA Schools

See template at the end of this section for required format.

QUALITY EXPECTATIONS

To ensure that the accreditation process is focused on quality, the following expectations provide a framework for planning, implementing, and reviewing the school improvement efforts:

| | |
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| VALID | The Strategic Plan and the Self-Study Report should accurately and honestly reflect the current reality within the school. |
| CONNECTED | The Strategic Plan should demonstrate a clear connection to the identified strengths and challenges identified within the Self-Study Report. |
| SUPPORTED | The Strategic Plan and Self-Study Report should be understood and supported by the various stakeholders within the school community. |
| VISIONARY | The Strategic Plan should have a long-range focus that goes beyond the mere correction of immediate deficiencies, focusing on broader, critical issues related to the achievement of the school's mission. |
| REASONABLE | The Strategic Plan has established objectives, strategies and action steps that are built within a timeframe that is challenging, yet attainable. |
| FOCUSED | The Strategic Plan has student performance as its primary focus. Some objectives might specifically describe improvements in student performance, while others address the broader educational program that indirectly supports student achievement. |



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OVERVIEW OF OBJECTIVES

Objectives are the end results the school sets out to achieve.

Rather than describing the means for reaching the desired end result, the objectives describe the desired future reality. Objectives identify *where the school wants to be*. All improvement efforts are then directed towards achieving the objectives. Objectives focus on both quantifiable and qualitative change.

Examples of good objectives:

- *The school will meet the academic needs of each student.*
- *To enhance the learning environment, the school will provide a safe, functional, and attractive learning facility.*
- *To continue providing educational services to students, the school will develop a plan to address issues of financial viability into the future.*
- *All students will be assessed on student learner outcomes identified within the curriculum handbook.*

Objectives are student-focused.

Most objectives can be written with an emphasis on students. Though some objectives do not directly impact students, the final result of an achieved objective is the improvement of the overall educational program. Consideration should be given as to how objectives directly or indirectly support students. (It is worth acknowledging that some objectives simply need to be done for legal, ethical or other reasons.)

Example of an objective that is not student-focused:

- *Additional library resources will be secured.*

Example of the same objective written in a manner that is student-focused:

- *The school's library will provide students with current and applicable resources to support learning.*

Some objectives should specifically address student performance.

Though building up the broader educational program is important, at least one objective should relate directly to improving student performance. These objectives should be written in a manner that emphasizes growth versus a specific anticipated achievement or change in student behavior. Some objectives may apply to specific groups of learners (e.g. special needs or advanced learners) – but others should always apply to the broader student body.

Examples of a student performance objective that is not achievable for every student:

- *All students will improve their performance by 10 percentile points.*
- *All 8th graders will pass the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment.*

Examples of a student performance objective that applies to all students:

- *All students will improve writing skills across the curriculum.*
- *Every student will demonstrate improvement in utilizing current technological resources.*

Objectives should be formally adopted and appropriately challenging.

Objectives should have the endorsement of the various school constituents and leadership. They are not simply to be a “wish list.” Objectives should also be challenging, while at the same time both reasonable and achievable. There should be resolve within a school to meet an objective if it is included within their plan.

Example of an objective that is a wish or dream:

- *The school would like to (or hope to) build a new gymnasium.*

Example of the same objective that is adopted and appropriately challenging:

- *The school will determine the feasibility of building a new gymnasium and act accordingly.*

Objectives should be built around significant areas of growth.

Objectives do not always conveniently fit under a MNSAA standard, nor is there a need for an objective for each of the MNSAA standards. Quite often the achievement of particular objective will relate to more than one standard. Schools need to identify the most significant areas within their plan, without concern whether the objective fits cleanly under a particular MNSAA standard heading, or whether there is an objective for each standard heading. Schools are encouraged to review their identified strength and challenge summaries within the self-study to assist in identifying common themes amidst all of the standards that may point to clear objectives.

Example of an objective that relates to several MNSAA standards:

- *To continue providing educational services to students, the school will develop a plan to address issues of financial viability into the future.*

(This objective does not conveniently fit under any one particular MNSAA standard heading, but could rather relate to a few standards – facilities, curriculum, personnel, leadership and governance.)

Objectives have breadth and substance - and are limited in number.

Ideally, the total number of objectives is between four and six. A fewer number of objectives, combined with a reasonable timeframe increases the likelihood of accomplishment and creates a framework for ongoing improvement for the future. A fewer number of objectives, provided they are broad and have substance, encourages a school to take more a macro-view of their strategic planning – recognizing that many areas of improvement relate to a common ideal.

Example of a narrow objective:

- *The school will install safety rails on the outside staircase.* (“To do” list item)

Example of an objective that has substance and is broad:

- *The school will provide a safe, functional, and attractive learning facility.*

Objectives support and reflect the mission.

The mission statement is an expression that reflects a shared vision of the school community. Objectives support and bring focus to the school’s mission. Objectives provide an effective means for achieving the mission. The relationship between the mission and objectives is expected to be discernible.

Example of an objective supportive of a school’s mission:

- *The school will have a curriculum design that provides a strong college preparatory curriculum as prescribed in the school’s mission statement.*

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OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIES

Strategies begin to identify how the school plans to achieve objectives.

While objectives identify the end results the school sets out to achieve – *where the school wants to be*, strategies begin to identify the methods for attaining the objective – ***how the school plans to get there***. Strategies outline the key activities and initiatives the school will undertake to achieve objectives. Through the articulation of clear, concise strategies, stakeholders are able to visualize the methodology that will be utilized for accomplishing each objective.

Examples of objectives with related strategies:

The school will provide a safe, functional, and attractive learning facility.
(objective)

1. *Develop a crisis management plan (strategy)*
2. *Explore an extended day program (strategy)*
3. *Outsource a facilities audit (strategy)*

To continue providing educational services to students, the school will develop a plan to address issues of financial viability into the future. (objective)

1. *Secure competitive market and demographic study (strategy)*
2. *Initiate formal advancement program (strategy)*
3. *Develop marketing/communication campaign (strategy)*

Strategies are concise statements that begin to define action steps.

In a broader context, strategies begin to define the paths for achieving objectives. There is a clearer sense as to what type of action is going to be necessary, but specifics have still not been identified. For this reason, strategies can often be written in a fairly concise manner. Each objective is achieved and supported by more than one strategy.

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OVERVIEW OF ACTION STEPS

Action steps identify specifically how strategies are implemented.

While objectives identify the end results the school sets out to achieve – *where the school wants to be*; and strategies begin to identify the methods for attaining the objective – *how the school plans to get there*; action steps clarify the specific details for implementing strategies – ***what are you actually going to do***. The sequence of action steps becomes the “recipe” for completing an objective. Essentially, this process guides a school community from the abstract (objectives) to the concrete (action steps) in order for the shared vision to become reality.

Action Steps are detailed.

The following components must be a part of action steps:

- What? A description of the specific sequential task(s) to be completed.
- When? A specific timeline for initiating and completing the action step.
- Who? The person(s) responsible for the development and implementation of the action step. Several parties may contribute to different elements of the action step.

Example of an objective with related strategies and action steps:

Objective: **The school will provide a safe, functional, and attractive learning facility.**

Strategy 1: *Develop crisis management plan.*

Action Steps

- *By November 2011, a task force made up of the administrator, school board members, and parent leaders will be established to develop a crisis management plan.*
- *By December 2011, the task force will review state guidelines and resources for establishing a crisis management plan.*
- *By January 2012, the task force will review current crisis management policies and practices within the school.*
- *By February 2012, the task force will interface with local authorities related to school safety (fire marshal, school district, police, etc.)*
- *By April 2012, the task force will develop a draft crisis management plan to be presented and reviewed by the school advisory board.*
- *By August 2012, the school advisory board will adopt a revised final edition of the school crisis management plan.*

Strategy 2: *Explore an extended day program.*

Action Steps

- *By August 2012, the administrator and activities director will conduct a needs assessment with parents through a survey.*
- *By December 2012, the administrator and activities director will research competitive programs in the local area.*
- *By May 2013, the administrator and activities director will review licensure requirements and facility needs and limitations.*
- *By August 2013, a plan and recommendation will be made and presented to the school board for review.*

Strategy 3: Outsource facilities audit.

Action Steps

- *By January 2012, the administrator will contact and research several facility audit firms.*
- *By March 2012, an outside firm will be secured with board approval with a projected date of audit completion by June 2010.*
- *By August 2012, the administrator and school board will review the facility audit and begin developing strategies for addressing the findings.*

Action steps are sometimes the establishment of a recurring good practice.

Action steps are most often incremental steps toward achieving a strategy. Sometimes in order to achieve a strategy, it is beneficial to inherit a recognized good practice within education that has not already been institutionalized within your school. Thus, in order to achieve a strategy, you identify an activity or event the school wishes to adapt on an annual or cyclical basis. (Recurring good practices are valid action steps. If a Strategic Plan is excessively weighted with simply recurring practices, though, it raises questions regarding the visionary quality of the plan. There needs to be an appropriate balance.)

Example of action steps that are recurring good practices:

Objective: *The school will provide a welcoming environment for new students and staff.*

Strategy 1: Develop a formal orientation program.

Action Steps

- *Every August, the principal will host a welcome gathering specifically for all new students and parents. (reoccurring good practice)*
- *At the start of every school year, every new student will be assigned a mentor student to shadow for the first week of school. (reoccurring good practice)*

Action Steps can project out a few years into the future.

It is not realistic to identify specific action steps that will happen in the latter years of a school’s seven year accreditation cycle. Though the intent or end result of some objectives might continue throughout a seven-year accreditation cycle or beyond, specific action steps have their limits – perhaps 1-3 years. Thus, the recognition of the Strategic Plan as a “living document” takes on a greater significance. It will be critical that schools demonstrate their commitment to ongoing improvement by annually reviewing their plan, with a commitment to further development. Schools will need to add new action steps to their plan after the initial steps have been completed. Additional strategies may be implemented as well. Some objectives will eventually be declared completed. What is discovered through the implementation of initial action steps will determine future planning and decisions.

Example of action steps being added in later years:

Strategy: Explore an extended day program.

Initial Action Steps established originally

- *By August 2012, the administrator and activities director will conduct a needs assessment with parents through a survey.*
- *By December 2012, the administrator and activities director will research competitive programs in the local area.*
- *By May 2013, the administrator and activities director will review licensure requirements and facility needs and limitations.*
- *By August 2013, a plan and recommendation will be made and presented to the school board for review.*

In August 2012, a full year in advance, the school board decides to move ahead with the development of an extended day program. (*This fact is not known at the time the original plan is established, but is later realized.*)

**Added
Action
Steps**

- *By December 2012, the administrator will secure bids on facility modifications necessary for before and after school programs.*
- *By January 2013, the school board will review bids and determine action.*
- *By July 2013, facility modifications will be complete.*

Action Steps increase accountability.

By specifying the details of each action step, the degree of accountability increases exponentially. Now stakeholders are able to envision the sequences of tasks that will be required to bring the particular objective to fruition. Every task that needs to occur in attaining an objective is defined by an action step.

Additional components of Actions Steps

Schools *may* consider including the following additional components when developing action steps:

- Resources from within and outside the school community, necessary for implementation of the action step. Consider time, materials, equipment, finances, etc.
- Evaluation procedures for acknowledging successful realization of the action step.
- Activities to celebrate success.

Action steps help foster greater ownership and vision within the school community.

When developing strategies and action steps, there should be an increasing sense of ownership and responsibility toward the realization of an objective. Through the experience of developing strategies and action steps, a sense of commitment is instilled in members of the school community.