

Cromwell
Public
Schools

2014-2018

A descriptive vision of the critical challenges facing the Cromwell Public Schools.



Strategic
Planning
Executive
Summary

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Strategic Planning Executive Summary

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Planning Process Overview

Incorporated in 1851, Cromwell Connecticut is located in Middlesex County in the Connecticut River Valley and has a population of around 14,000. The Cromwell Public Schools enrollment is roughly 2,000 and these students are housed in four school facilities; an elementary, intermediate, a middle and high school. Cromwell Public Schools have enjoyed a hard earned reputation for being an efficient and productive system with students who consistently perform at or above the levels of districts with similar demographic and economic profiles.

Like most other public school districts in Connecticut, the last few years have brought an ever increasing number of challenges that are an order or magnitude greater than most have ever witnessed in this arena. A new set of more rigorous Connecticut Core standards in language arts and math, deeper accountability for staff through a new educator evaluation process, new assessment challenges and testing protocols, the impact of digital learning, and a wave of additional Connecticut school reform legislation, have created a series of change imperatives that will impact every facet of public school education in Cromwell.

With the arrival of a new superintendent of schools and the end of the previous strategic plan's life span, the time was right to step back from the rush to meet immediate needs and take a more reflective systemic approach to the planning process. With this as her goal, the Superintendent met with and hired a planning consultant to design a process to meet the unique needs of the district. Her requirements were clear; design an efficient process that recognizes the work that needs to be done, the work we want to do, and builds on the foundation of what the district has already started and currently does well. With that process outline in hand, the Superintendent convened key staff members, Board of Education members, and a diverse group of community representatives and launched this effort in the fall of 2013. The representatives of this Strategic Planning Team and their affiliations are listed on the following page:

Cromwell Public Schools Strategic Planning Core Team

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At the introductory sessions, held in September, 2014 the Core Planning Team was oriented to their custom designed three phase planning process: 1. Preparation for planning by reviewing all of the most important change forces and requirements in the public school arena, 2. Revisiting the district Mission and Beliefs, organizing into productive content theme groups that connect all of the work that needs to be done and completing an assessment of the current efforts being undertaken in the district, and finally 3. Planning for how to bridge the gap between what is needed and what exists currently and how to measure the success of the plan long-term.

After a process orientation, it was agreed that when the plan is completed, the product should:

- Command respect and derive support from a broad cross-section of the Cromwell Public Schools community.
- Articulate 2-4 priority strategic goals that will serve as key areas of developmental focus over the next four years.
- Provide suggested indicators of success, strategies and action plans for continuously improving performance and/or building capacity in those areas of focus.

With these pieces in place, the group engaged with several hours of content related to all of the current changes that have been designated for public schools as a result of recent changes in federal, state, and regional legislation and standards. This included the impact of Connecticut Public Act 12-116 and the new Regional Accreditation Standards from the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. Finally, the group spent some time discussing the ever changing world of digital information and global competition that students will be entering after they leave the Cromwell Public Schools. Through these interactions, it was recognized by the Core Planning Team that at a minimum, over the next few years the district would have to address:

- Language arts curriculum revisions including higher standards and expectations related to new Connecticut Core State Standards
- Math curriculum revision including higher standards and expectations related to new Connecticut Core State Standards

- Anticipated science curriculum revision including higher standards and expectations related to new Next Generation Science Standards
- Instructional changes and classroom challenges required for the delivery of each of the revised curricula mentioned above.
- Transition from the current Mastery Test to a new generation of computer based adaptive assessments (the Smarter Balanced assessments)
- Support and implementation of a new state mandated teacher evaluation model
- Support and implementation in new state mandated administrator evaluation model
- New models of professional learning and support
- A transition from a print to a digital learning environment.

This discussion focused on the district's responsibility to meet the state's expectations but also on how to help prepare students for their life and work beyond school in this environment. Following this, the group was divided into four research and data collection groups. Each group was tasked with collecting data that would explore the status of the district's response to each of the above identified challenges as framed through the lens of goals, measures and practices required to meet these needs. The data collection benchmarks were as follows:

Area One: Goals for Learning

1. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the primary learning goals (skills and knowledge) associated with the Connecticut Core State Standards.
2. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of priority 21st century skills that are the focus of the districts community-wide learning expectations (NEASC).
3. All academic curriculum areas are aligned to integrate and focus on priority Common Core and 21st century content and skill goals.

4. There are easily accessible electronic instructional resources for staff and community in all academic areas that support the implementation of these updated and aligned curriculum frameworks

Area Two: Assessment Practices

1. There is a high degree of faculty agreement and alignment regarding the standards and practices (terms, definitions, rubrics etc.) used to measure student growth and development in the priority Common Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
2. There is a high degree of agreement on the value and appropriateness of the assessments used to measure student progress (we measure what we value and we value what we measure).
3. There is a high degree of alignment and agreement among and between grades and schools regarding the assessments and data points used to track student progress toward priority Common Core and 21st century skill practices.
4. Performance data is easily accessible to all appropriate stakeholders, is reflective of district priorities, and is used regularly to improve practice in real-time.
5. Leadership practices and supporting resources are consistently promoting and aligned with these measures and practices.

Area Three: Instructional Practices

1. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) and community (parents' et. al.) awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the desired Information Age student higher-order thinking and engagement behaviors that lead to mastery in the identified Common Core and 21st century skill goal areas.
2. There is a high degree of faculty (staff) knowledge and understanding of how to design and facilitate digitally supported instructional experiences that maximize the desired Information Age higher-order thinking and engagement.
3. There is a high degree of alignment and coherence among and between grade levels and schools regarding what successful practices would look like if these behaviors were occurring regularly across the district.
4. Leadership practices and supporting resources are consistently promoting and aligned with the indicators of successful Information Age higher-order thinking and engagement identified in this area.

Area Four: Supporting Systems

1. There is a high degree of alignment regarding the standards and practices (terms, definitions, rubrics etc.) used to measure teacher/leader growth with the key Common Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
2. There is a high degree of agreement on the value and appropriateness of the assessments used to measure student progress (we measure what we value and we value what we measure) with the measures used to assess adult success in the system.
3. There is a high degree of alignment in the content and delivery of professional learning resources with Common Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.
4. There is a high degree of alignment between the identification and delivery of budget resources with the support of Common Core and 21st century skill practices identified in the goals for learning area.

The result of this work began with reflection and deliberation around the wording and meaning of the district's stated Mission and Beliefs. The product of that work was the following consensus-based changes agreed upon on 1/23/14:

Cromwell Public Schools – Mission and Belief Statements

"Placing Students First"

The Cromwell Public Schools educate and inspire all students to apply the essential skills needed to become productive and responsible citizens in a rapidly changing global society.

In pursuing this Mission, the Cromwell Public School community believes that:

- **All students are valued and deserve an education that meets their academic, physical, and social/emotional needs.**
- **All members of the community have a right to a safe, supportive, engaging, and culturally inclusive learning environment.**
- **All members of the community value effective communication, involvement and collaboration among all partners in the educational process.**
- **All members of the community must uphold high expectations, be accountable, and demonstrate a commitment to excellence.**

Goal Work Organization Summary

After the Mission and Beliefs revision, the group spent time analyzing the information collected and the evidence gathered in response to the previously stated reflection questions. Each of the groups presented their findings while colleagues listened, asked clarifying questions, and took note of their own individual insights related to what the data indicated. Participants then used an Affinity Diagram processing tool to determine the common threads and priority needs. Through this process, four areas of focus gained consensus:

1. **Goals for learning – how do our curricular and instructional support materials align with Common Core and 21st Century Skill Priorities and how are these supported throughout the learning community?**
2. **Assessment practices – how do our assessment and measurement systems align with our goals for learning, teaching practices, and the demands of data driven instruction?**
3. **Digital learning practices – how do our teaching practices support and align with the increased effective use of the digital tools for learning that will best prepare our students for success in an information age learning and work environment?**
4. **Adult learning practices – how do we support our adult learners as they seek to acquire the skills and dispositions needed to support student growth in this environment?**

With these priority areas set, Goal Planning Teams that were balanced with staff and community representatives were then formed around each goal area. These Planning Teams set out first to clarify and strengthen the goal statement language and then to identify indicators of success that could be used to measure progress of the plan during the implementation period. Using those indicators of success, the Goal Planning Teams worked together to build a cohesive vision of what the achieved goals would look like.

Goal One:

The Cromwell Public School Community will have a common understanding of the knowledge, skills and dispositions students will need for success in life, learning, and work beyond school.

Indicators of Success:

- There is a common language Pre-K-12 used by the community to describe knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required for success and why they are important for all children
 - Identify shared language
 - Communicate shared language with students, teachers, and public
 - Ensure that language is infused into all critical district documents and practices (e.g. - report cards, student handbooks, approved curriculum)
 - There is a consensus on priority focus areas for improvement
- Parents and community will have a shared understanding of the common core, 21st century skills and related dispositions and what it looks like in practice.
- All curriculum will be aligned to the Cromwell skills and dispositions
 - Units of study will contain project-based and authentic learning experiences
 - Instruction will require students to think critically , solve real world problems, and work collaboratively
 - School work connected to work/career
 - Assessments will be aligned to the curriculum (see goal two)
 - A variety of assessment strategies will be utilized to determine student achievement (see goal two)

Steps	Outcomes	People	Dates
Identify priority skills and attributes and develop shared language	Skills are identified and prioritized Shared working vocabulary is established	CIA	Fall 2014
Review district documents	To ensure clear and consistent language that reflects Cromwell knowledge and dispositions	CIA	Spring 2015
Professional development opportunities for staff	Deepen understanding of DOK and authentic student assessments	CIA/ Building administrators	Spring 2015 - ongoing
Develop student capacity for self-assessment and reflection	To build student understanding of the dispositions needed for success in life learning and work beyond school	Identified group	Spring 2015
Review curriculum units	To ensure alignment to CCSS and opportunities for authentic learning experiences	Members of Division of Teaching and Learning, CIA, district leaders	Spring 2015
Review and align current assessment practices	To ensure alignment to Cromwell knowledge and disposition	CIA, district leaders	Spring 2015

Goal Two:

To continuously improve student learning through the application of Common Core State Standards/21st Century Skills aligned common assessments that inform and support professional practice.

Indicators of Success:

- The district will have reliable assessments in place that can determine in a timely fashion the impact of instruction on student learning at the classroom level and track student performance and its improvement in key areas over time (Common Core/21st century skills).
- There is alignment Pre-K-12 of SPI/DPI measures that reflect local district values.
- The district will have a process to communicate the district's progress in 21st Century learning expectations to the community at regular intervals.
- The district will be regularly reviewed and revise grading and reporting practices to ensure alignment with the district's core values and beliefs about learning.
- The district will implement a formal process to use data teams to collect, disaggregate and analyze data from a variety of sources including information for use of district wide rubrics to drive curriculum and improve instructional practices.
- The district will employ effective data collection and analysis processes relative to student achievement of 21st Century learning expectations in all content areas.

Steps	Outcomes	People	Dates
Refine, focus and re-align Cromwell High School 21 st century skills rubrics with identified district priority skills.	PK-12 understanding of aligned skills For CCSS/ 21st	Grade level Teams/Content Area Teams	6-12 months
Skills Defined PK-12	PK-12 aligned skills For CCSS/ 21st	Grade level Teams/Content Area Teams	6-12 month
Determine what and how data from these assessments could/should impact DPI and SPI	Results from District wide rubrics or other agreed upon measures to form locally constructed DPI/SPI measures	Representative from CIA	6-12 months
Inventory assessments for measuring specific skills	Mapped what assessments are currently in place to reliably measure the identified PK-12 skills	Representative from CIA	6-12 months
Identify gaps and redundancies PK-12 assessment continuum	Gaps and assessment needs are identified	Identify the person/group to Identify gaps Representative from CIA	6-12 months

Develop the strategies/assessments to close the gaps	Implementation of the strategies/assessments to close the gaps.	Grade Level /Content Area Facilitator	6-12 months
Assessment outcomes used to inform and improve performance	Informs instruction by seeing growth over time	Identify the person to align assessments Representative from CIA	6-12 months

Goal Three:

The district will build capacity in the use of digital tools for both students and staff to improve learning and communication.

Indicators of success

- Consistent use of digital tools across grades and content areas
- Students and staff using digital tools for instruction and assessment
- Digital learning skills are embedded throughout the Pre K-12 curriculum
- Digital tools are used to communicate between staff, students, parents and community
- On-going PD for staff in the area of digital tools and integration
- Regular scheduled re-evaluation of digital tools and technical needs

Steps	Outcomes	People	Dates
Define what staff and administration skills and understanding of 21st century skills should be	Baseline of current status re 21st century skills	IT Dept., administration, CIA Sub-Committee, selected staff	By May 2014
Create inventory of current digital tools and staff skill level	Areas of strength and areas for development	IT Dept., administration, CIA Sub-Committee, staff	By June 2014

Use data from inventory to create goals for integration of digital tools and staff training	Create district goals for achieving desired integration of digital learning	IT Dept., administration, CIA Committee, selected staff members	By August 2014
Use the goals to create a plan for integration of digital tools	Timeline with clear steps to achieving the plan	IT Dept., administration, CIA Committee, selected staff members	Starting 2014-15 school year and ongoing throughout year

Goal Four:

The district will provide the capacity for PK - 12 staff to engage in an on-going professional learning community process that increases student achievement.

Indicators of Success

- All staff can articulate and utilize the instructional practices that align with priority Common Core standards and 21st century learning skills.
- All staff is engaged in structured, professional dialogue focused on student achievement.
- All staff has access to professional development opportunities within and outside of district that align with common core standards and 21st century learning skills.

Steps	Outcomes	People	Dates
Explore ways where staff can collaborate at regularly scheduled times to discuss content, instructional practices and student achievement.	To build and sustain professional learning communities to focus on student achievement.	PK-12	weekly-Oct.-May
Provide and review job-embedded professional development where	Develop district teacher leaders and coaches to support instructional	PK-12 Staff Administration	Professional Development

instructional practices incorporate common core standards and 21st century learning skills.	practices aligned with common core standards and 21st century skills.	Central Office District Coaches	Days
Provide training for staff in a structured process that allows them to analyze student work and instructional practices to improve student achievement.	Creating plans based on information gathered from student work, formative assessments that focus on the individual student.	Administration Central Office District Coaches	Weekly
Provide professional development training opportunities for staff new to the district in August.	Staff new to the district will have current information on best practices and district initiatives.	District Coaches Central Office Administration	Prior to the start of the new school year
The Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability Committee will continue to oversee and plan professional development within and outside the district, monitor the staff evaluation process and curriculum development.	Through the CIA and its sub-committees, its purpose will serve as the unifying body for all district, state and federal initiatives and mandates.	Members of the CIA Committee Central Office	Monthly