

FIVE COMMON STRATEGIC PLANNING MISTAKES

1. Failure to clarify your school Vision and Mission as part of the process.

Many schools spend a great deal of time clarifying their school Vision and Mission – and then forgetting about it. Being clear about both of these and ensuring that **every** member of the school community is also clear is essential to successful planning. Many schools fall down at the first hurdle because lack of a shared vision and mission means lack of commitment to where the school is going. Any plan is, therefore, doomed to fail. The time, and sometimes agony, it takes to reach a consensus on what your school does, for whom and where it is going, is worth every hour it takes.

2. Failure to consult

If it is important to have commitment to a shared vision (and it is!), then failing to communicate with all stakeholders throughout the strategic planning process is likely to result in a flawed plan, and flawed implementation. It denies the creative input of people who have excellent ideas to move the school forward and it increases the dangers of 'group think', with influential school leaders more likely to hijack the plan to fit their preconceived ideas. While this is not fatal if the leader is knowledgeable and open to new ideas, it does run the risk that some of the best ideas will never be heard.

Consulting all stakeholders does not mean they must be involved in every step of the planning process, but it does mean that at some time in the process parents, staff, board members, students and the wider community should have the opportunity to provide meaningful input.

3. Failure to gather data

Knowing about your school and all of its characteristics, both good and bad, is essential to useful strategic planning. It is a waste of valuable time, for example, to implement a new behaviour management plan if you don't have data on the type of behaviour that is causing concern, the number of incidents of bad behaviour and when and where the behaviour concerns. Similarly, implementing a new literacy program when the data reveals that all members of the school community are reaching literacy benchmarks may be a waste of time and resources.

After clarifying the vision and mission, the next essential step is to collect the data on which you will base decisions about the future.

4. Failure to communicate

Most people are uncomfortable with change if they do not understand how the change might impact on them. Many difficult times in schools are eliminated, or at least reduced, if school management gets the communication process right. When discussing change that may occur as a result of strategic planning, all members of the school community need to understand the strategic planning process, need to be kept up to date on how the plan is progressing, need to know when and how they will be consulted, and need to have access to the plan when it is completed.

5. Failure to implement

A plan is nothing more than words on paper until it is implemented. School stakeholders quickly become cynical if months are spent on developing a strategic plan, and then the plan remains in the principal's office, or amongst the board's papers. Towards the end of the planning process, the implementation plan must be developed. This involves identifying the strategies and actions to reach the goals outlined in the plan, deciding on the timeline, and identifying the people who are responsible for the actions. And it also means establishing a monitoring process to review on a regular basis how implementation is progressing.