

# Winterset Public Schools

## Strategic Plan Final Report

November 29, 2022



**Keeping the Focus on Students**

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### Executive Summary

We acknowledge through research and our collective experience that effective public schools are the catalyst for a strong foundation of our communities. The health and well-being of the students and the communities our schools serve are crucial to the success of our society. Public education continues to evolve to meet the needs of the students and communities it serves. To this end, a comprehensive strategic plan is critical to addressing the ever changing needs of our stakeholders and the overall organization.

## I. RATIONALE FOR ENGAGING IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

Strategic planning is an organizational management activity that provides direction and focus for organizations. It is a customized roadmap for success designed specifically for each individual organization. By setting overall goals for the organization and creating a plan to achieve them, the organization can improve its efficiency and effectiveness. It allows the organization to take a step back from the day-to-day operations and reflect on the current reality in order to plan for the future.

Engaging in the strategic planning process promotes innovation, improves decision making, assists in setting the right goals, promotes clarity for the community, reduces overlapping of services, and ensures efficient use of resources.

The strategic planning process invites stakeholders, parents, community members, staff members, administrators and students to actively participate in examining the district's current reality, consider what's possible, and define the desired future for Winterset Public Schools. These stakeholders refine the Mission, Vision and Values of the district, in order to establish priorities that bring focus to the district's future work. Once the priorities are identified, the administration creates the goals, strategies and tactics needed to achieve the desired reality, typically over a three to five-year period.

- **Stakeholder Input:** Meetings and surveys were conducted to seek perspective and advice about the status and future needs of the district from parents, students, teachers, staff and district community members.
- **Data collection:** Key information from various sources were gathered to inform future directions including a District Overview, Local, State and US Economic Data, and National Education Trends and Issues.
- **Directions Development:** Based on the findings and conclusions of the stakeholder input and data collection, the Key Stakeholder Group worked to update the mission, vision, values, Portrait of a Graduate characteristics and priority strategies.
- **Approval of Strategic Directions:** The Winterset Public Schools Draft Strategic Report will be presented at the December Board meeting including the mission, vision, core values, POG and priority strategies with expected outcomes.
- **Implementation Plan Development:** Staff leaders will work with the School Board to develop an action roadmap for achieving the strategic directions including:
  - Actions: Specific short and long-term initiatives and action steps

- Resources: Projection of time, human, physical and/or financial resources to support action
- Process metrics: Benchmarks for measuring implementation progress and success

## II. CURRENT REALITY

Winterset Public Schools leadership team identified both current strengths and challenges to guide the strategic planning process:

**Strengths:** The leadership team identified strengths in achievement, technology, work-based learning and post-secondary learning opportunities, facilities, finances, community outreach and extra-curriculars.

### Academic & Program Success

Directions: Please use your handout to add your perceptions, ideas, questions and feedback.

#### Technology

- ❑ 1:1 devices district-wide
- ❑ Classroom resources (Projectors, etc.)
- ❑ Expanded bandwidth and access points
- ❑ Three FTE tech support staff

#### Work-Based Learning

- ❑ IJAG
- ❑ Multi-Occupations Course opportunities



Provide your input!

#### Post Secondary Education

- ❑ Since 2015 55-70% have enrolled in postsecondary education (80-89% of those students returned)
- ❑ Two FTE Counselors at the High School

### Academic & Program Success

Directions: Please use your handout to add your perceptions, ideas, questions and feedback.

#### Achievement

- ❑ ACT data is above the state average in the last five years
- ❑ Average Student Daily attendance above 95%
- ❑ Best Buddies Program
- ❑ Capturing Kids' Hearts Implementation
- ❑ Concurrent Enrollment (College Level Course) opportunities
- ❑ District Model PLC Award 2019
- ❑ Graduation Rate exceeds 97% since 2014
- ❑ Iowa State Assessment scores near or above state average across all disciplines
- ❑ Life-Skills Programming
- ❑ Middle School Blue-Ribbon Award (2018-2019)



Provide your input!

### Community Successes

Directions: Please use your handout to add your perceptions, ideas, questions and feedback.

#### Community Outreach

- ❑ Juvenile Court Liaison
- ❑ Community Food Pantry
- ❑ Shared District Social-Worker

#### Extra Curricular Activities

- ❑ 2021-2022 80% of Junior High student body were involved in extracurricular activities
- ❑ 2021-2022 75% of High School student body were involved in extracurricular activities
- ❑ WHS Band has been named the Class 3A Honor Band 4 times since 2009



Provide your input!

### Facility & Financial Success

Directions: Please use your handout to add your perceptions, ideas, questions and feedback.

#### Facilities

- ❑ 20 Million dollar bond completed in 2020 (Classrooms, Competition Gym, Secure Entrances)
- ❑ Secure entrances and increased camera surveillance

#### Finances

- ❑ Solvency = 20%
- ❑ Unspent Authorized Budget (UAB) = 28%
- ❑ Instructional Support Levy & Physical Plant Equipment Levy - in place



**Challenges:** The leadership team identified challenges in staff recruitment and retention, student enrollment and providing student mental health services and behavior supports.

## III. IDENTIFIED NEEDS

As we examined the current reality through conversations with leadership, community stakeholders, staff members and students, a consistent list of needs and themes emerged. These needs were categorized as follows:

The key stakeholders who participated in the strategic planning process included staff, students and community members. The 45-50 community members were a diverse cross section representing the city, businesses, parents and staff. They met two evenings for three hours each time to better understand the current state of the district as well review

## Keeping the Focus on Education

stakeholder data from all other stakeholder groups (students, staff, community) and define a desired future that best matches the needs of the students in Winterset.

SOAR Activity (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results). The Key Stakeholder Group identified the following:

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School pride</li> <li>Community involvement</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Opportunities for students; academic &amp; co-curricular</li> <li>Heavy staff engagement</li> <li>Adaptable</li> <li>Inclusion of special ed students</li> <li>Small town vibe</li> <li>Staff feel supported</li> <li>Instructional coaches</li> <li>Outside resources</li> <li>MTSS process improving each year</li> <li>Proximity to the metro</li> <li>Great facilities</li> <li>Technology</li> <li>Alternative school</li> <li>Community financial support for students</li> <li>PTO is getting better</li> <li>Student centered teachers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure teachers with skillset to meet 21st century skills</li> <li>Stronger investment in our staff certification for concurrent enrollment</li> <li>Mental health training for staff</li> <li>Aligned student experiences with their future plans.</li> <li>Public relations to the community</li> <li>Community investment - opportunities for partnerships with businesses</li> <li>Collaborate and cooperate with the community</li> <li>Adult learning opportunities to build more comfort with the school</li> <li>Students to have: problem solvers, grit, perseverance, conflict/resolution, collaboration</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aspirations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kids prepared with a plan, purpose and 21st century skills</li> <li>Employability skills</li> <li>Foster 'safe to fail' moments for kids at an earlier age</li> <li>Relationships, happiness, mental health</li> <li>Success post high school</li> <li>Positive communication skills</li> <li>Community buy in for CKH (district initiatives)</li> <li>Opportunities for mobility</li> <li>Long-term connectedness</li> <li>Confidence in skills - be prepared</li> <li>Omit standardized testing - bring quantitative and qualitative analysis</li> <li>Career planning, strategizing,</li> <li>World awareness</li> <li>Help students find their passion</li> </ul>	<p><b>Results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retention of teachers</li> <li>% of students who complete college, trade schools, certifications, military, etc</li> <li>Students returning to the community</li> <li>Strong alumni support</li> <li>Local employment rates increase</li> <li>Educated and involved stakeholders</li> <li>Increased enrollment</li> <li>Maintaining graduation rate</li> </ul>

Overall, the SOAR Analysis themes are as follows:

**Strengths:** Community connectedness, staff and resources

**Opportunities:** Develop 21st Century Skills

**Aspirations:** Focus on 21st Century Skills, employability skills and social emotional needs of students

**Results:** Staff retainment, involved alumni, increasing enrollment

## Student Feedback Themes:

Students identified support for the following:

- quality, caring trustworthy teachers
- variety of courses at upper levels (college level, hands-on classes, electives)
- supportive stakeholders (teachers, administration, community)

Students identified the following as desired opportunities:

- additional choices and variety on courses
- more freedom and flexibility
- Increase cultural awareness and opportunities
- more courses (online, language and college offerings)
- more authentic learning experiences and assessments (less memorization, more hands-on, real-world connections)
- college ready schedule at HS

Student themes were derived from three focus groups with twenty-five high school students from grades 9-12 in each group.

## Staff Feedback Themes:

### **Strengths of the District (prioritized)**

- Student-Centered/Relationship Focused
- Curriculum, Resources and Technology
- Caring Staff
- Small District with lots of Pride
- Data-driven

### **Challenges for the District (prioritized)**

- Meeting 21st Century Needs
- Competition and enrollment
- Keeping up with Technology
- Teacher agency and accountability
- Resources
- Staffing
- Tradition

### **Other Themes-Gaps we see in our instruction/schools**

- Social Skills

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- Real World experiences and projects
- Problem Solving/Critical Thinking
- Exposure to Career Pathways
- Meaningful use of Digital Tools and Resources

### Other Themes-What we need to focus on for students to be future ready

- Social/Emotional Needs
- Authentic Learning including projects, collaboration, hands-on, real world, career-focused
- More authentic use of technology
- More student directed and student-centered learning
- Effective Communication
- Problem Solving
- Creativity

Staff themes were derived from a comprehensive staff survey.

## Community Feedback-Opportunities & Needs:

Rank order of community support for themes. Percent indicates the percent who stated they agreed or strongly agreed:

- Winterset High School students need opportunities to explore career pathways - 91.8%
- Winterset students need to practice 21st Century Skills (creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication) in their learning experiences - 88%
- Winterset students need more real world, authentic learning experiences - 86%
- The Winterset community needs to be more connected to the schools through partnerships, internships, learning experiences and job shadowing - 85.6%
- Winterset students need opportunities to explore their interests and passions within their school learning experiences - 85.2%
- Winterset students need more relevant, real-world experiences with technology and digital resources - 77.8%
- Winterset High School students need a more student driven learning experience to prepare them for college, work and careers - 72%
- The Winterset School District needs to provide additional support for students' social, emotional and mental health needs - 66.6%
- Winterset High School students need a wider variety of courses to meet their needs - 65.4%
- Winterset students need more experiences to better understand diverse cultures and global awareness - 64.9%
- The Winterset School District needs new strategies to market the district to counter declining enrollment - 51.3%



Community themes were derived from a comprehensive community survey.

## Portrait of a Graduate:

A group of parents and staff worked through the Portrait of a Graduate process meant to determine what additional skills and dispositions are critical to our students' success. The following themes were determined as most crucial:

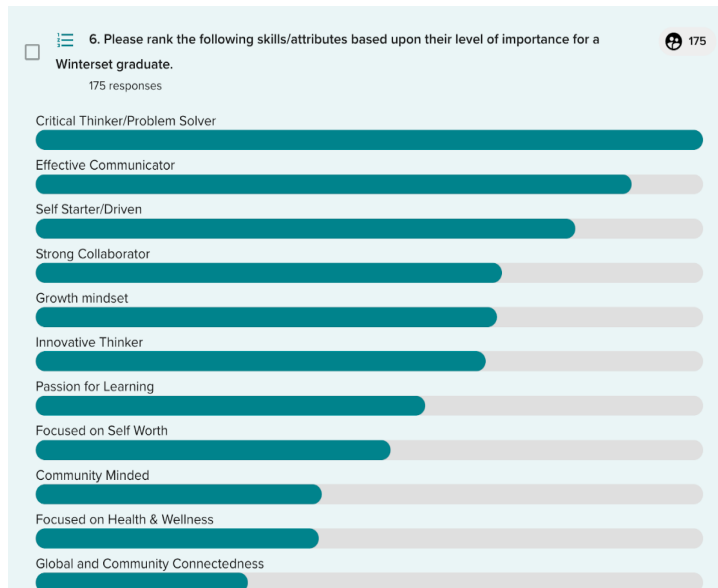
- Critical Thinker/Problem Solver
- Self-Started/Driven
- Community Focused
- Growth Mindset
- Focused on Self Worth
- Innovative
- Globally and Community Connectedness
- Effective Communicator
- Passion for Learning
- Focused on Health and Wellness
- Collaborator

To determine the level of support for these themes two surveys were developed and sent to the community for feedback. The following was the result:

Rank order of community support for themes (257 respondents). Percent indicates the percent who stated it was needed or strongly needed:

- Effective Communicator - 94.6%
- Critical Thinker/Problem Solver - 93.4%
- Growth Mindset - 87.1%
- Self-Started/Driven - 84.9%
- Collaborator - 76.4%
- Innovative - 73%
- Focused on Self Worth - 70.8%
- Passion for Learning - 69.3%
- Focused on Health and Wellness - 64.5%
- Community Focused - 61.5%
- Globally and Community Connectedness - 56.4%

## Keeping the Focus on Education

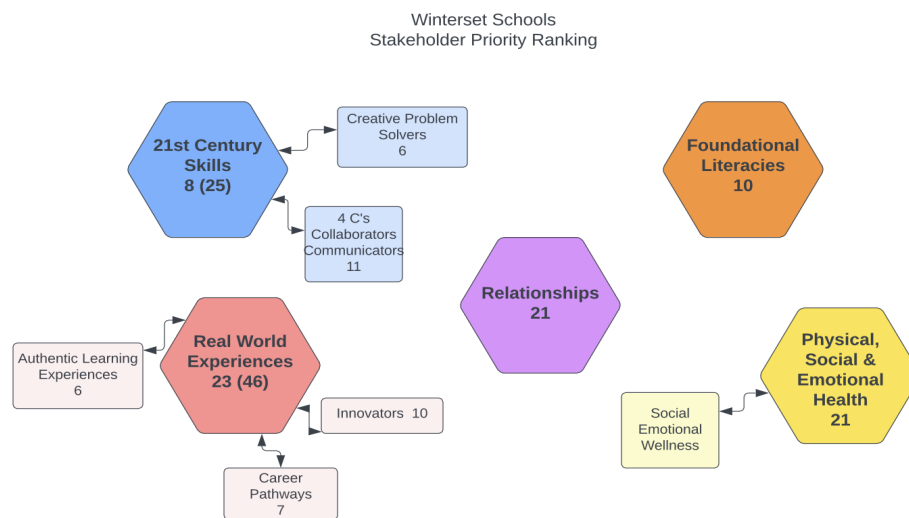


In both surveys, the top six skills/attributes were as follows: effective communicator, critical thinker/ problem solver, self-starter/driven, collaborator, innovative thinker and a growth mindset.

## IV. DESIRED FUTURE

***“How will we ensure an excellent education for all Winterset students now that prepares them for a successful future?”***

The following diagram illustrates the focus areas identified by the task force to answer this, our guiding question, for the strategic planning work. The number associated with the focus area indicates the level of priority identified by the group.





Suggested priorities that emerged from the “desired future” activity to ensure ***Winterset students are prepared for a successful future (in rank order) are:***

1. Real World Experiences
2. 21st Century Skills
3. Strong relationships
4. Social and Emotional Health
5. Foundational Literacies

## V. STRATEGIC PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The key stakeholder group analyzed the current mission, vision and core values in relation to the collected data from focus groups and surveys. The following mission and vision statements were suggested based on the key stakeholders' analysis:

### Mission Statement:

We will empower a community of lifelong learners who strive for personal excellence through meaningful relationships and real world, authentic learning experiences.

### Vision Statement:

We will strive for excellence, ensuring all students are college, career and life ready.

Through the mission and core values work, the key stakeholder group landed on the following core values:

### Core Values:

**Excellence** - high expectations for *all* in everything we do.

**Innovation** - in our approach to problem solving and learning

**Pride** - in self, others, school and community

**Relationships** - amongst all stakeholders as foundational to our success

**Sense of Belonging** - where all students, staff and community members feel valued and connected.

# Portrait of a Graduate:

We believe the following skills and attributes are critical to student success. As a result we will ensure each student engages in learning experiences to develop these assets.

- Effective communicator
- Critical thinker/problem solver
- Self-starter/driven
- Collaborator
- Innovative thinker
- Growth mindset

## Strategic Priorities

As a result of combining the *Identified Needs* with the *Desired Future Priorities*, the foundation for our recommendations emerged. These recommendations are presented for your consideration and approval. Based on the identified themes, the following strategic priorities and potential strategies have been identified:

1. Increase student opportunities that integrate Real World Focus and Application-based Learning to ensure all students are college, career and life ready.

Potential Strategies:

- In collaboration with key stakeholders, identify the key success indicators and define the learning experiences for every student
- Consider a business mentoring program for high school students
- Explore career pathways aligned to local and state economy
- Pursue partnerships with local businesses

2. Integrating 21st Century learning skills and student opportunities.

Potential Strategies

- Fully integrate the Portrait of a Graduate in all classrooms K-12

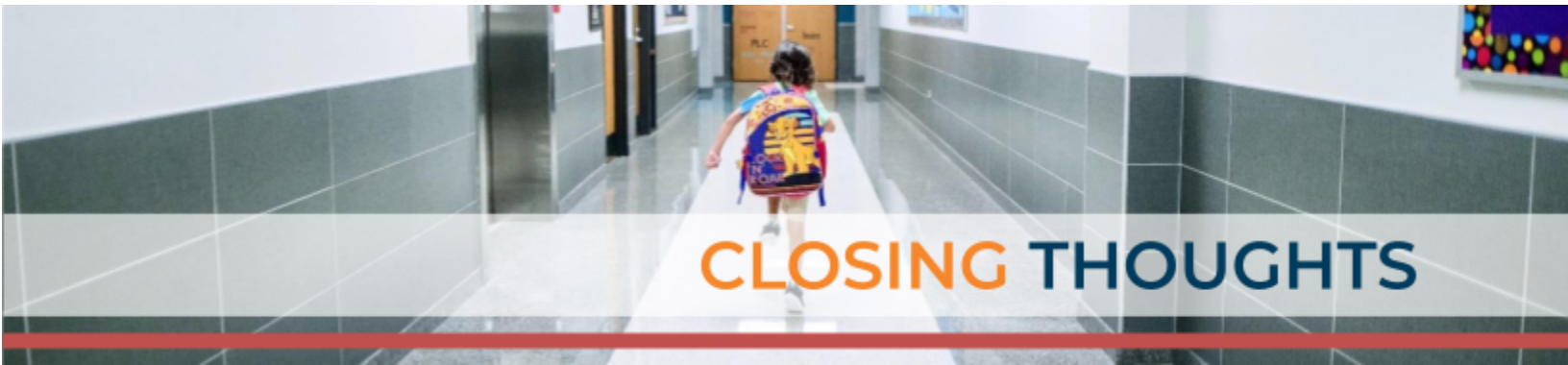
3. Expand opportunities for students to develop self-worth and connection to others.

Potential Strategies

- Increase learning opportunities in social and life skills
- Promote strategies that support students and staff with mental health needs
- Increase opportunities for student agency (voice/choice) to enhance self-esteem, confidence and self-worth

4. Build strong, authentic relationships among students, staff and community members.

- Adopt strategies that enhance a sense of belonging for each student, staff and community member.



The Winterset School District has paid careful attention to programs, facilities, finances and stakeholders in order to provide a high-quality education for all students. This work has been validated through the strategic planning process as we listened to students, staff, community members and administrators who speak with pride about all that is good in this District.

While discussing what future ready means for the Winterset's students and community, a list of priorities emerged. We know that if we are focusing on the students' future, education needs to adjust in order to keep pace with the ever-changing world. To that end, the strategic planning task force identified a list of priorities that will guide the decisions of the school board in the next three to five years. The recommendations included in this report will need careful attention as the administration strives to create actionable and tactical plans that include measurable goals, strategies and tactics. It will be important to regularly measure and report on the goals and strategies spelled out in this plan. Additionally, community support and partnerships for the above initiatives will be crucial in carrying out this strategic plan.

As consultants serving the Winterset Public Schools through School IQ, we have been impressed and proud of the thoughtful, student focused discussions that have taken place over the course of the past two months. It has been our pleasure to serve and support your school district.