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Summer July 2009

## **Collaborative Strategic Planning: A Mixed Methods Study of Models and Superintendents' Perspectives**

William Robert Espinosa

Loyola Marymount University, [wespinos@lmu.edu](mailto:wespinos@lmu.edu)

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Collaborative Strategic Planning: A Mixed Methods Study of Models and  
Superintendents' Perspectives

by

William R. Espinosa

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,  
Loyola Marymount University,  
in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

2009

Collaborative Strategic Planning: A Mixed Methods Study of Models and  
Superintendents' Perspective

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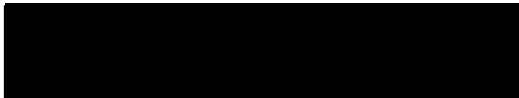
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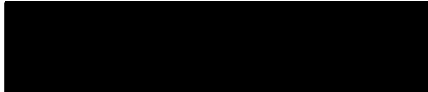
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Most importantly, I thank my wife, Susan Espinosa and all my family for their patience, support, and love – Angela, Kimberly, Brett, Will, Cordelia, Caroline, Linda, Geoff, Olivia, Elena, Owen, and Joe.

## DEDICATION

Dedicate  
Para mi Abuelo  
José Salvador Padilla  
Nació en San Juan de los Lagos,  
Jalisco, México

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## ABSTRACT

### Collaborative Strategic Planning: A Mixed Methods Study of Models and Superintendents' Perspectives

By

William R. Espinosa

School district leaders use strategic planning as a tool for leading their complex education systems. They may be mandated to prepare a strategic plan or they may elect to use the strategic planning process to adapt, focus, and align their education system to improve student achievement. The challenge comes in the confusion around what constitutes an effective strategic planning model. Using models from other sectors such as business are often unsuccessful when they are modified to deal with the diversity of stakeholders, multi-discipline systems, and complexity unique to school district systems. The purpose of this study was to research the practice of using strategic planning in 269 U. S. school districts. A survey using a nine-step strategic planning model as a conceptual framework was designed to determine the use, nonuse, and prevalence of the steps. A content analysis of 78 school district strategic plan documents and the semi-structured interviews of six district superintendents provided qualitative data and narrative to the analysis. The analysis of the data from this mixed methods approach provided insights into strategic planning models in use in school districts and a perspective of their effectiveness from the point-of-view of the superintendent.



## CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND STUDY DESIGN

### Introduction

The compelling reason for studying the use of strategic planning in school districts is best captured in the axiom offered by McDonough and Braungart in their book *Cradle to Cradle: Design is the first signal of human intent* (McDonough & Braungart, 2002). Design in the modern world is of two sorts: natural and human. The focus of the book is on the stewardship of life on earth. The consequence they argue is “poor design on such a scale reaches far beyond our own life span. It perpetrates what we [the authors] call intergenerational remote tyranny—our tyranny over future generations through the effects of our actions today” (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 43). Applying the same tenet to education means the design of school districts with their systems, policies, and organization structures, reflect an intent that will be experienced by future generations of children as a positive or negative factor in their lives. The leaders of school districts play a critical role in cultivating an environment and crafting the means to design with the collective intent strategies for districts to improve student achievement, goodwill, and social justice.

Goodwill and social justice reflects the intent of leaders in the organization’s design and strategies. Beaver (2000) stated, “There is no doubt that strategy is an extraordinarily demanding, complex and subtle management discipline” (Beaver, 2000, p. 465), because “strategy involves risk and uncertainty, and strategy is about the informed speculation of what might happen” (Beaver, 2000, p. 467). Cook (2004) argued

strategic planning is a creative process that school district stewards use to design with intent. There is a need for a better understanding of the use of strategic planning in education (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004). This study contributes to the discussion by researching the practice of using strategic planning in midsize school districts with 25,000 or more students, and the perceptions of their superintendents on its effectiveness.

### Statement of the Problem

Research shows that certain inefficiencies in the district-level education system can be traced directly and indirectly to a lack of adequate planning (McHenry & Achilles, 2002). McHenry and Achilles state one reason for inadequate planning is that “by their very nature educators emphasize the status quo. Consequently, change is difficult in public education” (2002, p. 2). Another reason is the lack of knowledge and core competencies in collaborative strategic planning models and processes. Hambright and Diamantes (2004) attribute this in part as the result of confusion around the different models and processes. They conclude: “A model is needed that will validate or refute the identified planning components so that the conceptual framework gap... can be closed” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 102). This study investigates the practice of using strategic planning in the target U.S. school districts with 25,000 or more students to address confusion around strategic planning and to gather evidence of its effectiveness.

### Definition of Strategic Planning

Now would be an appropriate point in this study to define strategic planning, however that is the crux of the problem. “There has simply been no agreement on a single

definition of strategy within education” (Eacott, 2008, p. 11). Researchers report there is confusion and discord in the dialogue around the definition and use of strategic planning in education. This is evidenced by the different definitions (Cook, 2000; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; Mintzberg, 1987a). Eacott (2008) attributed this variation to the pluralistic position of strategy in education being multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) reviewed 40 years of literature on strategic planning and used the parable of the blind men describing an elephant to illustrate their conclusion that the confusion could be explained as discussions about parts of the same thing.

This study will research strategic planning in practice to determine if there is a pattern of use that will help clarify the situation. A conceptual framework comprised of nine steps will be used in the research and analysis. In their review of the literature of strategic planning in K-12 education Hambright and Diamantes (2004) identified eight steps that emerged from the different models analyzed. The steps identified included: a) planning to plan (pre-planning); b) developing the organization’s vision and or mission statements; c) determining the organization’s guiding principles or core beliefs; d) conducting scans of the external and internal environment; e) identifying the strategic issues facing the organization’s in achieving its vision or completing its mission; f) prioritizing the strategic issues; g) developing strategic issue resolutions for each of the priorities identified; and h) authoring compelling guidelines for the implementation of the resolutions. Developing action plans and strategic financial plans is a ninth step I added that links the eight steps to the implementation of the strategic plan through action plans

(Cook, 2000) and strategic financial planning (Garner, 2004). The conceptual framework steps are discussed and developed in chapter two of this study.

A part of the discourse about strategic planning in education is a discussion about its effectiveness, and that it has been viewed by some as being detrimental to student achievement. There are two reasons for addressing these arguments. First, there is a need to deal with the argument that there is a conceptual flaw in the use of strategic planning in education. The second reason is the arguments for and against strategic planning may help clarify what it is. Arguments for the use of strategic planning in education highlight the features that benefit education. The specific issues in the argument against its use clarify what an acceptable strategic planning model must avoid and achieve for schools. The review of this discourse may help refine the understanding of what strategic planning is and is not. Reviewing of differences in perspectives accentuates the fine distinctions in the definition of strategic planning to help clarify it.

An assumption of this study was that clarity is needed because the lack of a comprehensible definition of strategic planning is an impediment for its use by a steward of an education system, such as a school district superintendent. If a superintendent chooses to develop a school district strategic plan, the confusion around strategic planning may be a distraction diminishing its effectiveness as a tool. As a result, the question becomes are the costs, effort, and time invested in the process perceived by the superintendent to outweigh the benefits? Logic dictates that poorly designed school districts put student achievement at risk. Minimizing or eliminating this risk then

becomes the impetus for researching the practice of using strategic planning in a target population of school districts with 25,000 or more students. This is warranted because as Eacott concludes, “However, strategy in the educational leadership context is an area of practice and application where practitioner trends lead the way and scholars are left to play catch-up to understand the continually changing context” (Eacott, 2008, p. 11).

### Defining Social Justice in Strategic Planning

Education systems are about the distribution of social goods and therefore the participation of stakeholders in making decisions that directly concern them is a condition for a socially just process for designing and developing these systems (Bourdieu, 1986; Dewey, 2001; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Walzer, 1983). The design of an education system determines the dissemination of social goods to the community and the resultant accumulation of social capital by its recipients (Bourdieu, 1986). Schools and district organizations, i.e. education systems, are planned enterprises. The designs of these systems reflect the intent of the designers. This raises the issue of inclusion and exclusion in the design process (Gale & Densmore, 2000). Social justice for strategic planning processes that design and develop education systems requires the participation of all the stakeholders. This stops short of asserting that the use of strategic planning automatically provides a socially just education for all students. To provide or not to provide a socially just education for all students is the consequence of the collective intent of the stakeholders. This means social justice requires the process of strategic planning to ensure all stakeholders have meaningful participation.

This study takes the point-of-view of that leadership and all participating stakeholders can use strategic planning as a tool for viewing their education system through a lens of social justice for the equitable education of all students. Social justice is the intent and the resolve to provide to all stakeholders their due (Gale & Densmore, 2000). The authors cite three conditions for social justice to be: to foster the respect for different social groups; to facilitate opportunities for self-development; and to participate in the decision making that directly concerns them. Leadership can use the strategic planning process to look for opportunities and potential threats in providing a socially just education to all students that may exist in the design of the complex processes and relationships in the organization. A collaborative strategic planning process is suitable because designing for “social justice is messy, complex, and at times, full of contradictions” and “the enactment of social justice is complex and contested” (McKenzie et al., 2008, p. 114) a condition requiring a process requisite with these challenges for education system designers, that is participation of all stakeholders.

As stated before, design is a signal of intent of the designers and for many school districts the collective intent needs to reflect its diversity to be social just. School district superintendents have a key role in fostering participation in the designing and developing of a culturally proficient organization and developing schools that are culturally responsive. Being culturally responsive is as Gale and Densmore (2000) averred the condition of fostering respect for different social groups; facilitating opportunities for self-development; and participating in decision making processes of the organization.

From their vantage points superintendents may appreciate that participation of all stakeholders could bring the ethical resolve of the whole system to bear on student achievement, a requirement for success. This study will contribute to this discourse of social justice in the designing and planning of school districts by researching the extent stakeholders' participation is facilitated in the practice of strategic planning and the extent the design of the resulting strategies is perceived to reflect the direct involvement of all stakeholders.

### Research Questions

The focus of this study is twofold:

First, identify strategic planning steps currently being used in midsize U. S. school districts with 25,000 or more students;

Second, investigate the superintendents' point-of-view on the effectiveness of strategic planning in practice at their school districts.

Previous research studies of strategic planning in school districts focused on local, state, or regional segments of the country. The researchers often noted a limitation of their studies was being able to generalize their findings until a study on a national scale was made. This study is intended to fill part of that need. The scope of this study is on the current practice of using strategic planning in school districts with 25,000 or more students in some or all of the grade levels from K to 12 across the United States.

The following questions guide the research:

1. What are the most prevalent strategic planning steps used by the selected school districts?
2. What are the perceptions of the selected school district superintendents on the use and effectiveness of strategic planning in their districts?

Key terms used in this study are:

Artifact is defined as an object that has been produced by a strategic planning process to serve a purpose. These would include strategic plan documents, written and approved policies, and strategic financial plans. They influence the social and business behavior of the organization and stakeholders.

Social justice in education is defined as fair, equitable, and adequately funded schools that focus on the each student achieving their full potential.

Socially just strategic planning is an inclusive stakeholder participation process.

#### Using the Superintendent's Perspective

A key characteristic of this proposed study is that the perspective of the school district superintendent will be a source of data. Previous studies included a variety of perspectives, such as the district's board of education, teachers, or an all stakeholders' viewpoint. The school district superintendent has a unique vantage point of being located on the border between the internal organization and the external stakeholders. The superintendent is a steward of the education system fostering the collective intent of the organization and is an advocate of that intent to the external world. In their role



superintendents move from leadership to management or from transactional to transformational leadership (Bush & Coleman, 2000). The strategic planning process is unique in that its output is the design and the plans for the creation of new systems that add value only when they are effectively implemented and made operational (Cook, 2004). The fruition of the plans involves the superintendent in both the design and implementation of the plans and new systems. The superintendent's perspective from this vista could provide relevant data on the use and the perceived effectiveness of strategic planning for the whole school district.

#### Internal and External Perspective

Superintendents lead school districts that are situated in the context of the communities they serve and are linked to network of local, state, and national educational entities. The study assumes that each school district superintendent has a key role in designing and developing a school system that has the means to adapt to external forces by changing how it makes sense of and operates in its environment. The assumption is a superintendent has a unique position and brings a perspective of the district, its resources, its internal limits and external challenges, and its options for change. A school district superintendent faces the challenge that change is the work of many people directly and indirectly involved in the schools. It would seem that a superintendent needs a tool that fosters a whole system perspective and facilitates the collaboration of the people that are part of that system. As a system and complex organization, a school district could benefit from using a tool that works with practitioner research in classrooms, supports double-

loop learning in schools, and provides meta-level knowledge for the whole system (Cook, 2004; DuFour, Richard, DuFour, Rebecca, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). One of the tools a superintendent could use in this complex work is strategic planning.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to research the practice of using strategic planning in selected school districts in the United States. The study assumes that school district superintendents use strategic planning for varied reasons ranging from strategic planning's perceived effectiveness as a leadership tool to the need to fulfill an obligation to prepare and submit a strategic plan document to a governing entity. The study also assumes that there are a multitude of approaches in developing a strategic plan and this is presenting dilemmas for education leaders. The design of this study is to research the current practices of using strategic planning in school districts and to analyze the superintendents' perception of the effectiveness of strategic planning.

### Strategic Planning in Practice

The study of the current practice of using strategic planning in school districts could alleviate part of the confusion by determining what processes or models are currently in use and by ascertaining the common steps that make up the process. This study is designed to research the practice of strategic planning in school districts to determine if a pattern emerges from the data that approximates a certain model, definition, or conceptual theory. An overview of strategic planning conceptual theories

will provide a background for analyzing and understanding the practice of strategic planning in school districts.

To aid in the research, the following criterion is employed for identifying a school district strategic plan: it is comprehensive addressing internal and external factors; district-wide; and multi-year plan that is the official document approved by the school district's oversight body, such as a board of education. Once identified, the plan's efficacy will be determined by researching the superintendent's perception of its effectiveness.

### Legacy of Strategic Planning

The study of strategic planning includes a long history of forward thinking concepts of strategy, planning, and working toward a common goal. There is much confusion as to what a strategic plan is, what it is comprised of, and how it is defined. The brief overview of the history of strategic planning below will show that it is greatly influenced from its practice in warfare and business; and to some extent in other sectors such as education. It is important to note that warfare and business have an advantage in that the effectiveness of strategic planning is readily apparent: you win or lose the war; you prosper or go out of business. Researching the use of strategic planning in education poses a problem in trying to determine its effectiveness since results of a poor design may be less immediate and evident but clearly reflected in its tyranny on future generations. The study of current practices in school districts is being done to address these issues with these challenges in mind.

To facilitate the inquiry, the researcher chose the following definition as a starting point. In the course of the study the researcher will use the findings to refine the definition, expand it, and determine its' relevance to school district superintendents in school districts with 25,000 or more students. Based on the criteria stated above, the following is the initial working definition for strategic planning: it is a tool by which a community continuously creates artifactual systems to serve extraordinary purpose (Cook, 2000).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this national study was to research the practice of strategic planning in selected school districts across the U. S. to determine the strategic planning steps most used and to analyze superintendents' perceptions of its effectiveness. By definition strategic planning involves many people in the process, which makes its research and analysis complex. To simplify the research design, superintendents' perspectives are being used to provide strategically positioned point-of-views that are broad and give the study a common and consistent source of data. This simplifies the complexity of the number of participants involved and puts the focus on the use of the strategic planning tool, which is a focus of this study. In addition, the research provides data on the importance of the role of superintendents in strategic planning.

The point in studying strategic planning is to better understand its function as a tool for education systems, school districts, and superintendents as part of the effort to improve student achievement. Strategic planning is a tool that could foster convergence

of intent including social justice and regard for the environment, develop creative systems designs, maximize the use of scarce internal resources, tap into resources available in the extended network, and bring together the varied, complex, and extensive array of districts stakeholders.

A reason for studying strategic planning is that school district superintendents are challenged to find the means and tools to foster social justice and the solidarity of all the stakeholders in the diverse and complex relationships of school districts. Strategic planning could help in two important ways to promote collaboration and social justice. The process of developing a strategic plan is an opportunity and a venue where stakeholders can participate. An effective strategic planning process could be a tool for superintendents to use to identify opportunities to proactively promote social justice as well as address unjust situations. The combination of both could increase the effectiveness of the design process and development of effective strategic plans in regards to social justice in education.

It has been the contention of bell hooks (2003) that schools are special types of organizations involving more than one organic entity. Schools are unity within diversity. If schools are anything, they are relationships, stated Gale and Densmore (2000). This relationship brings in the human element that links to social justice. Lebacqz (1986) argued that social justice is best served through participation especially since school districts are responsible for those that are challenged in being able to engage on their own behalf because they are young, emigrants, poor, or learning disabled. Strategic planning

can be used as a tool to address the whole of the education system and purpose the allocation of scarce resources in a fair and just way, but past research has identified a number of challenges.

An important part of the reason for this study is to build on prior research, summarized in Chapter Two, of the theory that school districts appear to benefit when using strategic planning as a tool. There is evidence supporting the concept that a strategic planning process that does work is perceived by school district superintendents as key to positive results achieved over time (Moxley, 2003). There are, however, differing accounts of what strategy means to school district leaders. Cook states, “Strategy is about creating the capacity for constant emergence” (Cook, 2004, p. 74). Cook offered his own strategic planning model for use in educational organizations (Cook, 2000) but his assertion is like that of the authors of alternate models who stated that first and foremost schools need to use strategic planning. This study was designed to contribute to the dialogue on the use of strategic planning in school districts.

#### The Significance of the Study

Current strategic planning research studies focus on certain regions or are reported from differing perspectives. This will fill the void in the current knowledge and report on school districts across the United States. This study provides the consistent perspective of the superintendents’ viewpoint, and an analysis of strategic planning through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. The benefits this study offers to educators are the following:

1. School district leadership can incorporate the findings on the prevalent steps in current practices of strategic planning in U.S. school districts into process in their districts.
2. School district stakeholders can draw on the findings on the effectiveness of strategic planning when weighing the costs and benefits of employing it in their school districts.
3. School district leaders can use the findings on stakeholder participation in the in the design of their district's strategic planning process.

The study of school district strategic planning is important because the moral purpose of the organization is more than intent it is also action (Fullan, 2001).

Sergiovanni (2000) describes the school district leader as a midwife to a process that engages in problem solving, making decisions, and implementing decisions. To this end, this study researches the use and perceived effectiveness of districts' strategic planning processes in developing strategies that result in school improvement. Sergiovanni (2000) also stated that an education leader is a special leader because schools and districts are special places. A school leader can therefore use strategic planning as a venue to facilitate a collaborative process where all stakeholders can engage in a meaningful way and be well served in the design of the school district.

It is important to provide school district superintendents with the substantiated data of this study so that they can use it to determine whether or not to invest the time and costs involved in a collaborative strategic planning process in their district. The research

of the perceptions of superintendents surveyed can inform that decision. The information can be incorporated into school district superintendents' due diligence in determining whether or not to use the nine-step strategic planning model and to set expectations about the possible outcomes, including student learning.

This study is an important contribution to increasing the understanding of where in the steps and to what extent collaboration is used in strategic planning. School districts require collaborative strategic planning to support student learning. "We submit that it is the purposeful implementation of a school's mission and vision and the coherence between resources and carefully identified goals that is the most certain way for school resources to impact student learning" (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006, p. 66). Collaborative strategic planning should foster "collective" planning in a holistic way and focus resources because "it is the equitable and purposeful distribution that yields results" (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006, p. 66). Richard DuFour et al. argued that substantive change "demands the sustained attention, energy, and effort of school and district leaders" (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006, p. 191). The authors went on to state that deep reform requires support and pressure from the system. School district leaders therefore have a critical role that only they can fulfill in the design and alignment of the whole education system from the district office to the classroom. Initiatives that advocate giving full autonomy to teachers and professional learning communities would have superintendents turn over full responsibility to teachers. As Richard DuFour et al. stated, "Leaders do not



empower teachers by disempowering themselves” (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006, p. 192).

This is not a contradiction.

This study is significant in that it provides school district superintendents current information on the perceived effectiveness of collaborative strategic planning as a tool to facilitate leadership from all stakeholders in the system. Evans (1996) argued that a full system change almost never begins from the bottom. What a superintendent and all stakeholders need is a process to collaboratively engage in deep change for student achievement (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992) such as collaborative strategic planning. It is the primary responsibility of the organization’s leader, e.g. the superintendent, to deploy a tool for all to use. The success of the school district requires that “leaders must be willing to lead” (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006, p. 191). The process of a school district creating goals then linking and aligning them to schools’ goals requires a framework and meaningful participation of all stakeholders. “The biggest factor in the ineffectiveness of formal strategic planning rests on its faulty underlying assumption: some people in organizations (the leaders) are responsible for thinking and planning while others (the workers) are responsible for carrying out those plans” (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006, p. 135). Therefore, the requirements for an equitable and effective collaborative strategic planning model would be: to have meaningful participation by all stakeholders, to facilitate meta-learning, and to provide a framework to design and develop broad and deep change for improving student achievement for all students.

The study investigates school district superintendents' insights into the perceived effectiveness of collaborative strategic planning as a tool for problem solving (Surowiecki, 2005) and for developing the culture of the organization. Schein argued that "culture is also the result of a complex group learning process" (Schein, 2004, p. 11) shaped by experience. Leaders who recognize when their organization's culture becomes maladapted to the environment also understand they need to facilitate the creation of a new shared future vision and to emulate it in practice. By doing this they foster learning around this new paradigm as a means to drive change in the present. The study of collaborative strategic planning as a leadership tool provides evidence of the perceived suitability of it for the task of providing a venue for meaningful stakeholder participation and improvement for all. That can also be a potential venue for fostering socially just education systems.

Schein (2004) illustrated how the learning process extends from the artifacts of organization structures and operating processes to the espoused values and deep down into the basic underlying assumptions of the organization. Schein argued further that deep change therefore requires validation "by the shared social experience of a group" (Schein, 2004, p. 29) which can be facilitated by a process of collaboration. As Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003) argued, leaders motivate by learning, having a vision, sharing the vision, assessing one's personal assumptions and beliefs, and understanding the structure and nature of the organization. The intent is to have leaders that proactively rather than reactively develop culturally proficient schools. This study measures the extent

collaborative strategic planning is perceived as effective in providing a venue for meaningful participation in the process of collaborative design work by the organization and its stakeholders.

The research in this study provides information on the effectiveness of using collaborative strategic planning as a tool to address issues that emanate from outside the organization as part of the fourth step of environmental scanning. Further this study investigates how effective collaborative strategic planning is perceived to assist in fostering solidarity and providing a collective voice of internal and external stakeholders. A collective voice is important because it can have more impact than an individual member acting alone, and could bring about change in external stakeholders such as the state. Easton stated that “schools must go public” (Easton, 2007, p. 394) to be effective. Collaborative strategic planning may be effective in fostering solidarity in the organization and providing a venue to meaningfully engage internal and external stakeholders in the dialogue.

This study is significant in that it asks school district superintendents if they perceive strategic planning as an effective means in fostering trust. Trust is an important aspect of the context and content of this study since it underpins all other characteristics. Collaborative strategic planning models that improve student achievement have the characteristics of fostering organizational learning, creating organizational knowledge at the meta-level, providing a tool to work on the whole system level, reducing defensiveness by openness (Argyris, 1990), fostering collective planning, and providing a

framework that supports deep change through prioritization and equitable resource allocation. A collaborative strategic planning model facilitates culturally proficient leaders and organizations by providing a venue for meaningful participation of all stakeholders and opening the dialogue to include the deep underlying assumptions of the organization. Collaborative strategic planning engenders solidarity that presents a unified front to the pressures on a school. It also generates solutions that tap the genius of the whole enterprise and are superior to the work that can be done individually (Surowiecki, 2005). Collaborative strategic planning can spawn a new and vibrant entity that emerges from the linking of all those committed to student achievement. The result is trust in school district leaders, systems, and each other. “Trust is one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 17). For schools trust extends beyond the organization to others like parents. The leadership perception of strategic planning as an effective means in fostering trust and solidarity is a focus of this study.

### Research Design

The research is designed to provide data in two ways:

First is to provide current data from U. S. school districts with 25,000 or more students as evidence of the use of strategic planning processes in education.

Second is to gather data on the extent superintendents perceive strategic planning to be an effective tool.

The study provides empirical data on what strategic planning models are being used in the selected school districts. Hambright and Diamantes (2004) researched the literature on strategic planning in K-12 school districts and determined that many districts choose or are mandated to implement strategic planning processes. They stated that there are varied models being used and there is confusion as to the definition of strategic planning and its composition.

Hambright and Diamantes (2004) did a content analysis of literature on strategic planning in school districts and identified eight common steps that emerged from the data. The authors noted that action planning was sometimes included as a separate step or a component of one of the eight steps. Cook (2000) argued that action planning is a discrete, important step in a strategic planning model. Furthermore, Garner (2004) stated that a strategic plan also requires a strategic financial plan. Based on Cook's and Garner's arguments and the experience of the researcher a ninth step called Action Plans – Strategic Financial Plan is being added to Hambright and Diamantes' model. Table 1 outlines the nine-step model. This is the conceptual framework for this study.

Table 1. *Nine Step Strategic Planning Model*

Step	Description
1. Pre-planning	Includes sharing data, eliciting feedback from stakeholders on the need for change, determining who is to participate in the process, training, and setting a calendar.
2. Vision – Mission statements	Described as a broad statement of the organization’s identity, the unique purpose to which the organization is committed, and the basic means of accomplishing that purpose.
3. Guiding principles – Core beliefs	Includes statements of the organization’s fundamental convictions, values, moral commitments, or planning assumptions.
4. Environmental scanning	The examination of internal factors and those relevant external forces that impact an organization over which it has little or no direct control.
5. Strategic issues identification	The analysis of the data from the environmental scan used to identify those factors that necessitate fundamental change or risk failure as an organization.

*(table continues)*

Table 1 (*continued*)

Steps	Description
6. Prioritizing strategic Issues	Factors such as urgency, values, ethics, and commitments of the organization are used to create a framework for prioritizing resources and time.
7. Strategic issue resolutions	Designs that reify the current systems or specify new systems and practices that address the identified strategic issues in the priority order determined.
8. Compelling guidelines	Assumptions or declarations that establish the boundaries, limits, and rules within which the strategies will be implemented.
9. Action plans – Strategic financial plans	Includes outlines of tasks and actions required to realize the strategy, an analysis of the benefit and costs for each specific action plan, and a multi-year comprehensive financial plan including a budget.

Adapted from Cook (2000); Garner (2004); Hambright and Diamantes (2004).

#### Conceptual Framework

The nine step strategic planning model is this study's conceptual framework for gathering and analyzing data. However, from the review of strategic planning literature the researcher is cognizant of the use of other planning models, variations of the nine-step

model used in practice, or the situations where school districts do not have a formal strategic planning process. To accommodate this phenomena the study uses a mixed methods approach to focus specifically on the use of a formal multi-step strategic planning process in school districts that approximate the proposed model.

### Methodology

The mixed method research design is comprised of three phases: a quantitative analysis of surveys sent to a select group of school district superintendents, a content analysis of strategic plan documents from selected school districts, and semi-structured interviews of six selected superintendents. The data from these three phases serves to triangulate the dominant models use and the factors that may determine the superintendents' perceptions on the effectiveness of strategic planning in midsize to large school districts.

### *Target Population*

School districts in the United States with 25,000 or more students were the target population of this study. The rationale for this research parameter is based on the supposition that school districts with this level enrollment might have a bias toward using a strategic planning tool in order to address the size and complexity of these large organizations. The resultant target population is the source of descriptive and inferential data on the practice of using strategic planning in school districts. Enrollment information was filtered to select school districts with 25,000 or more students using National Center for Education Statistics for academic year 2005-6 data resulting in a target population of



269 school districts. This target population had 16,361,522 students enrolled attending 24,046 schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-2006).

### *Survey*

A strategic planning survey based on the nine-step model was used to gather data from school district superintendents, resulting in a quantitative analysis on data collected (Dillman, 2007; King & Minium, 2003). The survey had three parts: Part I – contained general information on the strategic planning process used by the district identifying the strategic planning activities, and participants. The superintendents were asked to indicate the extent internal and external stakeholders participate in the development of the district strategic plan. The data indicate the level of collaboration being used as part of the strategic planning process. Part II – employed a Likert-type scale to identify the degree of agreement or disagreement on the effectiveness of the strategic planning process. Superintendents were asked to indicate if each school develops its own strategic plan in alignment with the district strategic plan and the extent to which these school plans influence the district strategic plan. Part III – included a survey of demographic information. The survey was mailed to all superintendents of school districts with student enrollments of 25,000 or more (269 districts). The analysis provides descriptive data on models being used and extent to which superintendents perceive the models to be effective. The quantitative findings were complemented by the other research methods by providing narrative around the use of strategic planning in school districts.

### *Content Analysis of School District Strategic Plans*

The second phase of the data collection provided data gathered through a content analysis of school district strategic plans (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Marvasti, 2004). The websites of each of the 269 school districts were visited and the districts' strategic plans were located and downloaded. There were documents found in 182 (68%) of the 269 districts searched. The output of the content analysis supplemented the survey data.

### *Interviews*

The third phase of data collection included semi-structured interviews, in person or by phone, (Silverman, 2006) with six superintendents who indicated on their questionnaire a willingness to be interviewed. This allowed for direct access to data on what some superintendents are accomplishing by using strategic planning, how they make use of the process, and what they perceive are the most compelling reasons for and against using strategic planning in their school districts. The researcher used probing questions to gather data on the level of collaboration in the strategic planning process and to explore linkages between issues of social justice in the school district and the extent the strategic planning process facilitates resolution and deep change for all.

### *Limitations*

The focus of this study is on the practice of strategic planning in U.S. school districts with 25,000 or more students. The study gathers data and makes sense out of the districts' current use and experience of the practice. One limitation of the study is the non-longitudinal design, a critical aspect of strategic planning. Data gathered and

analyzed is for one point in time and conclusions from the data are limited to that single point in time.

This study is limited to the practice of using strategic planning and not on the identification of successful and unsuccessful strategies in education. This limit is a consequence of the confusion on the definition of strategic planning and the absence of a generally accepted strategic planning model in education. The lack of a common strategic planning process makes it difficult to determine if the level of success is the result of a flawed strategy or a flawed strategic planning process. This study may contribute to clarifying the definition of strategic planning, identify the prevalent strategic planning steps in practice, and potentially enhance the study of strategies in education.

The study focused on a target population of 269 school districts selected on the basis of student enrollment being equal or greater than 25,000 students. The ability to generalize the conclusions is limited to school districts of similar characteristics. For example, the use of strategic planning in small school districts may be significantly different and would require a separate study.

The study is limited by the assumption that the questionnaire sent to the 269 target school districts is answered honestly. The condition of anonymity and the promise to share the results of the study with the participants is conducive to candor and care in answering the questionnaire.

## Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter one introduces the study by providing the problem statement, articulating the research questions, giving the purpose of the study, and stating its significance to education leaders. The chapter describes a research design proposal by highlighting the nine step strategic planning conceptual model and the methodology supporting the inquiry. The chapter concludes by identifying limitations to the study. Chapter two is a literature review that provides as background the current thinking around strategic planning in education. The background is a critical context for the research. The review highlights some of the debate in the discourse to help crystallize the distinguishing characteristics of strategic planning that gives it the importance advocates are promoting or the flaws that critics are identifying. This information helps make sense of the school districts' practice of using strategic planning as a tool for designing education systems that reflect the collective intent of the stakeholders by developing effective strategies and creating socially just organizations for student achievement. Chapter three outlines the research methods proposed to implement the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the study, and chapter five the conclusions drawn from those findings.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Strategic planning is a leadership tool with a long history and uses in many different types of organizations, including school districts. This study builds on the observation that school districts across the United States elect to develop or are mandated to develop a strategic plan to use as a tool in leading their organizations. This study researches the practice of developing a strategic plan and determines the extent strategic planning is perceived to be an effective tool in leading school districts. Chapter two provides a background of the literature and discourse as it relates to the use of strategic planning in organizations and in education specifically. Strategic planning is practiced across many disciplines. The review draws from some of these disciplines to better comprehend and appreciate the discourse of strategic planning in education.

Chapter two is organized into sections beginning with an overview of strategic planning as part of the means by which organizations are led. The next section focuses on using strategic planning in education. Strategic planning has its critics and in this section two areas of concern are examined and analyzed. Then a review of strategic planning models provides the context for a conceptual framework used in the research methodology of this study. The conceptual framework is then examined through the lens of designing for learning as a prerequisite for use in an education system. The concept of collaboration is discussed to address two key aspects of the study: the issues about the use of certain types of strategic planning, and to establish a link to ethical leadership and

social justice. Literature as it relates to leadership, management, and strategic planning completes the review and uses it as the foundation for this study.

## Strategic Planning

### *A Strategic Planning Overview*

Twenty-five hundred years ago Sun-Tzu said: “In general, in battle one engages with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox” (Sawyer, 1996, p. 62). That is to say when presented with a situation where conventional methods are insufficient or even detrimental to fulfilling the mission of the organization a leader will change the strategy to re-establish a viable course and regain the advantage. Unpacking Sun-Tzu’s lesson further, he encourages leaders to stay the course until it proves to be inadequate. That is one does not change strategy for the sake of change. Change is a reflection of the realities of the situation that are critical and drive the need for timely corrections and to take a sensible course of action. In this way a dire situation can be overcome through the creative process of looking for alternatives when the situation warrants them. Strategic planning is ancient, so it is remarkable that defining it remains so elusive and is yet to be refined into a well developed, commonly accepted model. From the time of Sun-Tzu to today it is commonly understood that what differentiates strategic planning is its process of envisioning an unlimited number of alternative approaches to the future by combining the orthodox with the unorthodox.

Strategic planning differs from other problem solving and sense making tools used in organizations. Strategic planning is about discovering possibilities (Cook, 2004).

These possibilities are real but are latent in the complexity and chaos of the present and in the yet unknown future. A defining characteristic of strategic planning is that it incorporates the realities of internal and external factors in new combinations to generate creative designs of potential strategies that are more effective in serving the purpose and the intent of the organization. As Cook stated, strategic planning is as it was 5,500 years ago: “the means by which those of one accord continuously create artifactual systems to serve extraordinary purpose” (Cook, 2004, p. 75). However, after thousands of years of practice a single definition of strategic planning is yet to be universally accepted.

For example, is a strategic plan a tool, a process, an artifact that is created as part of a leadership methodology, or a management style? Looking at the practice of strategic planning in education presents examples of each. One articulated perspective is in the North Dakota University System Strategic Plan. A strategic plan allows an organization to be “drawn by a vision rather than driven by a budget” (North Dakota University System Board of Higher Education, 2005, p. iv). The authors put the strategic plan in the context of a set of related documents and processes that are part of transforming the vision and mission into a reality. These include the following: Annual Operating Plan which converts strategies into short-range specific achievable results; Action Plans that describe how objectives are to be achieved through selected steps, timelines, measures, responsibilities, and resourcing; Accountability Measures that are a feedback system of data points over time that indicate progress toward the long-term goals and objectives. The authors and signers of the document concluded that the strategic planning process

was as important as the finished document because it drew the whole system toward their Vision that “The North Dakota University System is the vital link to a brighter future” (North Dakota University System Board of Higher Education, 2005, p. i).

What defines where strategic planning begins and where it ends? Is it bounded by the artifact produced, the strategic plan document? The metaphor of an architect may help in understanding this question. An architect in designing a community park may use sketches, conduct a design charrette (a collaborative session to brainstorm a solution to a problem) with experts and community members, draw an artist rendering of the project giving it a vision that everyone can share, and encourage providing feedback on the design. The architect would then develop detailed engineered drawings suitable for construction. Each step along the way provides learning. The architect could have gone straight into preparing detailed construction drawings. Technically this is the specific expertise an architect provides. This might save time and money. But it might risk being rejected by the community. So which part of the process is architecture and which is not? Is it only the detailed plans or does it include the colorful drawings, the input from the community, the iteration of a vision until it became a shared vision? In a similar way this study is about understanding which activities are the integral parts of strategic planning.

Critics present counter points into the strategic planning discourse. This review highlights their arguments that strategic plans are centrally driven tools to control the organization. Other authors argue that strategic planning is multiple parts that are phases



of a singular process. Others will argue strategic planning is every aspect of organizational leadership (which might therefore say it is nothing).

This overview begins to describe the confusion and tension that are part of the discussion of strategic planning. What is possibly at risk is forfeiture in the use of a potentially vital leadership tool (as stated in the North Dakota University System Strategic Plan, 2005) because school districts cannot find an accepted, usable definition. This study looks to the practice of using strategic planning in school districts to gather data and possibly provide some clarity.

#### *Prior Research*

This study builds on prior research of strategic planning in education. The following three research studies are part of the knowledge base this study uses. These studies are of specific geographic areas of the country and reflect practices in those regions. The studies vary in methodology providing data and results from multiple approaches. The studies similarly ask the questions: Are school districts using strategic planning tools? Are the tools producing positive results? What are the barriers to the effective use of strategic planning in school districts?

Moxley's (2003) study was on the use of strategic planning in 180 school districts in the states of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi. The author also inquires in to the superintendents' perceptions of the effectiveness of strategic planning. The analysis utilizes 129 completed surveys. The key findings are that 84.5% of the school districts had a current strategic plan. That 94.4% of the

superintendents agree that as a result of strategic planning districts resources are more efficiently utilized. The same number report that strategic planning is a valuable process. A key finding is that 90.7% of the superintendents state that the educational leaders in their school district value strategic planning as a profitable exercise. Two-thirds of the superintendents rated the overall effectiveness of strategic planning as high or very high. Using a frequency distribution Moxely determined that the common components were vision, mission, goal statement, performance audit, strategies, action plans, progress measures, implementation, and evaluation.

Moxely concluded that a “comprehensive strategic plan is needed to provide specific focus and direction for the district as nothing can be left to chance” (Moxley, 2003, p. 137) in meeting the high performance standards being mandated with continually declining funds. The author recommends further research in other parts of the United States to validate the findings in the study. The author suggests that a mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research would further understanding of specific information regarding the development and implementation process used with the district’s strategic plan.

Ward-Bovee (1999) researched the impact of strategic planning on learner outcomes utilizing the 1997 Ohio State designated criteria for assessing the effectiveness of its school districts. Using a survey the author determines which districts used strategic planning and the degree the planned efforts were implemented. The study uses the 340 surveys returned out of the 611 districts sent. A majority of the school districts (230)

report being involved in strategic planning, 67.5% of those on a continuous basis. The study groups the school districts based on similarities and 49 districts who reported using strategic planning were compared to 49 similar districts that did not use strategic planning.

Four years of learner outcomes as specified in the state mandate were statistically analyzed (Ward-Bovee, 1999). The variances between the mean scores of outcomes for dropout rates, attendance rates, and passage rates for the proficiency tests were analyzed. The results revealed a numerically higher score for school districts using strategic planning. Statistically there were no differences in the outcomes for both groups. Ward-Bovee noted that the timeframe analyzed could be too short for statistical differences to be revealed. The author argued that strategic planning can assist in meeting critical challenges facing schools districts by building a sense of community and promoting the district to the community by providing the “groundwork to establish participative decision-making by the stakeholders of the district” (Ward-Bovee, 1999, p. 99). Numerous benefits were identified by the districts using strategic planning as a tool to create greater awareness of the district’s needs, to prioritize and organize resources of time, money, and people. The author suggested that additional research is critical to investigate how continuous improvement plans or other versions of strategic planning are raising student outcome results since “reform efforts that do not improve student academic learning will not allow school districts to meet the educational challenges of today or tomorrow” (Ward-Bovee, 1999, p. 101).

McHenry and Achilles (2002) studied the use of planning models in 81 school districts in South Carolina. They determined how many of the districts were conducting some type of systematic planning; how many were preparing adequate program-management documents; and what key planning components were absent in the current plans of K – 12 school districts. A survey was sent to each school district and 27 were returned. In addition, a qualitative analysis using a questionnaire and phone solicitations was done to determine the superintendent's impression of the planning process within their respective districts.

The authors concluded that “there clearly is a lack of understanding of the elements of planning, whether strategic or long-range” (McHenry & Achilles, 2002, p. 12). Superintendents reported that they were confused and frustrated by the state mandated requirements of accountability and planning. McHenry and Achilles (2002) reported the lack of understanding was fostered by several factors specifically the inadequate preparation and training of district superintendents and the supporting staffs. They deduced from this situation the “consequence then is the probable gross inefficiency of district level operations given the evident lack of effective planning and the resultant reactive in lieu of proactive allocation of increasingly scarce resources” (McHenry & Achilles, 2002, p. 9). The authors argued “there exist certain inefficiencies in district-level education that can be traced both directly and indirectly to this almost universal lack of adequate planning” (McHenry & Achilles, 2002, p. 12). The authors stated that

district-level education strategic planning should not significantly differ from planning efforts in other multi-functional institutions and offer a model: The planning matrix.

Although the studies vary in target populations at the state or regional levels, they do consistently argue that strategic planning in school districts is needed. Concluding it is difficult to measure cause and effect results, the studies are able to point to positive results from those school districts using strategic planning. The authors argue that the lack of use by school districts stems from confusion over what strategic planning is and the lack of preparation of the key stakeholders and participants in the skills to use the process. They conclude a lack of strategic planning negatively impacts school district and student learning outcomes in many ways and specifically in the efficient use and effective allocation of scarce resources in a proactive rather than a reactive way. This study adds to this discourse by researching the prevalent steps in use by school districts and the superintendents' perceptions of its effectiveness.

### *Strategic Planning Definitions*

Definitions of strategic planning vary ranging from being almost formulaic to being mostly inspirational. These variations may stem in part from the way one looks at strategic planning as being a leadership tool, a system process, or a style of management. Some researchers of strategic planning focus on models that describe a tool. The tool usually has discrete steps and elements, encompasses the whole system, and is vested in the leadership of the organization (Boyle, 2001; Cook, 2000; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004). Other researchers describe strategic planning as a process. The process may

incorporate phases such as strategy development from which strategic implementation comes as the process enters a discrete implementation phase (Cook, 2004). Some argue strategic planning is ultimately about a distinctive management style of thinking strategically as part of the norms or culture of the organization (Fullan, 2001; Owens & Valesky, 2007). The following are three approaches to defining strategic planning that represent this spectrum.

Boyle (2001) defined strategic planning by describing what is commonly included in it.

Strategic planning is a process that involves a) setting goals or objectives; b) assessing and forecasting the external environment; c) designing and assessing alternative courses of action, including analyzing the potential risks and rewards; d) selecting the best course of action; and e) evaluating results as the course of action is implemented. (Boyle, 2001, p. 23)

Boyle (2001) presented a model of distinct steps that are interrelated and interdependent. The author stated that this methodology has the characteristics of developing a long term perspective, understanding the realities of the situation, setting a clearly defined course for the organization, and incorporating feedback. Boyle noted that this model is superior to short term planning or no planning at all but is limited. The author pointed out that the model is usually rooted in past experience that is tracked in a linear fashion to the present. Boyle argued that a visioning of the future, particularly in collaboration with the stakeholders of the enterprise, puts a dynamic tension in the

strategic planning process. And the visioning process fosters commitment to the shared aspirations for the future. But there are those that argue that having only one definition is inadequate.

Mintzberg (1987b) noted the different ways strategy is used. The author offered five definitions: As plan, ploy, pattern, position, and perspective. Strategy as plan is a consciously intended course of action that is mapped out and progress is a linear path from one point to the next. Ploy is also a chosen course of action but is done as a maneuver, for example to confuse a competitor or an opposing army, to get to the real intended conclusion. Mintzberg notes that stated strategies are often not the realized strategies of some organizations for various reasons. In this case the pattern of actions of an organization is the real, though not the stated, strategy. One explanation might be the point made by Boyle (2001) that there is a lack of commitment by the stakeholders to the expressed strategy of the organization. Strategy by position is the intended placement of the organization into a niche where leadership sees an advantage, a strategy often used in business (Mintzberg, 1987b). Strategy by perspective is the propagation of a way of viewing the enterprise and the world it operates in is an internal strategy such as culture, ideology, driving force, or world view, for example would help organizations. Do the different uses of strategy negate the existence of a strategic planning model such as presented by Boyle (2001) is the question for the practitioner? This is a critical question in this study because as Eacott (2008) argued the confusion on the mechanisms (models and processes) of strategic planning in education is a barrier to understanding and

evaluating the strategies used in education, that is learning about strategies that are working in practice.

Cook (2000) advocated a definition of strategic planning that holds to the original concept of being a method by which an organization continuously creates an organization to serve its purpose. For Cook, a defining attribute of strategic planning is that it leads to the creation of new systems for the organization. Cook's strategic plan model (Cook, 2000) parallels Boyles' (2001) model. Cook argued a strategic plan (and the model used to craft it) provides a discipline and: "nothing creative happens until energy is forced into a discipline" (Cook, 2000, p. 115). Cook viewed strategic planning as involving all aspects of the organization's work. That is it is pervasive and continuous and not just an isolated task done periodically. The author noted that this is only possible when strategic planning involves all stakeholders in the organization and is not relegated to a few people that are dubbed planners.

The literature reviewed in this section corroborates the problem of identifying a definition for strategic planning that is acknowledged as being adequate for use by all practitioners, in all circumstances. However, one possible defining attribute may be drawn from the literature might be a concept that strategic planning uniquely addresses changing the status quo by creating new systems for the enterprise. Enabling change and transition to a more effective state by design is both desirable and required of education systems. Because education systems are about the distribution of social goods the design process of these systems requires the participation of stakeholders as a condition for



being a socially just process (Bourdieu, 1986; Dewey, 2001; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Walzer, 1983). Therefore the strategic planning process for designing education systems like school districts should be suitable for use in complex education systems, be effective, and facilitate the participation of all stakeholders.

### Social Justice and Strategic Planning

The study takes the point of view that there is a social justice aspect to the definition of strategic planning given the critical role of strategic planning in designing education systems. Gale and Densmore stated a necessary condition for social justice in education is the “participation of groups in making decisions that directly concern them, through their representation on determining bodies” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 19). The strategic planning process of developing a vision of the new state and designing strategies to realize the vision is an opportunity for participation in meaningful way for all stakeholders. The exchange of concepts, concerns, and aspirations with all stakeholders provides a rich source of data and perspectives. The collaborative crafting of a shared vision fosters a commitment to the organization’s strategic plan. Participation by all stakeholders in a strategic planning process can foster the design of socially just education systems. Each person affected by the strategic plan would have the opportunity to input their intent and work toward a shared vision that respects that intent (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Gale & Densmore, 2000; Teschannen-Moran, 2004). Designing socially just strategies and systems for an education system should have

meaningful input of all those they impact and by everyone providing resources to create them.

However, the lack of agreement on defining strategic planning creates confusion and controversy in the discourse that limits the understanding of strategy (Eacott, 2008; McHenry & Achilles, 2002). This study researches the practice of strategic planning in school districts across the nation to better understand and use strategic planning in education. The next sections provide a background for building a conceptual framework that will be used in the research of strategic planning by examining some of the relevant ideas in the discourse and some of the disagreements. These will highlight more of the defining nuances in strategic planning.

#### Themes in the Discourse of Strategic Planning

The following are some of the themes that emerge from the discourse around strategic planning. Drawing on experience and research in the business sector Mintzberg argued that there are five Ps (Mintzberg, 1987b) that describe strategic planning as a process that has different definitions as a result of the different uses of concept of strategic planning. Unlike strategic planning models that use “rational control, the systematic analysis” (Mintzberg, 1987a, p. 66) to yield a strategic plan, the author sees the process as strategic learning where strategies emerge even as they are implemented. This is desirable to avoid the issue of executing the approved strategic plan without question. The behavior of focusing and following only the approved strategy runs the risk of curtailing learning and failing to make changes when the situation around the

organization warrants an adjustment in the course. Mintzberg argued that strategy emerges from many places in the organization. The author describes strategic planning as being more a program to formalize the emergent strategies of an organization, at an advantageous point in time. Leaders have a key role in balancing the use of the formal strategic plan of the organization to stabilize and channel its energy until that point where a “quantum leap” (Mintzberg, 1987a, p. 71) is appropriate. To Mintzberg, strategic planning is a craft practiced throughout the organization and at its edges.

Table 2 illustrates some of the phenomenon of differing schools of thought over the years with an abbreviated summary of the findings of Mintzberg and Lampel (1999). They surveyed 40 years of literature and found ten major schools of thought.

Table 2. *Ten Schools of Thought on Strategic Planning*

School of Thought	Sources	Base Discipline	Message
Design	Selznick (1957); Newman (1951); Learned, Christensen, Andrews and Guth (1965)	None (architecture as metaphor)	Fit
Planning	Ansoff (1965)	Some links to urban planning, systems theory, and cybernetics	Formalize
Positioning	Hatten and Schendel, (1977); Porter (1980, 1985)	Economics and military history	Analyze
Entrepreneurial	Schumpeter (1934); Cole (1959)	None (although early writings come from economists)	Envision
Cultural	Rhenman (1973); Normann (1977)	Anthropology	Coalesce
Cognitive	Simon (1947); March and Simon (1958)	Psychology (cognitive)	Cope or create

*(table continues)*

Table 2 (*continued*)

School of Thought	Sources	Base Discipline	Message
Learning	Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963); Cyert & March (1963); Hamel and Prahalad (1994); Quinn (1980); Weick (1979)	None (perhaps some peripheral links to learning theory), chaos theory in mathematics	Learn
Power	Allison (1971); Astley (1984); Pfeffer and Salancik (1978)	Political science	Promote
Environmental	Hannan and Freeman (1977); Pugh et al. (1968)	Biology	React
Configuration	Chandler (1962); Miller and Friesen (1984); Miles and Snow (1978); Mintzberg (1979)	History	Integrate, transform

(Adapted from Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999)

Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) examined the ten schools of thought in different ways. They noted a pattern in later thinking that appeared to cut across the ten schools as a more complex but higher level concept. They posed the proposition that there was only

one process with different parts rather than different approaches that had a strategy formation single process model. They linked the ten schools in a progression of strategy formation (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999). They also plotted the school concepts along the two dimensions of the states of the external world and states of internal processes from rational to natural. The schools spread out on the chart “implying that they represent different processes” (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999, p. 28). Finally they surmised that these schools were evidence of evolution in strategic thinking that was the result of “the sheer creativity of managers” (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999, p. 29). They concluded that there was a need for research of strategic planning that emanates from practice to generate new and better research questions.

Another theme was the case by Cook (2004) who concluded that a definitive characteristic is that strategic planning leads to creating new systems that change the circumstances of the organization to a new and desired state. Accepting this premise implies that strategic planning may be a critical tool to foster the formation of design from the intent of those participating in the process, to a new system with fidelity to that intent, and to catalyze a new, more beneficial situation for the organization.

Strategic planning promotes the search for and understanding of emergent patterns in both the internal and external environment of the organization. An integral part of strategic planning is based on the concept that strategy is created at the intersection of an external appraisal of the threats and opportunities facing an organization and an internal appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses (Andrews, 2003;

Stacey, 2007). Knowing the strength and weaknesses of the organization, is important. And being aware of the threats that exist and the opportunities for change are part of the creative tension for developing the unorthodox that will bring success.

Nonprofit strategic planning makes the distinction of the context of nonprofit organizations such as government, foundations, and education systems a factor in the choice of strategic planning models (Bryson, 2004). Aspects of the context include socio-cultural, political, macro-economy, demographics, tax codes, and regulatory (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). They discussed how nonprofits operate in this context by a creating social-value proposition by bringing together people, opportunity, and capital. The nonprofit leader is a social entrepreneur that must achieve a state of alignment of both externally and internally factors and stakeholders. It is through strategic management of these that social value can be created (Stone, Bigelow, & Crittenden, 1999). Bryson (2004) provided the following model for nonprofit enterprises:

- Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process
- Clarifying organizational mandates and mission
- Assessing the environment to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges
- Identifying strategic issues facing the organization
- Formulating and adopting strategies and plans to manage the issues
- Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future
- Implementing strategies and plans

- Reassessing and revising strategies and plans

The author emphasized the importance of a collaborative setting for the strategic planning process. Bryson's model is similar to the nine step model. However, the sequence for vision is different. He argued that the vision dynamic and formation are drawn from the assumed plan environment and the intent of the stakeholders. Another strategic planning model for nonprofits put importance on flexibility in planning approaches. Nutt (1984) argued that there are a defined set of techniques which are applicable to strategic planning for nonprofit organizations that can be deployed contingent on the context of the planning situation and are identified by the leaders' expectations for quality, acceptance, and innovation in the strategy given that context. The author provided a contingency framework that is a network which identifies planning methods for each application. The condition of strategic planning parallels the situation in education with a spectrum of models and conditions for application in practice. The expectations also define the process.

Some authors have viewed strategic planning models as deficient in practice because they have not met certain expectations especially for education systems. Senge (1990) put rigorous requirements on strategic planning. The author expected it to be long term, to foster a shared vision of the future, and to result in a learning organization. Citing the chaotic nature of the external world Senge saw the need for making sense of it in order to navigate toward the future. Senge argued a shared vision can be the attractor for a learning organization to use in fulfilling its mission. Strategic planning without the



interplay of a shared vision is a mechanical process that is limited to lessons learned from the past, awareness of the current conditions but no sense of a desired future (Boyle, 2001; Cook, 2000; Senge, 1990). Strategies would tend to be linear and rigid.

An important aspect of what strategic planning provides then is the means to design a shared vision through the participation of the all stakeholders in the endeavor. In this way the outcome of strategic planning would be a collective sense as to the direction of the organization, a broad based commitment to the strategic plan, and a greater likelihood that the organization will be successful in fulfilling its purpose. “Strategic intent sets a target that deserves personal effort and commitment” (Hamel & Prahalad, 2003, p. 88). This is the outcome of strategic planning as organizational learning and collaborative design. Even with these compelling reasons the practice of strategic planning does differ. The following section is a discussion of the history of strategic planning in education systems that provides a context of the practices, models, and prevalent steps in use at school districts.

#### Strategic Planning in Education

Eacott (2008) in his 25 year review of literature on strategy in education noted that there was very little prior to 1988. With the passing of the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the UK came a mandate that all schools have a development plan. This act unleashed a voluminous of literature on the how-to aspects of creating a development plan. Strategic planning models from other sectors such as business were degraded as they were modified from their original purpose to be compatible with the complexity,

pluralism, and differing values of education system (Lozeau, Langley, & Denis, 2002). At its peak, the literature became very narrow, primarily on the planning process (mechanics) to the exclusion of other aspects of strategy (Eacott, 2008). Eacott noted that the confusion and lack of consistency of strategic planning in education is a barrier to the meaningful study of education strategies where research of strategic planning in education could yield its greatest value. These barriers can be traced back to the government policies and laws that mandated the creation of strategic plans without a generally accepted model and process.

#### *Mandated Plans*

Regulators use Strategic Planning as a tool in the implementation of legislated policy in education. It is part of the UK Education Reform Act of 1988, No Child Left Behind 2001 Act, the California Education Code, the Ohio Revised Code §3302.04, and the South Carolina Education Code to name some examples. They all stated the intent to improve student achievement. All used strategic planning to advance their education policies with positive and negative outcomes. An observation is that the use of strategic planning in education by some oversight agencies is to control teaching in the classrooms through mandating content, using accountability measures based on unilaterally set standards, and allocating resources based on compliance. The review showed this happens unintentionally at times. What became apparent is that some of the confusion, resistance, and acrimony may be due to this type of application of the strategic planning process.

### *Legislative Policy and the Use of Strategic Planning in the UK*

The Education Reform Act of 1988 started the most recent endeavor to improve education in the UK (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988). From the start academics and researchers argued that this course stultified schools causing stagnation and complacency unless the full aspects of strategic management are allowed to function (Fidler, 1998). Fidler argued that the preoccupation with planning, assessing, reporting narrows the discourse on education. This mindset runs the risk of failing to improve schools and bringing the successful ones down.

The Education Reform Act 1988 mandated the preparation of School Development Plans [ERA 1988 164(1)] (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988). The aim of the Act for developing school plans was to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils. The intent was to prepare these pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experience of adult life. The intent stated in the law was that teaching Religious Education reflects the religious traditions in Great Britain that are Christian, while taking into account the teaching and practices of other religions in Great Britain. The principle provisions and the mandates on religious education signaled the intent of the Parliament. That education in the UK has a strong British national focus and Christian emphasis. The mandate for school development plans that conform to these tenets gives strategic planning in UK education more of a control mechanism rather than the creative process that Cook (2000) supported.

Researchers in the UK reacted accordingly. They argued that the National Curriculum is based on a model of Britishness that is racist since it marginalizes blacks and the working-class pupils (Francis, 1990). Gray (2007) argued that the preoccupation of teachers with detailed planning, assessment, reporting, and accountability created an occupational culture of teachers being more technicians than educators. Gray stated that there was a risk that it will continue to the point it undermines role of the child as an individual. Parents had concerns about the government having such a central role in education (Wikeley & Hughes, 1995). In the United States No Child Left Behind 2001 mandated school improvement plans.

#### *No Child Left Behind 2001*

Government policy and legislation took its most recent step in education in the United States with the passage of No Child Left Behind 2001 (U. S. Congress, 2002). The intent of this Act was in contrast to the intent of some of the founding fathers and designers of our constitution. (DuFour, Richard et al., 2004) noted that Thomas Jefferson was one of the first to call for universal public education. Jefferson linked education to the future of the nation. What he promoted in his home state of Virginia was a design where only the genius of the class would move on to grammar school then the best genius would go on to complete their education. His plan ensured by design that exceptional students would be “raked from the rubbish annually” (Jefferson, 1782, as quoted in DuFour, Richard et al., 2004, p. 16). Students that did not show themselves as exceptional would continue in their education at their own expense.

The intent of the act was to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards [NCLB SEC. 1001]. The act specified its approach to be the alignment of all educational systems. The NCLB act required the development of plans at several levels. The distribution of funds to each State was based on the submission of a State Plan [NCLB SEC 1111]. The law described this as an application or a plan but also provided that it can be done as a part of a consolidated plan for the State (Strategic Plan). The Federal law also mandated the development of Local Educational Agency Plans (school districts) [NCLB SEC 1112]. This could have been in the context of a comprehensive plan (school district strategic plan) [NCLB SEC 1905] (U. S. Congress, 2002).

#### *State Mandates*

The states response was to develop their own mandates on schools and school districts. Some states required the development of district plans and some required school plans. States had the option to submit a consolidated plan to the U. S. Department of Education in compliance with the Federal mandate. An example is California's consolidated state performance report for 2003-2004 submitted by the California Department of Education (CDE) to the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) indicates the intent of the state plan (California Department of Education [CDE], 2004). The State of California also looked to its local education agencies to submit plans to the CDE.

The focus shifted from the State and school level to the local educational agency (school district) as results lagged behind plan (Richard, 2004). States were beginning to identify and assist entire school districts that were in need of improvement. States mandated the preparation of an improvement plan for the whole district (Richard, 2004). For example, the State of California mandated the preparation of plans by each Local Educational Agency and set out a template to be used [(Rev 12-07) California Department of Education, School and District Accountability Division].

This was to comply with NCLB. It was the intent of the planning effort that state and federally funded initiatives aimed at student improvement complement each and work in tandem by moving toward a level of alignment and streamlining (California Department of Education [CDE], 2007). The guide and template for the LEA Plan provides recommended steps and schedules for use in the plan development. Although suggested as a process for all education planning in the LEA, the requirements were for underperforming schools and Title program funding. However it was necessary to annually review and update the LEA plan (O'Connell, 2008).

School districts in turn mandated the preparation of school site plans such as Los Angeles Unified School District site improvement plans (LAUSD). The Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education approved an initiative to mandate the preparation of site improvement plans for high priority schools (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2007).

The observations are that at each recursion of planning the level of specificity increases and less information on education strategies is conveyed. The reporting requirements are the driving factors and not the discourse between the state and its local governing agencies. In the findings of a study of state mandated planning in Ohio, Ward-Bovee (1999) attributed part of the result from the absence of critical steps in the planning process used by the some districts. Another was the openness and inclusiveness of the planning process. Using the results of their study of strategic planning in all the districts in South Carolina, McHenry and Achilles argued “there clearly is a lack of understanding of the elements of planning, either strategic or long-range. Fostering this lack of understanding may be several factors; among them: inadequate preparation and training of district superintendents and their supporting staff” (McHenry & Achilles, 2002, p. 12). They concluded that inefficiencies in district-level education can be traced directly and indirectly to this universal lack of adequate planning.

#### *Implications of Legislative Policy and Law*

Law is important socially in arbitration of opposing interest. It has a mission to guarantee educational system efficiency as a way for transmitting collective social values, and be the prime agent of change in developing the world of tomorrow according to two United Nations studies (Birch, 1993; Durand-Prinborgne, 2002). The use of strategic planning by nations, states, school districts, and schools to implement education policy is prevalent. What needs to be understood is its use as a tool for leadership or for management of school systems in the implementation of education policy. Even when

the stated intent of the governing agency is that the states, school districts, or school have the prerogative and are encouraged to develop robust, relevant, collaborative strategic plans the attention on accountability seems to take priority.

What this discourse indicates is that there is evidence to support the critics' argument that the use of strategic planning in education may be for central control and a conduit for top-down planning. Part of this condition stems from the lack of an accepted strategic planning model for use in education systems. The literature supports the idea that there is a need for training education leadership in the development of strategic plans. Fulfilling these needs must also address the tension between strategic planning being required with the intent to manage and control performance versus using strategic planning to creatively address the issues in education that incorporates local knowledge and transforms it into global knowledge for the system (Hargrove, 1998). But there are researchers that reject the use of strategic planning in education for conceptual reasons and from their data on the practice of using strategic planning.

#### Critiques of Strategic Planning

This section reviews some of the critics of strategic planning in education systems. Two critiques called for the total elimination of strategic planning. They argued strategic planning is a form of central control and curtails autonomous actions and creativity in organizations; and that linear strategic planning is in conflict with the perspective of the world which is chaotic and unpredictable (Wheatley, 1999). The two



points of view may help refine the specific requirements of a strategic planning process with the potential to affect school district effectiveness and student achievement.

### *Central Control*

The first issue may stem from how organization leaders use strategic planning to incorporate the viewpoint of the whole system in making sense of how the organization should proceed. To some this may seem to be a means to centralize control (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006; Reeves, 2002; Schmoker, 2004). Schmoker questioned the “assumptions” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 426) that strategic planning is effective. The author wrote this in the context of education and about the efforts to reform schools through strategic planning. The Schmoker grouped strategic planning with whole school reform efforts and cites a long list of researchers that argued their data shows that these efforts have failed because it was centrally driven, over reaching, or bore no relevance to the local realities of the schools. Schmoker (2004) argued that reform development through strategic planning results in low value to the district or the process generates a huge number of initiatives without having the ability to monitor them. The author asserted that autonomous teacher learning communities that focus on short term wins are better.

Schmoker (2004) singled out Cook as a leader in the strategic planning movement. Schmoker was joined by others that have the opinion that strategic planning lacks evidence that it produces results (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006). Schmoker’s personal experience with strategic planning was ineffective due to a lack of clarity and coherence about the process. The author concluded the process failed for three reasons.

First, the planners were holding onto an unquestioned assumption about the effectiveness of planning itself. Joyce (2004) elaborated on this point in a peer review of Schmoker's (2004) article, that the "movement did not study itself" (Joyce, 2004, p. 79). That is once a strategy was embraced it drove actions because it was the strategy even when results failed to materialize or performance declined. The process appeared to have the effect of stifling organizational learning. Schmoker (2004) added this was made worse by the exclusion of teachers in the strategic planning process in deference to planners. This was the primary point of Schmoker (2004), that teacher led learning communities were the most effective strategy for school improvement. Schmoker and Joyce (2004) noted that true learning communities were rare. Both cited the lack of clarity in the process and the difficulty of persisting through the effect of whole school reforms.

Cook (2004) responded to Schmoker's (2004) article by stating that besides being misquoted, Schmoker was among the many that have a misconception about and a bad experience with strategic planning. McHenry and Achilles (2002) agreed as they concluded from their extensive research of the literature on strategic planning in school districts that there was a wide spread lack of understanding of the elements of strategic planning and its use. They found inadequate preparation and training resulting in the use of inappropriate models. Done appropriately, strategic planning is about seeing a "new reality" (Cook, 2004, p. 75) and the process does whatever it can to push the organization in that direction. Without this ability to look out beyond the current situation, Cook (2004) questioned the ability of a continuous improvement strategy alone to make the

quantum leaps necessary for meaningful school improvement. Schmoker (2004) argued that teacher led learning communities cannot co-exist with strategic planning because they ignore teacher input and stop organizational learning. This differed from Cook (2004) who sees improvement through the combined effort on both the local and global levels. It appears that Schmoker (2004) and Cook (2004) agreed that teachers are an integral part of the process which argues for a collaborative process.

The long term planning horizon of strategic planning makes it difficult to understand the effectiveness of the process. Schmoker (2004) based the argument for effectiveness on how learning communities use quick reads of progress or lack of it to make quick changes in teaching methods in a continuous improvement flow. The issue for strategic planning stems from the long time horizon which is necessary to solve complex or expansive problems. Senge (1990) insisted that strategic planning be truly long term. This poses a problem in attributing a specific impact on outcomes to its use. Research indicates that: “Two or three years of continuous strategic planning is necessary before major organizational behaviors are affected” (Ward-Bovee, 1999, p. 10). This makes it difficult to prove a cause and effect result from strategic planning. However, the strategic intent of the plan can be compared to the outcomes to demonstrate the influence of the strategic plan on achieving major improvements.

#### *Chaos as a Barrier to Strategic Planning in Education*

A second issue argues the world is chaotic and unpredictable which renders all long planning useless including strategic planning. If this argument has merit then it is a

fatal flaw in the use of strategic planning and must be addressed. The following reviews the literature and discussion around chaos theory and the use of strategic planning, especially in the complex environment of schools and education.

There are specific characteristics of chaos theory and the related complexity theory that seem to be relevant to understanding planning in education systems. These are the connectedness of complex systems (Barabasi, 2003); attractors (Waldrop, 1992); and pattern rules (Holland, 1996). These characteristics are useful in understanding and guiding an education system (Banathy, 2000). Is the level of participation in the strategic planning process a way to test connectedness? Do Visions and Missions in a strategic plan behave like attractors for the system? Do strategic plans and the supporting school district policies serve as pattern rules that align and focus the organization? This study is a search for evidence of them in the practice of school district strategic planning.

### *Context*

Literature on school reform reports on that failure to take hold and get past the tipping point (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). Some of the reasons given are: nothing really changes; never understood the program; never believed it would work; did not address the real core issues; programs did not fully address all of the needs to implement it; programs failed to establish classroom routines and practices that were personalized and data driven; and people had a weariness toward new solutions of the month being pushed by leadership (Fullan et al., 2006).

### *The Solution is the Problem*

School leadership is in continual quest of methods and tools to address the issue of school reform. They often look to the business sector to find out what is working there that might translate across to the education sector. As a result schools have a wide range of experiences in many methods (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

The methods range from top down at one end to bottom up. Frederick Taylor developed his principles of scientific management (Taylor, 2005) that are used to build organizations with hierarchy top down structures and command and control processes. Models of this approach are McGregor's Theory X and its variant Theory X soft (McGregor, 2005). McGregor's Theory Y is a representative model of the other end of the range where "the essential task of management is to arrange organizational conditions and methods of operation so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing their own efforts toward organizational objectives" (McGregor, 2005, p. 183).

Schools are using Theory X and Y approaches, and they appear to be unsuccessful in consistently implementing school reform. Literature on chaos theory and an emerging body of knowledge coined new management science (Wheatley, 1999) posited that Theory X is a description of an all but dead system and that Theory Y needs the means to deal with the chaos that results from people being empowered to direct their own efforts.

### *The Question*

Can chaos theory inform school organizations and leadership? Does chaos theory help to understand why hierarchical, command-and-control organizations are unable to

cope and stay viable with their environments? Does chaos theory support the argument for a different organization design? Are school organizations based on these new design features better suited to deal with change? If it can be reasoned that there is a positive case for using concepts from chaos and complexity in organization design then a basis will be set for arguing that this type of organization needs tools suited for it such as strategic planning. The answer starts with the definition of chaos.

### *Chaos Definition*

Definition: “From a scientific point of view, chaos is that unlikely occurrence in which patterns cannot be found nor interrelationships understood” (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000, p. 6).

The study of chaos theory indicates the behavior of certain nonlinear, dynamical systems where seemingly random events can be shown to actually be predictable from simple deterministic equations. This perception comes from the disciplines of mathematics and physics, as did the concepts of Newton’s laws. And, like Newton’s laws, chaos theory is influencing the concepts around organization and leadership (Overman, 1996). The author argued that chaos theory provides answers and the methods for getting answers in situations where Newtonian cause-and-effect and linear consequences fail.

Some argued by using the lens of chaos theory to view ostensibly random activity in organizations or unexpected results in leadership practices or curriculum that oscillates between effectiveness and non-effectiveness, patterns reveal themselves. Although cause-

and-effect precise predictions are not made, the patterns show that a range of outcomes can be determined and be useful (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 2000).

Pascale et al. (2000) referred to characteristics of chaotic systems that are relevant to created systems. One often cited is the sensitive dependence on initial conditions or the butterfly effect when conditions, called attractors, change on their own they affect all those connected to them. A related characteristic is that changes in chaotic systems are nonlinear. An example is a sand pile. At a point, which cannot be predicted, adding one more grain of sand will cause the pile to flatten. The impact is non-linear: One grain impacts a few, they impact several, they impact many, and they cause an avalanche (Catastrophe Theory) (Waldrop, 1992). This concept is used to explain things like tipping points. Although precise predictions seem impossible, patterns can be determined. Chaos theory is also critical in understanding complex adaptive systems (CAS), which is another major concept in the new science.

Pascale et al. (2000, p. 6) declared: "The world is not chaotic; it is complex." This reflected in that the study of chaos is closely related to the study of complexity. Stuart Kauffman (1995) described complexity as that region between order and chaos. As long as a system stays at the edge of order and chaos it can adapt to its environment, it can incorporate changes, and it can live and be robust. Features of complex systems are: networks, feedback loops, open systems, memory (hysteresis), and relationships that are non-linear. These also appear to be features of an education system.

Researchers use chaos theory and complexity in different ways. Many use it a metaphor for explaining organizational phenomenon. Others argue the merits of chaos theory based on experiences or case studies. Finally, some do use the analytical methodologies of chaos theory to develop and test new organization theory. The caveat for this is that the understanding of chaos theory and its related areas is expanding in a seemingly chaotic way (Barabasi, 2003). This may mean the basis for the arguments made in the literature might prove to be premature. At best this is a co-evolution in thinking. Hunt and Ropo (2003) argue that there is even a need for new ways of studying organizations.

Another concern is that the authors selectively use some of the chaos concepts. For example, the premise that nothing is precisely predictable is used to argue that strategic planning makes no sense (Griffin, 2002; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1999). This ignores the property of aggregation which nature and complex systems use this to deal with the chaos in the world (Holland, 1996).

Given these caveats and concerns why look to chaos theory over Theory X? Nearly without exception the literature cites the seminal work of Senge (1990) where he asked the question why the tools for dealing with complexity have not empowered us. The author argued: “The answer lies in the same reason that sophisticated tools of forecasting and business analysis, as well as elegant strategic plans, usually fail to produce dramatic breakthroughs in managing a business. They are all designed to handle the sort of complexity in which there are many variables: detail complexity” (Senge,



1990, p. 71). But the tools do not deal with dynamic complexity where cause and effect are subtle and not obvious over time. That is businesses exist in chaotic environments. Chaos theory challenges popular management tools argued Cooper, Crowther, and Carter (2001) when they questioned business accounting techniques for predicting. They concluded chaos theory and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle appear to reduce predictability to a myth and relegate accounting to a ritual role at best.

#### *Organization Viability over Time*

So why do organizations need to do anything different than they have in the past? *Fast Company* magazine stated, "The first rule of life is also the first rule of business: Adapt or die" (as cited by Pascale et al., 2000, p. i). Wheatley (1999) concluded, "Our interest is prompted by the relentless need for organizations to grow and reform at intervals so short that change has become a continuous demand. We speak about 'organic organizations, self-organization, and emergent properties'" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 158). The literature used examples and case studies of organizations with hierarchical structures and command-and-control processes that were unable to stay requisite with external demands. "If data are volatile and untrustworthy and the interrelationship of key factors is complex and poorly understood, tapping the distributed intelligence of the entire system usually generates better solutions than a central authority" (Pascale et al., 2000, p. 127). Chaotic and complex systems use their distributed information to self-organize and adapt.

The characteristic of self-organization is powerful in chaotic and complex systems because it is the way systems adapt to their environments and thrive. The literature

supported the concept that organizations have always needed to adapt, but in today's networked and instant messaging world the need is vital to survival. Arguing that organizations are living systems that must grow and adapt Pascale et al. (2000) put forward four principles for organizations. The first principle states: "Equilibrium is a precursor to death" (Pascale et al, 2000, p. 6). They stated that faced with this dilemma an organization must move closer to the edge of chaos to evoke mutation and experimentation, which is second principle. The third principle states that organizations will then self-organize and emerge from the turmoil better suited to carry on. This creates a new problem.

Can an organization that self-organizes complete a mission? Knowing that the shape of the self-organizing enterprise is unknowable, how does it fulfill its purpose? The fourth principle states that organizations as living systems cannot be directed along a linear path. But the systems can be strategically disturbed (Pascale et al., 2000).

Olson and Eoyang (2001, p. 161) argued that: "Self-organization is not the same as a self-managed team, or empowerment, or a flat organization chart. It is not laissez-faire management." It is an evolution of the organization that is guided not directed. Wheatley (1999) pointed out that attractors influence chaotic and complex systems. Wheatley theorized that organizations develop shared purpose, intent, and values to be attractors, with the freedom for responsible individuals to make sense of these in their own ways. In this way the organization will self-organize into a fit and vital system. Dolan, Garcia, and Auerbach (2003, p. 24) argued: "A complex system has many natural

rules that influence its behavior, and multiple intricacies for dealing with a turbulent environment. You can't control these natural rules, but... you can at least guide them and lead them toward one defined direction." They compared three philosophies: Managing by Instruction (MBI), by Objectives (MBO) and by Values (MBV). They concluded that MBV is a philosophy that transformational leaders should use in relation to chaos. They suggested that chaos should not be controlled in fear that it will stifle creativity. They posited that if left alone and with MBV the organization is able to self-organize. The authors then appear to confound their argument by stating that organizations have many internal quantitative characteristics that are necessary and "should not be left to chaos" (Dolan et al., 2003, p. 32). Therefore there is a need for a framework that permits this co-existence.

Similarly, Ofori-Dankwa and Julian (2001) argued that an organization is complex and that a four level framework helps in understanding how chaos interacts within an organization. The levels describe core theoretical concepts that have time orientation characteristics of long-short endurance and high-low exclusivity. The authors' level four has the characteristics of short-term endurance and a relatively low level of exclusivity. They theorized it is at this level "in which organizations are characterized as nonlinear, dynamic systems that exhibit some of the qualitative properties of chaotic systems" (Ofori-Dankwa & Julian, 2001, p. 421). This appears to differ with a critical concept of chaos theory and complexity in that understanding is through looking at the whole system and not by reductionism.

Pascale et al. (2000) supported the whole system approach in an Army example. The single attractor that permeates all levels of the system in executing a mission is the Commander's Intent. "When soldiers understand the overall objectives of each engagement, they are free to improvise" (Pascale et al, 2000, p. 141). The capacity to perform in this way can be understood through complexity theory. A computer simulation program that displays random behavior would self-organize under specific conditions. The simulation demonstrates that the use of a few simple rules changes the random behaving points into groups that organized and replicated. This simulates Wolfram's four classifications of class I static blobs; class II oscillating blobs; class III chaos; and class IV complexity where points align and move across the screen (Waldrop, 1992). The author argued that this concept got close to supporting the idea that life is based on the ability to process information using a few simple rules. The rules did not program where the points would move, the points were still able to change in any direction. But by using a few simple rules they could now do it while traveling together.

The simple idea of the commander's intent enables the soldiers to complete the mission even when the original plan is disrupted because they have enough information to improvise and innovate based on the new situation. This applies to education as well according to Wheatley in an interview where she argued that people who care about education need to focus on strategic intent and creating intentionality (Steinberger, 1995).

### *Using Chaos and Complexity Theory in Education*

A growing body of literature argues for using the concepts of chaos theory and complex adaptive systems in school organizations. Why is this appropriate? Morrison (2002) argued that schools exhibit several features of complex adaptive systems: They require distinguishing structures and features to change over time; they are dynamic and unpredictable organizations; they are nonlinear where small changes sometimes have massive effects; they are complex; relationships are highly important in their work; and they are learning organizations. Therefore “careful attention to developing the emergent self-organizational of schools as open systems is needed” (Morrison, 2002, p. 188). Seller (2001) argued that reform typically fails due to compartmentalization. He concluded school reform needs to be systemic involving both restructuring and re-culturing within school organizations.

Other articles pointed up the specific use of chaos theory in education: In school violence (Moore, 1998), and in addressing quality initiatives in early care and education programs (Buell & Cassidy, 2001). Goff (1998) argued that chaos theory is an appropriate framework for curriculum development because it is a social process that should include all stakeholders, and that curriculum suffers from departmentalization. The author concluded in using chaos theory “deliberation, like a strange attractor, keeps the system within boundaries and defines its order, its rightness” (Goff, 1998, p. 40). So the argument in whole and in part is made for using chaos theory and complex adaptive

systems in education. The question is how does this come to be? The answer in part is leadership.

Morrison (2002) declared that school leadership is itself at a bifurcation point. The author suggested that higher, emergent forms of leadership will be needed to tap the creative and interpersonal side of schools in chaotic and complex school systems. “It is much more about the fostering, nurturing and enabling of the emergence of self-organization in an unpredictable and turbulent world” (Morrison, 2002, p. 188). And, in this new context leadership is distributed throughout the organization. It is worth it because “complexity theory for school leadership is a theory whose time has come” (Morrison, 2002, p. 191).

#### *Implications for Strategic Planning in Education Systems*

Critics argue that the chaotic environment of school systems precludes the use of strategic planning. Others argue concepts of chaos theory and complex adaptive systems are being incorporated into the arguments of researchers who support moving away from hierarchical, command-and-control organizations into connected, flat, and dynamic systems that become and stay fit through adaptation. Authors reviewed and cited put forward strong arguments for this approach in education to breach the reform barrier. The following looks at one extreme version and a counter-argument for not using chaos theory at all.

Griffin (2002) argued because the future is unpredictable all decisions and all solutions to problems need to be done at the local level in real time. “This focuses

attention on everyday interaction between people in their local situation in the living present. It is in these interactions that ethical interaction emerges and it is also therefore in these interactions that roles emerge, including the roles of leaders” (Griffin, 2002, p. 219). This precludes the use of whole system views as stated in missions, visions, ethical principles, and culture which he labeled cult values. This is juxtaposed to a counter argument.

Smith stated: “I’m not sure what chaos theory contributes to discussions of organization, or more pertinently, ‘how’ it contributes” (Smith, 2001, p. 276). The author argued that the appeal is to postmodern sentiments and the appeal of its indeterministic attribute (the future cannot be precisely predicted.) Smith pointed to scientists that are criticizing this sentiment as they illustrate that chaos theory is deterministic in a very modernist way. The author also noted the lack of evidence supporting the chaos organization theory, and its use as a metaphor is limited. But, even as a metaphor it should be capable of supporting analysis and increasing understanding. “However, the status of chaos theory within future operationalisation is largely unexplored” (Smith, 2001, p. 278). Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007) put forth their complexity leadership theory to develop leadership perspectives that extend beyond bureaucratic assumptions to add a view of leadership as a complex interactive dynamic through which adaptive outcomes emerge. They argued that leadership is a complex interplay of many interacting forces (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Having an understanding of the critiques of strategic planning is necessary to at least suspend judgment on the appropriateness of its use in education systems. What is evident in this discourse is that a resolution to the argument is being encumbered by the theory of strategic planning being in disarray. The following is a conceptual model for strategic planning in education systems based on a review of the literature. The model serves as a framework for this study in researching school district strategic planning in practice.

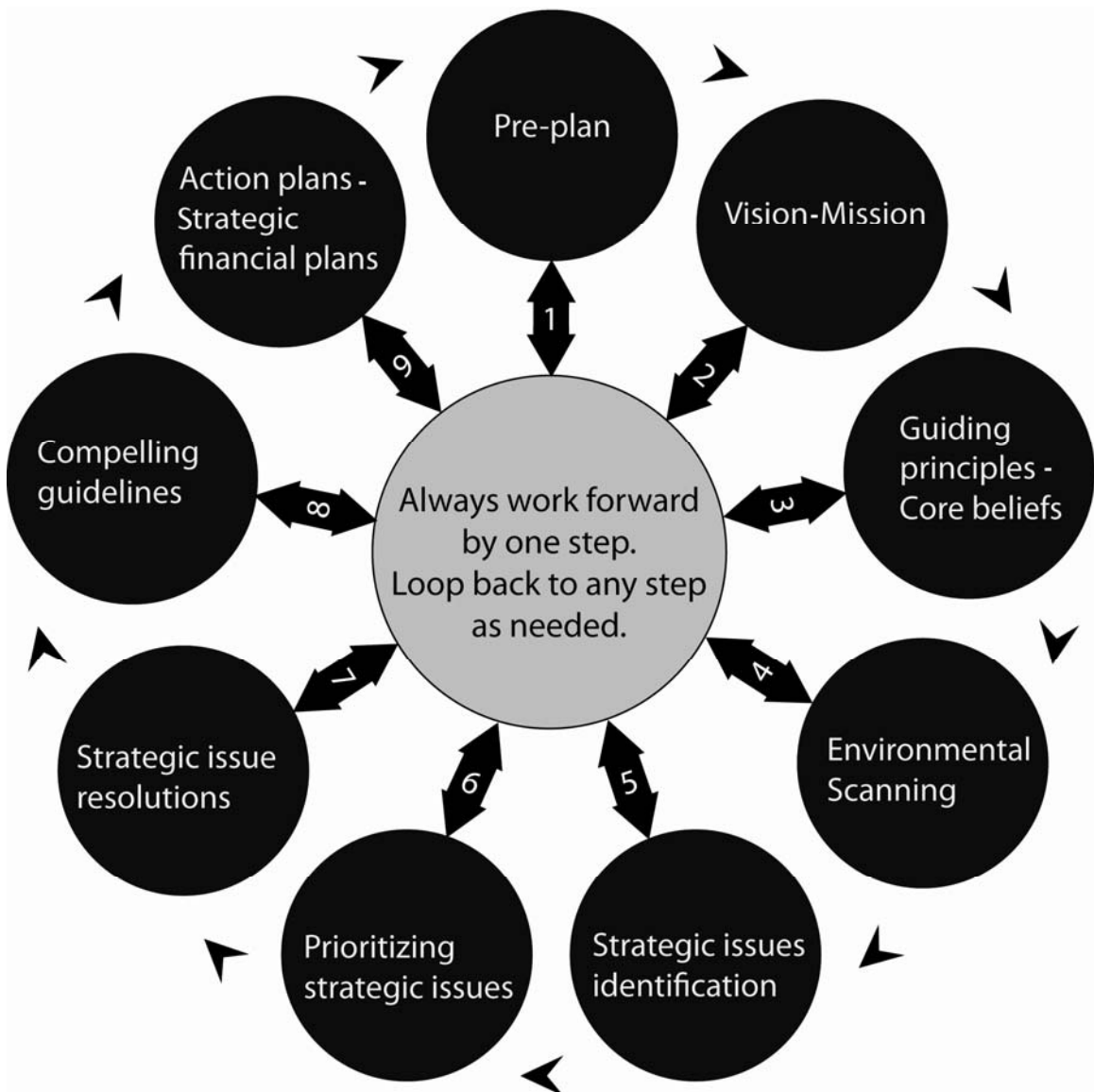
#### A Nine Step Strategic Planning Model

A strategic planning model for school districts can be useful because it is a process for designing and creating new systems that change the circumstances of the organization to a new and desired state that fosters better student outcomes (Bryson, 2004; Bush & Coleman, 2000; Cook, 2000; Davies, 2004; Eacott, 2008; Fidler, 1998; Lane, Bishop, & Wilson-Jones, 2005; McHenry & Achilles, 2002). School districts can be viewed as communities of practice. And the designs of these communities of practice reflect the intent of their stewards. Stewards of school districts use strategic planning to develop the designs of the organization and systems to accomplish the intended results in a changing environment. Strategic planning provides the discipline for designing a framework for systems, policies, resources, and personnel of the school district to use to effectively perform its purpose. Cook argued that strategic planning is a tool by which a community continuously creates an organization and systems to serve an extraordinary purpose (Cook, 2004).



The nine step strategic planning model outlined in Table 1 uses the findings of Hambright and Diamantes (2004) from a content analysis of literature on strategic planning in K-12 school districts. Their analysis identifies eight steps that emerge from the many different models researched. Steps are discrete groups of activities in a strategic planning process. A ninth step that links strategic planning to the work of implementing the strategies is a synthesis of the works of Cook (2000), Garner (2004), and Odden and Picus (2008). The result is the nine step strategic planning model illustrated in Figure 1. A definition or description of the each step is followed by the group of activities often associated with the step adapted from studies by: Bryson, 2004; Bryson & Alston, 2005; Cook, 2000; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; and Lane, Bishop, & Wilson-Jones, 2005.

Figure 1. Nine Step Strategic Planning Model.



Note: Each step is made up of activities that support the step. Arrows depict the direction of workflow. Work moves forward only one step at a time. Arrows in the center portray paths taken when new data or understanding precipitates a need to loop back and iterate one or more steps.

### *Pre-planning*

Step 1 Pre-planning: Pre-planning is a group of activities done to prepare the organization to engage in a strategic planning process.

Definition: Often referred to as plan the plan, or planning to plan (Cook, 2000; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004).

Step 1 is a critical or vital step to the overall success of the planning process. It is where the desired outcomes of the process are established. The participants are chosen and invited to engage in the process (Bryson, 2004; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004). Providing for all stakeholders to participate meaningfully throughout the process requires planning for it at the beginning of the process. This is key to the success of the strategic plan since it engenders the commitment of all stakeholders to the process and ultimately to the strategic plan for the organization. “A stakeholder is defined as any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization’s attention, resources, or output or that is affected by that output” (Bryson, 2004, p. 35). Step 1 is a decisive opportunity to design into the process a socially just level of meaningful participation for all stakeholders.

Activities:

- Conduct awareness sessions on the purpose of the effort and the need for the effort.
- Leaders evaluate the readiness and competency of the organization to perform all the steps in the strategic planning process and set expectations accordingly. That

is determining the level of fitness of the organization to complete the strategic planning process. Bryson and Alston (2005) stated “if the organization lacks the skills or resources or the commitment of key decision makers to carry through an effective strategic planning process and produce a good plan, the effort should not be undertaken” (Bryson & Alston, 2005, p. 13). The effort should be limited and attention given to developing the skills, resources, and commitments.

- Educate and train staff, board members, and community participants on the process.
- Prepare a planning calendar outlining the timing of each of the strategic planning steps.
- Form a planning team with the authority and resources to perform all the tasks in the strategic planning process. “Most educational models advocate utilizing a broad-base panel of the district’s internal and external stakeholders” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 98). Train the team and enhance the team’s competency in strategic planning.
- Conduct a thorough assessment of all stakeholders and determine who should participate in the process and when and how each group will participate in each step. Communicate with all stakeholders and the community at large through several channels including the use of mass media.

## *Vision – Mission*

Step 2 Vision – Mission: Describes the extraordinary purpose the organization serves and the reason why the participants are developing a strategic plan.

Definitions:

*Vision*: Statements that serve as a catalyst for long range and broad based aims.

*Mission*: Statements that focus on efforts toward a short range and narrow based ends. The mission is a statement of the organization's identity, the unique purpose to which the organization is committed, and the basic means of accomplishing that purpose.

Vision and mission statements establish a strategic direction for the organization. The vision is the ideal of what the organization will become and therefore the subject of critical dialogue with all stakeholders. The mission establishes the identity of the organization, the people served, purposes for existing, what issues to address, what is to be achieved, and what makes the organization distinctive and unique (Lane et al., 2005). The special distinctiveness sets the organization apart from others and if it cannot identify its uniqueness, it probably cannot justify its existence (Cook, 2000). Clarifying both statements is critical for the success of the strategic planning process, the strategic plan implementation, and the promulgation of a socially just process vital to the organization.

As Bryson stated, "development of the mission statement should grow out of lengthy dialogue about the organization's identity, its abiding purpose, its desired

responses to key stakeholders, its philosophy and core value, and its ethical standards” (Bryson, 2004, p. 38).

It is a matter of creating an indispensable, unique identity toward which all energies can be concentrated. . . . Everything else in the plan will be predicated on the mission, and everything about the organization will be dedicated to it. The mission is the basis of all decisions, all allocations, all evaluations, and all measures of success. (Cook, 2000, p. 122)

There is an important linkage to the previous step which is identifying and soliciting the participation of all stakeholders. Including the voices of stakeholders vested in the organization creates a matter of social justice. Excluding voices of stakeholders deprives the organization of their perspectives and concepts. Exclusion impedes the long-term commitment of those left out since the dialogue reveals the reasons why this work is important.

Activities:

- Vision statements emerge from brainstorming sessions with all stakeholders at all levels as a view of the realistic, credible, and attractive future of the organization.
- Conduct sessions with all stakeholders to clarify the organizational mission.

#### *Guiding Principles – Core Beliefs*

Step 3 Guiding principles – Core beliefs: An essential portion of the planning process they are described as an organization’s ethical code, convictions, and moral commitments.

Definition: “These beliefs are the fundamental, deep, and abiding convictions of those who make up the system, principles they will never compromise, matters of conscience” (Cook, 2000, p. 116).

The terms guiding principles, core beliefs, and values are used interchangeably or each are used to define the other. This lack of clarity is problematic given the emphatic importance placed upon them: “The driving force in all human systems is values” (Cook, 2000, p. 116). Cook pointed out that they are not a construct but are formed by the members of the organization. They represent a composite distillation of the values of those who make up the organization and as such give each organization a distinct identity. This also implies that shared values cannot be mandated. Cook stated that the beliefs of the organization are not intended to be divisive or a litmus test for participation. This would direct the process to seek a socially just disposition through meaningful participation by all stakeholders. In this study, the phrase meaningful participation was meant to describe dialogue that is truly two-way, regarding a subject that is consequential to the organization, and with the expectation that the outcome would influence the final design of the strategic plan and organization. This step links to the previous steps as it describes the formation of shared values that are attractors for participants that are motivated to commit to the organization’s mission are willing to work to the fruition of the vision.

Activity:

- Conduct sessions with all stakeholders to form and clarify the guiding principle, core beliefs, and shared values of the organization.

### *Environmental Scanning*

Step 4 Environmental scanning: Strategic planning uses internal and external data to determine current status, identify trends, and provide factual evidence of performance. All relevant data forms a unique knowledge base to support the work of developing and proposing possible courses of action.

Definition: An environmental scan is the assessment of the current state of affairs with the organization (internal) and the current state of affairs regarding things outside of the organization (external) (Lane et al., 2005).

Developing data and performing critical analysis of it is a “prerequisite to developing the objectives and strategies, which are the essence of the plan” (Cook, 2000, p. 123). This requires complete honesty and objectivity. The value of the strategic plan is directly affected, that is garbage-in will yield garbage-out. This conviction toward candor is particularly difficult in the internal analysis of the organization’s performance in putting into action the current strategic plan. Recognizing the strengths of an organization is important because these are the areas in which leverage may exist. Identifying the “weaknesses of the organization provides an understanding of the internal characteristics, conditions, or circumstances that are impeding or even preventing the realization of the current strategy” (Cook, 2000, p. 125). Furthermore, “without performance criteria and



information, the organization cannot objectively evaluate the relative effectiveness of alternative strategies, resource allocations, organizational designs, and distribution of power” (Bryson, 2004, p. 41). The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses fosters an organizational understanding of its actual strategies and the value the organization creates for its stakeholders (Moore, 2000). Bryson argued “understanding the current strategy can also sensitize people to the ways in which an integration of human resource management, information technology, and financial management might be used to sustain, strengthen, and protect desirable strategies” (Bryson, 2004, p. 42). Moore (2000) called this the story of the organization. The story completed the assessment when combined with the other metrics analyzed. Bryson (2004) argued analyzing performance must include the value and social good created by the organization for its stakeholders. “Stakeholders judge an organization according to the criteria they choose, which are not necessarily the same criteria the organization would choose” (Bryson, 2004, p. 41) and understanding the differences is vital which argues for participation by all stakeholders in this important step. Davies, et al., described this step of analysis and synthesis as reflection and strategic thinking.

Reflection is a reactive process trying to understand the significance of where the school is and what is happening in the wider environment. Strategic thinking is trying to understand what should happen. This is a proactive process. When these two processes interact with the analysis of additional information, a synthesis of

ideas can take place, resulting in the formation of new mental models. (Davies et al., 2005, p. 20)

This step links to prior steps in several ways. The assessment of performance to identify gaps compares current data (feedback) to the vision/mission and scrutinizes the means used as compared to the guiding principles and core beliefs. The assessment also examines the current strategies in the context of trends in pertinent environmental factors to identify critical issues. The findings may be issues of internal competency or capacity or a dissonance between the actual value created by the organization and the expectations of the stakeholders.

Activities:

- Analyze the alignment of the organization's story (vision and mission) and aspirations with the stakeholders' expectations and perceived value of the organizations work.
- Conduct a performance analysis of the value created using organizational and stakeholder criteria. Utilize both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Conduct an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities (or SWOT) of the organization.
- Conduct a budget financial performance and cost trend analysis to understand variances to plan. Utilize tools such as adequacy models (Odden & Picus, 2008) and equitable distribution of funds to determine gaps with Core Beliefs and Values.

- Analyze external factors, trends, and pending events (e.g. new legislation, demographic shifts in non-English speakers, ethnic populations, etc.) to create plausible future scenarios as frameworks for further analysis.
- Share the findings with all stakeholders with the purpose of being transparent and to facilitate full and meaningful participation by informed participants.

### *Strategic Issues Identification*

Step 5 Strategic issues identification: This step entails analyzing environmental data with the perspective of the organization's Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles/Core Beliefs and asking: So what?

Definition: Strategic Issues are “fundamental policy questions or critical challenges affecting the organization's mandates, mission and values, product or service level and mix, clients, users or payers, cost, financing, structure, processes, and management” (Bryson, 2004, p. 42).

Step 5 is the point in the strategic planning discipline to identify critical issues that must be dealt with because they mean success or failure. They are important because they provide the “compelling rationale for the strategic deployment of resources” (Cook, 2000, p. 133). Strategic planning is about focusing on adapting an organization to its environment (Bryson, 2004). In this step the planning participants utilize all the information and understanding from the process to assert the need for change. As is true for all the steps, it may initiate an iteration of the steps to provide deeper analysis or better understanding. For example, a strategic issue may be the failure to perform to the

stated mission of the organization. The dialogue in this step may point out that the practice of the organization indicates that the actual mission differs from the formal mission and there is a critical need to reconcile the differences. The differences are more than numeric variances to stated objectives. They may “involve ends (what), means (how or how much), philosophy (why), location (where), timing (when), and the entities advantaged or disadvantaged (who)” (Bryson, 2004, p. 43). The critical issues emanate from the environmental scan that grounds them in real data (quantitative and qualitative) and are vital factors that make up the critical issue. The issue is critical because of the implications to the organization if it is not addressed. Clarifying the consequences and supporting them with data provide the compelling rationale for strategic action.

Activities:

- Convene work sessions to frame the critical issues of the organization through a synthesis of the findings and conclusions in the environmental scan. Use this information as the basis for dialogue with stakeholders that are informed of the organizational operations, have vested interests, and have an understanding of the external demands and possibilities.
- Conduct an analysis of the whole system and organization design identifying internal critical success factors.
- Identify all the critical issues facing the organization such as gaps in performance to mission, vulnerabilities to environmental factors, and breaches with stakeholders.

### *Prioritizing Strategic Issues*

Step 6 Prioritizing strategic issues: Developing and using an ordering methodology that is appropriate and accepted by all stakeholders to set the hierarchy of importance in addressing the critical issues facing the organization.

Definition: Prioritizing strategic issues is the ordering of identified critical issues based on some type of framework.

Another facet of the discipline of strategic planning is the prioritizing of the multitude of critical issues coming from the previous step. The gravity of the issues warrants the deployment of resources and scarcity requires choosing an order to address them. Prioritizing bases include: logical, temporal, political, and financial. A logical basis for prioritizing issues include the need for action, the magnitude and importance of the issue, rightness and usefulness, and impact on the strengths or weaknesses of the organization. Temporal basis is assessing the urgency of the situation. Political factors include social costs or political opportunities. Financial factors include ability to respond to the issue, the costs, a cost/benefit analysis, and the available resources (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004). The point of this step is to identify and understand the paramount threats and opportunities (Cook, 2004) facing the organization in fulfilling its mission by using multiple lenses on the data. Constructing maps, models or frameworks facilitates making sense of the information by removing complexity to make the information perspectives more accessible for the participants in the planning process (Davies et al., 2005). Methods vary from diagramming relationships to scoring factors, but they are all

aimed at achieving the vision and fulfilling the mission of the organization which gives the outcome such high importance. It is important to consider all these variables since “there is always just one best opportunity for truly recreating an organization” (Cook, 2000, p. 134). Prioritizing sets up the order of action to follow. Choosing poorly may mean the organization is working on the wrong issues. Therefore, the consequence of not fully understanding the consequences of the strategic issues, particularly in a complex and chaotic environment (Dolan et al., 2003; Fullan, 2001; Schmoker, 2004), may be detrimental. The importance of comprehending the strategic issues is a strong case for participation of all stakeholders in this step for the contributions of their perspectives and judgments. The import of the linkage to the data and dialogue of the prior step is clear.

Activities:

- Planning team develops one or more prioritizing methodologies and analyzes the strategic issues summarizing findings and potential impacts on the organization.
- Convene sessions with all stakeholders to review and discuss findings and consequences of the strategic issues priority and make recommendations.

#### *Strategic Issue Resolutions*

Step 7 Strategic issue resolutions: Specific strategies are developed in this part of the process that describes what exactly needs to change and by what means as responses to the prioritized strategic issues.

Defining this step is problematic:

The literature is bogged down within a semantic morass concerning the strategic issues resolution step within the broader strategic direction setting process.

Various authors' terminologies embedded in their models complicated the process picture. The major obstacle dealt with the use, or perhaps misuse, of the term strategies, goals, objectives, and assorted combinations of these terms.

(Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 101)

The following logic provides a structure for this step in order for it to be usable.

The identification of strategic issues and the further prioritization of these strategic issues are compelling reasons for taking strategic action. Before leaping to action establishing a goal provides a set direction and focus. Setting a specific objective gives the organization the means to gauge progress, timing, and ultimate success. Designing and developing alternate strategies, and selecting a strategy that commits specific organizational resources to the resolution of a strategic issue.

Definitions:

*Goal:* Goals are broadly stated purposes toward which ends are directed.

Goals are issues oriented. Goals should be in harmony with the vision, mission, and values statements (Lane et al., 2005).

*Objective:* Objectives are quantifiable steps that must be met on the way toward achieving a long-range vision and goals (Bryson & Alston, 2005; Lane et al., 2005).

*Strategy*: Strategies are the means by which an organization intends to accomplish a goal or objective. Strategies reveal the organization's commitment to a new reality by summarizing a pattern across policy, programs, projects, decisions, and resource allocations (Bryson & Alston, 2005; Cook, 2000).

This step applies to resolving strategic issues. Goals, objectives, and strategies that are found to be requisite with the environment are unchanged since the system environmental scan shows them as working according to plan (Hambricht & Diamantes, 2004). Cook (2000) made a finer distinction stating that there are two kinds of strategies. Maintenance strategies are those that refurbish and develop existing actions and systems. A change strategy is a strategy designed with the intent to create radical change, a metamorphosis, or as Henry Mintzberg stated a "quantum leap" (Mintzberg, 1987a, p. 71). This compares to what Hambricht & Diamantes (2004) found in linear strategic planning models where each strategic issue has an objective and each objective has a strategy. Cook (2000) argued this is too narrow and is no longer strategic thinking. He stated that strategies need to be at the level that they address the whole system and support all the objectives of the organization. A metaphor may help explain the quandary. A medical team that treats a patient who has cancer with powerful therapy without regard to potential side effects, a narrow strategy to kill the cancer, may kill the patient. A strategy to live healthy through wholesome foods, exercise, and vitamins is too broad a



strategy and may allow the cancer to turn critical and the patient dies. The complexity of the human body is similar to the complexity of organizations and designing strategies for both is a challenge with dire consequences.

This step links directly to the prior step of prioritizing strategic issues. It also links to the environmental scan in evaluating strategy options and reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization.

Activities:

- The planning team utilizes the prioritized strategic issues output from the prior step and the data and dialogue used to establish the issues as strategic and of high priority to define the desired end-state goal. This implies a systemic change in the organization to deal with a specific issue. The goal describes what in the current situation needs to change.
- The planning team then develops quantifiable targets, i.e. what change, to measure progress toward the goal, again using the data and information developed in the prior steps. The introduction of new data indicates a new iteration of the strategic planning steps.
- The planning team researches, designs, and develops alternative strategies to achieve a goal or objective. Stakeholders participate in the discussion of the strategy options of how to achieve the objectives.

### *Compelling Guidelines*

Step 8 Compelling guidelines: Planning assumptions, policies, and the manner in which implementation will be done are described for use in preparing action plans and guiding implementation.

Definition: Compelling guidelines define desirable and unacceptable management practices in implementing the strategies.

Some of the models reviewed by Hambright & Diamantes (2004) have a step where the planning team provides specific guidelines for use in implementing the strategies. As noted in the prior step, strategies are broad statements of intent on how objectives will be achieved. Implementation of the strategy requires more detailed information and many supporting decisions. Compelling guidelines provide assistance to the implementation team when making these choices to insure they are in accord with the intent of the strategic plan.

This step builds on the prior step by clarifying the intent. For maintenance strategies this step may be a reification of the existing guidelines and assumptions.

Activities:

- Planning team prepares guidelines for implementation of the strategies for clarification of intent.
- For some strategies the planning team convenes a session with all stakeholders to develop guidelines and assumptions for the implementation team.

### *Action Plans and Strategic Financial Planning*

Step 9 Action plans and strategic financial planning: Detailed plans are developed that specify the work to be done in implementing the strategies including setting timeliness and identifying required resources.

Step 9 describes the planning that is needed to link strategies to implementation. The step also closes the loop in the strategic planning process as the results from implementation become the data needed to iterate the cycle.

#### Definitions:

*Action plan*: A detailed description of the specific actions required to achieve specific results necessary for the implementation of the strategies (Cook, 1995).

*Strategic financial plan*: The merger of financial and strategic plans into one plan (Garner, 2004).

*Adequacy*: Used as a finance tool adequacy is defined as:

A principle which involves the provision of a set of strategies, programs, curriculum, and instruction, with appropriate adjustment for special-needs students, districts, and schools, and their full financing, that is sufficient to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn to high performance standards. (Odden & Picus, 2008, p. 75)

A review of strategic planning literature indicates that there is a gap between the strategic planning process and the budgeting and other implementation processes. As a

consequence, there is a risk that the distribution of resources to school-site operations may not be adequate to implement the strategies of the district or the school. A means to bridge this gap is adding the ninth step to the strategic planning model where action plans are developed, and needed resources are identified provided to school-site leadership to prepare their own strategic plan. The strategic plan should have a budget as part of its strategic financial plan for review and approval by district leadership. All the units' plans would then be consolidated into the district strategic financial plan. The use of the adequacy principle using evidence based analysis during the environmental scan would assist in determining the needs of the district and schools. The use of the adequacy methodology for distribution of the resources would facilitate the mapping of funds back to the schools at the levels that are needed to successfully complete their mission of educating children to high standards and closing the gap between the strategic plan and operational budgets.

A convergence of actions demonstrates how each member of the enterprise has an essential role in accomplishing the mission (Cook, 2000). School districts use strategic planning to facilitate this convergence. School principals look to the school district to provide policies and resources needed to implement the strategies (Cook, 2000; Garner, 2004; Odden & Picus, 2008). The typical method of providing resources to schools is in services and budgets (Garner, 2004). What is needed then is a step that bridges from the strategic plan to the school budget. The following examines some of the methods found

in literature to bridge this gap and facilitate the convergence of actions needed to accomplish the mission of the school district.

Cook stated what is at risk when strategic planning is done poorly:

Most do not realize the full power of strategy. Because the plans are not infused with strategic thinking or carried to strategic action, the vast majority of strategic planning is worse than futile, it is destructive. Not only is the future of the planning enterprise placed at great risk, but both credibility and competence are seriously compromised. (Cook, 2000, p. 3)

Moxley (2003) found evidence supporting the conclusion that a strategic planning process done well is perceived by school district superintendents as key to positive results achieved over time. Fullan (2001) challenged educational leaders that “moral purpose cannot just be stated, it must be accompanied by strategies for realizing it, and those strategies are the leadership actions that energize people to pursue a desired goal” (Fullan, 2001, p. 19). There is a strong motivation to link the strategies of a district to the individual actions of each member of the enterprise to minimize risk and maximize positive results.

Two methods of linking strategies to actions are: Cook’s (2000) strategic planning model that includes the additional step of action planning. Second is Garner’s (2004) model that adds the concept of a strategic financial plan. Finally, to fill a gap in both models, the concept of adequacy by Odden and Picus (2008) is examined.

Cook's (2000) strategic planning model paralleled Hambricht and Diamantes' (2004) emergent model with the addition of a step Cook called action plans. Action plans are several assignable tasks that will be necessary to realize the strategy. An action plan is "an initiative that can be accomplished by individuals or groups as part of their organizational responsibilities" (Cook, 2000, p. 139). Cook called these individuals or groups action clusters and the process of planning to implement the action plans action-cluster planning. The author called the resultant plans tactics. This process is necessary because action plans in themselves are only plans. They must be taken to the next step of implementation. Cook pointed out that action plans are the only component of the strategic plan that will be implemented.

Cook (2000) stated that there are two types of action plans. Projects are characterized by detailed steps and specific costs that are needed to produce specific deliverables. The second type of action plan is a program. Programs have the characteristic of being less defined. Programs are where the particular steps to achieve a specific outcome cannot be known until the course of action reveals them. For example, the United States had a vision to put a man on the moon. The NASA space program was designed to fulfill that vision. However, the specific technology to do it needed to be invented as part of the implementation. In both cases, Cook (2000) noted that these are creative acts that must have a certain discipline invoked to guarantee concentration of effect, credibility, and practicality.

Part of this is the cost/benefit analysis that is done at the action planning level and at the action-cluster planning level. "The cost-benefit analysis that accompanies each action plan is extremely important because such an analysis ultimately forces the question of best use of resources and the greatest return on investment" (Cook, 2000, p. 140). It is a major factor in validating the entire strategic plan in actual performance as feedback answers the questions: Did the plan produce what it promised? Did it do it at the cost it projected?

The flow in the strategic planning process is toward operations. Cook maintained that this is necessary to allow creativity at the implementation level.

In a whole-context organization, action-clusters are, first, an expedient for facilitating the accomplishment of individual responsibilities within the context of the system's strategic plan, and, second a continuous stimulus for individual creativity as well as the development of individual and system capacity. (Cook, 2000, p. 233)

Action-cluster planning is done to maintain congruence in the system and harmony in the organization.

A possible issue, absent a pledged block of funding, is the action-cluster, as Odden and Picus (2008) noted, would reallocate resources that are within its purview. The action-cluster decides from where to take the source of the funds. These funds support actions that are also presumably essential. Planning in action clusters must be consistent with and facilitate "both the strategic plan of the system and the mutual

commitments and expectations of the individual within the systems” (Cook, 2000, p. 232).

Participation in the strategic planning process may be a critical part of the answer as Sonstelie (2008) argued that in the new world of standards and accountability, policy makers are asking educators to accomplish quite a lot. If this mission is to succeed, it must have the active support of those charged with carrying it out, support that is unlikely to come if policy makers ignore the beliefs of educators about the resources they need to carry out the mission assigned to them. This would describe one nexus point where the superintendent and the principal would join together in developing the strategic plan for the district. Having the implementers as part of the process when action plans are being developed may provide a forum for open discussions about funding before the plan is cast in stone for approval and implementation.

Action planning is an additional step toward bridging the strategic planning process to operations. Action-cluster planning is a new process that continues the development of implementation plans. It is unclear in Cook (2000) how the financing of the strategic plan is reconciled with the implementation plans. The second planning model incorporates a new component called a strategic financial plan to address this concern.

Garner (2004) argued that in a school district, school leaders must merge financial and strategic plans into one plan, which he refers to as a strategic financial plan. The author described a process for accomplishing this. The school district mission, goals, and



objectives which are part of the district strategic plan are given as input for developing school goals, objectives, and targets. The school uses this input to develop their site-based unit strategic financial plan. The plan is multi-year and is part of an all schools and departments consolidation to create a strategic financial plan for the whole school district.

Garner (2004) stated that in public school districts the critical information found in the strategic plan is its mission (why it exists), goals (its vision for the future), and objectives (what it intends to do). Garner described three components of a strategic financial plan. First, using the district strategic plan, school leaders must be able to assemble a strategic financial plan for their school to meet the stated expectations. Second, the strategic financial plan must include a budget. This requires comprehension of the budgeting process imbedded within a strategic financial plan. Third, strategic financial plans must be prepared for all site-based programs and services, preferably with stakeholders at the operational level. These plans should present what the unit will accomplish in measurable outcomes and outputs and include a schedule of periodic benchmark reviews. This is consistent with Cook (2000) who states that strategy requires concentration of effect, credibility, and practicality.

Since the district strategic financial plan is a consolidation of the unit plans, the budget should be requisite with the agreed to strategies. Garner stated, "School district personnel must recognize that a strategic financial plan is an opportunity to act proactively" (Garner, 2004, p. 88). There is a potential issue in completing the process. If, as Garner noted, the method of distributing resources in the budget process resort to

commonly used devices such as per-pupil funds, then the result may be a mismatch of tasks and resources to accomplish the tasks. Garner argued that a unit's budget proposal should be presented with that unit's strategic plan since "one completes the other" (Garner, 2004, p. 82).

The strategic financial plan adds a loop back to the district strategic plan and the district strategic financial plan has the input from all parts of the enterprise. The use of the district's strategic plan with the vision, mission, goals, objectives, and strategies as input will facilitate the concentration of effort across the district to some extent. But strategic planning is as Cook (2000) stated a creative process. How then do principals approach the specific needs of their schools and make the reallocation decisions that change will require? The following describes the financial implications of school reform and the ways in which decisions about the distribution and use of funds affect implementation and link to student achievement (Odden & Picus, 2008).

In budget implementation, because budgets are developed from the site-level up does not mean the distribution would follow the path back to the school. School districts typically use formulas to direct resources to schools (Odden & Picus, 2008). This poses a risk that the funding will not be adequate, in all regards, to the approved school site strategic plan. "Adequacy requires some link between inputs and outputs" (Odden & Picus, 2008, p. 76).

Odden and Picus (2008) argued adequacy is an additional principle to judge a school finance system. The notion of adequacy involves the provision of a set of

strategies, programs, curriculum, and instruction, with appropriate adjustments for special-needs students, and schools, and their full financing, that is sufficient to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn to high performance standards. The outputs are the measurement of the results that are achieved. The justification of the definition of adequacy is grounded in legislation, NCLB; and as a result of litigations. The authors developed a method to measure adequacy to use at the district and the school site. It is the Odden-Picus Adequacy Index (OPAI). The idea behind the OPAI is to calculate an index to roughly indicate the percent of students educated in schools or districts that are spending at an adequate level (Odden & Picus, 2008).

The authors recommended a specific methodology for establishing adequate levels. The method is the evidence-based approach. The method identifies research or other evidence-based educational strategies, prices them out, and then aggregates them to identify adequate school site and district expenditure levels (Odden & Picus, 2008). The timing of this analysis would appear to be crucial. Done after the development of the strategies, it might prove to be incongruent to the realities of the site-based operations. The use of the methodology at all levels during the environmental scans, both internal and external, would provide input into the design of the strategies up front. Also, the participation of site-based personnel with the use of the adequacy methodology would enhance the clarity of the findings and give credibility to the recommendations and the outcomes.

Activities:

- Planning team identifies and engages action-cluster members to develop action plans for implementation.
- Planning team conducts orientations on the district strategic plan to the schools and departments in the district.
- Each school and district department develops a strategic plan and a strategic financial plan and presents it to the superintendent and planning team.
- District personal prepare a consolidated strategic financial plan utilizing the input from the schools and district departments

The ninth step completes the conceptual framework for a strategic planning model for school districts. It is based on the concept that it is a discipline to design strategies that change the organization. Cook stated: “Strategy is about creating the capacity for constant emergence” (Cook, 2004, p. 74). This is critical if an organization is to be requisite with its purpose and to the environment. Notably for education systems, this parallels the description of a learning community. The following is an overview of Wenger’s (1998) four dimensions of design for learning used to analyze the discipline of a strategic plan as a model for learning in education systems.

#### Strategic Planning through the Lens of Designing for Learning

Richard DuFour et al. (2006) and Fullan et al. (2006) argue that education organizations must be learning communities. Through the comparison of the four dimensions of design for learning (Wenger, 1998) to the nine step strategic planning

model and highlighting how strategic planning contributes to the design and development of a district wide community of practice and learning. The following compares the nine step strategic planning model (Table 1) to the four dimensions of design for learning (Wenger, 1998).

### *Design for Learning*

For Wenger (1998) learning is about engaging in practice that supports the purpose of the organization. Wenger argued that there are four issues that make up the dimensions of the space of a design for learning. The four dimensions are challenges in designing for learning that can be explained through dualities. These dualities exist in tension and designing for learning is a matter of combining them in ways that are useful. The four dualities of design are:

1. Participation and reification
2. The designed and the emergent
3. The local and the global
4. Identification and negotiability

### *Participation and Reification*

Wenger (1998) argued that participation and reification are dimensions of both practice and identity. Both therefore influence the future, one by setting a direction for the practice, the other by setting the trajectory of a person. One sets out artifacts such as tools, plans, procedures and assumes the community will organize around them. The other relies on the right people put in the right place, at the right time with the right

relationship and they will make something happen. Design in this dimension is how these two fit together to do the work. The design becomes a source for negotiating meaning in the context of the community. However, the extent of design is itself a challenge.

### *The Designed and the Emergent*

The tension in this duality would seem to be a paradox. The intent of a design will include the hope to maximize achieving the desired outcome and minimizing the risk of failure. Wenger (1998) stated that there is a point where over prescription can in fact increase the risk of failure. The author pointed out that “in a world that is not predictable, improvisation and innovation are more than desirable, they are essential” (Wenger, 1998, p. 233). The author concluded that design is not about eliminating emergence but designing to capture it as an opportunity.

### *The Local and the Global*

All practice is local. And no local practice can be global. “No practice has the full picture. No practice subsumes another” (Wenger, 1998, p. 234). Likewise communities of practice design their own learning by deciding what it is they need to learn. Design is therefore about creating relations between local communities and not a local community linking to some global entity. Wenger stated: “Whenever a process, course, or system is being designed, it is thus essential to involve the affected communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 234). Taken to the extreme however, is an issue because local learning is limited by the immediate resources of the community. And it excludes relevant learning in the exchange in practice with other communities. Learning requires the design

of new connections that are meaningful engagements in practice. Wenger distinguished design as an object between communities in a constellation of localities through which they can communicate and negotiate their contributions, positions, and alignment with each other.

### *Identification and Negotiability*

Design must have the power to influence the negotiation of meaning. It begins with the granting of power to define, adapt, or interpret the design itself. Because design represents a perspective and this perspective can be one that is intended to be shared by those affected or narrowed so as to exclude some by privileging a select portion thus fragmenting the constituents. Design is also a position that creates a focus for identity (or not) and either laying claim to exclusively interpreting the meaning or opening the negotiation up and sharing the ownership of meaning. The process fosters the tension between cohesion and differentiation. The design for learning must generate social energy and direct it (Wenger, 1998).

Wegner (1998) concluded that a design is a process of choices along each of these dimensions. This creates a space in which possible approaches to design problems can be crafted. Increasing the richness of the space allows for more innovative solutions to problems. The strategic planning in school districts must create a rich space for creating innovative solutions to problems to be a design for learning.

### *The Nine Step Model as a Design for Learning*

The following argument is that the nine step strategic planning model (Table 1) meets the fundamental requirements of creating a space for design. Viewing the activities in the steps through the lens of design for learning reveals some potentially critical choices. The sharing of data in the pre-planning step is a choice to open the design to input from a narrow or a wide range of sources and inviting those engaged to interpret the data based on their perspectives. The level of sharing and dialogue is an opportunity for meta-learning (global). Eliciting feedback on the need for change is a choice of increasing the negotiability of the current design. This is a posture of being open to the possibilities of new designs emerging from the planning space. The choice of the levels of participation in the activities of each step (and including external stakeholders) affects the openness to diversity in negotiating meaning and being open to modifications to the mode of identification. As Wenger (1998) stated, all those affected by the design should be participants in creating it. The discipline of the nine step strategic planning model provides a forum (space) to engage in a dialogue that has the potential to change systems and the organization. This is a sharing of power. The engagement also increases shared ownership and identity that strengthens the enterprise. The choices along this dimension of the design clearly communicate the intent of the stewards of the organization in regard to shared ownership of the design.

The vision-mission step of strategic planning relates to identification and negotiability by making a statement that defines identification and non-identification. The



choice is whether or not the design permits the sharing of the meaning or even the negotiation of its modification. The impact will be on allegiance and orientation, on whether the design is imposed, embraced, or abandoned. The choice could change the trajectory of people or the direction of the practice.

Using the lens of design for learning would suggest avoiding prescribing outcomes in the guiding principles and core beliefs step. The design could not impose a new value onto the organization since it is formative and not a construct. The choice would be to design strategies that might foster the formation of a certain value. Wenger (1998) would argue that the activities in the step of establishing guiding principles and core beliefs is a design that would provide a framework but it would be the practice that negotiates the meaning of the new value. The design could open the negotiation of meaning by including a broad range of participants such as external stakeholders. To ascribe values to the organization that are not integral to practice is spurious. To ignore values and convictions that are in the wide spread practice of the organization is to be blind to a significant reality that will challenge any design that excludes them. This underscores the importance of this step to the design for learning.

The design choices in the environmental scanning step and the strategic issues identification step are the extent to which emergent practice is facilitated. The world is chaotic and resilience is a critical factor to success even survival. The choice is to go beyond a global perspective and analyze the situation at the local level. The analysis itself would require the local interpretation of its meaning through the incorporation of the

histories of practices. As Wenger (1998) argued all practice is local. The level of understanding is increased through the focus of local practice in tension with the possible need to design and resource alternative strategies at the global level.

Choices in the prioritizing strategic issues step facilitate organization learning in balancing the tension between local and global factors. The discourse in the negotiation of these choices increases ownership and commitment to the strategy.

In the strategic issue resolutions step the dimension of design and emergent creates the tension that opens or narrows the design space for strategy development. That is to say the creative action can be the result of a prescribed strategy or the result of a new emergent practice at the local level in which participation increases sharing of power and foster reciprocity.

The choice in the compelling guidelines step is in the dimension of participation and reification since the extent to which local practice can negotiate the meaning of the strategies into new practice is in balance. The more narrow the guidelines the less the participants are able to determine how to implement the strategy. Compelling guidelines also impact the design in the balance of designed and emergent. The more that is designed the less improvisation and innovation in practice can develop.

Action plans from the action plan and strategic financial planning step directly impact practice and their design is the result of the balance between local and global as well as the designed and emergent dimension. Strategic financial planning also reflects the interplay between local and global as subunits (e.g. schools and departments) prepare

their own strategic plans and strategic financial planning that interpret and plan to implement locally the global strategic plan. This balancing is mirrored in the strategic allocation of resources and support.

### *Implications for Strategic Planning*

It is important to examine and discuss the effect of strategic planning on organizational learning to address the criticism that strategic planning is controlling and stifles creativity (Schmoker, 2004). Other criticisms of strategic planning are that it can be detrimental to the formation and cultivation of professional learning communities (DuFour, Richard et al., 2006; Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). The discussion in this section also illustrates how the design of an organization is the result of choices that reflect intent and how strategic planning can facilitate the work. The thoughtful choices made for each dimension as they apply to each step of the strategic planning model could create a space for robust design. What the analysis implies is that choices made can also narrow and limit the space for creative design. Not choosing, neglect, is an indication of intent of those tasked with facilitating the process to keep the status quo even at the risk of failure. This is a concern of those who trust the discipline of the strategic planning process when its application is done poorly.

Using strategic planning to foster learning in the organization can be an effective methodology to cultivate socially just participation. The discipline provides ways for meaningful participation at all levels of the organization. It can even include internal and external stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, and civic members. The

participants can engage in negotiating the meaning of critical aspects of the organization and practice in a venue that meets the criteria of being socially just. They can also contribute to process of negotiating meaning of the shared data that informs the process. Participants could also enhance the meaning of mission, values, and designs through their contributions of their perspectives, beliefs, values, and intent. Finally the quality and effectiveness of the design is enhanced when the discipline of the strategic planning process reflects the design of a community of practice that is both open and learning.

A reoccurring theme and key aspect of the discourse above is participation. The following section focuses on collaboration in strategic planning. A collaborative strategic planning process fosters participation of all stakeholders.

### Collaboration

The following section refines the concept of participation in the strategic planning process. This review notes varying descriptions of participation such as a collective of people working together, stakeholders collaborating, and when people affected by an organization partner. This study focuses and uses the concept of collaboration. In this section are a description of the concept and an explanation of the rationale for choosing it. A working definition is: Collaboration is a phenomenon where by two or more people work together toward common ends, they appreciate that they cannot do the work alone, and their commitment to the work fosters coherence among the participants that evolves and strengthens over time (Austin, 2000; Hargrove, 1998; Lachotzki & Noteboom, 2005; Linden, 2003; Madda et al., 2007; Surowiecki, 2005).

What is significant is that “collaborative people see others not as creatures who force them to compromise, but as colleagues who can help them amplify their talents and skills” (Hargrove, 1998, p. 4). In the study of Ohio school districts, Ward-Bovee found that “one of the most important predictors of effective strategic planning implementation is the successful formulation of the strategic plan by involving as many people as possible” (Ward-Bovee, 1999, p. 10). The examination of the nine step strategic planning model above highlights the numerous opportunities and the extent to which all stakeholders can have meaningful participation in the process of designing the strategies and systems of the organization. Two of the primary reasons for doing so are because it is pragmatic and because collaboration serves the common good.

Collaboration is pragmatic because a “broad citizen involvement usually results in better plans and implementation processes” (Bryson, 2004, p. 60). Collaboration is a leveraging of the organization’s resources, both internal and external. The wider the participation and more genuine the collaboration the more the potential impact increases with the “accumulation of experience and interaction” (Austin, 2000, p. 177). Collaboration starts at the beginning of the process with the forming of a shared vision of a future organization that fits its environment and thrives. A shared vision in turn aligns the goals of a stakeholder-based process resulting in coherence of the actions and resources that drive implementation of the collaboratively designed strategies. This is critical given the complexity of school districts and warrants “attention towards coherence throughout the design process” (Madda et al., 2007, p. 1958). Coherence is

evident by the alignment of the critical success factors of the organization: Goals, priorities, and resources. It is the discipline of the process that focuses the power of the collective organization to bring about change (Cook, 2000). What defeats the power of collaboration is when coherence becomes conformity because the power of collaboration is the diversity of the participants in the strategic planning process.

“Diversity and independence are important because the best collective decisions are the product of disagreement and contest, not consensus or compromise” (Surowiecki, 2005, p. xix). An organization that uses a process like strategic planning to aggregate and produce collective judgments that represent not what any one person thinks but rather, what all the participants think (Surowiecki, 2005). This means collaboration is hard work. Collaboration is learning, individually about each other and the environment, and collectively resulting in the formation of shared ideas, designs, and the creation of strategies and systems. Collaboration is a process that effects deep change in learning organizations (Weick, 1995). The challenging environment means significant and lasting accomplishment will not come from a heroic individual but from the collective power of a people who learn how to think and work together (Hargrove, 1998). Hargrove argued that the power of collaboration comes from an appreciation of the complexity of the process, not from oversimplification of it. The purpose of an organization is to facilitate stakeholders talking and exchanging ideas. Organizations facilitate this information becoming powerful “knowledge ecologies” to support the vision, mission, and strategies (Hargrove, 1998, p. 117). It is “by engaging in participatory strategic planning and

communication, top managers are likely to achieve less interdepartmental and hierarchical conflict” (Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004, p. 356) achieving alignment, coherence, and accountability; and empowering a rich diversity of knowledge and talents.

Reeves’ (2002) Holistic Accountability Cycle is functionally similar to the Nine Step Strategic Planning Model. The author argued that a result of the analysis should impact policy and the strategic allocation of resources to effect student achievement (Reeves, 2002). This would be best served by a mechanism that prioritizes resource allocations over an extended period of time to assure that fundamental change initiatives will persist. These actions are the manifestations of what an organization learns (Weick, 1995). The author argued, “Organizations are designs for interpretation” that they “scan, interpret, and learn” (Weick, 1995, p. 180) and act. Collaborative strategic planning is an effective mechanism to form a shared vision and engage all stakeholders in sensemaking or interpreting this vision into actions for deep change to make it a reality. Weick stated that sensemaking gives rise to expectations and expectations filter. Expectations provide “guidance” (Weick, 1995, p. 190) to participants for behavior. A vision statement is an artifact of a collaborative strategic planning model. A vision statement is a shared aspiration for the common good that can drive behavior.

Education systems are for the service of the common good (Walzer, 1983) and are therefore held to standards of social justice for all stakeholders.

The right of people to take part directly in making decisions that affect their lives and guide their own destiny is a fundamental human right. If the life of the society

is so organized that people can learn how to exercise this right then they can develop competence that enables them to guide their own evolution toward a desired future. (Banathy, 2000, p. ix)

Dewey stated that school is where the aspirations of an individual toward a full and productive life are in the best interest of the community. The school is the nexus where “individualism and socialism are one” (Dewey, 2001, p. 5). The school is how society keeps itself going and is an active part of the community more to it than proficiency scores. That is because education is also where society self directs itself to its true self (Dewey, 2001). Dewey notes that a society is a people bound together through work along common lines toward common aims and this requires clear and purposeful communication. The arguments of Banathy (2000) and Dewey (2001) underscore the importance of collaboration in the strategic planning process for school districts.

Collaboration gives all stakeholders the opportunity to make a difference. “People want to make a difference and, when given the opportunity, they will” (Hargrove, 1998, p. 29). What stakeholders require are a venue, process, and competency. A strategic planning process that is socially just supports working collaboratively. This implies more than the invitation to participate, it implies the need to help all stakeholders become proficient in collaborative strategic planning. This supports prior research findings that the lack of preparation and training of the participants is a critical factor in the success of a strategic planning process. Not providing training to all stakeholders is a de facto denial of participation to those that lack the skills.



A socially just strategic planning process balances the autonomy of the individual stakeholders and the coherence of the collective organization. Collaboration improves through talking with other stakeholders, developing relationships, finding consensus. This is essential in bringing about change in schools which requires more than reform or restructuring. Change in schools “requires re-conceptualizing the entire enterprise” (Evans, 1996, p. 18). In a collaborative process the stakeholders form the concept (expressed in a vision statement, mission statement, goals, or values) and it is a shared artifact of their collective work. There is a danger when the process presses for conformity and violates the integrity of true collaboration (Surowiecki, 2005). A socially just process balances nurturing diversity and fostering coherence. This is accomplished by creating something that is a shared reality and unique because it is not present in any one stakeholder. This is more than diversity. Zoos are diverse but schools run like zoos are not socially just. A forest is an ecology of living species that sustains pluralism and multiculturalism (Steinfels, 2003). The collaboration of the stakeholders creates a “shared culture” (Axelrod, 1997, p. 156) that supports their shared aspirations and exists through their collective resolve. In this collaborative process systems, such as schools, evolve being guided by the participants. In the life of evolutionary systems it is primarily the intentions, desires, and preferences that are guided by ethics which guide the design and work of the system (Banathy, 2000).

A final important aspect of a socially just, collaborative strategic planning process is its ability to engender trust among all the stakeholders. Schools today face changing

expectations (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Society is placing a greater role on schools in addressing issues such as equity. More information on inequalities is being made available through medium such as the Internet. The disadvantage are growing more and more discontent and looking to schools as part of the solution. Schools are under increasing pressure to do more to bring equity into balance. Society trusts schools with their children who are the hope for a better future. Collaborative strategic planning is a part of trustworthy leadership which is at the heart of productive schools (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

The use of strategic planning in education for top down control is the antithesis of collaboration. It is important to understand and appreciate this situation. Mandating it for control purposes is why strategic planning in education is misunderstood, mistrusted, and rejected by some educators. It is the role of school district leadership to facilitate the strategic planning process to the point that balances collaboration and governance as discussed in the following section.

### The Role of Leadership

#### *Strategic Planning and Leadership*

“Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain. Sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 1). This final section of the literature review focuses on the role of leadership in the use of collaborative strategic planning to change education systems. The strategic planning process predicates a role for leadership and indicates

some aspects of that role. A distinction is made between leadership and management to help clarify the role when it is formally engaged in strategic planning. Aspects of the leadership role in strategic planning involve the reoccurring themes of this literature review: organization transformation; collaboration; the distribution of leadership; the creation of organization context and culture; fostering a learning organization; important differences between education systems and other types of organizations; and the formation of a socially just education system. Leadership is an integral part of strategic planning but not its culminating point (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leavy & Wilson, 1994). A leader is just one important element in a model of strategy formation (Leavy & Wilson, 1994). What emerges from this review is an understanding of the interplay between the two processes of strategic planning and leadership.

Strategic planning is about change for the whole system. This is vital since the task of education systems is to “support and provide resources for the schools, create cohesion among their effort, provide parameters of purpose and a climate of urgency, and ensure effective monitoring and intelligent accountability” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 269). This order of magnitude is necessary because to a leader change is about making a difference for all and not being content with pockets of excellence and understanding that innovation by “voluntary networks will not do the trick” (Fullan, 2003, p. 57) for the whole system. Furthermore “deep change which by definition involves changes in the culture, establishes conditions more likely to have staying power” (Fullan, 2003, p. 51).

Fullan argued further that the moral imperative writ large is that an education system engages all the stakeholders.

Strategic planning is about creating meaning for all stakeholders of the education system as it is about setting a direction. Creating meaning is the result of engaging all stakeholders in strategic conversation and dialogue. Engaging stakeholders in strategic conversation to make the vision real is a leadership skill combined with the attendant emotions of conviction and passion (Davies & Davies, 2004). This is part of the strategic planning process of translating the vision and moral purpose of the organization into action. Creating meaning in turn creates the capacity for the organization to achieve the direction shift and change to transform itself (Davies & Davies, 2006).

#### *Leadership and Management*

Leadership and management are not synonymous terms. There are times when “one can be a leader without being a manager and one can manage without leading” (Bush & Coleman, 2000, p. 19). The distinction is more that semantics and it may be a source of part of the confusion around strategic planning in general. Understanding the distinction is also important because as Bush and Coleman argued, both effective leadership and effective management are required to generate school improvement. Understanding they can also be detrimental to each other is imperative:

Leading and managing are distinct, but both are important. Organizations which are over managed but under led eventually lose any sense of spirit or purpose. Poorly managed organizations with strong charismatic leaders may soar

temporarily only to crash shortly thereafter. (Bolman & Deal, 1997, as cited in Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 5)

Both leadership and management are essential. They appear to be two ends of a spectrum. Activities around vision and values formation and organization transformation are regarded as leadership. Activities that tend to system processes, organization structures, and transactions are considered as management (Bush & Coleman, 2000; Fullan, 2005). Another understanding of leadership and management is viewing it as a phenomenon of comprehending the system in two dimensions at the same time and assessing the strategic and operational implications simultaneously. Management involves the application of proven solutions to known problems, where as leadership engages when the leader-manager recognizes a situation that requires they learn their way out of problems that they could not have predicted (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Recall Sun-Tzu's admonishment: In strategy engage with the orthodox and succeed with the unorthodox where appropriate. Another perception is a complexity leadership perspective that distinguishes leadership from management and uses the terms adaptive leadership and administrative leadership which occurs throughout the organization. Adaptive leadership occurs in emergent, adaptive dynamics of the organization. Administrative leadership refers to formal acts to coordinate and structure organizational activities sometimes referred to as bureaucratic functions (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

### *Complexity and Leadership*

Uhl-Bien (2007) encapsulated this concept in a complexity leadership theory as a framework for leadership specifically for knowledge-producing organizations such as schools. The framework enables learning, creative, and adaptive capacity for a complex education system that must adapt to succeed. The framework seeks to integrate complexity dynamics and bureaucracy. It does this by enabling and coordinating: exploration and exploitation; complex adaptive systems and hierarchical structures; and informal emergence and top-down control. Thus administrative leadership focuses on alignment and control. Emergent, adaptive leadership thrives when catalyzed by enabling leadership. Enabling leadership nurtures the interface that facilitates an innovation-to-organization transference. This supports the concept that leadership and management are distinct but dependent on each other.

### *Strategic Leadership*

Work in the strategic planning process is designated strategic leadership because it connotes leadership of the overall organization versus a part of the system and it implies substantive systems decision making responsibilities (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Strategic leadership is enabling the coordination of rhythms or oscillations between the relative importance of top-down structuring and stabilizing dynamics and the emergent complexity of the system as it learns to adapt to its environment. This is critical in education systems since knowledge producing organizations must nurture both creativity and exploitation of scarce resources and time to be fit (Uhl-Bien, 2007). That is

strategic leadership understands the tension of the organizations dualities of change and stability and utilizes this knowledge to stimulate creativity in the direction that fulfills the purpose of the organization.

Strategic leadership also realizes that plans, budgets, and action plans “are all tools they use in their communicative interaction with each other and what happens depends upon the interplay of intentions, plans, and choices” (Stacey, 2007, p. 434). This implies leaders should be cautious and not let planning templates, rubrics, and the forum for stakeholder participation become so rigid as to stifle creativity. Written plans are essential artifacts of strategic planning processes as communicative tools and not an end in itself or a means to control operations. In this way strategic leadership creates a context that nurtures strategic creativity and effective organization. Fullan stated, “Context must become the direct focus of reform, not treated just as a set of constraints” (Fullan, 2003, p. 21). “Leaders must be fully cognizant of the big picture” (Fullan, 2003, p. 59). Boal and Schultz (2007) argued that strategic leaders play a crucial role in moving the organization to the edge of chaos and aid organizational learning and adaptation by influencing where and when structures of interaction occur among organizational agents. “Strategic leadership resides at the intersection of cognitive, social, and political concepts” (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996, p. 3) from which strategic leadership contributes to the development of emergent distributed leadership by creating an “inclusive, purposeful, and optimistic culture in which initiatives can easily come forward” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 123). However, strategic leadership is aware that

centralization errs on the side of over control but “decentralization leans toward chaos” (Fullan, 2003, p. 21). Fullan stated it is the leaders job to help change the context by introducing new elements to the situation that are bound to influence behavior for the better, for example the strategic infusion of resources. The author asserted a major reason why this is critical in education is because it serves all children and not simply those with the means or the loudest advocates. The position of strategic leadership, such as a school district superintendent, has the vantage point and the responsibility to proactively address this condition.

Strategic leadership also aligns the organization by “forging a bridge between the past, the present, and the future, by reaffirming core values and identity to ensure continuity and integrity as the organization struggles with known and unknown realities and possibilities” (Boal, 2004, as cited in Boal & Schultz, 2007, p. 412). Strategic leadership uses the skill of conveying vision to all the stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2003) and by creating strategy with all stakeholders and not just communicating it to them (Davies & Davies, 2004). This is leveraging the competency of the organization. However, distributed leadership also needs to attend to the commitment, motivation, and passion of the participants as well as their competence (Morrison, 2002). The strategic leader plays a critical role by fostering a supportive context and culture for the whole system. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) stated, this is the distribution of leadership and not its delegation. The authors noted that sustainable leadership spreads and is also dependent on the leadership of others. These relationships nurture and support trust. In education



systems, relational trust in turn encourages a moral resolve to take on the hard work of school improvement (Sergiovanni, 2005). It is in this way that strategic leaders have the ability to align people and organizations. Stakeholders as followers choose to follow and as such are active agents in the overall system and the leader is another part (Prince, 2005) of the emergent process (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

### *Distributed Leadership*

There is a risk that distributed leadership can pull an organization apart as a result of having multiple sources of decision making and direction setting. That risk is minimized through the articulation of a clear vision, the design of disciplined processes, and the communication of clear accountabilities (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The authors reported that large-scale studies of education systems provide clear indications that distributed, shared, or collaborative leadership are associated with effectiveness. Sergiovanni (2005) argued that wise leaders know that education systems need centers of harmony that contain enough of what is important and shared by all stakeholders to hold things together. Strategic leaders can also structurally influence the dynamic of distributed leadership through their decisions on staffing, structural, and incentives (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). But it is the power of the collective that is critical to success. Fullan (2003) stated the complexity of problems facing education systems require collaboration to increase the capabilities of the organization and to be commensurate to the task.

### *Collaborative Strategic Planning Leadership*

Collaborative strategic planning provides education system leadership a framework to address cognitive issues and develop the collective answer of the collaboration which is a complete answer that no one person has (Surowiecki, 2005). Collaborative strategic planning facilitates the formation of a shared vision and values, nurtures trust and commitment, and supports an organization identity that can be expressed with an emotion and passion that inspires the work of the organization. Leadership is integral to using collaborative strategic planning to form a shared vision that gives rise to the intent to change. Leadership uses the same vision influence the direction of change. An important role the leader has is to sense the power and direction of the flow and use the collaborative strategic planning process to reach the tipping point of the system's transformation and exploit it. This is critical in the design of socially just strategic planning processes and education systems. Strategic planning, as in any advance systems thinking, has no inherent moral purpose (Stacey, 2007). Using a strategic planning process can be designed for good or bad ends. It is leadership that influences the strategic planning process by challenging the participants to consider issues of social justice and by keeping the dialogue open until the collective forms a shared position. The position is the outcome of the participants of the process and therefore it is also the responsibility of leadership to continually improve the participation of all stakeholders in the collaborative strategic planning process. Sergiovanni stated that leaders have an ethical responsibility to foster a covenant of shared values (Sergiovanni, 1992). Fullan

places parameters around participation when he stated, “The moral imperative writ large is a highly engaging enterprise both inside and outside” (Fullan, 2003, p. 74).

### Summary

This review of the literature on strategic planning which provides a foundation this study and an overview of the following: The history of strategic planning, a summary of three research studies on strategic planning in education systems, an examination of definitions for strategic planning, a survey of schools of thought on strategic planning, an elaboration on the nine step strategic planning model which is the conceptual framework for this study, a comparative review of strategic planning seen through the lens of designing processes for learning, a summary of the discourse in some of the critiques of strategic planning, an assessment of pertinent literature on collaboration, a synthesis of the literature on strategic planning in education systems, and a review of literature on the role of leadership in the strategic planning process. The literature points to the ongoing need for effective strategic planning and the critical role played by leaders. The literature also validates the need for further study in the area of effective strategic planning models in education.

Chapter three presents the research methods implemented to study strategic planning in practice and to generate the data to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This study employed a mixed methods approach for gathering and analyzing data on the practice of using strategic planning in midsize U. S. school districts. A target population of 269 school districts provided a cross section from all areas of the nation to allow for the generalization of findings on the use of strategic planning. A mixed methods approach provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of strategic planning in education systems. The methods included a survey of the 269 school districts; the content analysis of 78 strategic plan documents; and semi-structured interviews with six superintendents. A synthesis of the findings from these research methods provided the data to answer the research questions and to draw conclusions from the findings.

The following research questions guided the study of strategic planning in school districts.

### Research Questions

The focus of this study was twofold. First, to better understand the practice of utilizing strategic planning in education systems by identifying the prevailing steps currently being used in U. S. school districts with 25,000 or more students. Second, to investigate the effectiveness of strategic planning from the superintendents' point-of-view.

The study findings contribute to prior research of strategic planning in school districts focused on local, state, or regional segments of the country. A limitation in these

regionally focused studies is the ability to generalize their findings. The previous researchers recommended further study on a national scale as potentially useful. This study was an undertaking to fill part of that need. This study was on the current practice of using strategic planning in school districts from across the United States, which have 25,000 or more students, and have some or all of the grade levels from K to 12.

The following questions guided the research:

1. What are the most prevalent strategic planning steps used by the selected school districts?
2. What are the perceptions of the selected school district superintendents on the use and effectiveness of strategic planning in their districts?

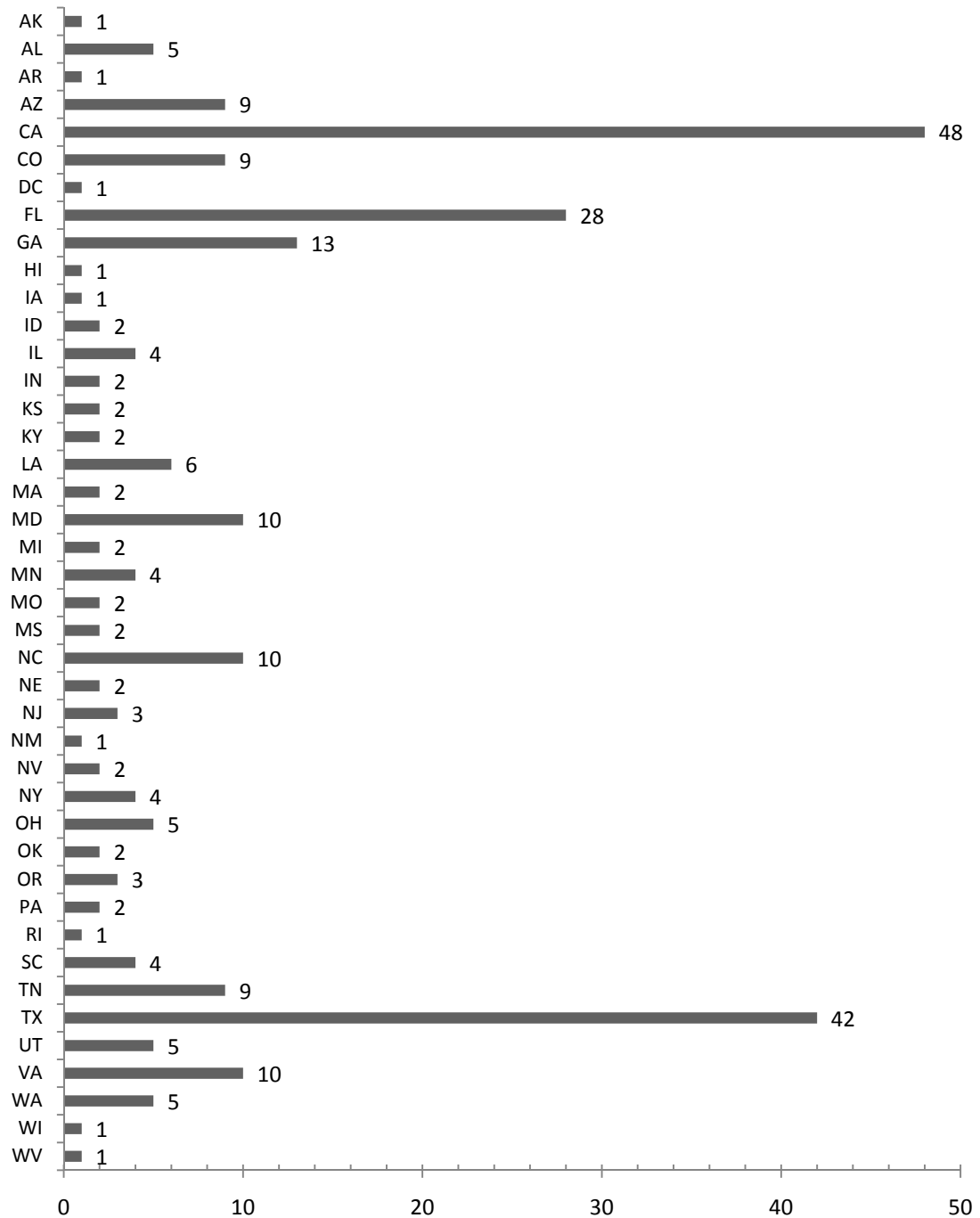
Surveys were mailed to a target population of 269 school district superintendents using a questionnaire based on the nine step strategic planning model. The websites of each of the 269 school districts were explored to locate and download the districts' strategic plans or any elements of the plan that were public.

The school district strategic plans were used in a content analysis which provided empirical data of the strategic plan steps produced as a result of their school districts strategic planning process. The final research element was the data generated from interviewing six volunteer school district superintendents. This data provided narratives on the practice of using strategic planning and perceptions of its effectiveness.

## Target Population

U. S. school districts with all or some of K-12 grade levels and total enrollments of 25,000 or more were the target population of this study. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the resulting 269 school districts by state.

Figure 2. Number of School Districts by State for Target Population.



The targeted list of school districts, Appendix A, was the result of filtering enrollment information to identify school districts with 25,000 or more students using National Center for Education Statistics for academic year 2005-6 data. The result was a target population of about 269 school districts. This target population was comprised of 16,361,522 students attending 24,046 schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005-2006).

### Survey

The survey methodology is a tool used in prior research of strategic planning in school districts (Moxley, 2003; Ward-Bovee, 1999). These studies were of school districts in a single state or a geographic region of the United States. In this study, surveys were from school districts across the United States to investigate the practice of using strategic planning nationally which may be helpful in understanding this phenomenon. Gauging the perception of the effectiveness of strategic planning in practice may help in understanding its value to school district leadership.

A strategic planning questionnaire based on the nine-step model, Table 1, was developed as a means to gather data from the target school district superintendents (Dillman, 2007). A quantitative analysis (King & Minium, 2003) of the data provided descriptive histograms showing the frequency of use of the planning steps, the activities in each step, and the level of participation by groups of stakeholders. Descriptive statistics of the perceived effectiveness of strategic planning from the point-of-view of the superintendent provided an aggregate profile.



The survey, included as Appendix B, was built around the nine-step strategic planning model as seen in Table 1 and the incorporation of the concepts of Tailored Design (Dillman, 2007) in the development of the survey procedures. Central to Dillman's (2007) approach was the theory of social exchange that states respondent behavior is a result of three factors: Perceived benefit of participation, cost of participation, and trust that the benefit will be realized. The benefit to the respondent was the promise to provide an executive summary of the findings to them via email. The cost to the respondent was the time and effort to answer the survey and transmit it back to the researcher. Minimizing the cost was a function of the ease and time to answer the questions.

The cost in time for the participants due to the length of the survey was an important consideration. To inquire into all of the nine steps of the model meant each participant would need to make a large time commitment to complete the questionnaire. The decision was made to focus on three of the steps in the questionnaire. They were Vision and Mission, Environmental Scan, and Action Plan/Strategic Financial Plan.

The rationale for focusing on these three steps was as follows. Understanding how the vision and mission is developed in practice provided insight into how direction and purpose are developed for the school district and how they draw participants into the process. The environmental scan step incorporated critical data, analysis, and perspectives into the planning process and grounds the other steps in relevant

information. Finally, the action plan and strategic financial planning step was important because it links the strategic planning process to practice.

To further reduce the cost of time and inconvenience, an alternative method was made available for those that preferred an electronic medium the option of completing the survey online. Trust was enhanced through the thoughtful preparation of the materials including the mode of returning the answers and follow-up with non-respondents.

The survey had three parts:

Part I contained questions on the strategic planning steps in use by the district. They were Vision and Mission, Environmental Scan, and Action Plan/Strategic Financial Plan. The vision and mission step inquired into the activities that were used to develop these process artifacts. As stated in Chapter Two, these are formative artifacts of the strategic planning process that facilitate clarifying the purpose, the convergence of intent of stakeholders, and the cohesion of the organization. The environmental scan step distinguished the strategic planning process from simple brainstorming through the discipline of being data-driven to formulate issues, priorities, and strategies. The action plan and strategic financial planning step was an inquiry into the activities around the implementation of the strategies designed and developed in the districts' strategic planning processes. The respondents rated the extent of use for each strategic planning step, and specific activities that are part of that step. The questionnaire also included an open ended question for the respondents to describe the strategic planning process they used in their district for the step. The respondents rated the extent to which participants

were involved in the development of the school district strategic plan. The list of participants included: District staff; principals and site administrators; teachers; parents; community members; governmental representatives; and students.

Part II utilized a Likert-type scale for the respondent to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement of the effectiveness of the strategic planning process. A question indicating if each school developed its own strategic plan in alignment with the district strategic plan provided information on vertical participation and the extent schools influenced the district strategic plan. The analysis of this data indicated the level of collaboration and alignment in the strategic planning process.

Part III contained a series of demographic questions.

The primary mode of conveyance was through the mail. A personalized cover letter, Appendix C, and a numerically coded survey was mailed with return postage and envelop to each superintendent of the 269 target school districts. An alternative method to complete the questionnaire was made available for those that preferred an electronic medium for completing the survey online. The names of the superintendents were taken from the websites of the school districts and used to address the envelope and personalize the cover letter. Dillman (2007) stated that response rates improve through follow-up with non-responders, so the procedure included sending a reminder postcard to each non-responder in week two.

### *Survey Data Analysis*

The questionnaires were reviewed for completeness. An incorrect or incomplete survey was fixed by contacting the respondent and asking for revisions. The following statistical analyses provided the output needed to answer the research questions. The data was used to generate frequency histograms of the strategic planning model steps used by the responding school districts for developing descriptive statistics of the effectiveness responses (King & Minium, 2003). The respondents rated the levels of participation for stakeholder groups on a scale from extensively to not at all. The results were summarized into tables. Demographic data of the responding superintendents were summarized including the summary data on the experience and training of the superintendent.

The quantitative analysis of the raw data provided empirical information on strategic planning steps being used and to what extent superintendents perceived the process to be effective. The next phases of the research complemented the quantitative findings by providing qualitative data on the use of strategic planning in school districts.

#### Content Analysis of School District Strategic Plans

The second phase of the data collection provided qualitative data through a content analysis (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Marvasti, 2004) of school district strategic plan documents of the 269 school district target population. Analysis of the documents incorporated the use of NVivo 8 software (Bazeley, 2007). The analysis utilized a typological method of analysis of the documents. The topological framework was the nine-step strategic planning model in Table 1 and had a node for each step for coding the

documents. The analysis was a process of coding applicable segments of the documents to one of the nine nodes. The findings were patterns, relationships, or themes within each node (Hatch, 2002). The findings of the content analysis provided corroboration for findings in the survey data; identified alternative step names; or filled in gaps in the survey information.

### Interviews

The third phase of the research used semi-structured interviews (Hatch, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2004/2007; Silverman, 2006) in person or by phone with six volunteer superintendents. Qualitative interviewing was vital in combination with the other methods of this study in providing insights that improved the quality of the interpretation of the data (Gaskell, 2007). In this study, the semi-structured interviews with superintendents provided a more in-depth understanding by providing a contextual narrative of their experience and reflections on their experiences.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed regarding the use of strategic planning in their school districts. The first six superintendents indicating that they would participate were chosen. The first response method was used because of time constraints and because when there was no one method for selecting respondents the researcher must use their “social scientific imagination to inform the selection” (Gaskell, 2007, p. 42).

The semi-structured interviews were narrative interviews for the elicitation of data (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007). “There is no human experience that cannot be expressed

in the form of a narrative” (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007, p. 58) Telling stories was a method for respondents to recall what happened, put the experience into an understandable and potentially interesting sequence, bring out the storyteller’s explanation for it, and used the sequence of events in ways to accentuate the events that shaped individual and social life. The topic guide for the interviews opened two ways to share their experiences. The first was to tell their stories of using strategic planning in their districts. This provided narrative of events and actions from their personal experience. The second way to share their experience was by asking them to make sense of the experience and describe its meaning to them as leaders of the school district. This allowed for direct access to narrative data on what some superintendents were accomplishing by using strategic planning, how they made use of the process, and what they perceived were the most compelling reasons for and against using strategic planning in their school districts. Finally, using probing questions provided data and understanding of the level of collaboration in the strategic planning process, explored the linkage between issues of social justice in the school district, and offered insight into the extent the superintendents used strategic planning to facilitate issues resolution and bring about deep change for all.

Analyzing the data from the interviews was through the use of inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). The inductive process of analysis progressed from the specific to the general. The analysis was a process of reading the transcripts and fieldnotes and identifying specific elements and coding them. The coded data were then searched for

patterns of meaning in the data so that general statements about the phenomena of using strategic planning in school districts from the perspectives of the superintendents interviewed could be further analyzed.

The procedure for the semi-structured interview was: Interview candidates were selected from the completed surveys as they are returned. Arrangements for the interview were made promptly. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of the respondent. The audio files of the interview were transcribed as they were made. Each interview was imported into NVivo 8 and coded. A synthesis of findings was made.

#### Preparing the Findings

The three elements of the research were done in parallel. The critical path was the survey analysis with a total duration of 60 calendar days. Data from the three sources were gathered, analyzed, and synthesized into the findings discussed in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Introduction

This study researched strategic planning in school districts across the United States to better understand its use in practice. This chapter presents data that contribute to that understanding by addressing two questions.

What are the prevalent steps of the strategic planning process in practice?

What are the superintendents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the district's strategic planning process?

The data to answer those questions were drawn from a survey, a document analysis of school district strategic plans, and interviews.

An overview of the results from the three methods employed describes how the data were generated. Data from Part I of the survey and the data from the document analysis of school district strategic plans were the basis for answering the first research question. The data from Part II of the survey and from the interviews provided the data to answer the second research question. The findings in this chapter support the conclusions, recommendation, and suggestions for further research made in Chapter five.

### Overview of the Three Methods Results

#### *Document Analysis*

The websites of all the 269 school districts in the target population were searched to locate and download the school districts' published strategic plans. School districts sometimes posted certain parts of a strategic plan on their websites, did not post it at all,



or did not do a strategic plan. Of the 269 school district websites searched, 182 (68%) strategic plan documents, or parts of their strategic plans, were located and downloaded. Limitations of the approach were: Some districts that have a strategic plan do not publish it on their websites, or the strategic plan was on the website but was not located. The latter situation was due in part to the use of different names for the document, e.g. long range plans, master plan, or strategic governance manual resulted in confusion and required vetting the documents by reviewing cover letters from the superintendent or board of education or examining the content of the document and comparing it to the description of a strategic plan and the nine step strategic plan conceptual model in Table 1. The documents downloaded were found in many different locations on the website. This required searching the website if a search engine was provided or clicking through each link on the website till the document was found.

Because the strategic plan documents used in this analysis were posted on the website for use by the general public they are considered public domain information. Most of the strategic plan documents downloaded were new or updated plans that superseded prior plans. Generally the practice was that past plans were not available for downloading and overtime the plans used in this analysis will not be retrievable.

The analysis of the downloaded documents was done using NVivo 8 software. The documents were imported into the program then coded. The coding was done using the topographic method base on the nine step strategic planning conceptual framework (Table 1) (Hatch, 2002).

The data from the document analysis and the data from part I of the survey were used to answer research question one: What are the most prevalent strategic planning steps used in practice in school districts?

### *Survey*

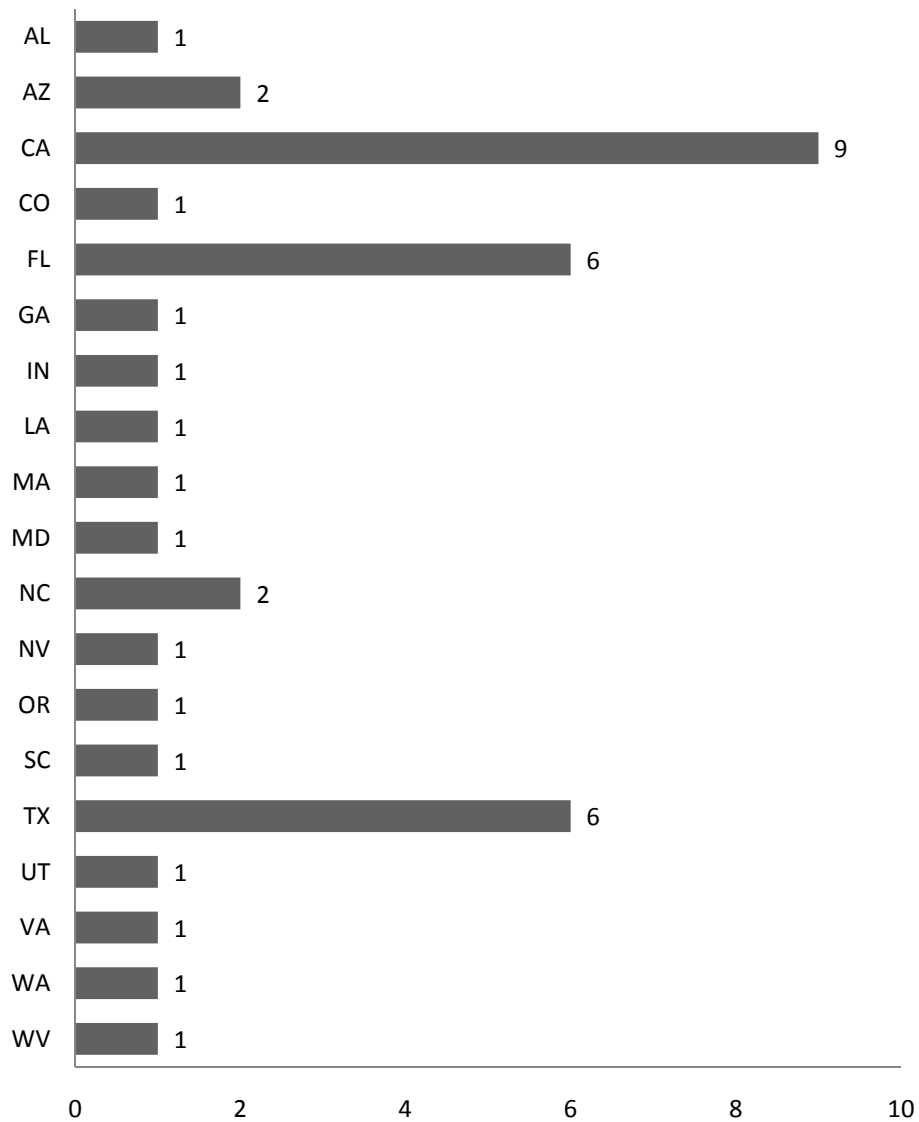
The survey had three parts: Part I – inquiry into three of the conceptual model steps; Part II – questions regarding the perception of the effectiveness of the districts’ strategic planning process; and Part III – demographic information.

Of the 269 surveys mailed, 8 (3%) were returned as undeliverable after rechecking the mailing address on the school districts’ websites. Five (2%) of the districts responded that they required an application to be submitted requesting permission to conduct research in the school district, some with fixed dates that meant waiting up to a year for an answer. Ten (4%) of the respondents declined to participate in the survey some noting pressing issues facing their district such as the economic downturn and budget gaps. Two hundred and seven (77%) of the school districts mailed did not respond after a follow-up reminder was mailed to them. Thirty-nine (14%) of the districts did complete the survey.

The respondents had three methods of completing the survey. A majority of the respondents (33 or 85%) completed the paper questionnaire and returned it by mail. The option to complete the survey online was taken by 6 (15%) of the respondents and none were returned by fax.

The respondents completing the survey represented a total of 3,327,203 students for an average of 85,313 students per district. The respondents had a total of 4,258 schools for an average of 109 schools per district. The districts were in 19 states across the country as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Number of Respondents by State that Completed the Survey



Part III of the survey provided demographic data. The responses were analyzed and descriptive statistics were summarized in the following narratives and tables.

The results from question #43 showed that 83.9% of the superintendents had strategic plans that were developed under their leadership. These superintendents were operating with a strategic plan they had some level of participation in its development.

They may have had some level of expectations from the strategic plan process and its implementation that influenced their evaluation of its effectiveness. The respondents (16.1%) that inherited their strategic plans presented another point of interest. Their perception reflected the effectiveness of strategic planning on the continuity of strategic direction during as transition of key leadership such as the superintendent. The point was probed in the interviews with superintendents.

The experience, training, and tenure of the superintendents are important to consider as part of understanding and interpreting the responses to the surveys. Table 3 presents the summary data on the length of service in the role of superintendent in the district.

Nearly two-thirds of the superintendents (64.9%) had more than 2 years in their role at the school district indicating that only one-third were relatively new to the role of superintendent at their district. All respondents had extensive experience in education with more than 6 years experience in education and with 94.6% having more than 21 years.

Table 4 summarizes the experience and training of the respondents.

Table 3. *Summary of the Length of Time Superintendents Have Been in Their Role.*

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Question #45: What is the number of years you served as this district’s superintendent?

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Years	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1	16.2%	6
1 – 2 years	18.9%	7
3 – 5 years	32.4%	12
6 – 8 years	8.1%	3
More than 8 years	24.3%	9
Total		37

---

Most of the respondents (89.2%) acquired their strategic planning skills through the experience of working on a strategic planning team so what they learned was the model used by the district. A majority of them (59.5%) incorporated the expertise of a facilitator. Other approaches listed were training from the state and teaching a class on strategic planning.

Table 4. *Summary of Training and Experience in Strategic Planning*

Question # 47: What is your experience and training in the strategic planning process?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
I have completed a college course in strategic planning.	27.0%	10
I facilitated or worked on a strategic planning team.	89.2%	33
I utilized a facilitator in the strategic planning process.	59.5%	22
Other	24.3%	9
Answered question		37/39

*Interviews*

As part of the survey the superintendents were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed (Question #20). Of the 39 respondents, 20 indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed via telephone. All those willing to be interviewed were also using a strategic planning process in practice. The first six of the willing respondents were contacted and interviews scheduled 5 via telephone and 1 in person. The interviewees were from school districts across the country as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Summary of Number of Interviews by State*

State	Districts
CA	2
FL	1
TX	1
VA	1
WV	1

The interviewees represented a total enrollment of 1,022,025 students. The districts of the interviewees had a total of 1,255 schools.

The data from the three methods was organized around the two research questions for presentation. The results were arranged to provide progressively more granular data on the subject areas. The 269 school districts sent surveys were identified by using an enrollment criterion of 25,000 or more students. From this target population 182 strategic plan documents were found on the websites of the districts that posted them and 78 were used in the document analysis. There were 54 respondents from the surveys sent to the target population. Of this group 39 completed the survey which was the basis for the survey analysis of usage and perception of effectiveness. Finally, the six interviewees were the first respondents to return their surveys and to indicate a willingness to be interviewed.



## Research Question One

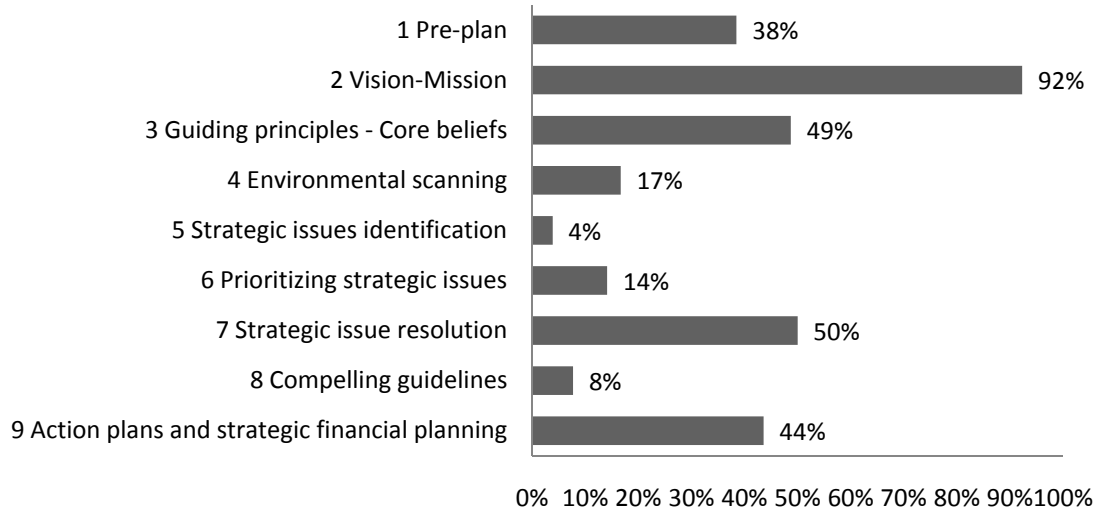
What are the most prevalent strategic planning steps used by the selected school districts?

### *Document Analysis*

All 269 of the target school district websites were visited and 182 strategic plans were found and downloaded. The formats of the plans varied. The plan formats ranged from well written narratives of the district's strategies and context in downloadable or printable files, and others were presented in sections throughout the website and the reader needed to navigate through the site to see all the pertinent parts of the plan.

The school district strategic plan document files were imported into the software program NVivo 8 and coded using the nine step strategic planning model as the topographical framework. The presence of the steps in the strategic plan documents was determined if they were referenced by name, the activities of the steps were described, or the content of the narrative was germane to the steps. A qualitative content analysis of school district strategic plan documents was done by coding the identified sections to the appropriate node in the conceptual framework of the nine step strategic planning model. The output was used to answer research question one. The results were summarized in the frequency of use distribution graph in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Document Analysis Results.



Note: Bar graph shows school districts' usage for each model step.

### *Step 1 Pre-plan*

The Pre-plan step included activities such as setting a work plan for developing the strategic plan, recruiting a team, indentifying participants, and setting a calendar. Based on the presence of a strategic plan document it was concluded that some or this entire step was performed. Some of the school districts (38%) chose to report these activities to provide a context for the strategic plan. The activities mentioned were the work of the participants such parents, community members, and students. Some of the information on how this step was done was presented in some of the strategic plans in a journal like format that gave the reader the context and process of how the strategic planning was done (Espinosa, 2009b). Public notices of planning sessions were used as a community wide call to action. One district put a challenge to the community, “We can choose to engage constructively and collaboratively to build a strong educational foundation for or

children and our community or we can sit on the sidelines and point fingers while the problems remain unsolved” (Espinosa, 2009b). Some of the districts acknowledged that their current strategic planning effort was part of a history of strategic planning collaboratively with all stakeholders. Some strategic plan documents reported on the pre-plan step to set expectations and provide a working vocabulary for the participants to facilitate communication.

### *Step 2 Vision – Mission*

This part of the strategic plan used broad statements of the school districts’ identity, its unique purpose, and the basic means of accomplishing their purpose. This appeared to be a major component since it was present in 92% of the strategic plan documents analyzed. The terms used to describe it varied. Some of the terms districts used were: Vision, Mission, Credo, and Goals. Cook (2000) suggested short concise statements, but in practice they varied in length. Some of the statements were short, “Vision: Every Student, every day, prepared to meet tomorrow” (Espinosa, 2009b). Others were extensive descriptions of a future situation either in narrative or through specific points such as goals. There were differing hierarchies. Some had progressions of Vision to Mission to Goals to Objectives or Aims. Others began with the Mission which led to a Vision described in part by Strategic Objectives and defined by specific Goals.

The effect of this step, regardless of the terms, names, or labels used was “to focus our resources, our thinking, and talents to provide the highest quality educational experience we can envision” (Espinosa, 2009b). The focus varied from moving to higher

levels of excellence, to moving schools or the whole district out of the classification of improvement status, or to rectifying the financial viability of the district's operations. The statements used ranged from very broad qualitative goals to more specific metrics such as percentage gains per year in each discipline. Some documents showed evidence of incorporating terms from other popular planning models such as aims, district journey maps from good to great, and scorecards. The pattern of use and document narrative indicated the methods were meant to provide focus to the school district's work and set expectations. One school district labeled them as "Transformational Goals" (Espinosa, 2009b).

### *Step 3 Guiding Principles – Core Beliefs*

This step included statements developed to describe the fundamental convictions, values, moral commitments, and character of the district. Strategic plan documents of 49% of those analyzed included terms used in this step of the model. These included Guiding Principles, Beliefs, Parameters, (Core) Values, Commitments, Educational Ruler, and a declaration of a community Compact. Some documents were brief and had 5 statements, others were longer lists of up to 30 Guiding Principles such as: The district "will allocate resources equitably, based on need" (Espinosa, 2009b). The statements were provided to the district's strategic plan development participants and the users of the strategic plan document so that "all decisions will be based on them" (Espinosa, 2009b).

#### *Step 4 Environmental Scanning*

A number of strategic plan documents reviewed (17%) included a description and data from the examination of environmental factors. This included external and internal information on past, current, and anticipated dynamics. The information presented in this section provided supporting data to the focus areas of the plan, for example projected continuation of enrollment growth due to new housing construction (Espinosa, 2009b). Multiple types of data were presented such as historical trends and benchmarking data on comparable school districts. The environmental scan section also provided a bridge from past efforts to create a context and to provide knowledge from what the organization learned from the past. The authors of the strategic plan document stated that there were challenges in reporting the output of this step because of the volume and complexity of the data. This section was used as context for the rationale for the adopted direction from supporting holding the current strategic direction of the district, to raising an already high level of performance, or to establishing a sense of urgency, in one case a financial crisis. One district described how the output from audits of different functional areas of the organization were synthesized and used as input to the strategic plan in order to make sense of all the data. Some districts summarized the results from a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis (SWOT) in this step. The data included summary district data and some school specific information particularly for improvement schools.

### *Step 5 Strategic Issue Identification*

Evidence of the use of the strategic issue identification steps methods or outcomes was found in 4% of the documents reviewed. Data from the environmental scan was used to identify factors that require fundamental change in the organization or risk failure to reach its vision, goals, or perform its mission. In this step logic used by participants in the strategic planning process was reported to school district stakeholders so that an “understanding the complex causative reasons for our current state of affairs will, hopefully, help us understand that the solution will also be complex” (Espinosa, 2009b). One district used this section to debunk a generally accepted belief among the stakeholders that change was unattainable because of the socioeconomic demographics of the community. The strategic planning process was designed to accomplish this change by juxtaposing benchmarking information from similar school districts that made strategic changes and brought about major gains on key measures. Some of the authors of the strategic plans regarded this important step as part of the process of addressing strategic issues that provided organizational focus on what might make a difference in achieving the goals of the school district. The districts used this step for a thorough and sometimes difficult self reflection of performance by candidly reporting program failures or less than anticipated results. This may have been the reason few districts reported the output of this step (4%) given the difficulty of being absolutely transparent about one’s own performance.

### *Step 6 Prioritizing Strategic Issues*

The strategic plan documents that included information on how urgency, values, ethics, and commitments were used to order the sequence in which the strategic issues would be addressed was found in 14% of the plans. This section provided the reasoning behind the prioritizing of the issues “as we begin addressing strategic issues and options it is important to categorize the effort in a simple manner to focus findings and expectations in ways that can be measured and monitored ... to see what is and is not happening within the plan” (Espinosa, 2009b). The strategic plan narrative underscored that this was a bridging point to the distribution of resources and input to budgets for the long term planning period. Some of the other documents reviewed provided simple lists of the priorities.

### *Step 7 Strategic Issue Resolution*

Half (50%) of the documents reviewed included information on how the district would either continue the current strategies or change direction. These were presented as specific areas for improvement over the planning time horizon for each of the goals. The documents analyzed used terms such as Strategic Objectives with subordinated Goals; Goals with subordinated Objectives and supporting Strategies; Strategy statements; and utilized a District Balanced Scorecard. Some of the statements were broad such as Strategic Initiatives. Some of the plans presented the strategies in a linear fashion with each objective having a corresponding strategy. The strategy statements set up or lead into the projects, programs, or action plans that implemented them.

### *Step 8 Compelling Guideline*

Districts (8%) used this step to document the assumptions that are to be used in the implementation of the strategies. Some of the terms used were parameters, strategic delimiters, and decision making criteria (SP2095). The pattern of language that emerged appeared to be lists of do's and don'ts.

### *Step 9 Action Plans and Strategic Financial Planning*

Action plans and strategic financial planning were evident in 44% of the documents reviewed. The strategic plans described strategic action plans as specific programs, projects, or actions to address the strategic issues resolutions to be implemented over the planning period. These plans were linked to measurements such as "Performance Promises" and had action teams identified (Espinosa, 2009b). Some of the strategic plans mapped implementation plans to the department and others were tied to specific school sites. The linkages to budgets and business (administrative department) plans were established as part of this step. Methods of measurements and tracking were part of some plans such as "Results-Based Budgeting" (Espinosa, 2009b). Characteristically what distinguished these plans from an annual budget was the planning time horizon of 2-5 or more years. The plans used different formats such as school district "Balance Scorecard" (2009b) or frameworks of goals, objectives, or priorities. The explanation given in one plan for the purpose of using action plans was so that the plan would hold each and every individual in the district and the community accountable for creating the best outcomes for the students by providing a framework for translating



strategy into action. This step included information on timing (milestones), resources requirements, and responsibilities. Some of the action plans were described as recursions at the school site or department of the district strategic planning process and contained visions, missions, values, strategic goals, and objectives for the action items with annual goals. The intention of this step was described in a document as:

What is lacking is an overarching picture of how things fit and collectively integrate in ways that move the entire system forward. That is, to ensure that broader initiatives become part of everyday actions! (Espinosa, 2009b)

Some of the districts used the process and this step to put the work on specific schools (High Priority) in a framework that shaped the work that the whole district will focus on them.

This step was used to link resources to the action plans. This included human resources, operating budgets, and capital funds. The plans documented the planned action steps, people responsible, timeframes, and funding.

#### *Limitations of the Process on Collecting Data from School District Websites*

The use of school district websites by 100% of the 269 target school districts is evidence that they are ubiquitous in today's internet environment. The analysis of the strategic plan documents downloaded from the websites of the school districts is a demonstration of intent to share the strategic plan with the school district stakeholders and the community at large. The content analysis of the documents is limited to the extent each district elected to make all, some, or none of their strategic plan documents public.

The districts could use alternate mediums for communicating the strategic plan to all or some of the stakeholders. What is found on the website is possibly not all that was done.

The survey sent to the 269 target school districts provided data on three of the nine steps. The limit of three steps was an accommodation to the time cost of completing or even attempting a lengthy nine step questionnaire. With that consideration, the following is a summary of the data gathered through the survey sent to the schools districts.

### *Survey Part I*

Part I questions related to the use of three of the steps in the nine step conceptual model. The number of steps was limited to three so the questionnaire could be completed in a reasonable amount of time to enhance the response rate. Those chosen were step 2 Vision – Mission; step 4 Environmental Scanning; and step 9 Action Plans and Strategic Financial Plans. Vision – Mission (Step 2) was chosen in order to gain insight on the planning process was used to determine overall direction and unique purpose of their specific school district. Environmental scanning (Step 4) asked about the gathering, analysis, and use of internal and external data in the process of designing strategies for the school district. Step 9, action plans and strategic financial plans, was selected to gather information on how the school districts implemented district strategies and the bridging of the strategic plan to daily operations. The section included open-ended questions asking the superintendents to describe their districts process for each of the three steps. Table 6 summaries the survey data on Vision and Mission.

### *Vision – Mission*

All respondents with strategic plans worked on the vision and mission of the district as part of the strategic planning process. The participants in the process formed a vision as a depiction of the school district's aspirations. The participants developed a mission that described the unique purpose the district fills, distinguished it from other organizations, and described the school district's identity. The mission stated to all stakeholders the school district's role in achieving the vision. Respondents indicated that participation was broad and comprehensive in this step. The process provided for broad participation in these activities and gave stakeholders voice in the development of the vision and mission. The input from a wide range of stakeholders provided the opportunity for the approved vision and mission to reflect their intents and facilitated buy-in to the overall school district strategic plan.

All respondents indicated that working on the vision was part of their strategic planning process (Not at all= 0%). Respondents (78.8%) indicated the work was extensive or on almost all aspects of the vision.

The respondents (89.3%) answered that the mission was reviewed, developed, or clarified at length as part of the strategic planning process. The extent to which the mission was scrutinized indicates that the purpose of the school district was subject to review, further development, and greater clarity for all those participating in this step. The aspirations and purpose of the district appeared to be dynamic and subject to change as the participants determined the need.

Table 6. *Summary of Data from Survey Part I on Vision and Mission*

Question: Which of the following were parts of the district's strategic planning process?							
Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
3. Developed, revised, or enhanced the district's Vision?	0.0%	3.0%	18.2%	30.3%	48.5%	4.24	33
4. Reviewed, developed, or clarified the district's Mission?	0.0%	7.2%	3.6%	39.3%	50.0%	4.32	28
5. To what extent did the following participate in the Vision/Mission step?							
District Staff	0.0%	3.0%	12.1%	18.2%	66.7%	4.48	33
Principals, Admin.	0.0%	6.1%	27.3%	21.2%	45.5%	4.06	33
Teachers	6.1%	9.1%	36.4%	21.2%	27.3%	3.55	33
Parents	12.5%	6.3%	31.3%	21.9%	28.1%	3.47	32
Community members	9.1%	15.2%	18.2%	27.3%	30.3%	3.55	33
Students	31.3%	28.1%	18.8%	18.8%	3.1%	2.34	32

The participation reported in this step was skewed. A majority of the respondents (59.4%) rated the participation of students to be limited or not at all. When compared to the respondents (21.9%) who said students were engaged for almost all aspect or being extensively involved in the development of the school district strategic plans a posit could be that students are able participants and that some school districts chose to exclude them from the strategic planning process. Most of the respondents (66.7%) rated district staff as having the most involvement versus approximately 70% of the respondents indicating that teachers, parents, and community had less than full involvement. The implication of this may be that the vision and mission may be influenced by the dominant voices of those that have direct participation in the development process.

The respondents also indicated in their open-ended question that these activities served other functions. The process served to align the thinking of the participants with the resulting vision and mission. This is important because it “drives all aspects of the strategic plan” (Espinosa, 2009a). The respondents also said the vision and mission orient the organization to a set of aspirations. They reported that this orientation of the organization also facilitated transitions such as the changeover in superintendents.

The respondents indicated that their districts had their own terms for the process components such as Strategic Initiatives, Goals, and Aims. There were also a wide range of approaches in performing this step from large community gatherings to focus groups to forming a Core Team of 38 diversified members that worked on the vision and mission initially then engaged stakeholders to refine and approve the final results.

### *Environmental Scanning*

All respondents indicated that they conducted high level scan of the school districts' environments. They reported that this was the point where relevant data was incorporated into the process and used to drive design and decision making in the strategic planning process. However, the use of resource and financial data was done to a lesser extent. Respondents told of using this step to bring together data from multiple sources and make it coherent to the participants. Participants were facilitated thorough reviews and analysis of relevant past, current, and future data. Respondents reported that participants provided various lenses to view the data and provided their interpretation of the data.

Table 7 summarized findings are presented in four parts: High level scan; resource factors; and future scan, communication, and participation. The last section is a summary of the themes found in the respondents' answers to the open ended question on environmental scan.

### *High Level Scans*

Questions 7 – 10 were high level inquiries into the data gathered and analyzed as part of this step of the district's strategic planning process. Respondents (93.8%) reported that they analyzed pertinent internal data to determine the status of the district, current trends, and identify issues. All respondents conducted analysis of external data with 83.3% performing this activity for almost all aspects or extensively. Respondents (76.6%) reported analyzing how well the districts' vision and mission aligned with the

Table 7. Summary of Part I on Environmental Scanning

Question: Which of the following were parts of the district's strategic planning process?							
Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
7. Analyzed pertinent data to determine status, current trends, and identify issues for:							
a. Internal situation	0.0%	3.1%	3.1%	18.8%	75.0%	4.66	32
b. External Situation	0.0%	10.0%	6.7%	43.3%	40.0%	4.13	30
8. Analyzed the alignment of the Vision and Mission with stake holders' expectations to identify differences.							
9. Conducted an analysis to identify gaps in the value created by the school district using:							
Organizational criteria	0.0%	9.7%	16.1%	41.9%	32.3%	3.97	31
Stakeholder criteria	0.0%	16.1%	19.4%	32.3%	32.3%	3.81	31

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
10. Conducted an analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.	0.0%	10.0%	6.7%	16.7%	66.7%	4.40	30

expectations of the stakeholders in order to identify differences that required consideration. The unique value created by the district was analyzed to identify gaps with the organization's criteria (74.2% most aspects or extensively) and with stakeholder's criteria (64.6% most aspects or extensively). All districts gather data and performed an analysis of the district's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities and 83.4% did so extensively or for almost all aspects.

Table 8 presents a summary of the survey results on the extent financial information is part of the strategic planning process for the district.

*Resource Factors*

Questions #11 and #12 focused on resource utilization. Half (50.0%) of the respondents indicated that almost all financial aspects were considered of which 21.9% reported doing so extensively. Financial factors, however, were not considered at all by 6.3% of the respondents. In terms of reviewing and analyzing the equitable distribution of



Table 8. *Summary of Part I on Analyzing Financial Information*

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Question: Which of the following were parts of the district’s strategic planning process?

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Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
11. Conducted a financial performance and cost trend analysis to understand variances to the current budget.	6.3%	18.8%	25.0%	28.1%	21.9%	3.41	32
12. Analyzed gaps in the equitable distribution of resources.	3.3%	16.7%	23.3%	30.0%	26.7%	3.60	30

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resources, 56.7% indicated this was done thoroughly. Implications are that resource utilization may be an issue particularly in times of reduced funding because implementing strategies requires funding. Table 9 summarizes the results relating to future factors, communication, and participation in this step.

*Future Scan, Communication, and Participation*

This section of the survey addressed the degree to which projections and assumptions of the future were incorporated into the strategic planning process and the level to which the findings from the environmental scan were communicated. A majority of the respondents (62.5%) reported they analyzed external factors, trends, and pending

Table 9. Summary of Part I on Future Factors, Communication, and Participation

Question: Which of the following were parts of the district's strategic planning process?							
Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
13. Analyzed external factors, trends, and pending events (e.g. new legislation, state budget cuts, demographic trends, etc.) to create plausible scenarios for analysis.	3.1%	9.4%	25.0%	37.5%	25.0%	3.72	32
14. Communicated findings	0.0%	3.3%	16.7%	26.7%	53.3%	4.3	30
15. To what extent did the following participate in the Environmental Scan Step?							
a. District staff	3.3%	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	56.7%	4.27	30
b. Principals, Admin.	3.3%	6.7%	30.0%	33.3%	26.7%	3.73	30
c. Teachers	3.3%	23.3%	36.7%	30.0%	6.7%	3.13	30
d. Parents	6.7%	23.3%	33.3%	26.7%	10.0%	3.10	30
e. Community members	10.0%	20.0%	30.0%	26.7%	13.3%	3.13	30
f. Students	36.7%	33.3%	16.7%	10.0%	3.3%	2.10	30

events which were used to create variations of future environments and utilized the strategic planning process. Communicating the findings of the environmental scan prevalent as 80.0% of the respondents rated the activity as extensive or almost all aspects.

The Mean ratings for participation indicate the responses were skewed toward predominately district personnel (4.27) followed by school administration (3.73). Teachers, parents, and community members were less involved as shown by ratings of 3.10-3.13. The average rate for student participation was lowest at 2.10. Students were excluded in 36.7% of the districts or limited to some aspects in 33.3% of districts responding.

In an open ended question, the respondents were asked to describe how the environmental scanning step was carried out in their districts. Some of the respondents answered that they were unfamiliar with the term or unsure what an environmental scan was. These same respondents did however rate questions 7 through 15 indicating the extent to which environmental scanning activities were done and the level of participation by stakeholders. This may imply that the lack of common labels for steps in the strategic planning process is more a terminology issue than a question of whether or not the activities were performed. This point will be elaborated upon in Chapter Five.

The respondents reported a variety of forums for gathering, reviewing, analyzing, and interpreting data which covered a wide spectrum. Venues included groups such as planning teams, planning committees, core teams, parent groups, student advisory groups, interviews, and audit teams. Broader participation came through town hall

meetings (one respondent reported that 5,000 stakeholders took part in the process), focus groups, and stakeholders' surveys.

The respondents indicated some of the kinds of data that was generated and disseminated in the process. Types of data included disaggregated student scores, graduation rates, staff tenure statistics, a report from the Rand think tank on the future environment for education, all aspects of the budget, books to stimulate thinking, survey results, focus group findings, audit reports, and benchmarking information from demographically similar school districts.

A common theme in the survey responses was that the planning sessions were facilitated by outside consultants and that the consultants brought their own approach to the strategic planning process, terminology, and way of conducting the environmental scan.

Some of the methods mentioned in the surveys included analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis). Other methods were Six Sigma (an operations processes quality control methodology) and process management analysis to inform improving the overall effectiveness of school and district operations.

A key responsibility of the planning team was the proper preparation of the information to be shared with the process participants. Data needed to be gathered and organized to be understandable by all participants. The direction the data flowed varied. Some gathered data in a bottom-up approach as in town hall meetings. Others had data flowing from the top down as when board adopted governance policies were used to

request stakeholders input to develop district ends (objectives). Some school district planning processes used both. Districts used this step in the strategic planning process to synthesis data from different areas of the organization such as targeted academic, human resources, facility audits and used it as input to the process.

Respondents wrote in the survey about the reasons why this step was important to them. Some noted the issues of budget constraints and the impact of strategies on funding; understanding trends data to anticipate situations; to check that there was an alignment of strategies and operations with the district's vision, mission, and goals. In a time of expected declines in funding or enrollments, efficiency and resource management analysis was a factor to be incorporated into the planning process. A respondent regarded the environmental scan as an important step because it drove the whole strategic planning process.

Some of the survey narrative was about times when knowledge and understanding of the results generated in the environmental scan step were lost due to a change of superintendents. Some of the respondents noted that they had inherited the strategic plan from prior management and did not have personal experience in the process that was conducted. This loss of corporate memory may be an issue if it results in management not fully understanding why they are doing what they are doing.

#### *Action Plans – Strategic Financial Planning*

The findings from this section of the survey indicated that there were extensive implementation activities in the districts' strategic planning process. This is significant

because this step did not emerge from the literature as a separate step in the strategic planning process. Table 10 summarizes the survey results on the activities in this step.

*Action Plans, Implementation Teams, and Orientation of Stakeholders*

All the respondents prepared detailed plans that specified the work required to implement the strategies including timing of the work and the associated budgets. Action plans were done extensively or for almost all aspects of the strategic plan by 81.3%. Forming implementation teams as part of developing action plans was done for almost all aspects or extensively by 64.5% of the respondents. Conducting orientations of the final district strategic plan to communicate the strategic direction of the school district was done to varying extents for different groups of stakeholders. Slightly over half of the respondents (51.6%) had done orientations extensively or for almost all aspects of the strategic plan for the schools staffs and 12.9% indicated that they had no orientations for the schools. It was reported that district staffs received thorough orientations (64.5%) while 9.7% of the district staffs did not receive a strategic plan orientation. Some of the respondents (35.5%) conducted strategic plan orientations for students and parents while others (38.7%) reported that they gave orientations on some aspects of the strategic plan or not at all.

Table 10. *Summary of Part I on Developing Action Plans*

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Question: Which of the following were parts of the district’s strategic planning process?

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Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
17. Developed detailed plans that specify the work required to implement strategies with timing and associated budgets	0.0%	9.4%	9.4%	34.4%	46.9%	4.19	32
18. Organized implementation teams to develop action plans with associated budgets for strategy implementation.	3.2%	6.5%	25.8%	16.1%	48.4%	4.00	31
19. Conducted orientations of the final District Strategic Plan for:							
a. School staffs	12.9%	12.9%	22.6%	16.1%	35.5%	3.48	31
b. District staffs	9.7%	6.5%	19.4%	22.6%	41.9%	3.81	31
c. Students, Parents	16.1%	22.6%	25.8%	19.4%	16.1%	2.97	31

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Table 11 is a summary of the survey results regarding how deep in the organization recursions of the strategic planning process is done and to what extent they are consolidated into the overall district strategic plan.

#### *School and Department Level Strategic Planning*

More than half (53.3%) of the respondents indicated that as part of the strategic planning process each school prepared their own strategic plan including a strategic financial plan. However, 36.7% of the respondents reported that schools did not prepare strategic plans or were only done for parts of the strategic plan. A variation of this question was asked again later in the survey. Question # 41 asked: Are school site strategic plans developed as part of the district strategic planning process? A larger group (73.3%) answered yes and 26.7% answered no. The differences may be in characterizing how extensive the school site strategic plans were. In question #21, 60.0% of the respondents rated the district departments' preparation of strategic plans as part of the strategic planning process as extensive or for almost all aspects. In contrast, 26.7% reported none to limited preparation of departmental strategic plans were done. In question #42 the respondents were asked: Are district functional department strategic plans developed as part of the district strategic planning process? The answers were 83.9% yes and 16.1% no. The differences in answers appear to be the extensiveness of the departments' strategic plans. Respondents (45.2%) utilized the school and district department strategic financial plans to prepare a consolidated district strategic financial



Table 11. *Summary of Part I on Developing School and Department Plans*

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Question: Which of the following were parts of the district’s strategic planning process?

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Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
20. Each school developed a strategic plan with associated strategic financial plan to support it.	16.7%	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	43.3%	3.43	30
21. Each district department developed a strategic plan with associated strategic financial plan.	10.0%	16.7%	13.3%	26.7%	33.3%	3.57	30
22. Prepared a consolidated district strategic financial plan using the schools’ and district departments’ strategic financial plans.	16.1%	16.1%	22.6%	25.8%	19.4%	3.16	31

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*(table continues)*

Table 11 (*continued*)

Item	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
23. Assessed that all strategies are designed with high student achievement standards and associated resource provisions were sufficient for all students to have an equal opportunity to learn.	0.0%	12.9%	12.9%	22.6%	51.6%	4.13	31

plan. Some (16.1%) did not prepare the district strategic financial plan by using school or department financial plans at all.

The respondents (74.2%) rated high the extent to which all strategies were assessed to be designed with high student achievement standards and that the associated resources needed were sufficient so that all students would have an equal opportunity to learn. None of the respondents excluded this activity in their strategic planning process. Strategic planning in each sector of the district indicates the potential degree of synchronization of plans and financial plans at the district, department, and school sectors. Table 12 summarizes the data on participation in the activities in this step.

Table 12. *Summary of Part I Participation in Developing Action Plans*

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Question: To what extent did the following participate in this Action Plan and Strategic Financial Planning Step?

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	None	Some	Part of most	Almost all	Extensively	Mean=	N=
District staff	0.0%	3.2%	9.7%	22.6%	64.5%	4.48	31
Principals, Admin.	0.0%	10.0%	13.3%	33.3%	43.3%	4.10	30
Teachers	6.7%	20.0%	16.7%	40.0%	16.7%	3.40	30
Parents	13.3%	20.0%	33.3%	16.7%	16.7%	3.03	30
Community members	10.3%	20.7%	24.1%	24.1%	20.7%	3.24	29
Students	37.9%	37.9%	10.3%	6.9%	6.9%	2.07	29

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*Participation*

The data showed that participation was heavily skewed with 87.1% of the respondents rating the participation of the district staff as widely involved. Likewise principals and site administrators for 76.6% of the districts were part of almost all of the aspects or more. Over half of the respondents (56.7%) rated the participation of teachers as extensive or for almost all aspects. Students had little or no role in this step for 75.8% of the respondents. However, some (13.8%) of districts did have students participate for almost all or more of the process step. The implication as stated for the other steps is one of having role and voice in the school districts' strategic planning process.

Question 25 was open-ended and asked the respondents to describe how action plans and strategic financial plans were done in their districts. Recalling that the respondents have declared that they have a district strategic plan (Question 4) the interest was to see how the strategic plan was implemented and was linked to district and school operations. What emerged from the responses were patterns that demonstrated the different ways the strategic planning process was coupled to implementation plans and the allocation of resources needed.

There were different ways to describe the flows of activities (Espinosa, 2009a). One respondent described the activities as Objective → Goals → Action Plans. Another stated that learning goals were set at the district and given to schools to prepare Campus Improvement Plans. Other respondents listed the hierarchy as Goals → Objectives → Action Plans → Measures. Another mapped the flow as Goals → strategies → tactics → cost → timelines → persons responsible. As was observed in the previous section it appears that the labels used to name the parts of the process vary, but the activities or purpose of activities in each step appears to be the similar.

The respondents described how some districts assigned champions for each district strategy. The champions were responsible for developing action plans to include financial and human resource needs to implement them. The champions then engaged the annual budgeting process to insure the action plan requirements were funded. District departments action planning and financial planning were similar. The strategic goals for the district were given to each department and they prepared objectives and action plans

to meet them. Funding was allocated to meet the strategic goals. The respondents stated that in this way the strategic plan became a living document and not something that was put on the shelf. Respondents reported taking the strategic plan to meetings with teachers, principals, and district staff as part of the development and vetting process for this step and therefore extending involvement and understanding in the strategic plan.

Some of the respondents wrote that the strategic planning process specifically addressed schools that were categorized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) improvement schools in the district. School improvement plans were developed by each site to meet the district goals laid out in the district strategic plan. One respondent described them as not quite strategic plans but more than an action plan (Espinosa, 2009a). Several had schools use templates either provided by the state or prepared by the district.

The respondents were emphatic as to the reasons why this step was part of the districts' strategic planning process. It was stated that the current dire state of the economy put strategic financial planning at the forefront of all district decision making. The strategic planning process provided the means to develop a strategic plan, school and district improvement plans in a complementary fashion and thereby keep all of the organization focused on the same critical goals. At the core of the whole process and plans was the intent to increase student achievement. Respondents reported that the process aligned strategic plan objectives and action plans to the budget development process. The process was the way in which each strategic goal was linked to supporting initiatives to realize the objectives which were focused on data driven results. All

departments and schools developed their own objectives within the framework of the district strategic plan. The planning activities differed in some procedures or protocols and were called by different names such as project management, change management, or balanced scorecard process. But all were about implementing the strategies of the district.

The following presents the data gathered to answer Research Question 2.

### Research Question Two

What are the perceptions of the selected school district superintendents on the use and effectiveness of strategic planning in their districts?

The data used to answer research question two were from part II of the surveys completed by school district superintendents and from semi-structured interviews with six district superintendents that volunteered to be interviewed.

### *Survey Part II*

Part II of the survey was a series of questions regarding the superintendents' perception of the effectiveness of their districts strategic planning process. This data was analyzed and descriptive statistics of the answers provided were developed. The superintendents were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their strategic planning process (Question #39) and elaborate in an open ended follow-up question to give their primary reasons for the rating they gave. The data from their narrative were imported into NVivo 8 and an inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) of the responses done. The data was then searched for patterns of meaning and summarized into general statements about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategic planning process.

The superintendents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with statements about the practice of strategic planning in their district. A five point Likert-type scale was used. The answers were interpreted as agreed, disagreed, or undecided or neutral. The response undecided or neutral provided the respondents the option to indicate that there may not be enough data to definitively agree or disagree with the statement. Given the long timeframes for strategic planning this choice can be interpreted as – time will tell. The answers are summarized in Table 13.

Overall the respondents asserted a positive perception on the effectiveness of strategic planning in their districts.

Item #26 stated that the strategic planning process developed new leaders in the district to which 67.8% agreed, 1.9% disagreed, and 19.4% were undecided. Most (74.2%) of the respondents agreed with statement #27 that strategic planning was an effective way for stakeholders to participate, however, 22.6% were undecided or neutral, while one respondent (3.2%) disagreed that their district process was effective in facilitating broad participation. Question 28 was a more specific inquiry on whether the strategic plan process enabled business and community members to participate to which 71.0% agreed, 9.7% disagreed, and 19.4% were undecided. When asked (#29) if the respondents felt the strategic planning process facilitated effective collaboration of all participants in designing shared district strategies 66.6% agreed, 10.0% disagreed, and 23.3% were undecided or neutral.

Table 13. *Summary of Part II on Superintendents' Perspectives*

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Question: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

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Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided or neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean =	N=
26. Strategic planning process developed new leaders in the school district.	0.0%	12.9%	19.4%	48.4%	19.4%	3.74	31
27. Strategic planning process facilitated stakeholder participation.	0.0%	3.2%	22.6%	38.7%	35.5%	4.00	31
28. Strategic planning process enabled participation by business and community members.	0.0%	9.7%	19.4%	51.6%	19.4%	3.81	31

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*(table continues)*



Table 13 (*continued*)

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided or neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean =	N=
29. Strategic planning process facilitated collaboration of participants to design shared Strategies.	0.0%	10.0%	23.3%	33.3%	33.3%	3.90	30
30. Strategic planning process aligned and focused the organization to the district's strategies.	0.0%	0.0%	9.7%	38.7%	51.6%	4.42	31
31. Strategic planning process fostered shared accountability.	0.0%	0.0%	16.1%	48.4%	35.5%	4.19	31

(*table continues*)

Table 13 (*continued*)

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided or neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean =	N=
32. Strategic plan guides the decision making for district administrators.	0.0%	3.2%	12.9%	41.9%	41.9%	4.23	31
33. The strategic planning process was part of improving student achievement.	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	39.3%	46.4%	4.32	28
34. The strategic planning process affected the utilization of resources.	0.0%	3.3%	26.7%	33.3%	36.7%	4.03	30

*(table continues)*

Table 13 (continued)

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided or neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean =	N=
35. Process aligned and increased cohesiveness in operations.	0.0%	0.0%	26.7%	33.3%	40.0%	4.13	30
36. School and district leaders valued the process.	0.0%	3.2%	32.3%	35.5%	29.0%	3.90	31
37. Strategic planning process facilitated developing strategies for student achievement.	0.0%	6.5%	12.9%	25.8%	54.8%	4.29	31
38. Strategic planning was a valued process.	0.0%	6.5%	19.4%	25.8%	48.4%	4.16	31

Statement #30 elicited the most emphatic answers from the superintendents (Mean = 4.42) and no one disagreed with it. Nearly all the respondents (90.3 %) agreed (51.6% strongly) that the strategic planning process aligned and focused the whole organization to the districts' strategies. Furthermore, the 9.7% who declared that they were undecided or neutral could be interpreted to mean that they had a wait and see attitude but being positive enough to not disagree with the statement. A total of 83.9% of the respondents reported that the strategic planning process fostered a shared accountability (statement #31). Some respondents (16.1%) answered they were undecided or neutral. Statement #32 related to the effectiveness of the district strategic plan in guiding decision making processes for all district administrators. Most (83.8%) agreed that it did, one respondent (3.2%) disagreed, and 12.9% were undecided.

The second most emphatic response (Mean = 4.32) was regarding their perception of the district strategic planning process as being a critical part of improving student achievement with 85.7% agreeing while 14.3% were undecided, and none disagreeing with statement #33.

In regard to the impact on the utilization of resources, 70.0% of the superintendents agreed that the strategic planning process affected the efficient and effective use of the districts' resources while 26.7% were undecided and 3.3% disagreed (#34). In addition, 73.3% agreed that the strategic planning process was effective in aligning and increasing cohesiveness in the district and the schools operations. No one disagreed with that statement (#35), but 26.7% were undecided or neutral.

Statement #36 probed the respondents' perceptions on whether school and district educational leaders regarded the strategic planning process as important and worthwhile, 64.5% agreed, 32.3% were undecided or neutral, and 3.2% disagreed.

The next question was a prompt to summarize their thoughts. In question #39, the superintendents were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their school district's strategic planning process. Most (81.5%) rated it high, 11.1% rated it as acceptable, and 7.4% rated it as low. The superintendents were asked for an explanation of the primary reasons for giving their overall ratings. The following summarized their comments.

Emergent themes from the responses of the superintendents were that the strategic planning process was effective because it was student centered. They reported that the strategic plan linked directly to student achievement in their district. The superintendents felt that the process positively impacted the whole school district system, student achievement, and organizational efficiency. From the respondents' points of view as a result of the strategic planning process the school district was positioned to respond positively and proactively with laser like focus on student achievement. They characterized their strategic planning process as a vehicle to focus the district's energy and resources on student achievement. This occurred in districts that described themselves performance improvement districts as well as high performance districts. "The process yields what is expected in a school district – student achievement, quality staff, fiscal responsibility, and comprehensive offerings" (Espinosa, 2009a).

The respondents stated that student centeredness was facilitated by the strategic planning process by bringing focus and alignment to the organization. The process provided specific direction for improvement focusing the organization's work. This occurred in several ways such as by bringing district and school plans into concert with each other. Strategic plan were used to reinforce the district's goals and in the process gave the district focus by directing the allocation of limited resources. The strategic plan and the process also served to facilitate engaging the community in a positive and formative way. The strategic planning process was used to underscore the importance of having an aligned vision, mission, strategic plan, and key metrics that were communicated and understood by all stakeholders as important to guiding the district work.

The respondents reported on what they perceived were the characteristics of the strategic planning process that made it effective. Stated were the process was inclusive, transparent, and rigorous. The process increased awareness and knowledge as it focused the organization on the key factor: Student achievement. The process was effective because it was data driven and goal oriented. The process was effective because it was refined over time and in practice. The process was effective because it was linked to all areas and aspects of the district.

The superintendents rated the strategic planning process high noting it provided a means for participation by the school districts' stakeholders. The formal planning process for some districts extended over 18 months and involved "thousands" of stakeholders

(Espinosa, 2009a). Some respondents noted how the process was designed was important to participation and the respondents regarded the use of consultants as an indication to the community of the seriousness of the process. They described the process as logistically complex to achieve inclusion of the wide range of stakeholders to gather input from community, school, and district members. The intent was for broad participation to bring about greater alignment of the whole education system. They held that it created a commitment to a unified district vision and guided the district work in measurable ways.

The respondents pointed out issues and barriers they encountered in the strategic planning process. Some stated that the large size of their district challenged them in engaging the large number of stakeholders in the endeavor to achieve a high level of community buy-in. Those respondents that rated their strategic planning processes low explained they did so because the process failed to attach accountability for the plans to a specific person or department to assure adherence or to be responsible for follow-up. In general the superintendents said they recognized that their district's process never achieved textbook perfection but that it worked for them because it was "fit for us" (Espinosa, 2009a). Part of the reason for this is the complexity of school districts and therefore the strategic planning process was an aggregate of the efforts from many parts of the system such as operations, facilities, and mandates from the state. They stated that it was a progression of always improving the process by developing the organization's competency and becoming better fit. They reported that it took years to develop a highly effective school district strategic planning process.

### *Interviews*

The third means used to gather data was through a semi-structured interview methodology (Hatch, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2007; Silverman, 2006). The interview was based on a narrative interview method for the elicitation of data (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2007). The interviewees were asked to tell their stories to by recalling episodes that illustrated their points and as explanations for their opinions (see Appendix D). They were asked to describe the strategic planning process in their districts and how it suited their needs. They were also asked probing questions as follow-up based on the context of their responses. For example, in the situation where the respondents were new to the position and inherited the current strategic plan, the follow-up questions probed into how this facilitated the superintendents' personal on-boarding process or how did the strategic planning process facilitate the continuation of the current strategies and minimize disruptions? This segued to the second line of questioning regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of their districts' strategic planning process. The summary question was an exercise of having them critique their strategic planning processes by indentifying what they regarded as the pluses or positive aspects of the process. Then, in the spirit that all processes can be improved in some ways, what were the deltas or changes they were working on or would like to see done.

The six interviews ranged from 32 minutes to 53 minutes in length. All the sessions were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee and on the condition of anonymity of the respondent. Interview data are presented using an alphanumeric code



to indicate when a statement is attributable to a respondent and to keep the identity of the respondent confidential. Audio files and transcriptions were imported into NVivo 8 for analysis. Audio clips and transcriptions were reviewed and coded using an inductive analysis methodology (Hatch, 2002). Narratives were analyzed for specific themes and patterns that emerged were used to generalize findings as they related to the research questions. Respondents characterized what an effective strategic planning process meant to them, and what a strategic planning process contained that made it effective. The interview data also provided some insights into the use of differing models as they relate to effectiveness.

#### *Process Outcomes of Aspirations, Focus, Alignment, and Expectations*

In discussing the effectiveness of their districts' strategic planning processes, three process outcomes stood out in their narrative. They were the convergence of aspirations, the ability to focus the school system, and the utility of aligning the organization to enhance the efficient use of resources.

The language of visions, missions, and goals gave way to descriptions of aspirations, expectations, alignment, coherence, and like terms. What the interviewees said was important was that the process moved the organization closer to being on the same page. This was evident to the interviewees in the expectations of board to superintendent; superintendent to principals and administration staff; and with district to parents and community stakeholders. The process of forming shared aspirations and expectations raised the level of intent such as raising performance in high priority

improvement schools. An interviewee related how the poor results of the schools were regarded an inevitable condition due to the demographics of the community. But in the course of ten years of raising expectations through the strategic planning process the same district moved 19 schools from being improvement schools to one that made progress in all categories save one (I3695). The strategic planning process facilitated developing aspirations and expectations beyond mandated criteria and reaching for results that were “sort of a push back beyond No Child Left Behind and just looking at one slice of the child ... toward the development of the whole child, and looking at bringing each child from where they are and moving them to the next level” (I3565). In a pragmatic sense, the strategic planning process fostered a culture in which results were expected and the pressure for performance came from all areas of the school system and community. The tone was one of expectations for student achievement and critical reviews of plans that failed to demonstrate performance (I3695).

#### *Stated Goals*

In effective strategic planning processes aspirations were formed into stated goals by the participants. There were differing ways of setting goals reflecting in part the context of the school system and community. Some were broad statements of aspirations; others were statements of specified expectations. As a result, the measures were also different. The following two examples illustrate this point. In district I3695 the strategic planning process involved the board of education developing broad goals with the stakeholders and then having the superintendent prepare specific objectives for the goals

in collaboration with the schools and community. The agreed to goals and the corresponding objectives were documented in the school district strategic plan. The document was called the strategic governance manual, or as the superintendent stated, “The rule book” (I3695). The superintendent explained that the strategic plan were the rules that everyone would use through the year. Only by mutual agreement were they changed, deleted, or added to. Since the board looked to the progress toward the agreed to strategic goals this provided the superintendent the opportunity to work with the school sites and staff to develop the objectives and strategies that they felt would work best. The superintendent stated that the process was effective because of the discipline of adhering to the strategic plan, i.e. the rule book.

In the second example, district I1385, very specific goals for the districts high priority schools were set and the schools were facilitated in preparing plans to meet them. The opinions were that the conditions for each warranted the approach and that each were effective because they were appropriate to the task.

The interviewees shared ways in which the goals contributed to the effectiveness of the strategic planning process. They explained that the goals were used proactively in the preparation of plans and budgets. Those that did not align to the goals were challenged and because resources were scarce deleted. The goals were used post action to determine if the plans and resources resulted in the expected outcomes. Goals were said to be useful tools for leading the district but they were also looked upon as just tools and not absolutes. Goals and measures that were thought to be useful were found in practice

to be wrong as was related in some instances it was agreed that they were measuring the wrong thing (I3565). The interviewees regarded the strategic planning process effective when it transitioned over to everyday operations. Goals that stayed in the strategic plan document and reviewed once a year were dead. Using goals they stated in periodic reviews were one way to make the strategic plan a living document. The frequency of the formal performance reviews ranged from monthly status reports to quarterly reviews. The sense was that informally the goals were top of mind in school districts that had effective strategic planning processes.

This phenomenon was described as the organization aligning itself to the vision and goals of the school district: The “process has provided specific direction for improvement. It has focused our work” (Espinosa, 2009a). This alignment was described as essential for school districts where school autonomy was part of the culture: “One of the fundamental beliefs is that the role of the central office and the central organization is just very insignificant compared with what’s happening at the school sites” (I1335). The reoccurring point made in the narrative was the orientation toward the child. That focal point above all seemed to be the test when going through the hard work of sorting things and making the plan work.

The interviewees also used the term focus to describe an effective strategic planning process for large and small districts. Focus for them worked in several ways. One way depicted was in planning for a very large school district. The strategic planning process it was explained allowed the district to focus on high priority schools that saved

them from being lost in the large system. The strategic planning process it was felt allowed the district to marshal resources that were available because of its large size and therefore use what was regarded as a disadvantage as an advantage (I1385). Likewise those in smaller school districts spoke of the scarcity of resources or the need to wear multiple hats in their situations and that strategic planning was effective in focusing on the highest priority needs in a systematic way. In a high performance district improving student achievement was through the focus that strategic planning process facilitated because, “Well, it’s everybody’s job here” (I1385).

Alignment and focus in effective strategic planning processes also affected the decision making around resources and funding. The interviewees spoke of using the goals to determine where budget monies and other resources would be committed. This served to align the budgets with the strategies of the district. Likewise, if a project or program was unfunded, it was a basis for stating that the expectations would also change keeping the process honest and effective (I3565). The strategic planning process was being used to review and determine the effectiveness of programs and make decisions on continuing or terminating them in order to fund other high priority issues. The strategic plan was being used by the districts to cope with their current and future economic realities. “With our budget cuts, we’re using our strategic plan as a filter for all our decisions” (I1765).

What the strategic planning processes had that made them effective was the ability to focus the school system. This was true in large or small districts or districts in different academic performance situations. The focal point was also an important aspect

of the process. From the interviewees' perspectives effectiveness was when processes had a clear linkage to schools and the classrooms, be it initiated from the district to the classroom or facilitated from the classroom to the district agenda. And, the interviewees stated that what made their strategic planning processes effective was how it facilitated thinking toward the students. The strategic planning process was "student centered. For the most part our staff understands that we're [about] children first" (I3425).

### *Collaboration*

According to the interviewees, the strategic planning process was effective because it facilitated system wide collaboration. Participants in the strategic planning process were brought together from all parts of the organization. The strategic planning process was an effective means to deal with the realities of the silos in the organization. In the normal course of work, functional areas or parts of the school district would tend to their own missions and interests. The strategic planning process disrupted the status quo and legitimized working together across the organization collaboratively (I1765). The strategic planning experience conditioned the organization by recognizing that "central's role is to coach and support when needed. It is very, very, and the key work is collaborative" (I1335). Achieving this level of effectiveness took intent, time, and effort.

The organization's fitness to take on strategic planning was an important factor in the effectiveness of the process. Time and resources were needed to get to the state of readiness where they were able to do strategic planning. This involved developing skills and fostering a culture of trust (I1765). "It takes years and hard decisions to develop it"

(I1335). The decisions would sometimes involve changing the organization by insisting that people got on board or “got off the bus” (I1765). It was through these many ways the strategic plan became for the school district a living document.

“What we do is to make sure that the district plan is vital and is a document that is living and directs our work” (I3425). What was important to the interviewees was that the strategic plan was used and not put on a shelf and ignored or forgotten. In our district a “from the top strategic planning process is not valued as part of the culture. The culture is what we want. It is that we trust the integrity of people. We have complete trustworthiness” that working collaboratively fosters (I1335). Effective strategic planning process brought this to life. “Well, because I honestly believe when you have leadership who works with folks and gets them to come together around a set of ideas for what are we going to do, when you translate those ideas into action, I think it works” (I385). “The things that are driving our work today are strategies that have been developed through the strategic plan ... and its part of our classrooms” (I1765).

One interviewee shared the following story.

If we noticed that on one side of town we’ve got issues in decimals, say in mathematics, in the fifth grade, then that cluster may come together. Those principals may bring together their teachers to work on strategies to help the kids to be more successful in that objective. Of course all of that takes planning and that’s why we build those days into our calendar instead of putting all of our professional development days up front. Our teachers also know that if our data

comes back and it shows that we need some work in a certain area, they know that they could be asked to come in on a certain evening or on the weekend for a few hours to address those needs. And that's a culture change that we implemented three or four years ago to help people understand that this is not just an 8-4 job. You have to do whatever it takes to make sure that kids are learning what they need to learn. (I3425)

The document was regarded as living because the process was transparent and evolutionary becoming real form and substance. It was dynamic as opposed to static (I3565). But it also provided some stability.

Some of the interviewees had inherited their strategic plans and were asked to comment on what strategic planning did or did not do for them in this situation. Their observations were that it afforded the organization continuity in the school district. This was possible because the district had good institutionalized processes that people understood and embraced (I1345). It took years and many cycles for the strategic planning process to become part of the culture of the organization, the way things were done naturally. What had also evolved for the interviewees was a "shared accountability" (I3565) imbedded in the culture.

Planning models used by the interviewees differed. Each had some variations in sequencing, use of names, and participants in the process. Some processes were extensive and complex e.g. involving financial plans and resourcing methodologies. Others were described as simple and direct and were regarded as appropriate for the current school



district circumstances and readiness for engaging in the work of strategic planning. Whether their processes were complex or simple they regarded them as effective or highly effective.

What was common in their stories was that within the school districts strategic planning processes were clearly defined and were continuously improved and evolved with each planning cycle. The superintendents had created the context for the strategic planning process to function for them. The process had become or was well on the way to becoming part of the culture of the school district. This manifested itself in their responses to questions regarding the informal processes of the organization.

When asked, the interviewees acknowledged the existence of vibrant informal processes and that these processes were also an important part of getting the strategies implemented. The means of dealing with this situation ranged from proactively aligning projects, programs, and budgets with the strategic goals to having a robust culture in which it was deemed unacceptable to detract from the organization's efforts to reach its goals. The role of leadership was regarded as very important and ranged from strong, visible leadership, to mentoring and facilitating, again more dependent on the fitness of the organization to take on the task. Some of the interviewees had taught or written on strategic planning and that may be why they were completely supportive of bottom-up strategic planning in their organizations.

## What it All Means

The findings and conclusions from the data developed in this study will be discussed in Chapter Five. The connections between the data from each of the methods used are made. The findings of the study are discussed. Recommendations for education are made as are recommendations for future study. A conclusions section completed the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

Chapter Five is an analysis and a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn to be added the discourse around strategic planning in education. The findings confirm what was expressed in the literature, that school districts need a strategic planning conceptual model (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; McHenry & Achilles, 2002). This study contributes to the discussion by providing findings from the practice of using strategic planning in school districts across the United States. The findings from this study may assist those that use and facilitate strategic planning in school districts. The following two research questions guided the discussion.

1. What are the prevalent steps of the strategic planning process in practice?
2. What are the superintendents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the district's strategic planning process?

The first section summarizes results from the three research methods which are:

A document analysis of 78 school district strategic plans downloaded from the districts' websites.

A summary of descriptive statistics from the 39 surveys of a three part questionnaire sent to superintendents across the United States.

The analysis of data from six semi-structured interviews with school district superintendents or designates.

A discussion of the findings from these three methods supports the recommendations and conclusions of this study.

### Discussion of the Results from the Three Methods

#### *Limitations on Interpreting the Results*

Limitations were considered when analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. The document analysis of school district strategic plans was a methodology used for identifying patterns of usage that emerged from the data. A concern was that the school districts may have only parts of their strategic plan documents posted on their websites. This prevented the elimination of any step due to a low frequency of occurrence in the analysis since it may in fact have been a part of the district's strategic planning model but the district officials opted to not make it public. Also an issue was the use of terms, names, or labels in the plans and in the narratives. This confounded the analysis to some extent as was found in the strategic planning literature review of Hambright and Diamantes (2004). The terms varied among the districts in important ways. For example the hierarchy of statements of desired outcomes varied from Goals to Objectives or from Objectives to Goals. Another example was some of the districts posted their vision statement as the outcome of an environmental scan as espoused by Bryson (2004). Others used terms such as ends, aims, or outcomes and avoided the term vision, which paralleled the models of Carver (2006) and Cook (2000). This was a problem when navigating from district to district. This inter-district discord in planning models was not a barrier to effective intra-district strategic planning as reported by the respondents. It was observed

that within a district that had a well developed shared model the terminology used appeared not to be an encumbrance to the organization as seen in the surveys and interview data.

In evaluating the survey responses a consideration was that the respondents were people using strategic planning and motivated to answer the survey. They appeared to be positively disposed to strategic planning. The responses did, however, include critical feedback of the strategic planning process on how it was being implemented. Another factor was that the respondents were self reporting which should have posed a problem since it was their personal perspectives that were sought. The interviewees were also users of strategic planning and felt motivated to respond to the survey and volunteer to be interviewed.

It is with these considerations the results are discussed below.

#### Patterns of Usage in Practice

The study investigated the practice of using strategic planning to determine if there was a preferred model used by school districts. The investigation was at three levels: The frequency of use of each step in the nine step model (Table 1); the reporting on activities that constitute a step regardless of what it was labeled; and the district's own terms used and descriptions of their strategic planning models and processes. The data from the three levels was used to answer research question 1.

Research question 1: What are the prevalent steps of the strategic planning process in practice?

The document analysis of school district strategic plans indicates that the most prevalent steps are:

Step 1 Pre-plan is assumed to be done for 100% of the documents analyzed.

Step 2 Vision – Mission which is present in 92% of the documents analyzed.

Step 3 Guiding principles – Core beliefs are in 49% of the documents.

Step 7 Strategic issue resolution is in half (50%) of the documents.

Step 9 Action plans and strategic financial planning are in 44% of the documents

This may indicate an issue of communication or that the models in use do not include the other steps of the conceptual model. For example, in searching for Step 1, Pre-plan, it was sometimes found in the documents or the cover letters of some of the districts to give the reader some background in the districts' strategic planning process. However, since each of the documents existed, it was safe to assume that the districts used some or all of the pre-plan activities.

The analysis of the narrative also provided some insight into the idea of fitness. Some of the respondents reported that they had to take stock of their organizations' skills, resources available, and time constraints before engaging in the rigor and demands of developing their strategic plans. Some of the plans noted that the participants were trained on the use of the strategic planning process. Some even delayed the commencement of the process until the organization was determined to be fit to take on the task. This parallels the findings of McHenry and Achilles (2002) who reported the lack of understanding of the strategic planning process was part of the reason the process

fails and was due to several factors specifically the inadequate preparation and training of district superintendents and the supporting staffs.

The concept of fitness is a significant consideration. The implications are a process that yields poor quality plans; ineffective implementation; and frustration for the process participants (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004; McHenry & Achilles, 2002; Ward-Bovee, 1999). This finding is consistent with the experience of the researcher as chief planning officer of several corporations and as facilitator for strategic planning processes in school districts. The multi-facets of participant fitness need to be determined and addressed. Fitness of an organization determines the level of investment in participant training and the level of sophistication in the strategic planning process. Effectiveness is in part a function of adjusting to fitness and making improvements with each new strategic planning cycle.

The issue is that the means of resolving the problem in education appears to be ad hoc. The most frequent means of acquiring strategic planning skills and fitness reported are the through outside facilitation, formal training provided by some states or schools of education, and through the experience of participating in a strategic planning process.

Step 2, Vision – Mission, was the most prevalent of the steps found in the documents analyzed. This finding was contrary to the thinking of some authors who state that the use of vision statements was problematic (Cook, 2000; Griffin, 2002). Bryson's (2004) model places the vision step after the environmental scan and stated that its utility was to give the participants in the strategic planning process a way to see how all the

parts of the plan come together. The data from practice strongly indicated that there was an important function being served in this step.

Understanding this phenomenon began with addressing the use of terminology. Terms found in this part of the strategic plan documents included: Aims, Credo, Ends, Goals, and Mission. In some documents the term Objectives were defined as preceding the stated Goals. In those strategic plan documents that included narrative the purpose of the step was to focus the organization and give it a direction. The districts used Vision, Strategic Goals, and Strategic Aims as statements that were broad and descriptive of a place, time, and condition different from the present. This appeared to be an effective way of conveying the concepts and intent of the planners and was more accessible to the wider more diverse groups of stakeholders in school districts. The prevalence of this step in the documents analyzed was evidence of a favored means to engage and involve all constituents of the school district. The results from the survey reinforced this interpretation and yielded a significant observation as to extent vision and mission were reviewed and revised in the process evolving a wide range of participants.

The respondents related that there was extensive activity by a broad group of stakeholders indicating that the vision, mission, and goals of the organization were not static but fluid and dynamic. It also implied that buy-in was an ongoing negotiation. All of the respondents had some work done on the vision and that for 80% of the districts this involved developing, revising, or enhancing extensively or almost all aspects of the vision. The work on the mission was even more prevalent with 89% answering the work



was extensive for almost all aspects. The data may be interpreted as evidence of a way the school district uses the strategic planning process for organizational learning. The nature of the activity seemed to be a tension between identification and negotiation (Wenger, 1998) of the school districts' direction and purpose.

The extensive participation in the strategic planning process reported by the respondents by a wide range of stakeholders further supports this concept. The survey results indicated high participation in this step for all stakeholders groups. The exception was students which raises the issue of omitting the one group that loses the most if the strategies fail. Step 2 Vision and Mission in the strategic planning process provided a venue where tension among the districts' stakeholders involved working toward a point where the community went along with the shared vision, mission, and goals of the school district. It appeared that participation and having a voice in this step of the process were gauging factors of the outcomes of the design and ultimately the outcomes of the strategic efforts of the school district. In the open ended question of the survey a respondent confirmed this idea stating the step "drives all aspects of the strategic plan" (Espinosa, 2009a). The respondents noted that they used their own terms for this step but what they expected to gain from the work was a common understanding of the aspirations of the stakeholders and buy-in.

The findings from the interviews corroborated and expanded on these themes. The interviewees' use of the formal terms of vision, mission, and goals changed to substituting them with terms such as aspirations, expectations, alignment, focus, and buy-

in. Interviewees related how vision, mission, and goals were an effective means to focus and align the organization to bring about change. The theme of focus and align was perceived to be important to the largest school districts studied. They felt the strategic planning process facilitated the use of the broad range of resources that were part of their system. Smaller district interviewees shared that they used the strategic planning process to focus and align their limited resources strategically.

This theme was illustrated in a story that underscored the usefulness of this step. A superintendent told the story that ten years ago it was an accepted belief that the poor performance of the school district was preordained by the socioeconomic condition of the community. To counter this belief and create a shared vision of a more productive attitude, part of the strategic planning process included using benchmarking of demographically similar school districts that were high performing. That activity in the strategic planning process resulted in a new vision of the school district and creating a just community with high expectations for all. The dynamic was a process of forming new expectations and fostering shared aspirations with the stakeholders that changed the trajectory of the district. In the course of ten years the district raised the performance in the 19 improvement schools to a situation where at the time of the interview only one was left to complete the transformation. Developing a shared vision creates an attractor for the complex school district system to focus on and align itself to (Pascale & Millemann, 2000; Wheatley, 1999).

School districts are complex systems because of some unique characteristics such as stakeholder diversity, types of work done, and types of management. They have diverse stakeholders that include parents, teachers, students, government regulators, community representatives, and organizations with missions to support education. School districts are organizations with formal and informal structures, and they are made up of stakeholders with relationships that range from intensive to casual. School districts are also complex because they are multidiscipline (Lozeau, Langley, & Denis, 2002; Madda, Halverson, & Gomez, 2007; Schein, 2004). Effective leadership and management of school districts with these characteristics require a tool like strategic planning because of its total system approach. As the story illustrated, using vision, mission, and goals created a way to dialogue with the district's diverse stakeholders and change the strategic direction of the whole system which the superintendent perceived as essential to success.

The respondents pointed out that the diversity of the stakeholders required preparations to accommodate their access to relevant data and the venues for engaging in the discourse. The facilitators understood that as the process progressed and approached implementation the technical nature of the discourse limited if not posed a barrier for participation of some stakeholders. This challenge required preparing information that was understandable by the participants as part of the strategic planning process as noted in some of the strategic plan documents. The venues for the participants to engage in the discourse were also diverse ranging from town hall type meetings with thousands participating to a demographically balanced team of 38 made up of stakeholder

representatives. The point was the strategic planning process was designed to reach as many stakeholders as possible because the respondents' experiences were outcomes from these sessions were the development of vision, mission, and also buy-in to the strategic direction of the district by its stakeholders.

The mechanical differences in strategic planning models noted in the Chapter 2 included sequencing the vision after the environmental scan (Bryson, 2004). This difference in practice appeared not to be an issue. The strategic planning documents for the respondents referred to using an appropriate level of data at each step and that the process was iterative as they loop back to the vision, mission, or goals as needed. This phenomenon was described in a story by an interviewee who told of how mutually agreed to goals with the board of education were sometimes changed in the performance reviews if they were found not to be the best way of measuring the progress intended. This did not mean the goals were capricious. In the opinion of the interviewee they were so important to setting expectations, being held accountable, and above all being effective in getting the intended results that they needed to be the best the process could produce. This was a learning process facilitated by a clear understanding of shared aspirations of the district and the common focus.

Data showed that through Step 2 vision, mission, and goals were developed and later made possible the transition to implementation in a manner that facilitated collaboration within the organization. In a district that used a board governance model (Carver, 2006) the board prepared the broad goals of the school district and the

superintendent worked with the schools and staff to prepare the objectives for them. This allowed the objectives and strategies in Step 7 then the action plans and financial plans in Step 9 to be designed and developed by all levels operations in alignment with the intent of the strategic plan. The agreement on goals and objectives bound the vision to the strategies and implementation even in the complex organizational structure of the school district.

This approach was consistent with the arguments of Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (2000) about engaging complex and chaotic systems through a process that guides strategy development versus attempting to mandate and control behavior. The schools adapted to their situation and were aligned to the direction of the district. It avoided a pitfall of complex systems the authors warned about, which was that overly controlling systems in order to stabilize them is a precursor to the death (vitality) of that system. Visions aligned the organization and strategic goals focused the efforts in implementation without stringent prescriptive mandates. One superintendent described their Strategic Governance Manual as the rule book (Espinosa, 2009b). These were straight forward agreed to rules that are metaphorically similar to those studied in complexity theory. Waldrop (1992) used a flocking algorithm to illustrate how three simple rules allowed the entities in chaotic systems to flock together and maximize their speed and distance achieved. The rules did not mandate a destination or even directly order the system to flock together. In a similar way the Strategic Governance Manual document, visions, and goals appeared to have the same effect in these school districts. In this way the strategic

planning process also facilitated the management of day to day operations by facilitating the transition from transformational leadership to transactional management.

The interviewees related stories on how goals aligned implementation plans and focused budgets on the strategic goals of the district. Performance and outcome reviews used goals to continually make adjustments in the course of analyzing results. This constant checking and adjusting kept the organization focused and aligned with the strategic plan. It was also the way that the formal influenced the informal according to the interviewees. The performance reviews varied from annually, quarterly, and monthly and at all levels of the organization. The respondents described this phenomenon an integral part of the culture of the school districts.

The use of vision, mission, and goals facilitated making the strategic plan a “living document” which was a key determinant of the effectiveness of the strategic planning process in the opinions of the respondents in this study. The strategic plan “focused our work” (Espinosa, 2009a). Two stories illustrated their point. In the course of reviewing progress toward math goals with teachers, 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in some of the schools were falling behind their cohort. The superintendent related how the planning of resources was kept broad so that professional development staff could work with teachers to make changes and get back on track. As a result research on methods, meetings with the teachers, and professional development workshops were implemented in a timely manner with acute precision to get the students back on track.

The second story was how the shared vision and broad goals of the strategic plan facilitated the autonomy of the schools. This high performance school district used a bottom-up planning model. Top down was not part of the culture. The strategic planning process was designed and utilized to sustain the culture. The organization was aligned and supportive of the district strategic plan and the whole system worked together to stay on course. The respondents argued that an effective strategic planning process was having a living strategic plan document and not one that sat on the shelf. This was a requisite to the success of the diverse, complex context of school districts.

Step 3 was the formation of guiding principles and statements of core beliefs and values. The terms in the strategic plan documents included: Guiding Principles, Beliefs, Parameters, Core Values, Commitments, Educational Ruler, and a declaration of a Community Compact. The purpose of this step the documents relate was so that “all decisions will be based on them” (Espinosa, 2009b). This step was also a forum for the stakeholders to influence the design of the strategic plan and to shape the culture of the organization. The collaborative formation and documentation of these artifacts facilitated the process of developing the districts’ strategic plans as they further delineated the shared aspirations of the school district and they were stated in broad terms that provided latitude in the design and development of strategies and implementation plans at each level of the organization fostering the vitality of a creative process of learning and planning.

Step 4 was the environmental scan of the school district. Evidence that this step was used in 17% of the strategic plan documents reviewed. This appeared to under represent the usage as the survey respondents reported that this was an important part of the process with 94% of them indicating the work was on almost all aspects or extensively done on internal data and 83% for work on the external situation. Using internal and external data to design and develop strategies and measurements was an important part of the strategic plan development (Bryson, 2004; Cook, 2000). The interviewees portrayed a continuous process of using data and the strategic planning event was a wider, longer view of the data. This characterized a strategic plan that was a living document and relevant to the organization. The absence of evidence of this step in the strategic plan documents may have been for the same reasons that Step 5, strategic issues identification, was only in 3% of the strategic plans reviewed. Data on school district progress and the strategic issues that were identified were parts of the self evaluation of the districts' performances. Based on past experience the lack of total transparency was to minimize the risk of the data being used for a political agenda or the time and effort to prepare technical data for wide distribution and use was not done.

The school districts may have performed these steps and chose not to publish the results on the school district website. The researcher's experience in corporate and school district strategic planning has shown that transparency is essential for a learning organization. This may be disruptive and in some sense it is meant to disrupt the status quo. What an effective strategic planning process does is put the data and analysis in the



context of methodology to address and resolve the issues identified to channel the energy and resolve of the stakeholders response to the data. As the respondents noted, an effective strategic planning process is grounded in relevant data that is critical to each of the subsequent steps in the process.

The process of prioritizing the strategic issues, Step 6, was present in 13% of the strategic documents. Given the continued pressure on school district budgets it was reasonable to think that a prioritizing process existed to determine which strategies were funded. Step 6 is strategically critical to the system since it determines where the focus of the organization is set. There was not enough data to determine how extensive this step was in the school districts' strategic planning processes.

Evidence of Step 7, strategic issue resolution, was in 50% of the documents reviewed. The documents used various terms in this step which confirmed the findings of Hambright and Diamantes, (2004). Terms used were: Strategic Initiatives, Strategic Objectives, Strategies, and Goals. Some districts used a district balanced scorecard. The communication of these was part of making the district strategies pervasive according to Bryson (2004), Carver (2006), and Cook (2000). The fact that they were not on the districts' websites may mean there was a limited distribution of this part of the plan. This was a problem to the interviewees who noted that a strategic plan document that stayed on the shelf was an issue that impacted the effectiveness of the whole process. They stated that it was their role to get the strategic plan out to the whole school district and its stakeholders as well, if it was to receive the support it required to be successful.

The dynamic of Step 7 tied into the discussion of Step 2 vision, mission, and goals. The respondents noted that the design, development, and approval of objectives and strategies were effective when they were linked to the goals developed in Step 2. Effectiveness was improved because there were clear and understood linkages between each. The superintendents stated this focused the organization on the goals and aligned the work and resources of the organization to efforts for achieving the goals. The process was effective because buy-in and ownership of the plans were facilitated through a collaborative and negotiated approach. The outcome had accountability built in since these were mutually agreed to goals, objectives, and strategies versus mandated goals, objectives, and strategies that required an auditing process to determine compliance and performance.

There is insufficient data in this study to determine the prevalence of step 8, the use of compelling guidelines, in the strategic planning process for school districts reviewed. However, in the experience of the researcher there are three points of view on compelling guidelines as a strategic planning tool. First, written too stringently they become absolute rules and limit the implementers' latitude in designing and developing implementation plans that reflect the local circumstances. A school district illustrates the point when the financial insolvency of the schools dominated the strategic plan and set out stringent compelling guidelines to deal with the issue losing sight of the learning priorities for students. The second is when compelling guidelines further refine the intent of the strategic plan.

This was the case when a large school district launched a 12 year strategic plan with a goal to build over 200 new schools and facilitated implementation by setting the order in which each community received their new school by develop compelling guidelines. Many factors were considered such as how badly impacted the community was with overcrowding. The relative level of difficulty in acquiring the land and the costs involved, and the speed with which schools could be built were analyzed. The discussions were politically charged with each community arguing for priority. The shared compelling guidelines reflected the intent of the district and community that the schools most impacted for the longest time should be given priority even though they tended to be urban communities where costs were higher and the degree of difficulty was greater. In this case the compelling guidelines facilitated getting the work done since the time spent justifying one project over another was avoided and the guidelines only set the order and did not mandate specifics which gave the implementation teams latitude to deal with local conditions. The third point of view is that compelling guidelines are optional tools to be used when they serve a need such as in the second point.

Step 9 was the design and development of action plans and strategic financial plans. Step 9 was an addition to the eight steps that Hambright and Diamantes (2004) derived from their document analysis of literature on strategic planning in school districts. The concept was step 9 linked the district strategic plan to daily operations through action plans and strategic financial plans. Evidence of its use was in 44% of the strategic planning documents analyzed. Survey results confirmed the use of the Step 9 in

the districts' strategic planning processes. Developing detailed plans with timing and budgets was performed by 81.3% of the respondents. Implementation teams were formed by 64.5% of the districts as part of the process. The respondents (53.3%) indicated that vertical integration of the districts' strategic plan was accomplished by having each school prepare its own strategic plan to support the district strategic plan. Administrative departments in 60% of the districts participated in the process by preparing strategic plans. There were some school districts that reported they do not have each school (16.7%) or department (10%) prepare their strategic plans for their areas.

As seen in the preceding steps, the narrative from the survey on Step 9 provided data on the different ways the activities were done and the different names given to the activities. The No Child Left Behind Act influenced the approach and format of the plans for some districts. The review of the strategic planning documents showed that districts used the state prescribed templates for school site improvement plans for preparing school level plans. The mandated improvement plans were described by one respondent as not quite a strategic plan and not quite a budget plan but something in between (Espinosa, 2009a). Another response was that using mandated templates avoided redundancy and insured the plans were aligned to the district strategic plan. The mandated planning for some districts were only prepared for schools classified as improvement schools. This was seen as a positive because it focused the efforts and resources of the district on low performing schools. The issue for the interviewee was

that other schools in the district did not participate in the planning process and benefit from it.

An important aspect of Step 9 to the respondents was the linkage to the financial plans of the district including the annual budget. As stated by an interviewee, strategies alone were unfunded mandates to the schools. The best strategies were ineffective without linkage to the districts' financial plans. The survey showed that 45.2% of the districts prepared financial plans by consolidating school and department financial plans. Yet a majority (74.2%) of the respondents indicated that all strategies were designed with high student achievement standards and associate resource provisions were determined to be sufficient for all students to have an equal opportunity to learn. Past experience in corporate and school district strategic planning supports the respondents' perceptions that linkage to the districts' financial plans was a critical determinant of the strategic plans success. Strategic focus and alignment includes the financial resources of the district.

What was apparent was that Step 9 was part of the strategic planning process for many school districts. It acted as a bridge to the implementation of the district strategies. The activities of the step served to extend the shared aspirations and expectations of the district into operations. The step facilitated focus on district goals and aligned the organization's efforts. The step was a means for making the strategic plan a living document and influencing the organization's culture. It was a legitimate and necessary step in the school district strategic planning model.

### *The Prevalent Steps Found in the Analysis*

There were two major obstacles to answering research question one: First, the different terminology used was an issue. This was partially resolved where descriptions of the activities were part of the strategic plan documentation. The survey addressed three of the steps and avoided some of the terminology issues by probing into the activities. Second, the strategic plans that were made available on the districts' websites may only be part of the document. That made it difficult to determine if the step was used. There were insufficient data to reify or exclude the following conceptual model steps:

Step 5 Strategic Issues identification

Step 6 Prioritizing Strategic Issues

Step 8 Compelling Guideline – Parameters

With these qualifications the answer to research question one was that the analysis showed widespread use of the following steps:

Step 1 Pre-plan

Step 2 Vision – Mission – Goals

Step 3 Guiding principles – Core Beliefs – Values – Assumptions

Step 4 Environmental Scanning

Step 7 Strategic issues resolutions – Objectives – Strategies

Step 9 Action Plans and Strategic Financial Planning – Project and Program  
Budgeting

The findings of this study aligned with prior research as reviewed in Chapter 2. The practice of using different terms for the steps continued to be a challenge for determining if there was a preferred strategic planning model used in practice. The investigation of the activities in each step provided more information about the practice. As was noted in Chapter 4, respondents indicated that they performed the activities in Step 4 but wrote that they were unfamiliar with the terminology environmental scanning. The study added to the research evidence of the school districts use of Step 9, action plans and strategic financial planning, as a way district strategic plans were effectively implemented linking them to operations and budgets.

The following section is a discussion of the superintendents' perceived effectiveness of their districts' strategic planning processes.

#### Perceived Effectiveness of Strategic Planning

Research question 2: What are the perceptions of the selected school district superintendents on the use and effectiveness of strategic planning in their districts?

#### *Models in Use Differ*

All three methods supported the case that the important factor for the effectiveness of strategic planning was that the school districts adopted an organization wide model and all stakeholders were trained to be proficient in its use. The data also indicated that effective models were models that "fit" the organization's situation. The strategic planning processes for districts that were developing their first strategic plans were different from districts where the process had become part of the culture. What the

superintendents perceived as effective was the extent to which the process fostered shared aspirations, facilitated focusing the organization on the strategic goals, and aligned the efforts of everyone providing greater impact and efficiency in implementing the districts strategic plan.

### *Aspirations*

An effective strategic planning process fostered the development of shared aspirations. Shared aspirations allowed the organization to continually adjust goals and strategies adapting to the environment. Examples were: The development of a shared vision of a high achieving school district in an economically challenged community; or goals that reflected the whole child; or the moving of schools from failing to improve to high achieving. Strategic planning processes were venues for shaping shared aspirations that differed from the current realities and raising expectations.

### *Focus*

A theme that was repeated in the discourse of the superintendents was that they judged their strategic planning process effective because of how it facilitated focusing the whole system. Focus was achieved proactively when strategies and budgets were evaluated for their contribution toward achieving the strategic goals of the district. Focus was maintained when results were measured against goals and adjustments made as needed. Focus for some evolved into a culture where achieving the strategic goals were “everyone’s job here” (I3695). The effectiveness of the process for the superintendents



was when you could demonstrate there were direct results or changes with student achievement.

### *Efficiency*

The efficient utilization of the districts' resources was facilitated in effective strategic planning processes that aligned the strategies and budgets of the organizations. Goals were used to determine if a budget supported the strategies that were aligned with the goals. Those that were not were changed or eliminated. The strategic planning process facilitated the prioritizing of projects which resulted in the elimination of some projects thought to be "sacred cows" (I3425). This was particularly important in difficult economic times when budgets were being cut.

The difficulties of decision making were not reduced. But an effective strategic planning process provided a way for making them and continuing to work toward shared aspirations, staying focused on the strategic goals, and implementing the strategies efficiently and effectively. This was because, the respondents related, an effective strategic planning process had collaboration, buy-in, and the plan was in practice a living document.

### *Buy-in*

The effective strategic planning processes cultivated the buy-in of stakeholders. They knew when buy-in was achieved when they could see an alignment of thinking, actions, and funding. Different strategic planning models had different ways of facilitating this. In all approaches, buy-in meant that what was mutually agreed to was

the basis for work and measuring progress until mutually agreed to changes were made. Strategic planning processes were effective when participation of stakeholders was high. Challenges to participation were the fitness of the organization in terms of process know-how and the confidence and trust among the stakeholders. The superintendents related that they were constantly seeking ways to expand participation that incorporated stakeholders input and fostered a culture of confidence and trust.

Strategic plans were more than a source of inspiration. They were agreements and rule books for working together toward a shared vision and goals. A common theme in their narrative of this phenomenon was the linkage of the district strategic plan to the schools and to the classrooms. For some this was accomplished by the schools developing their plans to meet the district goals with direct control over most of their school budgets. The narrative related that all along the way the strategic planning process was tested to make certain all efforts were student centered and that everyone understood that “we’re children first” (I3425).

### *Collaboration*

The strategic planning process was perceived to be effective to the superintendents when it fostered going beyond working together and became a culture of collaboration. The strategic planning process was effective because it both defined roles and demonstrated the support the participants gave to each other. In some models the strategic planning process was a demonstration that the central district’s role was to coach and support when needed in a very collaborative way.

Fitness of the organization was a factor to taking on strategic planning and required time, resources, and determination to get to ready. A key finding of this study is that effectiveness not only involved strategic planning skills it also required fostering a culture of trust. The superintendents interviewed related that it took years of hard work to develop the trust of the districts' stakeholders. Superintendents understood that the strategic planning process would evolve with each cycle and that each cycle was effective and valuable because it was fit for the district at that time. Having an effective strategic planning process also meant making the hard decision to insist that participants got on board or got off the bus if they were unable to share the vision, goals, and strategies designed and developed in the collaborative process.

An effective strategic planning process for the superintendents helped deal with silos in the organizations. The strategic planning process gave functional areas a process for looking beyond being proficient in their departments and legitimized working collaboratively with others. The strategic plan was effective because it brought the district aspirations and expectations into the daily operations of the whole organization.

#### *Living Document*

The superintendents stated that the strategic plan was effective when it was a living document for the organization. Respondents that rated their strategic planning process as ineffective cited the lack of assigning responsibilities and follow-up. The strategic plan sat on the shelf till the next planning cycle. Effective processes had high levels of activity around the vision, mission, goals, values, and strategies that manifested

the vitality of the strategic plan document. The continuous referencing to the goals and strategic objectives kept the intent of the strategic plan in the forefront of each person in the organization and developed a culture of shared accountability.

### *The Effectiveness of Strategic Planning*

Superintendents perceived strategic planning to be effective in their school districts because it facilitated focus, aligned the organization and resources, facilitated the participation of the diverse stakeholders of the district, and fostered a culture of collaboration and shared accountability. Promoting the use of a strategic planning process designed for school districts is a major recommendation of this study.

### Recommendations for Education

The following are recommendation based on the analysis of the research data developed in this study; the prior research on this subject; and experience. The recommendations address the overarching theme of this research to provide information for education leaders to consider in determining the processes and tools to use in effecting system change to improve student achievement. Paraphrasing the sentiment found in the school district strategic plans and narrative of the interviewees: The first important thing in the school district is the education of all children to their full potential. The second is ensuring everyone and everything else supports the first.

1. School districts adopt a strategic planning model that fits their context, fitness, and invest time and resources to implement the process with the determination to improve it with each planning cycle.

2. School district leaders use a strategic planning process designed to facilitate meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the design of the school systems and strategies; gain buy-in throughout the school district and community; and foster trust.
3. Educators develop strategic planning process fundamentals and a standard set of terms for strategic planning in school districts to facilitate proficiency in the use of the tool, minimize confusion, and facilitate the study of successful strategies in practice.
4. Universities and colleges develop courses in strategic planning for school districts at the undergraduate and graduate levels to alleviate the issue of using ad hoc means to acquire these skills as was seen in this study.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

The following are recommendations for further study of strategic planning in school districts. The limitations encountered in this study suggest there may be alternative approaches that can deal with them successfully. Another recommendation builds on the findings of this study that a robust district strategic planning process needs corresponding school site and functional department strategic plans to facilitate bottom-up as well as top-down planning.

1. A study using descriptions of the activities and work done in each step of the strategic planning process would further the understanding of the practice. The issue of the lack of a common terminology for school

district strategic planning could be minimized by a study of the activities of strategic planning. The use of qualitative and quantitative methods for a large target population would help by determining what is done at each step of the planning process and minimize being confounded by the use of different terms, names, and labels.

2. School district organization fitness was a determinant of the design of the school districts' strategic planning processes. A study of this phenomenon and the implications for variations in strategic planning models may facilitate the adoption of the process by the school district and improve its effectiveness.
3. A study of how strategic planning models in school districts deal with diversity of stakeholders and multi-discipline systems. Using conceptual frameworks of networks and complexity theory may provide insight.
4. Study the vertical integration of the strategic planning process through all levels of the district to better understand the phenomenon of the strategic plan document becoming a living document. An in-depth study of the strategic planning process from the district, to the school, and into the classroom.
5. Study school site strategic planning processes in practice.

6. Conduct a longitudinal study of school district strategic planning in assessing the effectiveness of the process over a time period of five or more years.

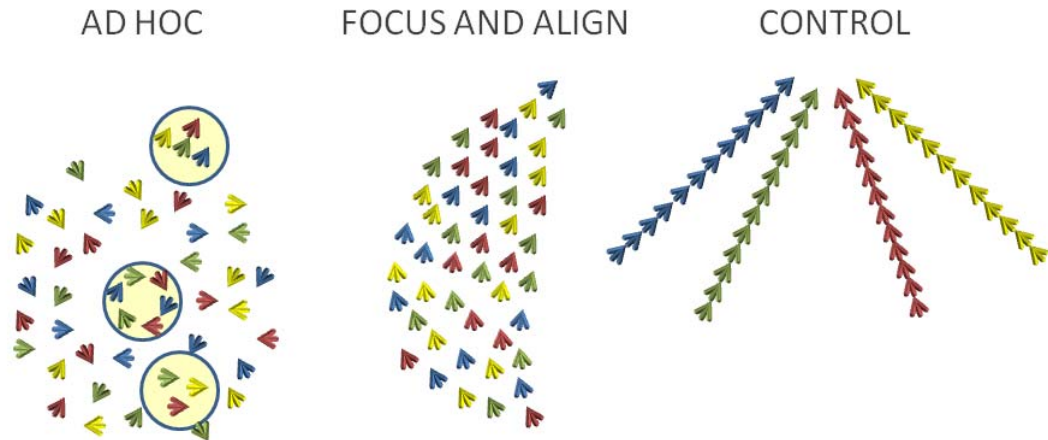
## Conclusion

### *Focus and Align*

Based on the findings of this study and experience a conclusion is that effective strategic planning processes are vital to leading school districts. School districts use effective strategic planning processes to focus and align the whole system on their shared visions and goals and improve student achievement. Because school districts are complex, diverse, and multi-disciplined the conclusion is they need tools like strategic planning models that are designed for this type of operating context. Effective strategic planning is, in the practitioners' words, a process that fosters shared aspirations and mutually agreed to expectations that are ubiquitous and that focus and align the organization so that all stakeholders can work together as illustrated in Figure 5.

A strategic planning model that uses shared aspirations and mutually agreed to expectations to focus and align the school district is more successful to the use of a central control model. The complexity of school districts requires local knowledge to design and develop effective strategies that global knowledge alone lacks. Focused and aligned organizations use shared aspirations and expectations to set direction and allow for local determination and responsibility of how to proceed. Control is when aspirations, expectations, or implementation are nonnegotiable in the planning process. This is

Figure 5. Graphics Depicting: Chaotic, Ad Hoc Behavior; Focus and Align Collaboration; and Prescriptive Control (Copyright © 2009 by William R. Espinosa)



consistent with Schmoker's (2004) argument that strategic planning models designed to facilitate central control management are detrimental to education. The use of shared aspirations and expectations is consistent with Wheatley's (1999) argument that organizations guided by these attractors can adapt to local conditions and more effectively progress to the strategic goals. The opposite extreme of control is ad hoc chaotic behavior where strategy is totally improvised and implemented locally.

Two major findings in the study support the conclusion that a focus and align model is more effective for school districts than using a model that allows ad hoc chaotic behavior. First is the importance of effective and efficient use of resources. Respondents from large school districts argued strategic planning facilitated leveraging the advantage of being large by focusing the organization on strategies that benefit the whole system.



The findings from respondents of small school districts are that the scarcity of resources because they were small and everyone wears multiple hats necessitates having a process to focus resources and efforts on the strategic priorities that critical to the whole school district.

The second argument is district leaders need the means to ensure an equitable opportunity for all students. As illustrated in Figure 5, instances of aligning and focusing occur in ad hoc situations. Experience shows that exceptional principals and teachers will emerge and those in their charge benefit from their presence. District leaders have the responsibility to facilitate the work of the exceptional and to provide for those schools and classrooms that are having difficulty to ensure all students have a fair and equitable environment to reach their full potential. The focus and align model accomplishes this task not by overly prescribing and controlling all aspects of the school system, nor by abdicating responsibility for the inequitable outcomes of a totally ad hoc situation, but by collaborating with all stakeholders to gain local and global knowledge, tap the problem solving talents of all stakeholders, and to foster buy-in.

#### *Collaboration*

School districts use strategic planning processes to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in the design and development of the school systems and strategies. As stated above there are pragmatic reasons for having stakeholders participate in the strategic planning process. A collaborative process taps into the collective input of the community and can use the input to develop better and more effective strategies. This is

consistent with the findings of Surowiecki (2005) who argued the collective input of stakeholders is rich with local and global knowledge, multiple perspectives, varied interpretations, and a phenomenon of the whole being better in solving problems than anyone individual.

A second reason found for using a collaborative strategic planning process is to facilitate buy-in to the strategic plan. Collaborative participation provides the opportunity for stakeholders to gain an in-depth understanding of all parts of the strategic plan. A process that provides forums for input and negotiation fosters organizational learning, trust, and ownership. Another compelling reason for collaboration is accountability.

With shared ownership comes shared accountability. This is a characteristic found in effective strategic planning processes. Effective strategic planning processes are mechanically proficient in linking resources and responsibilities to support implementation. Collaborative processes also foster shared expectations based on the joint work on the design of the goals, objectives, and strategies. Progress becomes a shared responsibility in that the strategies are the collective resolve of the participants. In school districts, implementation of strategies is complex and failure is complex but when all share aspirations and expectations that are compelling the focus is on the issue and not on the blame.

#### *Socially Just Strategic Planning Process*

Because school districts dispense social goods to the community social justice requires that the community have a voice in the system's design and operation which is

facilitated by a strategic planning process. This is asserted in strategic plan documents analyzed and a theme in the narrative of interviewees. However it is not universal. A strategic plan analyzed for a school district that was financially insolvent stated the priority for the district as a ward of the state was to gain financial stability quickly through the strategies prescribed. The case illustrates the point that collaboration needs to be designed into the strategic planning process with the intent of involving all stakeholders regardless of the pressures and the difficulty in working with the diversity of participants and multiplicity of disciplines.

Effective collaborative strategic planning processes provide school district leaders with opportunities to incorporate the perspectives and intents of the districts' diverse stakeholders into the forming of shared aspirations and expectations which drive the rest of the planning process. This is especially critical with issues of social justice. Stakeholders' participation in forums to negotiate the meaning of ensuring that all students are well served from the district to the classroom provides diverse perspectives and fosters creative and constructive tensions that promote fair and equitable strategies. The inclusion of parents and students extends the considerations to the personal level of practices and equitable distribution of resources. A collaborative process exceeds the mandated requirements of public hearings before the board and facilitates involving and not just informing all stakeholders.

### *School District Governance*

The findings support the conclusion that strategic planning works with board of education governance structures and with bottom-up school driven structures. Strategic planning processes that are designed to focus and align the school district and not prescribe work well going in both up the organization and down the organization. Enabling operations to creatively design objectives, strategies, and action plans to achieve the districts' strategic goals and the district responds by aligning itself to support operations is critical. In this way the strategic planning process facilitates the bridging from district to classrooms by transitioning from district strategic plan to daily operations. Strategic planning does this by cultivating a strategic perspective, fostering a collaborative culture, and building trust. Strategic planning is an effective way of giving voice to all that are part of the system and promote shared accountability.

### *Fitness*

Finally, the effectiveness of school district strategic planning is dependent on fitness. Fitness is considered in three ways: the tool, the maturity of the process, and the competency of the participants. The first consideration is the fitness of the tool to the work of strategic planning. The combined steps required for a strategic planning model are unique to the task. The nine step strategic planning model described in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1 encompassed most of the models analyzed in this study. Some school districts posted one year plans and budgets as the districts' strategic plans. There are districts that use mandated district improvement plans. These include use of templates

prepared by governing agencies. Respondents noted that improvement plans are neither annual budgets nor strategic plans. One interviewee stated that NCLB mandated improvement plans are only a slice of the child whereas the strategic planning process addresses the whole child.

The second consideration is the fitness of the school districts' strategic planning process. A strategic planning process takes years to develop and mature. The process matures with each planning cycle. The model, terminology, and expectations are better understood by the participants. The model is refined and made fit for the organization and user friendly. Leaders and process facilitators should consider how to leverage the existing process. This was a predicament for superintendents that inherited processes and strategic plans that were developed prior to their appointments. Those superintendents that adapted to the existing process had to learn the terminology, model steps, and protocols. They felt initially staying with the strategic direction of the district minimized anxiety from the change of leadership. Those that reported changing the strategic planning process had to invest significant time and resources for the organization to make the transition.

The third consideration is the fitness of the participants. Prior research shows that ineffective strategic planning processes are due in part to the lack of training and experience (McHenry & Achilles, 2002). A strategic planning process is more effective when the participants are trained in the district's model and process and is critical for success. From a wider perspective of educating leaders or researching best practices in

strategic planning the predicament is it leads back to the start of this study. Determining what should be taught to future educators requires resolution. The nine step strategic planning model furthers the discourse and more needs to be understood about the activities that compose each step and how fitness needs to be considered.

One option is the joining of educators and outside facilitators to develop and standardize a school district strategic planning model. Other industries use this approach when a consensus is reached among practitioners that the industry would benefit as a whole from standardizing. The initiative in education is to better serve the global responsibility of educators to improve student achievement and not just design a fancier model. The development of strategic planning fundamentals for school districts allows for variations in the models from basic to advanced models depending on the fitness and context of the school district. Standardizing school district strategic planning models would improve the practice, allow for continuity geographically and over time, and allow the development of undergraduate, graduate, and professional training classes. School district educators, facilitators, and stakeholders can be better equipped and prepared to design with intent organizations and strategies to focus and align the district and schools to effectively, fairly, and equitably use resources to educate all students to their full potentials.

## APPENDIX

### A. School Districts

The target population for this study was comprised of all the U. S. school districts with student enrollments of 25,000 or greater. The following list was from the 2006-NCES data downloaded from the website on August 11, 2008.

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CITY	ST	STUDENTS
ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT	ANCHORAGE	AK	49,714
BALDWIN COUNTY	BAY MINETTE	AL	25,900
BIRMINGHAM CITY	BIRMINGHAM	AL	30,698
JEFFERSON COUNTY	BIRMINGHAM	AL	35,834
MOBILE COUNTY	MOBILE	AL	65,615
MONTGOMERY COUNTY	MONTGOMERY	AL	32,523
LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT	LITTLE ROCK	AR	26,462
CHANDLER UNIFIED DISTRICT	CHANDLER	AZ	31,879
GILBERT UNIFIED DISTRICT	GILBERT	AZ	37,641
MESA UNIFIED DISTRICT	MESA	AZ	74,626
PEORIA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT	PEORIA	AZ	37,773
DEER VALLEY UNIFIED DISTRICT	PHOENIX	AZ	34,802
PARADISE VALLEY UNIFIED DISTRICT	PHOENIX	AZ	34,763
PHOENIX UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT	PHOENIX	AZ	25,010
SCOTTSDALE UNIFIED DISTRICT	PHOENIX	AZ	26,936
TUCSON UNIFIED DISTRICT	TUCSON	AZ	60,557
ANAHEIM UNION HIGH	ANAHEIM	CA	33,112
BAKERSFIELD CITY	BAKERSFIELD	CA	27,890
KERN UNION HIGH	BAKERSFIELD	CA	35,394
SAN JUAN UNIFIED	CARMICHAEL	CA	48,325
CHINO VALLEY UNIFIED	CHINO	CA	33,693
CHULA VISTA ELEMENTARY	CHULA VISTA	CA	26,472
SWEETWATER UNION HIGH	CHULA VISTA	CA	41,865
CLOVIS UNIFIED	CLOVIS	CA	36,378
COMPTON UNIFIED	COMPTON	CA	30,233
MT. DIABLO UNIFIED	CONCORD	CA	35,880
ELK GROVE UNIFIED	ELK GROVE	CA	60,735
FONTANA UNIFIED	FONTANA	CA	41,930
FREMONT UNIFIED	FREMONT	CA	32,121
FRESNO UNIFIED	FRESNO	CA	79,046
GARDEN GROVE UNIFIED	GARDEN GROVE	CA	49,574
GLENDALE UNIFIED	GLENDALE	CA	28,002
IRVINE UNIFIED	IRVINE	CA	25,496
DESERT SANDS UNIFIED	LA QUINTA	CA	27,565
ANTELOPE VALLEY UNION HIGH	LANCASTER	CA	25,312
LODI UNIFIED	LODI	CA	30,911
LONG BEACH UNIFIED	LONG BEACH	CA	93,589
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED	LOS ANGELES	CA	727,319



(continued)

<b>SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>STUDENTS</b>
SADDLEBACK VALLEY UNIFIED	MISSION VIEJO	CA	34,592
MONTEBELLO UNIFIED	MONTEBELLO	CA	35,286
MORENO VALLEY UNIFIED	MORENO VALLEY	CA	37,019
CORONA-NORCO UNIFIED	NORCO	CA	47,510
OAKLAND UNIFIED	OAKLAND	CA	48,135
ONTARIO-MONTCLAIR ELEMENTARY	ONTARIO	CA	25,376
ORANGE UNIFIED	ORANGE	CA	30,901
PLACENTIA-YORBA LINDA UNIFIED	PLACENTIA	CA	26,757
POMONA UNIFIED	POMONA	CA	33,294
POWAY UNIFIED	POWAY	CA	32,645
RIALTO UNIFIED	RIALTO	CA	30,715
WEST CONTRA COSTA UNIFIED	RICHMOND	CA	32,197
RIVERSIDE UNIFIED	RIVERSIDE	CA	43,052
SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED	SACRAMENTO	CA	50,408
SAN BERNARDINO CITY UNIFIED	SAN BERNARDINO	CA	58,661
SAN DIEGO UNIFIED	SAN DIEGO	CA	132,482
SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED	SAN FRANCISCO	CA	56,236
EAST SIDE UNION HIGH	SAN JOSE	CA	25,817
SAN JOSE UNIFIED	SAN JOSE	CA	31,646
CAPISTRANO UNIFIED	SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO	CA	51,245
SANTA ANA UNIFIED	SANTA ANA	CA	59,310
STOCKTON UNIFIED	STOCKTON	CA	38,936
TEMECULA VALLEY UNIFIED	TEMECULA	CA	27,298
TORRANCE UNIFIED	TORRANCE	CA	25,428
VISALIA UNIFIED	VISALIA	CA	26,105
VISTA UNIFIED	VISTA	CA	26,207
ADAMS-ARAPAHOE 28J	AURORA	CO	33,301
BOULDER VALLEY RE 2	BOULDER	CO	27,933
DOUGLAS COUNTY RE 1	CASTLE ROCK	CO	48,041
COLORADO SPRINGS 11	COLORADO SPRINGS	CO	30,959
DENVER COUNTY 1	DENVER	CO	72,312
POUDRE R-1	FORT COLLINS	CO	25,215
JEFFERSON COUNTY R-1	GOLDEN	CO	86,332
CHERRY CREEK 5	GREENWOOD VILLAGE	CO	48,573
ADAMS 12 FIVE STAR SCHOOLS	THORNTON	CO	37,591
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUB SCHLS	WASHINGTON	DC	59,616

(continued)			
SCHOOL DISTRICT	CITY	ST	STUDENTS
POLK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	BARTOW	FL	89,443
MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	BRADENTON	FL	42,370
VOLUSIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	DELAND	FL	65,627
BROWARD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FORT LAUDERDALE	FL	271,630
LEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FORT MYERS	FL	75,634
ST. LUCIE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FORT PIERCE	FL	36,201
OKALOOSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FORT WALTON BEACH	FL	31,011
ALACHUA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	GAINESVILLE	FL	29,109
CLAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	GREEN COVE SPRINGS	FL	34,169
DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	JACKSONVILLE	FL	126,662
OSCEOLA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	KISSIMMEE	FL	49,798
PASCO COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	LAND O' LAKES	FL	62,768
PINELLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	LARGO	FL	112,174
DADE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MIAMI	FL	362,070
SANTA ROSA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MILTON	FL	25,188
COLLIER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	NAPLES	FL	43,292
MARION COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	OCALA	FL	42,035
ORANGE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ORLANDO	FL	175,609
BAY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	PANAMA CITY	FL	27,618
ESCAMBIA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	PENSACOLA	FL	43,460
ST. JOHNS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SAINT AUGUSTINE	FL	25,757
SEMINOLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SANFORD	FL	67,530
SARASOTA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	SARASOTA	FL	41,890
LEON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	TALLAHASSEE	FL	32,327
HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	TAMPA	FL	193,757
LAKE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	TAVARES	FL	38,060
BREVARD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	VIERA	FL	75,233
PALM BEACH COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	WEST PALM BEACH	FL	174,935
ATLANTA CITY	ATLANTA	GA	50,770
FULTON COUNTY	ATLANTA	GA	81,100
RICHMOND COUNTY	AUGUSTA	GA	33,910
CHEROKEE COUNTY	CANTON	GA	33,183
MUSCOGEE COUNTY	COLUMBUS	GA	33,502
FORSYTH COUNTY	CUMMING	GA	25,593
DEKALB COUNTY	DECATUR	GA	102,310
CLAYTON COUNTY	JONESBORO	GA	52,657
GWINNETT COUNTY	LAWRENCEVILLE	GA	144,598

(continued)

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CITY	ST	STUDENTS
BIBB COUNTY	MACON	GA	25,253
COBB COUNTY	MARIETTA	GA	106,724
HENRY COUNTY	MCDONOUGH	GA	35,367
CHATHAM COUNTY	SAVANNAH	GA	34,021
HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	HONOLULU	HI	184,925
DES MOINES INDEPENDENT COMM SD	DES MOINES	IA	30,766
BOISE INDEPENDENT DISTRICT	BOISE	ID	25,805
MERIDIAN JOINT DISTRICT	MERIDIAN	ID	30,582
INDIAN PRAIRIE CUSD 204	AURORA	IL	28,510
CITY OF CHICAGO SD 299	CHICAGO	IL	420,982
SD U-46	ELGIN	IL	39,656
ROCKFORD SD 205	ROCKFORD	IL	29,145
FORT WAYNE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS	FORT WAYNE	IN	31,597
INDIANAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS	INDIANAPOLIS	IN	38,142
SHAWNEE MISSION PUB SCH	SHAWNEE MISSION	KS	28,523
WICHITA	WICHITA	KS	48,155
FAYETTE COUNTY	LEXINGTON	KY	33,873
JEFFERSON COUNTY	LOUISVILLE	KY	92,090
EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH SCH BOARD	BATON ROUGE	LA	49,945
SAINT TAMMANY PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	COVINGTON	LA	34,408
LAFAYETTE PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	LAFAYETTE	LA	30,731
CALCASIEU PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	LAKE CHARLES	LA	31,877
JEFFERSON PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	MARRERO	LA	41,625
CADDO PARISH SCHOOL BOARD	SHREVEPORT	LA	43,935
BOSTON	BOSTON	MA	57,349
SPRINGFIELD	SPRINGFIELD	MA	25,177
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	ANNAPOLIS	MD	73,565
BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	BALTIMORE	MD	87,643
BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	BALTIMORE	MD	107,043
HARFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	BEL AIR	MD	40,212
HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	ELLCOTT CITY	MD	48,596
FREDERICK COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	FREDERICK	MD	39,672
CHARLES COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	LAPLATA	MD	26,406
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	ROCKVILLE	MD	139,398
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	UPPER MARLBORO	MD	133,325
CARROLL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	WESTMINSTER	MD	28,940

(continued)d

<b>SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>STUDENTS</b>
DETROIT CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	DETROIT	MI	131,508
UTICA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS	STERLING HEIGHTS	MI	29,698
ANOKA-HENNEPIN PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST.	COON RAPIDS	MN	41,603
MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST.	MINNEAPOLIS	MN	38,538
ROSEMOUNT-APPLE VALLEY-EAGAN	ROSEMOUNT	MN	28,261
ST. PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT	SAINT PAUL	MN	41,274
KANSAS CITY 33	KANSAS CITY	MO	34,700
ST. LOUIS CITY	SAINT LOUIS	MO	40,093
DE SOTO CO SCHOOL DIST	HERNANDO	MS	27,166
JACKSON PUBLIC SCHOOL DIST	JACKSON	MS	32,403
BUNCOMBE COUNTY SCHOOLS	ASHEVILLE	NC	25,533
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS	CHARLOTTE	NC	124,005
DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS	DURHAM	NC	31,719
CUMBERLAND COUNTY SCHOOLS	FAYETTEVILLE	NC	53,201
GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS	GASTONIA	NC	32,498
GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS	GREENSBORO	NC	68,951
UNION COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	MONROE	NC	31,580
WAKE COUNTY SCHOOLS	RALEIGH	NC	120,996
JOHNSTON COUNTY SCHOOLS	SMITHFIELD	NC	27,624
FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS	WINSTON SALEM	NC	50,165
LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	LINCOLN	NE	32,505
OMAHA PUBLIC SCHOOLS	OMAHA	NE	46,686
JERSEY CITY	JERSEY CITY	NJ	29,288
NEWARK	NEWARK	NJ	41,857
PATERSON	PATERSON	NJ	25,308
ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS	ALBUQUERQUE	NM	94,022
CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	LAS VEGAS	NV	293,948
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	RENO	NV	64,200
BUFFALO CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	BUFFALO	NY	36,706
NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	NEW YORK	NY	1,014,058
ROCHESTER CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	ROCHESTER	NY	34,096
YONKERS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	YONKERS	NY	25,022
AKRON CITY	AKRON	OH	27,308
CINCINNATI CITY	CINCINNATI	OH	36,201
CLEVELAND MUNICIPAL CITY	CLEVELAND	OH	58,784
COLUMBUS CITY	COLUMBUS	OH	58,961

(continued)

<b>SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>STUDENTS</b>
TOLEDO CITY	TOLEDO	OH	30,423
OKLAHOMA CITY	OKLAHOMA CITY	OK	40,322
TULSA	TULSA	OK	41,568
BEAVERTON SD 48J	BEAVERTON	OR	36,535
PORTLAND SD 1J	PORTLAND	OR	44,538
SALEM-KEIZER SD 24J	SALEM	OR	35,863
PHILADELPHIA CITY SD	PHILADELPHIA	PA	183,188
PITTSBURGH SD	PITTSBURGH	PA	32,255
PROVIDENCE	PROVIDENCE	RI	25,284
CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	CHARLESTON	SC	42,970
HORRY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	CONWAY	SC	35,218
GREENVILLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	GREENVILLE	SC	67,551
BERKELEY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MONCKS CORNER	SC	27,649
HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	CHATTANOOGA	TN	40,800
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOLS	CLARKSVILLE	TN	27,008
WILLIAMSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	FRANKLIN	TN	25,791
SUMNER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	GALLATIN	TN	25,552
KNOX COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	KNOXVILLE	TN	54,427
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MEMPHIS	TN	120,275
SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MEMPHIS	TN	45,922
RUTHERFORD COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	MURFREESBORO	TN	33,294
NASHVILLE-DAVIDSON COUNTY SD	NASHVILLE	TN	72,713
ALIEF ISD	ALIEF	TX	47,595
AMARILLO ISD	AMARILLO	TX	30,061
ARLINGTON ISD	ARLINGTON	TX	63,397
AUSTIN ISD	AUSTIN	TX	81,057
BROWNSVILLE ISD	BROWNSVILLE	TX	48,260
CARROLLTON-FARMERS BRANCH ISD	CARROLLTON	TX	26,231
CONROE ISD	CONROE	TX	42,613
CORPUS CHRISTI ISD	CORPUS CHRISTI	TX	39,101
DALLAS ISD	DALLAS	TX	160,969
EDINBURG CISD	EDINBURG	TX	27,424
EL PASO ISD	EL PASO	TX	63,811
SOCORRO ISD	EL PASO	TX	36,842
YSLETA ISD	EL PASO	TX	46,115
FORT WORTH ISD	FORT WORTH	TX	80,336

(continued)

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CITY	ST	STUDENTS
GARLAND ISD	GARLAND	TX	57,425
ALDINE ISD	HOUSTON	TX	58,093
CYPRESS-FAIRBANKS ISD	HOUSTON	TX	86,256
HOUSTON ISD	HOUSTON	TX	210,292
SPRING BRANCH ISD	HOUSTON	TX	32,701
SPRING ISD	HOUSTON	TX	31,389
HUMBLE ISD	HUMBLE	TX	29,706
IRVING ISD	IRVING	TX	32,677
KATY ISD	KATY	TX	48,247
KELLER ISD	KELLER	TX	25,873
KILLEEN ISD	KILLEEN	TX	34,584
KLEIN ISD	KLEIN	TX	39,432
UNITED ISD	LAREDO	TX	35,697
CLEAR CREEK ISD	LEAGUE CITY	TX	35,232
LEWISVILLE ISD	LEWISVILLE	TX	47,317
LUBBOCK ISD	LUBBOCK	TX	28,298
MANSFIELD ISD	MANSFIELD	TX	25,623
MESQUITE ISD	MESQUITE	TX	35,615
ECTOR COUNTY ISD	ODESSA	TX	26,060
PASADENA ISD	PASADENA	TX	49,227
PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD	PHARR	TX	28,088
PLANO ISD	PLANO	TX	53,238
RICHARDSON ISD	RICHARDSON	TX	35,088
ROUND ROCK ISD	ROUND ROCK	TX	37,847
NORTH EAST ISD	SAN ANTONIO	TX	59,817
NORTHSIDE ISD	SAN ANTONIO	TX	78,711
SAN ANTONIO ISD	SAN ANTONIO	TX	56,422
FORT BEND ISD	SUGAR LAND	TX	66,104
ALPINE DISTRICT	AMERICAN FORK	UT	55,389
DAVIS DISTRICT	FARMINGTON	UT	61,736
WEBER DISTRICT	OGDEN	UT	29,140
GRANITE DISTRICT	SALT LAKE CITY	UT	67,345
JORDAN DISTRICT	SANDY	UT	77,111
LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	ASHBURN	VA	47,306
CHESAPEAKE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	CHESAPEAKE	VA	40,336
CHESTERFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	CHESTERFIELD	VA	57,239

(continued)

<b>SCHOOL DISTRICT</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>ST</b>	<b>STUDENTS</b>
FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	FALLS CHURCH	VA	163,753
PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	MANASSAS	VA	68,458
NEWPORT NEWS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	NEWPORT NEWS	VA	33,046
NORFOLK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	NORFOLK	VA	36,014
HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	RICHMOND	VA	47,747
STAFFORD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	STAFFORD	VA	26,178
VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS	VIRGINIA BEACH	VA	74,303
KENT SCHOOL DIST 415	KENT	WA	27,415
SEATTLE SCHOOL DIST 1	SEATTLE	WA	46,085
SPOKANE SCH DIST 81	SPOKANE	WA	30,999
TACOMA SCH DIST 10	TACOMA	WA	31,820
EVERGREEN SCHOOL DIST 114	VANCOUVER	WA	25,576
MILWAUKEE	MILWAUKEE	WI	92,395
KANAWHA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT	CHARLESTON	WV	27,999
END			

## B. Survey

Letter of invitation to participate and Questionnaire Form follow.



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Dear Superintendent,

As part of my doctoral research at Loyola Marymount University, I am conducting a survey that investigates the use of strategic planning and the perceptions of its effectiveness in school districts with 25,000 or more students. The following survey focuses on some of the specific steps in a strategic planning process and the perceptions of superintendents on the use of strategic planning in their districts.

I appreciate your completing the following questionnaire. Your participation is voluntary. Please indicate this by completing and signing the attached Consent Form and returning it in the pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Your responses will remain confidential and no identifying information will be made public.

Please complete the survey using one of the following methods.

A. Paper questionnaire

1. Complete the attached questionnaire in black ink or lead pencil.
2. Please sign the attached Consent Form
3. Mail the questionnaire and Consent Form in the pre-addressed, postage-paid, return envelope.

B. Online questionnaire

1. Enter in your web browser. Sorry it is not simpler, but it must be exactly:  
[www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=WNYgU98dC6mvIFaLXUpJAA\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=WNYgU98dC6mvIFaLXUpJAA_3d_3d)
2. Please sign the attached Consent Form
3. Mail the Consent Form in the pre-addressed, postage-paid, return envelope.

If you have any questions regarding the research, please contact: Bill Espinosa (Researcher) 714-389-3159 or e-mail [wespinos@lion.lmu.edu](mailto:wespinos@lion.lmu.edu); Dr. Mary McCullough (Faculty Advisor) 310-338-7312 or e-mail [mmccullo@lmu.edu](mailto:mmccullo@lmu.edu); Dr. John Carfora (Chair IRB) 310-338-4599 or e-mail [john.carfora@lmu.edu](mailto:john.carfora@lmu.edu).

This study builds on the research of others that found that strategic planning needs to be better understood in practice in school districts across the U. S. Your thoughtfulness and candor is invaluable to this understanding. Thank for your contribution it is appreciated.

William Espinosa (Researcher)  
Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California

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**NOTE: QUESTIONNAIRE IS PRINTED ON BOTH SIDES! (THINKING GREEN)**



1. Respondent contact information:

Phone Number

E-mail

**PART I**  
**SCHOOL DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

Please check where appropriate.

2. Does your school district currently have a strategic plan?

- NO: The School District is not involved in a formal strategic planning process. Please proceed to Item #45 on the last page of this questionnaire.
- YES: Please continue to Item #3.

For each of the statements that follow, please indicate the extent you do or do not perform each of the steps by checking in the appropriate box.

The response scale is as follows:

1. Not at all
2. Some aspects
3. Some part of most aspects
4. Almost all aspects
5. Extensively

VISION/MISSION	1. Not at all 2. Some aspects 3. Some part of most aspects 4. Almost all aspects 5. Extensively
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Which of the following were part of the district's strategic planning process?

3. Developed, revised, or enhanced the district's Vision?  1  2  3  4  5

4. Reviewed, developed or clarified the district's Mission?  1  2  3  4  5

5. To what extent did the following participate in the Vision/Mission step?

a. District staff  1  2  3  4  5

b. Principals/Site Administrators  1  2  3  4  5

c. Teachers  1  2  3  4  5

d. Parents  1  2  3  4  5

e. Community members, governmental representatives  1  2  3  4  5

f. Students  1  2  3  4  5

6. Please describe how the Vision/Mission step was carried out in your district.



**ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING**

- 1. Not at all
- 2. Some aspects
- 3. Some part of most aspects
- 4. Almost all aspects
- 5. Extensively

Which of the following were part of the strategic planning process?

7. Analyzed pertinent data to determine status, current trends, and identify issues for:

a. Internal situation

1  2  3  4  5

b. External situation (e.g. legislation, demographic trends)

1  2  3  4  5

8. Analyzed the alignment of the Vision and Mission with stakeholders' expectations to identify differences.

1  2  3  4  5

9. Conducted an analysis to identify gaps in the value created by the school district using:

a. Organizational criteria

1  2  3  4  5

b. Stakeholder criteria

1  2  3  4  5

10. Conducted an analysis of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

1  2  3  4  5

11. Conducted a financial performance and cost trend analysis to understand variances to the current budget.

1  2  3  4  5

12. Analyzed gaps in the equitable distribution of resources.

1  2  3  4  5

13. Analyzed external factors, trends, and pending events (e.g. new legislation, state budget cuts, demographic trends, etc.) to create plausible future scenarios for analysis.

1  2  3  4  5

14. Communicated findings.

1  2  3  4  5

**ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING**  
(Continued)

- 1. Not at all
- 2. Some aspects
- 3. Some part of most aspects
- 4. Almost all aspects
- 5. Extensively

15. To what extent did the following participate in the Environmental Scan step?

- |  |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. District staff                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| b. Principals/Site Administrators                  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| c. Teachers  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| d. Parents   | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| e. Community members, governmental representatives | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |
| f. Students  | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 |

16. Please describe how the Environmental Scanning step was carried out in your district.



**ACTION PLANS & STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING**

- 1. Not at all
- 2. Some aspects
- 3. Some part of most aspects
- 4. Almost all aspects
- 5. Extensively

Which of the following were part of the strategic planning process?

17. Developed detailed plans that specify the work required to implement strategies with timing and associated budgets.  1  2  3  4  5

18. Organized implementation teams to develop action plans with associated budgets for strategy implementation.  1  2  3  4  5

19. Conducted orientations of the final District Strategic Plan for:

a. Schools' staffs  1  2  3  4  5

b. District's staff  1  2  3  4  5

c. Students' Parents  1  2  3  4  5

20. Each school developed its own strategic plan with associated strategic financial plan to support it.  1  2  3  4  5

21. Each district department developed a strategic plan with associated strategic financial plan.  1  2  3  4  5

22. Prepared a consolidated district strategic financial plan using the schools' and district departments' strategic financial plans.  1  2  3  4  5

23. Assessed that all strategies are designed with high Student achievement standards and associated resource provisions were sufficient for all students to have an equal opportunity to learn.  1  2  3  4  5

24. To what extent did the following participate in this Action Plan and Strategic Financial Planning step?

a. District staff  1  2  3  4  5

b. Principals/Site Administrators  1  2  3  4  5

c. Teachers  1  2  3  4  5

d. Parents  1  2  3  4  5

e. Community members, governmental representatives  1  2  3  4  5

f. Students  1  2  3  4  5

**ACTION PLANS & STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING**  
(Continued)

1. Not at all
2. Some aspects
3. Some part of most aspects
4. Almost all aspects
5. Extensively

25. Please describe how the Action Plan and Strategic Financial Planning steps were done in your district.

**PART II**

**SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**

As superintendent, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
Please indicate by using the following scale.

The response scale is:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided or neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree



**As superintendent, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Please indicate by checking the appropriate box.

- 1. Strongly disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. Undecided or neutral
- 4. Agree
- 5. Strongly agree

26. The strategic planning process developed new leaders throughout the school district.  1  2  3  4  5

27. The strategic planning process was effective in facilitating broad-based stakeholder participation in developing the plan.  1  2  3  4  5

28. The school district strategic planning process enabled active participation by business and community members.  1  2  3  4  5

29. The strategic planning process facilitated an effective collaboration of all participants to design shared Strategies.  1  2  3  4  5

30. The strategic planning process aligned and focused the whole organization to the district's Strategies.  1  2  3  4  5

31. The strategic planning process fostered shared accountability.  1  2  3  4  5

32. The strategic plan guides the decision making processes for all school district administrators.  1  2  3  4  5

33. The strategic planning process was a critical part of improving student achievement in the district.  1  2  3  4  5

34. The strategic planning process affected the efficient and effective utilization of the district's resources.  1  2  3  4  5

35. The strategic planning process was effective in aligning and increasing cohesiveness in district and school operations.  1  2  3  4  5

36. School and district educational leaders valued the strategic planning process as important and worthwhile.  1  2  3  4  5

37. The strategic planning process facilitated developing strategies for achieving high standards for all students.  1  2  3  4  5

38. Strategic planning was a valuable process for the whole school district.  1  2  3  4  5



**PART II**  
**SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**  
(Continued)

- 1. Very low
- 2. Low
- 3. Neutral
- 4. High
- 5. Very High

39. As superintendent, I rate the overall effectiveness of the school district strategic planning process as:  1  2  3  4  5  
My primary reason for this rating is:

40. Is the school district legally required to develop and submit a strategic plan/long range plan?

No:  1

Yes:  2

41. Are school site strategic plans developed as part of the district strategic planning process?

No:  1

Yes:  2

42. Are district functional department strategic plans developed as part of the district strategic planning process?

No:  1

Yes:  2

43. Was the current district strategic plan developed under your leadership as superintendent?

No:  1

Yes:  2

**44. Would you be willing to be interviewed by phone by the researcher regarding your personal experience with the district strategic planning process?**

Phone Number

No:  1

E-mail

Yes:  2



**PART III**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

45. What are the number of years you have served as superintendent of this district?:

Less than 1 year  1

1 - 2 years  2

3 - 5 years  5

6 - 8 years  8

More than 8 years  9

46. What are the number of years you have been in the field of education?

1 - 5 years  5

6 - 10 years  10

11 - 15 years  15

16 - 20 years  20

More than 21 years  21

47. What is your experience and training in the strategic planning process? Please check all that applies.

I have completed a college course in strategic planning.  1

I facilitated or worked on a strategic planning team.  2

I utilized a facilitator in the strategic planning process.  3

Other, please describe   4

**NOTE:** If you are completing this survey on behalf of the superintendent, please identify your position in the school district:

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INSIGHTS THEY ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED!**

Please return your survey by February 15, 2009 by mail:

**William R. Espinosa**  
**23 Carpenteria**  
**Irvine, CA 92602-1081**  
**- or - by E-mail:**  
**wespinos@lion.lmu.edu**

### C. Interview Protocol

I used semi-structured interviews (Hatch, 2002; Richards & Morse, 2004/2007; Silverman, 2006) in person or by phone with six superintendents. The goal of these interviews was to gather data that helps identify the steps and activities of the practice of use strategic planning in school districts. The data was the narrative of the superintendents about their experiences with using strategic planning and their perceptions of its effectiveness. The questionnaire was open-ended questions along three main themes: The steps that were used in the districts strategic planning process; the effectiveness of the strategic planning process; and the positive aspects of using strategic planning and changes to the process that would enhance the experience and effectiveness of the process.

Question 1: Would you please share the story of how the district used strategic planning? What happened at each step in the process? What were the key activities?

Who was involved, how did they participate, what did they contribute, what do you think they got from it? What was your role in the process?

What surprised you about the process?

Question 2: What is your perception of the effectiveness of the district's strategic planning process? What are some examples?

Question 3: In your opinion what were the positive outcomes of the process: What changes would you make to the process?

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