

CREATING THE

Future



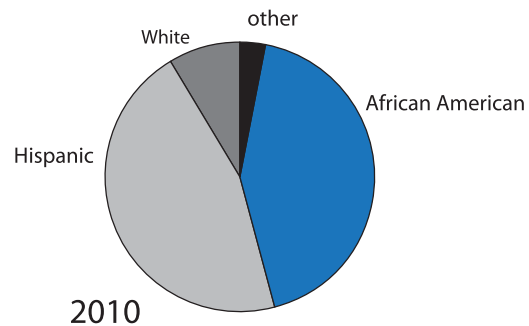
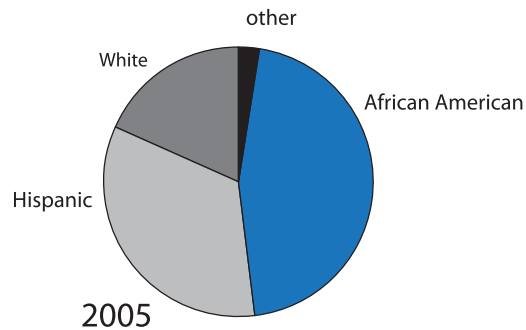
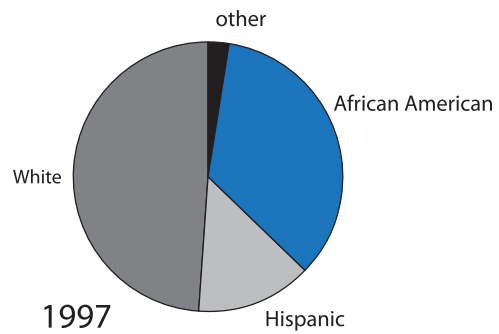
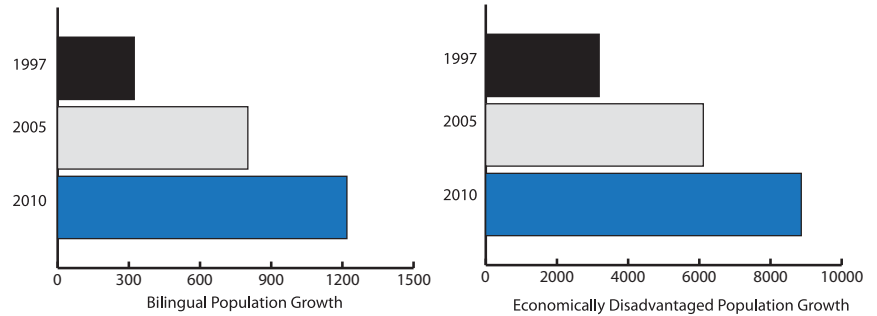
Duncanville ISD

A CALL FOR CHANGE

Duncanville ISD has a proud tradition as the leading school district in southwest Dallas County. While the world, and Duncanville itself, have changed dramatically over the past 30 years, our commitment to excellence and providing strong academic, extra- and co-curricular programs has stayed the same. We are proud of our numerous successes, including local, state, and national recognitions. Duncanville ISD schools continue to achieve high scores on state tests, earning Recognized and Exemplary ratings from the Texas Education Agency.

But this is not enough. In the past decade alone we have witnessed a number of technological advancements that have impacted our lives with the same force as the industrial revolution. This new digital era of texting, iphones, Google, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter make information readily available to everyone. Today, unlike in previous generations, the more knowledge you share, the greater your following and value.

This is the world in which Duncanville ISD must prepare students to thrive, and we realize that doing so will require us to accept change and transform our schools.





OUR SYSTEMIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 2004 the district embraced the “Engaging Hearts and Minds” concept. At the time, we didn’t realize the full impact that one small phrase would have on our organization. Since then, the district has been focused on a better understanding of engagement, using it as a basis upon which to build a new vision that clearly defines who we are.



Equipped with a strong set of district core beliefs and a true grasp of engagement, the district formed in April 2008 a Strategic Design Team comprised of parents, community members, teachers, and administrators. This group was challenged to develop a very concise set of strategies that would lead the entire organization in a unified direction toward the vision of engagement. Over the course of 18 months, the team met seven times to research, design, and develop five Strategic Aspirations, based on the District Core Beliefs, and the Vision of the Learner. Their work was comprehensive and included book studies, school site visits, community focus groups, and student panel interviews.

This document is a result of their work that includes the five Strategic Aspirations and the Vision of the Learner.



District Core Beliefs

In August of 2007 the district embraced five core beliefs. These beliefs, along with the Vision of the Learner, are the district’s sustaining directional system and compass. We look to these beliefs daily to guide every conversation, decision, and action we pursue. Below is a summary of Duncanville ISD’s Core Beliefs.

Purposeful Engagement

Purposeful engagement is the most effective long-term way to learn and is our primary responsibility. We are all responsible for creating engaging learning opportunities, experiences, and challenges for every student, every day through relevant and meaningful work.

Quality Teachers

Teachers are the single most important influence on the quality of learning; therefore, we commit great energy and resources to recruiting, hiring, developing, and retaining the most effective teachers.

Collaboration and Continuous Improvement

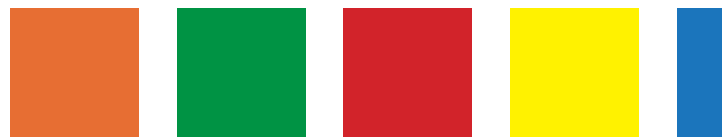
We are a learning organization with a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. High expectations for all students and staff are our standard.

Valuing Each Individual

Each person is unique and of infinite value; therefore, we embrace and celebrate diversity. We treat every person with dignity, equity, respect, and trust.

Schools Impacting Community

Quality schools encourage and sustain quality of life, freedom, democracy, and economic growth. We invite and encourage interactive and engaging partnerships among students, parents, community members, businesses, and governmental and educational institutions.



ENGAGING STUDENTS – WHY IT’S OUR FOCUS



higher levels of learning and understanding, as well as the ability for students to demonstrate they have the knowledge and skills required. Truly engaging the hearts and minds of children is the best way to prepare them, not only to pass accountability tests, but much more importantly to instill the love of learning and prepare them to be good and productive citizens.

As greater accountability standards are placed on schools, some districts “buckle down” on the basics and spend more time on direct instruction (lecture) and worksheets. According to Sir Ken Robinson (*Out of Our Minds*), “The essential problem is that many governments and organizations seem to think that the best way to prepare for the future is to do better what we did in the past – just to do more of it and to a higher standard. The fact is we have to do something else.” He goes on to say that he believes innovation and creativity are the essential competitive advantages

Anyone visiting classrooms in America today will usually see teachers at the front of the room working, lecturing, and demonstrating a skill. Today’s schools were established and modeled after an industrial factory. They were designed to efficiently (assembly line) produce a product (students) that would better the community (become workers in the nation’s growing industrial complex). This model is no longer effective because of technological advancements.

learn things adults want them to learn. If educators want students to work hard and be persistent, they must find ways of designing work that students believe to be worth doing.” Although students are required to attend school, their attention, commitment, and effort cannot be mandated – it must be earned by the relationships built and the quality, relevance, and meaning of the learning experiences.

“Children, and adults, learn best when they want to achieve some end that is not possible without developing new skills, new understandings, new attitudes, and new habits of mind.” - (Schlechy, *Inventing Better Schools*, pp. 65-67.)

Phillip Schlechy (*Inventing Better Schools*) directly addresses the transformation needed in schools: “The reason America’s schoolchildren are not learning what we want them to learn is that in too many instances they are being asked to do things they do not see as worth doing in order to

So what does this mean for Duncanville ISD? In a world where information is readily available to everyone, it is imperative that we see our primary task as designing engaging learning experiences and challenges that students find meaningful and compelling – experiences that lead to

that students, the economy, and our world will need in the future; however, the way we “do school” today is systematically educating these qualities out of our students. “Will it be on the test?” is the question students end up asking after a few years in school, rather than “What will

happen if . . . ?” or “I’d like to learn more about”

Steven Covey, in his book *The 8th Habit*, shows the hierarchy of commitment to a task. He relates the underlying emotions or motivations for that commitment as well as the learning outcomes that result from the commitment levels. The quality and relevance of the assignments that students are asked to complete directly affect the amount of attention and effort that students apply. This, in turn, directly affects how much each student will learn.

At Duncanville ISD, we believe that purposeful engagement is the best way to learn. Marc Prensky (*Growing Up Digital*) agrees, when he compares our educational system to the incredible attraction that

children have for certain video games. How is it that a student who cannot focus or even sit still in class can spend countless hours with incredible energy, enthusiasm, and concentration playing a video game? Prensky says, “all learning requires effort . . . people rarely do it without a motive. . . Computer games

are so engaging because the primary objective of the game designer is to keep the user engaged.” He adds that “the most important thing that educators can learn from game designers is how they keep the player engaged.”

Covey’s Levels of Commitment



THE VISION OF THE LEARNER



graduate. At its basest form the Vision is a profound experience – one that is deep, important, meaningful, and inspires the learner to continue questioning and seeking knowledge.

“Continual growth and embracing the creed of a lifelong learner are essential as we strive to embody the attributes of this vision. Therefore, we must commit to being a learning organization devoted to the task of developing profound learning in both competence and character through purposeful engagement, with a mindset that systemic change is required to advance the vision.”
- Dr. Larry McHaney , Deputy Superintendent of Learning Services

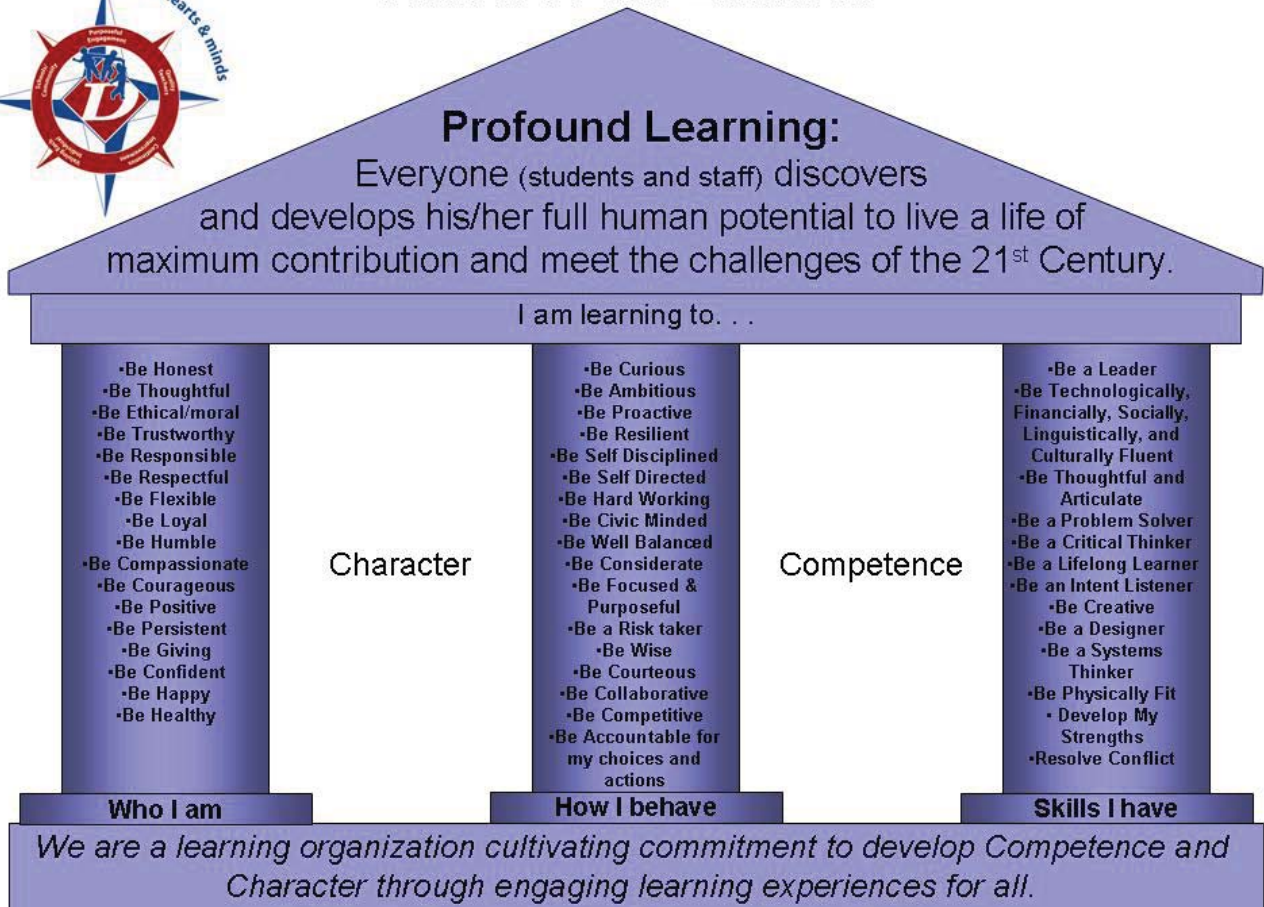
The Vision was developed by posing a question to various internal and external groups: “Thinking of your own child, grandchild, or any other young person who is especially important to you, what knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics would you want and expect them to develop as a result of a quality education in school?”

As the Strategic Design Team compiled all of the responses, they quickly recognized that this profile was more than just what we want for students. This is a Vision for our staff as well.

When they began their work, the Strategic Design Team knew it was critically important to have a clear understanding of what we want students to develop. A profile of what Duncanville ISD students will gain as a result of their education, the Vision of the Learner lists the character and competency traits students will have when they



Vision of the Learner



ADVANCING THE VISION

The Strategic Design Team has identified five strategic aspirations that we believe will advance the district's vision of engagement. These aspirations paint a big picture of the vision and are broad strategies that address the five areas of organizational culture, leadership development, collaboration and support systems, building strengths and talents of students and staff, and creating partnership with our community. These aspirations will guide campus administrators and department managers as they set their goals and develop action plans. As these plans are developed we will create measurement systems to track our progress and report information to stakeholders.

Strategic Aspirations

Cultivating a Culture to Make Profound Learning Through Purposeful Engagement Central

- Establish throughout the organization an understanding of the importance of the urgency for change, and a commitment to focus on engagement. Each person must also know their role in contributing to that focus.
- Craft relevant and important learning experiences that are designed with the explicit intent to engage the learner in the necessary content, to compel him or her to commit the time and effort required to reach profound learning.
- Organize and design learning spaces that are aligned and structured to best meet the needs of students.
- Advance the Vision of the Learner through specific ongoing efforts.

Developing Capabilities for New Roles for Teachers and Other Leaders

- Recruit, develop, and retain great staff members who exemplify the directional system.
- Develop an effective induction program/system that keeps the organization focused on our core beliefs and directional system.
- Design and implement evaluation systems that include the core beliefs and Vision of the Learner attributes.

Developing Organizational Capacities to Support Continuous Innovation and Teamwork

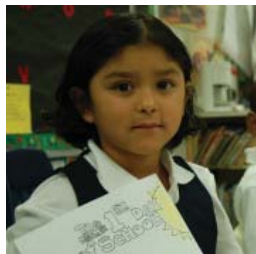
- Create a culture that continually builds collaboration and commitment to the directional system.
- Create a culture of high expectations and incentives for continued profound learning and innovation.
- Develop a culture of engagement and a clearly defined shared decision making process.
- Develop clearly defined leadership at all levels of the district.

Cultivating a Culture for Unleashing the Talents of All

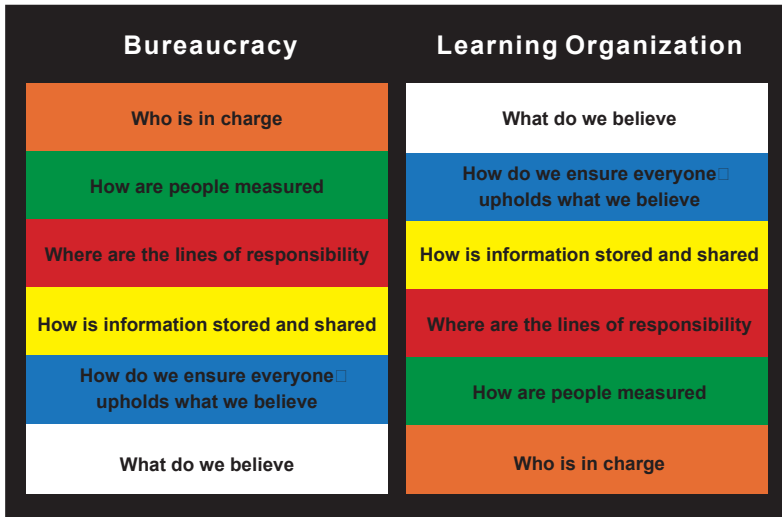
- Create a culture that clearly respects the dignity and worth of all people.
- Allocate time, effort, and resources to help all learners discover and develop their natural gifts and strengths.
- Provide a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all learners.

Building Community Relationships, Capacities, and Shared Understanding

- Include parents as indispensable partners in the learning process.
- Discover community "navigators" to help develop reciprocal relationships between schools and communities.
- Design community engagement systems/opportunities to continually build a mutually beneficial relationship with the community through dialogue and actions.



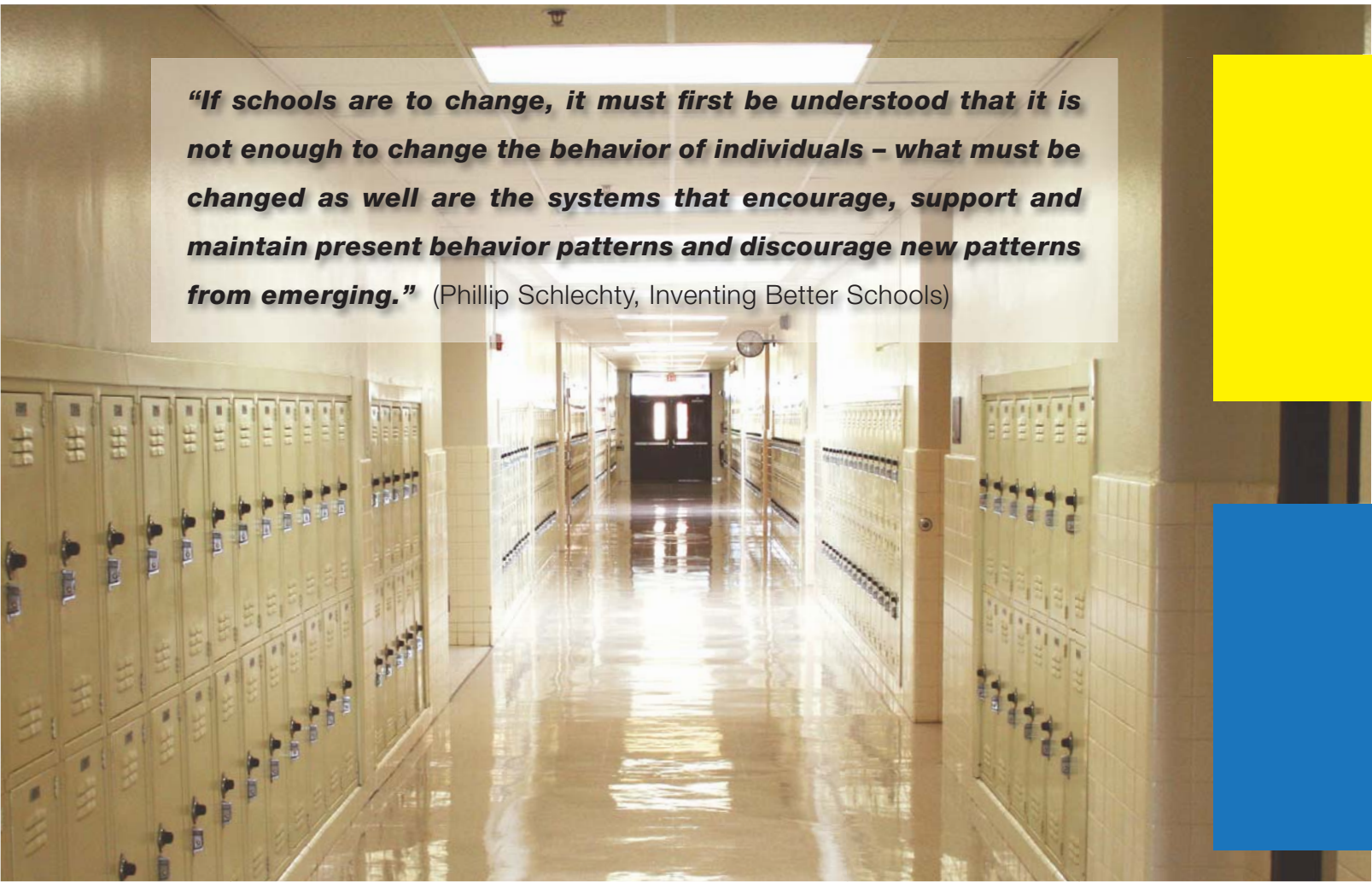
Organizational Priorities



In order for Duncanville ISD to achieve the Vision of the Learner, we must move away from a bureaucratic business model to that of a learning organization. Both systems are comprised of the same six priorities. The difference in the two systems is the emphasis and importance placed on each priority. In a bureaucratic system, power and authority are the most valued. These priorities are the least valued in a learning organization, thereby creating an environment that is more open to collaboration

where individuals at all levels are free to provide input and focused less on who is in charge or their title. The Organizational Priorities diagram contrasts the relative priorities of a bureaucracy and a learning organization.

“If schools are to change, it must first be understood that it is not enough to change the behavior of individuals – what must be changed as well are the systems that encourage, support and maintain present behavior patterns and discourage new patterns from emerging.” (Phillip Schlechty, Inventing Better Schools)



Trip to the Principal's Office

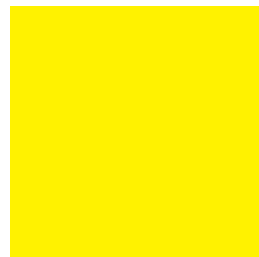
As Mark and Susie headed to school one morning they had no idea their school day would end with a trip to the principal's office. It was a day like any other day for the two average students. Wake, eat breakfast, catch the school bus, and head to class. But when they entered Mr. Williams classroom things were very different than they had been all year long. Desks were no longer arranged in neat rows and the overhead projector was no where to be found.

What greeted Mark and Susie were groupings of desks with supplies and books setting atop flip chart paper. On each desk were pre-labeled name plates. Mark and Susie took their seats somewhat anxious to find out what they would be doing that day.

The bell rang and Mr. Williams greeted the students, "Good morning class. Today's lesson in World Literature will require you to work together to solve a challenge. Together you will review the clues provided to your group and uncover your mystery author. You only have 45 minutes to conduct your investigation. The remaining instructions are at your tables. You will also find resources at your tables that may be helpful, and you're free to use any of the other resources around the room. One word of caution, beware of potential misleading clues. Good luck!"

Mark and Susie worked intently with their group. "This is so much better than listening to Mr. Williams lecture," Susie shared with her peers. "I think I'll actually remember something about our author," said Mark. The day's lesson left them feeling excited. They had been in charge of their learning. At the end of the school day, as Mark and Susie made their way to the main exit, they were still talking about Mr. William's class. But before they could get out the door they heard their principal call to them, "Mark, Susie, can I see you for a minute?" Mark and Susie stopped and looked at each other wondering what they had done.

They followed the principal to her office. "How was your World Literature class today?," the principal said to Mark and Susie. You could see a sigh of relief fall over the two students. "It was great!," they exclaimed. "We're working on a project about different authors," Susie shared. "After we finish the project we're going to host a living author event that Mr. Williams has invited people from the community to attend and judge our projects. "Yeah, and we can invite our parents," added Mark. "I wish we could do this kind of work in every class."



QUESTIONS

What is engagement?

Students are engaged in learning when they find school work so meaningful, relevant, and compelling that they will commit themselves to completing the work. The classroom experiences and challenges then lead to a higher level of learning and understanding, and students have the ability to demonstrate the required knowledge and skills. Sometimes students will be engaged simply because they have a natural interest in the subject. To engage a student who doesn't have that natural love for the topic, they must be presented with a challenge that is so compelling that they develop a strong desire to learn what is required in order to meet the challenge.

What is profound learning?

Profound learning is deep, important, meaningful, and inspires the learner to continue questioning and learning. We believe everyone has a set of gifts and strengths, and education plays a significant role in helping children discover and fully develop their personal gifts, strengths, and areas of talents. We must help students realize their full potential so that they may make a distinctive contribution to humanity.

How have things changed and what has remained the same?

The Industrial Revolution radically changed the world of our grandparents and great-grandparents. It changed the whole foundation and structure of our society from farming to industrial and manufacturing. Today we find ourselves in a revolution that is just as profound – a digital one. Today's students were born with technology all around them, and embrace it naturally like learning their native language.

In earlier generations the knowledge (and amount of knowledge) you had in your head gave you great value, esteem, and power. It was important not to give away too much of that knowledge or your relative value would drop. Today, with social networking and websites like YouTube, blogs, Flickr, etc., the more you share, the greater your following and value. Therefore, education must follow suit. Working alone, filling in blanks on a worksheet will not typically keep students truly engaged and compelled to learn.

The way schools operate and “deliver” instruction has changed very little over the past several decades. The time for change is now.





What are strategic aspirations?

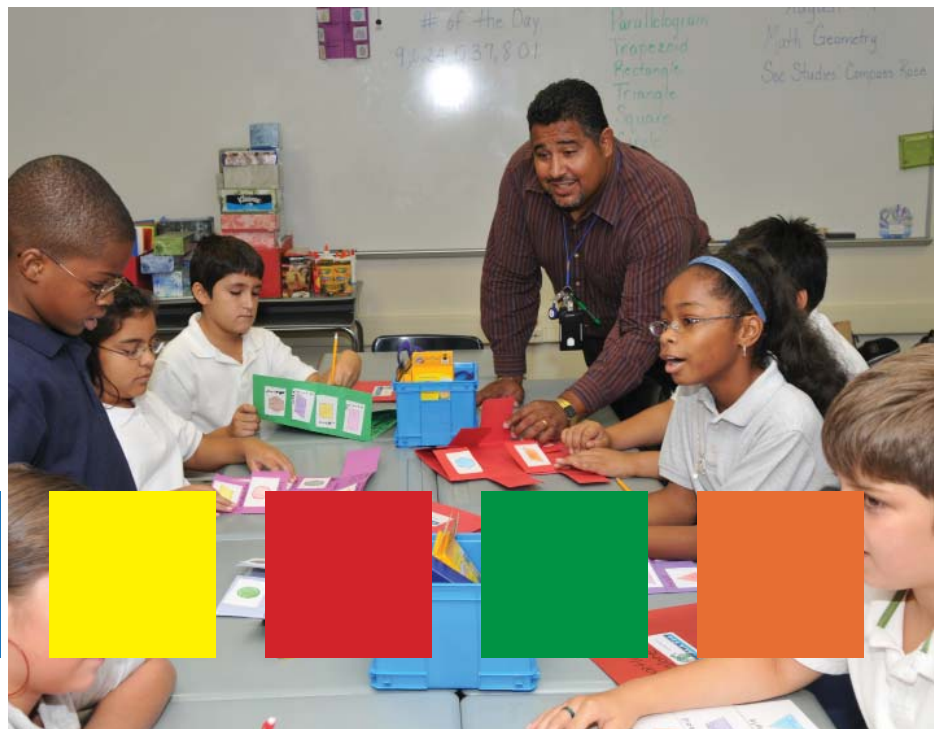
Strategic aspirations serve as the framework, aligned with the district's Core Beliefs, for broad-reaching outcomes that will advance the vision of Duncanville ISD.

How will this plan be used?

The Strategic Plan is a visual design of the systemic transformation for Duncanville ISD. It is a plan for our students, our parents, our staff, our community, and our partners. The strategic aspirations of this plan live in the day-to-day operations of the district and are evident in all campus site-based plans and district initiatives. Resources are allocated in alignment with desired outcomes and initiatives that advance the vision. The plan is a fluid document that is utilized regularly at all organizational levels.

What do we hope to achieve through this plan?

Profound learning for all students is our goal. Through this plan, classroom environments will be transformed to meet the needs of tomorrow's students and prepare them for the future, empowering them to be lifelong learners and contributors for the betterment of humanity.





WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Related Tasks that Support the Strategic Aspirations

Following the framework of the five district aspirations, we must also work to develop strategic aspirations for the following related support areas:

- Facilities that contribute to learning opportunities.
- Finances that support and sustain long-term learning opportunities.
- Nutrition that builds healthy, informed learners.
- Transportation that models efficient pickup and delivery, and contributes to student well-being.
- Information System and Support that is integrated into the learning process as essential elements for organizational effectiveness.

Next Steps

- Design a venue for feedback from staff and community members about specific aspects of the strategic design.
- Each campus and department will design strategic, high-leverage action plans that will advance the vision and strategic aspirations of the district.
- Each action must contain performance measures that will reflect a strong correlation with progress toward the strategic aspirations.
- Design visible “scoreboards” or “dashboards” to indicate progress toward the Vision of the Learner.



Duncanville ISD