

**Final Project Phase 3 – Implementing a Strategic Plan at Lakeview High School**

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EDU515: Measurements and Metrics

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March 3, 2023

## **Addressing Significant Issues**

In the last phase of this Final Project three-part series, the focus will be on suggested approaches to address the two most significant issues previously discussed, who needs to be involved and their roles, and a plan for determining effectiveness using collected data and reporting measurements.

As a summary refresher, Lakeview High School (LHS) is a fictional secondary school in Waterbury, CT, experiencing several concurrent issues, as reported by the *2014-2015 Lakeview High School Profile*. In the previous Phase 2 review, two data-driven decision-making (DDDM) tools, a SWOT analysis and a fishbone diagram, were used to determine the existing issues. Low academic performance and attendance were the most critical concerns. More specifically, the primary end goal of education is to reach graduation, and with a 19% graduation rate and 55% attendance rate (*Lakeview High School*, n.d.), the school is failing at this main goal. It is relevant to mention that the Connecticut Department of Education graded LHS' performance index at 55.77, earning a CHALLENGED rating, for only meeting 1 out of 15 performance indicators (*Lakeview High School*, n.d.).

Therefore, a strategic plan must be developed and executed by a newly formed planning committee ("core action team") led by a designated leader. To begin, the core action team needs to fully understand the goal and what success looks like, so it can be measured along the way and recognized when achieved. Now is the time to perform a VMOSA document to clearly articulate the hopes for the future, so the core action team—and all others involved—can remain focused on what is really important (*Community Tool Box*, n.d.). A VMOSA is an acronym for a practical planning process that helps a group to define its Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action Plans (*Community Tool Box*, n.d.). For example, the Vision for LHS' strategic plan would be "Students graduate." The Mission should be stated in a positive manner, such as, "All

students graduate Lakeview High School,” rather than “Improve the graduation rate” or “Prevent student dropouts” (Mind Tools, n.d.).

Part of the VMOSA exercise is establishing Objectives (distinguished by the acronym "O"). This includes discovering concrete steps to meet LHS students' needs by identifying goals that will evolve into action items. Using the SMART Goals process helps ensure that what needs to be achieved is realistic and helps determine a deadline (University of California, 2017).

Objectives, which are also called goals, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound, thereby creating a SMART goal. Setting goals are an integral step of the early planning process as they can increase motivation and achievement, advance learning, and set a clear picture of expectations.

The next step would identify the current state of being to determine what needs to be done to bridge the gap to the end state or the end goal. This is done by creating a planning process that includes conducting surveys, listening to various people about issues and options, understanding personal and environmental factors, and raising awareness to solicit resources, identify opportunities, and involve key stakeholders (University of Kansas, 2008). This audience should be inclusive and include those most at risk in the situation, such as LHS students, as well as those interested in the community. Defining the current state also involves determining measurements and metrics of data to show over time the distance between the current "As Is" baseline and desired "To Be" environment.

There are other steps in the project planning process, such as identifying the types of people and subject matter experts (SMEs) needed in the different areas of operation. For example, individuals with extroverted personalities would best fit people-facing roles. In contrast, others may excel at behind-the-scenes roles, such as writing communications or posting updates on the school's website or social media platforms. It is also essential to be aware of

existing programs and resources that are already working and in place and can be leveraged. Additional actions should include identifying barriers, assumptions, risks, similar project attempts, opposition, or missed pain points by conducting feedback efforts. In other words, while internal DDDM analyses have already been done, feedback is also needed from external sources. This should involve a combination of student and instructor surveys, facilitated live focus groups, 1:1 and group listening sessions, and community or made-for-public meetings.

### **Stakeholders Involved in the Action Plan**

A solid strategic planning team begins with a leader who understands and holds a clear vision of the project's vision, mission, shared purpose, and goals and can convey it to others. This person should have excellent communication, facilitation, and conflict management skills and can relate to others with a talent for keen listening and the ability to translate complex ideas and theories into simple terms. Other members of the core action team should include anyone with a vested interest or specified skillset to bring value to the overall goal. For example, teachers, administration, parents, and any allies who could make a difference would serve well. Ideally, the overarching team, including all subgroups, should represent a diverse population regarding language, learning abilities, and understanding of cultures, to name a few. Smaller groups can be structured into task forces or action committees (University of Kansas, 2008).

Stakeholder candidates should be evaluated on their knowledge, beliefs, skills, interests, education, and training. For example, current students are vital stakeholders in LHS' goal toward successful graduation. They should have opportunities to voice ideas and participate in volunteer planning activities as much as possible. Alum students can also be called to action, as their previous experience as students at LHS is invaluable. Other potential targets of change include those with a particular interest or risk in the matter, such as parents of younger grade students, who are excellent candidates for involvement as their children are likely to attend

Lakeview High School eventually. Additionally, local businesses, colleges, key officials, and government advocates may feel a responsibility and show a keen interest in contributing or participating in the planning and execution efforts.

An early action of a Communications subcommittee will be to create an email directory of current students' parents or caretakers and all possible individuals who might offer value towards the strategic goal. This would aid awareness and campaign efforts throughout the strategic project immensely.

### **Plan for Stakeholder Involvement**

After the main issues are analyzed, the project's VMOSA and SMART goals are identified, the beginning "As-Is" and end "To-Be" states are defined, and stakeholders and community partnerships are selected and onboarded, it is time for actions to be fleshed out and assigned to subcommittees and individuals.

A RACI chart can outline who will be Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed throughout the project, acknowledging that plans are not always linear, and the RACI assignments could change along the way as needed. This approach is excellent, as it allows tracking people's key deliverables and measuring timeline progress over the project's trajectory.

The leader of the core action team will be responsible for leading the core team and its subcommittees through continuous effective planning sessions. Agenda items should include brainstorming exercises, activities, and discussions that clarify and uphold the common purpose and obtain consensus. Action items should be regularly tracked, and a round-robin update process should occur at each meeting, whereby those charged with actions are to provide an update. Stakeholders will be involved with many intricate and specific steps throughout the project, and each will tie back to VMOSA aspects and one or more SMART goals. There are too

many to list for this final phase paper. Instead, Figure 1 illustrates how an eligible action item would look when addressed in a measurable format, similar to a SMART goal approach.

**Figure 1**

*Actions items in a specific format*

**What action or change will occur?**

Bring in colleges and speakers (such as successful alumni) to motivate students to want to do well in school and graduate. Let them feel “pulled” to want to succeed vs. needing to “push” them toward success.



**How much, or to what extent, will this action occur?**

Each speaking event will include an organic Q&A opportunity for students to ask questions publicly and a sign-up table for resource and mentoring opportunities. Ambassador students can provide tours to visiting speakers of the school, inviting a sense of ownership and pride.



**Who will carry out this action?**

A subcommittee of students, teachers, and parents will be responsible for the planning, logistics, setup, and breakdown of the events, working alongside other strategic project stakeholders, such as the Communications subcommittee.



**When will it take place and for how long?**

Informational college visits or motivational speaking events will occur bi-weekly during a 45-minute school period on a consistent day and time cadence. Field trips to local colleges will also be considered. A calendar will be distributed.



**What resources will be needed?**

Agreement from teachers and administration will be required. The gymnasium needs to be secured, and volunteers will be needed for various tasks, such as manning the resource tables.

### **Plan Effectiveness and Types of Data Collection**

During the starting stages of a strategic project, data analysis is essential because it helps to uncover hidden patterns, correlations, and other insights and identifies new opportunities (SAS.com, n.d.). It also helps uncover vital missing data that could be deemed

useful or revealing because it can be crucial to decision-making (Work Group for Community Health and Development, 2016), as examined in the first two phases of this Final Project series. Lastly, data-driven decision-making (DDDM) tools are excellent because they help create actions from collected and analyzed data and then understand the situation to develop solutions (Ikemoto & Marsh, 2007).

The core action team needs to develop reporting tools to track actual, current measurements and metrics against original key assumptions and then report findings regularly. For example, the two critical areas of this project are a 55% attendance rate and a 19% graduation rate. Required measurements should be to track the needle on these two data points at determined intervals. In other words, does the attendance rate improve after implementing action items and project initiatives – after two weeks, one month, or six months? Are more students headed toward graduation, and do they graduate at the end of the year? Do survey responses show increased positivity, and are the number of respondents increasing? Are students signing up for and leveraging mentorship opportunities? Do they show interest in visiting speakers or colleges? There are various angles from which to measure improvement. Some data will be qualitative, others quantitative, and sometimes a hybrid of both.

Another meaningful way to measure progress is to track grades on a bell curve. For example, students comparable in age and grade can be assessed against each other in a standardized/norm-referenced view. At the same time, individual learners can be measured from a criterion-referenced angle, which scopes out specific skills on a topic (Logsdon, 2020). Both of these approaches have their merits and aid in measuring if improvement is occurring.

Additionally, control points and key measurements for success should be planted at intervals in parts of the overall project's timeline to ensure items stay on track and as planned. In other words, anchor points throughout the plan should be identified to check that scope creep doesn't incur and that the project stays aligned with the initial objectives and financial goals, if applicable.

Lastly, a reporting structure and cadence should be created to address the findings from surveys and focus groups to ensure the strategic plan's goals and action items remain calibrated. For example, all input received from surveys, focus groups, brainstorming and listening sessions, best practice benchmarking, and other feedback mechanisms should dictate if plan adjustments are needed. This will ensure structured thinking for a closed-loop corrective action process.

Implementing an overall, top-level strategic action plan at Lakeview High School, as described, can help to ensure students are motivated to attend classes and ultimately graduate, which provides a greater chance of success in life.



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