**Envisioning the Future**

Working with the Community to Create a Vision of the Future;

Using the Results in the Planning Process

**What is the Vision?** The vision, as defined by the Massachusetts Planning and Implementation Framework, articulates the district’s aspirations for students: what you value and why, and what future success will look like. The district or school vision, mission, core values, and theory of action are the foundation of the district or school plan.

**Why This Step is Important:** Envisioning the future with members of the community is a powerful early step in the planning process. The community feedback gathered through the visioning process is essential data in the development of the plan.

After all community feedback has been synthesized to identify common themes, as described in the PfS resource “Synthesizing Visioning Feedback,” these themes can be explored for connections to the district or school analysis of the current context, as described in the PfS resources “Analyzing Data for Root Causes” and “Analyzing District or School Planning Practices and Culture: SWOT Analysis.” From this work the plan’s strategic objectives—the three to five overarching goals and key levers for improvement on which the plan is based—begin to emerge.

The visioning process itself offers the opportunity to engage a diverse range of stakeholders in the planning work and ensure that voices from across the community are heard. Diverse perspectives in the planning process will strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the resulting plan, and inviting participation in the planning process will build ownership and advocacy for the resulting plan among both educators and the community. An inclusive approach will also contribute to a positive district or school culture, helping to build a shared understanding of the work required to serve all students as well as the relationships and trust among stakeholders that will support that work.

**Visioning Protocol:** A number of visioning protocols and processes exist, and districts or schools may choose to create their own process as well. One visioning protocol that is commonly used, readily available, and easily adapted to the *Planning for Success* process is the Back to the Future Protocol. This protocol, which includes guidelines for facilitators in how to work with groups to conduct the visioning process, was originally developed by Scott Murphy and is available from:

* The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), at <http://www.nsrfharmony.org/system/files/protocols/future.pdf>
* The School Reform Initiative (SRI), at <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>

**The Visioning Process:** Designing and conducting the visioning process is an important first step in the planning process. Leaders will want to consider: *How can we design an inclusive and equitable planning process that creates a shared vision for all students while strengthening community understanding and support?*

Leaders should identify a visioning protocol and a process for using it to conduct visioning sessions with educators (for example, during school faculty or departmental meetings at each school) and with families, students, and community members (for example, during family meetings or student government meetings or a School Committee or School Council meeting). Leaders will also want to consider issues of equity in participation, designing the process to ensure outreach to non-dominant student groups (for example, English language learners or students participating in the METCO program) and to members of the community whose voices may be less often heard across the district or school (for example, those with a first language other than English or families of students with disabilities).

It is helpful if leadership and planning teams are the first to participate in the visioning process. Their participation in visioning is, of course, essential to the planning process. These participants can also vet the protocol and the design for conducting visioning sessions across the community. In addition, having experienced the protocol and the effective facilitation of it, these participants will have some preparation should they choose to facilitate the protocol themselves in future sessions as part of the visioning process.

The process below describes facilitation of an adapted Back to the Future Protocol.

1. Organize into small groups of 5 to 6 participants each. If possible, ensure that each group includes members of different stakeholder groups.
2. Conduct the Back to the Future Protocol, which consists of three questions. Allow approximately 15 minutes for small groups to discuss and record answers to each of these questions. Small group work may take approximately 45 minutes to complete.
3. Reconvene as a whole group. Ask the facilitators of all small groups to share (and post, if on chart paper) their group’s work.
4. Debrief as a whole group, identifying common themes across small group work.
5. Collect the charts/documented work from the recorders of all small groups. Type up and distribute results of the visioning process to team members.

**Time Required**: A visioning session based on the adapted Back to the Future Protocol described above requires approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete, depending on the number of participants and the number of small groups that will report out.

**Note to Facilitators:** If using the Back to the Future Protocol, you will find that all three of the protocol’s questions can serve as useful starting points in developing strategic objectives and initiatives. Themes identified for Back to the Future’s first two questions, about the future and present state, can serve as useful starting points in identifying strategic objectives. Themes identified for the protocol’s third question, about actions that helped the district or school to move from the present to future state, can serve as a useful starting point in identifying strategic initiatives.

**Text for Facilitator Presentation Slides:** Some suggested text for presentation slides for the adapted Back to the Future Protocol is included below.

**Slide 1: Envision the Future**

* We will imagine that the future is the present
* We are looking back on the change process that has moved [district or school name] from where it was in the past (today) to what it has become (the future)

**Slide 2: Back to the Future**

* Organize into small working groups
* Identify a facilitator and recorder
* Conduct the Back to the Future Protocol
  + Adapted from Scott Murphy, SRI, <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>
* Recorder: chart group responses
* Facilitator: prepare to share small group work with the whole group

**Slide 3: Back to the Future Protocol**

1. *What does [district or school name] look like, sound like, feel like today?*

* Project into the future; imagine it is 5 years later. Use the present tense!

1. *What did [district or school name] look like before?*

* From the projected present, look back into the past (today).Use the past tense!

1. *How did [district or school name] become what it is today?*

* Continue looking back from the projected present. Describe as specifically and concretely as possible. Use the past tense!

Adapted from Scott Murphy, SRI, <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf>

**Slide 4: Group Presentations**