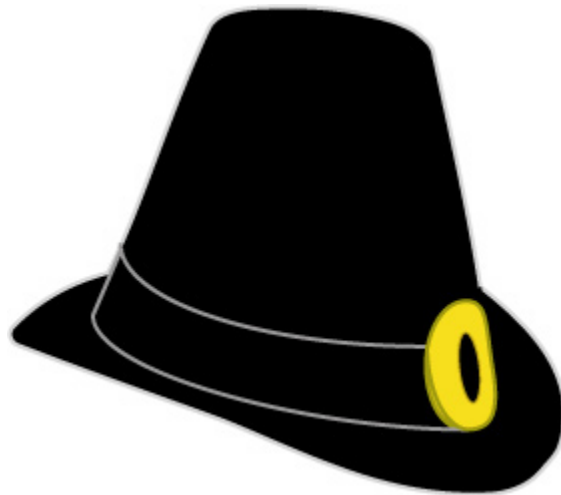


# **PILGRIM AREA COLLABORATIVE**

## **Strategic Plan**



**June 23, 2011**

## RECOGNITIONS

The Board of Directors and the Executive Director of the Pilgrim Area Collaborative are to be commended for the foresight and leadership in commissioning the strategic planning process. The inclusive and open process serves to validate the importance of all members of the Collaborative. The resulting document and action plans will serve as a vehicle of positive change and enhanced effectiveness of programs and services for the near and distant future.

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr. Maureen Gaughan

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Carver	Elizabeth Sorrell	Superintendent
Duxbury	Bruce Cole	Director of Special Education
Halifax	Cassandra Hanson	School Committee Member
Kingston	Stacey Elmes	School Committee Member
Marshfield	Dr. Susan Dupuis - Chair	Director of Special Education
Pembroke	Kathleen McGerigle	School Committee Member
Plymouth	Robert Bielen	Director of Pupil Personnel Services
Plympton	Maureen Springer -	Vice Chair School Committee Member
Silver Lake Regional	Maureen Springer	School Committee Member
Stoughton	Dr. Margaret Rizzi	Superintendent
Whitman-Hanson Regional	Mildred O'Callaghan	Director of Special Education

## BACKGROUND

The Pilgrim Area Collaborative [PAC] was established in 1976 to provide individualized educational services to children with significant learning challenges whose need for support could not be met within their home, school-districts and service areas. Children are referred to PAC programs and services by appropriate liaisons from their local school districts. While the majority of students served come from the member school districts of Carver, Duxbury, Halifax, Kingston, Marshfield, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Silver Lake Regional, Stoughton and Whitman Hanson Regional School District, PAC also serves a significant number of students from municipalities outside the membership region. PAC students are educated primarily in substantially separate classrooms located in age-appropriate, public schools within member school districts. PAC students are provided opportunities to be included within typical education classes and activities as appropriate, and to be active participants in the school community, as well as the local municipality. Parents play an active role in their child's education through the development of their son/daughter's Individualized Education Program (IEP), by volunteering in PAC classrooms, and by participating in the activities of the Collaborative at large. The Pilgrim Area Collaborative Parent-Staff Organization (PAC PSO) provides a vehicle for parents to work together with PAC staff and administration to support the development of collaborative programs and services. Pilgrim Area Collaborative is one of thirty educational collaboratives established throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. A Board of Directors, which is comprised of representatives from each member school district, governs PAC. An Executive Director oversees all PAC programs and services. An Operating Committee that is composed of the Pupil Services Directors of each member school district advises the Executive Director.

## MISSION

The mission of the Pilgrim Area Collaborative is, in partnership with member districts, to be a resource by providing programs and services that reflect high-quality, research-based, best practices for the ever-evolving needs of the students, families, educators and communities that we serve.

## GUIDING BELIEFS

- ❖ *We believe that the community has a responsibility to educate all of its children.*
- ❖ *We believe in honoring and valuing the uniqueness, diversity, abilities and talents of all students.*
- ❖ *We believe that given the appropriate instructional environment, all students can and must learn.*
- ❖ *We believe that the community has an obligation to provide the specialized programming that each student needs.*
- ❖ *We believe that all students have a right to safe, secure and positive learning environment.*
- ❖ *We believe that each individual student must have a vision for the future that he/she should be able to attain.*
- ❖ *We believe that we are accountable to the student, parents and community for assisting each student to reach his/her fullest potential.*
- ❖ *We believe that an appropriate environment fosters positive growth and change.*
- ❖ *We believe in mutual respect, open communication and collegiality.*

## VISION

Our vision is to offer a range of programs and services to strengthen and challenge children in need. Through innovation our staff creates programs and services that are current, as well as anticipatory of future needs. Our highly skilled, knowledgeable, and well-trained staff design and implement individualized services for our students that maximize opportunities for their academic, emotional and social development.

The Collaborative is regarded as an expert resource to communities offering consultation, training, human resource and creative solutions to address the ever-changing dynamics of our students and their families. To do so, means that we thrive in safe, attractive, and stable learning environments where students are integrated with peers and staff is recognized for their expertise. Collegiality, reflection, and partnership will be at the core of our daily interactions.

Collaboration with public school districts will provide customized, economical and effectual supports to children and families in need. Multi-faceted communication strategies foster highly evolved relationships committed to students' success.

As a result of these conditions, the Collaborative is the interdependent extension of the public schools and families in meeting our students' needs. Communities and colleagues engage the Collaborative in meaningful affiliations to ensure opportunities for our students' happiness and success.

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Pilgrim Area Collaborative offers four major programs and three specialized services. The four programs are designed to offer academic, life and social skills education to students, preschool through age twenty-two, during the traditional school year. The programs are as follows:

- ❖ **Learning Skills Program** – serving students on the Autism Spectrum
- ❖ **Developmental Skills Program** - serving students with intensive and multiple learning and life challenges.
- ❖ **Transitional Skills Program** – serving students, ages 18-22, with moderate to intensive learning challenges with a wide range of abilities.
- ❖ **Pilgrim Academy** – serving students in an Elementary, as well as alternative middle school/high school model who are experiencing emotional and behavioral challenges.

The above programs are augmented and supported by an extended-year summer program; a comprehensive related services support program and the PACES program. PACES is an extended service program providing specialty supports to families through home based student instructional programs and parent training.

## GOVERNANCE

The Pilgrim Area Collaborative is governed by a Board of Directors composed of representatives from each member school district. Board members may be a School Committee representative, Superintendent of Schools, or designee of the Superintendent such as a Special Education Director. A representative from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is an advisory member of the Board of Directors. The primary responsibility of members of the PAC Board of Directors is "to establish services, programs and procedures that will best produce the educational services needed by member towns. The Board is charged with accomplishing this while also being responsible for the wise management of available resources. The Board must fulfill these responsibilities by functioning primarily as a legislative body to formulate and adopt policy, by electing an executive officer to implement policy and by evaluating results. It must carry out its function openly, while seeking the comments of the public, students and staff in its decision-making process."

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

The BOD (OP) elected to conduct a strategic planning process during the 2010-2011 school year. The process was designed to answer two essential questions. The first and foremost question was the degree to which the collaborative programs and services were meeting their established mission and goals. The second question, one that was geared to the future work of the collaborative, was designed to determine the degree to which key stakeholders felt that the collaborative should expand services with regard to their existing programs or to areas not currently offered.

### **Methodology**

A traditional structure of assessing strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) was utilized as the foundational structure. In addition to SWOT analysis, focus group participants completed a visioning exercise and survey participants were asked questions of a more evaluative nature. (Appendix 2). Thirty-two individuals participated in focus group activities. The membership of those focus groups consisted of collaborative staff and administration as well as district leadership through School Committee members, Superintendents and Directors of Special Education. 77 staff members, five superintendents and 27 parents completed surveys.

Analysis of the feedback indicated thematic consistency to areas of strengths and weaknesses in a few key areas. Those areas are summarized below:

- **STRENGTHS**

It is clear that the staff is the Collaborative's greatest asset. Overwhelmingly, the staff is viewed by parents, district leadership, and one another as knowledgeable, dedicated, compassionate, caring, flexible and creative. Staff members themselves indicated a love of the students and a deep appreciation for the purposeful work in which they participate. It is evident from the data that the students are the single most important aspect of collaborative. Meetings students' needs and working with students to grow and learn is a motivating factor for all staff. Staff members clearly identified the diversity of their students as a strength. They viewed themselves as student advocates and valued opportunities to find meaningful learning opportunities for their students. This included the opportunities for inclusion with peers.

It is important to note that the staff strongly indicated that they felt valued, respected and supported. They enjoy the collegiality of their work, value the teamwork and collaboration that exists in their programs and feel empowered to be creative and resourceful in advancing the programs.

As a result of the above statements, the reputation of the Pilgrim Area Collaborative is quite strong. The Collaborative is regarded as highly effective and respected for its responsiveness to the needs of the districts and for the relationships that have been built over time.

Communication was another area where multiple data sources indicated positive feedback. Teacher to parent communication was frequently noted as a strength. Communication about students and their needs within the programs and between specialists was highly regarded. Administrative communication to the Board and Operating Committees was also noted as effective. It may be appropriate to view the strength of communication as an important contributor to the positive reputation that the Collaborative holds.

- **WEAKNESSES**

As with the strengths indicated above, there existed areas of consistency with regard to weaknesses. The most frequently noted area involved the facilities and location of programs. While program design and services was highly regarded, the inconsistency and unpredictability of classroom locations was a deep concern for parents and staff alike. The lack of long-term commitment from districts to collaborative program space contributes to the identified feelings of nomadic existences, fractured relationships with local school staff and vulnerability with regard to program consistency. The large geographic spread of program locations was seen as a deterrent to effective communication and the building of a more cohesive collaborative network. In addition to the widespread geography, the out-dated and worn condition of the administrative offices was identified as a consistent concern.

A second and important concern expressed by staff was the pay structure. Staff members felt that their pay was not competitive to that of their colleagues in local school districts. It is clear that resources are a concern to all parties. Financial constraints were identified as the major contributing factor to the lack of more current administrative facilities and competitive salaries.

An additional concern expressed was the absence of a more clearly developed curriculum or program of studies. Related to this concern was the need for consultation from individuals with expertise in mathematics and literacy. The domain of curriculum and instruction with regard to core content areas was identified as in need of focused attention.

The domains of **Opportunities** and **Threats** yielded more varied responses; however, in these areas some themes were evident. Below find a summation of the most frequent and consistent responses:

- **OPPORTUNITIES**

All stakeholders identified this strategic planning process as an opportunity to expand collaborative services into one or all of the areas of after-school child care, recreational programming – including integrating students with age-appropriate peers, vocational programming and respite programs. Based on the high regard that the Collaborative holds, parents and district administration deemed expansion in the above areas as a natural next step for programs and services provided by PAC. Utilization of staff expertise was seen a critical element in fostering expansion of programs and services in the above noted areas as well as in direct consultation and training to district staff, both regular and special education. In addition, providing more parent training was identified as a possible area of expansion. Of note is the consistency with which the collaborative staff identified the same areas of possible opportunities for expansion.

Improving facilities and upgrading and expanding technology services was identified as appropriate opportunities to explore through this process. Determining effective ways to garner greater district support for long-term facility agreements and identifying a more current and permanent location for administrative offices was deemed noteworthy.

Finally, there existed significant consistency of data identifying the exemplary level of knowledge and expertise of the collaborative staff. Three critical areas were identified as possible opportunities to be pursued for expansion of collaborative services. These three areas include broadening consultation services, expanding training opportunities, and completing curriculum development.

- **THREATS**

Data on threats supported many of the identified areas throughout the SWOT process. Lack of consistent facilities was seen as a threat to the effectiveness of the programs and services offered by the Collaborative. There was a concern expressed for the isolation of the individual programs and the possibility of stifling the strength of the collaborative as a result of the large geographic area of program locations. Stakeholders also identified diminishing financial resources and the need for districts to identify cost saving measures, including the development of in-district programs.

An important area of concern noted revolves around the issue of staff. The theme of continuing to support staff and foster their desire to maintain the high degree of expertise and functioning was identified. This was often tied to limited financial resources as it was identified that the need to provide competitive salaries and benefits was a constant threat to the effectiveness of the programs and services. The ever-changing complexity of students serviced and the need to continually improve and expand staff knowledge was also identified as a threat if appropriate resources of time and money were limited.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a result of the data collected through the strategic planning process, I would recommend that the Board of Directors consider the development of future goals in the following from the following areas:

1. Develop a means for securing greater consistency and predictability of facilities for both administrative offices and program locations.
2. Expand programs and services into the areas of after school care, recreational and vocational programs for students with disabilities and / or the provision of respite services for parents. It is important to note that there was a small percentage of parents that suggested that these programs could in fact be services that are fee-based.
3. Seek ways to expand an already effective communication system amongst and between staff and administration, staff and staff, staff and parents, parents and parents.

While there was consistent indication that communication throughout by these key stakeholders is viewed as effective; there also existed feedback indicating a need for greater communication. The standard of “communicating in as many different ways, as often as possible” may be effective in assisting the Collaborative in achieving even greater success in this area.

Determine the need for communication of a public relations nature. Parents were clear that they valued the programs and services; however with the exception of PACES and Pilgrim Academy program identity was inconsistent. In addition, the need to have all district constituents knowledgeable about the Collaborative purpose and mission was determined to be an effective means of maintaining future financial support.

4. Explore the provision of more parent training and consultation services to regular and special education staff in member districts.

## **SUMMARY**

The strategic planning process has allowed key stakeholders a voice in the future planning of the Collaborative. It is evident that the Collaborative staff, programs and services are highly regarded by parents, district administration and staff members themselves. Pilgrim Area Collaborative enjoys a highly respected reputation.

In answering the two questions posed at the beginning of the strategic planning process the data supports the conclusion that the Collaborative is largely meeting its current goals and mission. Responding parents were quite favorable in their evaluative responses. District leadership was also quite positive. Staff members feel valued, respected and professionally challenged. With regard to the second question and the need to expand into other and diverse directions from those expressed in the current mission statement, there existed minimal data to support that notion. What was evident however was the desire to expand on the already highly successful areas of providing ever-evolving, student-focused, quality services that promote the maximum potential of all students.

The data collected supports the conclusion that stakeholders feel confident that the current administration is highly capable of leading the Collaborative in meeting the future goals for the Collaborative. Once the OC/ BOD determines

the final goals the administration is advised to develop specific and agreed upon action plans for the next three years for the attainment of said goals.

## **GOALS**

As a result of a review of the initial findings and through subsequent meetings of the Operating Committee and key stakeholders, including representatives from the staff, and the Superintendents goals were developed in the following Focus Areas,

- ❖ Organizational Development
- ❖ Curriculum
- ❖ Facilities
- ❖ Informational Network

The following five goals address the Collaborative's priorities for the next three years:

1. To develop innovative programs and services that meet the evolving needs of member students, families and districts.
2. To sustain a Culture within the Collaborative of collegiality, communication, and teaming.
3. To enhance the current PAC curriculum by aligning with the DESE standards for the new frameworks.
4. To develop a plan for facilities that addresses the changing needs of the Collaborative and promotes equity and stability.
5. To enhance the PAC informational network promoting programs, services and offerings.

## **ACTION PLANNING**

Specific objectives, action steps, outcomes, timelines, and implementations strategies will be detailed for each of the five goals. Input was sought from the Operating Committee as well as from staff and administration. The attached plans will serve as a compass for the work and will be evaluated for progress and redirection on a consistent basis.