

Visionary Planner Analysis

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EDIT 760: Instructional Technology Leadership

June 13, 2020

### **Visionary Planner Introduction**

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) states the visionary planner standard for educational leaders as “leaders engage others in establishing a vision, strategic plan and ongoing evaluation cycle for transforming learning with technology” (ISTE, 2020). Accordingly, five indicators are provided to ensure the standard is met which include: collaborating with stakeholders to create a shared vision; creating a strategic plan for how technology will be implemented; monitor and adjust the strategic plan to transform learning; continue to collaborate with stakeholders for input and improvements; and share knowledge about learning with technology with other educational leaders (ISTE, 2020).

### **Collecting Information**

This paper is analyzing the standard of visionary planner as it pertains to the Rock Hill School District in Rock Hill, South Carolina. While I am a teacher at Rock Hill High School who can provide my own anecdotal evidence, this standard seems to apply to more of district level technology plan, so I also used the Rock Hill Schools website to obtain information about their instructional technology plans. Further, I decided to conduct a phone interview with one of the districts educational specialists in the area of technology, Chris Odom. Odom was chosen specifically as he is the technology specialist who has been employed by the district the longest and was present when the district’s five-year plan was authored. Through these various methods, I was able to find supporting evidence that applies to the indicators.

### **Evidence Found of Indicators**

According to ISTE the first indicator for visionary leadership is to “engage education stakeholders in developing and adopting a shared vision for using technology to improve student success, informed by the learning sciences” (ISTE, 2020). Several years ago, the Rock Hill

School District decided to implement a one-to-one environment, where all students grades 3 – 8 are issued district owned devices (initially ipads for younger grades and laptops for older grades). The five-year plan developed for purchasing and phasing in devices, along with expanding broadband and wifi capabilities, came to a grand total of over 21 million dollars (Technology/Our Mission, 2020). When discussed, Chris Odom, district educational specialist in technology, said the plan was developed with “all stakeholders, including the school board, community businesses, and a parent and student committee” (2020). While this does indicate deliberate planning with stakeholders, I asked him to clarify the part of the indicator concerning plans being based on the learning sciences. He informed me that the five year plan was more focused on operational costs and concerns at the time, and the instructional aspect was not defined at the time. However, since the plan was adopted starting in 2015, an additional four instructional specialists in the area of technology have been hired by the district office, who plan professional development (PD) sessions for teachers and offer support about how to plan instruction using technology (Academics and Accountability/Instruction Department Staff, 2020). Odom did clarify that those instruction-focused plans, informed by the learning sciences, are not created with input from stakeholders but generally created “in house” (2020).

The second indicator for visionary leadership is “build on the shared vision by collaboratively creating a strategic plan that articulates how technology will be used to enhance learning” (ISTE, 2020). As stated above, the district did create a five year technology plan illustrating plans and their corresponding costs for each year. However, the focus was more on operational concerns than how technology is used to “enhance learning”. According to Odom, this lies under the purview of the instructional specialist department, but they do not have a

written plan as “technology changes so readily, best practices are constantly evolving, so we keep our plan open” (2020).

The next indicator for visionary planner states leaders should “evaluate progress on the strategic plan, make course corrections, measure impact and scale effective approaches for using technology to transform learning” (ISTE, 2020). According to Odom, much of this takes place “behind the scenes” from classroom teachers. As a department, he and his colleagues can aggregate usage reports, and track what programs and software teachers are utilizing, and depending on what it is, they can also assess its impact. (2020). One major change was the phasing out of ipads for grades 6 – 8 and the adoption of laptops instead, as teachers requested more “powerful” devices for classroom use that were easier for the students to use for things like research and essay composition. Additionally, the recent incorporation of Launchpad as a “one-stop” for accessing the LMS, Powerschool, e-textbooks, Microsoft 365 and Google accounts, Discovery Learning, Desmos, etc. were all “thoughtfully considered and researched initiatives that we analyzed and felt would improve student outcomes” (Odom, 2020).

The fourth indicator is to “communicate effectively with stakeholders to gather input on the plan, celebrate successes and engage in a continuous improvement cycle” (ISTE, 2020). As a teacher stakeholder, there have been a few surveys sent out concerning instructional technology, but I have not ever received any follow up communication. Odom assures me they do review these surveys and use them to plan “ways to improve”. (2020). He says that while district staff, school board members, school administrators, teachers, and students are asked for input, requesting parent input comes “less frequently” – he would guess once every two to three years (2020).

The fifth and final visionary planner indicator states leaders should “share lessons learned, best practices, challenges, and the impact of learning with technology with other education leaders who want to learn from this work” (ISTE, 2020). From a teacher standpoint, I can offer that the district instructional specialists in the area of technology to offer many professional development opportunities for both classroom teacher and school level administrators every year. These are not just technology demonstrations, but they do truly blend instructional techniques and researched “best practices” incorporating technology into the classroom. The instructional team also travels to conferences such as High Schools That Work from the Southern Regional Educational Board and holds sessions and shares information about the district’s technology plans (Odom, 2020).

### **Areas of Concern**

Almost all of the indicators for standard two, visionary planner, have some level of concern regarding their implementation in Rock Hill School District. I would assign indicators one and two with a low level of concern, as the district clearly did meet with stakeholders and came up with, and communicated, a five year plan. I think the concern comes from the lack of clear statements about *how* the technology plan will impact student learning. If such a plan exists in the instructional department, it is certainly not communicated as well as the operational strategic plan. At present, I would also assign a low level of concern to indicator three, as every year there are generally some changes being made, leading me (as a teacher) to believe the instructional specialists are taking the idea of “course correction” seriously. Additionally, all the PD provided does include how technology supports learning, not just technology-for-technology’s-sake. I believe indicators four and five are where a more moderate level of concern should be applied. I do not think the district technology leaders communicate effectively with *all*

stakeholders, such as parents, to continuously improve. I also think there is not as much communication with students, leading to many more “top-down” directives than truly collaborative plans. Concerning indicator five, I am not sure that the district shares as much as it could be doing – as one of the first one-to-one districts in South Carolina, there are no doubt other schools who would appreciate learning from our successes and failures. However, I think the district has made a conscious public relations choice to focus on just talking about the positives and remaining quiet on the negatives. While it may sound cynical, public schools have been put into the position of fighting for students to stay enrolled, instead of leaving for charter schools, and recruiting people relocating from elsewhere into the school district (over other neighboring districts). While I have no verification of this suspicion, my experience tells me the district would not encourage any public sharing of struggles.

Overall, I think the Rock Hill School District does an adequate job of meeting all the indicators for standard 2, visionary planner. I think publishing a more comprehensive technology plan, which includes supporting research from the learning sciences and stated plans for how the technology will improve instruction is warranted. Also, more transparency in how changes are made, and how (and how often) stakeholders are involved would be a welcome change. Ultimately, I feel Rock Hill School District has a steady foundations in place, and just a few minor adjustments can help it become stronger.

## References

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