



LEADER

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A photograph of Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, a woman with short reddish-brown hair wearing a blue patterned blazer, smiling and interacting with a group of young students in a classroom. One girl with braids and a colorful bow is looking at her. Another boy is in the foreground with his back to the camera. In the background, another student is working at a desk.

BOLD, COMPASSIONATE, ATTENTIVE:
2018 Superintendent of the Year
DR. JEANICE KERR SWIFT

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MSU's EPIC

seeks to be a research partner with districts.

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Educator Shortage Workgroup

exploring solutions

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DREAM! DON'T FIX

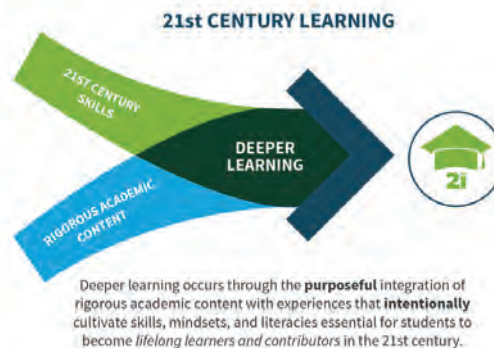
By Mike Nicholson, PhD

STRATEGIC PLANNING IS ABOUT CHANGE. OFTEN, change is rooted in trying to fix something broken. For many educators, most experiences in strategic planning have been about trying to make the current systems and processes better—or solving lingering problems.

Organizational and systems expert and *The Fifth Discipline* (1990) author Peter Senge sees a real flaw in that approach. He contends that sustained efforts at real change are difficult to achieve when the purpose for doing so is rooted in deficit thinking. Rather, more energy and commitment are often the result of aspirational thinking **toward** a compelling future vision.

If you consider the great works in human history—grand cathedrals, moon landings, iPhones, colossal stadiums, inspiring works of art, etc.—few, if any, were designed to fix a problem. People pursued these grand plans to fulfill a dream—to create, to build where there was once a void.

This same thinking can and should be applied for strategic planning for schools. In short, we should “dream, don’t fix,” for garnering system energy toward successful strategic planning.



Toward this end, there is an innovative movement afoot in the work of school system strategic planning that dreams. This movement is centered on the work called “*Portrait of a Graduate*.” What are our aspirations for graduates of our schools and districts? What skills, mindsets, and literacies do our graduates need to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape? Starting a

district’s strategic planning with this visioning process anchors the endeavor in a future vision, from which the plan can be back-mapped to current reality.

As is widely understood, our schools were made for a different time. The physical, curricular, assessment, and instructional structures and processes of schools today better served society and individuals during a bygone era—the industrial age and its economy. During that time, our schools did really well at preparing students for 20th century expectations in their work, civic, and personal lives.

A quick example of how successful our schools (and related government policies) were during this age can be seen by the explosive growth of the middle class during the mid-20th century. However, because of the vast changes in technology, geopolitical policies, and interpersonal human dynamics since then, schools should seize the opportunity to revise how best to prepare our students to thrive in a dramatically new context.

Consider for a moment these monumental shifts in our world:

- **Employment:** Moving from routinized work tasks to high task variety, high concept-high touch engagement in a service economy;

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- **Engagement:** Shifting to a flat world where people need self-inspired motivation and global awareness to be active participants in work, personal, and civic life;
- **Experience:** Shifting to a world where empathy is critical for driving and producing meaning in personal, civic, and work-life experiences.

Because every school system community has a different conception of the landscape shifts, and therefore a unique definition of success, we ask this key question early in our strategic planning process:

What do students need in terms of rigorous academic content and the skills, mindsets, and literacies to be prepared for being lifelong learners and contributors in the 21st century?

This is where we begin,

convening and educating a strategic design group of key representative stakeholders about shifts in expectations for our graduates and what they need to get to success. When students graduate, you and your community want them to be ready for whatever the future brings. To be lifelong learners and contributors, young people need deeper learning experiences rooted in rigorous academic content, as well as 21st century skills, mindsets, and literacies. This is what we call deeper learning, and it leads to 21st century success.

Many districts call this their Portrait (or Profile) of a Graduate. The process captures this re-envisioning. It entails, in part, learning about how society has changed. Knowing this prompts the next step: engaging with the community to imagine the learning experiences required to develop

the knowledge, competencies, and mindsets our graduates need to live to their fullest potential in the new landscape.

This work not only excites participants about the possibilities of the vision, but it can be richly informative and appropriately provocative for all stakeholders. There is real potential when a school district serves as the hub for the community's conversation about how to help students succeed. Compellingly, the landscape shifts conversation is one wholly embraced by the school community, which is critical for building the political support necessary to redesign our schools.

Aspirational thinking breathes new life into strategic planning. The Portrait of a Graduate process is about building and creating. It sets the community's vision framed by student success, based on the many ways our students can have bright futures. The Portrait helps us set our sights for 21st century learning experiences and educational transformation to frame your school system's future.



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