



CHARTING A COURSE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE
SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

**An Executive Summary of the 2016-17 Strategic
Planning Process**

Submitted by New Profit to the
Salem School Committee
May 16, 2016

Introduction

The following is an executive summary of a scope of work to facilitate, in partnership with the Salem Public Schools (SPS), a Strategic Planning Process that is developed and owned by SPS, and in which the entire Salem community is deeply and fully engaged. During the next 10-12 months, we look forward to helping the Salem Public Schools lead a series of important conversations with school and community stakeholders that will inform and help shape the future direction of SPS—which, of course, is tied directly to the future success of Salem itself. These conversations, and the important data that emerge from them, will result in a Strategic Plan for SPS—a roadmap for the district and each of its schools in the years ahead.

Now, as perhaps never before, the fates of our cities depend largely on how well we educate our children. The world is rapidly changing and our young people will need to acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions that have not been demanded of previous generations. The Strategic Planning Process can help SPS and its many stakeholders create a compelling vision to enable its young people to meet their futures—and Salem’s collective future—fully prepared to lead and contribute as productive workers, committed family members, and engaged citizens.

Salem joins many districts in Massachusetts and around the country in “remodeling” its schools for modern life. Like a beautiful historic home, SPS has “good bones”—excellent facilities, many talented leaders and teachers, and numerous innovative programs. But as is the case with any historic home, many aspects of public schooling need to be brought “up to code.” Fortunately, there are models both within and beyond Salem that can guide SPS in its modernization efforts.

As a non-profit venture philanthropy firm that aims to improve the quality of life in America’s cities and towns, New Profit feels privileged to take this journey with the Superintendent, the Senior Leadership Team, the School Committee, and the many other stakeholders who want the best for Salem’s children and the professionals who work with them. Given what we have seen and heard to date, we believe that SPS is uniquely poised to become “THE district of choice on the North Shore”—one of the most desirable places for young people to learn, grow, and thrive.

Project Overview & Philosophy

As you know, upon assuming her new role, Superintendent Margarita Ruiz embarked on a ‘listening and learning tour’ to inform her Entry Report to the Salem School Committee. This tour yielded several clear areas of focus for the district; one of those was developing a powerful Vision and Strategic Plan for the future.

New Profit heard about Salem’s aspirations and made an initial outreach to Mayor Kim Driscoll and Superintendent Ruiz to explore how we might make a contribution to the district’s efforts. Our rationale for doing so was straightforward. The Reimagine Learning Fund at New Profit focuses on ensuring that all young people have access to the supports and opportunities they need—within and beyond the school day—to achieve academic and life success. In order to make a sustainable impact, we wanted to be as close to the ground as possible to learn what it really takes to turn around a district, in exchange for our organization’s resources and expertise in the areas of strategic planning, project management, data collection and analysis, communications, and facilitation. In addition, the lead funder of Reimagine Learning, the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation, has deep roots in Essex County and was especially committed to improving education in this geographic area.

After a series of exploratory conversations, Superintendent Ruiz invited New Profit to help facilitate the district's Strategic Planning Process.

New Profit is deeply committed to behind the scenes leadership. We provide ongoing thought partnership and essential leverage to those we work with in a way that makes it possible for them to do more, faster than they would be able to do without us, but also ensure that we are always in service of the objectives and approach that most strongly resonate with our partners. Put differently, we look for projects where we have shared aspirations and values, but do not enter a situation with a pre-set agenda or set of outcomes that we are trying to bring to life. We are deeply committed to co-creation.

For the Salem Public Schools, this means that we see ourselves as SPS's strategic thought partner and essential leverage for planning, but that the ultimate decisions to be made – e.g., choice of approach, model, timing, etc. – are yours. We will provide our best advice and guidance and then work to bring to life the vision that feels most right and relevant to the district and the community.

With that in mind, we would like to share a few specifics with you about our approach:

1. **Acting as Facilitators:** We are, first and foremost, facilitators. We believe strongly that the school district and the community as a whole are the creators and owners of the Strategic Plan. While we bring valuable strategies tools, resources, and perspectives, our role is to enable district leadership and other stakeholders to develop a robust and effective Strategic Plan, one that is both ambitious and doable. Toward this end, we will share our toolbox, gather data, ask guiding questions, and help facilitate the important conversations that will animate the Strategic Planning process and help prepare the district for implementation.
2. **Community-Engaged Planning:** Historically, Strategic Planning has been the province of top-level leadership, who then “roll out” a plan to stakeholders, with an expectation of immediate buy-in and implementation. Research has shown that such an approach can backfire, and that a preferable approach is to engage all stakeholders in creating a vision and giving life to it. In other words, people have a stake in what they've helped to create. We look forward to helping SPS create a community-engaged Strategic Planning Process, one that invites all sectors of the community to be at the table.
3. **Building on Assets:** Oftentimes, in trying to improve an organization, it is natural to focus on what is not working. While every school district in the country, including SPS, wrestles with challenges, we believe there is much to be gained by assuming a stance of “appreciative inquiry,” that is, by recognizing the existing “bright spots”—those aspects of the organization that are valued by internal stakeholders and produce value for the external stakeholders. We believe that this stance is especially important in Salem because there is much to be hopeful about: there are many examples of excellence in SPS that can be appreciated and possibly adopted elsewhere in the district.
4. **A Whole Child, Student-Centered Focus:** Perhaps most salient to us from our initial conversations in Salem thus far is that the city is devoted to its children, and that it regards all domains of development—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical—as intertwined and important to success in school and in life. Emerging science tells us understanding the whole child and adopting a “student-centered” approach enables successful students to shine even

more brightly and creates the opportunity for students who struggle to benefit from a variety of innovative practices that are showing promise around the country. A perspective that puts students at the center also helps us gain much better clarity about what the adults who serve children need to succeed.

5. **Connection to the New Profit Network:** Though we are charged with helping to facilitate the Strategic Planning Process, we also have in mind the longer term needs of the district. The New Profit network consists of many thought leaders and practitioners. We would be happy to make whatever connections the district would deem appropriate to inform the Strategic Planning Process more deeply and, over time, to support implementation of the Strategic Plan.
6. **Adaptable Planning:** The focus of a Strategic Plan is on the future. An effective Strategic Plan is regularly used and frequently revised to reflect new trends or developments. It helps focus on the distinctive capabilities of the organization in its specific context, sets a formal direction for the organization with a pro-active orientation, creates an environment of teamwork, where all participants can make more effective decisions and utilize their skills more fully; and provides external audiences with a concise basis for analysis, evaluation, and input. Our hope is to help SPS create a Strategic Plan that provides direction now – outlining priorities and a pathway to achieving them in the near term – but also serves as both an analytical tool and a working document that will guide the district’s action over time.

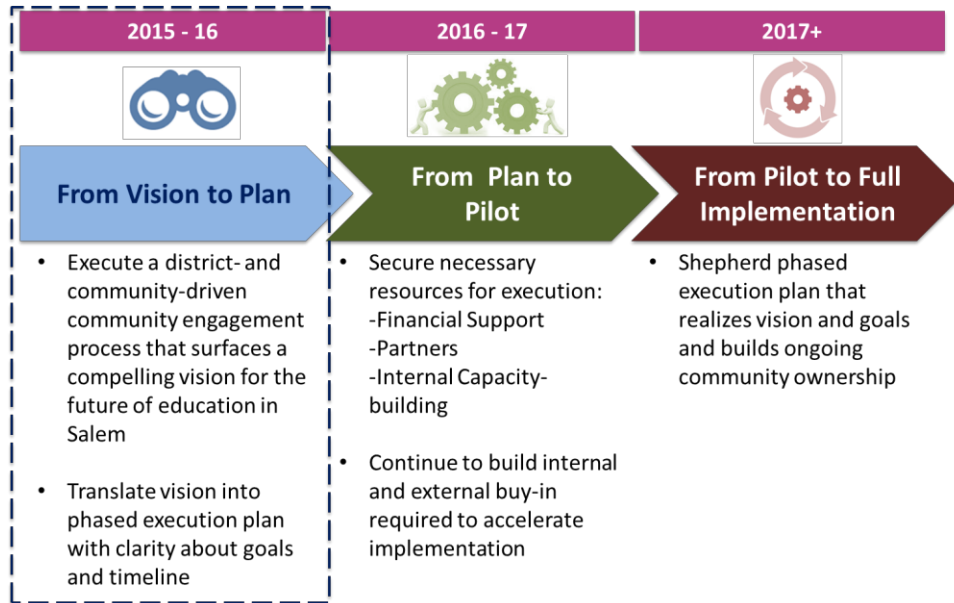
A Multi-Stage Process for Developing and Implementing a Strategic Plan

Having had the opportunity to meet with and interview key members of the Senior Leadership Team, we have gained a preliminary understanding of the current strengths and challenges in Salem. This was very helpful in developing a scope of work for the Strategic Planning Process.

We envision the following three-stage process for the planning and implementation of SPS’s Strategic Plan.

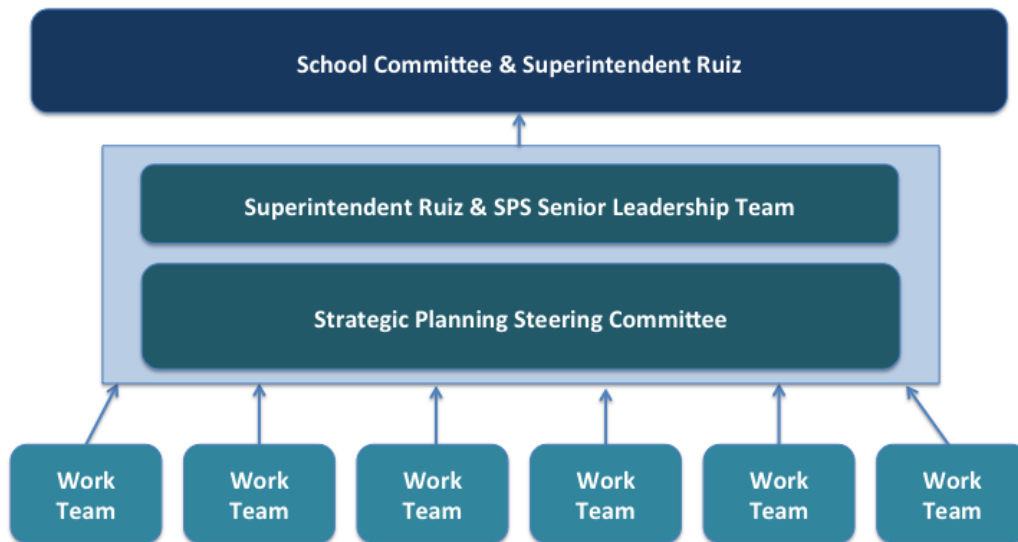
- 1) **From Vision to Plan:** Translate the high-level vision, mission and areas of focus that emerged from the Superintendent’s Listening Tour into detailed plans of action to bring these changes to life.
- 2) **From Plan to Pilot:** Identify early wins and execute against these, and secure necessary resources for longer-term change priorities including financial support, partners and internal capacity.
- 3) **From Pilot to Full Implementation:** Fully executed change management process that ensures all of the identified priorities and change levers are translated into district operations in a manner that will support positive impact on learners in the district.

New Profit’s support focuses solely on the first stage, from Vision to Plan, with the intent of enabling Salem to think through the more detailed design considerations that will need to be addressed in order to bring the vision of the future for SPS to life in schools and classrooms across the district.



Governance and the Structure of the Strategic Planning Process

In order to ensure the fidelity of the process, we have partnered with the Senior Leadership Team to design a governance structure that fosters participation and accountability across a wide swath of stakeholder groups. The governance structure is described in the schematic below, followed by a narrative about the role of each group.



ROLE OF THE SALEM SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

The School Committee and the Superintendent will ratify the final Strategic Plan. Two members of the School Committee will sit on the Steering Committee and other School Committee members will have the opportunity to join Work Teams.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT & SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Co-create the plan for the Strategic Planning Process with New Profit
- Staff the Steering Committee
- Staff the Work Teams
- Participate in Community Conversations
- Report on progress to the School Committee
- Attend meetings with New Profit at key mileposts

THE ROLE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Who:

- A representative body of approximately 13 people, consisting primarily of the Leads of the Work Teams
- Includes two (2) School Committee Members
- Includes parent, student and teacher representatives
- Superintendent & Senior Leadership Team serve as staff
- Steering Committee meets approximately four (4) times over the life of the Strategic Planning Process

What:

- Establish a charter for itself and select members of the Lever for Change Work Teams
- Serve as a multi-stakeholder body that keeps an eye across all of the Levers for Change and the connections among them
- Share and communicate discoveries through communications channels
- First reviewer of drafts leading up to the final Strategic Plan

Vision & Entry Plan Priorities

Building on hundreds of conversation with stakeholders that have taken place since Superintendent Ruiz began her tenure, the Superintendent and Senior Leadership Team recently came together for a full-day retreat to discuss and vet the Mission, Vision and Core Values that were drafted by the Superintendent and the School Committee. The Strategic Planning Process will build on the existing draft vision for the district:

“All students prepared to achieve, inspired to learn”

Identifying Priorities

Superintendent Ruiz also identified a number of Priorities in her Entry Plan that articulated the core capabilities required to allow the Salem Public Schools to deliver high quality education to all students. These Priorities are as follows:

- **Ensure Learning & Growth for Every Student, Every Day**
- **Strengthen Infrastructure to Support Our Schools**
- **Inform and Engage Our Parents and Community at Every Level**
- **Develop a Powerful Vision of the Future of SPS**

Building on the Vision for the district and the core operational capabilities identified in the Entry Plan Findings, the Senior Leadership Team engaged in a deep discussion of what it considered the Key Change Levers for district transformation. Six Change Levers were identified, with a Work Team dedicated to each Lever. The Work Teams will develop strategies for each Lever, keeping in mind the core capabilities required to drive change in service of SPS’ vision.



VISION FOR PORTFOLIO SCHOOLS IN THE DISTRICT

Is SPS a school system or system of schools? This important question speaks to many critical decisions—from budgeting to organizing professional development to hiring and retaining staff and determining the models of educational design that are most suited to the needs of Salem’s school-age population. What values, principles and practices will enable SPS to make an informed decision about the architecture of the educational delivery system?

TEACHER LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

To be effective in today’s 21st century world, teachers—like students—must master a much broader set of skills and strategies than was ever expected of their counterparts in previous generations. How do we recruit and retain the best talent and ensure that SPS teachers have best-in-class opportunities to advance their learning, exercise their leadership in meaningful ways, and feel empowered to design experiences that fully engage children’s heads, hearts, and hands?

FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In earlier times, the school and the community were viewed as separate spheres, often competing for resources. Today, we recognize that: 1) children succeed when their families are engaged in their learning 2) families become engaged when they feel competent, respected, and welcome in the schools and 3) community partners are truly aligned with the needs of the students. How will SPS ensure that family and community are part of the very fabric of the educational experience?

VISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD IN SALEM

Recent developments in neuroscience make clear that the first months and years of life are a critical period for development, and that quality early learning experiences make a significant difference in children's later learning outcomes. Today, there are not enough affordable and high-quality Pre-K options to meet demand. How might Salem design a Pre-K strategy that will enable children to succeed as part of a robust Pre-K-12 system?

THE FUTURE OF HIGH SCHOOL IN SALEM

It is widely recognized that the American High School was built for an industrial economy in which only a small percentage of students were expected to go onto post-secondary schooling. Today, the realities of 21st century life require that all young people have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to thrive in complex environments. In addition to helping students master the basics, how will SPS ensure that they also know how to solve problems, analyze data, communicate clearly, and work well with diverse groups of people?

MEETING THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE LEARNERS

Despite the fact that the U.S. educational system has been designed in large measure for "the average learner," we now know that such a design excludes the vast majority of our young people. Experts recommend instead that we "design to the edges," i.e., customize the educational experience in a way that enables each student to experience growth and meet or exceed standards. How will Salem customize learning for all students, from those who are academically excelling to those whose first language is not English, who have learning disabilities, learning and attention issues, or have been exposed to trauma and the effects of chronic poverty?

Role of the Work Teams & the New Profit Team

THE ROLE OF THE WORK TEAMS

Each Change Lever of the Strategic Plan will have a Work Team consisting of 6-10 people who will:

- Develop strategy for the particular Lever
- Define the landscape for the content area
- Develop a learning agenda for determining best practices
- Determine goals, strategies, objectives and tactics for the Lever

Work Teams will meet 5 – 6 times throughout the Strategic Planning Process. A team member from New Profit will staff each Work Team, in order to support project management.

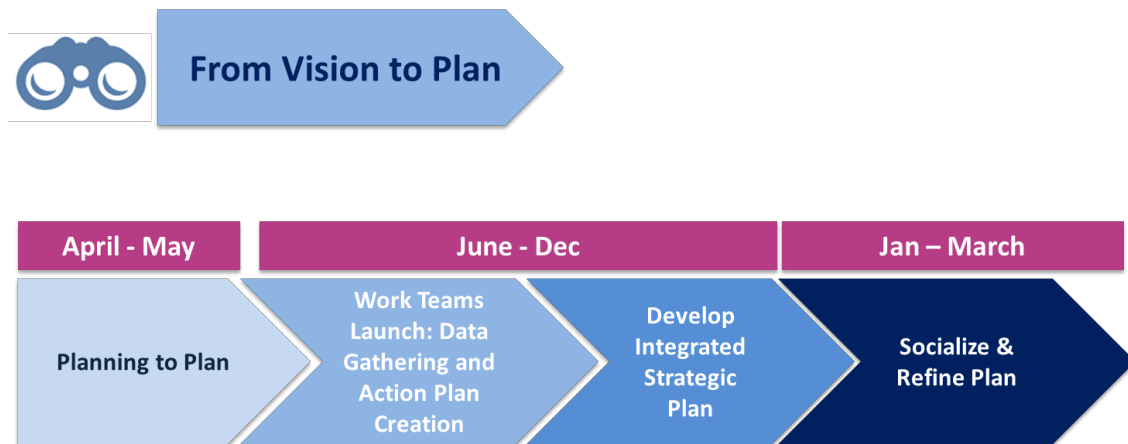
THE ROLE OF NEW PROFIT TEAM

- Co-create the plan for the Strategic Planning Process with the Superintendent & Leadership Team
- Facilitate key conversations
- Develop strategies for communications, outreach, and building buy-in
- Help establish Work Team culture and norms
- Gather and analyze relevant data to inform the plan
- Conduct interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders

- Facilitate Community Conversations
- Draft early versions of the Strategic Plan for vetting by stakeholders

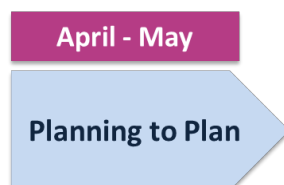
Timeline of Activities

The Strategic Planning Process will yield a five-year plan that outlines a vision for what we want to accomplish as a district. To fully develop and implement this plan, we see a three-phased process. New Profit will support SPS through the 'From Vision to Plan' phase of the process.



- *The planning process will encompass 6 discrete Work Teams that address key Levers for Change identified by the School Committee and SPS Leadership Team.*
- *The Work Teams will meet separately and then bring their work together into an integrated plan that addresses the interconnected aspects of the district's operating plan*

The 'From Vision to Plan' phase of the plan encompasses four tasks and will result in a full Strategic Plan that has been vetted with community members. Below is a more detailed outline of each of the elements of the 'From Vision to Plan' phase of the Strategic Planning Process:

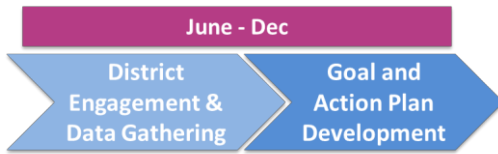


Completed:

- **March, 2016:** Proposed scope of work submitted
- **April 2016:** Scope of work revised and accepted by Superintendent and Senior Leadership Team
- **May 2016:** Senior Leadership Team Retreat
- **May 2016:** Salem School Committee Presentation

Remaining:

- **May 2016:** Select Steering Committee Members
- **May 2016:** Staff Work Teams
- **May 2016:** Finalize meeting schedule for all groups



- **June – October 2016:** Work Teams launch; learning and data gathering
- **October – December 2016:** Work Team goal and action plan creation; Steering Committee meets twice; Work Teams meet roughly every 2 weeks
- **October 2016:** Community Conversation # 1
- **November 2016:** Steering Committee debriefs Community Conversation #1
- **December 2016:** Work Teams finalize plans and deliver to Steering Committee



- **January – February 2017:** Steering Committee and Staff integrate Work Team plans into coherent first draft
- **February 2017:** Community Conversations # 2 to vet draft plan; Steering Committee meets to debrief
- **March 2017:** Senior Leadership Team & New Profit team finalize draft and submit to School Committee
- **April 2017:** Strategic plan submitted to School committee; Community Celebration of Strategic Plan

Conclusion

In May 2015, Mayor Kim Driscoll gave a presentation at the annual conference of the Massachusetts Association of Planning Directors. The title of the presentation was “Planning and Implementing the Salem of Tomorrow.” On Salem’s 400th birthday, she said: “...The city has the potential to be a community that is leading the way with innovations and entrepreneurs that are the envy of the nation.”

New Profit believes that the Salem Public Schools are a key driver and incubator of this vision, and that a remodeled education system will deliver on the promise of ensuring that the diverse talents and strengths of Salem’s young people are maximized for the common good. It is our hope that, by facilitating the Strategic Planning Process in partnership with the district and the larger community, we can help you realize the vision of a 21st century educational system that is second to none.