

East Side Learning Center Strategic Plan 2012-2015

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East Side Learning Center Strategic Plan Overview

Mission

Unlocking each child's potential through the foundation of reading.

Vision

To be a major force in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to read at grade level by the 4th grade.

Clients

Children in kindergarten through 4th grade who are not at their grade level, many of whom do not have the resources to get help elsewhere.

Roots

The East Side Learning Center began on the East Side of St. Paul, Minnesota, with a group of concerned citizens and the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). The Learning Center was established in 2001 as a ministry with SSND in partnership with the local community. Though the Learning Center may expand to other communities, it will retain the name East Side Learning Center in honor of where it started and has its heart.

Core Values

- L LOVING**, affirming and respectful atmosphere
- E EDUCATION** that transforms, encouraging each child to reach the fullness of his/her potential
- A ACCOUNTABILITY** and careful stewardship of community resources
- R RESULTS**, driven by high quality, systematic approach and academic rigor
- N NEEDS** of children drive where resources are allocated

Key Ingredients

- One-on-one time with caring adults
- Personalized lesson plans written by licensed teachers
- Individualized tracking and measurement of progress
- Certified tutors and trained volunteers
- Programming embedded in schools and aligned with classroom instruction
- Effective use of resources

2012-2015 Strategic Direction.

Over the next three years, we will:

- 1. Prevent children from falling behind in reading**
- 2. Seek opportunities to reach more children**
- 3. Maximize tutoring impact**
- 4. Ensure funding adequate to maintain and expand programming**
- 5. Maintain organizational strength and sustainability**

2012-2015 Strategic Plan Major Initiatives:

1. Prevent children from falling behind in reading.

- Grow the kinder pilot
- Explore pre-K programming where it resides within the schools

2. Seek opportunities to reach more children

- Identify priorities for expansion; with a value on maximizing efficiencies and resources
- Expand to a maximum of 6 sites under current staff structure
- Explore opportunities for expanding capacity to operate more than 6 sites

3. Maximize tutoring impact

- Articulate and demonstrate criteria for success in varied program applications
- Maintain/strengthen relationships with educational partners and families
- Explore opportunities to augment instruction with emerging tools and technology

4. Ensure funding adequate to maintain and expand programming

- Broaden promotion of ESLC services and results to grow volunteers and financial support
- Explore alternative funding opportunities, broader initiatives or collective endeavors that support children and reading (for example Title I or Thrive)

5. Maintain organizational strength and sustainability

- Increase inclusivity among board, professional tutors, volunteers and staff
- Review staffing structure to ensure sustained leadership, efficiency and opportunity for growth
- Dedicate resources to ensure excellence in the volunteer program

Strategic Planning Process and Framework

In 2011, as a previous strategic plan reached the end of its life span, leaders of ESLC determined that it was time to renew strategic direction. The board began conversations in the fall of 2011. Kim Sundet Vanderwall was brought on to facilitate a planning process, and a planning team of board and staff members formed in January of 2012.

Most aspects of the previous strategic plan had been brought to life with great success, despite the major economic recession that hit shortly after the plan was completed. In fact, in a time of great financial challenge for most nonprofit organizations, ESLC had managed to open two new program sites.

Other than the economic downturn, the context for the organization had changed little since the 2008 plan was developed. The thorough environmental scan conducted in 2007 still seemed relevant; including the following key factors:

- ✓ ESLC is almost universally **seen very positively** by those who know the organization. The organization is viewed as having integrity, rigor and a real solution for a huge need. In the face of very promising results, there was increased pressure from supporters to expand the program. Most wanted the program to grow, but differed on how that should happen.
- ✓ The program is intertwined with the vision of Sister Audrey and charism of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), an order whose numbers are declining. The SSND also subsidize the program through donations and through providing staff at below-market prices. The continuity of good leadership is a critical question for the organization to ensure. Could the program continue to exist as it does without leadership and support from the SSND?
- ✓ Opportunities and direction are heavily influenced by the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) The SPPS Foundation is looking at tutoring as a critical component of education and sees ESLC as a shining star. The foundation would like to see ESLC take a much larger role in the district; and offered to help raise funds toward that end.
- ✓ There could be as many as 6,000 SPPS students who meet ESLC's criteria for services. ESLC is currently serving 160 of those students. At the two public schools ESLC currently serves, leaders estimate that the program is serving about 45% of the children who could benefit from it. There are over 50 elementary schools in the St. Paul Public Schools alone.

In the first few months of 2012; parents, principals and allies at the SPPS Foundation and United Way were again interviewed. It is clear that ESLC is still seen very positively by those who know the organization. In addition, a scan of recent trends identified the following drivers:

- ✓ **Drive to get better results in education.** There is worry on a national basis about the increasing number of children getting left behind. Minnesota has one of the highest achievement gaps in the country. Children of Color here fare worse than they do in many states that have poor overall achievement. Local school districts, and Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) in particular, are under great pressure to close the achievement gap. For partners such as ESLC, some flexibility may be important as the district tries strategies for improving results.
- ✓ **Increased focus on and resources for early learning.** Research shows that the best age for intervention is pre-k. Experts foresee pre-k moving into schools. In 2013, five SPPS schools will pilot a pre-k to 3 model. Over the past 10 or 15 years, the early childhood learning field has done an excellent job of helping funders, institutions and community members understand how

critical early learning is to a child's future success. As a consequence, there is great interest and support right now for reading by third grade.

- ✓ **Funders wanting to fund results.** There is big momentum among funders to fund results rather than programs. After decades of programs, they see that poverty, for example, remains as big a problem as ever. They are working together on issues they'd like to see improve, including student success.
- ✓ **National and local attempts to increase results for young people.** No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is dying as a program, and Minnesota now has a waiver so it doesn't have to comply with NCLB. But there are several national and local initiatives attempting to incentivize better outcomes for children. Increasingly, these programs follow a model called **Collective Impact** (aligning multiple programs and multiple sectors toward common goals and outcomes). Initiatives include Race to the Top, Promise Neighborhoods, St. Paul Children's Collaborative, Investing in Innovation (i³), and STRIVE Together.
- ✓ **Increasingly diverse population.** The population in St. Paul continues to get more diverse. In 2011, the SPPS population of children grades K-3 was 74% of Color; and 70% qualified for free and reduced lunch. There is even more diversity and poverty in the population actually served by ESLC.
- ✓ **Instability.** There is a great deal of transience in the student population served by the public schools in which ESLC has programs. 60% to 70% turnover in a year is not unusual. This means that many of the children who need the most help are not in the school for the entire year or from one year to the next, limiting ESLC's ability to help them get long term results.
- ✓ **St. Paul Public Schools Foundation's (SPPSF)** mission is to rally investments of time and resources to support academic success in the Saint Paul Public Schools. It has selected tutoring as one of three core focuses to accomplish that mission. ESLC is a founding member of the partnership, and informed much of the recently published *Best Practices for Tutoring Programs: a Guide to Quality*.

The board and staff came together for two retreats in March, 2012 to look at all they had learned and begin to draw conclusions. (See appendix 1 for a summary of the retreat findings.) In light of continued excellence in organizational practice and in student outcomes, the group used an appreciative inquiry approach in order to best build on strengths and opportunities. They agreed that growth is still a goal – as long as it is financially and administratively possible. And that the growth may be about deeper results as much as about serving more children. In particular, there was interest in trying to reach children earlier so they don't fall as far behind.

The planning team shaped the conclusions into a strategic plan from April to May of 2012. The board adopted the plan on June 14, 2012.