




COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Vision and Strategic Plan

2012 - 2017



**Many Voices, One Vision.
Colchester Schools.**

Malletts Bay cover photo by Jen Gamache
Dancer cover photo by Laura Miller



Photo by Maia Patrie

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I. Introduction

The community of Colchester is located on Lake Champlain within three miles north of the city of Burlington, Vermont. Currently, the town has an aggregate population of about 17,000 residents. The town is served by Colchester School District (CSD), which has approximately 2,200 students. The district operates five separate school buildings—Colchester High School, Colchester Middle School, Malletts Bay School, Porters Point School, and Union Memorial School—and an administrative office building, employing about two hundred teachers and fifteen administrators. Colchester graduates attend a wide range of colleges and universities throughout the state and country.

The district is renowned for its implementation of differentiated instruction as part of its efforts to provide all students with meaningful and appropriate educational opportunities. Two of its schools, Colchester High School and Union Memorial School, have received national recognition for their differentiated instruction professional development programs and practices.

Colchester and the greater area hosts a number of colleges and universities, including Saint Michael's College, the University of Vermont, and Champlain College, that provide a comprehensive range of academic programs for Vermonters as well as for students from many other states and from regions around the world.



Colchester School District initiated a strategic planning process in the fall of 2010. Strategic planning can be defined as the process of determining what an organization wants to be, what it desires to achieve, and, most importantly, how it intends to reach its goals.

The approach the district used to create its five-year vision and strategic plan was designed to engage as many individuals from the Colchester community as possible. Over seventy-five Colchester community members, including students, teachers, parents, citizens, business owners, and administrators, participated in the Colchester School District Vision Summit on June 15 and 16, 2011. The community members came together to share their best experiences with the district, their ideas about the strengths and assets of the district and the community, their vision and biggest hopes for the future of the schools, and their ideas for how the district might accomplish its vision. These conversations led to the creation of this vision and strategic plan document, which will be used to navigate the district's future while leveraging all the strengths and resources of the CSD community.

While Colchester School District was developing its vision and strategic plan, the Town of Colchester was also looking toward its future through the work of the Heritage Project. Colchester School District and the Town of Colchester seek to align the work of these two processes to ensure maximum collaboration and mutual support in order to achieve their common educational goals.



Photo by Tawnya Safer

The district is renowned for its implementation of differentiated instruction as part of its efforts to provide all students with meaningful and appropriate educational opportunities.



II. The Process: Appreciative Inquiry Framework

Colchester School District chose a strategic planning approach known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which builds upon the positive core of an organization. Rather than identifying and solving problems—or identifying and closing gaps—this strengths-based framework focuses upon what is working well in an organization and further develops those aspects. Over time, the process replaces the problems with successes.

“Appreciative Inquiry is a process that replaces classic problem-based analysis of institutional deficiencies with large-scale collaborative exploration of what is working well within an organization. Based on a philosophy of positive change, Appreciative Inquiry contends that the most rapid, systemic way to improve a human system is to build connections between its members, its positive core of capabilities, achievements, and wisdom, and its vision of a preferred future.”¹

¹ Miles, Cindy. Leadership Abstract 16, no. 4 (2003).

Organizations throughout the world use AI to provide a foundation for organizational change and inspired action, and it is not a one-time or even an annual process. It is a mind-set—a way of searching for strengths and successes every day, investigating the conditions that support those successes, and intentionally creating more of those conditions. This vision and strategic plan is an opportunity for learning and an ongoing, collaborative process of exploring and building upon our assets and achievements.

Our vision and strategic plan directly reflects the voices of those who participated throughout the process and provides the five-year framework within which the district and its schools can realistically develop one-year action plans, including goals and benchmarks that will assess progress and chart a clear course of action for the district’s future.



Photo by Jen Gamache



II. The Process: **Chronology**

September 2010: The Colchester School Board and superintendent collaboratively decided to develop a five-year vision and strategic plan using an Appreciative Inquiry framework. Mary Jane Shelley from TriFocal Consulting and Dr. Marge Schiller were contracted as consultants to facilitate the process.

November 2010: A core planning team of parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and business owners met to plan the vision summit. The team learned about AI and chose the topics for the pre-summit interviews they planned to conduct with the Colchester community in order to determine the summit's focus.

December 2010–February 2011: The core planning team conducted eighty-five one-on-one interviews with community members about the three chosen topics, including "Quality Education," "Financial Investment in Education," and "Building Bridges with the Community."

February 2011: The core planning team organized, analyzed, and themed the extensive information collected during the interviews, and they determined the focus for the vision summit. Three topics stood out for further exploration: "Preparing Our Students for the Future," "Community Partnerships," and "Effective Communication."

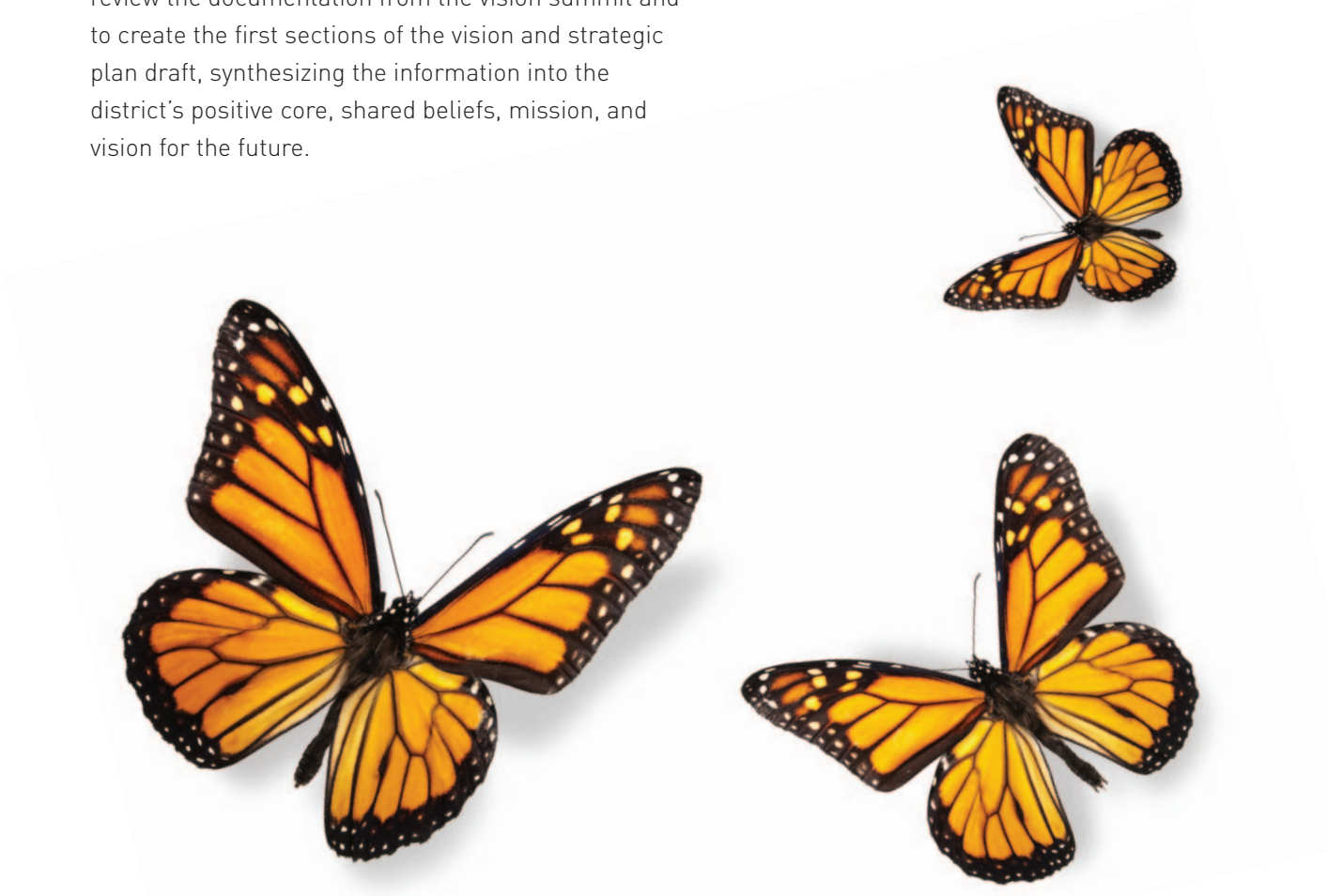
February–June 2011: The core planning team formed three subgroups and planned for all aspects of the vision summit, including logistics of the summit, outreach and communication, and writing the interview guide.



June 15 and 16, 2011: The vision summit, entitled "Many Voices, One Vision. Colchester School District," was held at Colchester High School. It was facilitated by Mary Jane Shelley, Dr. Marge Schiller, and Dr. Matt Moehle, and it was attended by more than seventy-five members of the Colchester community.

July–September 2011: A writing committee met to review the documentation from the vision summit and to create the first sections of the vision and strategic plan draft, synthesizing the information into the district's positive core, shared beliefs, mission, and vision for the future.

September–November 2011: The administration worked with Mary Jane Shelley and summit participants to finalize the vision and strategic plan.





II. The Process: Vision and Strategic Plan Core Documents

The strategic planning process resulted in the creation of the district's positive core, shared beliefs, mission, vision, and identification of the pathways for Colchester School District for the next five years.

The Colchester School District Vision and Strategic Plan incorporates the following documents:

- **The Positive Core** represents Colchester School District's unique strengths, assets, resources, and capabilities that will carry us into the future. We are able to leverage our positive core to propel us into our future.
- **Shared Beliefs** represent the district's highest priorities and deeply held driving forces. The shared beliefs lay the groundwork for the mission.
- **The Mission** is a precise description of what the district does and why it exists. The mission drives decisions about the direction of the district.
- **The Vision** is a series of statements about what the district wants to become, and it gives shape and direction to the district's future. It should resonate with all members of the community and help them feel proud, excited, and part of something much bigger than themselves.
- **Pathways** are the broad directions the district and community will pursue over the next five years to achieve its vision.

Photo by AnnaMary Lauricella



III. Positive Core, Shared Beliefs, Mission, and Vision: Our Assets, Strengths, Resources, and Capabilities

- We have proximity to and availability of natural resources, including the lake, forests, and farms.
- We are just-right sized—big enough for a range of offerings but small enough for individualization.
- Our community cares for its young people.
- The parents are involved in the schools.
- Individualization is based upon strong personal connections.
- We have responsible and respectful students.
- We support arts, academics, and athletics.
- We value open, ongoing communication.
- We have invested and talented employees.

Photo by Kaeng Takahashi



Photo by Lee Cordner





III. Positive Core, Shared Beliefs, Mission, and Vision:

The Colchester Community's Shared Beliefs

- Each student is a successful learner, capable of achieving high standards.
- Each student learns best when the entire community is involved, engaged, and connected with the student, the learning environment, and learning outcomes.
- Each student has a unique learning profile that must be recognized, embraced, and celebrated on all levels.
- Learning opportunities must educate the whole child, including physical, emotional, academic, cognitive, and social aspects.
- Successful learning opportunities are differentiated, relevant, and rigorous.
- Everyone is recognized as a learner and teacher.
- Strengths-based thinking and planning are essential to student success and program improvement.

Photo by Amy Minor



III. Positive Core, Shared Beliefs, Mission, and Vision:

The mission of Colchester School District is to partner with our community to educate each of our students to become engaged, productive citizens who lead successful, balanced, and healthy lives.

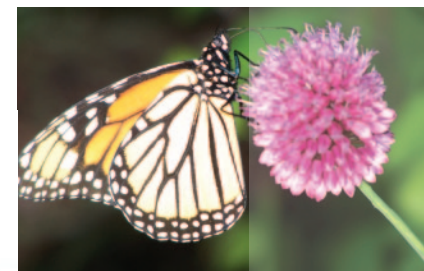


Photo by AnnaMary Lauricella





III. Positive Core, Shared Beliefs, Mission, and Vision: The Vision for the Future

Our students, families, and citizens will feel a sense of belonging and pride as we work to prepare for an ever-changing society. Our partnerships will lead to a vibrant, inclusive community, proud of innovative and flexible approaches with a commitment to excellence for individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

WE ENVISION:

Community Engagement. We will go beyond involvement to true engagement. As our town and schools move toward integration, we envision multigenerational learning partnerships where students learn in the community, and the community learns in our schools. The people of Colchester will support our schools because they are active shareholders who feel a sense of pride of our current and future citizens' successes.

Innovative Teaching and Learning. Creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving will be the hallmarks of innovative teaching and learning, providing relevant and authentic experiences that ignite and excite our learners. We will capitalize on the opportunities inherent in modern technology. We realize that technology helps free us from boundaries imposed by time and space, allowing us to provide rigorous educational opportunities in flexible ways.

Success for Each Student. We will provide a wide range of opportunities to capitalize on the strengths and interests of each learner. We embrace the responsibility of helping to prepare all learners for their future in a rapidly changing world.

Photos by Tawnya Safer (left and middle) and Connie Gavin (right)



IV. PATHWAY A:

High Standards, Expectations, and Individual Engagement for All Learners

Success for each of our learners will be achieved through knowing and engaging them. Students will be expected to meet high standards and will be given the opportunity to individualize their learning. Teachers will be supported in using best practices to create rigorous, differentiated, engaging learning experiences.

GOALS

OUR GOALS ARE TO ENSURE:

- that all learners in the Colchester community have the opportunity to achieve high standards and expectations;
- that learners are provided with comprehensive, rigorous, and differentiated learning experiences based on state and national standards and best practices;
- that student learning is assessed regularly to inform instruction and demonstrate individual progress toward high standards and expectations; and
- that students determine individualized learning goals, creating a plan for their own learning based on their interests, readiness, and abilities.



IV. PATHWAY B:

Technology Infrastructure and Integration

We wish to provide technology and digital literacy for all stakeholders in the Colchester community. Technology should also be accessible to educate, engage, and inform the greater Colchester community.

GOALS

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- provide instant and open access to technology for all stakeholders in the Colchester community; and
- establish best practices for the integration of technology.

IV. PATHWAY C:

Learning Outside Our Four Walls

We wish to ensure an academic environment in which real-world relevancy meets the classroom. This environment must:

- be experiential;
- provide internships and community service within the building and the community;
- complement and enrich classroom learning; and
- move beyond physical and structural confines.

GOALS

OUR GOAL IS TO:

ensure that our students are able to apply their acquired skills to the challenges and needs of their work and of the world.



IV. PATHWAY D:

Commitment to Effective Communication

In order to nourish successful partnerships, every stakeholder in the Colchester schools is dedicated to actively promoting and collecting school-related information throughout the greater community.

GOALS

OUR GOAL IS TO:

generate positive awareness of school activities and services and to encourage effective dialogue within Colchester and beyond.

IV. PATHWAY E:

Parent, Community, and School Partnerships Among Lifelong Learners

Parents, community members, students, and school personnel share their skills, knowledge, and passions in order to enhance lifelong learning in our community. The educational system is the nexus of those who have something to teach and those who have a desire to learn.

GOALS

OUR GOAL IS TO:

connect skills, knowledge, and passions among all community members, thereby increasing respect and support for our educational system and enhancing lifelong learning in our community.



IV. PATHWAY F:

Wellness-Oriented, Balanced, and Healthy Learners

Colchester School District's health and wellness initiatives serve as a pathway toward the promotion of a three-tiered educational experience centering on healthy lifestyles. It focuses upon the whole person, including physical, nutritional, and community health considerations. Through a coordinated effort, CSD shall provide students, staff, and community members alike with the opportunity to identify, discuss, and review healthy learning lifestyles.

GOALS

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- establish a district-wide wellness coordinator who oversees the health and wellness curriculum and its implementation;
- establish wellness committees to meet regularly to plan, facilitate, and implement wellness goals; and
- develop a comprehensive, grade-level health and wellness curriculum.

IV. PATHWAY G:

Town + School = One Vision

Schools are a cornerstone in every town in Vermont. Parents and community members invest heavily in the education of students in order to prepare them for their life experiences. The concepts of town and school are not separate. They are one in practice and in life, and each should hold the same truth and share the same goals about the education of its students and citizens.

GOALS

OUR GOAL IS TO:

integrate community services and education at all levels for the purpose of educating all citizens.

Photo by Jayda Posey





Appreciation

Colchester School District deeply appreciates our community members' collaboration in this endeavor as we continue preparing and inspiring our students for their futures and for their positive contributions to our society. We believe that by partnering with our community, we can continue our mission of educating each of our students to become engaged, productive citizens who lead successful, balanced, and healthy lives.

Photos top row

"Tightrope Walkers" by Morgan Samler

"Skier" by Brendan Copley

"Racer Girls" by Chris Antonicci

Photos middle row

"Girl with Flower" by Jessica Richland

"Tree Art" by Aidan Williams

"Jars on Windowpane" by Tawnya Safer

"Girl with Wing" by Brittney Dart

"Lemur" by Jessica Richland

Photos bottom row

"Boy with Butterfly" by Tawnya Safer

"Officer Dewey with Tazor" by Jeff Fontaine

"Oranges" by Jessica Richland

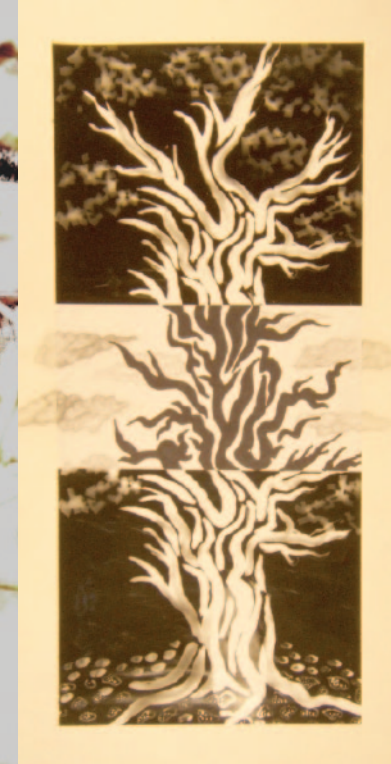




Photo by Lee Cordner

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