



Strategic Planning Process – Update May 2019

Background

The Connected Learning (CL) strategic planning process thus far has included discussions among key leadership, survey of the Leadership Team and Board of Directors, meeting of the Board of Directors, and external SWOT analysis (attached) with a focus on diversity and equity. The resulting plan, to be executed beginning July 1, 2019, will serve for 2 years through June 30, 2021.

The following points were discussed in Leadership and Board of Directors meetings:

1. Our specific niche is to provide a network for teachers to ask the important questions that lead to better classrooms. This includes “innovation” (and our survey showed a strong preference for innovative learning and events), however “innovation” may not be clear to some and may need to be reworked as an alternative such as “creativity.”
2. The goals of our events are to:
 - a. Reduce isolation by providing support for educators
 - b. Have fun!
 - c. Encourage sharing (innovation)
 - d. To disrupt and challenge the status quo
 - e. We speak to those educators who learn (or want to learn) experientially, while EdPlus and others focus on traditional learning styles (i.e., lecture)

Goals [Draft] per the 4/30/19 Board of Directors Meeting

1. To embrace and promote diversity in all CL practices, services and events, demonstrating the culture we want to see in our schools.

- a. Determine who is missing from our organization and its events (this includes but is not limited to: geographic location, school type, race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation).
 - i. In order to determine who is “missing” from Connected Learning (other than through observation), we must begin documenting additional demographic information upon event registration beginning with school district or school
- b. Target a minimum of 4 events annually in areas where we lack members – i.e., in areas north of Delmar, in Illinois, etc.
- c. Incorporate equity and inclusion language in all CL marketing (we are not communicating our sincere desire to represent all educators)
- d. Begin holding intentional and meaningful conversations with those who may want to assist in equity efforts, specifically school leaders, leaders in the educational equity space, etc.
- e. Investigate alternative meeting formats: online, in-person with childcare, etc.

2. To provide exclusive tools and resources for educators that encourage creativity and success in the classroom

- a. Develop an online presence that includes resources, links, etc. for members
- b. Develop the Connected Partners Program to meet the needs of educators via their schools
- c. Explore webinars, virtual meetings, growth groups, podcasts and other technology that may help connect educators. Launch a minimum of one of these formats to meet educators’ needs
- d. Continue to provide monthly events and Edcamps that provide unique and creative formats for learning and sharing
- e. Increase the number of special interest group (SIG)-based virtual offerings we have (example: Connected Coaches)

3. Formalize and solidify CL's leadership structure for future growth

- a. Develop a formal succession plan for Chris and other key leadership
- b. Develop a plan for formalizing Leadership Team roles, including possible pay for these roles
 - i. Develop job descriptions for each role to eliminate confusion
 - ii. Investigate low-cost project management software to serve as a "one-stop-shop" for managing all activity and events
 - iii. Develop a fundraising plan that supports all CL events as well as provides a 25% reserve for future years
 - Secure \$10,000 from Bayer (Edcamp)
 - Secure \$25,000 in new grants
 - Raise \$5,000 (net) at the unGala
 - Secure \$20,000 in Connected Partners members
 - iv. Board of Directors growth
 - Add 1 additional member for a total of 4 new members (3 existing rollover, 1 addition)
 - Secure a board member with expertise in educational equity
 - Secure a board member who is comfortable with fundraising responsibilities/willingness to access funders
 - Determine by 2021 if the Board of Directors should be larger in size or scope than current status.

SWOT Analysis Findings (courtesy of W.E. Consulting)

Strengths

- (1) High level of volunteerism for staffing, demonstrating significant programmatic cost-savings
- (2) Approximately 27% of event participants report they would be willing to volunteer staff a future event, demonstrating engaged user group
- (3) Focus of events explore non-cognitive skills and STEM is unique in the region and critical for delivering college and career-ready instruction
- (4) Many events occur in spaces outside of traditional school settings, encouraging practitioners to think and create outside of their day-to-day
- (5) Events clearly have a following, illustrating learning experiences that are consonant with researched best practices in educator retention
- (6) Leadership of Board is stable, allowing for institutional memory to counteract weakness in codified organizational structures/ processes
- (7) Board member commitment agreement allows for inclusivity (esp. low financial threshold for participation)

Weaknesses

- (1) High level of volunteer-dependency may create challenges to accountable and reliable event planning and execution as organization grows
- (2) Diversity of Board, staff populations (race, background, geography) may not proportionally reflect diversity of practitioners within the education sector, posing limitations to programming "footprint and regional relevance"
- (3) Events are seemingly "one-and-done" in nature, not conducive to skill-building/development over time
- (4) Focus of events (content) are not reflective of priority areas of most "high growth" districts across the country
- (5) Focus of events (content) is not reflective of basic content/skill needs of students in the largest districts, demonstrating misalignment with market accountability needs
- (6) Focus of events does not seemingly address advancing racial equity in education in the region, a current education sector priority
- (7) Unclear organizational governance and decision-making processes are not reflective of best practices re: staff and stakeholder communication and accountability
- (8) Most relied upon method of communication (newsletter) is not aligned with primary method by which participants learn about events (word-of-mouth)

Opportunities

- (1) Given that 33% of participants hear about events by word-of-mouth, utilization of volunteer staff as recruiters could be configured as a principal function in an effort to establish diverse participant groups and diverse/relevant event types
- (2) Organization currently "employs" two volunteer team leads who work full-time in the largest school district in the metro area, allowing a foothold to critical practitioner populations to recruit

- (3) More institutional-level partnerships (SEAs, LEAs, Unions, EPPs, etc.) engagement could yield improved alignment in student-centered skill/content area professional learning; provide additional sources of revenue; increase participant levels
- (4) Increased focus or integration of racial equity could be leveraged to incent institutional-level partnerships
- (5) Increased focus on module-based professional learning, connecting multiple events under a common skill/content thread, may be more conducive to authentic professional learning over time
- (6) Adopting “best practice” procedures for governance and decision-making could insulate organization from disfunction given inevitable shifts in governance and leadership over time

Threats

- (1) Competing needs of practitioners to supplement their full-time incomes after school hours may serve as obstacle to reliability of volunteer staff members AND general participation in programming events
- (2) Absence of diverse (esp. racially diverse) participant groups is misaligned with key component of current education sector priority work to advance racial equity in education in the region
- (3) Potential Institutional-level partners (especially on the SEA and LEA level) already have designated external professional development partnership with Ed Plus, the state’s regional professional development center, posing barrier to penetrating districts
- (4) Educator Prep Programs (EPPs) are already adopting racial equity frameworks and external partners in micro-credentialing efforts
- (5) Absence of clear decision-making processes and protocols AND/OR dependency on 1-2 individuals to own all facets of decision-making threatens operational sustainability over time

Essential Questions for Strategic Consideration

- (1) What is a “high performing” educator?
- (2) Is the program staffing model optimal for internal communications and event coordination?
- (3) How can Connected Learning best ensure practitioner and institutional diversity that is more reflective of educator demographics throughout STL region?
- (4) Is the board composition (esp. in terms of background) sufficient for effective organization stewardship (finances, programs, partnerships, fundraising, etc.)?
- (5) What is the organization’s theory of action (if Connected Learning did “a”, “b”, and “c”; then “d” would happen)?
- (6) How does Connected Learning measure success? Are these meaningful measures?
- (7) What does providing “high performing” educators with professional development actually do in terms of results for educators and/or youth?
- (8) To what extent do Connected Learning events incorporate best practices in adult learning?
- (9) How does Connected Learning’s work fill a current or future market need?

(10) Who makes decisions and how are decisions made related to event offerings and facilitation responsibilities?

(11) What are the most effective mechanisms for internal communication? For external communication?

(12) What is the event planning and coordination process model?