



THE
**Learning
Center
for the Deaf**

**Strategic Plan
2012 – 2017**



Executive Summary

Background

In 1970, Warren Schwab and a determined and dedicated team of educators, recognizing that many deaf and hard-of-hearing children in Massachusetts were not benefiting from traditional educational practices, founded The Learning Center for the Deaf. From its outset, the hallmarks of The Learning Center have been continuous innovation, a fully accessible language environment, and respect for developing the whole child, while establishing and maintaining high academic standards.

The school grew quickly as it responded to the diverse needs of its growing student population. In the 1990s, The Learning Center became one of the first schools in the nation to develop a bilingual and bicultural model for educating deaf children; now, of course, this is a common and respected approach. Today, The Learning Center is a nationally recognized school for the deaf with 200 students in its school programs. As The Learning Center has grown, it has become much more than a center school, offering a wide range of services to children, families, and members of the community.

The Planning Process

This plan began with a series of meetings and conversations with students, parents, faculty, staff, school leadership, and our Board of Trustees to obtain feedback on existing services and ideas for future growth and development. A core planning committee was established to develop strategic priorities using this input, an analysis of trends in the field, and a needs assessment. Committees were then established to work on goals and objectives for each priority.

Looking Ahead

The Learning Center has achieved great success. In just 41 years, we have grown from a school of 19 children being served in rented space to a school and multiservice organization with a beautiful 14-acre campus.

Much of this success has been due to our willingness to adapt to meet the changing needs of our deaf students and their families while always staying true to our core values. As we go forward, this principle is reflected in the programming priorities detailed in this plan. We will maintain our high academic standards with a rigorous curriculum aligned with the National Core Standards. We

will build upon the success of our bilingual model and ensure that it meets the needs of the growing number of students with cochlear implants. We will expand our programming for deaf students with special needs to ensure they have the life skills needed to transition successfully into the community. Enrichment opportunities beyond the school day has remained a high priority for parents, and so we will work to develop those services, as well as expand our outreach programs and community based services. And because we recognize the importance of technology in education, we are committed to ensuring that our faculty and staff have the tools and a strong integrated technology curriculum to provide our students with the skills and knowledge they will need to compete in today's world.

Significant physical and financial resources are necessary to achieve these programming goals and to guarantee the continued stability and growth of The Learning Center. The final two strategic priorities address these needs. The development of a campus master plan will allow us to anticipate space and facilities needs and plan ahead for them and also help guide our efforts to provide sufficient funding for these changes.

Since TLC is a private, non-profit Chapter 766 special needs school, the state of Massachusetts establishes the tuition rates for our educational programs, which are then paid by the sending school districts. However, tuition alone does not cover our expenses. Some community based services, such as The Outreach Partnership Program, provide additional revenue. Others, such as the Parent Infant Program, a critical service to families with newly diagnosed deaf babies, receive very little state funding and operate at a significant loss each year. As a young school without an endowment, it is essential that we manage our resources carefully and generate more revenue through programming and development efforts. This is detailed in the final strategic priority.

We have an ambitious but attainable plan. The children and families we serve are depending on us, and we are committed to meeting their needs and securing the resources necessary to allow The Learning Center to grow and prosper for many years to come.

The Mission Statement

Our mission is to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing students achieve their full potential in an educational environment where language and communication are keys to building competence, character and community.

Core Values

The Learning Center's founding principles emphasized high academic standards, communication access for all children, and respect for and development of the whole child. The school also began with a strong commitment to innovative programming that is reflected in the development and growth of the past forty-one years.

Over time, as new programs emerged and methodology evolved, these founding principles have remained unchanged. The core values that serve as the foundation for all programs and services at The Learning Center include:

- Early language acquisition is the foundation of a quality education.
- Children have the right to an educational program that is academically challenging and places a high value on the integration of academic, social, and emotional development.
- A program serving children and families must value diversity, and that value must be reflected in hiring, curriculum, and service delivery.
- The environment in which children learn should be comfortable, warm, and welcoming.
- A school should adapt to meet the needs of individual children.
- Families know their children best; to serve children well, a school requires an ongoing partnership with families.
- An effective school functions as a community of learners; children, families, teachers, and all school personnel; each voice matters.

Vision Statements

I. Competence: Bilingual Education

The Learning Center for the Deaf will be an exemplary bilingual school, establishing best practices through research and innovation to provide deaf and hard-of-hearing students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed as 21st century citizens.

II. Character: Serving Children and Families

The Learning Center for the Deaf will be an inclusive and fully accessible school that supports and respects all students and their families.

III. Community: Beyond School Walls

The Learning Center for the Deaf will be recognized for its significant contributions to the larger community through collaboration, outreach, and professional development.



Strategic Priorities

Academic Excellence • Bilingual Education

Success for All • Life Skills Programming

Success for All • Walden School

Commitment to Community • Beyond School Walls

21st Century Technology

Campus and Facilities

Finance and Development

Academic Excellence • Bilingual Education

Strategic Priority #1: Maintain and build upon The Learning Center's position as a national leader in the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children through further development and demonstrated success of The Learning Center's bilingual model.

Rationale

Language competency is the foundation of academic excellence. It allows one to absorb information, to think critically, and to engage in dialogue and debate. With that foundation in place, the deaf child is able to achieve at his/her highest potential.

The Learning Center has been a leader in the development and application of a bilingual model of education for deaf children. Utilization of ASL, starting in our Parent Infant Program, allows for natural language development, and establishing ASL as the language of instruction in our classrooms ensures rich learning environments.

English is the primary language of American culture and the language that brings printed text to deaf children. The development of English language competency is of equal importance at The Learning Center and is facilitated by ensuring that the deaf child has a first language fluency in American Sign Language.

Emotional health gives one the confidence to pursue and engage actively in learning. Many factors contribute to one's emotional well-being. Included among these is a sense of belonging, which is a key component of the Learning Center bilingual model. From partnering with families in the Parent Infant Program to the teaching of Deaf Culture and History, TLC fosters the development of a sense of self within the context of family and community.

We recognize that continued development of our bilingual model is central to the success of our students; therefore, it remains a strategic priority. Our objectives will focus on research, assessment, curriculum, academic achievement, auditory access services, family support, and professional development.

Goals

1. Research and assessment

- a. Establish protocol to assess students' ASL fluency, using formative and summative standardized measures and incorporating the National ASL Standards.
- b. Compile comprehensive achievement and outcomes data to provide evidence of the success of a bilingual model.

2. Curriculum development

- a. Develop a school-wide ASL curriculum integrated with the Language Arts curriculum, addressing grammar, composition, and ASL literature.
- b. Develop a school-wide Deaf Studies curriculum addressing Deaf Culture and History.

3. Spoken English in the classroom

- a. Develop a collaborative model for addressing ASL and spoken English needs that includes the ASL, Speech and Language, and English Language Arts departments.
- b. Develop a formal assessment procedure to identify students who could benefit from academic instruction in spoken English.
- c. Develop a format for individualized language plans inclusive of time allotted to instruction in ASL and spoken English.

4. Family support and education

- a. Develop an ASL and Deaf Culture curriculum for families, with classes designed specifically for parents and with opportunities for individualized and in-home support.

5. Faculty and staff professional development

- a. Create an assessment and training protocol for ASL fluency and bilingual/bicultural teaching knowledge with collection of baseline data and targets for improvement.
- b. Develop modules for professional development of bilingual practices and applications.
- c. Host a national conference on bilingual/bicultural education with deaf children.

6. Student performance outcomes

- a. Ensure alignment of our curriculum with the new Common Core Standards adopted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- b. Determine which Curriculum Based Measurements (CBM) will be useful to determine student progress and the success of our instruction.
- c. Establish baseline data on academic performance and independent living skills for all students; establish assessment schedules appropriate for all students' developmental levels and diagnostic profiles.
- d. Develop an effective system of organizing data in an effort to have the most relevant information possible to regularly track student progress and ensure improvements in student learning.
- e. Using current SAT, MCAS, Brigance, ASLAI, and PIAT information, begin to analyze this data and determine an effective format for reporting student growth over time.
- f. Through the collection of assessment data, demonstrate steady and significant progress in academic and ILS skills for all students through the IEP process.
- g. Monitor graduation rates and program completion rates for students in the Day, Intensive and Residential, and Walden School programs.
- h. Using the above data, develop a 3-year School Improvement Plan designed to mark year-to-year performance and progress of each TLC student.

Strategic Priorities



Success for All • Life Skills Programming

Strategic Priority #2: Provide comprehensive secondary and transitional services to students with multiple learning challenges, so that they may maximize their potential and move into the community with the skills and confidence to lead happy and meaningful lives.

Rationale

Serving all deaf children and adapting to meet individual needs are founding principles of The Learning Center. Our school serves many deaf children who face learning challenges as a result of cognitive delays, autism, physical or emotional health issues, and other disabilities that impact the development of academic and independent living skills.

These students need programming that addresses the development of functional skills, particularly in the upper grades, to ensure they are able to transition successfully into adulthood. This learning model goes well beyond the classroom. It must include tools for ongoing assessment of independent living skills, support and inclusion of families, community experiences, advocacy, and collaboration with adult services and the business community. In addition, to effectively educate these students, faculty and staff must receive specialized training and ongoing professional development.

While The Learning Center has always served deaf students with special needs, we have seen this population grow in recent years, first at the pre-school and elementary levels, and now moving into the secondary program. Strategic priority #2 is designed to build upon the already effective specialized services offered to these students at The Learning Center, thus ensuring all students are ready and able to move successfully into young adult life as they complete their program at TLC.

Goals

1. Assessment

- a. Develop a formal comprehensive life skills assessment procedure for students from upper elementary through high school.

2. Curriculum development

- a. Expand the usage of current curriculum from upper elementary through high school, including school-residence-home collaboration along with personal rights and self-advocacy.
- b. Expand the range and frequency of community experiences for the development of life skills and incorporate a related rubric into the formal curriculum.

3. Family support and inclusion

- a. Provide families with information regarding all aspects of this specialized curriculum and integrate home visits to assist parents with life skills teaching in the home.

4. Community involvement and collaboration

- a. Establish relationships with businesses, agencies, and other schools to collaborate on life skills development and community experiences.

Success for All • Walden School

Strategic Priority #3: Build upon the success of Walden School through targeted expansion of services, outreach, and staff development to enable students with severe emotional, behavioral, and psychiatric challenges to achieve their academic potential and transition to adult life successfully.

Rationale

For twenty-four years, Walden School has provided quality educational and treatment services to children and youth faced with huge challenges as a result of neurological, cognitive or psychiatric disabilities, and/or severe abuse, neglect or abandonment. This is a highly specialized program that has served 17 states and the District of Columbia. It epitomizes The Learning Center's core value of adapting to meet the individual needs of deaf children and provides critical services that are available nowhere else in the state.

Walden School has grown from a program providing therapeutic, educational, and residential services to eight children to one with over thirty students, offering a wide range of program options and a community based program providing services to families and children in their homes.

Given the scarcity of services nationwide for this very low-incidence population, it is important to identify the most critical needs and adjust or expand services to make sure those needs are being met. This will allow Walden School to maximize its resources, maintain or increase its student population, and remain fiscally strong and viable.

Initial data collection and analysis will lead to strategic program development, the success of which will be measured by treatment and educational outcomes. Attention will also be given to the recruitment and retention of highly specialized staff and to a marketing plan that will reach the greatest number of potential referral sources.

Goals

1. Data collection and analysis

- a. Analyze referral and admissions data from the previous five years to determine the percentage of referrals that resulted in admissions and identify patterns in diagnostic profiles, rationale for admissions decisions, and referral sources.
- b. Analyze outcome data from the previous five years to determine percentages of students who transferred to less restrictive programs, completed their program with a diploma or certificate, transferred to another treatment program or more restrictive setting, or dropped out of school.
- c. Begin collecting data on student outcomes 1, 2, and 5 years after leaving Walden School.
- d. Begin collecting data on how those making inquiries and referrals learned of Walden School.

2. Program development

- a. Based on the information received through the above analyses, review and revise the current treatment model to best address needs and maximize student success.
- b. With the addition of a Recreation Specialist, develop and implement a comprehensive therapeutic recreation plan.
- c. Explore the feasibility of establishing a diagnostic center.

3. Treatment outcomes

- a. Based on the information received through the above analyses, establish 1, 3, and 5-year goals for an increase in positive treatment outcomes.

4. Staff recruitment and retention

- a. Using information from staff surveys and an analysis of exit interviews over the previous 5 years, develop a staff recruitment and retention strategy to guarantee the continued recruitment of high quality staff and increase retention.

5. Marketing and outreach

- a. Develop new printed and web-based material and schedule a targeted statewide and national mailing.
- b. Develop an outreach strategy to visit East Coast schools and programs for the deaf and share information about Walden School services.
- c. Identify major conferences related to the field of education of the deaf and submit proposals for workshops.



Commitment to Community • Beyond School Walls

Strategic Priority #4: Establish The Learning Center as a center of excellence in serving a broad range of needs beyond the school day through the expansion of our after school educational and enrichment opportunities and the broadening of our range of services to deaf and hard-of-hearing children and adults in the community.

Rationale

The Learning Center is proud to be the largest school for deaf children in New England, but we are much more than a center school. In keeping with our belief in support of the whole child, we are committed to after school and athletics programming. We also provide a range of services to deaf children, families, and community members beyond the walls of The Learning Center:

- The Outreach Partnership Program (TOPP) serves close to 100 students attending schools in 30 public school districts.
- Our Wraparound Program serves families with children struggling with emotional disabilities.
- Our outpatient audiology clinic provides comprehensive audiology and hearing aid services to children and adults.
- We offer evening and summer American Sign Language courses to the general public.
- Our interpreting department, one of the largest and strongest of any school for the deaf in the nation, has recently begun offering services outside of TLC.

These services further our mission and confirm our commitment to the greater community. Strategic priority #4 addresses objectives to build upon our successes in these areas through the addition and expansion of services.

Goals

1. **Student development beyond the school day**
 - a. Pursue opportunities to financially support a comprehensive after school program including options for transportation that would make the program available to all students.
 - b. Develop an after school curriculum with a wide range of options including, but not limited to, enrichment courses, club activities, opportunities for leisure skill development, academic support, and athletics.
2. **Outreach**
 - a. Develop a plan to increase the staffing and services of The Outreach Partnership Program (TOPP) to enable the program to serve more schools and communities.
3. **Wraparound**
 - a. Complete a financial analysis and adjust the staffing structure to maximize the availability of services while minimizing the costs.
 - b. Expand the program through the addition of services and the number of regions served.
4. **Audiology**
 - a. Analyze current structure and staffing and assess the feasibility of further expansion.
5. **Interpreting**
 - a. Establish a full service interpreting agency to serve the community through fee-for-service interpreting, education, supervision, and quality assurance.

21st Century Technology

Strategic Priority #5: Become a school with advanced technological capabilities in all classrooms and all areas of business operations and develop an integrated technology curriculum to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills to succeed in today's environment.

Rationale

Competence in the use of technology has become essential in the 21st century. We need it to effectively manage and market our school; we need it to collect and maintain critical data; we need it as a teaching tool in our classrooms; and we must educate our students to use technology effectively and responsibly.

The use of technology as a means of social and interpersonal communication, including text messaging, social networks, and the use of videophones, has greatly enhanced the lives of deaf people. With this, however, comes the risk of misuse and abuse of these systems. A strong curriculum that balances theory and application, teaches appropriate use and personal responsibility, and spirals through all grades is essential.

The objectives of strategic priority #5 address this need for a comprehensive technology curriculum, while also covering the broad range of technology needs at The Learning Center, including hardware and software expansion, faculty training, web development, and expansion of the IT department.

Goals

1. **Curriculum development**
 - a. Develop a technology curriculum that spirals across all grades and aligns with the Core Standards.
2. **Resources and technical support**
 - a. Maintain and regularly update a school-wide technology plan to provide sufficient resources and technical support to meet the growing needs of faculty, staff, and students.
3. **Web development**
 - a. Design and maintain a new interactive website that can meet the needs of stakeholders and effectively promote the school.
4. **Research and development through collaboration**
 - a. Establish partnerships with agencies focused on research and development in educational technology to expand opportunities and ensure TLC is utilizing evidence-based best practices.

Campus and Facilities

Strategic Priority #6: Develop a long-range campus master plan that will lay out a phased approach to campus development and identify what will be needed to safely and effectively support current programs and future aspirations.

Rationale

As The Learning Center has grown both in size and range of services, our campus has expanded to meet these changing needs. Over the years, programs have been moved from building to building, new facilities have been purchased or built, and outdoor recreational areas and parking lots have been added.

Since 1971, when the school moved to its current location, renovations and expansion have generally occurred as individual needs arose. However, our school now covers 14 acres and includes 16 buildings, and as a large and complex organization we must now look ahead and develop a campus master plan. This is essential to ensure we have sufficient and appropriate space to serve students, families, and other stakeholders. The campus master plan will be aligned with the programming and the finance and development priorities identified in this strategic plan.

Goals

1. **Data collection**
 - a. Compile comprehensive enrollment data and identify patterns and trends to guide decision making regarding future campus and facilities needs.
2. **Safety and security**
 - a. Identify and prioritize safety and security needs with estimated improvement costs for inclusion in the budget planning process.
3. **Proposal submissions/selection**
 - a. Obtain proposals for the development of a campus master plan that will address space needs and short and long-range campus planning.
 - b. Establish a committee to review proposals and make a selection.
4. **Campus master plan development**
 - a. Continue to improve The Learning Center's facilities, grounds, and infrastructure through the development of a campus master plan consistent with identified needs and strategic plan programming goals.

Finance and Development

Strategic Priority #7: Acquire the financial resources necessary to implement the strategic priorities and serve current and future generations.

Rationale

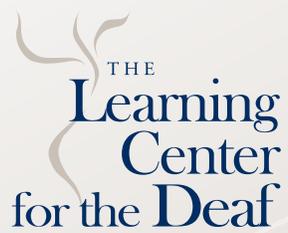
The Learning Center will continue to fulfill its mission by securing a strong financial future, building an endowment, providing and maintaining appropriate facilities, technology, and infrastructure, and implementing the goals of this strategic plan. In doing so, we must exercise sound business management, generate more revenue from donors, and become less dependent on tuition. To fund projects and programs essential to our mission which are not funded through tuition, we must create more flexible financial systems, generate revenue which is more robust and reliable, manage costs, and implement best practices in fundraising, financial controls, and purchasing.

Known as a warm and caring community that focuses on the individual needs of students, The Learning Center must apply this same attitude to our relationships with donors, vendors, and community leaders in order to build a stronger culture of philanthropy and model best business practices among our peer and competitor schools. We will seek to honor and preserve the core values of The Learning Center by celebrating and generating commitments of time, talent, and treasure in order to sustain our mission and enhance the opportunities and resources available to those we serve.

Goals

1. **Best practices: Identify, benchmark, and implement best practices based on industry standards and relative to peer and competitor schools.**
 - a. Create internal procedures and policies consistent with the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's (CASE) Management Reporting Guidelines, and the National Association of Independent Schools' Principles of Good Practice.
 - b. Develop, strengthen, and systematize existing policies and procedures such as purchasing, vendor on-boarding and vendor relations/reporting, internal controls, and work with consultants (legal, accounting, etc.) to identify weaknesses and implement best practices.
2. **Management of resources and data-driven decision making**
 - a. Collect Finance and Accounting data, educate key decision makers, and expand reporting capabilities in order to foster data-driven decision making.
 - b. Identify key benchmarks to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of non-core operations such as Audiology, Wraparound, TOPP, etc. Decisions to invest limited resources in these areas can then be driven by data and sound business acumen.
 - c. Develop systems to ensure all expenditures are cost-effective, balancing the importance of quality of results with a disciplined use of resources.
3. **Culture of philanthropy: Strengthen the culture of philanthropy and demonstrate how donors impact our ability to fulfill our mission.**
 - a. Create broader community awareness and clearer information regarding our tuition structure, financial model, funding needs, and opportunities for support.
 - b. Rely on an active partnership among the Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Institutional Advancement Department, staff, alumni, and parents to identify and inform potential donors of opportunities and outcomes.
4. **Donor revenue: Create greater, more reliable, and more predictable donor revenue.**
 - a. Strengthen the Annual Fund. The Annual Fund generates the most reliable and predictable donor revenue stream and serves as the foundation for all other giving programs. We must focus on expanding the breadth and depth of our Annual Fund program in order to create stable, sustainable donor revenue that can be used to create a balanced operating budget.
 - b. Refine major and capital gift strategies. Generating revenue for special projects, major and capital giving programs need to be prioritized, aligned with strategic goals, and focused on one-time expenses rather than ongoing operational expenses.
 - c. Build endowment for long-term stability.
5. **Long-range planning**
 - a. Develop long-range financial models (5 and 10-year budget goals). Informed by historical data and future strategic goals of the organization to forecast revenue and expenses by program, management and the Board can focus resources and balance competing priorities. Special attention should be given to inherent financial risks associated with a fluctuating Walden School census and to developing plans to mitigate these risks.
 - b. Further reduce dependence on tuition revenue by identifying, developing, and investing in new sources of non-core revenue.
 - c. Seek to strengthen contingency cash reserves to ensure long-term stability and flexibility in meeting the school's mission.

Strategic Priorities



Where Innovation is a Tradition

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