



**CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

# **REQUEST FOR SERVICES**

**PREPARED BY**

**CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

*Beyond the Blueprint: Holistic & Iterative Strategic Planning*

**SPECIFICALLY, FOR**

**Riverside School District 96**

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# CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

## COVER LETTER

Dear Dr. Ryan-Toye,

Catalyst for Educational Change (CEC) is pleased to submit our proposal to support Riverside School District 96 in developing its next strategic plan. Your district's deep commitment to academic excellence, equity, and community partnership provides the ideal foundation for this important work. This plan will serve as a guiding framework that ensures clarity of direction, collective ownership, and sustained success for all learners.

CEC brings nearly four decades of experience facilitating strategic planning with Illinois districts and school systems nationwide. Our *Beyond the Blueprint* framework is designed for inclusive, data-driven collaboration, one that unites diverse voices around shared priorities and measurable outcomes.

Our approach is grounded in three guiding principles:

- **Inclusive Engagement:** Elevating the voices of students, staff, families, and community partners to shape the district's shared vision.
- **Actionable Design:** Delivering a plan that is both aspirational and practical, with measurable goals and accountability structures.
- **Equity and Access:** Applying an equity lens throughout every phase to ensure opportunities and outcomes are accessible to all learners.

Together, we will co-create a plan that captures the spirit of Riverside 96 — forward-thinking, student-centered, and community-driven. Thank you for the opportunity to partner in this meaningful work.

With appreciation,  
Elisa Brente  
Managing Director  
Catalyst for Educational Change



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## WORK PLAN

Catalyst for Educational Change proposes a three-phase process that will guide Riverside School District 96 in developing its next five-year strategic plan. This process will emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and alignment, ensuring that every stakeholder voice informs a clear and actionable framework for the district's future.

## SCOPE OF WORK NARRATIVE

**Phase 1: Pre-Planning  
& Foundation Setting**

**Phase 2: Strategic  
Design & Co-Creation**

**Phase 3: Living the  
Plan—Implementation  
& Adaptation**

### Phase 1: Pre-Planning & Foundation Setting

*Laying the groundwork for a collaborative and inclusive process.*

- **Kickoff & Steering Committee Formation:** Partner with district leadership to establish a representative guiding coalition of staff, students, families, and community members.
- **District Portrait Development:** Collect and synthesize quantitative data (student outcomes, demographics, performance metrics) and qualitative insights (stakeholder interviews, focus groups) to create a “portrait” of the district.
- **Shared Values & Principles:** Facilitate workshops to establish the guiding principles that will anchor the planning process.

**Milestone Deliverable:** District Portrait and Guiding Principles report

### Phase 2: Strategic Design & Co-Creation

*Developing a shared vision, strategic priorities, and actionable goals.*

- **Vision & Mission Development:** Engage stakeholders in creating a refreshed vision and mission for Riverside SD 96.



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- **Strategic Priorities Identification:** Define 3–5 key focus areas balancing academic excellence, equity, and student well-being.
- **SMART Goals & Strategies:** Develop measurable goals with clear indicators of success.
- **Draft Plan Development:** Prepare a draft plan for review by the steering committee, leadership, and the Board.

**Milestone Deliverable:** Draft Strategic Plan with vision, mission, priorities, and goals

## Phase 3: Living the Plan — Implementation & Adaptation

- **Community Feedback & Refinement:** Conduct surveys and listening sessions to test and refine the draft plan.
- **Final Plan Production:** Deliver the completed five-year strategic plan, including an executive summary and a framework for annual updates.
- **Board & Public Presentation:** Present the plan to the Board of Education and key community stakeholders.

**Milestone Deliverable:** Final Strategic Plan and Executive Summary delivered to Riverside SD 96

## Ongoing Commitment

Throughout all phases, CEC will:

- Provide **regular progress updates** to district leadership and the Board.
- Ensure engagement strategies intentionally include **underrepresented voices**.
- Embed structures for **continuous improvement and adaptability**, so the plan remains relevant year after year.



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## DELIVERABLES CHECKLIST

CEC will provide the following key deliverables in alignment with Riverside School District 96's priorities:

### 1. District Portrait & Guiding Principles

- A synthesis of quantitative data (performance metrics, demographics) and qualitative insights (stakeholder interviews, focus groups).
- A shared set of values and guiding principles to anchor the strategic plan.

### 2. Draft Strategic Plan

- Includes revised vision and mission statements, core values, 3–5 strategic priorities, and SMART goals.
- Developed collaboratively with the steering committee and refined with community feedback.

### 3. Final Strategic Plan Document

- A comprehensive five-year plan that is visionary yet practical, with measurable objectives and clear accountability structures.
- Designed as an adaptable document, allowing for annual goal updates and progress monitoring.

### 4. Executive Summary

- A concise, accessible overview of the strategic plan for use with families, staff, and the broader community.

### 5. Board and Community Presentation

- A tailored presentation of the final plan to the Board of Education and district stakeholders.

### 6. Continuous Improvement Framework

- A monitoring and feedback process to ensure the plan remains a “living document,” responsive to evolving district needs.



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## PROJECT TEAM

### Elisa Brente, Managing Director

Elisa Brente is a highly experienced educational consultant with over 35 years in K-12 education. Elisa holds an Ed.S. in Instructional Leadership and an M.S. in Elementary Education, along with certifications in Professional Coaching, Applied Positive Psychology and a HeartMath Certified Mentor. She is the author of many professional resources.

### Crystal Conley, Field Director

Drawing upon 25+ years in K-12+ education, Crystal Conley excels in systemic change and transformation. Equipped with dual Master's degrees in Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Leadership, she translates her deep knowledge into impactful initiatives that drive continuous improvement and systems coherence.

### Tiffany Layton, Impact Manager

Dr. Tiffany Layton, PCC, is a seasoned educator and leadership coach with a proven record of school transformation. She has a rich history of serving high-needs K-12 schools across the US and internationally, and her diverse experience includes roles as a teacher, reading specialist, instructional coach, principal, curriculum director, leadership coach, and professional development specialist. She holds a doctorate in learning and organizational change along with a professional coaching certificate.



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## SCOPE OF SERVICES AT-A-GLANCE

\*\* Some pricing reflects support from **two consultants**, which is recommended given the scope of work and the number of stakeholders involved.

Phase	Activities	CEC Responsibilities	District Responsibilities	Deliverables	Estimated Cost
<b>Phase 1: Pre-Planning &amp; Foundation Setting</b>	Establish steering committee Collect/analyze district data (student outcomes, demographics, surveys) Facilitate workshops to define shared values & principles	Design process and tools Facilitate committee formation/orientation • Provide data analysis support and facilitation materials	Identify and convene steering committee Provide district data and reports Support outreach to stakeholders	District Portrait & Guiding Principles	\$4,350
<b>Phase 2: Strategic Design &amp; Co-Creation</b>	Conduct stakeholder engagement (focus groups, surveys, workshops) Refresh vision & mission • Define 3–5 strategic priorities Develop SMART goals & strategies	Facilitate focus groups, retreats, and workshops Draft vision, mission, priorities, and goals Integrate equity lens throughout	Ensure participation of staff, families, students, and community Provide feedback on draft components	Draft Strategic Plan (vision, mission, priorities, goals)	\$20,750  <i>Focus groups are optional; if not chosen pricing will be adjusted.</i>
<b>Phase 3: Living the Plan — Implementation &amp; Adaptation</b>	Gather community feedback on draft plan Revise and finalize strategic plan Prepare executive summary & Board/community presentation	Facilitate review sessions Prepare final plan and summary Deliver Board/community presentation	Review final drafts Support community communication and rollout	Final Strategic Plan, Executive Summary, Board/Community Presentation	\$10,500





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Ongoing/ Adaptation	Establish monitoring & annual update structures  Provide tools for progress tracking	Provide templates, training, and facilitation support	Commit staff to annual review and progress reporting	Adaptable Plan Framework for annual updates	\$7,500
Total Estimated Cost: \$43,100 (includes travel, materials, and facilitation time)					

## OPTIONAL SERVICES

OPTIONAL SERVICES		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Ongoing Board Updates &amp; Support</b> – Pricing TBD CEC provides progress updates after retreats, including KPIs, challenges, and recommendations.</li></ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Living the Plan Implementation Support</b> – Pricing TBD CEC provides coaching/training in team effectiveness, decision-making, communication, and data monitoring.</li></ul>	

## CEC: A PARTNERSHIP-DRIVEN APPROACH

CEC approaches every engagement as a collaborative partnership. We believe that meaningful plans are not written by consultants but co-created by the community. With Riverside SD 96, we will design a process that honors your district's voice while providing the structure, facilitation, and expertise to bring clarity and focus.

## CEC: COLLABORATING DIFFERENTLY

Riverside's strength lies in its engaged community, dedicated staff, and commitment to student growth. CEC's facilitation approach helps transform this energy into alignment and action. Through collaborative workshops and transparent communication, we ensure that diverse perspectives inform cohesive strategies that are embraced by all stakeholders.

## CEC: ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

An equitable plan depends on authentic community input. CEC designs engagement opportunities that ensure inclusive participation, from small focus groups and multilingual family sessions to districtwide surveys and open forums. By building transparent feedback loops, Riverside 96's community will see how their input shapes each step of the plan.



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## WHY CEC IS THE RIGHT PARTNER

Catalyst for Educational Change brings nearly four decades of experience helping Illinois districts and consortia develop strategic plans that are both aspirational and actionable. Our team has partnered with dozens of school systems across the state, supporting them in clarifying their vision, strengthening collaboration, and building practical roadmaps that reflect the needs of their communities.

What sets CEC apart is our unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion. We are intentional in amplifying the voices that are too often left out of planning processes including multilingual families, students with disabilities, and families and communities navigating systemic barriers. Our facilitation methods and engagement strategies are designed to ensure that the resulting plan reflects the lived experiences of all Riverside SD 96 stakeholders, not just the most vocal or privileged.

We also specialize in translating community aspirations into measurable goals and sustainable strategies. This means that Riverside's strategic plan will not sit on a shelf, but will serve as a living document that guides daily practice, decision-making, and accountability. Our *Living the Plan* framework embeds structures for annual updates and continuous improvement, ensuring the plan evolves with the district's priorities and needs.

Finally, CEC brings a proven record of building trust and ownership across diverse groups. Districts consistently report that our process strengthens collaboration, clarifies focus, and results in plans that stakeholders truly embrace. By combining deep experience, an equity-driven approach, and a commitment to sustainability, CEC is uniquely positioned to help Riverside School District 96 shape a strategic plan that inspires, empowers, and endures.

## CONTRACTOR PROFILE

### CEC Board of Directors:

- Daniel Woestman, Board Coordinator Superintendent of Schools, Warren Township 121
- Lori Bossman, Board Treasurer Retired, VP Ace Hardware
- Ray Gaer, Board Secretary President ABC Federation of Teachers
- Andrea Walker, Board Member Associate Director, Strategy, National Education Association
- Jasmine Jourjy, Board Member Telecommunications Practice Director with PricewaterhouseCoopers

### Leadership Team

- Shelley Taylor, Executive Director
- Elisa Brente, Managing Director
- Crystal Conley, Field Director
- Jon Dambek, Partner Development Manager
- Tiffany Layton, Impact Manager



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**Catalyst for Educational Change (CEC)** provides districts with the right mix of consultants, combining expertise in building effective systems with deep knowledge of specific content areas. We intentionally match our team to the unique needs of each district, ensuring both technical expertise and strong facilitation skills. In addition, we place a priority on developing long-term relationships with the districts we serve, offering continuity and trusted partnership well beyond the life of a single project.

CEC was founded in 1987 as a nonprofit corporation and formally incorporated in October 1996. Since our founding, we have maintained an excellent record of integrity and service, and we have no litigation history with former clients.

## REFERENCES AND SAMPLE WORK

LaGrange School District 105 Dr. Brian Ganan, Superintendent <a href="mailto:bganan@d105.net">bganan@d105.net</a> 701 S. Seventh Ave. La Grange, IL 60525 708-482-2700	Northbrook School District 28 Dr. Jason Pearson, Superintendent <a href="mailto:jpearson@northbrook28.net">jpearson@northbrook28.net</a> 1475 North Maple Northbrook, IL 60062 847-498-7900 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.northbrook28.net/about-us/future-focus-28-strategic-planning-2024">https://www.northbrook28.net/about-us/future-focus-28-strategic-planning-2024</a>
Northbrook Glenview School District 30 Dr. Emily Tammaru, Superintendent <a href="mailto:etammaru@district30.org">etammaru@district30.org</a> 2374 Shermer Rd Northbrook, IL 60062 (847) 498-4190 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.district30.org/strategic">https://www.district30.org/strategic</a>	Township High School District 113 Dr. Chala Holland <a href="mailto:cholland@dist113.org">cholland@dist113.org</a> 1040 Park Avenue West Highland Park, Illinois 60035-2257 (224) 765-1001 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.dist113.org/strategic-plan">https://www.dist113.org/strategic-plan</a>
Lake Bluff ESD 65 Dr. Lisa Leali, Superintendent <a href="mailto:lleali@lb65.org">lleali@lb65.org</a> 121 E. Sheridan Place Lake Bluff, IL 60044 847-234-9400 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.lb65.org/page/strategic-plan-2023">https://www.lb65.org/page/strategic-plan-2023</a>	Belvidere CUSD 100 Dr. Cassandra Schug, Superintendent <a href="mailto:cschug@district100.com">cschug@district100.com</a> 1201 5th Ave. Belvidere, IL 61008 815-544-0301 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.district100.com/about-d100/strategic-plan">https://www.district100.com/about-d100/strategic-plan</a>
Lyons Township HSD 204 Dr. Brian Waterman, Superintendent <a href="mailto:bwaterman@lths.net">bwaterman@lths.net</a>	Community Consolidated School District 21 Dr. Michael Connolly, Superintendent <a href="mailto:michael.connolly@ccsd21.org">michael.connolly@ccsd21.org</a>



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100 S. Brainard Ave LaGrange, IL 60525 708-579-6300 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.lths.net/domain/1243">https://www.lths.net/domain/1243</a>	999 West Dundee Road Wheeling, IL 60090 847-537-8270 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="#">Strategic Plan 2020-2025   CCSD21</a>
Arlington Heights SD 25 Contact: Dr. Lori Bein, Superintendent <a href="mailto:lbein@sd25.org">lbein@sd25.org</a> 1200 S. Dunton Ave. Arlington Heights, IL 60004 847-758-4900 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://ecriss.ecragroup.com/strategy/Home/Index?Building=5356&amp;Dashboard=ARL025">https://ecriss.ecragroup.com/strategy/Home/Index?Building=5356&amp;Dashboard=ARL025</a>	Independent SD 271 Contact: Dr. Eric Melbye <a href="mailto:emelby@isd271.org">emelby@isd271.org</a> 1350 West 106th Street Bloomington, MN 55431 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/strategic-plan">https://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/strategic-plan</a>
Berkeley School District 87 Dr. Daniel Sullivan, Superintendent <a href="mailto:dsullivan@berkeley87.org">dsullivan@berkeley87.org</a> 1200 N. Wolf Road Berkeley, IL 60163 708-449-3350 Link to Strategic Plan: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/D87StrategicPlan">https://tinyurl.com/D87StrategicPlan</a>	Carbondale Elementary School District 95 & Carbondale Community High School 165 (Plans executed separately spanning 2019-2021) Contact: Daniel Booth, Superintendent <a href="mailto:dbooth@ces95.org">dbooth@ces95.org</a> 925 S. Giant City Road Carbondale, IL 62902 618-457-3591 Link to Strategic Plan: Elementary School Plan: <a href="https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AciTiob4jnqOBi5jpqmlLe4hZVwacHSr/view">https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AciTiob4jnqOBi5jpqmlLe4hZVwacHSr/view</a> High School Plan: <a href="http://www.cchs165.jacksn.k12.il.us/strategic_plan">http://www.cchs165.jacksn.k12.il.us/strategic_plan</a>

## IMPACT

The true measure of a strategic plan is not the document itself, but the difference it makes for students, staff, and the community. Catalyst for Educational Change is committed to ensuring that the planning process for Riverside SD 96 results in meaningful, lasting impact.

### For Students and Families

The plan will expand equitable opportunities for all learners, ensuring that students from every background have access to the resources, supports, and experiences they need to succeed. Families will



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see greater clarity in the district's vision, stronger connections between home and school, and a commitment to preparing students for the challenges of tomorrow.

## **For Staff and Schools**

The process will bring alignment across schools, departments, and programs, helping staff work together toward shared goals. By engaging teachers and support staff throughout the process, the plan will reflect classroom realities and create strategies that are both visionary and feasible. Staff will benefit from clear priorities, transparent expectations, and a renewed sense of collective purpose.

## **For the District and Community**

Riverside SD 96 will have a unifying framework that guides decision-making and resource allocation, grounded in the voices of its community. The process itself will strengthen trust between the district and its stakeholders by demonstrating transparency, inclusion, and responsiveness. With structures in place for monitoring progress and updating goals annually, the plan will remain a living tool that adapts as the district evolves.

## **Lasting Change**

CEC's partners consistently report that our work leads to more collaborative cultures, stronger focus on student outcomes, and increased use of data for continuous improvement. For Riverside SD 96, this means the plan will not only set direction for the next five years but also build the capacity, trust, and shared ownership necessary for sustained success well beyond 2026.

## **EXAMPLES OF DIVERSE POPULATION WORK**

Catalyst for Educational Change has a long history of partnering with districts to design strategic plans that expand equity and access for all students. Our approach begins with listening: we work intentionally to bring forward the voices of those who are too often underrepresented in planning processes, including multilingual families, students with disabilities, and communities navigating economic challenges.

In past projects, we have guided districts to examine their full continuum of services from general education to targeted supports ensuring that every learner has clear and accessible pathways toward success. Rather than isolating students in separate initiatives, we help systems embed equity practices directly into governance, instructional design, and community engagement.

For Riverside SD 96, this will mean creating engagement opportunities that truly reflect the diversity of the district. We will host dedicated focus groups with multilingual families and first-generation learners, provide translation and interpretation for materials and sessions, and design outreach strategies that meet families in familiar community spaces. By using multiple modalities surveys, virtual forums, and in-person listening sessions we ensure that quieter or less-connected voices are also represented.

Our experience has shown that these strategies do more than inform a plan; they help shift district culture. When families and students see their input authentically reflected in goals and strategies, trust grows, engagement deepens, and equity becomes embedded in the system rather than an afterthought.



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This is the kind of inclusive, responsive approach we will bring to Riverside SD 96's strategic planning process.

## EXECUTIVE CONCLUSION

Riverside School District 96 stands at an exciting juncture ready to shape a shared vision that connects its proud history with future aspirations. The development of this strategic plan offers an opportunity to reaffirm the district's mission, strengthen collaboration, and create a roadmap that ensures every student thrives.

Catalyst for Educational Change is honored to partner with Riverside SD 96 in this work. Our *Beyond the Blueprint* framework is designed for districts like yours, where excellence, inclusion, and innovation intersect. By engaging stakeholders authentically, aligning systems thoughtfully, and embedding structures for continuous improvement, we will co-create a plan that is not only visionary but actionable, living, and enduring.

Together, we will design a strategic plan that unites Riverside 96's educators, families, and community members in one shared purpose: ensuring every learner's success, now and into the future.