

## Recommendation for Strategic Plan Facilitator



Over the past several weeks I have spent time reviewing the work of several consultants who specialize in facilitating the strategic planning process for schools. My recommendation is for the Board of Directors to contract with the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) to facilitate the strategic planning process. Despite the fact that working with MSBA will require us to make changes to our desired timeline for this process, I make this recommendation because I feel more confident that working with MSBA will result in us having a comprehensive and actionable strategic plan than I am with the other consultants. I also believe that the process utilized by MSBA is more transparent and inclusive than any of the other processes reviewed.

### **Process**

The MSBA process centers around a “Strategic Planning Committee.” This committee does the work of reviewing the community input that it receives and using it to draft a strategic plan. The Strategic Planning Committee made up of the Board of Directors, staff, administration, students and members of the community. At the October Board meeting, Nova Classical’s Board expressed a desire to keep the strategic planning process to around 15 hours or less. The MSBA process typically involves 3 evening meetings and would align with this desire. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the process has primarily been completed remotely.

### **Stakeholder Input**

One of the areas where MSBA excels is having a process that is transparent to the school community and allows involvement from all of the stakeholder groups in the school. Internal and external input is received through surveys as well as through listening sessions. The listening sessions typically occur on one day with separate sessions for the Board, administration, staff, students and the community. MSBA codes the feedback from the listening session and presents the themes found in the feedback to the Strategic Planning Committee. This feedback will become a key tool to assure the strategic plan that is created aligns with the desire of the Nova Classical Academy community. In addition to receiving the feedback from stakeholders, having them represented on the strategic planning committee creates a sense of inclusion in the process.

### **Deliverable**

During the October Board meeting, the Board spent significant amounts of time discussing what they wanted to see in a new strategic plan. My major takeaways from that conversation are that the Board wants:

- A concise strategic plan that would make sense as a standalone document (without needing to refer to any prior documents or additional documents for further clarification)
- Clear and measurable goals/objectives.

Both of these are areas where MSBA excels. MSBA has worked with over 90 Minnesota districts and charter schools to create strategic plans. Some of these have taken the delivered strategic plan and reformatted it for messaging, however, the recently completed strategic plan from [McGregor](#) is a good example of the standalone nature and measurable objectives contained in a strategic plan as it is delivered from MSBA.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

In speaking with MSBA, it is clear that they are willing to work with the client to determine what role COVID-19 should have in the strategic plan. For example, some of their clients are choosing to have the strategic plan reflect their response to the pandemic and others are using the strategic plan to impact opportunities for the future that have been identified during the pandemic.

### **Cost**

At the October meeting, the Board indicated that they would prefer to keep the cost of strategic planning to \$10,000 but that I should not recommend a lessor vendor just to meet this request. MSBA uses a scale based on enrollment to determine the cost of their strategic planning services. Based on this, it is likely that the cost to Nova Classical Academy would be just over \$10,000.

### **Timing**

MSBA has indicated that they cannot guarantee Nova Classical Academy a slot on their strategic planning calendar until the Fall of 2022. However, there are two items that could change this timing:

- Having grown quickly, they are looking to hire additional staff to their strategic planning program. This may allow them to get to us sooner.
- MSBA has indicated that it is not uncommon following the November election that a school may choose to push back their previously scheduled strategic planning process. If this happens with any of their scheduled clients, they would likely be able to give us the earlier slot.

### **Alternatives**

MSBA is not able to guarantee that we will complete a strategic plan with them before the end of the 2021-2022 school year. This means that if this Board decides to utilize the MSBA services, it may be Nova's next Board that actually completes the work of the strategic planning process. Ultimately, I believe that the quality of work and history of creating strategic plans for schools outweigh the timing issues. I also like that doing the strategic plan next fall could potentially move it to a time when we do not feel the same level of pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic. When speaking with the Board Chair and Chair-Elect, I shared the concerns I had with the fit between the other commonly used school strategic planning facilitators who reside in Minnesota and the desires the Board identified for its strategic plan in their October meeting. We identified 3 potential options for the Board to decide on:

1. Approve moving forward with MSBA at their earlier availability not later than the Fall of 2022.
2. Ask the administration to review and recommend a facilitator who does not typically work in school settings.
3. Ask the administration to review and recommend a facilitator who does not typically work in Minnesota.