ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION, MISSION AND HISTORY

The Stark Education Partnership (SEP) is an independent 501c3 organization that leads in supporting and enhancing education in Stark County. SEP works to create and respond to opportunities that add substantial and measurable value to education and in doing so offers the county’s school districts and schools new and collaborative ways to transform education.

The original objective of the Partnership was “education reform,” the success and systemic changes accomplished in Stark County over the last 20 years suggest that the county’s schools and educational systems have achieved significant reform. In the last 10 years, SEP’s objective has shifted from “reform” to “enhancement” referring to a drive for continuous improvement toward excellence. Furthermore, its scope in education has been expanded and clarified to include “student educational success and student career success” through the systemic capabilities of the entire educational system.

From SEP’s inception, the mission included the concept of working with key stakeholders (leaders in education, business, community, social services and philanthropy) throughout the community to build capacity for sustainable improvement in the county’s schools. The improved communication, engagement and integration of these stakeholders have opened new avenues to improve the entire educational system.

Mission

*The Stark Education Partnership is a *catalyst, engaging and collaborating* with education, business, civic and community stakeholders to *drive sustainable improvement and innovation* to provide all students with *education and career success*.*

May 2016 SEP Strategic Planning
SEP: A Brief History and Context

The founding of the Stark Education Partnership was announced on July 13, 1989, by Richard A. Gulling, the organization’s first chairman. Known then as The Education Enhancement Partnership, the new Partnership represented the spirit of Stark County’s leadership in responding to a clear need identified in two studies in the late 1980’s. The data revealed that while districts were high performing for their design, they needed additional community support to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The Timken, Hoover, Deuble, and the Stark Community Foundations endowed the organization insuring that it would serve the community as long as needed.

Now, nearly 30 years later, SEP is still serving the community while its evolution and successes can be divided into three distinct periods.

1989 to 1993 – Focus on Teachers and Best Practices: The initial focus of the Partnership, under the direction of Victor Young, was on professional development and best practices in ten specific areas. A Staff Development Council, including all county superintendents and association heads, was formed. A public fund raising campaign for $2.8 M was held, and the first program staff was hired. Math, Staff Development, and Science and Economics Councils were formed. The Timken Foundation pre-funded Saturday Schools and Small Grants Initiatives. By 1993, the first Arts Academy was held, Saturday Schools grew to 17, the VIP in Science program was developed, and a new Technology Council was formed. The elementary science pilot program, Science Education Enhancing the Development of Skills, (SEEDS) began. That year the National Science Foundation awarded Stark County the largest local grant in Ohio history ($3M) to the SEEDS program. The Early Childhood Council leveraged state funds to form the Stark County Family Council, the Technology Council leveraged two of the original seven state SchoolNet pilots for Stark County; work began on Science and Math on the Move (Samm) and 400 teachers were trained through the Technology Council. SEP at this point was a large, but conventional, partnership with over 400 volunteers on working councils and programs.

1994 to 2000 – Focus on Schools: In late 1994, Dennis Gray succeeded Victor Young and the focus shifted from broad based programs to reform at the single school level. The second public fund raising campaign for $2.5 M was conducted. The Partnership’s participation in Project AHEAD in Massillon began. In 1997, the Timken Foundation awarded $10 M to Canton City Schools to establish the Timken Regional Campus with the Partnership serving as the fiscal agent and program advisor. The third public fundraising campaign, conducted in 1999, raised $1.8 M. Beginning in 2000, new collaborations were formed through the Community Schools Think Tank resulting in Choices High School and the Early Childhood Center at Canton City Schools. The name of the Partnership was changed to Stark Education Partnership, Inc.

2000 to 2015 – An Era of Collaboration and a Focus on P-16 (Preschool - Baccalaureate): In 2001, Dr. Adrienne O’Neill was named President and a new collaboration was formed with the Stark County Educational Service Center. Grants-in-kind of SEP staff time were made to school districts for a variety of projects; the “Stark County Theory of Action Model” was developed by collaborative teams and endorsed by all superintendents; the Partnership adopted a new strategic plan; and the Stark County P-16
Compact was formed and soon recognized as a state and national model. Stark’s P-16 included leaders from Preschool, K-12 and higher education, foundations and business. Action elements of the P-16 Compact were implemented as the Partnership, now an education reform support organization, served as an advocate, broker, convener, educator, and researcher. This was the transformation era of collaborative “breakthrough” strategies.

“All students can learn at high levels with proper support” became the foundation of SEP support of collaborative strategies including Canton Timken Early College High School; the implementation and reporting of dual credit opportunities in all 17 districts; and major grants including the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative at McKinley; the $7.5 M Math and Science Partnership grant from the National Science Foundation; college access support in urban high schools; and the highly collaborative Straight A grant for the Young Entrepreneur’s Consortium.

A shift in thinking about “what students can do and when” fostered the collaborative development of dual credit (courses earning high school and college credit) offered at the high school and eliminating the need for students to lose time to travel to college campuses. A successful SEP grant proposal to TG provided over 40 Stark County teachers with the opportunity to take additional college coursework to qualify as college adjunct professors.

During this collaboration and P-16 era, three high-level objectives were developed and measured – high school graduation rates, college-going rates, and degree attainment rates. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Student Tracker (funded by a TG grant written by SEP) demonstrated that these collaborative strategies resulted in significant progress in Stark County public school districts:

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<td>High School Graduation Rates</td>
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<tr>
<td>College-Going Rates</td>
<td>(2005) 51%</td>
<td>(2013) 67%</td>
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<td>Degree Attainment Rates</td>
<td>(2012) 18%</td>
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SEP’s success has been a result of intentional collaboration with the community. Equally vital has been SEP’s role in keeping the community informed on education issues and in the monitoring of key data elements such as dual credit, Canton Timken Early College High School, SPARK, Olweus and other indicators that portray the educational health of the community. Without such data, progress cannot be tracked.

**CURRENT EDUCATION LANDSCAPE**

With the appointment of Dr. Teresa Purses as SEP’s new president late in 2015, and the 2016 Strategic Planning Process, the organization is poised for the next step in its evolution. As a part of the process, the board and staff collectively analyzed the current education landscape and identified significant strengths in the Stark County community.
Collaborating to Succeed

Stark schools and their partners are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that their graduates are college, career and life ready. Stark benefits from an effective and efficient Education Service Center, six innovative and collaborative colleges/universities, as well as committed foundations and business partners who are invested in ensuring a high quality education for all students in Stark County. Data demonstrate that these efforts are successful:

- Stark children in high quality preschool programs are better prepared for kindergarten
- 97.4% of Stark 3rd grade students met the promotion standard for reading
- 91% of Stark students are graduating from high school in four years
- 5,934 students are enrolled in college courses while in high school, an increase from 461 students in 2007
- 17% more students are taking Advanced Placement courses than did five years ago
- Over 100 Stark students are engaged in the demanding International Baccalaureate curriculum
- Many students are earning Associate Degrees while in high school at Timken Early College and Perry High Schools
- Stark’s six Career Technical Centers excel at graduation, dual enrollment and post program placement rates

Collaboration also impacts preschool. The SPARK model (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids), that originated in Stark County by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton, is a nationally recognized kindergarten readiness program that works with families, schools and the community to help children prepare for kindergarten. Since the program’s inception, SPARK children have significantly outperformed their non-SPARK peers on Ohio’s kindergarten readiness assessment.

As students enter kindergarten, it is critically important that the school environment is safe, inviting and provides the individual support each student needs to be successful. Stark leaders have worked together for over 20 years to design a comprehensive, proactive approach that provides the additional supports students may need. CARE Teams collaborate with teachers, administrators and staff from mental health, social service agencies and law enforcement to address obstacles facing K-12 at-risk students and their families by providing prevention, intervention and asset-building strategies tailored to the needs of each student.

Opportunities for Improvement

While the Stark data is impressive and shows remarkable improvement, SEP’s strategic planning process has identified several specific issues and significant calls for improvement that need to be addressed.

Education Gaps Exist by Student Population Groups – Disaggregated student achievement data analysis reveals significant achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged, minority and students with disability populations from preschool through college going. Research has shown that some of the solutions intended to provide support for underperforming students (i.e. intervention programs or special...
education resource rooms) have actually further marginalized students by excluding them from high quality instruction with their peers (Frattura, 2007). Systemic changes will be necessary to improve the education outcomes for all students.

**Limited Preschool Access** – Research informs us that students who experience high quality preschool have significantly greater success in school. Moreover, it is more cost effective to invest in preventive, high quality preschool than it is to provide interventions once students enter kindergarten. Unfortunately, many preschool-aged students do not have access to any preschool due to limited funding. The Stark Preschool Task Force is committed to ensuring that every preschool program is of the highest quality. The task force, including SEP, has determined that their first priority is the development of a common data management system. This data system will be designed to track progress and inform the task force regarding successful practices as well as serve as a reporting mechanism to the legislature and donors.

**Reactive System: Students Must Fail First Before Qualifying for Intervention** – Currently, our education system is designed to support students in a deficits-based/reactive model. This approach waits for students to fail before providing interventions and learning supports to meet their needs. Students are often pulled from their general education ‘core instruction’ to attend these supplemental learning experiences causing the student to be farther behind in their core instruction (Frattura, 2007). While well intentioned, these innumerable intervention programs have not helped students ‘catch up’ and closed achievement gaps. In fact, they further marginalize students by removing them from accessible and rigorous core instruction (Frattura, 2007).

**Learning Experiences are Often Passive** – Students retain more when they are actively engaged in the learning process (Hattie, 2009). Additionally, students who are actively engaged in learning exhibit “traits such as motivation, enjoyment, and curiosity” (Loveless, 2015). While the research is replete with evidence that active engagement correlates to more positive learning outcomes for students, many still experience passive learning environments for most of the school day. Evidence shows the positive impact of active learning experiences (including discussion, projects, and teaching peers) increases student retention of knowledge and skills.

**Skills Gap Exists Between Education and the Workforce** – Employers have expressed their need for a workforce that has strong academic and ‘soft skills.’ The term “soft” is often used to describe such skills as oral and written communication, creativity, collaboration, leadership and problem solving. The reality of the 21st century workplace is that these skills are as essential as industry-specific and academic skills and must be included in the cradle to career (C2C) curriculum.

**Need for Metrics at Predictive, Transition Points** – For many years research has shown that there are formative and predictive transition points in a student’s education journey at K, 3rd, 8th, 9th and 12th grades. When students have the academic and socio-emotional preparation at each predictive point, they are highly likely to have positive academic outcomes. Unfortunately, the education community lacks consistent measures at some predictive transition points and/or a data management system to demonstrate outcomes. Stakeholders will need essential metrics at each transition point to develop effective strategies to proactively prepare students for success.

**Over Emphasis on Summative Testing** – Assessment experts recommend an assessment system inclusive of both formative and summative assessments. District quarterly and end-of-year state
assessments (tests) are summative, standardized tests and are useful to inform the system regarding success of a given program and for comparison across schools. To impact student achievement, the most important assessments are the formative, classroom assessments given daily, weekly and quarterly to guide instruction. Students typically learn new skills and accomplish tasks in a step-by-step manner. To help students make achievement gains each day, teachers use daily diagnostic assessments to ‘inform’ their instruction to support each student’s incremental progress to learn the skills, content or perform a task. Evidence shows that implementing more of these formative and predictive diagnostics can have a powerful impact on student development. Unfortunately, Ohio has expanded high stakes, summative testing impacting students, teachers, principals and schools. Significant instructional time is lost as teachers are required to prepare students for state testing formats, new technology tools required to administer the test and the actual test taking windows of time required for each content area. This over emphasis on summative tests reduces valuable instructional time, negatively impacts student achievement and does not inform practice.

**TRANSFORMATIONAL SUCCESSES IN STARK COUNTY**

Despite the many challenges faced in education today, SEP and its partners have identified highly successful programs and opportunities that have accomplished dramatic and systemic improvement in Stark County.

**Closing the Achievement Gap**

Several districts have adopted gap-closing, research-based strategies and practices. The impact has been greater student achievement for typically under-performing students. During on-site interviews, educators shared that the first key to their dramatic change was a mindset shift in their belief about students’ ability to achieve. They have adopted the belief that ‘smart’ is what you get, not how you are born (Saphier, 2008). Moreover, both research and their own district trend data showed that the resource rooms created to provide individual education for students with disabilities actually separated students from rich learning experiences with their peers and failed to help close the achievement gap (Frattura, 2007). Once the shift was made to include all students in the general education classrooms, other systemic shifts were needed to ensure that each student had the time and support needed to achieve. Key elements of those shifts included: 1) all educators work collaboratively in a team planning model; 2) these teams proactively design engaging instructional units to meet a wide variety of learning needs in advance of instruction; 3) all students are included in “core” instruction in their general education classrooms; 4) instruction and assessment are personalized with and for each student; 5) daily formative assessments guide instruction; 6) students are given additional time and support as needed during the day to stay on track; 7) all educators participate in all training to ensure everyone can serve students well. These systemic changes pool the resources of all programs and maximize the collective expertise of educators in schools to benefit all students. Results from districts that reached advanced implementation of these key elements showed dramatic academic improvement across all student groups.

In December 2015, SEP, the Stark Education Service Center, and the State Support Team were awarded a Straight “A” grant titled “All IN: Ensuring All Students Succeed” from the Ohio Department of Education.
to build on the highly successful practices that have been identified in closing the achievement gaps.

Training for all Stark district teams begins August 2016.

While the initial design and implementation of the key elements had a focused intent on closing the achievement gap, these systemic changes have broader implications for developing other key indicators of future student success. As educators design proactive, universally designed units, soft skills can be embedded into the design to ensure that students develop those essential habits and attitudes needed to succeed in college, career and life. Stark County School Districts have begun transforming their practices to address some of education’s biggest challenges.

**Expanding College Access and Readiness**

The Stark education community has created a more seamless high school to college pathway as evidenced in several exemplary programs. For example, Canton Timken Early College High School was a paradigm shift in education. The high school partnered with a college to design and implement a program enabling students to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree. The experience changed lives and the concept has permeated across the state and nation. Simultaneously, Stark County districts embarked on expanding the options for high school students participating in college courses while in high school. The program has evolved from approximately 400+ students enrolled in 2006 to over 4,000+ enrolled in 2016. As the technology and career demands have shifted, many schools have responded by developing more innovative learning experiences that engage students in the community in authentic problem and problem based projects requiring students to be actively involved in the process. SEP, with its partners, will continue to build on the successful aspects of all of these programs.

**Shifting from Passive to Active Learners**

In 2014, many Stark schools launched a “Straight A” state funded initiative entitled the Young Entrepreneur’s Consortium (YEC). One key component has been transforming teaching practices from teacher as transmitter of knowledge, to teacher as facilitator of active, hands-on problem-based learning experiences. At the first YEC Student Success Summit held in spring 2015, students shared their projects, excitement and solutions from their work in their transformed classrooms. Students worked in teams with school and community leaders to identify an authentic community challenge. The students shared their research, interviews, and described their wide variety of potential solutions. Students demonstrated a wide array of ‘soft skills’ during their presentations. During interviews, students were asked how this classroom experience differed from other classes. Some responses included: “I love working in a team with other students interacting with the community. I felt like my ideas were respected, and I could really help my community.” Another student shared, “I was failing in 9th and 10th grade because I don’t learn by listening to someone talk. I learn by doing something. Now that I am in this welding class, I know that I am smarter than I thought I was, and I am doing great in all of my work.” These active learners were passionate, prepared, and articulate in their presentations.
VISION FOR THE FUTURE

To take education to the next level and meet the demands of a dynamic and information-intensive world, a new educational model is emerging. The purpose of the new model includes personal, cultural, social, and economic improvements. The goals of the new model are for students to understand: the world, their talents, and their potential so that they can become fulfilled, active, and compassionate citizens.

Today, personalization is everywhere, from the apps on our phones, to the music we choose. Personalization is growing so quickly because it motivates and energizes each person in a unique way. The impact of this personalization trend has also been shown to have a dramatic impact in education. SEP’s strategic plan will thus be guided by basic principles of personalization with students as our central focus. In our design we will recognize that intelligence is diverse and multifaceted, students will be given options to pursue their particular interests and strengths through a rich and balanced curriculum, time and support will be flexible and adapt to meet individual learning rates, and students will be assessed in a wide variety of ways that support their personal progress, learning style and achievement. (Robinson, 2015; Hattie, 2009)

Basic Principles Supporting the Foundation of Our Efforts

Value of the individual – respect and value the uniqueness of each learner’s interests, talents and dispositions
Self-Determination – empower learners to seek their own future or course of action
Potential – inspire learners to realize their unique skills, talents and possibilities
Civic responsibility – engage learners as active citizens in community and government
Respect for others – support learners’ cultural and social development

The critical success factors of this new transformative model are powerful and can be articulated in two main factors: student motivation and student self-perception – core aspects of personalization. These critical factors are achieved through quality of teaching and a rich and balanced curriculum, combined with a supportive and informative system of assessment. “[T]he aims of education are to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens” (Robinson 2015: p. xxiv).

The board and staff at Stark Education Partnership are committed to working collaboratively with our partners to ensure that ALL students from cradle to career(C2C) are engaged in high quality, customized education. Our guiding principles focus on developing and empowering each learner to be self-determined, to realize and value his/her potential, to show respect for others and to develop civic responsibility.
2020 SEP Targets and Strategies

Targets

Dramatic improvement in Stark education’s highest-level goals has been achieved during the last ten years; however, there is room for even more improvement. For the 2020 Strategic Planning period, targets will be:

• **High school graduation rates (2020 target 90-99%)** – As in the past, SEP supports increasing the high school graduation rates, understanding that today it is an important step in the process of successful attainment of education that leads to a smoother transition to the workforce. Therefore, SEP continues to support high school graduation rates, as well as the combined efforts of educators and the community to reach young people about the importance of continuing their education beyond high school.

• **Education rate beyond high school (2020 target 75%)** – A target will continue to be increasing the college-going rate. Student Tracker provides college-going data after a student graduates from high school. Multiple data points are needed to report courses taken while in high school in addition to college-going rates after graduation.

• **Credential/degree attainment rates (2020 target 50%)** – In the past, SEP has focused on tracking associate and bachelor’s degree attainment. This will continue to be a target, and we will expand our metrics to include certificates and other types of credentials earned by graduates.

• **Education to career (metric to be determined)** – Workforce needs are changing. Our graduates need strong technical and academic skills as well as “soft skills” to meet the demands of the current market. To close the skills gap and prepare Stark students for successful futures, we will work with our business and community leaders to develop metrics that will foster a smoother transition from education to career.

2020 Strategies

The great achievements of Stark County’s educational system over the last ten years have been powered by the collaborative efforts of all educators and community stakeholders in the county. During that time, SEP served as a catalyst in the roles of advocate, broker, convener, educator, and researcher. Going forward, the SEP model for success will be maintained and enhanced. That model includes efficiency, effectiveness, collaboration, influence, research, grant design, and leveraging of county resources for synergistic impact.

*The first dimension of the 2020 SEP Strategy is to maintain and improve on the successes already achieved.*

As we move forward, we will build on the innovative practices that have been identified in this narrative to support districts in the transformational changes needed to prepare students for their future.
The second dimension of the 2020 SEP Strategy is for the Stark Education Partnership to drive...the implementation of innovative practices using quality measures through research to transform student engagement in collaboration with our cradle to career partners.

- **Implementation of innovative practices** – evidenced-based, leveraging, predictive

- **Quality measurements through research** – evaluation, analysis, reporting

- **Student-engaged transformation** – active learners, prepared at each transition, rich and balanced, grassroots

- **Cradle to career collaboration and transformation** – design, leverage, stakeholders, communicate, influence, systemic

**Stark Education Partnership will drive...**

- **Strategy One: Innovative and effective practices to ensure high quality educational options are implemented.** Our greatest strength is the ability to adapt to new environments and challenges. Research clearly shows predictive, transition points for our children as they progress through primary and high school. Through research, SEP will identify and endorse best practices at every transition point. SEP will coordinate opportunities for practitioners to observe and understand gold standard strategies and programs. We will develop innovative strategies to support a diversity of talents, roles and occupations. While researching best practices is essential, on its own, it is not enough. SEP will continue to support the implementation of best practices as seen through the work done by SEP and its partners on Canton Timken Early College High School, Stark County Ohio P-16 Compact, and AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides.

- **Strategy Two: Quality measurements through research, data analysis and evaluation support.** An important role for SEP is external evaluator. In this role, SEP provides metric and measure support, research and data collection, as well as data analysis for our partners and stakeholders. Our external status and experience in providing these services add to the reliability, credibility and validity of the results and reports produced. This rigor leads to evidence-based recommendations, stronger programs and the ability of stakeholders to use the results to support the continuation of funding, programs and application for innovative practices and programs. SEP’s dedication to high quality research and evaluation can be seen in the annual reports for Dual Credit, SPARK, Young Entrepreneur’s Consortium, Farm to School, and the Stark County Olweus Bullying Prevention.

- **Strategy Three: Student-centered transformation by engaging the education community in grassroots efforts.** While the SEP efforts have always focused on improving outcomes for students, this strategy stretches stakeholders to personalize the school environment. The strategy encourages schools to banish the culture of anonymity and teaching to the “average’ and shift to developing personalized learning plans for each student with student-involvement. The deeper transformation is with the curriculum, instruction and assessment to improve student performance and develop students in eight core competencies: curiosity, creativity, criticism, communication, collaboration,
compassion, composure and citizenship (Robinson, 2015). In a personalized learning environment, students are central in the planning, monitor their own progress toward their learning goals and are given time and support from educators as needed. The focus of learning will be depth of knowledge over breadth of knowledge, offering alternatives to tracking and grouping, providing students with real-life connections to the concepts they are learning.

- **Strategy Four: C2C (Cradle to Career) transformation by collaborating with all stakeholders.** Stark Education Partnership will continue to work collaboratively with our partners to leverage resources to drive change. SEP will to serve on active task forces to develop, implement and monitor the effectiveness of the collectively determined strategies at each predictive transition point (i.e. early childhood task force committees to improve outcomes). If a task force/work team does not exist in the community for a particular transition point, SEP will convene leaders to build on exemplary practices and or seek effective practices to improve outcomes. We will continue to communicate education news and data to the greater community with SEP publications such as Looking at the ISSUES, Significant Progress, and white papers.

### HOW A CATALYST CAN SUPPORT TRANSFORMATION

Stark County has a statewide reputation of strong collaboration and a commitment to keeping Stark education on the leading edge. This gives Stark County a distinct advantage and positions SEP to serve with our stakeholders as a catalyst in the roles of advocate, broker, convener, educator, and researcher. The board and staff at Stark Education Partnership are committed to working collaboratively with our partners to ensure that each student is engaged in high quality, customized cradle to career (C2C) education. The strategies in this plan and the tactics added to our operating plan each year are designed to transform education to actualize our targets in this dynamic document. The SEP Board and staff will monitor the metrics of this plan and will make adjustments as needed.

The 2020 vision of the Stark Education Partnership will be to drive the implementation of innovative practices using quality measures through research to transform student engagement in collaboration with our cradle to career (C2C) partners.
REFERENCES


