



Catalyst | Connector | Cornerstone

Strategic Plan 2022

Background

The Stark Education Partnership (SEP) was founded in 1989 to spark innovation in Stark County’s educational community and support the educational system’s pivot towards the future. Over more than three decades in existence, SEP has evolved as needs have evolved, from a focus on teachers to a focus on building generations of successful individuals with roots in Stark County. However, its role remains the same: SEP is a connector, a catalyst, a collaborator, and a researcher, passionately focused on improving outcomes of students and the community.

SEP’s strategic plan reflects the input of the community and is designed to work in synergy with the work of other community partners. Accordingly, SEP has set out three key strategies. They are:

- 1) **Create Pathways to In-Demand Jobs through Talent Development**
- 2) **Foster Best Practices, Innovation, and Technology in Education**
- 3) **Enable Strategic Action through Communication, Data, and Research**

These strategies honor SEP’s history, while staying consistent with SEP’s commitment over the decades: responding to the most pressing needs of today to build a better and more vibrant tomorrow for Stark County residents.

Mission and Vision

Mission: 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.

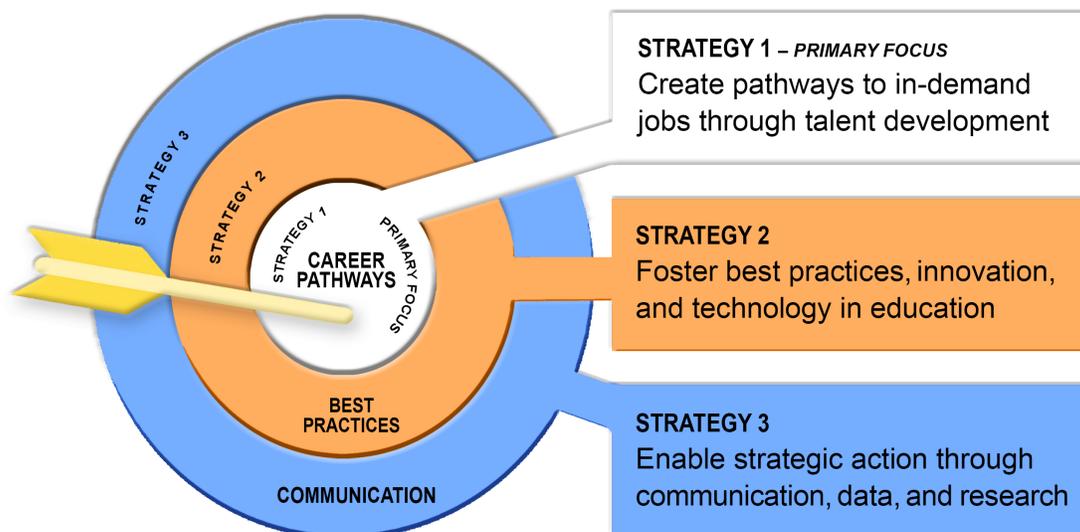
Vision: To build generations of successful individuals who fulfill their potential and grow roots in Stark County.

Who SEP Serves

SEP serves education, business, and community organizations in the Stark County region as a connector and partner. SEP collaborates with local foundations to ensure a continued focus on meeting emerging needs and works in complementary fashion with other nonprofits throughout the region.

Strategies and Tactics

SEP’s strategic plan focuses on three interrelated strategies that work together to meet SEP’s vision, to build generations of successful individuals who fulfill their potential and grow roots in Stark County.



Strategy 3 – *Enable strategic action through communication, data, and research* – is a crosscutting strategy that works to support the other strategies. Strategy 2 – *Foster best practices, innovation, and technology in education* – works together with Strategy 3 to support the ultimate success of Strategy 1 – *Create pathways to in-demand jobs through talent development*.

SEP recognizes that the challenges it seeks to address are multifaceted and require action from multiple angles. Thus, each strategy is supported by a range of tactics designed to work together, which in turn encompass a variety of specific initiatives that will continually evolve as SEP catalyzes new initiatives and identifies new opportunities to serve the community. Underlying all this work is a belief that individuals thrive, as does the community they are part of, when we create opportunities for an individual’s interests and abilities to find their alignment with local career opportunities.

SEP’s strategies work at the intersection of each student’s interests, abilities, and opportunities. SEP looks to make an impact by ensuring individuals have a greater opportunity to identify their interests, develop in-demand skills, and connect to local job opportunities, as represented in Strategy 1 – *Create pathways to in-demand jobs through talent development*.



STRATEGY 1 – Create Pathways to In-Demand Jobs through Talent Development

SEP creates pathways to local opportunities by strengthening connections between education and workforce. We will enable Stark County Residents to pursue their futures in our community by identifying the most in-demand workforce needs, developing awareness of local careers, equipping educators to support students with developing the hard and soft skills necessary for success, promoting the scaling up of credential-earning opportunities so that every student has an opportunity to earn an industry-recognized credential, and fostering partnerships between businesses and our schools and colleges. Priorities include:

- **Identifying workforce needs by routinely convening workforce leaders.** This may include meetings to identify technical and soft skills, incorporating skills into curriculum, aligning K-16 pathways with local workforce by leveraging programs like New Skills for Youth and Learn to Earn, and promoting engagement with Business Advisory Councils (BACs).
- **Promoting awareness of local career pathways by fostering collaborations between employers and educators.** This may include supporting BACs in adopting quality practices, such as those described in the Awards for Excellent BACs, promoting employer visits at schools as early as middle school, promoting educator visits to businesses, and coordinating professional development for teachers.
- **Increasing student exposure to career opportunities.** This may include expanding access to career counselors, piloting afterschool or summer enrichment, intentional exposure to career exploration, promoting summer employment opportunities, preparation, and training, including job shadowing, internships, mentoring programs, and soft skills sessions.
- **Growing the next generation of business leaders by fostering entrepreneurship.** This may include facilitating Stark Tank, aligning with Junior Achievement, and supporting initiatives like the Minority Business Association’s middle school entrepreneurship program.
- **Supporting educator effectiveness.** This may include piloting career counselors or champions in high schools and universities, providing educator professional workshops, providing credit for educator license renewal tied to externships, incorporating needed workforce skills into classroom instruction, and providing recognition and/or incentives for exemplary BACs.

STRATEGY 2 – Foster Best Practices, Innovation, and Technology in Education

SEP challenges and supports local educational leaders in continually advancing the system to better meet student and community needs. We will sustain and strengthen conditions for student success by supporting the growth of innovative new practices, the adoption of proven best practices, and leveraging technology to improve student outcomes and equip them with in-demand skills. Priorities include:

- **Communicating and encouraging research-based best practices in curriculum and instructional delivery.** This may include utilizing data to inform and influence classroom instruction and school leaders (the same practices might also be applied to institutions of higher education), providing technical assistance to nonprofits and others interested in launching talent development programs in schools, and showcasing local best practices in the Looking at the Issues newsletter and/or via other modalities.

- **Supporting initiatives to reinforce the teacher pipeline.** This may include catalyzing efforts to get more undergraduates to engage in schools and building “grow your own” programs that start as early as high school.
- **Strengthening seamless transitions for students across the educational continuum.** This may include supporting FAFSA completion, creating opportunities for students to earn technological credentials, promoting graduation pathways to college and careers, and developing new internship and work-based learning opportunities for college students.
- **Promoting best-in-class professional development opportunities.** This may include facilitating new training opportunities addressing emerging needs, piloting new concepts in continuing education opportunities for teacher licensure, and coordinating career exploration opportunities for teachers virtually and in-person.

STRATEGY 3 – Enable Strategic Action through Communication, Data, and Research

SEP enhances the ability of organizations throughout Stark County to make timely decisions that move our community forward by providing actionable research and data. We will track, analyze, and synthesize research, leverage data, share national and statewide best practices to Stark County, and learn together with other organizations to facilitate collaborative problem-solving on the most pressing issues across the educational continuum, and invest in high impact strategies. Priorities include:

- **Making community data more accessible and actionable.** This may include developing and maintaining a dashboard of indicators, tracing progress of key transition points (kindergarten readiness, 3rd grade literacy, 8th grade math, high school diploma and credential attainment, and college persistence), individually tracking students beyond high school and college graduation by up to six years, facilitating goal setting, and collaborating with other community organizations to make data more accessible.
- **Discovering and communicating emerging best practices.** This may include updates in the Looking at the Issues newsletter, disseminating research on effective instructional strategies in areas of interest, and facilitating informational sessions on emerging areas of interest.
- **Providing evaluation support to assess impact.** This may include providing low-cost evaluation services to partner organizations in the community.

Values

The Stark Education Partnership believes that its success is wholly dependent upon the success of partner organizations and students we serve. SEP leverages the following organizational values to advance this goal:

Respect: SEP works with partners to ensure opportunities for all individuals in Stark County, recognizing value in diversity of ideas, cultures, and people.

Expertise: SEP advances its mission and vision through research, data, and best practices.

Catalyst: SEP accelerates the trajectory of new ideas and programs through research, support, and a space to incubate new initiatives.

Engagement: SEP engages collaboratively with local employers, partner organizations, education entities, and the public to ensure our work is aligned and to achieve maximum impact.

Responsibility: SEP is committed to the success of its strategies through identifying key performance indicators of success and aligning with the work of relevant partners.

Discipline: SEP diligently remains focused on strategies with the greatest potential for impact.

Measuring Success

SEP is committed to impact. This includes using data to monitor progress, adjust, and celebrate success. SEP sets annual goals aligned to strategies and uses key performance indicators to understand the effectiveness of tactics aligned to those strategies. SEP seeks to measure its impact on the following:

Strategy 1

- Identifying workforce needs by routinely convening workforce leaders
- Promoting awareness of local career pathways by fostering collaborations between employers and educators.
- Increasing student exposure to career opportunities
- Growing the next generation of business leaders by fostering entrepreneurship
- Supporting educator effectiveness

Strategy 2

- Communicating and encouraging research-based best practices in curriculum and instructional delivery
- Supporting initiatives to reinforce the teacher pipeline
- Strengthening seamless transitions for students across the educational continuum
- Promoting best-in-class professional development opportunities

Strategy 3

- Making community data more accessible and actionable.
- Discovering and communicating emerging best practices.
- Providing evaluation support to assess impact.

SEP's goals and key performance indicators help SEP remain aligned to the mission, vision, and strategic priorities. They also help SEP to identify effective strategies and to transparently share information with stakeholders. SEP continually uses data to improve its own effectiveness as an organization.

Whenever possible SEP disaggregates quantitative data to better understand the impact of strategies and tactics on diverse communities. In addition, SEP seeks to gather and share qualitative stories and examples to illustrate the “why” and “how” of effective tactics and strategies.

About the Strategic Planning Process

In 2021-2022 SEP met with over 75 individual stakeholders and organizations in a series of listening sessions and workgroups. The overarching message from a diverse array of stakeholders across Stark County was that SEP plays an important role in the community, yet there are opportunities to continue adapting, evolving, and maximizing impact. A consistent theme of these conversations was that workforce needs are critically important and gaining momentum as a focus area.

SEP finds itself positioned to significantly improve the lives of individuals and contribute to Stark County's well-being. Trends laid out in the *2017 Strengthening Stark: A Call for Economic Transformation Report* informed and compelled many community members engaged in SEP's strategic planning process. As the report makes clear, demographic trends showcase emerging workforce challenges in the region. Stark County is witnessing a decline in population, particularly younger residents, and low degree attainment relative to demand for skills. Education, workforce, and community leaders acknowledged these trends and spoke to the role SEP can play in better connecting the education and workforce systems, thus, potentially impacting individuals and the greater community positively.

Acknowledgements

SEP is thankful to the many community members who contributed their time to this process, offering insights and reflection along the way. Special thanks to the SEP Executive Committee and SEP Board of Directors, SEP team members, foundations/supporters, education leaders, workforce leaders, and nonprofit partners.