



small steps nurturing center



SMALL STEPS NURTURING CENTER
STRATEGIC PLAN 2010 – 2012



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STATEMENT FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends of Small Steps Nurturing Center,

More than 70,000 preschool aged children in the Houston area are classified as economically disadvantaged, and almost all of these children lack access to high-quality preschool. The positive impact of early childhood education has been well documented, and the Small Steps program model has proved to be effective. Demand for this program has been strong, and the school now functions out of two campuses with a student body of 117.

The Small Steps Board of Directors recognizes the need to reach more students. To provide direction for the coming years and address the issues of growth and expanding the scope of the organization's programs, the Small Steps Board determined that developing a new strategic plan is necessary.

The strategic planning process that we embarked on gave us the opportunity to seek valuable input from Small Step's Board, staff, and volunteers. We took into account the current situation and economic environment, and we scrutinized our mission to ensure that our program is furthering that mission. As a result of this intensive process, we have created a detailed roadmap that will guide the organization's priorities and activities for the next three years. We share this plan with you here, along with a good deal of valuable information developed through the process.

We are indebted to the many people who devoted their time, energy, and talents to the development of our new strategic plan. We are especially grateful to the members of the Board of Directors who served on the Strategic Planning Committee, generously sharing many hours of work and great wisdom along the way. We also received valuable guidance and support from partners and our dedicated staff.

We believe this plan reflects Small Steps' vision and values and is grounded in our deep commitment to providing high-quality preschool to economically disadvantaged children. We invite you to join us now as we undertake the challenging but very promising path of turning this plan into reality.

Sincerely,

Evan Harrel
Executive Director

John Rathmell
Board Chairman

Fred Brazelton
Chairman of Strategic Planning Committee



BACKGROUND

PLANNING PROCESS

The strategic planning process began when the Board of Directors of Small Steps Nurturing Center (SSNC) formed a Strategic Planning Committee. This team was composed of the following SSNC board members and staff:

Fred Brazelton
Oswald Scott
Marty Phillips
Jonathan Gregory
Nancy Kornegay
Evan Harrel

The strategic planning process was facilitated by Sterling Associates, a consulting firm serving nonprofit organizations.

The Strategic Planning Committee met in July 2009 to discuss the strategic planning process and create an action plan. To generate a global understanding of the issues facing Small Steps as well as to provide a consistent level of understanding about the organization's activities and programs, the Strategic Planning Committee defined areas of strategic importance to provide the topics for SWOT analysis meetings. Five areas were identified, as listed below, and team leaders were chosen for each area.

THE FIVE KEY AREAS CHOSEN:

1. **Mission and Programs**
2. **Finance and Fundraising**
3. **Staff and Volunteers**
4. **Partnerships and Environment**
5. **Board and Governance**

SWOT team leaders were chosen from the strategic planning group, and teams were assigned to promote and encourage broad participation. Stakeholder representatives were invited to participate in SWOT meetings where particular areas of interest and expertise could provide additional perspectives and depth of knowledge.

The SWOT meeting sessions were productive and lively, and all were well attended, with an average of 6 participants per session. Several Board members attended multiple sessions. Summaries from the SWOT sessions are included as Appendix A.

After all of the SWOT meetings had been completed, the Strategic Planning Committee met for a goal-setting session. This brainstorming session resulted in a draft set of six strategic goals, which were then circulated and revised several times and prepared for presentation at the Board retreat in September 2009.

Board Retreat

Small Steps held a six-hour Board retreat on September 17, 2009. The retreat agenda included the following items:

- ❖ *Relevant information about the nonprofit environment in Houston*
- ❖ *Summary of results from the Board survey*
- ❖ *Summaries of the SWOT sessions*

The SWOT team leaders presented the results of their SWOT sessions to the entire Board. These presentations informed all members of the Board about the current status of various aspects of Small Steps, as well as challenges and opportunities facing the organization.

Following the SWOT session summaries, the Executive Director presented the goals that had been drafted by the Strategic Planning Committee. The Board discussed and refined these goals to ensure that they were sufficiently strong, clear, and appropriate to guide the programs and fulfill the organization's mission for the next three years. After the goals were finalized, small groups were assigned the task of outlining implementation steps for each goal, while considering who should be accountable for each part of the plan, estimating the costs of implementation (as well as potential sources of funding to cover each step), and determining the amount of time required to accomplish each step. By the end of the retreat, the first draft of the strategic plan was complete.

PLAN COMPLETION AND EXECUTION:

At the retreat, the Strategic Planning Committee was charged with responsibility for refining the draft strategic plan and bringing it back to the Board for final approval. The Committee met several times to refine the plan, including the sequence and timing of the implementation steps. A timeline was drafted to provide graphic representation of the scheduled Board actions and other key steps. The strategic plan goals and objectives will be presented for approval at the Small Steps Board meeting in November 2009.

BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Annual self-evaluation is an important exercise for every nonprofit board of directors. Self-assessment gives the board a valuable opportunity to step back from its everyday business and reflect on how well it is fulfilling its responsibilities.

It is important to emphasize that board self-evaluations are not conducted to indicate that a board is either “passing” or “failing.” Rather, the results allow the board to identify important areas of board operation that need attention or improvement; to measure progress toward existing plans, goals and objectives; to shape the board’s future operations; to deepen understanding of the characteristics of effective and successful boards; and to enable board members to work more effectively individually and collectively. In short, a good self-evaluation helps a board identify ways to strengthen its performance and refresh its understanding of its role and responsibilities.

Accordingly, during the summer of 2009, the Small Steps Board of Directors commissioned Sterling Associates to conduct a board self-evaluation survey as part of the strategic planning process. Basing survey questions on the best practices of nonprofit boards, Sterling Associates – with input from SSNC board leadership and staff – developed and distributed an online questionnaire to all 23 members of the board, assuring respondents that their answers and comments would be compiled anonymously.

The survey focused on several categories of board activity, including:

- Knowledge of the organization’s mission
- Use of metrics to monitor progress toward key goals
- Relationship between board and staff
- Board roles and responsibilities, including fiscal oversight
- Board structure and effectiveness
- Executive Director review and performance appraisal process

The results of the survey of the SSNC Board highlight numerous areas of strength as well as several challenges that the Board should further investigate and address. These results, along with Sterling Associates’ interpretations and recommendations, are summarized in Appendix B.



STRATEGIC PLAN

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC GOALS

- GOAL #1:** *Eliminate the budget deficit and maintain the cash reserve by diversifying sources of funding.*
- GOAL# 2:** *Increase the number of children served at the Jensen Campus.*
- GOAL #3:** *Determine the best and most efficient expansion method(s) to serve more children.*
- Goal #4:** *Expand and strengthen efforts to improve long-term education outcomes for Small Steps graduates.*
- Goal #5:** *Adopt and institutionalize best practices in governance.*
- GOAL #6:** *Demonstrate Small Steps' effectiveness and impact through outcomes research.*

PLAN TIMELINE

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS



GOAL #1: ELIMINATE THE BUDGET DEFICIT AND MAINTAIN A CASH RESERVE BY DIVERSIFYING SOURCES OF FUNDING.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Create and present to the board a three-year operating forecast to balance the budget in calendar 2010 and beyond clearly delineating the following: Operating expenses for each year Revenues for each year based on known existing sources Amount of shortfall and plans for resolving	ED, Finance Committee	Nov. 2009	
2. Create and present to the board a one-year development plan with specific goals and tactics to: Diversify the number and mix of funders (potentially including public or other new sources), and Strengthen relationships with existing donors	ED, Development Committee, staff	Nov. 2009	
3. Implement third fundraising event in partnership with Women’s Auxiliary Committee	Development Committee, staff	Spring 2010 - in progress	
4. Assess staff capacity vs. demands, need to invest in additional personnel (cost-benefits)	Development Committee, ED, staff	Feb. 2010	
5. Refine marketing materials to support development plan, targeting specific potential donor audiences	Development Committee, staff	Spring 2010	

GOAL #2: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN SERVED AT THE JENSEN CAMPUS.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Appoint ad hoc committee to work with ED to clearly define goals of the project and to outline operating, staffing and capital requirements, e.g.: Classroom expansion Research and curricula development Teacher training Funding feasibility work and campaign plan	Board, Ad hoc Committee*	Nov. 2009	
2. Committee and ED to develop project plan	Ad hoc Committee, ED	Nov-April	
3. Report progress to board at frequent intervals	Ad hoc Committee, ED	Monthly	
4. Present draft of plan to Executive Committee for discussion and comments	Ad hoc Committee, ED, Executive Committee	April, 2010	
5. Committee and ED revise per Executive Committee and prepare for presentation to Board	Ad hoc Committee, ED	April- May	
6. Board considers and votes on initial plan	Board	May 2010	
7. Finalize budget and refine business plan elements, including: Assessment of capacity, staffing, and partnerships required to achieve the above objectives Analysis of fundraising prospects and feasibility	Ad hoc Committee, ED, Finance Committee, Development Committee	June-Oct. 2010	
8. Board approves project (case statement, feasibility, targeted donor list, schedule)	Board	Nov. 2010	
9. Develop and implement fundraising campaign	Board, Development Committee, staff	January 2011	

** to include representatives from the Finance and Building Committees, staff, and others as needed*



GOAL 3: DETERMINE THE BEST AND MOST EFFICIENT EXPANSION METHOD(S) TO SERVE MORE CHILDREN.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Executive Committee to appoint Long-Range Planning Committee*	Executive Committee	November 2010	
2. Conduct market assessment to ascertain areas of greatest community need for quality early childhood education (potentially outsourced to third party education consultant/evaluation specialist)	Staff and Long Range Planning Committee	December 2010	\$\$s for outsourced education consultant/evaluator
3. Define and analyze expansion options. Develop growth scenarios using these options to address identified needs. Review experience and lessons learned from building Jensen property as well as research and findings from Goal 2 planning work.	Long-Range Planning Committee	Dec. 2010-May 2011	
4. Select optimal operating model(s) for the Small Steps program and present recommendations to Executive Committee and discuss	Long-Range Planning Committee, ED, Executive Committee	April 2011	
5. Committee and ED revise per Executive Committee and prepare for presentation to Board	Long-Range Planning Committee, ED	April- May	
6. Present program options reviewed and recommendations for action to the Board, including: Necessary infrastructure (staffing, etc.) Financing (including potential use of public funding and other options) Sustainability	ED, Long-Range Planning Committee	May 2011	
7. If the board decides to approve expansion, develop business plan (including capital budget)	Board, ED, Long-Range Planning Committee, Development Committee	July 2011	

* to include representatives from the Finance and Building Committees, staff (DD, teachers, program director), and others as needed



GOAL #4: EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE LONG-TERM EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR SMALL STEPS GRADUATES.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Identify and implement strategies to further improve placement for all Small Steps graduates, including: Increased communications with parents of existing students (materials, info sessions, etc.) Continuing education opportunities for parents of SSNC graduates	Program Directors	Dec. 2009/ongoing	
2. Strength and formalize relationships with four target elementary schools: Crockett, Crawford, 2 others TBD	Program Directors	Dec. 2009 – ongoing	
3. Identify and secure resources for all children with special needs through Special Ed Partners and others	ED	Ongoing	
4. Expand buddy system to include all students 3 years of age and older	Volunteer Coordinator/staff	Mar. 2010	
5. Assess capacity, staffing, and partnerships required to achieve the above objectives	Program Directors/ED	Ongoing	
6. Report to Board about placement status, school relationships, findings and trends	Program Directors	January 2010 and 2012	

GOAL #5: ADOPT AND INSTITUTIONALIZE BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNANCE.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Develop, implement, and maintain a scorecard/dashboard that the Board can use to track the following: financial status and trends, fundraising progress toward annual goals, non-financial programmatic goals and metrics, and status and outcomes of all existing and potential partnerships	ED, Executive Committee	November 2009	
2. Redefine roles, responsibilities, and expectations of Board members and communicate to the entire Board	Executive Committee	Jan. 2010	
3. Recommit to orientation processes and materials.	Nominating Committee	Jan. 2010	
4. Create a board policy on partnerships.	Executive Committee	March 2010	
5. Reevaluate and improve committee structure and processes, including: Define annual goals and expectations for committees (e.g., frequency of reporting to the full board) Assess need for a partnership committee	Executive Committee, ED	Jan. 2010	Time of members
6. Assess purpose and potential role of an Advisory Board	Executive Committee	Mar. 2010	Time of members
7. Capture and record institutional memory of Small Steps' founding, history, and culture	Development staff, subcommittee	2012 (15-year anniversary)	Time of committee members, access to founding board members, budget



GOAL #6: DEMONSTRATE SMALL STEPS' EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT THROUGH OUTCOMES RESEARCH.

Implementation Step	Accountability	Timing	Resources
1. Clarify goals and purposes of outcomes research and present to the Board	ED, Program Directors	Dec. 2009	
2. Develop partnership(s) to conduct outcomes research: Prepare information needed to find potential research partners and funders Interview potential partners and funders to get input on scope, details, and options Choose partner Formalize partnership agreement Secure funding	ED/Program Committee	January - May 2010	
3. Report on progress to Board	ED/Program Committee, Board	March 2010	
4. Present draft recommendations and partnership plan to Executive Committee	ED/Program Committee	April 2010	
5. Revise and finalize plan based on Executive Committee discussion and prepare to present to Board for approval	ED/Program Committee	April- May 2010	
6. Board approves partnership agreement(s)		May 2010	
7. Create research plan: Review existing program outcomes Determine new outcomes to be measured Determine data to be collected and means of collection	ED, Program Directors in collaboration with partner	June-Aug. 2010	
8. Create highly functional student database to capture key student data	ED, staff	2010-11 school year	\$\$\$ for database software and staff to maintain data
9. Conduct research and monitor progress	ED, staff, partners	2010-11, 2011-12 school years	
10. Publish results of research	Partners/staff	Late 2012	