Background

In the context of strategic planning for Eastern Center for Arts and Technology, this report is intended to address the question, “Where are we now?” and will become a common foundation for the broader discussion among key stakeholders as they work together to form goals and initiatives for school improvement through 2021.

The Current Reality Report represents work from eight teams that examined EASTERN’s internal strengths and weaknesses or identified perceived external opportunities and threats (SWOT). During early winter 2014, each team met three times and focused on a specific area:

### Internal Teams
*Examined Strengths and Weaknesses*
- School Climate, Student Success, and Student Life and Services
- Finances, Facilities, Information Resources and Technology
- Health and Safety, Education Programs, Assessment
- Mission, Governance, and Institutional Planning

### External Teams
*Identified perceived Opportunities and Threats*
- Legal and Legislative Trends
- Technology and Environmental Trends
- Social and Local Demographic Trends
- Economic and Industry Trends
Statement of Strengths and Weaknesses

For a more in-depth look at the work of each team, please read the Summary Reports available on EASTERN’s website, www.eastech.org.

School Climate, Student Success, Student Life and Services

**Strengths:**
- Student of the Month awards are presented and shared with the community.
- SkillsUSA activities are available to students in all programs and are aligned with the school’s mission statement; a large number of students participate.
- Stakeholders take pride in the school’s mission statement.
- Early, consistent and comprehensive communication exists between the participating school guidance counselors and EASTERN’s Student Success Coordinator staff.
- The Student Success Coordinators are proactive in identifying and sharing potential student issues with staff.

**Weaknesses:**
- The responsibility of each administrator is not clearly defined and sometimes results in confusion for staff.
- SkillsUSA membership can be increased; there is a plan in place but it requires modification.
- Student data and surveys are collected but results are not shared with stakeholders.
- There are limited opportunities for community involvement within existing activities. Open House, Back-to-School/Parents Night, and Awards Night target current students. Events designed for the entire community are not currently in place.
- Systematic delivery of student assessments and identified student issues are not followed consistently by participating schools.
- EASTERN’s Student Success Coordinators are not consistently invited to prospective students’ Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings by participating schools.
- There are currently five instructional aides to provide support services to students; this may not be enough as this population increases.

“SkillsUSA activities are available to students in all programs & are aligned with the school’s mission statement; a large number of students participate.”

Finances, Facilities Information Resources and Technology

**Strengths:**
- EASTERN continues to provide excellence in preparing and presenting the Annual Budget and the Financial Statements to its stakeholders.
- EASTERN continues to maintain and grow its fund balances despite the current economic climate. Guided by Board Policy G124 (subsection G), EASTERN will continue to appropriately reserve funds and be held to responsible financial accountability required by participating districts and other stakeholders.
• The facility management team is very responsive and is actively involved in the Aramark Safety Program.

• Aramark and EASTERN both possess buying power, key vendor partnerships, and access to field experts, materials and resources.

• A comprehensive refresh schedule is in place for technology equipment; this allows for new technologies with limited infrastructure changes.

• The technology department is tremendously responsive; a state-of-the-art helpdesk and uniform Service Level Agreements are in place.

• Software deployment and imaging process is seamless.

Weakeness:
• Continuing Education programs may be improved by implementing a data-driven approach to analyzing programs that are to remain self-sustaining via tuition/local patron money.

• Managing the vendor partnership to ensure the highest quality of maintenance and custodial services is paramount. The current contract with Aramark is due for renewal on June 30, 2014. EASTERN must maintain its confidence in the management services agreement with special emphasis on Aramark staffing and its declaration “to enhance the educational environments and experiences for EASTERN’s students and staff.”

• There is a lack of consistent temperature regulation facility-wide.

• There is a lack of safe, secured exterior storage.

• The ramp entrance from the student parking lot is deteriorating and becoming unsafe.

• The outdoor sign used to advertise the school’s events is unattractive and inefficient; it does not have enough space to display the school’s full website address.

• A plan for the disposal of obsolete equipment does not exist.

• A wireless (cellular) option does not exist; in the event of damage to the external wired infrastructure, there is no Internet redundancy.

• The back-up restore system is all-inclusive, however, it is very slow and may take hours to restore a server.

• PowerSchool, the student record system, is cumbersome and not meeting important needs.

• Ongoing training for new and existing software is not made available to staff.

Health and Safety, Educational Programs, Assessment

Strengths:
• The Safety Committee meets monthly; staff is updated regularly.

• The Evacuation and Response Team is awaiting board approval on new routes and memos of agreement (MOA) with businesses.

• The Fire Drill Team ensures that monthly fire drills are performed safely.

• Quantifiable and observable evidence of student performance and growth is collected using multiple valid and reliable assessments including National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI), industry certifications, and state exams.

• Regular and accurate reporting of assessments is provided to stakeholders.

• All programs have a strong alliance with their Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC).
Curricula are designed to prepare students for further study and/or entry into the workplace.

Staff and students are aware and knowledgeable of the school’s mission statement and strive to meet its standards.

**Weaknesses:**
- Hazard plans, evacuation sites, emergency communication and Incident Command System (ICS)/National Incident Management System (NIMS) training are in need of updating.
- A common, consistent lesson plan format is not in place; this is needed to ensure that all appropriate content is included and aligned to standards.
- PA Core Standards are not explicitly integrated in curricula.
- The Standards and Curriculum Framework sections of the PA Department of Education’s Standards Aligned System (SAS) are not effectively incorporated into relevant curricular development processes.
- Assessment of student learning and performance should continue to improve by updating and aligning assessments to reflect research-proven practices.
- Currently, not all lesson plans are standardized to include assessments and best practices.

**Mission, Governance, and Institutional Planning**

**Strengths:**
- The Mission is clearly and concisely communicated on the E-Board.
- The data-driven Strategic Planning process continues to involve all stakeholders.
- Parents overwhelmingly express satisfaction with the quality of programs, instructors, and the positive learning environment.
- Leadership ensures that student success drives all decision-making.
- A systematic and continuous evaluation of student success is measured using various data: completion, retention, placement, NOCTI, and academic attainment.
- The Strategic Planning process integrates the requirements of the state mandated Comprehensive Plan, Middle States, Technology, and Professional Development Plan.
- Leadership recently reviewed and revised all Joint Committee Policies.

**Weaknesses:**
- Some parents report that they do not understand and/or appreciate the quality of the Mission Statement.
- There is a need to continue the focus on appropriate referral and placement in EASTERN programs by all participating schools. EASTERN’s admission policy was developed in order to ensure that students are in the right program for the right reason; participating schools do not always support this policy.
- Opportunities for staff recognition are minimal.
- Teachers do not have a sufficient understanding of PA’s Framework for Teaching.
- The existing Career Pathways Committee needs further development.
- Given the anticipated number of new teachers at EASTERN over the next several years, professional development may need to be revisited, specifically the topic of assertive discipline.
Statement of Opportunities and Threats

For a more in-depth look at the work of each team, please read the Summary Reports available on EASTERN’s website, www.eastech.org.

Legal and Legislative Trends

**Opportunities:**
- Periodic review and update of staff on current sexual harassment laws, child abuse laws and cyber safety protocols.
- President Obama’s STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) Initiative provides encouragement and incentives to increase rigor and integration of STEM education throughout all programs at EASTERN. Grants relating to STEM are widely available.

**Threats:**
- Use of social media, by staff and students, could result in legal consequences to EASTERN.
- Cyberbullying among students could lead to lawsuits or other negative consequences.
- The PA School Performance Profile incentivizes participating schools to increase the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Scheduling of these classes may conflict with students’ intention to attend EASTERN.
- Students who fail required Keystone Exams may need remediation; scheduling of these classes or sessions may conflict with students’ intention to attend EASTERN.

Technology and Environmental Trends

**Opportunities:**
- Optimize social media to connect with parents and community; share EASTERN’s message on most widely used platforms.

**Threats:**
- EASTERN’s building infrastructure is perceived as having air and water quality issues.
- EASTERN’s technology infrastructure is not keeping up with demand and is not considered well secured. There is an increase in users and devices that puts the infrastructure at risk.
- The threat of outside intruders is a concern; the doors are unlocked after school hours and the parking lots are not well lit at night.
- The destructive use of social media poses a threat to EASTERN’s students and staff.

“The creation of a Green Team, involving members from all stakeholder groups, could identify & monitor school environmental issues.”
Social and Local Demographic Trends

**Opportunities:**
- Increase participating schools’ staff and student awareness of multiple career pathways that can begin through EASTERN’s programs, including emerging industries that may be unknown to students and parents.
- Due to an increase in tuition and school closings, some students are leaving private schools and returning to public schools that have a strong connection to EASTERN.
- Seek new and innovative ways to increase and strengthen parent and community partnerships.

**Threats:**
- Nationally, there is a decrease in students’ mental well-being and limited resources are available to school staff.
- EASTERN’s target community is aging, which may result in fewer community members with school-age children. Further, an older community may force more young people to move out of the area.
- The response to the PA Core Standards, high school requirements, and high-stakes testing may create scheduling conflicts for EASTERN students.

Economic and Industry Trends

**Opportunities:**
- Staff and students will benefit from ongoing opportunities to learn more about college and career pathways relating to emerging industries such as green jobs and STEM-related careers such as coding, geothermal, and nanotechnology. EASTERN is especially positioned to provide stronger technology education than participating schools.
- Ensure that all students earn applicable digital badges, college credits, and certifications that are desired by industry.
- Expand the school’s funding base by increasing grant applications related to the emerging industries listed in opportunity number one (emphasizing the technology component of STEM), seeking and marketing new articulation agreements/dual enrollment options to increase EASTERN’s enrollment, and widening local business partnerships that could result in additional financial support.

**Threats:**
- Districts’ budgetary constraints could result in schools sending fewer students to EASTERN.
- The aging workforce may result in a limited pool of qualified career and technical education (CTE) instructors.
- If enrollment at EASTERN declines, so too does the pipeline of available skilled and trained employees for the local workforce.

"Seek new & innovative ways to increase & strengthen parent & community partnerships."

"Ensure that all students earn applicable digital badges, college credits, & certifications that are desired by industry."
Changing Reality

“Career & technical education is transforming. ‘Vo-tech’ classes, once reserved for low-achieving students, have been replaced with highly technical programs requiring extensive communication, problem-solving, mathematical, and technical skills.”

Career and technical education is transforming. “Vo-tech” classes, once reserved for low-achieving students, have been replaced with highly technical programs requiring extensive communication, problem-solving, mathematical, and technical skills. These programs are carefully aligned to industry needs and ensure that students are college and career ready.

CTE: Learning That Works for America®, formed by The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium (NASDCTEc) defines today’s career and technical education:

- CTE is helping our nation address key challenges - from workforce development to student achievement, from economic vitality to global competitiveness. With more than 14 million students nationwide, CTE programs in high schools and postsecondary institutions are leading change, transforming expectations and making a difference by:

  - Developing a skilled, sustainable workforce that is well prepared for the high-demand, high-skill and high-paying jobs of today and tomorrow.

  - Improving the educational experience for millions of students in high school and college, providing an engaging, relevant education that reduces dropout rates and improves student achievement.

  - Helping students discover the wide range of career options available to them—and chart the most effective and efficient educational pathways through high school and postsecondary education for optimum value and success.

  - Working directly with business and industry to ensure that CTE programs are developing people with the skills, credentials and technical knowledge necessary to keep America on the leading edge of innovation and global competitiveness.

Eastern Center for Arts and Technology is a high-quality career and technical center; its current reality identifies numerous strengths and opportunities. To continue improving, however, it is necessary to look critically at its weaknesses and threats.
Current Significant Issues

In synthesizing the weaknesses & threats identified by the eight teams, several themes emerge & may be considered areas of challenge.
- Technology
- Funding & Enrollment
- Building Infrastructure
- Student Success
- Professional Development
- Data

Technology

EASTERN’s Mission Statement includes the proclamation that it is “a leader in technology and in developing innovative, responsive programs.” Are EASTERN’s programs maximizing opportunities for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education? Are emerging industries and career pathways that rely heavily on STEM introduced to students and participating school personnel? As a career and technical school, EASTERN is uniquely positioned to provide a stronger STEM education, especially technology, than its participating schools.

Doing so, however, requires that EASTERN have a more secure technology infrastructure that can keep up with the number of users and their demands. Current technology infrastructure challenges include a slow backup restore time, lack of a wireless (cellular) option, and the inability to dispose of obsolete equipment in a timely manner.

Teachers at EASTERN are not provided with instructional technology training. The current use of research-proven instructional technology practices is inconsistent among staff.

Social media and other technology advances are continually evolving, and while they offer staff and students many opportunities, they may also result in negative consequences. As such, staff should have a strong awareness of cyberbullying and other technology-driven pitfalls.

Funding & Enrollment

EASTERN’s funding is dependent on its enrollment; participating schools pay for each student attending EASTERN. Several threats to EASTERN’s enrollment, and therefore its funding, were identified by the teams.

In response to budgetary restrictions during the nation’s slow economic recovery, participating schools may elect to limit the number of students who attend EASTERN.

The passing of Keystone Exams, a high school graduation requirement, will likely result in mandated remediation classes or sessions for some students. This may cause scheduling conflicts that prohibit students from attending EASTERN.

The PA School Performance Profile, used for state funding calculations, rewards participating
schools for the number of students taking Advance Placement (AP) classes; taking these classes may result in scheduling conflicts that prohibit students from attending EASTERN.

The EASTERN community is aging which may result in fewer community members with school-age children. Additionally, an older community may encourage younger people to move out of the area.

Enrollment in Continuing Education classes is not maximized; improving this could lead to additional funding.

The referral and placement program is not currently used with fidelity by all participating schools; doing so could improve enrollment and retention at EASTERN.

Beyond Occupational Advisory Committee members, local business partnerships may not be maximized and could become a potential source of funding. Further, STEM grants are now more readily offered; EASTERN may wish to increase its grant applications.

New and innovative ways to market the school should be considered.

Building Infrastructure

EASTERN opened its doors in September 1965; prior to that, the building was used as a factory. Not surprisingly, several teams noted that the infrastructure is in need of improvement.

Heating and cooling is inconsistent throughout the building and the air and water quality is uncertain. Exterior storage is not secured or safe. Green practices throughout the building are in place but can be increased.

Three specific safety issues were noted: a deteriorating entrance ramp, insufficient lighting in the parking lot and an unlocked building after school hours.

Finally, the outdoor sign is perceived as “unattractive and inefficient.” The school’s full website address does not fit on the sign.

Student Success

Student success is critical to EASTERN’s success. Several identified weaknesses and threats can be viewed through the lens of student success.

Nationally, the mental well-being of teenagers seems to be in decline as a greater number of them are prescribed medication for behavioral and emotional disorders. Several administrators voiced concern stating that the majority of their time over the past decade has been devoted to “dealing with students’ behavior and mental health issues.” It is imperative that all staff has an understanding of these challenges and the possible warning signs.

Students today face a wide variety of options upon high school graduation. EASTERN must ensure that its staff and participating school guidance counselors are continually updated on career pathways and emerging industries. For students to succeed at EASTERN, they must be matched with a program that fits their individual interests and goals. As was previously stated, participating schools should also work to improve their student placement efforts.

While at EASTERN, students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs), are provided support from instructional assistants. As the
population of students with IEPs increases, so too should the number of instructional assistants.

Participation in SkillsUSA can be increased. Presently, some students do not participate because they believe that the organization and its competitions are designed only for highly successful students. This perception should be changed so that more students take advantage of the opportunities SkillsUSA offers.

**Professional Development**

Student success is most likely to occur when teachers are highly skilled in implementing research-proven instructional practices. Several gaps in professional development were revealed, including:

- Periodic review of cyber safety, sexual harassment, and child abuse
- Instructional technology
- Career pathways and emerging industries (for both EASTERN and participating school staff)
- The integration of PA Core Standards
- PA Framework for Teaching
- Assessing student performance and achievement

**Data**

The development of data-sharing protocols is needed, especially at it relates to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other legal issues.

Student surveys and other data are collected at the end of each year; however, this data is not shared with all stakeholders. Participating schools are inconsistent in compiling and providing important student data to EASTERN.

A data analysis of Continuing Education is needed.

> "Eastern Center for Arts and Technology is a high-quality career & technical center; its current reality identifies numerous strengths & opportunities."
As is evidenced in their reports, participants in the eight teams were highly engaged in & committed to developing a road map for the strategic planning work ahead.

Strategic planning may be viewed as a progression:

What? • So What? • Now What?

This Current Reality Report provides an examination of the “What.”

What is evident right now?

What emerging trends are anticipated?

These perceptions lay a foundation for the next steps. At a fall 2014 retreat, stakeholders will gather to discuss “So What,” making sense of the information gathered through SWOT analysis and summarized in this report.

What does this information mean to EASTERN now and in the future?

What impact, if any, might it have?

That group will also begin to explore “Now What,” narrowing in on EASTERN’s most immediate needs based on its identified internal weakness and external threats. Finally, a team of EASTERN administrators and staff will synthesize the entire strategic planning work in order to develop action steps that ensure the school’s continued growth and success.

To be certain, a strategic plan could be developed more quickly than the one for which this report was prepared. However, the multi-stage process underway at EASTERN, along with the inclusion of many stakeholders, will result in a well-constructed, highly relevant and realistic plan of action for ongoing improvement at Eastern Center for Arts and Technology.

Fall Retreat
October 30, 2014 at
Eastern Center for Arts and Technology