

Technology Strategic Plan

2022-2027

Executive Summary

BlueSky Online is Minnesota's first full-time online charter school and serves students from across the state. The IT department provides critical services to the district through the development, implementation and maintenance of technologies that allow BlueSky to efficiently, effectively, and competitively provide a high quality public online education.

Key BlueSky stakeholders took part in a focused strategic planning process to identify its current state of technology and needs for the next 3-5 years. BlueSky's mission, vision, values and beliefs were reviewed against its technology strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to identify strategic themes, goals and actions as identified later in this strategic plan.

Mission, Vision & Values

BlueSky Mission: Bringing quality online education and diverse learners together.

BlueSky Vision: BlueSky is defining education for the 21st century by creating an individualized, dynamic education for all students. We are committed to empowering our community by facilitating relevant learning, skills, hopes and relationships.

IT Department Mission: BlueSky's IT department will reinforce the use of technology as a means to actualize BlueSky's broader mission and vision.

Strategic Planning Process

During the fall of 2021 BlueSky underwent a thorough strategic planning process. This process started with anchoring the strategic planning process around BlueSky's mission and vision by identifying the key roles technology plays in achieving our mission and vision.

During the main strategic planning work session key stakeholders were present and shared the technology needs for their departments and roles, along with what their long term vision for IT was. Stakeholders included a board member, the superintendent, the principal, the student services director, dean of students, instructional designer, IT staff, IT consultant, and a parent.

The previous strategic plan was reviewed to identify successes, areas to continue, necessary changes, and strategic items that were missing. Through this process the team identified our current state of technology and the following core competencies and competitive advantages:

- Support systems
- Flexible schedule
- Experience (20 years)
- Innovative & student centered (charter school ideals)
- Easy to follow attendance policy
- Local (representative of the state) & local control (not corporate)
- Course options
- Real people (personal touch) & responsive
- Activities/Community
- Teacher control/influence
- Vendor influence
- Partner schools

A SWOT analysis was conducted to further identify BlueSky's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The team then conducted a review of BlueSky's values and behaviors, identifying negative behaviors and positive behaviors. Key negative behaviors such as inconsistent monitoring of students, communication, support processes, instructional processes, and student engagement were identified. Positive behaviors include our committee approach to include stakeholder input, staff commitment to the mission and vision, teamwork, responsiveness, and compassion.

An in-depth external analysis was then conducted to identify trends in online education and with technology as a whole. Key trends included:

- *Artificial intelligence, augmented reality and virtual reality*
- *Expanse of distance learning (people now know that school can be anywhere - online is becoming mainstream)*
- *Device agnostic (end users don't know what type of device they are using)*
- *Improved internet infrastructure (Starlink/5G)*
- *Authentic assessment with feedback/learning centered*
- *Increased reliance on SSO and integrations*
- *Curriculum sources relying on proprietary SIS*
- *Enhanced security including two factor authentication*

The team then reviewed competitors along with political, economical, social, legal and environmental trends and impacts. Once a comprehensive understanding of BlueSky's state of technology was established the team engaged in a vision activity to identify what the future of BlueSky's technology systems would look like in the next 3-5 years in a perfect world. Based on this work, the team identified five strategic themes to focus on. These themes were further reviewed and dissected by BlueSky's leadership team, Technology Committee and IT department to identify the strategic goals and actions outlined below.

Strategic Themes, Goals and Action

Theme 1: Instructional Design and Facilitation

Goal 1.1 Instructional Best Practices: Identify and implement a variety of additional learning experiences proven to be effective in an online learning environment.

Action 1.1.1: Establish best practices for creating high quality synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences that allow for differentiation and align with the First Principles of Instruction.

Action 1.1.2: Establish best practices for creating high quality synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences that allow for meaningful assessment, self-assessment, and feedback.

Action 1.1.3: Identify and incorporate technologies to support educators in implementing actions 1.1.1 and 1.1.2.

Goal 1.2 User Experience: Establish a student and parent user experience that is intuitive, consistent and accessible.

Action 1.2.1: Develop, refine and implement course development and revision processes to ensure learning experiences are accessible to all students.

Action 1.2.2: Develop, refine and implement course development and revision processes to ensure learning experiences are consistent among courses at various grade levels and/or programs.

Action 1.2.3: Identify user interface (UI) improvements that provide an age appropriate, intuitive, and dynamic learning experience for students. Elements may vary by grade level or program.

Action 1.2.4: Establish and refine meaningful visual dashboards and reports to improve student and parent understanding of course progress and proficiency.

Goal 1.3 Accessibility: Identify and implement techniques for the design of accessible learning materials for all students.

Action 1.3.1: Establish guidelines for accessible design based on research-based practices to be implemented by BlueSky teaching and technology staff.

Action 1.3.2: Provide training and guidance documentation to staff regarding accessible design expectations and empower staff to incorporate the guidelines when building curriculum materials.

Action 1.3.3: Create a plan for an accessibility-centric review of curriculum materials.

Theme 2: Device & System Management

Goal 2.1 Device Management Review: Complete a comprehensive review of device management options including BYOD, BlueSky provided, and blended options in order to make an informed recommendation for moving forward.

Action 2.1.1: Create a review plan and timeline for identifying viable options for device management.

Action 2.1.2: Establish a list of key stakeholders and initial meetings to identify BlueSky's strategic needs and review criteria in terms of device management.

Action 2.1.3: Conduct one or more pilot programs to identify the option that best meets BlueSky's strategic needs regarding device management.

Action 2.1.4: Coordinate with vendors and community resources to ensure that the district office, staff, and students have access to high speed internet sufficient to meet the needs of stakeholders.

Goal 2.2 Device Purchasing & Inventory: Establish a best practice and guidelines for purchasing and managing instructional equipment and

software (ex. live sessions, document cams, microscopes, 3D printers, software like Photoshop).

Action 2.2.1: Identify, update and maintain BlueSky's inventory of current instructional equipment and software.

Action 2.2.2: Establish a project lead and stakeholders to create best practices and guidelines for consideration in terms of purchasing and managing instructional equipment and software (longevity, purpose, disaster recovery options, review cycle, evaluation, etc.)

Action 2.2.3: Coordinate with BlueSky's leadership team and school board to ensure identified needs are addressed as part of each year's annual budget.

Goal 2.3 Security: Enact updated security protocols for BlueSky devices, software and other technologies that meet or exceed industry standards.

Action 2.3.1: Identify and enact password management protocols that meet or exceed industry standards.

Action 2.3.2: Identify and enact file management security protocols that meet or exceed industry standards.

Action 2.3.3: Identify and enact user role security protocols that meet or exceed industry standards.

Action 2.3.4: Identify and enact server/database protocols that meet or exceed industry standards.

Action 2.3.5: Incorporate review criteria for the purchasing of technologies to ensure that industry security standards are met or exceeded.

Theme 3: Process Management & Documentation

Goal 3.1 Disaster Recovery: Review and refine the IT Disaster Recovery Plan and corresponding processes to prevent disaster recovery

instances and ensure a prompt and effective response during a disaster recovery instance.

Action 3.1.1: Ensure applicable IT staff and administration have sufficient access to systems to quickly respond in a time of need.

Action 3.1.2: Ensure the Disaster Recovery Plan remains updated with current vendor contacts, policies and procedures to be easily referenced in a disaster recovery incident.

Action 3.1.3: Review and establish appropriate processes and procedures to monitor all core IT systems and prevent escalated incidents.

Action 3.1.4: Develop a disaster recovery communication plan to ensure that stakeholders receive appropriate and responsive communications during and following a disaster recovery incident.

Goal 3.2 Organization & Storage: Establish organizational, naming, and security guidelines for electronic files, records, documents, notes, curriculum, assessment, and instructional materials.

Action 3.2.1: Determine central storage locations for various electronic files that reinforces established security and access protocols while ensuring ease of access for those with a legitimate need to access the files.

Action 3.2.2: As appropriate, establish file, organizational, and storage structures that promote the ease of finding files, including the ability to search by topic or keyword as applicable.

Action 3.2.3: Establish guidelines, expectations, and reference documentation for training and support purposes that promote the self management and implementation of file organization, storage, naming conventions, and document accessibility.

Goal 3.3 Helpdesk: Review the helpdesk system and processes in order to improve support response times and resolutions.

Action 3.3.1: Create and maintain a knowledge base of helpdesk support materials for internal and external stakeholders, including increased articles for IT staff.

Action 3.3.2: Review the structure and organization of the existing helpdesk system to simplify the menu so it is intuitive for stakeholders while being able to automate ticket distribution as appropriate.

Action 3.3.3: Conduct a formal review of helpdesk systems using criteria specific to BlueSky's needs and make recommendations based on the results of the formal review.

Action 3.3.4: Review options for making the helpdesk system more responsive during off hours or being more explicit regarding hours of technology support.

Goal 3.4 Systems Review Process: Establish a formal review schedule for operational systems and softwares that ensures BlueSky remains efficient and competitive in online education by the start of the 2023-24 school year.

Action 3.3.1: Engage stakeholders to identify short-term and long-term needs when creating the initial review schedule to prioritize needs.

Action 3.3.2: Create and follow the formal review schedule for operational systems and softwares.

Theme 4: Communication & Collaboration

Goal 4.1 Procedures & Practices: Review and update practices, processes and procedures for communication and communication documentation.

Action 4.1.1: Conduct a formal communication evaluation to determine best practices for various forms of communication and when they are best utilized.

Action 4.1.2: Conduct a formal communication documentation evaluation to determine best practices for documenting various forms of communication.

Action 4.1.3: Refine documentation systems and procedures, including automations, that reinforce newly established best practices for communications and documentation.

Action 4.1.4: Create and/or refine system reports to facilitate the implementation of established best practices.

Goal 4.2 Professional Development: Establish a comprehensive professional development plan to ensure fidelity of implementation of newly established best practices for communication and communication documentation by 2027.

Action 4.2.1: Create a synchronous and in person training plan that provides robust professional development for the initial launch of best practices and system updates.

Action 4.2.2: Update corresponding communication and communication documentation training materials, including asynchronous training modules, documents, and FAQs.

Theme 5: Marketing & Competitive Edge

Goal 5.1 Marketing: Support and manage BlueSky owned marketing, advertising and other promotional accounts to maximize reach of these systems.

Action 5.1.1: Identify social media account management protocols to support use and functionality of these systems (YouTube, Facebook, Bee Pro, Instagram, website, etc.).

Action 5.1.2: Continually monitor and improve BlueSky's website to ensure it is engaging, responsive (mobile) and accessible.

Goal 5.2 BlueSky Brand: Facilitate and support the distribution of BlueSky created content (newsletters, tutorial videos, field trips/events, graduation etc.)

Action 5.2.1: Develop reports to support the needs of targeted communications and marketing strategies.

Action 5.2.2: Review and refine processes for hosting and distributing newsletter, field trips, tutorials, and other mass communications to produce thoroughly reviewed high quality content, maximize the end user experience, and meet the needs of records retention expectations.

Action 5.2.3: Train staff in the use of key systems for self management and self facilitation (ex. staff create their own reports or post their own videos).

Goal 5.3 Support: Support BlueSky staff in attending and promoting BlueSky through collaborative professional groups or organizations or by presenting at professional conferences.

Action 5.3.1: Attend professional conferences and/or organizations to be aware of the online education market and trends in online education.

Action 5.3.2: Identify professional organizations and/or conferences that align with BlueSky's long term strategic needs regarding IT and marketing.

Action 5.3.3: Create marketing materials to highlight the dynamic technologies that make BlueSky unique in online education.