

Professional Development Activity on Prioritization

This activity helps team members prioritize the district's needs. Prioritization practice is essential because most school board–superintendent teams will simply not have the funds or resources to address all challenges facing their school, and as a result, difficult decisions will need to be made. Teams will use a PESTLE analysis to inform their decision making and strategic planning.

Time Frame

This activity should last approximately sixty to ninety minutes.

Materials

The activity requires a facilitator, a timekeeper, PESTLE prompts (see table 8.1 available online at go.SolutionTree.com/leadership), pens or pencils, and paper. Teams are encouraged to edit the PESTLE prompts based on their own district characteristics and the many external factors serving as potential forces of threat and opportunity.

Process

The school board–superintendent team can conduct this exercise as one large group or include additional stakeholders such as central office and building administrators. If only the team conducts this exercise, one large-group discussion around the PESTLE prompts might suffice. If other stakeholders are included (for example, more than eight), consider the following around-the-world format.

1. After identifying one person to serve as timekeeper, the facilitator organizes the team into three table groups. Each table should have a writing utensil and paper.
2. Each table group should choose someone to serve as the table facilitator (or host) to get the conversation started and to be responsible for taking notes.
3. For ten minutes, each table analyzes two of the six PESTLE areas to reveal the factors impacting its school district and to determine how these factors affect the district and what the result of their impact might be. (For example, the first table tackles political and economic factors, the second table analyzes social and technological factors, and table three focuses on legislative and environmental factors.) Teams may like to use the prompts in table 8.1 to guide their discussions. The table facilitator should record the group's thoughts. The timekeeper should provide a two-minute warning.
4. At the end of the ten-minute session, the table facilitator should remain in place as the rest of the group rotates to the next table. He or she will update the new group on the discussion of the previous round. Groups will then select a new table facilitator for their conversation and spend the next ten minutes adding their thoughts to the conclusions of the previous group, using their discussion at the previous table as a guide. Again, a two-minute warning should be given.
5. Groups rotate for the third time, with the new table facilitator remaining in place. They then repeat the update and discussion steps at the final table.

6. At the end of the third session, each table will be given five minutes to prepare a very short recap of the cross-pollinated conversation about the PESTLE forces assigned to that table.
7. Groups should then reconvene, and each table will present a synopsis of its discussions for the group.
8. Once groups have discussed PESTLE forces in terms of opportunities and threats, consider their implications on current strategic planning efforts, which include both the foundational statements and continuous improvement efforts.

Results

Participation in this activity helps the team prioritize the district's needs in a strategic way that accounts for the challenging and competing needs of any complex organization. It affords the team a prioritization tool that enhances effectiveness.