

Thinking Strategically: Cornerstone Charter Schools

When Tom Willis, CEO of Cornerstone Charter Schools, connected with EDSI in the summer of 2011, he was leading an organization in the midst of transition. “I talked about shifting priorities,” shares Willis. “We were trying to figure out what people we needed and what would be our next hire as we continued growing strategically.”

EDSI responded to Willis’ needs by introducing Cornerstone to Skilldex, a tool to help the organization think through these issues in a more systematic way. In addition to cataloging, analyzing and better understanding the responsibilities and tasks currently performed at Cornerstone, Willis was looking to develop a new job description for the Chief Operating Officer (COO) position.

During the summer of 2011, EDSI’s staff conducted Job Task Analyses with ten positions across two Cornerstone schools, and utilized Skilldex to catalog internal skills, as well as responsibilities and tasks, being performed throughout the organization.

Talking about the benefits of the process, Willis shares, “Much of the benefit came from the process and the journey, and getting people talking. Once our staff got into it and started seeing the results, it was tremendously helpful, and in some ways therapeutic.”

Working together, EDSI and Cornerstone were able to pull out some key insights. “Getting on paper the disconnect between how our staff is supposed to spend their time, and how they actually spend their time, is important as we grow as an organization and make changes along the way.”

“We’ve got really good people focused on the most important results and on the kids. We can only get there by having open and honest communication and valuing what people say. EDSI’s work helped our staff members think about what their focus should be and how everyone is working together to get things done.”

In addition to providing Cornerstone with a “thousand foot view” of the organization, EDSI developed a customized job description and job structure for a new COO position – based on current gaps and needs within the organization.

“Using the process laid out by EDSI helped us to create the right gatekeeper responsibilities and tasks, so we can ultimately focus more on the fit of candidates to the Cornerstone culture. I see this as a definite interest long-term. We spend a lot of time at Cornerstone finding the right people, with the right hearts, who are committed to our mission and culture.”

Cornerstone’s future goals include expanding its development activity and network of schools, all while keeping up with the demands of existing schools and students. Willis says, “we still are in the start-up phase with much more work to be done.”

Tom Willis: “EDSI did a fantastic job, we appreciate their approach and good work.”