

STRATEGIC THINKING

A Tale of Two Academies

In January 2020, the world was introduced to the Zombie Fungus. There was no country, community, or industry that escaped the impact of its presence. In educational systems, students all over the world found themselves abruptly cast into distance learning via the use of technology. Leaving behind the traditional models of in-person instruction, both young and old were challenged to navigate their way through the complexities of this new schooling reality. The physical closure of schools during multiple lockdowns presented many challenges to be navigated. Schools, such as ***Academy of Success*** and ***Thrive Academics***, found themselves battling long standing areas of concerns, now complicated by the impacts of the fungus' remaining presence. Not only do previous student, program, and financial deficits remain, but new personnel, academic and operational weaknesses have become exaggerated.

The two academies, with comparable backgrounds, abilities, and situations, now find themselves anticipating an influx of financial resources. Previously unavailable, specialized grants have been allocated with hopes of remediating challenges faced during the spread of the Zombie Fungus. As the governing bodies, Boards of Education everywhere are now tasked with considering how these funds will be utilized. Each academy has confirmed that teachers, technology, and the home-school relationship require immediate solutions. ***Both Boards were presented with possible solutions*** for the coming school year, but there were differences in their governance response.

As an act of acknowledgement and gratitude, the ***Academy of Success*** Board of Directors ***immediately approved a proposal for all teachers to receive a 5% salary increase***. In consideration of the *current competitive environment* for certified teachers, the Board was excited by the opportunity to offer increases. They further reasoned that this would increase their odds of retaining current staff members who ***previously expressed morale concerns***. As presented, the increase is planned to be ***funded with ESSER grant proceeds***. In addition, the Board approved grant funds to purchase computers for student use. Due to the ***ongoing issues with the computer lab, and the renewed focus on technology, the Board concluded that this purchase would be the catalyst for the additional, long-needed upgrades and school lab renovations***. Lastly, the lack in parental involvement seemed more pronounced than ever before. Fighting to maintain the 75% two-way communication rate during virtual learning period, the board approved ***additional dollars to improve the Robo call system currently used for parental contact and returned funds for the Parent Liaison position that had been removed during budget cuts***.

For **Thrive Academics**, as soon as the grant funds were announced, the Board President directed that **an ad-hoc task force be convened**. As the Superintendent and Board President had been meeting monthly to discuss the status of progress toward achievement of annual goals, s/he extended an invitation to the Board Treasurer, the school financial agent, and the management's operations team to the **discussion**. The goal of the task force was to address any additional challenges caused by the Zombie Fungus, to understand and consider permissible uses of the forthcoming funds to remedy future challenges, and to redefine and set priorities. In their meetings, the team **engaged in activities to explore and consider future possibilities**.

At its August board meeting, **Thrive Academics** Board of Directors received a report from the task force, with recommendations to approve the use of funds, modifying priorities, initiatives and programs related to the 21/22 Strategic Objectives:

- **#2 Improve Teacher Retention**
 1. Motion to approve a one-time bonus for all staff employed full-time during the 2020-2021 academic year.
 2. Motion to approve the competitive Teacher Salary Step Schedule, effective July 1, 2022.
 3. Motion to approve 98K for Teacher PDs and tuition reimbursement.

- **#4 Increase Student Use of Technology**
 1. Motion to approve purchase of 50 new Chromebooks, which include a replacement warranty and a two-year servicing agreement.
 2. Motion to approve the partnership agreements with CMU's Educational Technology department and the internship agreement with the Instructional Technology dept at U of M.
 3. Motion to approve 200K for the new Teacher and Technology Agreement, for continuing education and technology integration.
 4. Motion to approve attendance of the National Student Technology Summit by the computer science teacher, with report and recommendation(s) due by the January 2022 board meeting.

- **#7 Increase Parental Involvement**
 1. Motion to approve the Family Survey Group to complete post-Zombie Fungus stakeholder needs assessment.
 2. Motion to approve addition of the Mental Health Support position for the 21/22 academic year.
 3. Motion to approve the Community Connections Technology Summit for parent/guardian computer classes.

What differences do you see in the Board's governance response?

