

*The world is a risky place.  
The world is full of opportunities.  
Leaders who embrace both truths  
integrate crisis planning and  
strategic planning into one  
resilient whole for long-term  
health beyond short-term survival.*

## Strategy Yin and Yang

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The COVID-19 crisis may have brought strategic plans to a screeching halt, but it hasn't stopped strategic thinking. As evidence, look at what is happening in independent schools around the country. Teaching and learning communities everywhere are coming together in new and transformational ways to adjust and innovate not only the student experience, but new ways of being. Just because a traditional strategic process is not unfolding as intended or a strategic initiative is not happening at the moment, it shouldn't be assumed that school strategy is on hold. On the contrary. And here's why.

Strategy is all about finding ways to achieve goals. If my goal is to get to a certain southern destination with sand and surf and the bridge on the main highway is out, I need another route, not a new destination. Rather than focusing on the chasm ahead, my search for an alternative path demonstrates my adaptability and deepens my reservoir of resiliency, which I can then draw on in subsequent challenging situations.

In a similar way, while strategies a school has set in motion in to achieve the goals of its strategic plan may be on hold for the moment, the workarounds the school community is engaged in are themselves strategy.

Timing is strategy. Retrenchment is strategy.  
Deferment is strategy. Innovation is strategy.  
Resiliency is strategy. Collaboration is strategy.  
Expansion of delivery platforms is strategy.

The destination hasn't changed; the roadmap simply has been redrawn.

The traditional strategist looks at adaptability and resiliency in a time of crisis through the lens of preserving what is. Once the crisis is over and things return to the way they were, the traditional strategist's essential question is "what changes should we make to improve our crisis plan based on what we learned from our operational procedures during this crisis?"

Another type of strategist, the emergent strategist, sees things differently. The emergent strategist looks at adaptability and resiliency through the lens of opportunity to explore what might be. Once the crisis is over – and more importantly – during the crisis, the emergent strategist asks, "what learnings about how we delivered values and mission during this crisis align with vision and can become new ways of doing things?" Always learning from patterns that show up in unexpected solutions, emergent strategists may ultimately prefer the detour to the planned route.

During COVID-19, a school's crisis response of necessity is crafted to align with public health and safety requirements. This is the minimum to survive.

Strategic response goes further by intentionally linking crisis response with school values and mission while looking for patterns in successful outcomes that align with strategic plan vision.

A school that successfully executes its crisis response to COVID-19 may survive. But the school that integrates crisis response with strategic response will thrive.

Here is a list of key shifts that occur in times of crisis and a sample of strategic thinking questions to help school leaders integrate crisis and strategic responses into one resilient whole.

### Ten things that shift in a crisis:

1. Focus on opportunities shifts to focus on threats.
2. Offensive strategy shifts to defensive strategy.
3. Organizing people around growth shifts to organizing people around safety.
4. Focus on strategic growth of assets shifts to strategic preservation of assets.
5. Focus on anticipating worst case scenarios shifts to responding to worst case scenarios.
6. Focus on building resilience needed to thrive in good times shifts to building resilience needed to survive in the face of adversity.
7. Focus on the assumption that the opportunities of tomorrow will be like those of today shifts to a focus on the risks of tomorrow.
8. Time pressure: strategic planning normally unfolds over months or even years, while crises require urgent action.
9. Control: strategic planning assumes reasonable control over a school's processes and relationships while a crisis can inhibit control.
10. Range of options: the typically broad range of response options in strategic planning shifts to one or a few options in a crisis.

### Strategic questions head of schools can explore with trustees and administrative leadership teams before, during, or after a time of crisis:

1. *What are we doing and what more can we do to increase school leadership's capacity to anticipate, confirm, and respond to troubling changes in the internal and external environments?*
2. *What are we doing and what more can we do to increase resilience and strategically nimble behaviors that build our capability to persevere throughout a crisis?*
3. *What are we doing and what more can we do to encourage adjustments in the strategic plan that originate in changes the school experiences during a crisis?*
4. *What are we doing and what more can we do to maintain confidence in our strategic plan and/or our strategic process?*

5. *What are we doing and what more can we do to establish recovery and post-crisis enrollment management strategies?*
6. *What are we doing and what more can we do to ensure our school's reputation at the end of the crisis is better than it was prior to the crisis?*
7. *What are we doing and what more can we do to control the strategic effect of information, communication, and media relations strategies?*
8. *What are we doing and what more can we do to sustain our competitive advantage during and after this crisis?*
9. *What are we doing and what more can we do during crisis response not only to monitor crisis development, but to make sense of it?*
10. *What are we doing and what more can we do at the end of a crisis to not only improve our next crisis response but also build and, if necessary, rebuild trust?*
11. *What are we doing and what more can we do to integrate crisis management's defensive and preventive capacity with strategic planning's offensive and growth strategy to gain more comprehensive strategic management of our school?*

The goal of integrating crisis and strategic planning is to position a school to thrive, not simply survive. While crisis planning and strategic planning are different operating systems with different timelines, structures, and processes, taking advantage of their complementarity can produce an organizational resiliency that lives on past the immediate crisis.



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To explore the complementarities of crisis planning and strategic planning, go to this quizlet.

<https://quizlet.com/498256938/strategic-planning-and-crisis-planning-flash-cards/>