

Newburyport Public Schools

Superintendent's Entry Plan

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Introduction

Since July 1, 2013, I have had the opportunity to learn about the Newburyport Public Schools through inquiry, formal meetings, observation and participatory collaboration. The last five months have afforded me an opportunity to interact with staff, students, municipal leaders, parents, community members, community groups, and elected officials. During this time I have broadened my understanding and appreciation for all that comprises the Newburyport Public Schools (NPS). The continuous thread that runs through each group and unifies them is the sense of pride in the Newburyport Public Schools and the belief that all constituents are committed to the continuous improvement of student achievement.

This plan documents some of my findings derived from my inquiry over the past few months. It is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive. It is rather a guide, from which simple and complex action plans are developed and executed over time. This document is to be viewed as fluid and malleable; the ability to tweak details and even whole sections is essential to the entry plan, district and the superintendent's continued success and progress moving forward.

Components of the Entry Plan

This plan was predicated on gathering data via a variety of sources to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT Analysis). Data were gathered via interviews with School Committee members, administrators, staff, students, parents, municipal leaders, community members including members of business and industry. In addition, data regarding the history of the district, previous strategic plans and a variety of internal documents were reviewed in order to ascertain an accurate picture of current district functioning.

Areas of Focus

In organizing the data gathered and in order to prioritize work that needed to be done, I have chosen the four areas identified in the Educator Evaluation Superintendent Rubric. These include:

- I. Instructional Leadership
- II. Management and Operations
- III. Family and Community Engagement
- IV. Professional Culture

In addition, I will add two other areas that I believe need further exploration and strategic action: Governance and Fiscal Management. These two areas were singled out because preliminary data suggests that they have significant impact on the healthy functioning of the NPS.

This entry plan is not meant to identify every strength or gap. It is meant to highlight those areas that I believe need the most focus and attention for the remainder of this school year and beyond.

I. Instructional Leadership

Strengths:

- Building leaders have clear goals they can articulate regarding their own staff and students.
- District leadership provides a framework and guidance for building leaders and teachers.
- Building leaders have buy in from staff (there is variation from building to building).
- The leadership team is committed to becoming a professional and productive team.
- The majority of staff members remain committed to improving student achievement.
- Curriculum maps are detailed and cover all subject areas.
- Teachers are at the heart of curriculum development and refinement.

- Teachers have a significant voice in standards-based unit designs as they relate to Common Core Standards.
- Teachers have flexibility in their instructional practices and in assessments used.
- Support from the Newburyport Education Foundation in the areas of technology and literacy have allowed schools to remain current in some areas.
- The continuing success and cooperation from all parties with the continued implementation of the Educator Evaluation Plan.
- The creation and implementation of a staff induction plan that supports new teachers and teachers new to the district.

Gaps:

- Building leaders have limited knowledge of other building/district needs.
- Staff buy in to building/district initiatives is variable. More parity is needed across buildings and across the district as a whole.
- Teachers have limited time to interact with grade level teams/departments for curriculum development, assessment development and discussion of student progress.
- It is unclear where special education and “specialized instruction” fit into the curriculum as a whole.
- All staff members do not have a thorough understanding of curriculum. There is inconsistency in implementation.

- Gaps exist in vertical articulation of the curriculum in many subject areas and needs to be developed across buildings and across the entire district as a whole.
- Administrators must demonstrate respect for each other and individual roles as well as the responsibility to each other and the district as a whole.
- A long-term plan for technology use and replacement has not been funded. A complete technology inventory does not exist for hardware/software and for the skill level assessment of staff and students.
- Support for technology integration is not balanced across the district.
- Content areas at NHS are understaffed in some cases resulting in large class sizes.
- Electives are minimal due to staffing constraints.
- Scheduling at all levels limits academic and other options.
- Limited administrative staff makes the Educator Evaluation System and timelines a continuing challenge.
- There are limited STEM or STEAM opportunities for students.
- The NEASC report will outline areas of focus that will need to be addressed.
- More focus on career exploration is required at all levels.

II. Management and Operations

Strengths:

- District and building plans, procedures and routines exist.
- Student safety, including social, emotional and behavioral needs is a primary focus in every building.
- Highly qualified staff members are employed across the district.
- There is a strong induction program for new staff hired at the beginning of the year. The mentor/mentee program is highly regarded by both mentors and mentees.
- Teachers collaborate at all levels regarding curriculum development, student needs, and assessment.
- Two building projects are currently underway: a new PreK-3 Bresnahan School and the renovation of the Nock and Molin Schools.

Gaps:

- District and building plans, procedures and routines are not consistent across the district or from building to building.
- Protocols for student safety including addressing social, emotional and behavioral needs must be refined and clarified across the district.

- During the hiring process, there is no provision for demonstration lessons and limited opportunity to observe prospective hires interacting with students.
- No comprehensive training program exists for newly hired staff to ensure that they are trained in all district initiatives and instructional practices in a timely manner.
- Concerns regarding the consistency of special education instructional practices, as well as special education organization, were repeatedly raised by staff members and parents.
- Staff collaboration time is limited by building schedules and building start and end times, as well as the time constraints of the teachers' contract.
- The Bresnahan building project will culminate in the consolidation of the Brown and Bresnahan staffs and has resulted in a new leadership model of a "school within a school." This will require on-going focus and refinement for the immediate future and beyond.

III. Family and Community Engagement

Strengths:

- Parents and Families are actively engaged in the NPS.
- Parents overwhelmingly report positive experiences and expectations regarding their child (children) in the NPS.
- Significant district and community resources exist to support students and families.

- The Newburyport Education Foundation (NEF) is a significant source of revenue and materials, donating over 2.2 million dollars to the NPS over the last ten years.
- The NEF Business Coalition has had a significant impact on developing business partnerships with staff across varied grade levels over the last few years. This has resulted in partnership grants, internships and on-going connections to local businesses.
- Businesses and community organizations continue to support a variety of student- focused activities across the district by donating goods, time or expertise to enhance the educational experience of NPS students.
- The Swasey Fund provides substantial monies for teacher professional development as well as teacher leadership opportunities.
- The District has well established positive working relationships with the Beacon Coalition and Newburyport Youth and Family Services.

Gaps:

- An antiquated website limits communication to parents, staff, students and the community.
- There are currently limited opportunities for parents and community members to engage in dialogue regarding the direction of the district.
- Currently there is no clear procedure for families seeking district support or resources.

- There are limited formal processes to engage parents and community members.
- The superintendent has not yet established a vehicle for engaging with staff, students, parents, or the community on a regular basis.

IV. Professional Culture

Strengths:

- The majority of staff members are committed to upholding high standards.
- The School Committee has developed a calendar that allows for on-going professional development.
- Many staff members participate in extra curricular/community events that directly support students.
- There is a strong sense of pride in the Newburyport Teachers' Association.

Gaps:

- Core Ethical Values have yet to be identified.
- The calendar and early release days, to ensure staff professional development, continue to make child care difficult for parents.
- Not all groups have a plan for on-going professional development.
- Stakeholders need to be involved in the development of the District Mission Statement.

- Administrator and teacher turnover has negatively impacted the culture of the district.
- There is limited data regarding the evaluation of District culture from any stakeholder group.

V. Governance

Strengths:

- The School Committee members are individually committed to the success of the school district.
- School Committee members have explored governance models and systems of operations.
- School Committee members have many years of experience and take their roles seriously.
- Role delineation between the superintendent and the School Committee has been discussed and agreed to in principle.

Gaps:

- The role of the School Committee and the superintendent's role have blurred in the past with School Committee members being involved in day-to-day operations and personnel decisions.
- Clear role delineation has been agreed upon and needs to be consistently practiced.
- The School Committee has not settled on a model of governance that all members can support.

- Professional development has been limited for School Committee members.
- Participation in Professional Organizations such as the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) has been limited among members.
- A more positive culture between the School Committee and school staff is needed.

VI. Fiscal Management

Strengths:

- Budget priorities have focused on staffing and maintaining class size.
- The NPS are a “Race to the Top” District.
- The District takes full advantage of grant opportunities.
- The Newburyport Education Foundation has greatly enhanced “Excellence Opportunities” over the last ten years.

Gaps:

- The District’s funding limits have caused there to be significant cuts in programs and personnel over the last ten years.
- The District is currently in a deficit situation of approximately \$500,000. This may rise or fall

depending on a variety of variables over the next five months.

- All surplus funds have been exhausted.
- Unplanned special education placements negatively impacted the budget.
- Unless there is intervention and a new budget plan moving forward, the District will continue to start each school year with a deficit.
- No new staff or educational programs can or should be considered until an adequate budget plan is developed and supported.
- Communication between the Leadership Team and the School Committee regarding budget specifics has been lacking and a source of contention in the past.
- The foundation budget must be raised in order to maintain current programs, account for negotiated wage increases and in order to build back previous staffing and programmatic cuts.
- Lack of contingency funds impacted past budgets negatively.

Conclusion:

Over the next several months, the superintendent will work with the leadership team to prioritize key areas while continuing to tie them to current areas of focus. These key areas should be explored as part of a long-term strategic plan that results in the development of a realistic number of action plans to be executed over the next three to five years.