

Monthly Memo from the Superintendent

Dr. Laurie Hunter
Concord Public Schools
Concord-Carlisle Regional School District

Superintendent
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Report of Entry Plan Findings

This month I share the outcome of my entry plan process. Thank you all for your engagement and participation!

Introduction

New leadership brings an opportunity for reflection, observation and discussion of the school system's successes and areas for growth. As I enter the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District, it is very important to me that I gather information and conduct discussions that outline the history, initiatives and progress of our school district.

I approached the entry process systematically and purposefully with a commitment to active listening. Both quantitative and qualitative information was collected and analyzed. Documents such as budgets and contracts were also reviewed. I conducted interviews with a wide range of stakeholders including individual School Committee members, administrators, Presidents of the Teachers' Associations, town officials in both Concord and Carlisle as well as parent leaders such as SEPAC and the Parent Teacher Groups.

Several guiding questions focused the process:

- What processes and approaches are deemed highly successful and high functioning?
- What processes and approaches would benefit from review or revision?
- What priorities should we establish for our work?

Goals

The first goal of the entry process was to learn about both the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District including the accomplishments, the processes and the perspectives of all those involved. Facts related to the district's performance, culture and current status were explored. I especially looked to hear processes that are currently in place as well as pertinent history. The results allow me to have a current understanding of the work of the district.

The second goal was to cultivate relationships and build trust while listening. During the interviews especially, I endeavored to establish rapport through active listening. In hearing the perceptions and concerns of those involved, I hope to create and foundation to foster trust. I believe there was also validation in offering the invitation and welcoming the opportunity to hear a range of perspectives.

Phase I

Process and Timeline

March – June 2017

- Concord School Committee Meeting
- Administrator Meeting
- Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC)
- Parent Teacher Group Presidents
- Concord Education Foundation
- CC @ Play
- Concord Teachers Association Executive Board
- Concord-Carlisle Teachers Association Leadership
- Concord Town Meeting
- Carlisle Town Meeting

Upon my official beginning on July 1, I crafted a schedule to meet with the following stakeholders as well as accepting invitations from groups that approached me.

July - August 2017

- Individual School Committee Members
- Individual Building and Central Office Administrators
- Concord Police Chief
- Concord Fire Chief
- CASE Collaborative Executive Director
- Communications Consultant
- Concord Nanae (Japan) Executive Committee
- Massachusetts Partnership for Youth
- EDCO Collaborative Executive Director
- Concord Teachers' Association
- Concord-Carlisle Teachers' Association
- Concord Building Service Worker Leadership
- Concord Town Administrator
- Concord Assistant Town Administrator
- Concord Town Department Heads

- Concord Finance Director
- Concord Children's Center Director
- Carlisle Town Administrator
- Newspaper Representatives: Concord Journal and Carlisle Mosquito
- Carlisle Superintendent and Middle School Principal
- Concord Free Public Library Director
- Concord Finance Committee
- Concord Department Head Meeting
- Concord Town Moderator
- Concord Select Board
- Private School Headmasters
(Fenn, Nashoba Brooks, Concord Academy)

September-December 2017

- Community Entry Forums at All 5 Schools
- School Committee Meeting in Boston
- Community Cultural Forums (3)
- Teacher Entry Forums at All 5 Schools, Ripley and Preschool
- Formal and Informal School Visits Regularly
- Visits to Student and School Events and Activities Including:
 - Back to School Nights
 - Athletic Events
 - Concerts
 - Performances
 - PTG Social Events and Fundraisers
- Meetings with small groups of middle and high school students
- SEPAC Meeting
- Meetings with Consultants and Legal Counsel
- PTG Presidents Meetings
- Elementary School PTG Meetings
- Community Group Meetings:
 - League of Women Voters
 - Concord On Tap
 - CC@ Play
 - Friends of Concord Carlisle Fields
 - Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee
 - Concord Carlisle Rotary Club
 - Concord Carlisle TV Interview
 - Concord-Nanae Partnership Visit to Concord
- EDCO and CASE Collaborative Board Meetings
- Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School Meeting
- Meeting with Concord Education Fund

Document and Data Review:

- MCAS and Academic Benchmark Data
- Eight Contracts
- School Improvement Plans
- District Goals
- Teacher and Administrator Survey Responses
- Administrator Entry Survey Responses
- Staff Entry Survey Responses September 2017
- Parent Entry Survey Responses September 2017
- Student Survey Results:
 - Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2016
 - Challenge Success 2016
 - CCHS Entry Survey Responses September 2017
- Staff and Administrator Evaluations
- FY14 through FY18 Budgets for Both Districts
- Benchmarking Data Comparisons Between Like School Districts
- Student Demographic Data: Graduation, Attendance, Special Education, Cultural Background, ELL
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Data
- District Website, School Newsletters, School Schedules
- K-12 Curriculum Maps
- School Committee Policies
- School Committee Meeting Recordings 2016-2017

Phase II

Review and Reflection

Following the collection of the quantitative and qualitative information, January 2018 was spent analyzing the responses. Quantitative information was reviewed for outcomes and patterns related to enrollment data, fiscal status and performance on standardized testing. Themes were identified in the qualitative information based on interviews and surveys. These sources then become the basis for recommendations and priorities.

Phase III

Conclusions and Sharing

The entry process provided me the opportunity to align data points across a wide range of sources. Most obvious in these outcomes is the community's great pride

and investment in its schools. This was evident from the perspective of all involved: administrators, faculty, parents, community members and students. Education is a priority that is reflected in the opportunities, rigor, participation and resources afforded to the children of Concord, Carlisle and Boston served by the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District. This very strong foundation becomes a highly beneficial starting point for a view and vision of the future.

During the analysis process, four themes emerged:

- Teaching and Learning
- Culture
- Communication
- Finance, Facilities and Operations

Each theme is presented relative to perceived strengths and areas for further discussion.

Teaching and Learning

Strengths

- Academic performance is consistently among the highest performing school districts in Massachusetts.
- High expectations are in place for students and are shared among faculty and parents.
- Models of Response to Intervention are either in place or currently under development across all of K-12.
- Extensive work in the K-12 curriculum results in vertical and horizontal alignment based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- Special education services are extensively provided both within the district and outside of the district to meet a growingly complex population.
- Instructional resources relative to both personnel and materials are available to staff to support students and provide opportunities including one to one technology in grades six through twelve.
- The faculty are experts in their areas of content at the secondary level and high committed to student success at all levels.
- The level of discourse in classrooms is rigorous and promotes higher order thinking.
- The vast majority of students come to school prepared to learn given the supports and experiences offered by an invested, engaged parent population.
- The district is highly innovative as seen in the Rivers and Revolutions program and recent development of Q5, STEAM and World Language programs.

- The district provides and supports ongoing opportunities for professional development.
- A district vision statement for student learning is in place providing an agreed upon direction for the future.

Areas for Discussion

- While data collection is extensive in K-8 through benchmarks and common assessments, data collection at the high school level is found at the course and section level.
- A review of a continuum of special education services and resources across PreK-12 will provide a guide for creating programs to serve the needs of the future including possible opportunities for additional students to remain in the public school environment.
- Development of a long range vision of teaching and learning based on inquiry, individualization and problem-solving using technology as a tool would maximize its potential impact.
- CPS and CCHS can establish priority areas for professional development in pedagogy to further the extensive work in K-12 curriculum completed over the past four years.
- Continuing the work in RTI and other early identification measures will support those students who struggle to maintain the caliber and demands of the curriculum.
- Committing to discussions between schools will improve the experience of transition for all students (grade five to six, grade eight to nine)
- The pace of change, as in many districts, is a topic to be monitored and dialogued in a frequent and ongoing way.
- Students extensively express continued concern as to the volume and types of homework assigned to them.
- Building upon the growth to date, alignment of the three elementary schools will provide a strong, common foundation for middle school.

Culture

Strengths

- A common core value of educational excellence is agreed upon and pervasive.
- The faculty and building leadership are highly regarded and respected by students and parents.
- Teachers feel supported and valued through contractual agreements and structural elements such as resources, class size or teaching load and the availability of support staff.
- The district provides extensive, high quality extracurricular opportunities for students.

- The district has named student stress and anxiety as key areas of concern and created related action plans.
- The district is committed to a comprehensive approach to overall student wellness as evident in the work with Challenge Success and mindfulness.
- The high school start time moved to 8 a.m. as a result of long-term planning and a commitment to best practices for teenage students.
- Pride in the reputation of being high performing and highly committed to students is a stated value by all stakeholders.

Areas for Discussion

- Concerns around bullying and cultural proficiency foster discussion of inclusivity and acceptance.
- Data around student anxiety and stress remains high.
- Staff voice concerns over morale in the past and express initiative overload.
- Continuing to build relationships of trust and collaboration between district leadership, staff and community will further the district's vision of the future.

Communication

Strengths

- The district is growing in opportunities for community, staff, parent and student input.
- The district highly values communication at all levels and expresses positivity when information is provided and decisions explained.
- The community at large is highly invested in participating and supporting the schools.

Areas for Discussion

- The district will benefit from ongoing structured opportunities for stakeholder feedback proactively prior to the implementation of changes or broad scale decisions.
- The development of a strategic plan will allow cohesion of school plans with a common vision that can be communicated through strategic planning documents.
- Ensuring transparency as to how decisions are made, especially at the district level, will promote further trust.
- Continuing to develop community partnerships benefits both the schools and the communities of Concord and Carlisle.
- In an electronic time, creativity in communication will reach additional audiences.

Finance, Facilities and Operations

Strengths

- The state of the art high school is three years old providing an exceptional learning environment.
- The elementary schools are updated and maintained also providing a highly productive and rich environment for learning.
- The community historically supports school budgets.
- Alternative funding opportunities exist through private and community group opportunities.
- A new bus depot opened in August of 2017.
- The Joint School Committee formed a Campus Advisory Committee to provide structure to future planning of the CCHS campus.
- The district has electronically streamlined multiple administrative processes.

Areas for Discussion

- Concord Middle School currently exists in two aged school buildings providing a notably less ideal space than in the other four schools.
- The relationship between the school committees and finance committee is emerging but the long-term course has not been fully charted.
- What should be minor issues, such as student parking, remain time consuming and conflict ridden.
- Transportation is stretched to capacity with the addition of the high school start time.

Phase IV

Next Steps

The entry plan findings will inform input the strategic planning process as well as the continuing dialogue with the school committees, leadership, faculty and stakeholders as to priorities and action steps.

It is a privilege to serve these outstanding communities. I look forward to our continued work together.

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