

Superintendent's Entry Plan Report **February 28, 2013**

Introduction

Transitions in leadership are pivotal moments in the history of organizations. These moments set the stage for the direction an organization will take in the future, ownership and buy-in of members of the organization to a new culture and possible shift in priorities and goals, opening conversations about strengths and areas of growth, and evaluating current practices and considering alternative approaches. Creating a smooth transition in leadership requires a new leader to take the time to learn about the organization from as many perspectives as possible. He or she must gather information through direct observation of all aspects of the organization, meeting with all stakeholders to inquire about their experiences and understanding of the organizational strengths and needs, through the review of policies and procedures, analysis of available data, and by building relationships and understanding through the on-going day to day work that informs the leader about how the organization functions.

Entry Plan

Beginning in the spring of 2012, I embarked upon the process of entry into the position of Superintendent of the Lincoln Public Schools. Following a superintendent who completed a successful ten - year tenure provides a strong foundation to work from and also presents challenges in changing deeply rooted practices and beliefs. The focus of my entry process was on developing strong relationships with all members of the Lincoln Public School community and learning about the values and priorities of each constituent group. My daily work along with the formal process of my entry plan have informed my understanding of the state of the district and provided me with the community context of how the schools fit into the overall Town of Lincoln organization.

The established goals of the entry plan were to gain understanding of:

- teaching and learning practices and outcomes
- Achievement Gaps that currently exist
- school and district culture and communication
- employee morale
- efficiency and effectiveness of practices and systems
- relationships between the schools and its families
- relationships between the Lincoln School District and the Town Boards and Departments

In addition, the entry process provides an opportunity to build strong, positive relationships with members of the communities served by the Lincoln Public Schools.

Core Values

In addition to carrying out an entry plan process, the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP) requires that new superintendents develop Core Values that will guide the work of the district. As part of my entry process, I began this work with the Administrative Council at our summer retreat in August and have met with many stakeholders including; School Committee, Lincoln PTO, Hanscom PTO, Lincoln faculty, and Hanscom faculty. Input from these groups will be synthesized into narrative that provides a descriptive representation of each Core Value. The Core Values of the Lincoln Public Schools are:

- Excellence and Innovation in Teaching and Learning
- Respect for Every Individual
- Collaboration and Community

Our Core Values serve to guide the work we do as a district and learning community. They are the filter through which we review and test our decisions related to all aspects of the school

district. Over the coming years, continual work will be done to establish the Core Values. As they are referred to and used in our daily interactions and decision-making, they will become a foundation of the district and what we represent.

Current Understandings

While I have learned a great deal about the Lincoln community and the Lincoln Public Schools in particular, I must acknowledge that my understanding is still in the early development stages. There is a great deal for me to learn about the curriculum and programs provided in our schools and how our faculty and staff are organized to meet the needs of all of our students. My current understanding has been informed by my entry interviews, school and classroom observations, regular meetings with the administrative team and administrators and staff that I directly supervise, meetings with parents during Superintendent Office Hours and scheduled appointments, attendance at a variety of community events, and on-going committee work e.g. technology review, student engagement, evaluation PLC and bargaining, and School Building Committee.

Teaching and Learning

The students attending the Lincoln Public Schools are provided with a rich curriculum and wide breadth of experiences. The community held value in arts education, World Languages, and the provision of engineering courses is to be commended. At the middle school level, Academic Extensions provide additional breadth to the curriculum and opportunities for enrichment and support. The development of standards based curriculum, assessment, and reporting is important, valuable work that provides a clear focus for students and teachers on learning as the outcome of their work. Continued development of these practices will lead to increased student learning and more targeted instruction to meet student needs. Lincoln students are provided with a variety of learning experiences outside of the classroom. These include field trips to local resources such as Drumlin Farm, DeCordova Museum, Minuteman National Park, and the Lowell Mills as well as Sargent Camp, Washington D.C., and an overnight experience at the Museum of Science.

In review of our assessment data, it is clear that overall the students of the Lincoln Public Schools achieve at high levels. State assessment data show that high percentages of students are proficient and advanced in all areas. On the Hanscom campus, while levels of achievement are lower compared to the Lincoln campus, the growth measures are very high indicating that in the time spent in the Lincoln Public Schools, students make a great deal of progress. (Specific data can be accessed in the MCAS report to School Committee) District level measures of student learning and growth are under development. The district has several assessments in place including Fountas and Pinnell literacy assessments, common writing assessments, common open response questions in mathematics, and some assessments that are embedded within the curriculum. However, consistency of practice in administering the assessments is still being developed. The methods of tracking student achievement and progress also need further development. Currently, the available student information system does not provide an easily accessible way to input assessment data or utilize the information in meaningful ways. In the next two years, the new statewide educator evaluation system will require districts to identify district determined measures of student growth. Assistance with identifying assessments and systems of tracking student growth will be provided by the DESE. Assessment of student learning is an area that will need to be a focus for the district in the coming years.

As is true across the nation, Achievement Gaps exist in the Lincoln Public Schools. Goal Focused Intervention Plans have been established in order to identify targeted goals for students who are not meeting benchmarks. The district is to be commended for its allocation of resources towards these efforts. Again, the tracking of student progress is an area of continued development and need.

I have spent a significant amount of time in each school visiting classrooms in order to directly observe teaching, learning, and our curriculum in action. I have visited classrooms on my own and also conducted observations and walk-throughs with each principal on a regular basis. In addition, I have observed literacy data meetings, team leader meetings, and workshops led by curriculum specialists. The Lincoln Public School District is fortunate to have a talented, dedicated faculty who are highly invested in the growth of their students as learners. The faculty and administrators are also dedicated to their own learning and growth. I have been most appreciative of the willingness of faculty and administrators to engage in conversations about improving teaching and learning. There is a culture of learning and collaboration that is a great asset and should be highly valued.

In entry interviews and meetings with parents and community members, as well as information gathered through a variety of community outreach events, questions about the level of student engagement, high-level critical thinking opportunities, and appropriate differentiation of instruction to meet the range of learners in a class have been raised. This is an area that warrants further investigation and review. A Student Engagement Committee has been established consisting of one School Committee member, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, one Principal, and two faculty members. The work of this committee may help to provide additional information about the level at which students feel invested and engaged in their learning process.

In my classroom observations with principals, we have focused on observing the level of engagement of students in terms of the level of critical thinking required and the purpose and meaning of the learning tasks students are asked to carry out. We also looked for evidence of differentiation for individual student needs. The administrative team is working to develop a common vision of effective teaching and to calibrate our evaluation methods and measures.

Technology

There are pockets of technological innovation and consistent integration of instructional technology taking place. This is, of course, more prevalent where 1:1 pilots are taking place. However, the use of technology throughout the district is inconsistent.

Resources have been provided across the district for the integration of technology in classroom instruction. However, there is not a consistent set of tools in every classroom. Having regular access to technology is essential to learning to fully utilize the tools. In addition, it has been difficult to provide the level of professional development needed to ensure that technology is integrated into instruction on a consistent basis. Technology specialists and faculty report the need for more professional development opportunities in order to learn how to use a variety of technology tools. Throughout my entry process I have consistently received feedback about the inconsistency and unreliability of our wireless network. In addition, the available bandwidth does not meet the needs of high-level technology integration.

There is a need for a coordinated vision of technology use across the district. In addition, systems need to be developed for regular maintenance and replacement cycles that are planned for in the budget cycle. Discussion is taking place regarding the addition of a Director of Technology who would oversee and coordinate all aspects of technology including instructional technology integration, oversight of the network and infrastructure, coordination of data management systems, and management of resources.

Community Involvement and Support

In my first six months as Superintendent of the Lincoln Public Schools I have attended a wide variety of community events including PTO sponsored events such as parent meetings, picnics, and bingo. School based community events such as curriculum nights, concerts, and plays

provided another view of the community. I have attended Athletic events including cross country, soccer, field hockey, and basketball. I have attended and presented at METCO parent group meetings and Town board and committee meetings including Board of Selectmen, Capital Planning Committee, Finance Committee, Conservation Committee, School Building Committee and of course School Committee meetings. Each of these experiences has added to my understanding of the Lincoln community. I have also learned a great deal about the value the community places on the schools and the current perceptions of the education provided in the schools.

Community involvement in the Town Government process is impressive. I have appreciated the level of discourse that takes place in making decisions related to Town resources. It is highly evident that the Town takes great pride in its resources including the schools. Through the Lincoln School building process, mixed perceptions regarding the value the schools provide in terms of educational outcomes emerged. These communicated perceptions received in both public forums as well as in individual conversations range from a perception that the schools provide an outstanding preK – 8 educational experience in which children thrive as individuals to a perception that many families opt out of the public school system due to a sense that their children's needs will not be met. The range of feedback received raises questions about how we can do a better job of communicating the work that takes place in our schools and the educational outcomes that include yet go beyond test scores.

I am appreciative of the on-going support of the schools provided by the Lincoln and Hanscom PTOs, the METCO Coordinating Council and METCO Parent Group, and the Lincoln School Foundation. As a community, we are fortunate to have such active support groups. In addition, I want to acknowledge the support of the Town Finance Committee through the budget process and support of the school building process. We are a fortunate community to have such strong positive relationships between the school district and the Town management and its boards and committees.

It has been a pleasure working with Police Chief Kevin Mooney, Lt. Kevin Kennedy, and Officer David Regan. They have been a great support and resource to the school district all year but especially in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook event. In addition, I have developed relationships with the Security Forces at Hanscom Air Force Base, in particular Master Sergeant Charlie Humphrey and Master Sergeant Wayne Griggs. Fire Chief Steve Carter has also been a support to the schools as we respond to repeated false alarms in the Lincoln School. I have appreciated the opportunities to develop working relationships with these members of the Town and Base.

The Lincoln School Committee has been an invaluable support throughout my entry process. I am extremely grateful for the collaborative style of the committee and willingness to engage in open conversation regarding all aspects of the schools. Entry interviews with members of the committee have provided insight into current areas of focus for the district and ways of maneuvering through the district and town. They have provided extensive leadership with the Lincoln School building project and development of Town reports. Our collaborative development of a new Superintendent Evaluation process was helpful in understanding the priorities of the School Committee.

Facilities and Resources

I have learned a great deal in the last six months about the facilities of the Lincoln Public Schools. Both the proposed building projects on the Lincoln and Hanscom campuses and the review of facilities in light of the increased focus on school security have afforded me the opportunity to delve deeply into the current status of our school buildings. This is an area of high need for the district and one of great concern. As we assess each of our schools, it is a bit

overwhelming to consider that we have such a high level of facility needs in all of our schools. These needs will be a focus for the district for several years to come.

The Lincoln Public Schools are fortunate to have the resources available to carry out a high level educational program. Questions have been raised in the community about the Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) level for the district. The size of the district impacts the expenditure level since the administrative costs are spread over a fewer number of students as compared to our neighboring districts. That being said, the school administration is highly sensitive to our PPE and is committed to ensuring that funds are allocated responsibly as stewards of the Town of Lincoln.

The Lincoln Public Schools are not unique in terms of administration and faculty feeling that our human resources are being stretched very thinly and in many directions. The high number of state mandated initiatives in combination with district and school level goals are exerting a great level of pressure on the human capacity of the district. There is a huge cry to hone in on what is most important and most effective and focus on these areas. The sentiment is that focusing on fewer initiatives will result in better student learning outcomes. The challenge comes in identifying the high impact practices given our limited long range data.

Next Steps

It has been a very challenging and rewarding experience to begin my development as a Superintendent in the Lincoln Public Schools. I am thankful for the opportunity to lead this district and become a part of the Lincoln community. I would like to express my gratitude to the School Committee, parent community, administration, faculty and staff, and community members who have welcomed me into the Lincoln Public Schools. The information provided to me through the entry process has been invaluable as I learn about the strengths and needs of our school district. In the coming months, I will continue to learn and gather information about our district. Working with the School Committee, administrative team, and faculty and staff we will begin to develop a plan of action for the coming years. As I reflect upon all that I have learned, the following guiding questions emerge as the primary areas of focus for our work. The challenge that we face is how to be strategic in our focus to ensure that we are expending our resources on high impact practices that result in the greatest student learning gains. I look forward to our continued work together.

Guiding Questions for the Lincoln Public Schools:

What is our common vision of effective teaching?

How shall we effectively focus on purposeful, meaningful learning that develops high level critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaborative skills?

How shall we use the supervision and evaluation process to effectively support faculty growth and increase student learning?

How shall we support faculty in developing collaborative goals focused on student learning?

How shall we develop a systematic approach to measuring student progress and evaluating instructional practices?

What practices and measures shall we employ to address our achievement gaps?

How shall we ensure that the academic and social emotional needs of all students are met?

How shall we strategically focus our efforts to increase the probability of impact on student learning while decreasing the initiative fatigue felt throughout the district?

How can we communicate to the community about the practices and achievements of the school district in order to ensure that the perceptions of the school district are based on accurate information and data?

How shall we improve the oversight and coordinated vision of technology use throughout the district?