

**Opening Day Community Meeting Presentation by Superintendent, Becky McFall  
August 26, 2019**

1. Each year as I prepare for our Opening Day presentation, I reflect upon my time in the district and the progress we have made toward our District Vision. As I begin my 8<sup>th</sup> year as Superintendent, I am reflecting on the resources and structures we have in place and how we can turn our incredible potential into the best possible experiences and outcomes for our students and at the same time improve our own sense of professional satisfaction. In my Welcome Back letter to you, I made the statement “Change is in the air and opportunities abound”.

In three years, all of our students will be in newly designed schools that match the type of teaching and learning that is needed to ensure that our students have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be successful in an ever-changing future. We have taken steps to improve our school schedules to provide more consistent support and extension opportunities for students and increased uninterrupted learning time. I am certain that we will go through an adjustment period but we are taking steps in the right direction to address long-standing concerns and district needs.

I want to set the stage for today’s presentation by giving you a visual of a school that is designed in similar ways to the designs of our schools and the impact the building change has made for educators, students, and families.

Slide - <https://www.fieldingnair.com/videos/#post-1886>

My message today may come across as more direct than in the past. My intent is to inspire and incite action but I want to acknowledge that there may be points that make you feel uncomfortable. Our feelings of discomfort should not create resistance, or finger pointing or blame. Rather, the discomfort should lead us to take steps to self-assess how we are doing and grow and improve.

In my 8<sup>th</sup> year as superintendent – my sense of urgency to move forward is increasing, and yours should be too. I am not saying this to make anyone feel badly or discouraged. Quite the opposite - I am telling you because I care deeply about each of you and your professional well-being and your sense of purpose. And, I care deeply about our students and ensuring that we are meeting their needs for the present and the future. In order for us to learn and grow, each of us needs specific and honest feedback about how we are doing and ways that we can improve, just like our students do.

Let’s take a moment to consider the needs of our students. Many of you have seen this video during our Institute Day session about developing the Vision of a Learner. The rest of you will see it again this fall when we go through the Vision of a Learner work with you. I think that it is perfectly fine for us to see this video and hear the messages multiple times in order to consider the implications for our work.

Essential Skills (4:52)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_QJQz-8Y2Y&t=27s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_QJQz-8Y2Y&t=27s)

(sprout image)

Over the years, we have planted seeds about authentic learning experiences, project-based learning, and the components of high-quality instruction. And as a result, great things have sprouted and grown. You have created new inter-disciplinary units and developed processes for flexibly grouping students according to their needs, and so much more. There is wonderful work taking place across the district. The sprouts are growing and that is great! And, we need not just sprouts but crops and forests. (crop/forest image) We need more than individual change, we need systemic change.

I know that this is not easy work and it's difficult to know how to change when we have ways of teaching and learning that have been in place for a very long time. But, we must change if we are going to serve our students well.

(Slide – Gorbachev quote)

There are several of us in this room that worked with Superintendent, Matt King in Wellesley. Matt would frequently state, "If you aren't moving forward, you're moving backward". Mikhail Gorbachev Over the years I have often reflected on this quote.

We must be agile in the ways that we adjust to our changing world and the changing needs of our students. We have made progress but we are still behind. Many of the steps we have taken in the last few years are not cutting edge, they are established best practices or curricula that have been around for 10-15 years. Unit and lesson planning with backwards design, Collaborative practice teams/PLCs, Learning Targets, Calkins Units of Study, curriculum review processes, intervention and extension blocks, integrated and project-based learning. We are in the nascent stages of this work and we must move forward.

(slide- precipice)

We are on the precipice of greatness. In order to achieve greatness we must change, and this can be scary. I know that it can sometimes feel like we are asking you to take a leap off the edge while blindfolded without completely understanding where we are headed. We are on that ledge with you, we are all holding hands as we take our first steps.

Let's take some time to hear from Peter Sage an Inspirational Speaker, Serial Entrepreneur and Renowned Coach. His passion is helping people live with change and reinvent themselves.

How to Deal With Change in Life, Peter Sage (15 min.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoxOb5ls-sY>

Turn to your elbow neighbors and share what this video brought up for you.

(slide – either we...)

We are moving into a period of systemic change. Either we will work together to make the changes happen or, the changes will happen to us.

Let's take steps to control our destiny.

Let's focus on what we are grateful for instead of what we fear.

I have great news!:

**We Have Everything We Need (slide)**

Whenever I have spoken about what it takes to achieve our vision of the educational experience we will provide to students, I always say, "If it can be done anywhere, it can happen here." Because, we have everything we need.

We have everything we need and so much to be grateful for: (slide)

High-quality staff at every level

Amazing facilities and resources

Small district

Small class sizes

Breadth of opportunities for students

Engaged families

Common Planning Time during the school day

Individual Planning time during the school day

Collaborative Practice time

District Level collaboration/Adult Learning time

Supportive School Committee

Supportive Town and Air Force Base

High per pupil expenditure

Schedules that support student learning

To yourself, think about how you would complete this sentence.

We have everything we need to \_\_\_\_\_

- Create schools that students love attending
- Engage our students in their learning
- Allow our professionals to be creative and develop units they are passionate about
- Minimize the desire of families to send their children to private schools or homeschool
- Be on the cutting edge of education

You're familiar with the statement "Necessity breeds Innovation" – understanding the necessity for change that we face is important. We have so much. We need to make sure that we don't take it for granted and become complacent.

We have everything we need. But, do we understand our needs and the urgency we face?

Slide - What's our why? Why do we need to change and evolve?

As we saw in the video earlier and in our work of creating our Profile of a Learner, we have seen that the ways that the world is changing are a big part of the impetus for us to evolve.

Don't change slide

But there are more immediate needs...

- We have parents who want their children to love learning and to love coming to school. They want us to light a fire under their kids so that they are passionate about what they are learning and doing in school. They are asking for change and are supportive of our vision but they are impatient with how slowly we are responding.
- We are accountable to the Lincoln Community and the Department of Defense for our high per pupil expenditures. Community members want to know why our costs are higher than our neighboring towns and whether our outcomes are worth it. The DOD is pushing us to lower our costs as well.
- We have not had an override to raise our base budget by more than 2 ½ percent in about 12 years and with the building project passed, there likely will not be an override for many more years. We must become more efficient and create outcomes for students that justify the cost.
- We have seen the level of student needs increase over the years – this creates more reason for change, not less

(Blockbuster v. Netflix slide)

In the business world, it is imperative that you change or you will die. Let's consider this as we talk about Blockbuster and Netflix

Blockbuster vs. Netflix

(Slide graph over time)

1985 – Blockbuster was founded

1995 – valued at \$8.4 Billion

1997 – Netflix founded

This was a David vs. Goliath story with Blockbuster being Goliath.

In 2000, Netflix proposed a merger with Blockbuster offering to run Blockbuster's online platform. This didn't happen. Instead, Netflix who started out as service sending videos through the mail saw what was coming down the road and adapted moving into the media streaming business and now Blockbuster is nowhere to be seen.

(slide Netflix facts)

So what does this have to do with us?

(Slide – We must remain relevant)

It used to be that public schools did not have to compete or adapt and change. But, that is not the case anymore. Private schools, charter schools, school choice, homeschooling have all provided options for families. And, demands for outcomes that match the cost of education put pressure on school systems.

Our Lincoln enrollment has been dropping. (Slide enrollment over time)

There are likely many factors that have led to this decline.

But, we have one of the highest per pupil expenditure levels in the state. (slide per pupil expend) We see this as positive. We have all of the resources that we need. Community members ask why our costs are so high? They wonder why it costs so much more to educate a student in Lincoln than in our surrounding towns and whether the outcomes for students warrant the additional cost. They see that our enrollment is going down and we haven't reduced staffing, in fact we've increased staffing.

The Department of Defense is pushing us on our costs and asking the same questions.

Part of the reason for our high cost is that as a small district we do not benefit from economies of scale. But, this does not explain it all.

Slide - What does this all mean?

It means we have to change with the times. We have to create schools that every family wants their children to attend and that every child can't wait to get to each morning because they love being engaged in learning. We must demonstrate our value, we cannot take anything for granted or we will be going the way of Blockbuster.

(slide- Remember, We have everything we need. We can do this.)

### **Let's talk about What the work ahead of us looks like.**

I recently saw a presentation by Chris Heivly, founder of mapquest about how to build a successful business. I am going to share his thinking but connect it to my own childhood experience. He encouraged folks that are starting companies to think like 10 year olds.

Because of our construction projects, it seems appropriate to consider a construction metaphor. Chris Heivly talked about building forts but in my neighborhood in Los Angeles we didn't build forts, we built stuff out of trash and things we found. (Slide of high jump) Once we found an old mattress, dragged it into our yard and built a high jump that looked similar to this one but not as nice.

So here's how the process would go...

A group of us kids would be wandering around the neighborhood and we'd come to an empty lot, or the dumpster behind Kmart or someone's trash on the curb. And we'd find something interesting. We'd start talking about what we could do with it and suddenly we'd land on an idea that we could all get behind. One of these times, we found some plywood, two by fours, and empty wooden produce crates and we decided that we should build go carts (gravity powered). Once we had the idea and a sense of purpose we'd be off and running. (slide of go cart)

Heivly would call this (Slide) **Dreamers Connected or Dream Socialized** – we had visions of incredible go carts that looked amazing and would go very fast. (slide of go cart and skates)

Then we'd haul the junk we found home and gather all of the materials we would need. This meant that we might have to ask neighbors for additional materials or tools. Heivly would term this (Slide) **Serious Stuff Gathered or Assets Inventoried**.

Suddenly it was a neighborhood event and siblings and parents were involved in our quest to build go carts. Someone would know someone else who knew how to put wheels on that would turn smoothly and go straight. This is what Heivly would call (slide) **People Engaged**.

And as the carts were being built the **Why or Purpose** would be **Revealed**. Slide (Purpose revealed)

Teams would be forming, race heats would be organized and the whole block would be outside to watch the races and support our efforts.

**So, what does this have to do with where we are right now and where we are headed?**

**Dreamers Connected/Dream Socialized** (slide community members)

We are building a **Community of Learners**. We are a community of learners ourselves and our students and families join us to form another community of learners.

We have a vision: The Lincoln Public Schools seek to unite our communities in challenging and equipping our students to acquire essential skills and knowledge, think creatively and independently, exhibit academic excellence, appreciate and respect diversity, display creativity, value reflection, and demonstrate social and emotional competencies.

We have a Theory of Action. Our vision and our Theory of action make up our dream. : If we create a culture of continual learning and growth built on a shared vision of effective teaching, provide curriculum that is innovative and cognitively demanding, and instruction that is student centered and differentiated to meet the needs of all students, THEN we will strengthen the engagement, achievement, and social and emotional development of all students.

**Serious Stuff Gathered** (slide pile of unorganized stuff)

We have so much available to us to build with:

Educators, Students, Common Planning Time, Individual Planning Time, Collaborative Practice Time, District Prof. Development, Outside Prof. Development, Schedule structures that support learning time, Knowledge of best practices: culture, planning, instructional strategies, materials, support

Right now, we have an incredible amount of assets. We have wonderful stuff in our tool shed. But, it's not organized in a manner that works best for us or for our students. In some cases we may have only one wrench or 6 wrenches of the same kind and what we really need is a wide variety of wrenches that serve different purposes.

**Assets Inventoried** (slide- organized tools)

We need to organize our assets and ensure that everyone has the right tools and knows how to use the tools.

(slide - toolbox labeled leaders of their own learning, picture of LoToL book)

One tool we will be putting into our toolbox is the book, Leaders of Their Own Learning by Ron Berger.

Leaders of Their Own Learning is not a program. It is simply a text that provides clear guidance about best practices that should be used in every classroom in order to achieve our vision. (slide – lifestyle not quick fix) As I have said over several years, we are not going on short-term diets, there are no quick fixes or silver bullets. We are making life-style changes. We need to put practices in place that can and should be sustained long-term.

Throughout the year, in your faculty meetings and on Wednesday afternoons, we will delve into the first four chapters of Leaders of Their Own Learning  
(Slide – cover of book with chapters listed)

1. Learning Targets
2. Checking for Understanding during Daily Lessons
3. Using Data with Students
4. Models, Critique, and Descriptive Feedback

In addition, we will work on building the culture of our adult learning community.

We know that the success of this work in classrooms is dependent upon building a strong culture of learning and growth mindset. This is also true for our adult learning communities. We will spend some time thinking about what it means to be a community of learners ourselves.

We also know that our various schools and individuals are at different points of learning and use related to these topics. The Administrator Team will be working with faculty and developing experiences that we hope will provide learning opportunities for everyone.

I am going to show you a series of videos that will give you a sense where we are headed. This will be a journey of many years and this year is our first step.

In this video Ron Berger provides a brief overview of Leaders of Their Own Learning

Introduction to Leaders of Their Own Learning, Ron Berger (3:01)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3i4bz2XIX4>

**People Engaged** (slide – people raising the wall)

Bringing the vision to life requires all of us to see the value that comes with learning and growing and how the work that is being done contributes to the community or world.

In this video, Ron Berger shares the importance of purpose to engage students.  
The Quality of Student Work, Ron Berger (6:24)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPZqcFfLULE> Cut due to time

**Purpose Revealed**

The Development of engaged, passionate learners with the skills and ability to adapt and change over the course of their lives.

Snake overview

EL Models of Excellence Series – Part I (3:28) Cut due to time  
[https://modelsofexcellence.ededucation.org/resources/inspiring-excellence-video-series?\\_ga=2.14595895.1676376026.1565818703-799563385.1548342950](https://modelsofexcellence.ededucation.org/resources/inspiring-excellence-video-series?_ga=2.14595895.1676376026.1565818703-799563385.1548342950)

Finally, I want to remind us all of the incredible potential each of our students has. May we never underestimate what they are capable of if given the opportunity to soar.

AGT – Cody Lee (8:17)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDPdRYF7hTQ>

I hope that you will leave today with a feeling of excitement and hope about where we are headed as a district. I hope that you will bring a growth mindset to the table and approach our learning with an openness to change and the opportunity that it presents.

There is no room to say we can't or we won't. Because, We Must. The future of our students depends on us.

The time is Now and We Have Everything We Need.