



Entry Plan:

Report of Findings Related to the Instructional Core

Mansfield Public Schools

Collaborate to Achieve

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Entry Plan

It is the norm for new superintendents to utilize an entry plan approach (Barry Jentz) as they begin their new role in a school district. The term *entry plan* describes the process that the superintendent uses to become acquainted with the entire school community with the purpose of understanding it well enough to be able to develop the strategy for district improvement. My overarching goals for this entry plan are the following:

- To better understand the culture, values, and beliefs which define the Mansfield Public Schools
- To establish an identity in the schools and community as the Superintendent of Schools
- To foster positive working relationships with all stakeholders to cultivate credibility, trust, and confidence in me as the Superintendent of Schools
- To develop strategies, structures, and practices for organizational improvement
- To develop specific goals and action plans that will guide future action

The leaders of the New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP) understand that there are many departments, programs, and (oftentimes competing) variables that comprise a school district. NSIP's focus, and thus my focus, for this *Entry Plan: Report of Findings* are the issues relevant to the instructional core. The instructional core is the interaction of teachers and students in the presence of curriculum.

Several themes have emerged from this entry work:

1. Teaching and Learning in the Mansfield Public Schools
2. Social and Emotional Wellbeing
3. Family and Community Partnerships
4. Resource Allocation



Mansfield Public Schools Mission, Vision, and Core Belief Statements

These statements were in existence prior to my becoming superintendent of schools. I have found that they are not a part of the daily conversation and difficult to locate them in print.

Mission

The mission of the Mansfield Public Schools is to provide a high-quality education to prepare all students to be lifelong learners and contributing citizens.

Vision

Our vision of the ideal school is one in which all students are actively and intellectually engaged in their learning as a result of the instructional practices that are personalized, differentiated, innovative, and designed to challenge their thinking and understanding. The result of our collective efforts is for all students to achieve their personal best and become meaningful contributors to our society.

Guiding (Core) Beliefs of the Mansfield Public Schools

We believe:

- Education must respond to the changing needs of society.
- Students come from a variety of backgrounds and bring diverse experiences into our schools.
- Access to and use of technology enhances teaching and learning.
- Educating the whole student requires a partnership among the schools, parents, and the community.
- Effective education is achieved through high standards and a clear vision of the future.
- Successful schools require continuous assessment and improvement.
- Education contributes to the emotional, physical, social, and academic development of a student.
- All students can be successful lifelong learners.
- A safe, healthy, and respectful learning community is essential.

The Entry Plan Process

My entry process has been comprised of several components including: meeting and listening to stakeholders of the Mansfield Public Schools (MPS); hiring five of the nine members of my senior leadership team; reviewing many documents related to the school district; and collaborating with leadership team members.

Meeting and Listening to stakeholders: When interviewing, I opened the dialogue with the following statement: I am asking you to think about your experiences in (or with) the Mansfield Public Schools:

1. What do you value about the Mansfield Schools?
2. What do you believe that I, as the new Superintendent, should fight to keep/hold onto for our schools?
3. What do you think needs to be changed or improved in the MPS?
4. I'm interested in your perceptions about equity and access to all aspects of our academic and extracurricular programs.
5. What do you want me to know about you (or your organization)?

The need to hire leadership team members provided me with a unique opportunity to dig deeply and learn about several departments within the school system. I learned more about finances, facilities, human resources, and the high school through the search process. These individuals are now key advisors, and in hindsight, I am grateful to the search team process and for our patience to hire just the right professionals for Mansfield.

Document Review: In my entry plan I referred to a document review; the reality is that I didn't simply review the documents; I worked with these documents as I helped to write job descriptions and policies and used the Tighe and Bond report to create the Capital Improvement proposal. The "document review" became a richer experience because of these opportunities. A partial list of documents includes student achievement data, school improvement plans, 504 Plans, student surveys, job descriptions, policies, and reports such as educator evaluation summative reports, New England School Development Council (NESDEC) enrollment projections, New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) mid-cycle accreditation report; the playground analysis report and coordinated program reviews.

Collaboration with leadership team members: Several members of the leadership team collaborated with the previous superintendent and with me to develop the strategic goals that have been in place for the past three years. These goals have focused our School Improvement Plans that are currently guiding the work of our schools. The strategic goals are:

- 1) *Expanding opportunities*: Examine, evaluate, and expand our non-core and core offerings/programming to provide diverse educational opportunities for students, to meet their individual needs and allow them greater ownership of their learning.
- 2) *Teaching all students*: To create and implement a culture of unified and shared instructional practices that advance the belief that we share the responsibility for teaching all students utilizing strategies that include authentic, relevant, student-centered research-based tools.

This *Report of Entry Findings Related to the Instructional Core* is divided into four broad themes:

- 1) *Teaching and Learning in the Mansfield Public Schools*
- 2) *Social and Emotional Learning*
- 3) *Family and Community Partnerships*
- 4) *Resource Allocation*

Within each of the themes are two sections identified as *Strengths* and *Challenges*. The identified strengths and challenges are ones that I heard or observed throughout the process in my visits, while listening to students, parents, or community members or through the document review.

Finally, one should read this report with the understanding that the comments listed in each section are meant to provide the essence of the theme. This is not a strategy for district improvement; that is, it is not meant to provide solutions. Rather, the goals for the strategy will come from the themes that have emerged through this process.

Teaching and Learning in the Mansfield Public Schools

Strengths

“The “Grade Levels” (i.e. professional development) sessions at Robinson and Jordan/Jackson are vital to our district.”

(Said by an Elementary Reading Specialist when discussing the implementation of the new literacy model.)

We have Level 1 high school as measured by Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The high school celebrated “Level 1 Day” which is an indicator that they wish to celebrate academic success more prominently.

High School spring, 2017 MCAS scores (% in each column represents students who scored Advanced or Proficient)

| Grade | Math | ELA | SCI |
|-------|------|-----|-----|
| 10 | 92 | 98 | 91 |

The district provides a continuum of specialized special education programs based on disability categories. Even with this, the district is outpacing students as needed to meet their needs.

Project Teammate at Mansfield High School (MHS) has been in existence for over twenty years and has been an inclusive program well-respected in the greater school community. This year it’s been expanded to become a sanctioned Best Buddies program. In addition, Unified Track has been added as a spring sport at the high school.

Flexible learning spaces including gardens, Next Steps apartment, Jordan/Jackson’s (J/J) Innovation Station and new science lab increase student engagement and meets the needs of various learners.

The district’s ranking by several different metrics continues to increase. For example, for the first time, the MHS Quiz Show team reached the televised competition by ranking in the top 16 out of 100 high school teams. We were especially pleased to learned that the districts that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) considers as our comparable peers are higher achieving than some of the districts listed in previous years.

The transition planning work by teachers and administrators that was funded by the FY16 FC243 Transition Improvement Grant resulted in systems and protocols being developed for person-centered planning and the provision of high-quality individualized transition assessment.

There are many efforts to advance Science Technology Engineering and Math (S.T.E.M.) in the district including the S.T.E.M. Expo; the S.T.E.A.M. Career Fair; new courses at QMS, courses at MHS; the Innovation Station, and experiences in Roland Green and Robinson.

Students have access to high quality visual and performing arts instruction beginning in kindergarten. The visual arts are on display in the elementary hallways, in Qualters Middle School (QMS) front lobby, and highlighted in the annual Art Show illustrate the skills taught and applied by our students. The elementary performing arts concert is held at Xfinity Center and the QMS and MHS students receive numerous awards for their accomplishments in theatre and percussion.

The high school is highly ranked by colleges and universities and our students are accepted at some of the top schools in the country.

The new teacher induction program, in its second year of implementation, has a focus on the standards of teaching and the work that is being accomplished with new teachers and mentors is emerging as a strength.

Caseloads for special education staff are reasonable.

Teacher leadership is valued in teaching and learning: Two initiatives that are teacher directed are in their second-year of implementation: The science vertical team is following the lead of two Prekindergarten (PreK) teachers who began mapping the science curriculum to align with the Next Gen standards. They are using a software to make the PreK-12 curriculum map available electronically to their colleagues. The second initiative is the “Open Classroom” that provides opportunities for teachers to welcome peer observations and visits in their classrooms. The district is supporting this initiative by providing Professional Development Points (PDPs) for program participation. Finally, the decision to move forward with literacy programs/approaches was made by administrators upon the recommendations of our practioners.

The use of common rubrics, as recommended by NEASC, has been implemented after several years of planning.

Improvements in the MHS Program of Study, and the creation of a QMS Program of Study, is the result of educator, parent, and school committee collaboration.

There is a strong sense that the schools have high learning standards for all students.

Teaching and Learning in the Mansfield Public Schools

Challenges

“Our students would benefit from having subject-specific support classes that would be open for all kids to drop-in when needed.”

(comment made by an MHS teacher during an entry meeting)

The district has achievement gaps in several of our important sub-groups of students.

Until 2006 (when the practice ended due to fiscal limitations) the district provided training for all newly hired teachers in Saphier’s model known as the skillful teaching. Saphier “defines skillful teaching to include *anything* a teacher does that impacts the probability of intended learning. Thus, it includes a wide array of skills such as communicating their belief in students’ capabilities, motivating and engaging students, demonstrating cultural proficiency, planning engaging lessons, making concepts and skills accessible, and continuously assessing student understanding. It also includes quite a range of activities beyond interactive classroom behaviors, such as analyzing data, designing reteaching, involving families, and being a good colleague and team member.” I’ve heard educators at all levels in Mansfield say that there are no shared expectations for instruction and learning, and that it impacts calibration of the educator evaluation tool. Many express the desire for the district to select a model and begin the professional development to support our educators and which they believe should lead to improved experiences for students. Educators in the district are asking for a district-wide team to evaluate Saphier, Marzano, Hattie or other models and take a hard look at the professional standards, expectations, and knowledge about every facet of teaching.

Elementary and Middle School spring, 2017 MCAS scores (% in each column represents total Exceeding/Meeting Expectations for English Language Arts [ELA]and Advanced/Proficient for Science)

| Grade | Math | ELA | SCI |
|-------|------|-----|-----|
| 3 | 58 | 54 | |
| 4 | 53 | 57 | |
| 5 | 54 | 60 | 56 |
| 6 | 68 | 60 | |
| 7 | 70 | 66 | |
| 8 | 58 | 57 | 46 |

Many classrooms are set up with desks in rows. Several student leaders and educators have called for more active learning in some classes.

There isn't a practice or culture of formalized walk-throughs or learning rounds of classrooms.

Response to Intervention (R.T.I.) is not yet tracked from grade to grade in the student information record system (Aspen X2 is the software in use.) Hard copy paper files are passed from school to school so that there can be a continuum of services assured for the student within the RTI process.

Because the district went for over a decade with no central office teaching and learning support to the Superintendent, it lacks several crucial processes including: (1) a formal PreK-12 curriculum review process; (2) a comprehensive technology plan that addresses all aspects of technology; (3) a district-wide professional development committee or plan; (4) a cohesive district-wide data team; (5) an assessment of each Vertical Team in many years. Each needs to be assessed for purpose; equity of expectations and workload; and quality of final product. All the above are in the planning stage, but it will take time to achieve these goals.

Digital learning tools are not being fully integrated to engage student and personalize learning.

There is no alternative transition program/service for students returning to school from a hospitalization or medical leave.

The district needs to review the co-teaching model of instruction at the elementary and middle schools.

Increasing numbers of 504 Plans has led to the difficulty for teachers to manage the high number of accommodations in their classrooms

District does not have a STEM coordinator.

The Grades 6-12 Business Department needs a dedicated department chair.

Class sizes in many grades and classes are increasing. Teachers are finding it more difficult to differentiate in the classroom because of the varied academic, behavioral, social, emotional needs of their students. At the same time, there is a large segment of the student population that is hoping for more timely and helpful academic feedback.

Social and Emotional Learning

Strengths

“After completing over a year of training, the nursing and guidance departments will work together to implement Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT).”

(Mansfield Health & Wellness Newsletter, Nov. 2017)

There are a multitude of resources, programs, and training provided in each of the schools to support the behavioral and social/emotional issues that are evident in all student populations.

Professional development for faculty and staff has been ongoing. This year, paraprofessionals were provided with PD in the topics of *Growth Mindset* and *Students Impacted by Trauma*. Highly regarded specialists with strong credentials in this realm such as Jessica Minahan, Cheryl Davis, Charlie Applestein, Craig Murphy, the Ely Center, and Barry Plummer have provided job-embedded PD and/or presentations. MPS counselors provided training in signs of suicide.

Many teachers use activity “brain breaks” such as *Go Noodle*, *Move to Learn*, and ones created in-district by PE and Wellness teachers.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) has been implemented in Roland Green (2nd-year), Robinson School (5th-year), Jordan/Jackson School (7th-year), and Qualters Middle School (3rd-year).

There is evidence of success that the Social Thinking curriculum taught and generalized K-12.

Classrooms (substantially separate and inclusion) that provide services for students on IEPs for social emotional disabilities are well-supported and the staff receives additional training.

Build Our Kids Success (BOKS) program is a before-school physical activity and nutrition for students (with at-risk students given priority) that has been implemented at J/J for the past four years.

MHS added Best Buddies and Unified Track—both programs allow all students to feel comfortable and have a place to fit in at MHS

Several students within the performing and visual arts community commented that there is equity with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity with their peers in the art world at MHS.

The district administered the *Communities that Care* survey for the 5th-time during the spring of 2017. This bi-annual survey queries students in 6th-, 8th- and 10th- grades about their use and their perceptions of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs. The school district is at or below the average rating in most categories. The district supports the premise of the purpose of the survey and has implemented Screening Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) in middle and high school. In addition, evening events for students/parents and the community have been planned to inform them about the dangers and consequences of addictive substances and opioids.

The benefits of mindfulness were mentioned by educators as well as parents.

MHS and QMS has engaged the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in a two-year partnership to develop a cadre of students and teacher advisors to lead the school community in fostering a respectful climate that embraces diversity.

Social and Emotional Learning

Challenges

“FOMO is very real among my teen and her friends.” I asked, “What is FOMO?” The parent replied, “It’s the ‘Fear of Missing Out’ caused by excessive social media use.”

(Conversation with a parent of a high school student)

There is an increase of students with behavioral and social/emotional issues across all grades. Teachers are seeking smaller class sizes and more restrictive environments for these students.

Although there are a multitude of resources, programs, and training provided in each of the schools to support the behavioral and social/emotional issues that are evident in all student populations, the district hasn’t aligned its efforts to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) core competencies. The district hasn’t yet created a systemic program PreK-12+ that will promote consistency, common language, and grade level expectations.

Robinson’s teacher and clinical volunteerism for PBIS is lower than in the previous years’ implementation.

Open Circle has lost its impact because of inconsistent use. The edition of the program materials owned by the elementary schools is outdated.

Cultural competency is an area of focus district-wide.

A survey of teachers by teachers on professional development for mental health topics has elicited common needs. Of the 73 faculty who responded, 66% rated anxiety as the topic of most interest and 47% identified depression as their second choice.

Family and Community Partnerships

Strengths

“I am overwhelmed with gratitude that my children are so well taken care of by (Fire Chief) Neal, (Police Chief) Ron and you.”

(QMS PAC parent referring to the partnership of Fire, Police and Schools)

Financial generosity of the community is appreciated. The financial donations of the parent groups levels provide for opportunities that might otherwise be unfilled. This year alone, there have been donations of books, Chrome books and other technology, a Lacrosse wall, weight room equipment, Heroes’ Corner to honor veterans, funds to eliminate students with lunch accounts, funds to improve the MHS auditorium.

The Mansfield Police Department has provided our school employees with professional development. The Locate, Lockdown, Leave, Live (4L’s) training has increased knowledge and awareness and has resulted in improved school safety.

Staff from the secondary social emotional programs developed and hosted a parent support workshop series of four sessions.

A comment made during an elementary parent group (MESA) meeting is that schools interact with each other well. For example, the Buddy Classes of grades 2 and 3 to support the transition from Robinson to J/J; the “Senior Walk-Through” of the schools wearing their caps and gowns; elementary students walk to MHS for concerts and art show; world language students teaching lessons to younger students.

Westside Benevolent Society has been supporting families in Mansfield since 1890. The president and several volunteers are MPS employees. This allows for a fast-track to support for many of our students and their families.

Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) provides guest speakers and support for parents of students with disabilities. The group planned a meeting for parents of students on 504 Plans. Coincidentally, School Committee members were seeking the speaker on 504 Plans, so the district funded the program.

When called upon to do so, the local business community is supportive of our student programs.

The Town has a program that allows elders to reduce their tax bill for volunteer services rendered in our district.

Parents/Guardians had been asking the secondary schools to provide diagrams to illustrate the pathways students follow in mathematics. The schools completed this work for next year's Programs of Study.

There is a strong Health and Wellness Council with excellent school and community participation.

The community's *One Town One Budget* philosophy has been researched at the university level and is a cornerstone of our budget process.

There is excellent communication between the different municipal departments and there is a high level of support from Town to schools.

District Attorney Roundtable discussions are held monthly to access supports and resources for struggling students.

School Resource Officer is funded by the police department.

Family and Community Partnerships

Challenges

“I wish we could go on more field trips to be able to explore some of the places and ideas that we are studying in our classrooms.”

(Comment made by an MHS senior student leader.)

Although our community is very generous with their donations, we need to be able to manage them wisely. For example, although a group may wish to help to fund a project, the district needs to make certain that the project is a priority for the schools, that it is something we can afford, and that it meets policy guidelines.

Social media in the world outside of the Mansfield Public Schools has a culture that is becoming increasingly negative in tone and it is impacting our school community on many levels.

There are differing views of the value of online grade books. Although students and parents continue to ask for access to the online grade book, many teachers are resistant to them. Boundaries for the software tool have been placed in the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement.

Resource Allocation

Strengths

“This community supports kids. I wish my own lived here.”

(Spoken by an elementary school teacher.)

The campus-like setting provides for shared resources.

The Town is creating a special education reserve account. This account is meant to provide a financial cushion for unexpected special education needs.

The Town has made a change of group for health insurance which will be financially beneficial in FY19.

Due to decreasing student enrollment, the Qualters Middle School reduced a team at grades 6, 7, and 8 this year. Although this meant a reduction in staffing, the school has used this challenge as an opportunity to improve. They developed a new master schedule which has allowed them to create some very engaging and varied courses that were not available in past years.

The community has supported the financial investment of free full-day kindergarten for all beginning in the 2017-18 school year.

A \$3,000.00 grant was awarded by the Attorney General’s Office and the New England Patriots. *Game Change* allowed MHS to develop extracurricular programming for students to promote awareness about healthy relationships and to end dating violence.

The FY 18 & 19 budgets are supporting the purchase of materials and professional development for improvements in elementary literacy and math programs.

Resource Allocation

Challenges

“There is never enough time. There are so many mandated topics that we’re required to cover in professional development sessions, that there is never time to just sit and talk about how it actually works with our own students after we’ve applied the learning.”

(Comment made by a therapist in the district)

Although most would consider money as the key in a section titled “Resource Allocation”, there is another desired commodity; that is, *time*. Everywhere I have gone during my first few months on the job, I have listened as teachers and students have bemoaned the lack of time. There is too much to do and too little time.

The Town acknowledges that it needs to generate additional revenue.

A playground assessment was conducted by Playground Inspections of New England in the fall of 2016 and determined issues that result in the need for a plan to improve these areas and structures. This multi-year plan will address the playgrounds at the pre-school and both elementary schools

Teachers and some parents are seeking smaller class sizes and more paraprofessional assistance for students with behavioral needs.

Teachers and parents are seeking additional specialists at the elementary level in the following areas: math, reading, intervention, technology, and to support high achievers

Schools would like to develop “Bridge” programs for students at all levels, but particularly at secondary schools to support a growing population of students including those who are returning to school after hospitalizations; students who have sustained concussions and are going through the concussion protocol; and for students with chronic tardiness and/or absenteeism. These programs are generally designed around academic and social emotional support.

The preschool does not have an on-site principal.

The high school department chairs, teachers, students, and parents want academic support centers for each of their disciplines, staffed by teachers licensed in the content to support students during the regular school day.

More efforts to recycle are required in some aspects of our schools. Styrofoam trays at QMS and MHS are still in use.

Common planning time is needed in the elementary schools.

Considering enrollment decreases there should be consideration for moving the entire preschool program to an elementary building.

Training for Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) endorsed teachers continues to increase; it is costly but required to support our growing population of students who are English Language Learners.

Our schools are aging facilities. Written surveys and conversations elicit comments about improvements and updates needed in all buildings including HVAC, bathrooms, windows, grounds, security, and cleanliness.

Technology needs include: guest WIFI, switch management, bandwidth. The district is investigating moving toward a 1:1 learning environment with Chrome Books in selected grades.

Some parents are asking for additional clubs, child care, and extracurricular activities at QMS.

Next Steps

Next steps in this process are to work with the district's leadership team to develop a strategy for district improvement. This will be a two-prong approach.

- 1) The schools are currently collaborating with their School Councils to update School Improvement Plans. These plans align to themes presented in this findings report. The School Improvement Plans will be presented to the School Committee at the June 19, 2018 meeting.
- 2) Meanwhile, I will identify and propose strategic objectives to the district's leadership team. The goal is to reach consensus with the team on three to five strategic objectives. These strategic objectives will be substantive enough to drive the system's focus for three to five years.
- 3) Strategic priorities (oftentimes called initiatives) will be developed to address each strategic objective.
- 4) My tentative plan is to present the Strategy for District Improvement on the same evening that schools present their School Improvement Plans.

