

New Jersey Department of Education/Newark Public Schools

FIVE MONTH TRANSITION TO LOCAL CONTROL REPORT

February 1, 2018-June 30, 2018 REPORT

OVERVIEW

Effective February 1, 2018, the New Jersey Department of Education's Highly Skilled Professional (HSP) reported to the Newark Public Schools. Pursuant to the Transition Plan (the Plan), this appointment was made to allow for specific elements of monitoring and support to the District during the period of transition. The HSP is appointed by the Commissioner and reports to the Commissioner while providing guidance and support to the District and Board in the implementation of the Plan.

As is stated in the Plan, the role of the HSP will evolve as District needs are identified. In light of the initial focus for the HSP, supporting the District in executing personnel decisions in peak season, in developing the budget and planning for the opening of school for the first time under local control are high priorities (To date, during July 2018, the HSP has been updated on basic fiscal obligations and operational plans for the summer by the SBA). There has been appropriate involvement in the other referenced areas.

During the first five months, there was a very close working relationship with the Executive Director of Talent, the School Business Administrator and her staff, Board Relations, and the Interim Superintendent and his Cabinet. Meetings were placed on the calendar with the HSP as one of the attendees. All three involved the HSP in planning sessions, meetings with working groups, all updates, and Board Committee meetings. The progression of actions could be heard and the interactions among contributing staff members could be witnessed. The scheduled sessions allowed for accountability as any and all items needing attention were addressed and ready for the next meeting.

During this initial period, the HSP developed a "Transition Plan Tracker". This allowed the HSP to track important dates, section of plan/activities, actions/documentation, and completion dates (previously submitted). Tracker covers the period of February 1, 2018 – May 31, 2018. All required training for Board members have been noted and other training planned as required by the Plan.

A large replica of the "Accountability ScoreCard" has been placed in the office of the HSP and serves as a visual reminder of the work to be done. One can find post-its on the charts with reminders, dates, etc. Additionally, one can see the "Timetable for Activities Relating to and Leading to the Withdrawal from State Intervention". In an attempt to educate the public, a PowerPoint, "Transition to Local Control" was created to be presented when requests were made from community stakeholders, parents and/or district.

GOVERNANCE

Much of the work during the first five months was in the area of Governance. Initially, all documentation relating to training was secured from Board Relations. A review of the documentation revealed those Board members who were in need of training. Most Board members had attended required training sessions and were up to date. Board members were scheduled for needed sessions and other sessions were planned for the entire Board (i.e. Instruction and Programs).

Training was provided to the Board members on how to communicate and respond during public comment about an individual under appropriate RICE notification procedures and on Donaldson hearings. This was done by in-district personnel. More training is needed on these topics and Board members are anxious to better understand these processes.

The District has used the New Jersey School Boards Association to provide training to Board members and staff during and before this five month period. Others with expertise on various topics have been brought in for training. Board members have been trained on Ethics, Superintendent's Evaluation, Board Roles, Board/Superintendent Relationships, Governance Best Practices, Effective Decision-Making Processes, Board Finances, Budget Process, Revenue Sources, Financial Reports (Secretary's Report, Treasurer's Report), Financial Planning and Reporting, Personnel Issues for a Board, Overview of the Open Public Meetings Act, Discussions for Executive Session, Confidentiality. Additional training was held on Collective Negotiating, Instruction and Programs, NJ Learning Standards and Assessments (i.e. PARCC), and the difference between formative and summative assessment results. Board members are up to date on their required yearly training (i.e. Governance I, II, etc.).

The most important task during this five month period was the search for the Successor Superintendent. The search was national in scope and conducted by a reputable search firm that had experience running superintendent search processes for large urban districts. The firm selected was HYA Executive Search. The Search Committee convened for the first time on February 5, 2018 and met four times (Feb. 5, Feb. 26, March 19, and April 10). Committee included seven members: 3 Board members, 3 members with a clear and longstanding connection to Newark (selected by consensus by the Commissioner and Mayor), 1 State representative – selected by the Commissioner. The members were:

- Jennifer Carrillo-Perez (NJDOE appointee [replaced the original appointee, Carolyn Granato], former NPS Advisory Board Member 2001-2004, attorney)
- Marion Bolden (former NPS Superintendent)
- Irene Cooper-Basch (Executive Director , Victoria Foundation)
- Nancy Cantor (Chancellor Rutgers-Newark)
- Josephine Garcia, Kim Gaddy, Leah Owens (NPS Board Members)
- Stanley Ferdinand (NJDOE, non-voting member; committee secretary)

Advertising for the Superintendent's position was scheduled for February 13, 2018 and was open through March 2, 2018. The search timeline included a District Survey that allowed parents, staff, board

members, citizens, students, and community groups to have input into the process and Focus Group meetings (including Open Ward-Based Meetings). Interviews were held on April 20-21 at the Board office in Newark. Three candidates were submitted to the Board as finalists. At the “Meet the Candidates” held at Science Park High School on May 18, 2018, four candidates presented themselves to the public. Final Superintendent interviews were held at NJIT on Saturday, May 19, 2018. At the regular Board meeting on May 22, 2018, the candidate announced as the new Superintendent of the Newark Public Schools was Roger Leon.

Another area of Governance that was deemed a priority was good Boardsmanship practices in committee and public meetings. The HSP has attended all business and public meetings and several committee meetings with the priority committee meetings being Governance and Personnel followed by Programs and Instruction and Finance. The committee meetings have been the primary venue for discussing concerns and resolving issues. Board members have worked on their committee reports and have shortened presentations at the Business meetings. They also have become more familiar with the content and have been able to verbally present without reading every word of the reports. Business meetings have begun to look and sound differently from the public meetings and Board members continue to demonstrate growth in how they handle difficult situations. Work to continue in this area.

Several Retreats have been planned and held. Most were facilitated by outside consultants with in-district staff serving as presenters on relevant topics and by New Jersey School Boards. Documentation is available to support this training.

FISCAL MANAGEMENT

Budget Preparation – Much planning went into the District’s preparation for a balanced annual budget. Initially there was a working group that performed analysis, discussions with various department heads on needs and cost increases and/or decreases in budgets. The working group was comprised of highly skilled individuals who were knowledgeable in their areas of expertise. After planned meetings for several weeks, the budgets were rolled out to the departments and school administrators with an orientation on how funds were allocated and training on how to use the District’s *My Budget File*. The HSP participated in the working group meetings and attended the training sessions for the District administrators. Sessions were well planned and directions were quite clear to attendees.

The District also met with the Budget Committee of the Board on a bi-monthly schedule to discuss all elements of the budget planning and development process. The Board has established a practice of converting the Finance Committee into the Budget Committee. During budget season, beginning in early September, meetings are held to inform and educate the committee on various topics including:

- Sources of Funds
- Spending Analysis and Budget Allocations for both Central Offices and Schools
- Overview of Weighted Student Funding Formula

The Public Budget Hearing was held on May 10, 2018.

Budget best practices were:

- Weighted Student Formula for equitable allocation of funds
- Use of a consistent Budget Development Tool (District-wide My Budget File)
- Training of Users
- Assignment of individualized customer supports (assignment by location)
- Consistent use of Fund Accounting (GAAP)
- Grant Monitoring
- Reporting and Analysis of Financial Activities (monthly, quarterly Projected Budgets or LTF [Latest thinking forecast])
- Ensuring that Financial Staff are professionally certified and attend regular Professional Development in their areas
- Timely monthly reporting of district financial statements as required by the State of NJ

Receipt of Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) Meritorious Budget Award for 2017-2018 for excellence in budget presentation reflects the district's commitment to sound fiscal management and budgetary practices.

The District also received the International ASBO's Certificate of Financial Excellence in June 2017 as recognition for Comprehensive Annual Financial Reporting.

In order to review the various Financial Documents, the HSP has attended a training session and had one-on-one sessions with the SBA and attended meetings. Documents reviewed included but were not limited to:

- Board Secretary's Report
- Treasurer's Report
- Budget vs. Actuals
- Funding Analysis

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

Energy Service Improvement Plan (ESIP) – Under ESIP and Solar, new boilers or controls and LED light bulbs were installed in six school buildings (Arts High, Barringer High, George Washington Carver, Malcolm X Shabazz, Technology, and Weequahic). Detailed report on file.

Seven Schools scheduled for summer 2018 Painting:

- Eagle Academy, 14th Avenue, Ann Street, Quitman Street, Student Center, East Side, and Central High

Capital Bond Projects:

• 14 th Avenue	HVAC	Completed
• Harriet Tubman	Multi/Gymnasium Floor Renovation	Close-Out *
• Lafayette Street	A/E Services	Completed

SDA Projects:

• 14 th Avenue	Exterior Masonry Repairs	65% Completed
• Avon Avenue	Exterior Masonry Repairs	Close-out*
• Hawthorne Avenue	Exterior Masonry Repairs	65% Completed
• Lafayette Street	Roof Repairs/Replacement	65% Completed
• MX Shabazz	Exterior Masonry Repairs	25% Completed
• MX Shabazz	Roof Repairs/Replacement	25% Completed
• N. Vocational	Masonry and Roof Repairs	25% Completed
• N. Vocational	Window Repair/Replacement	25% Completed
• Peshine	Exterior Masonry Repairs	Close-out*

*Project work completed pending reimbursement

Proposed Summer Cleaning Schedule/Summer Project List:

Facilities Management has organized schools into two phases for summer cleaning. Twenty-two schools and their annexes are in Phase 1 and twenty-five schools are in Phase 2. Facilities have organized a cleaning team whose sole responsibility is to perform extensive cleaning of buildings throughout the district.

In addition to the cleaning teams, the various tradesmen have been assigned projects that are clearly listed on a spreadsheet with the reason/s for the project and the tradesmen responsible. Projects were rated priority 1, 2, or 3, with priority 1 being addressed. Documentation available for review.

Prior to school closing, each building principal completed an Operations and Facilities survey responding to questions from all departments that are responsible for supporting schools. The survey created a baseline of actions needed for successful opening of schools. The responses submitted by school administrators allowed the Facilities Director to coordinate and schedule summer work (i.e. painting, cleaning, repairs, etc.) and became the benchmark for updated status reports given at the Successful School Operating Team (SSOT) meetings that were held to monitor and report out on progress made. Meetings were held twice in July and now weekly in August. Upon the return of administrators in August, each building administrator will assess what has been completed and provide updates via the same survey. Information from these reports is used to develop a summary report that will be made available to the Superintendent, advising of completions, state of readiness, and immediate actions needed.

PROGRAM & INSTRUCTION

Student Performance Data – The Equivalence Application that was developed in 2016 and approved by the State “allowed the effectiveness of the District’s instructional program to be gauged through a variety of student performance measures that were specifically focused on current needs and circumstances.” The Equivalence was approved for three years through 2018-2019. The district, as outlined in the Plan, calculated its own scores and shared the data, analysis, and self-scoring with the State for review and confirmation. In the Spring 2017, scores for SY 2015-16 were submitted. NPS scored 30 out of 38. For SY 2016-17, Equivalency scores were submitted in June 2018 to the Department of Education. The score was 34 out of 38.

Moving forward, the HSP will continue to monitor the District’s activities in the areas below and share this report with the Superintendent:

- Curriculum: The District must have a process in place for ongoing review of district curricula based on student performance data and quality of teacher implementation in all grade levels. Curriculum must clearly specify the content to be mastered and be aligned with New Jersey Learning Standards. The District must have in place interim assessments in all tested subjects (including science beginning in the 2018-19 school year). It must be appropriate for students with special needs and English Language Learners.

At one of his first Leadership Team meetings in July, Superintendent Leon addressed student data and Curriculum and set expectations relating to both. One of his first mandates focused on the instruction of mathematics and perceived needs of students and teachers based on what the data communicates.

- Implementation of the Curriculum: The District supports schools with planning resources that complement the curriculum and make it clear what students should learn and when. Supervisory practices should be in place to ensure that instruction in every classroom is reflective of the quality needed to prepare students to meet demands of the curriculum. Professional development must be established to address the specific needs of each staff member.

Superintendent Leon communicated that the Assistant Superintendents will coach principals to ensure that they are knowledgeable of instructional strategies and practices that will lend themselves to higher student achievement. Additionally the subject area (math, science, language arts, social studies) curriculum teams have been given the charge to dissect the data, review the curriculum and make recommendations to the Superintendent on any changes necessary for stronger curriculum, resources, professional development and implementation.

- Data Informed Decisions: The new Superintendent spent quality time with his Senior Staff, Leadership Team, and middle managers reviewing available data, targeting certain areas, and discussing strategies for SY 18-19. His messages and actions clearly communicated how data will be used to inform decisions.
- As is required by The Transition Plan, the HSP will provide written warning to the Board, Superintendent, Commissioner of Education, and Comprehensive Accountability Office whenever there is an observed deviation from the standard.

As the next phase of the transition begins, it is the expectation that Newark will continue to successfully implement the activities in the Transition Plan from July 1, 2018 – January 31, 2020, accomplishing all the benchmarks that will allow it to have total local control as 1/31/20 approaches.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anzella K. Nelms
Highly Skilled Professional Assigned to Newark Public Schools
NJDOE
July 31, 2018