

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT 21
SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLAN

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

FINAL REPORT
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ACCEPTED BY THE SAU 21 JOINT BOARD
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This entry plan process was designed to assist me in developing a comprehensive picture of the School Administrative Unit (SAU) 21 and its member Districts (Hampton Falls, North Hampton, Seabrook, South Hampton and Winnacunnet Cooperative) that included the students, staff and community stakeholders. The planning process consisted of conducting interviews with various individuals and groups, as well as reviewing a number of documents, in an effort to develop a sense of the system and provide a basis for future goals, objectives and activities.

General Goals of the Entry Plan Process

- To better understand the SAU and School Districts and the people as fully as possible in a brief period of time, outside the daily context of crisis and problem solving;
- To examine key issues in the SAU's past, in order to make sense of how such issues are handled and to identify the norms which affect how the organization may function in the future;
- To identify the tasks which need to be done and to rank them in order of priority; and
- To establish how these tasks should be accomplished.

Specific Objectives of the Entry Plan Process

- To examine the ground rules and procedures which have governed how the School Boards have conducted business in the past.
- To develop with the School Boards a set of norms and procedures that will govern how we operate in the future.
- To determine the issues where Board members believe we should focus our efforts in the next year and ask the Boards to prioritize these potential initiatives.
- To develop charts of the predictable tasks where Central Administration and the School Boards will work in the next year. The charts will include what has to be done and describe how it will be accomplished.
- To determine the issues which Central Administration and School leadership face in their work over the next year.
- To determine the norms, procedures, and processes which govern how each of the tasks of the Central Administration and School leadership is accomplished.
- To develop work plans for the predictable tasks which Central Administration and School leadership will undertake next year. The work plan will describe not only what has to be done, but how (the steps in the process, the time frame, and the roles/responsibilities).
- To determine key issues at the building level.
- To clarify the role and responsibilities of Principals and how they coordinate with Central Administration, as well as how the work of building leaders can best be supported.
- To determine what the key issues are for other stakeholders, as well as how these ideas might become part of our overall planning efforts.

Interviews

The following individual and group interviews were conducted as part of this entry plan process:

- Individual interviews with current School Board members
- Individual interviews with SAU administrators, including the SAU 90 Superintendent
- Individual interviews with Principals, including the Principal of Seacoast School of Technology

- Individual interviews with other key school personnel
- Group interviews with Winnacunnet High School student leaders and Department Facilitators

Visitations and Open Forums

In addition, the entry plan process included a one-day visit to each school, an open forum with staff members at each building, and a community open forum with parents in each District.

Document Review

The following documents were collected and reviewed as part of the entry plan process:

- School Board Goals for the past three (3) years
- SAU and Individual District Policy Manuals
- School Board Meeting Minutes and Agendas
- Budget Documents for 2017-2018 and 2018-2019
- Review of Federal Grants for 2017-2018
- Capital Improvement Plans
- Technology Plans
- Emergency Response Data for 2017-2018
- Administrator Job Descriptions, Individual Contracts and Evaluations
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Employee Handbooks
- School Calendars for 2017-2018
- Educator Evaluation Plan, Process and Products
- Professional Development Plan, Process and Products
- School Handbooks
- Annual School District Reports
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Accreditation Report for Winnacunnet High School
- Special Education Issues, Hearings and Decisions
- Superintendent Search Consultant Report

In addition, I participated in the New Hampshire School Administrator Association (NHSAA) sponsored *New Hampshire Way* series, which covers School Finance, Personnel, and Special Education issues unique to the State.

Findings and Recommendations

While this report tends to focus on the work to be done, it is important to note that SAU 21 and the five (5) member Districts are very good places for students, families and employees. People who I met with were eager to tell me about their successes, their relationships with co-workers and students and what they love about working, living and/or attending school here. Clearly, there is a great deal of work to be done, but we are certainly starting at a point of being a good school system.

The following discussion of *Findings* and *Recommendations* is divided into eight (8) sections:

- Governance
- Planning
- Leadership
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- School Culture and Communication
- Social Emotional Learning and Safety
- Human Resources
- SAU Services and Administration

A. Governance

Findings

1. The five (5) SAU 21 School Boards are groups of people with diverse interests, communication and management styles, and expectations. These groups do a great job of working together with each other on behalf of the students, parents, and staff in each of the Districts. Generally speaking, however, Board members do not appear to engage regularly in professional learning opportunities through the New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA).
2. There is a struggle within our SAU to define the appropriate balance between collaboration among the five (5) Districts (tight coupling) and the need for local District control (defined autonomy).
3. The policy manuals in each of our five (5) Districts are inconsistent with law and certain important practices within the SAU and Districts. Furthermore, they have not undergone a comprehensive examination and the SAU and Districts do not have an ongoing review process in place.
4. The Districts within SAU 21 do not appear to take advantage of key opportunities for improved services and efficiencies that this larger organization could provide. Examples of potential opportunities include special education (administration and programs), systems integration (e.g., student management application), grants (strategy, management and/or collaboration), professional learning and technology.
5. There are opportunities for better collaboration with SAU 90 with respect to a number of important areas, including special education program and services, student management software integration and management, and professional learning.

Recommendations

1. The SAU and Districts should be involved in a continuous effort to explore where collaboration and centralization will enhance the efforts of all Districts, while ensuring that local autonomy is always valued and respected.
2. The SAU and Districts must implement a comprehensive policy and procedure review process, designed to ensure that policies are up-to-date, that we have defined the

differences between policy and procedure, that we have a regular cycle of review for all policies and that we establish commonality in policy across Districts wherever feasible.

3. The SAU should work closely with each District Board and administration to implement a regular, data-driven performance assessment process, including surveys of parents, students and teachers. These data should be collected and analyzed at least every two (2) years and should be utilized as an important aspect of the system and District decision-making processes.
4. A Director of Student Services position should be established at the SAU level. The primary aims of this role include coordination of efforts among our building-level student service leaders, identifying areas of coordination among the Districts and ensuring that students receive outstanding programming in the least restrictive environment.
5. The SAU and our Boards should ensure that we utilize one student management software package across the Districts and that this application is appropriately supported at the SAU level. Furthermore, all of our application needs should be examined and, where appropriate, this same approach should be taken in the spirit of better service and efficiencies.
6. The SAU should pursue discussions with SAU 90 leadership regarding potential areas of partnership, including special education program and services, student management software integration and management, professional learning, and the possibility of shared positions in certain critical areas.

B. Planning

Findings

1. The SAU and our five (5) Districts have not engaged in strategic planning efforts focused on what we are trying to achieve for our graduates (both at the pk-8 and pk-12 levels) in at least the recent past.
2. Our Districts have developed strong capital improvement plans, which address the needs of facilities in a forward-looking manner.
3. Through the efforts of the SAU, our Districts have begun to develop long-term technology plans designed to support teaching and learning across our Districts.

Recommendations

1. The SAU should initiate a strategic planning effort to define the system's mission and goals, streamline initiatives, and develop a focus for the schools, administration, School Boards, teaching staff and communities. This effort would also help define where tight coupling should exist and where defined autonomy should be maintained.
2. The SAU and Winnacunnet District should develop a formal process for conducting ongoing surveys of high school graduates. If possible, these data should be discernable by District in order to bring enhanced value to all decision makers, including SAU 90.

3. The SAU and Districts should continue to refine long-term technology plans and look for opportunities to achieve efficiencies across schools wherever possible.

C. Leadership

Findings

1. Principals and SAU Administrators are, for the most part, limited in experience in their present roles. While there appears to be much talent within the group, many feel the need for ongoing support and coaching.
2. There does not appear to be a focus within the SAU and Districts on succession planning; that is, where the next group of Principals and other educational leaders will come from when present leadership departs.

Recommendations

1. All SAU and school leaders should have access to quality coaching from outside the system, including those opportunities offered through the New Hampshire Association of School Principals (NHASP).
2. The SAU and Districts should implement succession planning efforts to include working with appropriate colleges and universities to establish programs in our schools, identifying leadership as a key system initiative (for credit reimbursement purposes) and establishing internship opportunities for individuals pursuing these licensure areas.

D. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Findings

1. While competency based education planning and implementation efforts are off to a positive start, there is need for continuing education efforts for school board members and parents regarding key components of this important initiative.
2. There are a number of outstanding curriculum offerings available across our Districts. However, it does not appear that the implementation of some programs are done in a thoughtful manner or evaluated on a regular basis.
3. Evaluation of teachers and administrators does not appear to have been viewed as a priority and/or a tool in improving teaching and learning. In addition, the current educator evaluation plan expires in June 2019 and will need to be revised/updated.
4. Implementation of a cohesive professional learning plan does not appear to have been viewed as a priority and/or a tool in improving teaching and learning. In addition, the current professional learning plan expires in June 2019 and will need to be revised/updated.
5. There is a clear need for a better professional learning program for educational associates, as well as other groups within the SAU.

6. One area of challenge for the SAU and many of our Districts is early education. While both North Hampton and Seabrook presently have offerings, the other Districts do not. This leads to challenges in finding seats for students with special needs, as well as accentuating disparities as students enter kindergarten.
7. Career education appears to have become somewhat less of a priority during the past few years. While Winnacunnet offers a multitude of programs and courses in this area, the schedule and graduation requirements seem to present significant hurdles for students interested in attending the Seacoast School of Technology (SST).
8. One notable exception to the career education finding is the proliferation of Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO), which are utilized by many students to gain real world and extension experiences both in the school and community.

Recommendations

1. Our competency based planning and implementation efforts must include the development of a comprehensive, clear and flexible three (3) year plan, which includes communication and stakeholder outreach efforts, as well as key decision points regarding important areas like grading, reporting, and “move when ready.”
2. The SAU should implement a comprehensive program review process, designed to conduct a regular review of each program and curriculum area throughout the system (pk-12). Moreover, the recommendations put forward from these groups should be carefully considered in each District and, where appropriate, adopted and supported in budgets.
3. The SAU should work closely with school leadership and Boards to appropriately coordinate grant efforts where such efforts would maximize available dollars and/or increase efficiencies for the Districts.
4. The SAU must implement a supervision and evaluation model for teachers that enhances practice, is manageable for school leaders, and is linked to SAU, District and professional goals, the professional learning plan, educator licensure and appropriate sections of the collective bargaining agreement.
5. The SAU must implement a professional learning model for teachers designed to enhance practice, and is linked to SAU, District and professional goals, the educator evaluation plan, educator licensure and appropriate sections of the collective bargaining agreement
6. The SAU must implement supervision and evaluation models for all other staff that enhance practice and are manageable for school leaders.
7. The SAU and Districts should implement an effective professional learning program for educational associates, focused on the needs of our schools and students, as well as these individuals. In addition, similar efforts should be implemented with other staff, including office and custodial groups.

8. The SAU and Districts should examine coordinated early education program to ascertain if such efforts could improve programming for students and families, while ensuring cost effective operations.
9. The SAU and Winnacunnet High School should encourage SST to provide flexible options so that more students can take advantage of courses offered at the school. In addition, we should examine the Winnacunnet schedule and requirements in an effort to ascertain what may create barriers for students taking advantage of SST programs.
10. The SAU and Winnacunnet High School should continue to enhance the Extended Learning Opportunity (ELO) model, while taking time to deal with a variety of system issues that need to be addressed as the program is taken to scale.

E. School Culture and Communication

Findings

1. There appears to be a need for close attention to school culture and communication in most, but not all, of our Districts. Many teachers do not seem to feel that they are appropriately involved in decisions that impact them and, perhaps more importantly, do not feel that the SAU and school leadership communicate effectively with people who work in our buildings.
2. There appears to be a need for closer attention to communication with parents in our Districts. In many cases parents indicate that they do not receive appropriate information in a timely fashion from SAU and school leadership.
3. There are many dedicated and talented people working in the schools across SAU 21 districts. Teachers express significant concerns about the collective bargaining agreement, given our history, and worry about what happens should the voters not approve an agreement in the near future.
4. All of the elementary schools seem to benefit from active PTOs, which provide a number of enrichment opportunities for students.

Recommendations

1. School leadership should look for opportunities to appropriately involve staff in collaborative leadership opportunities around important issues. School culture should be something that we value and measure at regular intervals and, when necessary, that we seek outside assistance to discuss and improve.
2. The SAU and school leadership must improve communication with teachers and other staff. While this might best be accomplished through a communication working group in each District, one suggestion would be to meet with teachers and other staff regarding the recommended budget before it goes to the School Board, then at regular intervals during the process.

3. The SAU and school leadership must improve communication efforts with parents, including (where appropriate) an upgrade of websites and the information available through this means.
4. Principals should enhance relationships with their PTOs to ensure that these groups are viewed as an important part of the District mission.

F. Social Emotional Learning and Safety

Findings

1. Emergency preparedness plans, which seem to have been viewed as a priority area at one time (3-5 years ago) across the SAU and Districts, are not currently up to date and/or implemented.
2. Efforts to implement social emotional and bullying prevention curriculum efforts across the Districts have not been thoughtfully planned and coordinated to achieve maximum success and efficiency. Current plans include both Open Circle and Responsive Classroom at the elementary level in some Districts, although it does not appear that any such efforts are in place in our middle grades.

Recommendations

1. The SAU and Districts must define and implement a plan for emergency preparedness that meets or exceeds all state requirements, implements appropriate strategies for addressing emergency situations (i.e., ALICE), ensures appropriate professional learning for all employees, provides opportunities for coordination of services across towns and includes preventative strategies.
2. The SAU and Districts must implement social emotional learning and bullying prevention curriculum efforts across all schools and grades in deliberate manner. These efforts must include all stakeholders, including parents.

G. Human Resources

Findings

1. The SAU has not, to date, implemented technology-based human resource strategies designed to provide better service to employees, while increasing efficiencies across the Districts. Examples would include paperless hiring procedures and electronic portal access and payroll for employees.
2. Job Descriptions throughout our SAU and Districts are largely out-of-date and in need of revision.

Recommendations

1. The SAU should initiate a process for ensuring that job descriptions are up-to-date, available for each position in the Districts, and are a key component in every hiring process. Furthermore, the SAU should ensure a timely and defined hiring process for

all positions, including reference checks, and that these processes are well-defined, user-friendly and paperless (as possible) for all school leaders to implement. Finally, the SAU should implement electronic portal access and payroll for employees as soon as feasible.

H. SAU Services and Administration

Findings

1. Many people who were interviewed for this report do not believe that the SAU administration has provided outstanding service to the Districts in ensuring support for District administration, a focus on educator evaluation, and in providing quality curriculum and instruction. One notable exception is the perception of our business and budgeting functions, which garner a high degree of trust and respect.
2. The present meeting and SAU administrative structures place significant demands on SAU level administrators with respect to time management, quality of life, ability to attend other events (athletics, musical performances, etc.) and productivity. This does not appear to be sustainable and will have long-term impact on the ability of SAU 21 to attract and retain outstanding administrators.

Recommendations

1. Communication efforts must be enhanced across all of our towns and schools. Too many positive stories regarding the accomplishments of students, teachers and our schools are not reaching stakeholders in our communities. Local access television programming and social media efforts should be planned and implemented.
2. The SAU and each District should include more specific staffing analyses and long-term planning components in the budget process, where appropriate. In addition, budgets should include transparency with respect to staff and other important components that are paid for through grants and other sources.
3. The SAU and District should consider the following issues and address the demands on SAU level administrators with respect to time management, quality of life and productivity:
 - a. Since preliminary findings were presented, we have added a Director of Student Services position for the coming (2019-2020) school year.
 - b. In addition, we have created a Joint Policy Committee, which is slated to meet at least every other month.
 - c. Based on a survey of other multiple district SAUs, I believe our Joint Board should be meeting quarterly (3-4 times per year) instead of the present twice per year model.

- d. Multiple district SAUs utilize a variety of strategies to address the identified area of concern, including:
- i. Shared Leadership. Some have Assistant Superintendents and/or Directors work directly with certain Boards, although the Superintendent is with each Board at least every other month. The Superintendent generally works with the Cooperative Board on a monthly basis. Assistants and Directors are at each Board at least quarterly. The Business Administrator deals with Budget Committees and is at Board meetings on an “as needed” basis.
 - ii. Stacking of Meetings. Some schedule their meetings so that two (2) occur on the same evening (i.e., 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.). This allows the SAU staff to attend all meetings, while reducing the number of evenings dedicated to Boards.
 - iii. Smaller District Boards Meeting Less than Monthly. Some have towns that have small student populations and/or no schools. In this model, these Boards meet less than monthly.
 - iv. Who Needs to be at this Meeting? Some have very thoughtful conversations on a monthly basis to determine which of the SAU administrators really need to attend particular meetings. An effort is made to ensure that all administrators do not need to attend all meetings.
 - v. Combined Approach(es). Some combine different aspects of these models. For example one could combine the stacked model with consideration of who needs to be at a particular meeting.

I would recommend that the SAU and Boards carefully examine our present structure, consider the additional elements highlighted here, and implement a model that addresses the needs of these Districts, while ensuring that we have a model that is sustainable and will not have a long-term impact on the ability of SAU 21 to attract and retain outstanding system leaders.

Summary and Next Steps

I am pleased to serve as Superintendent with School Administrative Unit 21 and the Hampton Falls, North Hampton, Seabrook, South Hampton and Winnacunnet Cooperative School Districts. Moreover, I am delighted to provide you with this entry plan and look forward to my public presentation, your questions, and our discussion on March 4th.

I hope that you agree with my assessment that this report represents a starting point for the formulation of long-term SAU and District goals, the development of Superintendent performance goals and, most importantly, a strategic planning effort for our public schools.

My goal over the coming months (prior to our April Joint Board meeting) will be to work with the SAU 21 team and building level leaders to develop action plans for those areas identified as priorities during our March 4th conversations. I look forward to working with you for years to come to make certain that our students are always at the center of our decision-making and that we are always striving for improvement in our SAU and schools.