

Superintendent Entry Plan

Washoe County School District

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"Building a World Class School District: The First Hundred Days"



Introduction

In the strategic plan, *The Blueprint for Student Success*, Washoe County School District (WCSD) articulates the vision of "building a world class school district." How close is the district to realizing this goal? What are the challenges that must be addressed to actualize the vision? Do all stakeholders share this desire? The new superintendent must address these and many other questions to ensure that WCSD is on a pathway toward becoming "world class," and that all students have the opportunity to excel on this pathway.

This Plan of Entry is designed to ensure that the new superintendent, Dr. Heath E. Morrison, engages in a thoughtful, proactive, strategic beginning to leading WCSD. Author Stephen Covey in his book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* makes the case that leaders must "first seek to understand, then to be understood." The transition activities outlined in this plan are designed to enable the new superintendent to engage in "listen and learn" opportunities in an accelerated fashion with a multitude of stakeholders; begin to assess the organization's strengths and weaknesses; identify areas that will yield quick wins as well as areas that will need intense focus; and leverage the momentum of change to not only create a network of contacts and resources in WCSD, but also to energize the community in committing to the vision of building a world class school district.

Goals

This entry plan is designed to address the following goals:

1. To ensure an effective, efficient, and orderly transition of leadership, keeping the focus on increased student achievement for all children
2. To develop a trusting, productive, collaborative relationship with the WCSD Board of Trustees
3. To create opportunities for the new superintendent to listen broadly and deeply to a multitude of stakeholders and gain a comprehensive understanding of WCSD
4. To proactively ensure that all voices, not just those who traditionally avail themselves to collaboration with the school system, are heard and engaged in the process of continuous improvement

5. To identify and execute activities that must happen immediately to ensure an outstanding beginning to the school year
6. To build excitement and momentum for WCSD's vision, mission, and strategic plan, while also establishing the commitment to engage in needed change to ensure a system of continuous improvement.

Outcomes

Expected results of this entry plan include:

- An energized district and community about the focus and direction of the organization
- A comprehensive summary of the findings, observations, and key learnings from the new district superintendent's "listen and learn" activities
- The outline of a strategic plan process to review WCSD's current strategic plan and improvement plan, and to establish how the Board of Trustees and the new superintendent will address the "big question" about how to engage in systemic reform to ensure the bar of academic rigor is raised for all students while ensuring the elimination of achievement gaps

Structure

This Entry Plan encompasses one hundred days as opposed to ninety as the new superintendent is being afforded the opportunity to spend ten days in WCSD in the month of July, despite having an official August 1, 2009, start day. These additional days will be maximized and leveraged to ensure optimal learning about the district. This plan will outline core areas that must be priorities for the new superintendent and will address "pre-entry" as well as "entry" activities.

I. Governance Team: WCSD Board of Trustees

In order to ensure that the district has an intense focus on meeting the needs of all children, the Board and superintendent must develop a trusting, positive, collaborative, team-oriented relationship. These relationships must be established with each Board member and the Board as a whole. During this Plan of Entry, the superintendent will work with the Board to discuss issues and matters of governance, management, core values and beliefs, structures of their working relationship, and to consider issues of Reform Governance and Theory of Action.

Pre-Entry

- Share Entry Plan for feedback , suggestions, and guidance
- Engage in one-on-one meetings with Board members to deepen relationships and broaden perspectives

- Hold first Board retreat to discuss communication protocols, roles and responsibilities, norms of behavior and interaction, expectations for first year, and agenda setting
- Review Board election calendar to assess continuity of governance

Entry

- Conduct two-on-one breakfast/lunch/dinner meetings with all Board members to continue to build positive, productive relationships
- Meet with the Board president and Board committee chairs to determine how they work in partnership with the superintendent and senior staff
- Determine the schedule and proposed agendas for quarterly meetings with the Board
- Collaborate on the next Board retreat to focus on shared values, initiate reflections on organizational structure, areas of improvement, and implementation of a systemic accountability system. Suggest a book study around Donald McAdams' *What School Boards Can Do*
- Clarify expectations and opportunities regarding the new superintendent's role as a "Broad Fellow"
- Develop a process, structure, and time line to measure current strategic plan, system improvement plan, and budget for the district
- Collaborate on a performance evaluation format with objectives and indicators of success to be used to evaluate the superintendent
- Establish regular meeting times with the Board president for reviewing and constructing agendas

II. **Organizational Capacity and Alignment: District Executive and Senior Staff**

To implement the basic tenets of the *Blueprint for Student Success* and execute the district's improvement plan at maximum efficiency, it will be critical to support and hold accountable a high-performing, results-oriented district executive team. To make sure we operate as a highly cross-functional team, dedicated to a positive, professional culture, we must, as author Jim Collins states, "Ensure we have the right people on the bus and in the right seats."

Pre-Entry

- Review the current central office structure to determine focus on student achievement and maximizing operational efficiency
- Conduct one-on-one interviews and review resumes and briefing papers with all direct reports

- Conduct a retreat with senior staff to review district's strategic plan, improvement plan, most recent achievement data, review current or anticipated vacancies in central office or principalships, and discuss leadership team structures and practice

Entry

- Determine how communication and decision-making will occur with executive team, establishing meeting protocols and systems designed to focus on increased student achievement and continuous improvement
- Conduct one-on-one interviews with all unit heads in central services, focusing on alignment and execution of key strategies
- Conduct an "Organizational Audit" using expert practitioners to review alignment, coherence, and efficiency of the current organizational structure
- Initiate plans to establish key metrics and customer service goals for each functional unit to ensure the performance of central office can be determined and measured with alignment to core function and support for student achievement
- Meet with regional directors to assess current data and performance of all schools under their supervision and determine quality of actions designed for continuous improvement
- Explore the current state of strategic data monitoring in WCSD to ensure all students are performing at or above grade level and/or are receiving appropriate, targeted interventions
- Examine how much autonomy and authority principals have in the current organizational structure and determine how much access and opportunity they have to play key roles in decision-making
- Plan a second retreat with senior staff to review accountability plans for all functional units, clarify process and progress toward improvement with strategic plan and district improvement plan, review current and future budget issues, and current organizational structure
- Ensure all necessary plans and preparations are in place for an outstanding opening of school; establish protocols for assessing effectiveness of the opening of schools

III. Student Achievement:

Ensuring that all students not only graduate from WCSD but also receive their diplomas truly college and work ready is the ultimate goal and responsibility of all employees. To ensure instruction is occurring at high levels, teachers must have a rigorous K-12 instructional curriculum, processes, and tools to monitor student progress as well as opportunities and resources to provide necessary interventions. Ensuring all decisions are made using the

barometer of "Is it good for children, teaching, and learning?" will be emphasized in all discussions.

Pre-Entry

- Initial plans for an academic audit of WCSD's curriculum and instructional program
- Analyze patterns in student achievement data and achievement gaps in order to begin to assess current state of teaching and learning
- Assess district's expectations for all students' academic success and commitment to meeting the needs of all of its diverse learners
- Identify chronically under-performing schools and initiate root cause analysis for why they are not meeting the needs of students; determine a course of corrective action

Entry

- Meet with district's instructional leadership team to review disaggregated achievement data, AYP status of schools, instructional program alignment, and current goals and priority action areas for the district
- Determine how comprehensive and research-based the current curriculum is and to what degree it is aligned between grades and allows for student mobility; assess the fidelity with which the curriculum is used throughout WCSD
- Determine the degree of rigor embedded in the current WCSD curriculum
- Conduct an "Academic Audit" through the Broad Foundation to assist in making changes in curriculum and programs, especially with student populations currently not meeting with success such as English language learners and special education students
- Assess current professional development efforts and capacity for meeting the training needs of principals, teachers, and central office staff; determine the degree to which it is job-embedded, differentiated, and student-achievement directed; do a "deep dive" in determining how much of the budget is devoted to professional development and how it is being assessed
- Evaluate system efforts towards improving graduation rates for all students with special focus on African American and Hispanic students
- Determine what monitoring is used in WCSD to ensure all students are performing at grade level or are receiving appropriate, targeted interventions
- Evaluate the use and effectiveness of current formative assessments to ensure fidelity to the instructional program and as an accurate assessment of student growth and progress; inquire about curriculum maps, pacing guides, and monitoring rubrics

- Initiate plans for school accountability with specific targets, school performance reviews, and developing a "report card" for each school; consider quarterly reviews and walkthroughs
- Ensure all necessary plans and preparations are in place for an outstanding opening of schools

IV. Community and Public Relations

The proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," reflects the new superintendent's core beliefs about involvement and engagement of the community. During this time of initial entry, there will be a focus on engaging and mobilizing parents and community leaders in the pursuit of making WCSD a world class school district. There will be a focus on establishing openness and transparency in all communication systems and protocols used by the new superintendent. Understanding the culture, history, and expectations of the WCSD will be critical. The new superintendent will be proactive and deliberate in reaching out to stakeholders traditionally underrepresented in public education to make certain their voices are also heard and valued. Key questions for all stakeholders will include:

- ✓ What are the strengths of WCSD?
- ✓ What are areas of needed improvement for WCSD?
- ✓ As the budget remains a challenge, what are the priorities of the district?
- ✓ How can we raise the bar of academic success for all students and eliminate achievement gaps?
- ✓ What will "world class" mean as a standard in WCSD?

Pre-Entry

- Call key leaders and introduce myself and build relationships
- Message (audio and written) to WCSD on website
- Meet with key leaders in consultation with Board chair

Entry

- Reach out to a multitude of critical stakeholders and establish routine meetings, communication protocols, and reciprocal dialogues, focusing on increasing student achievement and continuous improvement; initiate open, honest, and transparent dialogues with the goal of strengthening and improving strategic partnerships. This would include, but not be limited to:
 - all top-level elected officials
 - all area legislators -- state and national

- members of the state's Education Committee, the Chief State School Officer and the Governor's point person on education
- Chamber of Commerce officials
- heads of teacher, administrator, and other unions
- parent organizations and local PTAs
- university officials (University of Nevada, Reno, and Truckee Meadows CC)
- key business leaders
- heads of the Educational Alliance, Parent Involvement Council and Diversity Task Force and attend meetings
- civic leaders and advocates
- non-profit groups
- faith-based leaders and attend a variety of services during this time
- former superintendents

School Visits

- The superintendent will conduct visits to every school in WCSD to engage the principal, teachers, support staff, and parent volunteers about where we are as a district and where we need to be to meet the needs of all children.

Community Forums

- The superintendent, Trustees, and senior staff will host multiple "town hall" meetings using the Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis model to gather community input and initiate continuous dialogues about student achievement and improvement. These meetings will occur throughout all areas of the school district. There will be proactive efforts to meet with stakeholders who have traditionally not attended such forums.

Media Strategy

- The superintendent will meet with leaders of local media outlets, editorial boards, and education reporters, including ethnic and business press. These meetings will set expectations for collaboration that is open, honest, transparent, and accurate. TV, radio, and newspaper reporters will be invited to appropriate community sessions and first day of school events. These meetings will be important to engage the media in current education issues and system improvement efforts.

V. Operation and Finance

In order to meet the needs of all students in WCSD, it is critical that Operations and Finance are "world class" as well. Understanding the current strengths, strategies, and opportunities for improvement in light of current budget challenges will be a critical focus of the new superintendent. Each division will be appraised to determine how they maximize support and services to schools using the continuous improvement model.

Pre-Entry

- Review key district financial materials, budget, most recent audit, and grants
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with direct reports on budget, operations, and human resources

Entry

- Request briefing papers from all office heads providing an overview of their current area of responsibility, major initiatives under way with projected time lines, a review of significant or potential problems in each area of responsibility, and major decisions that need to be made in one month, three months, and six months
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with all office heads, ensuring each division has fidelity to its core function and has a student-focused agenda
- Review district's financial projections, resource allocation and budgeting processes; assess how district's budget and budgeting process is aligned to support student achievement
- Determine what should be centralized and what should be decentralized within the current organizational structure to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and support to schools
- Conduct one-on-one meetings with lawyers to review any current legal proceedings or outstanding judgments against the district and to provide a briefing on state education code with particular attention to statutes currently impacting or likely to impact the district
- Review employee group contracts and negotiation plans; find out what the role of the superintendent has been in negotiations
- Receive update on plans to apply for stimulus funds and federal "Race to the Top" monies
- Review district's safety and crisis communication plan
- Conduct a review of the district's public information office and programs; review the history, services, and outreach to entire community

- Assess the degree to which all offices are cross-functional and begin to establish key metrics and customer service goals to ensure peak efficiency and support for student achievement
- Examine the effectiveness of WCSD's information-data management system, especially around student achievement, budget, and human resources
- Ensure all necessary plans and preparations are in place for an outstanding opening of school

The Superintendent's First Day and First Day of School

When I officially begin on August 1, 2009, and consider the "symbolic" choices of how I will spend my day, I want to be very thoughtful and deliberate with my activities.

On my first day, I want to meet with Board members, visit some year-round schools, and meet with key leaders in the community as well as heads of the unions. I also want to arrange to meet with some students who did not graduate last year to discuss what could have been done to keep them in school and receive a diploma.

On the first day of school, I want to visit several schools moving on a high school, middle school, to elementary articulation pattern. I also want to visit a charter school. This will be an important day to meet with the press and have them accompany me on my visits. This might also be an appropriate day for a town hall meeting. I will meet with senior staff to evaluate the quality of opening day/week activities, making any needed adjustments and improvements.

90-100 Days

Near the end of the first ninety days, the new superintendent will have learned a great deal about WCSD and be ready to report out on those findings. Through multiple meetings with key stakeholders, some initial ideas will have been developed regarding new directions for the future.

Around this time, another Board retreat should be scheduled to announce findings, propose plans, and collaborate with the Board on a planning system to drive improvements in student achievement and organizational efficiency. The Board-Superintendent team will be able to work together to ensure the WCSD strengthens a commitment to a positive, productive culture with a laser-like focus on improving student achievement using the district's continuous improvement model. Proposed plans and agendas should also be communicated with the school community to promote understanding, commitment and support for the goals and purpose of making WCSD stand for "World Class School District."

"Every child, by face and name, to graduation."