



Superintendent Entry and Transition Plan: Overview

W. Bruce Benson, Ed.D.

Alamance-Burlington School System's (ABSS) 2014-2019 Strategic Plan contains 6 strategic goals in the areas of exemplary teaching, specialty programs, facilities, working conditions, compensation, and classroom support. The goals are intended to position students to meet high academic standards and become responsible citizens. These goals, along with stated values, vision, and mission, provide the foundation for work in classrooms, schools, and departments, as well as guide governance work at the board level. During the transition, I will assess the success in achieving goals in the strategic plan and the impact on the culture of the organization.

I believe successful superintendents possess three critically important attributes in developing and executing strategic work – they are good listeners, great communicators, and results-oriented leaders. Successful superintendents take the time to understand what is important – to students, parents, teachers, support staff, administrators, the school board, and the community. Successful superintendents also understand what knowledge and skills must be mastered for today's graduates to be successful in both the workforce and continued education. Successful superintendents must also be great communicators in order to lead and build support for next generation work and future success. Finally, successful superintendents produce desired results, but not without a critical partner: the school board.

According to George H. McShan, former president of the National School Boards Association, in order for a public school system to succeed on all important fronts – student achievement, parental involvement, administrative efficiency, financial stability, and strong public support – there is nothing more important than a school board realizing its full potential as a governing body and making a real difference in school district affairs, in close partnership with the superintendent and senior administrators.

The entry and transition work outlined in this plan is designed to help me listen to and understand stakeholder needs in an accelerated fashion, begin to assess the school district's strengths and challenges in meeting strategic goals, identify areas for both short-term and long-term development, and leverage the momentum of transition to build a network of resources and support for current and next generation work in ABSS.

This entry plan and transition plan is designed to accomplish the following:

- Ensure an effective, efficient, and orderly transition of leadership, keeping focus on ensuring all students are prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment
- Develop a trusting, productive, collaborative relationship with the ABSS School Board
- Create opportunities to listen broadly and deeply to stakeholders and develop an understanding of successes and challenges
- Promote a continuous improvement model that ensures input from all stakeholders is heard and considered in the charting of next generation work in the ABSS
- Identify and execute work that must happen immediately to ensure an outstanding start to the 2018-19 school year
- Develop and execute a successful bond campaign using guidance from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
- Build support, excitement, and momentum for next generation work in ABSS

Pre-entry: April-June 2018

- Visit several schools
- Meet with superintendent, school board chair, vice chair, and county manager
- Share personal contact information with board members
- Establish media contacts
- Review ABSS strategic plan, organizational structure, 2018-19 operating budget (as it is developed) , technology plan, policies, meeting schedules, school calendar, and teacher and administrator evaluation documents
- Review ABSS district and school report cards
- Review board member elected terms to assess continuity of governance
- Finalize transition plan
- Share transition plan with board members for feedback, suggestions, and guidance

Entry: July-December 2018

School Board, Board-Superintendent Relationship, and Governance

According to Doug Eadie in Five Habits of High-Impact School Boards (2005), school boards that make a real difference in their school districts work in close partnership with their superintendents. Cultivating a strong board-superintendent relationship is critical to success.

Negotiating superintendent-specific leadership targets and regularly evaluating performance against these targets is the preeminent tool for maintaining a healthy board-superintendent relationship.

- Conduct one-on-one meetings with all board members to build positive, productive relationships
- Meet with board chair and vice-chair to determine how they prefer to work in partnership with the superintendent and senior staff
- Visit all schools with board member(s)
- Review and/or determine agendas for upcoming board meetings
- Hold board retreat to focus on shared values, reflection on organizational structure, areas of success and challenge, accountability, governance, and the board-superintendent partnership
- Develop process, structure, timeline to review/revise, as needed, the strategic plan, improvement plan, and budget
- Review performance expectations
- Establish regular meeting times with board chair and vice chair for agenda review/construction

Organizational Capacity

In simplest terms, organizational capacity is the potential of an organization to apply knowledge, skills, and resources systemically to accomplish goals and meet stakeholders' expectations. Using constructs such as the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence (<http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/enter/education.cfm>), school districts can organize and integrate continuous improvement models to build organizational capacity, improving productivity and effectiveness. Assessing current organizational capacity is an important first step.

- Meet one-on-one with all direct reports to discuss responsibilities, successes, and opportunities
- Conduct meetings with senior central staff to review instructional and operational capacity, expectations, and monitoring and adjustment strategies
- Determine how communication and decision-making will occur with the executive leadership team
- Examine current assistant superintendent, director and principal autonomy, authority, and performance expectations
- Review financial projections, resource allocation and budgeting processes, and alignment with strategic goals

- Conduct a client survey of building-level leaders regarding division-level support and services

Student Achievement

According to Failure Is Not an Option (Blankstein, 2004), building professional learning communities and using data to guide decision making are key elements leading to high levels of achievement. It is important to determine the current level of data monitoring, curriculum mapping, professional development, and resources available to support these elements.

- Determine the current state of strategic data monitoring
- Review curriculum maps and pacing guides
- Review district-level formative and summative assessments
- Review interventions available for students who are under-performing
- Review professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and support staff
- Review technology infrastructure, services, and tools available to students and staff
- Examine current mid-year school performance review expectations
- Work with district-level staff and building-level leaders to identify growth opportunities and determine course of action
- Meet with students, including recent graduates and high school dropouts

Communication Networks and Public Relations

There is something to be learned from how sectors other than education view communication and public relations. It is important to build strong two-way communication networks. Consider Southwest Airlines. At Southwest, strong two-way communication networks help employees feel like owners. It is important that all stakeholders in Alamance-Burlington own the successes and challenges of the school division. As such I will initiate contact, conduct community forums/meet-and-greets, and dialog with:

- Local elected officials and government leaders, including one-on-one meetings with members of the Board of Commissioners
- Area legislators – state and national
- Chamber of Commerce officials
- Local education organization leadership
- Student leaders
- PTO presidents

- Local law enforcement entities
- Regional university and college officials
- Key business leaders
- Civic leaders
- Non-profit groups
- Faith-based leaders
- Local media representatives

Bond Referendum

The issue of bond referendums for school improvement is important to most school systems. It is critical to ABSS. Deferred maintenance has placed most of the schools in the district in need of significant repair, to say nothing of modernizing teaching and learning spaces. The Alamance-Burlington area is growing. According to the United States Census Bureau, the combined population in 2010 was 202,090. In 2016, the combined population was 212,397, an increase of 10,307 (5.1%). New schools are needed.

According to **Planning Successful Bond Campaigns**, guidance provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, a public relations campaign is essential in successful passage of bond referendums. As such, we must:

- Develop easily-understood communication materials
- Discuss tax increases in terms of dollars and cents
- Ensure our school family is well-informed
- Support principals as key communicators in their communities
- Meet with commissioners on an individual basis to deepen understanding of need
- Leverage local media in an objective manner
- Garner support from local business leaders, chamber of commerce officials, and chief executive officers, as a great school system is the cornerstone of economic development
- Develop a detailed action timeline from three months out to election

Summary Report

At the end of the transition period in December, I will present a summary report to the School Board outlining findings and observations, as well as considerations and recommendations for future work.