



Superintendent's Entry Plan

Newtown Public Schools

Christopher C. Melillo
Six Month Plan





For A Bright Future

Entry Plan Purpose

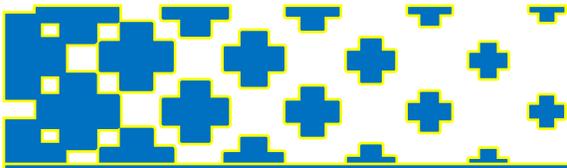
This entry plan outlines various goals and strategies that I hope to accomplish during the first six months of my tenure as Superintendent of Newtown Public Schools. The purpose of this plan is to create structures and processes that will provide the ability to establish a solid understanding of the traditions, relationships, operations, strengths and challenges that make up the fabric of Newtown Public Schools. The insights I gain will help me make informed decisions that will build on accomplishments of the past and take Newtown Public Schools to new levels of success. More importantly, this plan will chart a path which would allow me to build transparency and trust with community stakeholders, while remaining attentive to the teaching and learning needs of our classrooms.

Entry Plan Goals

1. Ensure focus is on instructional improvements and enhancements with the expectation that **EVERY** child in our school system can and should reach their highest potential.
2. Develop a strong, collaborative and transparent working relationship with the Board of Education.
3. Build a positive, collaborative working relationship with students, administrators, teachers and non-certified staff.
4. Create structures and forums to solicit diverse and comprehensive feedback and build a foundation for lasting, positive relationships with all stakeholders in the Newtown community.
5. Gain a deep understanding of the safety, climate and needs of the district to create systems of support and direction for all schools in the district.
6. Assess operational and financial efficiencies and alignment.

Entry Plan Strategies

- **Generous Listening:** Spend time understanding the needs of students, teachers, parents, administrators and other district employees. In addition, allow for open communication with the community, business members and state and local leaders. This approach will expose inherent challenges so I am well positioned to transform them into opportunities.
- **Understanding:** Seek insights and knowledge about the district as a whole, as well as the culture, strengths and areas of potential growth for each school community.
- **Communication:** Get to know the community and share my leadership experience, educational philosophies and core values. I will always strive to create a positive climate and build strong and sincere personal relationships.
- **Evaluation:** Review the current state of the school district, including core approaches to teaching and learning as well as operations, curriculum, business systems, finance and budgeting. This will offer invaluable insights that I can translate in tangible action plans.
- **Construction:** Build strong working relationships and develop a rapport with the Newtown community as a whole including the Board of Education, school community and state and local leaders. Design efficient and effective working systems. Focus organizational efforts and align resources to ensure all students are provided a world-class education.



Goal 1: Ensure focus is on instructional improvements and enhancements with the expectation that EVERY child in our school system can and should reach their highest potential.

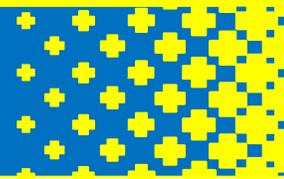
Actions:

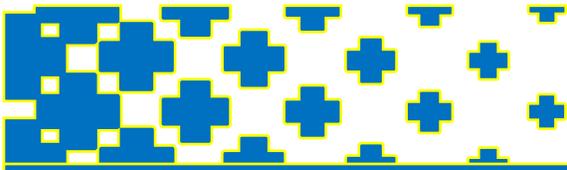
- Review the District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plans, achievement/growth and key data points including assessment, attendance, achievement gaps, discipline data, college and career readiness, graduation rates, as well as various initiatives for improvement.
- Analyze curriculum mapping and review instructional practices.
- Examine special education prevalence rates, audits and mental health supports.
- Assess programs of study, intervention programs, MLL services and talented and gifted programs.
- Conduct learning walks to observe current practices and learning.
- Evaluate professional development training including, but not limited to PBIS preparation, highly effective teaching practices, DEIA initiatives, bullying, human trafficking, DCF process, Title IX and staff evaluations.
- Understand the connections between district goals → budget investments → curriculum → professional development → instructional practices → evaluations → student outcomes.



Rationale

Implementing a cohesive systems approach allowing for a clear vision for the district will empower the staff to unleash the potential of their students.





Goal 2: Develop a strong, collaborative and transparent working relationship with the Board of Education.

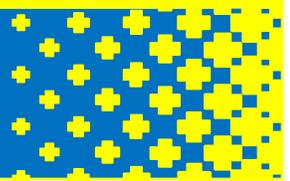
Actions:

- Meet with Board members on a one-on-one basis to learn about their individual goals, perspectives and aspirations for the school district.
- Develop and utilize consistent and effective modes of communication with various stakeholders.
- Establish a consistent and dedicated meeting time with the Board chairperson.
- Schedule a Board retreat to discuss procedures, protocols, roles, expectations and responsibilities.
- Review protocols and processes for addressing constituent concerns.



Rationale

Perhaps the most important characteristic of a school system's success is a close and effective working relationship between the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education.





Goal 3: Build a positive, collaborative working relationship with administrators, students, teachers and non-certified staff.

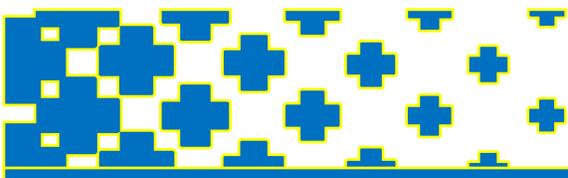
Actions:

- Host community conversations with all staff.
- Conduct one-on-one or small group meetings with administrators and bargaining unit representatives.
- Visit every school with a regular cadence – announced and unannounced.
- Create a realistic and “safe” conduit for student communication.
- Develop a solid for all internal communications.
- Celebrate small and large “wins” – recognize excellence whenever an opportunity presents itself.



Rationale

When faculty and staff appreciate one another, they become more unified, collaborative and creative, and this behavior is often imitated by students.



Goal 4: Create structures and forums to solicit diverse and comprehensive feedback and build a foundation for lasting, positive relationships with stakeholders in the Newtown community.

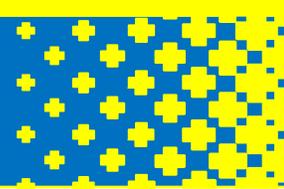
Actions:

- Schedule meet-and-greets in partnership with school board members to engage external constituents.
- Conduct one-on-one or small group meetings with Parent/Teacher Organizations/Associations.
- Plan one-on-one or small group meetings with community, business, political, and faith-based leaders.
- Organize community conversations with teachers and staff.
- Meet with parents and community members and create opportunities for continued communication i.e. expanded/dedicated office hours, scheduled events, social media and forums.
- Develop an understanding of internal and external communication processes.
- Leverage and expand media tools to gather input and ideas to enable the Newtown Public School District to reach its fullest potential.
- Review and assess the effectiveness of current external communication processes, procedures and data.



Rationale

Positive relationships in the community are central to the well-being of the school community and reinforce a supportive and effective learning environment.





Goal 5: Gain a deeper understanding of the safety, climate and needs of the district to create systems of support and direction for all schools in the district.

Actions:

- Review all climate surveys and evaluate data.
- Analyze safety investments and emergency operations plan including COVID precautions. Assess safety procedures including fire drills, building entrance protocols and lockdown drills.
- Survey the staff to ascertain climate, satisfaction, social and emotional well-being, strengths and obstacles.
- Examine the programs used to improve school climate and encourage positive behavior (Social Emotional Learning, Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports and Responsive Classroom).
- Implement the four principles of Fish Philosophy: 1) Choose Your Attitude 2) Play 3) Make Their Day 4) Be Present.



Rationale

A safe, welcoming and supportive school climate contributes to students' and staff's social, emotional and cognitive development. Positive school climate and conditions for learning contribute to improved student achievement, attendance, grade promotion, graduation rates and staff retention. A positive climate is essential to the creation of an environment where people feel safe, work effectively and efficiently together and step outside their comfort zone to be the best version of themselves.



Goal 6: Assess operational and financial efficiencies and alignment.

Actions:

- Review current bargaining unit contracts, benefit packages and schedule for negotiations
- Examine facilities and review construction reports, budget, litigation, data systems and technology.
- Study recent school board approvals, presentations and reports.
- Analyze current human resources systems, procedures and processes.
- Evaluate past and current budgets, grants and plans for sustainability.
- Review enrollment trends and prediction models.
- Assess five-year capital plan.
- Review past and current vendor contracts i.e. transportation, landscaping, snow removal, etc.
- Study student handbooks and all school procedures and processes.



Rationale

Analyzing operational data is essential to effective school improvement planning. Creating and organizing strong information systems and leveraging them to support planning, monitoring and evaluation of resource use will result in responsible budgeting practices.



Summary

After the successful completion of the aforementioned actions outlined in this plan, I will present to the Board of Education an efficient, coherent, innovative and strategic blueprint. This blueprint will promote strong academic achievement, equity for all students, alignment of practices and a fiscally sustainable budget. Additionally, through these efforts, I will start to develop meaningful relationships within the community which are essential to achieving long-term growth.

Before closing, I wanted to share my philosophies on leadership, management and instructional leadership as they will provide additional insight into what drives me professionally. These core beliefs will serve as supplements to my entry plan.

Napoleon Hill once said, "Plan your work and work your plan." Trust that this document is a testament to my strong core beliefs and evidence of the extensive thought and planning I have put into the interview process with Newtown Public Schools.

This is only the beginning...



Superintendent's Philosophy of Leadership

It is my strong belief that building and creating a positive culture, one that stakeholders want to be part of, is paramount to ensure all students can learn when given the opportunity. An atmosphere that welcomes exploration and enhances student confidence will yield the best result for the majority of students.

My personal leadership philosophy is simple. It is based on optimizing the learning environment, by establishing mutual trust amongst stakeholders, as a means to achieve rigorous goals and high standards for all staff and students. This is accomplished by being a leader who not only respects the work but engages in the work. One must be in the "community" trenches in order to build relationships and trust amongst the various stakeholders. Traditionally, schools have been the hub of our communities. The relationship between community and school has been created not only by the mission of educating students, but by the social interactions and opportunities a school system can bring to a community.

"It takes a village" is a proverb that I truly believe in. As administrators, we must be able to build relationships with all students, staff, and community members. Furthermore, we must be adept at discovering and playing to their strengths to build leadership capacity. Finally, we must empower students and educators to embrace a growth mindset. I am a leader who communicates openly with all stakeholders and understands that communication is a key component in the creation of a positive learning culture within a school or district.

Throughout my career, I have built many bridges and continue to leverage my strong interpersonal skills to foster trust amongst the community that I serve. I have designed and implemented programs around a specific philosophy - positive climates foster the development of mature, self-disciplined, proud and positive colleagues. When the basic needs of the staff, students and community are satisfied, a district is well-positioned to deliver high quality instruction and realize peak performance outcomes.



Superintendent's Philosophy of Management

Leading by example and enlisting the collective knowledge of stakeholders will build motivation and strengthen the community by building a team. As Sheryl Sandberg famously said, "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence." The relationship between a Superintendent and his/her employees should be built on actions based in mutual trust, respect, and feedback. This requires a willingness to connect with others. Leading by example is a form of authentic communication rooted in positive values.

When leading by example, it is imperative that one have a "team first" mentality. This will create and foster a positive work environment while simultaneously establishing criteria for organizational excellence. One of the primary responsibilities of a leader is to inspire and motivate others to do their best for the benefit of the collective organization. To achieve this, a leader must "show the way" by rolling up his/her sleeves and getting involved in the process. When a team sees their leader doing what is right for the organization – supporting, developing, nurturing, and defending in good times and bad – trust is established.

Managers who put the interests of their subordinates first by finding ways to help them grow, develop and take on more responsibilities and delegation to occur and tend to excel in other areas of "management." Some might say that their EQ (Emotional Intelligence) is high across the board and consequently, others benefit from it – colleagues, parents, community, Board of Education, and other community stakeholders.

Leading by example allows for information to be accessed immediately which is imperative when it comes time to make tough decisions. A good leader should be aware of the fact that they do not know everything. Conversely, having a mindset that embraces learning will pay dividends and build internal leadership within the district. It sets the right tone for those in the organization who are closely watching how their leaders behave. It disarms resentment that might be felt, rightly or wrongly, toward those in high managerial positions.

The simple thesis is that it is difficult to not want to emulate leaders who roll up their sleeves and wade into the trenches when need be. The message that these leaders send is that they are willing to share the same sacrifices as their team – when one team member is cut, everyone bleeds. As famed philosopher and physician, Albert Schweitzer once stated, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others; it is the only thing."



Superintendent's Philosophy of Instructional Leadership

It was Henry Ford who said, "Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

If this inspirational quote was translated from the auto industry to education, one could make the argument that a cohesive approach towards instructional leadership will yield systemic and sustained improvements across a district. A vision will undoubtedly provide direction, but absent a set of values, educational leaders will likely struggle to identify teachers, parents and students willing to follow. It is my strong belief that one of the pre-eminent values that people expect from educational leaders today is an appreciation for a cohesive approach to district improvement. In order for a district-wide strategy to be successful in practice, it must connect to teachers' work in the classroom and enable people at all levels to carry out their respective part within the overall strategy.

Borrowing from the sport of crew, rowers rowing in lock step serves as a strong metaphor for the effectiveness of systems advancing in a synchronous fashion. The "stroke" is the rower closest to the stern of the boat and generally-speaking, is the strongest and most competitive in the crew. Everyone follows the stroke's timing and lead, placing their oars in and out of the water at the same time. In order to maximize its fullest potential, it is essential that a district follow suit with a strong leader at the helm – one who can objectively identify strengths and weaknesses. Once armed with this information, the district should align its goals and objectives broadly - to curriculum, instructional practices, talent, professional development, community partnerships, evaluation, communication and resources. This alignment will create a disciplined approach to teaching and learning, resulting in an improved climate and culture. Furthermore, levels of parent and community engagement will increase, more effective teachers and leaders will be developed, budgets will better meet the needs of the school community and most importantly, students will be better served.

Finally, it is my strong belief that a cohesive approach to instructional leadership allows for a more proactive and less reactive form of decision-making. By keeping the shared vision and culture at the core, systems will work in tandem to support the overall effectiveness of the district's mission and goals.