

FALL RIVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"The Scholarship City"

417 Rock Street, Fall River, MA 02720

Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Fall River School Committee

FROM: Matthew H. Malone, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools 

DATE: July 18, 2017

RE: ENTRY PLAN REPORT

Most entry plan processes culminate after the first 90 days of employment followed by a detailed report of findings. This year my original goal was to report my entry findings somewhere within the 4-6-month range. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, I have been afforded the opportunity to extend said process for an entire 12 months, allowing me the opportunity for extensive learning with regard to the City of Fall River. Both professionally and personally, it has been an outstanding experience, as I have enjoyed being actively engaged in the daily operations of our schools - observing classroom instruction, building relationships with city officials, meeting parents, talking to faculty, staff, and students, and attending events at our schools and within the community. Throughout all my observation and interactions, one thing that stands out clearly is the great deal of pride in Fall River. Our greatest natural resources are the people of the community who truly care about the city, its schools, and the community's collective commitment to educate our children and graduate them prepared and ready to be productive members of our democratic society.

I have organized the findings of my Entry Plan into two categories: Strengths and Areas for Growth. As you can see, there is much in our school system of which we can all be very proud. There is really good work happening in our schools – the impact of which is frequently palpable. Over the next few years, we can build upon this work in a way that is more purposeful and with greater strategic investment in actions that will provide us with systemic alignment and deepened coherence and allow us to increase opportunities for all learners and close student achievement gaps. The Fall River Public Schools have limitless potential – we are a strong system of professionals with excellent governance and support from our municipal partners and local elected delegation. Our future will be determined by how well we continue to work together to govern, lead, focus, strengthen, and sustain our systems as we strive to improve learning and teaching in the classroom.

STRENGTHS: The Fall River Public Schools is well-positioned to move forward from a position of strength from which we can build and deepen our capacity to sustain the success we have earned while pushing forward expeditiously for even greater impact system-wide over the next four years. I have triangulated observational, anecdotal, and student achievement data gathered throughout the entry process to develop the following findings. I present them with confidence that said findings represent consistent application across the school system. I have organized the strengths into two areas - Human Capital and Systems of Support.

Human Capital:

- **People:** At all levels of the school system – from our students and their equally vibrant families and extended support systems who entrust us with their children, to our school-based personnel, district leadership, elected officials, and community partners – our team is top notch!
- **Pride and Spirit:** Across the entirety of our school system at all levels (adults and students), we have amazing pride in our schools and in our community - and nobody holds motivational events such as the ones we have in the Fall River Public Schools. It is clear to me that we love the work, the people with whom we work and the students we serve.
- **Culture of Collaboration:** Faculty and staff work together in a collegial manner; they are open to new learning, flexible and willing to adjust practice based on formative and summative assessment results to meet the needs of students.
- **Building-Level Leadership:** Our principals and their leadership teams are thoughtful, talented, and skilled at leading the delivery of instruction and support services in their buildings, developing their faculty and staff, and engaging parents at all levels of the process.
- **Centralized Leadership to Support Schools:** Our executive leadership team is cross-functional and includes central and site-level administrators serving as a problem-solving and decision-making body that drives the trajectory of the district’s improvement strategy.
- **Labor-Management Collaboration:** Based on open communication and honest straight talk, we have a “team-first” model in place to support a strong working relationship between our labor unions and our central / site-level management. The District Capacity Project, supporting school-based teams at Durfee and Talbot is an example.
- **Curriculum Leadership:** We have embedded content coaching and department head leadership at the site-level to support learning and teaching in the classroom.
- **Differentiated Professional Development:** We deliver needed professional development at the central and site levels using a scheduled delivery system that differentiates training based on need.
- **Parent Engagement:** Our Parent Information Center and its Parent Academy, coupled with school and department-based networks like PTO and SEPAC, are fully active and customer friendly in their support of the needs of students and families. District and school-based use of social media contribute to keeping everyone informed and excited about what is going on in our schools.
- **Community Partnerships:** We have a strong and growing network of community partners who collaborate with our neighborhood schools to provide a wide range of services in support of the social emotional, academic, and personal needs of our students and families.

- **School Committee Governance:** We have a high-functioning team focused on the governance and policy work of the school system that fully support schools, faculty / staff, students, and parents.

Systems of Support:

- **Schools:** Our schools are the true centers of the neighborhoods they serve within our larger community and we are fortunate to have made some excellent decisions historically to build new schools and replace old buildings, consolidating efficiencies and gaining economies of scale.
- **Standards-Based Instruction:** With curriculum maps in place in critical content areas (ELA, Math, Science, and PE/Wellness) at the elementary and middle school levels, we implement district-wide common benchmark assessments to measure progress towards mastery of the standards. Maps in ELA, Math, and Science are currently being revised, and we are at the developing stage of said maps in Social Studies.
- **Professional Learning Communities:** Driven by site-level Instructional Leadership Teams, we have PLC's in place at each of our schools. These school-based communities support teacher development around content knowledge and pedagogy.
- **Innovative Instruction:** Our faculty and staff use multiple modalities of practice to engage student learners in research-based pedagogy using differentiated methodologies.
- **Data Collection:** We have centralized systems to collect data and support the analysis of the data at the site level by instructional leadership teams.
- **Turn-Around Expertise:** We have demonstrated current and historical success in turning around failed schools as determined by DESE (Doran, Kuss, Watson, and soon to be Fonseca).
- **Extended Learning Time:** We have a track record of successfully leveraging extended learning time through core content and enrichment activities to improve student achievement results (Silvia, Doran, Kuss, Viveiros, Morton, Letourneau, Watson, and soon to be Fonseca).
- **New Teacher Induction and Mentoring:** Driven by leadership from within the FREA, this system of support for our newest teachers includes orientation meetings, classroom observations, peer group meetings, and regular meetings with an assigned mentor in the district.
- **Social Emotional Learning:** We have embraced the need to address students' emotional needs, have taken initial steps to build systems of structure and support aimed at strengthening lagging skills for our students, and continue to build capacity around trauma sensitive practices in our schools. This includes the traction we have achieved in implementing Responsive Classroom protocols at the pre-K - 8 levels.
- **Financial Stability:** Using zero-base budget practices, we have built trust through transparency around the strategic investments made to support learning and teaching and to build capacity within our system.
- **Collaboration with DESE:** We have been able to further our strategic goals, support school improvement work, and invest in innovation through technical assistance and grant support.
- **Advanced Placement and Advanced Work:** Our AP program at Durfee is award winning and our GATE program offers us an avenue for increasing student access to the most rigorous curriculum offerings.

- **Special Education:** Our inclusive practices and substantially separate programs coupled with various other practices aimed at support and intervention, allow us to provide a diverse continuum of services for our special needs students at all levels of the system from ages 3 to 22.
- **English Language Learner Instruction:** Rapid program expansion over the past few years has resulted in the district's increased ability to offer the best possible programs for identifying and supporting foundational language learners and exiting them into mainstream grade level programs.
- **Technology:** Our strategic investments in instructional technology and information systems have allowed us to meet the student learning needs of the 21st Century and allow for the full reporting functionality required by DESE.
- **Engineering/Science:** We have a vibrant Project Lead the Way (PLTW) model rolled out at the middle, high, and extended learning time elementary school levels to provide a continuum of learning in STE(A)M.
- **Career Vocational Technical Education:** We have a solid program of offerings at the HS level on which to build – one which will include our current school-to-career activities and allow for future expansion connected to the overall mission of our school system.
- **Student Re-Engagement Pathways:** We have strong alternative education pathway offerings, including RPA, our dual enrollment partnership with BCC, and those offered in partnership with community organizations such as People, Inc.
- **Robust Arts and Athletics:** We have award-winning arts programs and championship athletic teams at the middle and high school levels.

AREAS FOR GROWTH: The Fall River Public Schools is well positioned to engage in a long term strategic planning process to drill down and articulate the prioritization of initiatives that will increase internal capacity and institutional proficiency to accomplish the mission of the school system, close academic and opportunity achievement gaps, increase programmatic offerings and supports for students, and solve challenges through competent decision-making, sound planning, and further investment in growth. The findings as I have articulated them below are organized into four categories - Governance, Operations, Learning and Teaching, Engagement – and are presented as actions aimed at making improvements in each of these areas. I feel strongly, based on the triangularization of observational, anecdotal, and student achievement data that these represent the “big-picture” initiatives we should focus on strategically over the course of the next four years. It must be noted, the key element currently missing from the school system, and one thing that I have heard repeatedly over and over as a district-wide need, is “*Consistency*”. It is clear that fidelity of implementation is paramount in order for us to be successful in building a stable, highly-functional, supportive school system.

Governance:

- **Develop** a long-term strategic plan for the district – one that aligns goals, priorities, and initiatives under one umbrella and drives the collective work of the system.
- **Continue** to build each consecutive budget using zero-based practices to fund above minimum net school spending requirements.
- **Develop and implement** a written schedule to regularly revise and update School Committee policies using the new School Committee Policy Subcommittee.

Operations:

- **Use** the new long-term capital/facility master plan to strategically meet demands for growth in student enrollment and elementary school class-size reduction while tactically providing for the planning and delivery of routine preventative maintenance of district facilities in a prioritized and ongoing manner.
- **Compose and Implement** a framework to target low level-3 schools with additional student supports and redesign strategy components, including added resources, to turn around school achievement results so that we do not have any more schools designated as level-4 schools.
- **Fully implement** the DESE educator evaluation system and submit all necessary reports to DESE in a timely and organized manner.
- **Develop** a long-term human capital strategy focused on recruitment, on-boarding, retention, pipe-line development, and reduction of faculty, staff, and leadership turn-over. This should include a “grow-your-own” program as a diversity accelerator for faculty, staff, and leadership.
- **Create** a district organizational chart that clearly articulates oversight of instructional and operational leadership responsibilities.
- **Reduce** class sizes to a range of 22-26 at the K-5 grade levels, rolling out reductions over the next four years and planning in conjunction with the capital facility master plan.
- **Build** a transition pipeline for special needs students from the ages of 18-22, accessing the DHE ICE program, as well as offerings from Mass Rehab.
- **Post and Share** the district improvement plans and aligned school improvement plans on the district and site level webpages.

Learning and Teaching:

- **Develop and Implement** an articulated instructional framework - a dynamic model meant to build alignment, coherence, and consistency across all school sites and focused on best practices and capacity building at both the central and site levels.
- **Develop and Operationalize** an inclusive cross-functional district “learning and teaching” team that will steer and drive the coordination of district curriculum, instruction, and assessment systems while building a culture centered on the proficient use of data at the district, school, and classroom levels.
- **Develop and Implement** an aligned and more differentiated professional development model focused on the district’s instructional priorities as articulated in the instructional framework including: content, pedagogy, SEL, and strategies for inclusion and English language instruction.
- **Budget and Build** capacity with each consecutive budget cycle to support the oversight and coaching of curriculum, instruction, and assessment including more teacher-leadership positions.
- **Roll Out** a robust K1 (4-year-old) full-day early childhood program.
- **Create and Repurpose** an executive director of assessment, accountability, and student data research who serves on the senior staff - leading and coordinating all district efforts involving student achievement data, reporting, accountability, research, and analysis, and working at both the district and school levels.

- **Develop and Implement** a clear and consistent RTI model to identify, provide support for, and monitor the progress of struggling students.
- **Expand** our EL program strands at all levels of the system, growing strategically to meet the increasing needs of specialized language learning programs, exploring best-practices used in other high performing urban school systems in the Commonwealth.
- **Build** and expand special education programming and the capacity to deliver differentiated supports to meet the needs of students from ages 3 to 22, returning many students from out-of-district placements.
- **Create and Implement** a cadre of new coaching/support roles such as “teacher-leaders”, SPED inclusion coaches and community field coordinators working with at-risk students as re-engagement specialists (“street workers”).
- **Enhance** academic acceleration academies by extending learning time over winter/spring breaks and mandating summer school programming for struggling learners.
- **Study** the current world language program and make recommendations for strategic expansion to the School Committee for discussion and deliberation. Consider expanded offerings at both the MS and HS levels, including opportunities for the development of dual-language programs and offering students the Seal of Biliteracy.

Engagement:

- **Implement** the new district attendance policy, focusing on increasing communication, engagement, and targeted supports for struggling students.
- **Brand and Market** our school system to attract new students, maintain current students, and recruit human capital talent through active advertising strategies that “tell our story”.
- **Include and Embrace** a wider circle of parents through the provision of translators and language facilitators working within our parent engagement strategy and our district communication platform, recognizing that ease of communication is key to collaboration in a diverse community.
- **Develop and Implement** more clearly defined student school assignment zones building upon a foundation of high quality schools in every neighborhood and reducing transportation costs for reinvestment into school programming.
- **Establish** a district-wide task force on “respect for human difference” and steer a process of developing a “social justice” curriculum for all students K-12 working with community partners, as well as assess the current state of equality, diversity, and pluralism in core content materials.
- **Task** the health and wellness committee with working with community providers to develop and implement a curriculum program in sexual health education and decision making in grades 5-8.
- **Build** more alternative education pathway options for students, working with community partners to provide multiple access points for students to engage/re-engage and matriculate.

Next Steps:

1. Communicate the **Three Instructional Improvement Goals** and the **FRPS Learning and Teaching Framework** to support the consistent application of the instructional strategies to be driven across all levels of the system through the instructional leader teams and professional learning communities. This professional growth framework, rooted in research-

based best practice, will be the first step toward building an aligned and coherent instructional delivery model that will enable us to accelerate student learning and increase achievement results. The three district instructional goals will be the starting point for each school to develop their school improvement goals, each administrator to set their annual goals, and each faculty member to design their student learning and professional practice goals, all in support of the overarching “big picture” instructional goals. Toward that end, we have identified the following three instructional improvement goals:

***Literacy:** Graduates of the Fall River Public Schools will be able to access and use complex texts in a variety of forms including visual/performing arts and digital media technologies, demonstrating clear and concise mastery of content as proficient readers, writers, speakers, and listeners capable of using oral and written language to develop an argument and communicate as active civic participants of our democracy within a global community.

****Numeracy:** Graduates of the Fall River Public Schools will be able to apply reason, construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others, design and develop mathematical models, use appropriate tools, attend to precision, and look for and make use of structure and patterns - using these practices to make sense of problems and persevere in solving them as they communicate as active civic participants of our democracy within a global community.

*****Social/Emotional Learning:** Graduates of the Fall River Public Schools will possess the knowledge and skills of a healthy, resilient, engaged, and culturally proficient citizen who acts with integrity, empathy, respect, humility, and compassion towards self and others by practicing personal health and wellness and demonstrating proficiency as problem solvers, while serving as active civic participants of our democracy in a global community.

Following the School Committee meeting on July 18, 2017, we will use structured time at the Summer Leadership Institute in August to share and discuss the FRPS Learning and Teaching Framework and the leadership from each school will have designated team time to develop their school goals aligned to the overarching instructional goals.

2. The School Committee will meet in a retreat (using the entry plan areas for growth as a guide), to identify the five to six 2017-2018 district improvement goals from which they will hold the Superintendent accountable for progress towards implementation. The School Committee will use these five to six goals as part of the Superintendent’s 2017-2018 performance evaluation.
3. The Superintendent, in collaboration with and direction from, the School Committee, will begin a process to develop a long-term (four-year) strategic plan over the duration of the 2017-2018 school year. The strategic plan will be developed using the entry plan as a launch pad, and will include constituent input from community engagement, collaboration with district faculty, staff, leadership and associated labor union leadership and membership. The

Superintendent will establish a district wide “cross-functional team” to serve as the steering committee for this process and may contract with a technical assistance partner to co-facilitate the process with us. The Superintendent will present monthly updates to the School Committee with the anticipated conclusion of the final strategic plan presented to the School Committee in June 2018.

Conclusion:

School system improvement, especially in urban education, is hard work. There are no “quick fixes”, no “canned solutions”, and nobody better than we are - those of us working in the Fall River Public Schools - to actually take on, and complete - this thoughtful and skillful work. In 1513, Niccolo Machiavelli noted in *The Prince*, **“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”** District improvement is a marathon; some would argue an ultra-marathon or an “Ironman” triathlon. This is true, but the most important work we can engage in at this unique moment of time - in order to propel the future of our democracy, open the doors of access and opportunity, close achievement gaps, and increase the economic development possibilities for both Fall River and our Commonwealth - is constant incremental progress forward, one step at a time. The children that we serve are counting on us and we have no other option other than to serve with justice in our hearts, strategic planning at the forefront of our minds, and the tools of instructional improvement in our hands.

**Note: Thanks to all of the FRPS Leadership and Staff who offered outstanding contributions towards the development of this document with excellent feedback and suggestion. I especially want to single out, Dr. Tracy Curley, for her thoughtful and targeted editing and organizational skills.*