

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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TO: Andover School Committee Members
FROM: Sheldon H. Berman, Ed.D., Superintendent
SUBJECT: Superintendent End-of-Year Report on Standards for 2017-18
DATE: June 4, 2018

STANDARD 1: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by cultivating a shared vision that makes powerful teaching and learning the central focus of schooling.

This year has been a high point in instructional leadership. Over the past three years, I have focused on creating a shared vision, improving the quality of instruction, and strengthening the rigor and effectiveness of our curriculum. The effort to foster a shared vision began in my first year with our opening day activity, which focused on what inspires people about working in Andover. My second year, we followed up with an opening day activity to surface the passion and commitment people feel—a commitment they collectively expressed in our “We won’t stop until…” statement. Based on that work, we developed a theory of action that defined our vision, mission and strategic targets. We also launched a new and innovative agile strategic planning effort to focus our attention on those key strategies through which we could achieve our vision of a world-class, innovative and inclusive district. We documented that shared vision and direction in an “Andover Way” document (attached) that was distributed to staff and is now given to all new employees. It is also available on the website for parents and community members. The result of all of these efforts has been a shared vision and clear direction that focus on improving teaching and learning by creating caring and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, providing inclusive instruction, utilizing rigorous curricula, and monitoring progress to ensure we are achieving our goals for student results.

Throughout this year, my third in Andover, I continued to provide leadership and facilitation for the agile strategic planning process and the seven sprints that were launched at the end of last year. The sprints are targeted to advance student achievement, address the needs of students with learning challenges, provide a positive and productive learning environment, and expand authentic learning experiences to enrich and integrate our curriculum. The progress made in each of these sprints is well outlined in the end-of-year progress report on goals. The impact of the agile strategic planning process has been an empowering one for administrators and staff throughout the district as they help define and pursue next steps in critical areas. And the results have exceeded expectations. From the transition to a new high school schedule that went exceptionally smoothly to the enthusiasm of our elementary staff for integrating Responsive Classroom strategies into their daily routine, and from the growth in data use and a data-reflective culture throughout the district to the depth and thoroughness of our efforts to

address language-based learning difficulties, the agile planning process has set in motion improvements that lay a strong foundation for continued progress in the future.

It is also worth mentioning that our improvement efforts of prior years have remained positive contributions to teaching and learning—the accelerated middle school math pathway, the new elementary and middle school science curricula, and the iAndover 1:1 technology initiative. The very fact that these efforts have been successful and are producing positive results speaks well of the quality of the ideas we have introduced. Implementing new programs and strategies is seldom easy. It requires time and commitment. Staff are much more receptive to new challenges when they perceive that prior initiatives had a positive impact and that the initiatives are lending stability to the instructional and operational fabric of the district.

Our curricular improvement efforts have also served to substantially enhance the rigor, consistency and effectiveness of our academic instruction. That we have sustained curricular replacement and upgrading is, in itself, a major accomplishment. This past year we continued to strengthen the teaching of science through our new programs at the elementary and middle school levels. We continued providing professional development to support our new elementary writing program, which will also be implemented at the middle school level next year. Our literacy efforts, which are detailed in the end-of-year progress report, have been substantial. We have now selected a new core elementary literacy program and will be providing professional development to teachers over the next year so that they will be able to effectively implement the program in 2019-20. At the elementary level, we have slowed the adoption cycle so that teachers can go deeper into learning each new curricular program. This pacing has led to stronger support for curricular improvement efforts and better utilization of new curricula.

I am particularly pleased with our efforts to foster deeper and more authentic learning experiences for students. The New England Arts and Literacy (NEAL) initiative, the maker spaces at each of our schools, the professional development in design thinking that resulted in successful design activities in our schools, the evolution of the innovation lab at the high school to an IDEASTudio utilizing multiple spaces in the media center for coordinated programming, the expanding senior capstone initiative, the Portal and the increasing number of students participating in the Global Pathway, and Andover Coalition for Education's (ACE) hosting of our second annual Capstone Showcase have significantly expanded the opportunity for our students to experience authentic, integrated learning. The impact of these experiences on students has been profound, as they have found meaning and enjoyment in their learning. This work is growing organically, based on the interest of teachers and administrators, and is reflective of the very principles of learning that we are targeting for students.

Our assessment and progress monitoring efforts have also improved this year, particularly in the area of creating a data-reflective culture that uses data to enhance instruction and address individual student needs. Building on the initial efforts in using Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) in grades K through 5 last year, we provided extensive professional development in interpreting and using the results to modify instruction and provide appropriate interventions. We added the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment to provide better data on reading comprehension and mathematical understanding. Adding to these benchmark assessments, we have begun utilizing "just-in-time" learning and assessment software programs in both reading (Lexia) and math (Dreambox and Prodigy). As students use these programs, teachers receive ongoing data on the skills individual students have mastered and those they find challenging so that the teacher can intervene immediately to address each student's needs. We have also added a survey in the area of social-emotional learning so that we can better support a positive and productive school culture and climate that enable students

to perform at their best. Although we will need to continue our professional development and support for teachers in the use of these data, the data-reflective culture that is developing in the district will provide long-term benefits for our students. Working with our directors and principals, we will continue to strengthen our faculty's understanding of data and its application to instructional decision-making.

Another area that we strengthened over the past year is the effectiveness of our teacher evaluation process. In terms of the number of evaluations completed each year, we have improved from 55% in 2014-15 to 81% in 2015-16 to over 99% in 2016-17. We continue to build on the 2016-17 professional development program that included co-observation of classrooms with colleagues to bring consistency and meaning to our teacher evaluation process.

Leadership is personal as well as strategic. My visits to schools have served to personalize a shared vision of powerful teaching and learning. By including observations of as many classrooms as possible, meeting with the faculty to discuss their response to our improvement efforts and their concerns, and strategizing about instructional improvement with the principal, I have been able to appreciate the issues the faculty is confronting and the directions they believe are important. Because the staff at the high school is so large, this year I added visits to each department. The visits have given me a better understanding of the issues and directions that are most important to high school teachers and enabled me to get to know the faculty better and for them to get to know me better. Although these visits take a good deal of time, it has been a valuable investment in building connections across the district and a sense that we are one team working toward common goals.

Overall, our improvement efforts in instruction, curriculum and assessment are showing results. Our efforts to create a shared vision focused on high-quality instruction have continued to be successful. From our "Andover Inspires" poster, the "We won't stop until..." statements, and the "Andover Way" documentation of our vision and direction to the strategies embedded in our agile strategic planning, we have remained intentional in our improvement of teaching and learning.

STANDARD 2: MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, using resources to implement appropriate curriculum, staffing, and scheduling.

This year we made considerable gains in ensuring a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. Work on our facility plan represents a significant effort to improve the learning environment for students. Goal 2 of the End-of-Year Progress Report discusses the acceptance of West Elementary into MSBA's eligibility program, the progress of the AHS Feasibility Study Committee, the submission of a Statement of Interest to MSBA for the high school, and the improvements in building security. All of these efforts will have a major influence on the quality of our learning environments.

The capital projects supported in the FY18 Comprehensive Improvement Plan (CIP)—air conditioning and field access at High Plain and Wood Hill, doors at South, and audio enhancement for four elementary schools and one middle school—will also make a significant difference. The capital projects in the FY19 CIP are equally important as next steps to upgrade the learning environment throughout our schools. These planned projects include continuing the implementation of audio enhancement at other schools, evaluating Doherty's maintenance and

building conditions, updating the media center at Doherty and the cafeteria at West Middle, installing a chairlift at Shawsheen, and replacing the stage curtains at the Collins Center.

The effective use of resources is also key to Standard 2. Goal 6 of the End-of-Year Progress Report discusses the change in our budget process this year and the positive support we received for the proposed budget. Over the past three years we have focused our energy on ensuring that we provide a credible budget that demonstrates greater transparency and accountability in our expenditures. We have also enhanced our fiscal credibility by limiting staffing increases after the approval of the budget and by thoroughly documenting any changes in our budget. Although it is a challenge to turn around the impressions created by prior practices, our current budget process has produced a much more detailed and verifiable document, and we are committed to continue in this vein.

As part of our financial control and integrity efforts, we continued to make progress in managing our legal costs, although we again experienced an extraordinary number of requests for public records and student records, which consumed significant time on the part of our staff and attorneys. It is a credit to both the Student Services Office and our Finance Office that they made so much progress in their respective areas, even as they coped with the enormous workload created by these records requests.

In our drive to better align our budget with district needs, we have specifically targeted the use of resources to address critical improvement areas—adding elementary teachers to reduce class size in the FY17 budget, supporting the transition to the new high school schedule in the FY18 budget, and funding West Elementary’s feasibility study and the transition of textbooks from the CIP to the operating budget in the FY19 budget. Across all three years, we added resources focused on addressing the needs of students with language-based learning difficulties through progress monitoring tools, professional development, consultation services, and intervention materials. Of particular importance is the transfer of textbooks out of the CIP so that the CIP can focus on school maintenance issues. The success in adding 15 minutes to the school day in the negotiations with the AEA will constitute the target improvement effort for the FY20 budget.

Our human resource management continues to be a district-wide strength in sustaining and enhancing an effective learning environment. We maintained high standards for our staff and supported those who were in need of improvement as they either made changes to upgrade their performance or moved on. The district and school leaders we hired two years ago—Sara Stetson, Nancy Koch, Michelle Costa, Tracy Crowley, Caitlin Brown, Scott Darlington and Rebecca Perry—continue to demonstrate their leadership talent and effectiveness. We added Jason DiCarlo, Joanna Ganci, and Donna Ruseckas this year, all of whom are already making significant contributions to their schools and programs. To next year’s administrative team we will add Sandy Trach and Kathy Caron, both of whom are exceptional in experience and ability. We still have three positions to fill: an assistant principal, an elementary literacy program coordinator, and a communications coordinator. Given our track record and the district’s reputation, we anticipate that we will attract outstanding individuals for these positions as well.

Human resource management goes beyond bringing effective leadership to the system. It also entails creating a climate of support, growth and enthusiasm among staff. This past year we provided teachers, instructional assistants and administrators with extensive professional development that was responsive to staff requests and highly relevant to their positions and effectiveness. In addition, we supported teacher initiative and leadership in such areas as innovation, social-emotional learning, literacy, and math. Our hiring process is inclusive of the

voices of people who will be working with that candidate. We are focused on inspiring change and improvement as a part of each staff member's growth, rather than forcing change through directives. Personal attention, inclusiveness, and responsiveness matter when it comes to staff morale, and administration has exerted our best efforts to demonstrate all of these qualities on a consistent basis when interacting with staff in every facet of the organization. I firmly believe that the superintendent's presence at schools and events, as well as dialogues with faculty, are critical to a healthy and positive learning environment for both staff and students.

Overall, 2017-18 has been an extraordinarily demanding year with negotiations, budget development, facilities initiatives, and personnel matters. However, our operations and management have gone smoothly in spite of the number of tasks we undertook and the challenges we faced. The core administrative team continues to meet every Monday morning to coordinate our efforts. The SAT meets every other week to work through school and district decisions and directions. The All Administrator group meets four times during the year and participates in a four-day summer retreat. The inclusion of leaders in decision making and the collaborative development of district directions have been highly effective in coordinating our efforts, solving administrative problems in a positive manner, fostering pride and ownership, and moving the district forward.

STANDARD 3: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff through effective partnerships with families, community organizations, and other stakeholders that support the mission of the district and its schools.

The district continues to expand opportunities for family and community engagement and has set the stage for even greater growth in future years. The presence of the superintendent at events in the schools and in the community is key to promoting this engagement. I don't think it is necessary to repeat the discussion of events and meetings that I've provided to you throughout the year. I enjoy the opportunity to meet parents and community members at diversity nights, school plays, athletic events, foundation fundraising events, and meetings of community groups and town committees. I also joined the Rotary Club of Andover this year. My presence in schools and in the community has helped me strengthen the district's ties with families and the larger community.

Our partnerships with PTOs and PACs continue to be strong, as is our collaboration with ACE. The monthly Townwide PTO meetings continue to support effective communication and collaboration between the PTOs and PACs and the district. ACE has been a particularly important partner and has had its best year yet in terms of fundraising and support of district and school programs. By bringing the Portal to Andover, supporting our IDEASudio and Global Pathway, and providing grants to innovative teachers, ACE has enabled the district to promote innovation and engagement across the district. Having observed the impact of the Portal on family engagement at our diversity and international nights, I witnessed first-hand the excitement that our students and families experience as they understand how we are creating a whole new level of educational opportunity for our students. For example, at the High Plain and Wood Hill international event, students and parents crowded into the Portal as students co-created a song with a musician in Mexico City. ACE has also been pivotal in enhancing our partnerships with local businesses, particularly with Schneider Electric, Pfizer, and Raytheon. We anticipate that the number of such partnerships will expand in the coming years. In addition, I have participated in the events of numerous other organizations that are making a contribution to our schools, including the Andover Cultural Council, A Better Chance, Andover Rotary, the Service Club of Andover, Andona, Destination Imagination, and Andover Center for History and

Culture. Collaborating with the Service Club of Andover and many local businesses on the second Credit for Life Fair is a great example of the ways we continue to build stronger relationships with local area businesses and organizations.

The greatest expansion in family engagement this year has resulted from our efforts to reach out to families who emigrated from other countries. Four of our elementary schools and one middle school sponsored a family international, diversity or heritage night that attracted and engaged a broad range of families, many of whom were reluctant to participate in traditional school events. The fifth elementary school will host one of these family nights in the fall. High Plain and Wood Hill PTO took the lead in forming an Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity Alliance (IDEA) that has already raised funds for the school library to purchase books representing the schools' diverse cultures. High Plain has also begun offering English language classes for adults. These efforts have been successful in engaging our diverse parent community as well as in enhancing overall parent engagement.

Our relationships with various town departments also continue to be strong. Both Paul Szymanski and I served on town screening committees for positions such as the new Director of Facilities, Assistant Town Manager, and Town Accountant. Our collaboration with Municipal Services was critical this year, given the number of inclement weather days and power outages. Our collaboration with the Facilities Department on the development of the CIP and the Statement of Interest for Andover High School, as well as on the implementation of a variety of maintenance and improvement projects, has served the district well. For example, it was through our collaboration with the Facilities Department that the high school was able to remove some unused lockers to create a gathering space on the third floor of the high school. We have also collaborated extensively with the Police Department on ALICE drills, new safety and security measures, and a number of challenging student issues. Although the Economic Development Council has not met very often this year, the Planning Department has continued to support our efforts to better understand economic and housing growth trends in Andover as we completed the demographic study for the high school and the enrollment projections for West Elementary. Community Services and the district continue to collaborate on after-school programming, and Andover Youth Services continues to be a partner in our innovation efforts, providing space for events like the Global Summit and the Senior Showcase. Finally, there is close collaboration with IT and Human Resources on a daily basis. My relationship with the Town Manager remains a positive one, as exemplified in our collaboration on the budget, the CIP, and the transition of textbooks to the operating budget. All of these internal operational relationships provide the community with more cohesive and mutually supportive town-school services, simultaneously increasing the community's confidence in the way its tax dollars are being expended.

Our relationships with state legislators have been particularly important this year, given the underfunding of the Circuit Breaker. Those relationships were key in facilitating the restoration of some funding to the Circuit Breaker Fund this year and ensuring that next year's reimbursement is closer to the 75% level. I have also been working with other state-level groups as a superintendent representative on the Coalition for Special Education Funding.

Communication enhances family and community engagement. I reported extensively on our communication efforts in Goal 5, so won't repeat that information here. We have significantly expanded communications for special education parents. Our Connect5 messages on respect for diversity and other issues facing the district have received overwhelmingly positive responses, helping to reinforce the alignment of district and community standards. We have also expanded state and national visibility for our work through articles and reports in national

publications. Recently, we set the stage to take a giant step forward in this area with the hiring of a Communications Coordinator. Through these efforts, the district continues to make visible to others the important and innovative work that is enhancing and enriching student learning and performance.

The work of the AHS Feasibility Study Committee is a great example of the success of our engagement efforts. This committee represents a diverse set of stakeholders, including parents whose engagement has been vital to the committee's work. They have spent hundreds of hours working on options for the community to consider. They have held forums and meetings with town boards and are setting in motion a communication plan for the fall to further engage the community. The ownership that each member has taken of the mission, along with each member's commitment to the work of the committee, have been the moving forces behind this committee's high-quality work. It is by engaging and supporting groups such as this committee, ACE, and High Plain PTO's IDEA that we build community and parent engagement and pride.

Our presence, partnerships and communication have enabled the district to be more successful in our family and community engagement efforts and more inclusive of the broad range of families whom we serve. Not only have we created a more responsive and inclusive climate, but we are also finding more meaningful ways to engage parents and the community.

STANDARD 4: PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by nurturing and sustaining a districtwide culture of reflective practice, high expectations, and continuous learning for staff.

Of the four standards encompassed by the evaluation, I cannot overstate the importance of professional culture to the overall performance of the school district. A positive professional culture is one in which staff feel supported to do their best work, know their ideas are valued, feel acknowledged for their efforts, and are able to grow in professional expertise. Over the past year, the administration has continued to exert our best effort at developing and nurturing that kind of environment. From year-opening and year-closing meetings that create a sense of community, to professional development in areas of staff interest and concern, to listening to staff ideas and engaging them in decision-making processes, we have made numerous efforts to foster a strong professional culture throughout Andover.

Examples of this work abound, including my visits to schools and to departments at the high school to get to know staff and hear their concerns, the literacy curriculum advisory that has reviewed literacy programs and offered a recommendation, the elementary report card task force that is reworking the report card and parent reporting process, the screening committee for the assistant superintendent and other leadership positions that engaged a broad range of constituents, the teams of teachers across grade levels working to draft a new elementary social studies curriculum, the monthly labor relations meetings with the AEA leadership, the leadership and initiative shown by the seven sprint teams in advancing the district's vision, and the administrative team who meet bi-weekly to address important school and district issues. The involvement of staff has not only happened in district committees but during data meetings, faculty meetings, department meetings and other venues for faculty engagement and collaboration. As a matter of course, we strive to create an environment of respect and appreciation for our staff, and we seek their engagement in the decisions of the district and their collective ownership of the district's direction.

Providing meaningful opportunities for professional growth is a key element of professional culture. Staff members need to feel that the professional development is appropriately targeted and effective in helping them address areas of concern and areas they wish to explore more deeply. This year's professional development has been both targeted and highly productive. We focused primarily on key areas of concern that would make a meaningful difference and that would have continuity with last year's efforts: 1) advancing staff understanding of language-based learning difficulties and how to best respond to children who are experiencing these difficulties; 2) effectively using data to track and promote progress in reading; 3) utilizing universal design for learning strategies to enhance access by all students to the curriculum; and 4) fostering the social-emotional wellbeing of students. We also provided targeted professional development for particular groups, such as specific language-based learning strategies for our LEAP teachers or behavior management and de-escalation strategies for some of our instructional assistants who are training to become Registered Behavior Technicians. The district's investment in professional development and consultation services was the highest it has been in many years, and reports from teachers, IAs and other staff have noted how valuable these experiences have been in enhancing their professional skills. We have also attempted to enhance the meaning of these experiences by showing how they are directly tied to the four strategic target areas identified in our theory of action and agile strategic plan: inclusive instruction, caring and culturally responsive classrooms and schools, rigorous curriculum, and progress monitoring. In this way, we continue to collectively focus on our vision and bring greater clarity to our direction.

On opening day of the 2016-17 school year, Jon Saphier from Research for Better Teaching talked with staff about creating "a culture of non-defensive self-examination of practice." Our work in professional development, as well as our approach to teacher and administrator evaluation, continues to reflect that theme. Evaluations sometimes become pro forma experiences devoid of meaning. While ensuring that all staff are evaluated, we also want to ensure that the evaluation process is one that promotes growth. Collectively, as administrators, we have pursued that goal throughout this school year. Our coherence and consistency across such venues as committees, faculty meetings, professional development sessions, and evaluations have been key to making effective progress and creating a positive learning and working environment for staff.

Andover has a long history of setting high expectations for staff and students alike. All of the above-mentioned efforts reflect opportunities we have utilized to set a tone of high expectations. However, our efforts, outlined here and under standard 1, are also directed toward inspiring people to take risks, grow and innovate. Those behaviors happen when people are valued and appreciated—not just through awards or celebrations, but also through the simple notice accorded their daily efforts. I am pleased that I have continued to receive invitations this year to visit classrooms and observe new initiatives that teachers are pursuing or to observe demonstrations of student work on projects. Those invitations reflect the safety and appreciation people feel and their willingness to take risks. Andover takes pride in its strong faculty who set high expectations for themselves and for each other. They could continue simply doing what they are already doing and they would be considered successful. Instead, this faculty is motivated to tackle such challenges as addressing the needs of students with dyslexia, making the curriculum more accessible, and bringing authentic learning experiences into the curriculum. Through our approach to professional culture, I believe we are inspiring people to take on challenges and explore new areas, and in that way, add excitement to and enhance the meaning of their work. Through these efforts we have attempted to honor both our accomplishments and our staff, to engage staff in the ongoing conversation about our direction

and aspirations, to provide opportunities for reflection, and to encourage pride and foster commitment to our mission.

In closing, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that this reflection is not just about my own work. The collaboration between a group of thoughtful and dedicated leaders and a talented and committed staff continues to advance our district's performance. A good part of the work I do each day is to support and encourage them in their efforts. At times, I am the facilitator of these efforts, and at other times I'm simply a cheerleader acknowledging the many powerful achievements I see around me. We have an impressive and thoughtful staff and administration who work together well, complemented by parents and school committee members who are incredibly dedicated and supportive. This unity is a strength of the district and a great gift to the community. I appreciate the support and assistance all of these people have provided to me in my role as superintendent. The progress we have made this year is a credit to all who have given so much to the children of Andover. It is an honor to be part of this team.

Attachment

The Andover Way: A Culture of Learning, Teaching and Leading