MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUPERINTENDENT’S PLAN OF ENTRY

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Introduction

During the interview process, the Montclair Board of Education communicated its priorities for the leadership qualities sought in a superintendent. Those qualities included a strong commitment to a ‘student first’ philosophy, a vision for continuous improvement, and the ability to plan for improved student outcomes.

A successful partnership for school governance requires shared commitments; it has become clear that my experiences and values are well aligned with the goals of the Board of Education and the Montclair school community. As a teacher, principal, district and state leader my focus on creating the best possible school system for students has never wavered: I care about kids and beyond that I firmly believe all students have the ability to achieve at the highest levels if afforded the opportunity. For a school district to successfully provide that opportunity, a mindset of continuous improvement is necessary. In addition, a robust system of support and accountability, collaboratively developed with educators, provides necessary guideposts to move a system toward excellence. My experiences successfully executing strategic plans, and offering the supports necessary for continuous improvement, prepare me to collaboratively engage with the Montclair Public Schools community toward our common vision of educational excellence.
In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey makes the case that leaders must “first seek to understand, then to be understood”. The transition activities outlined in this plan are intended to allow for deep understanding of the context of public education in Montclair, the immediate and long-term challenges and opportunities we face and the hopes and dreams of the Montclair Public School community.

This Plan of Entry reflects my strong desire to make a thoughtful and deliberate entry into this diverse and high achieving school district. It provides the necessary time to listen and learn about the Montclair Public Schools and work collaboratively to develop, articulate and execute an educational vision for the future. High quality instruction and successful student learning are the keys to achieving our collective educational mission. This plan is organized to gather a great deal of information, input, and ultimately gain insight into how best to strengthen and build upon the current and historical success of the Montclair Public Schools.
Goals

This entry plan seeks to accomplish the following goals:

→ Commence a smooth transition of leadership
→ Create a structure to listen broadly and learn comprehensively about MPS
→ Ensure multiple perspectives and voices are heard
→ Create the foundation for a vision of the future and strategic planning process
→ Establish a strong working relationship with the Board of Education
→ Purposely and carefully structure the transition as a first step toward continuous improvement of instruction and student achievement measures for all students

Outcomes/Deliverables

The expected results of this entry plan include:

→ A 90 Days of School report on observations, findings and an approach for collaboratively developing a compelling vision for the future of Montclair Public Schools (based on 90 school days, a report should be expected in early April 2013)
→ The outline of a strategic planning process to develop a three-year strategic plan including measurable objectives and defined strategies
Structure

The most important part of entry is engaging in purposeful efforts to listen, learn, and begin to develop plans in collaboration with the Board and the Montclair Public School community. The following activities are the core components of this plan:

→ School visits
→ Meetings and at least one retreat with the Board of Education
→ One-on-one interviews with key stakeholders (Mayor, elected officials, union leaders, and local foundation e.g. the MFEE)
→ Community forums for parents, students, educators and other community leaders
→ Data analysis and document review
→ Media engagement and an internal/external communication analysis
→ Explore the utilization of outside resources to assist with analyses

A. School Visits

It is important to spend as much time as possible in each school listening and learning from teachers, school leaders, students and parents. Therefore, the plan allows for a full day and evening to be spent with each school community.

Teachers

Teachers are the cornerstone of our school system.
I need to comprehensively understand and leverage the expertise and perspectives of
Montclair’s teachers. One or more focus groups of teachers will be invited to join me for lunch and conversation about the strengths, challenges and opportunities they see for their school and the District.

School leaders

A strong instructional leader and leadership team is necessary for a school to support all students in achieving at high levels. The principal and leadership team will have the opportunity to share data demonstrating school and student level successes and challenges. In addition, input on district level resources and supports will be gathered to inform the continuous improvement of those services to our schools.

Students

No one knows more about what happens in classrooms and schools than the students and teachers who inhabit them. Therefore, each school visit will include a student focus group to give me the opportunity to learn what students see as successes and challenges in their school and hear their expectations of the education they receive.

Parents

Montclair parents, like all parents, care deeply about the education of their children. The school district is a pillar of the community that attracts diverse families seeking a high quality educational experience for their children. I intend to capitalize on the power of parental engagement to ensure the district is meeting every student’s needs; I will solicit input and ideas from parents in an evening meeting to follow each school visit.
B. Board of Education

The Board of Education members have conveyed to me their deep commitment, which I share, to providing a high quality education to all of the children in Montclair Public Schools. Therefore, during this entry period, we will work together to examine, discuss, clarify, and agree on the philosophy and mechanics of our working relationship. Through a series of discussions, and at least one Board retreat, we will work together to address:

→ Communication protocols
→ Roles and responsibilities
→ Performance evaluation criteria
→ Agenda setting
→ Protocols and processes for addressing constituent concerns
→ A process for developing a shared vision for the future of the Montclair Public Schools and the foundational goals for reaching that vision
C. Central Office/School Supports

To meet the needs of all students in the Montclair Public Schools, it is critical that central office functions are “best in class” and provide outstanding service to the schools. I will work alongside central office leadership to:

→ Review major initiatives underway, successes and significant or potential problems in each area, and major decisions that need to be made in the next month, three months and six months
→ Review the scope and breadth of the MPS curriculum as well as the degree of alignment to the rigorous requirements of the Common Core State Standards
→ Review the effectiveness of the district information-data management system with a special focus on student achievement, budget and human resources
→ Review all functions around talent acquisition and development as part of the review of the human resource department

D. Educator, Parent, Student and Community Meetings

Several community forums will be held during this 90 day Plan of Entry. These forums will provide opportunities for educators, parents, students, community members and other interested parties to provide input, ideas and perspectives on the Montclair Public Schools. The meetings will include at least ten *Kitchen Table Conversations* where community members will have the opportunity to host me in their home to meet with family members, neighbors and friends to discuss their aspirations for the education of their children as well as what they see to be the strengths and opportunities to improve the schools. Student government organizations will be engaged to plan opportunities for the student voice to be a powerful part of this plan. Union leadership will be asked to collaborate in the planning of forums where educators and staff will feel most comfortable sharing their thoughts regarding the strengths of and challenges faced by the school system.
E. Data Analysis and Document Review

Multiple data sources, particularly student achievement data, will be analyzed in order to discern trends, patterns, areas of accomplishment and areas for additional focus. Student outcomes on state assessments, graduation rates, Advanced Placement course enrollment, testing and passing rates, SAT and ACT scores, and National Clearinghouse data on college entrance and success rates as well as other relevant indicators will be reviewed. All data will be disaggregated (race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, special education, English Language Learner) and student growth data will be reviewed in alignment with the District and Board goals of improving academic achievement for all students.

The Board and District goals of achieving equity and improving efficiency of all programs will inform the review of district resources and administrative metrics. The current budget development process will be assessed, as well as the performance of central office staff in meeting professional goals as aligned to district goals. Departmental organization charts, job descriptions, resumes of key personnel, and the current compensation matrix will be thoroughly examined.

Written reports and presentations on MPS resource use, personnel, organization, magnet structure, leadership and/or academic outcomes will be read and considered.
F. Technology/Innovations

To leverage technology and other innovative ideas for promoting efficient operations and effective teaching and learning practices, an audit of the District’s technology infrastructure and current use in these areas will be completed. These findings will inform the development of the strategic plan framework.

G. Media Engagement

I will work to engage local and regional media through introductory interviews. I will ask local media outlets to continue and enhance their coverage on key educational issues to help create and sustain a substantive public conversation about the future of the Montclair Public Schools. In addition, I will seek to understand both the internal and external communications opportunities.

H. Additional Assistance & Resources

I may, in consultation with the Board, engage outside resources to assist in evaluation and/or analyses of programs, functions or initiatives that may require additional attention or represent significant complexity. If deemed necessary and appropriate, services may be leveraged through local, regional or national businesses, universities, organizations, individuals, associations or foundations to assist with exploring areas of accomplishment, weakness or opportunity.
Conclusion

As the Superintendent of the Montclair Public Schools, this entry plan will afford me the opportunity to listen and learn from a vast array of MPS stakeholders and gain a deeper understanding of the context and structure of public education in Montclair. This entry plan will help me begin to formulate ideas and strategies to strengthen, intensify and build upon the Montclair Public School’s distinguished record of student success.

It is important to note that this plan of entry takes place during a unique time in K-12 public education. Over the next few years, New Jersey will be among 45 states implementing the Common Core State Standards. These standards emphasize rigorous math and literacy expectations in order to prepare all students for college and career. The New Jersey State Assessments will be replaced by a new assessment system currently under development by a multi-state consortium, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. Student growth measures will be integrated into a more clear and effective system for evaluating teachers and principals. Technology will continue to evolve at lightning speed, opening up new possibilities for the context of communication, productivity, and the learning environment.

I firmly believe that these changes offer the Montclair Public School System a unique opportunity to leverage additional learning opportunities from across the nation and state focused on increasing rigorous and engaging instruction. Through these opportunities we can build upon our instructional strengths and realize our collective goal of supporting all students to achieve at high levels, preparing them for success in college and a rewarding career.

I look with eager anticipation toward working with the community to move the school system ever closer to excellence. Let us begin.