

NOTE regarding preparation and process for this evaluation

This report is based on a compilation of five individual End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation Reports written by: Bill Hurley, Margaret Coppe, Judy Crocker, Alessandro Alessandrini and Jessie Steigerwald. Steigerwald received all five by June 19, 2015, and prepared a draft compilation, which she distributed by email to the full School Committee, and also sent the individual evaluations by email in advance of the June 22 meeting. At his request, all documents were sent to Dr. Ash. Dr. Ash emailed feedback regarding the draft. Steigerwald conferred with counsel and replied that all feedback would require public deliberation. The draft was discussed in open session on June 22, 2015. Hurley chaired the meeting in Steigerwald's absence and invited Dr. Ash to share his feedback. The committee deliberated on the requested changes. By vote of 3 – 1 (Crocker in the minority), some changes were approved.

Complete End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation Report for Dr. Ash for 2014-2015

This is Dr. Ash's tenth year in Lexington.

In 2012 Part I of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation was designed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and included Superintendent Evaluation models for School Committee use. As chair, I provided a copy of the "Implementation Guide for Superintendent Evaluation" to all School Committee members to provide instructions for this annual evaluation of Dr. Paul Ash and we all agreed to use the same tool. Members completed a separate End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation and provided them to me between June 9, 2015 and June 19, 2015. Implementation procedures require the chair or a designee to compile the individual reports into one report. Some members provided very brief or no comments. I have tried to include comments on each section to give Dr. Ash more than just a rating.

The regulations require "all educators to take a leading role in shaping their professional growth and development... assess their own performance and propose challenging goals ... collect evidence and present conclusions about their performance, progress on their goals, and their impact on student learning, growth, and achievement." (p. 3) Further, "the superintendent evaluation process is a public process." (p.3)

DESE provides clear standards for evaluation ratings and these are the meanings for the three different ratings that were utilized by members in their individual evaluations:

- *Proficient* performance is understood to be fully satisfactory. For the superintendent, and all other administrators as well as teachers, this is the rigorous expected level of performance. It is a demanding, but attainable level of performance.
- *Exemplary* performance represents a level of performance that exceeds the already high standard of Proficient. A rating of Exemplary is reserved for performance on an indicator or standard that is of such a high level that it could serve as a model for leaders regionally or statewide. Few educators—superintendents included—are expected to earn Exemplary ratings on more than a handful of Indicators.

- A rating of *Needs Improvement* represents performance that is below the requirements of a standard but is not considered to be Unsatisfactory at the time. Improvement is necessary and expected. For new educators, performance is on track to achieve proficiency within three years.

The model requires written comments for ratings of Exemplary, Unsatisfactory or Needs Improvement. It is not enough to just check off a box; evaluators are asked to do more if they wish to select anything besides Proficient. And, if written comments are not provided along with the three listed ratings, the Chair “is encouraged to discount the ratings.” One evaluator felt that Dr. Ash exceed all expectations and was exemplary in every category. This evaluator did provide brief comments, but did not provide extensive examples or information. One evaluator felt that Dr. Ash needed improvement in specific areas. That evaluator provided detailed comments with specific examples. One evaluator selected both proficient and exemplary in several instances, but did not provide any written comments. For those instances, I treated the ratings as proficient based on the Implementation Guide’s direction. The spirit of the entire evaluation system is based on the idea that educators, including superintendents, are lifelong learners and that each person aspires to improve in each cycle. The implementation guidelines states: “A primary purpose of the five-step evaluation cycle is continuous improvement. Thoughtful feedback is important for continuous improvement.”

For the future, it may be helpful if each individual evaluator takes the time to include some “thoughtful feedback” as these comments may be more valuable than a rating without comments. It also adds a sense of five members’ voices in a document that strives to capture the combined view of the full committee.

Dr. Ash selected specific goals for himself and presented these to the School Committee for input in fall 2014. A Mid-Cycle Goals Review took place on April 28, 2015 and Dr. Ash provided an End-of-Cycle and Summative Evaluation on May 26, 2015. In future years, the mid-cycle evaluation should take place at the actual mid-cycle.

Evidence

The Model suggests that superintendents collect evidence described in their action plan and other evidence gathered throughout the year to present to the School Committee. Dr. Ash presented both a Mid-cycle and end-of-cycle report on his progress. Additional evidence was not presented by Dr. Ash to the School Committee at these public review sessions. The School Committee has, however, had the opportunity to review many of the following suggested types of evidence throughout the year:

- School committee agendas, materials, and minutes
- Observations of the superintendent “in action” at school committee meetings, in forums with faculty, and in community events
- Budget presentations and reports
- Samples of newsletters, local media presentations, and other community awareness and outreach efforts
- District and school improvement plans
- Enrollment analyses

Other evidence that could help the School Committee in the future:

- Staffing analyses
- External reviews and audits
- Superintendent’s analysis of educator practice and student learning goals
- Samples of leadership team agendas the superintendent selects

Direction to the Chair

The school committee chair compiles the End-of-Cycle Evaluation Reports compiled by each member of the school committee and prepares a single summative evaluation based on the preponderance of individual ratings.

Professional Practice: Met

Ratings included: Significant Progress, Met, Exceeded

Dr. Ash’s original Professional Practice Goal was related to doing research on data teams. In April, the School Committee agreed with Dr. Ash that this goal should be replaced.

We agreed that the new Professional Practice goal should be to work with the incoming superintendent to provide a smooth transition. In addition, to this end, Dr. Ash added the goal to hire an Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Operations, and Director of Educational Technology.

In terms of the goal to hire an Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Operations (after Mary Ellen Dunn announced she was taking a new position in Brookline), and Director of Educational Technology (after Tom Plati announced his retirement), both searches were unable to bring in qualified new candidates to fill the positions. Dr. Ash recommended seeking another waiver from the state to retain the current Director of Technology and recommended promoting a current employee to a new position between his current assignment and the role of the Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Operations.

On the hiring goal, member comments focus attention on the long-term management of the technology position and the need for succession planning:

“I would have hoped that the Superintendent would have developed other creative solutions rather than relying solely on apply for a critical shortage waiver from the state” after conducting the original search. Some progress has been made in hiring.

“Lexington needs to have a succession plan [for the technology position] and I hope administration will support in-house staff who may be interested in advancing, or a review and possible restructure of this department to make sure that we can properly support the significant investment taxpayers have made in technology infrastructure, equipment and staff.”

“... it is not clear how to evaluate the superintendent’s role in the search outcome [of the Finance and Business Operations position]. I am glad we will have continuity, but in an ideal world it would have been helpful to attract a person to fill all aspects of the outgoing ASFB.”

Student Learning: Met

Ratings included: Significant Progress, Met and Exceeded

Dr. Ash proposed to help improve student pro-social behaviors and resiliency to reduce unhealthy stress to then help improve student academic performance.

He also cross-referenced this Student Learning goal with Standard 2, so these comments may be applied to both.

Evidence presented by Dr. Ash to support progress on his key actions includes:

- (1) supported staff recommendations to add to the FY16 budget the following positions: .5 social workers to each elementary school, one high school guidance counselor, .5 guidance counselor at Bridge and .4 HS special education social worker and .4 HS general education social worker; and
- (2) reviewed the draft report of the School Committee's subcommittee Ad Hoc Committee for Youth at Risk and participated in garnering school department support for a future coalition-approach to supporting youth in and outside schools.

A superintendent is in a unique position to reach a wide variety of stakeholders, and can utilize a position of instructional leadership to impact an entire educational system. The urgency to address unhealthy behaviors reported in the past three Youth Risk Behavior Surveys is conveyed through statistics on suicide ideation, alcohol and marijuana use, and student reports of self-injury or lack of sleep. The evidence the superintendent cited for this year's evaluation did not convey specific impact he (his leadership) has had on this year's students in terms of advances in their pro-social behaviors or reductions to their unhealthy stress.

There must have been some progress made during this academic year – we can ascertain this from hearing the guidance department's report – but it would have been helpful in preparing for this evaluation to present some data to the School Committee. We did request formal reports as required by the Anti-Bullying policy. This could provide one data point for the School Committee – if there were reductions in the number of incidences, for example. Data also might be obtained from the nurses, or from teachers, guidance counselors, or principals. Also, any workshops, professional development or other efforts to impact students during this calendar year – from work with Peer Leadership, or other programs, could be brought to attention here if the superintendent has made a connection with those efforts, or supported them through the budget or in other ways. This type of evidence would support a data-driven system.

Looking forward, Dr. Ash has worked with the School Committee to help build a bridge toward a fall effort to try a coalition approach to support student stress.

District Improvement: Met

Ratings included: Some Progress, Met and Exceeded

In prior evaluations we have noted that Dr. Ash works with a very strong team of educators throughout the Lexington Public Schools. All nine principals and the director of our pre-Kindergarten program, in addition to the administrative leaders in the Central Office and in our buildings, and the entire staff of the Lexington Public Schools all play a role in addressing our annual District Goals – administrators, teachers, support staff, custodians, special education staff, librarians, specialists, department heads -- everyone. As the superintendent, all of their efforts help reflect on the progress made under his leadership and the School Committee appreciates the entirety of the efforts of everyone working with our students, along with Dr. Ash's unique contributions as the leader of the system.

1. Improve Academic Performance for All Students
2. Improve Social & Emotional Program Supports for All Students

1 and 2 are ongoing goals. Significant progress has taken place this year. LHS has begun to tackle major stress-inducers, including homework and working out a pilot to bring back an honors level science class. This work is very much appreciated. The School Committee was not able to complete a revision of the existing Homework Policy during this year's Policy Manual Review Process though more than 80 people provided input and suggestions. Partnership from the administration is required to move this forward and it is helpful to see that Dr. Ash has included a goal for the 2015-2016 District Goals to have a revised policy in place by June 2016. Assessments, returning tests, and the impact of technology-based homework also need to be addressed and may further the goals of improving academic performance while also reducing unhealthy stress. Dr. Ash has been open to these conversations throughout the year and that helps move the conversation forward.

Lexington Learns, championed and organized by Carol Pilarski and Len Swanton, and supported by Dr. Ash, was a major new initiative during the 2014-2015 year and the opportunity to have our LPS staff support and inspire each other is one we are excited to see continue next year. In addition, staff support for the Lexington Parents Academy was another new initiative that extended our school and community resources in the interests of students. Both of these efforts helped support Goals 1 and 2.

3. Improve Safety for All Students

Three members recognized and expressed appreciation for the ALICE training taking place and the collaboration between LPS, Mary Ellen Dunn and the Police and Fire Departments.

4. Refine and Implement the First Phase of the District's Master Plan

See further comments below. Pat Goddard, Director of Facilities, embraced the unprecedented challenges associated with the multi-school, multi-level facilities challenges caused by overcrowding.

Overall Performance: Proficient

Individual evaluations ranged from Needs Improvement to Exceeded, but the preponderance was Proficient.

Dr. Ash is a highly knowledgeable superintendent. He has an excellent grasp of budget finance, labor relations, and government mandates and is a strong advocate for professional learning.

After announcing his retirement date of June 30, 2015, Dr. Ash continued to work diligently throughout the entire year. This continuous energy helped move the LEA contract forward, provided progress on the Master Plan and complex follow-up, and continued the ongoing annual improvement efforts that have been part of his service during the last ten years.

While it is clear that Dr. Ash has the best interest of the district in mind, his actions are not consistent. He has not always demonstrated continuous collaborative leadership.

Members noted the complexity of the capital projects and shared both praise for the energy Dr. Ash was able to commit to the Master Plan process and additional meetings required to process multiple rounds of input from architects and staff. Concerns were noted around the need for more even support for the School Committee during this process, including during the fall Summits when there appeared to be a breakdown in communications at points.

Lexington's academic needs and increasing need for attention to social-emotional and mental health issues are demanding in themselves. Under Dr. Ash's leadership, the staff has grown, our Special Education programs have grown, and the daily operations is for an increasingly large number of staff and students. There is no question that the demand for more facility space has been on the front burner this year and will remain.

Standard I: Instructional Leadership E: Data-Informed Decision Making -- Proficient

The preponderance was proficient.
Ratings included proficient and one exemplary.

Comments included:

“Dr. Ash worked with the Director of Planning and Assessment (new position), continued working with Enrollment Working Group on enrollment forecasting.”

Enrollment Working Group was an effective means of incorporating residents with special expertise to help with data-informed decision making. While they did focus on forecasting student enrollments, several times School Committee members asked for the administration to work with EWG and our Special Education program experts to deepen this approach and help us understand how to understand the specific impact on our special

education programs so we can use space wisely and make sure that we are planning for future growth in programs ranging from the Intensive Learning Program to our social & behavioral focused programs to our programs focusing on neural processing challenges to dyslexia. As the year is ending we are glad the Superintendent is now trying to work on this as we believe we need the information to plan for all of our students. It was frustrating to have to ask multiple times for this information and to feel it was not going to be possible to obtain it.

Standard II: Management and Operations A: Environment -- Proficient

Develops and executes effective plans, procedures, routines and operational systems to address a full range of safety, health, emotional, and social needs of students.

The preponderance was proficient.

Ratings included proficient and one exemplary.

Dr. Ash referenced his Student Learning Goal for key actions and evidence for this standard. He interpreted this standard in alignment with his support for the Guidance curriculum review and social-emotional concerns.

Three members also noted Mary Ellen Dunn's work with principals, the Police Department and Fire Department on ALICE training as an area they were pleased with.

Standard III: Family and Community Engagement D: Family Concerns-- Proficient

Addresses family concerns in an equitable, effective, and efficient manner.

The preponderance was proficient.

Ratings included: Needs Improvement, Proficient and Exemplary.

Dr. Ash narrowed this goal to focus specifically on parent engagement and family concerns around K-12 overcrowding.

Comments:

“Dr. Ash visited multiple schools to discuss enrollment growth and capacity needs. Many of these were night meetings and he did not complain about any of the added meetings. His energy was appreciated.”

“While Dr. Ash exhibited due diligence in all steps of the process, some of the completed key action steps were not achieved without added layers of community and committee angst which I strongly feel should and could have been avoided.”

As the overcrowded conditions continued from last year, the superintendent and School Committee had the opportunity to hear family concerns regarding use of / loss of specialist space at the elementary level. In spring 2014 the superintendent presented a proposal to the School Committee to avoid taking an art room at Fiske – and the School Committee approved the proposal, with multiple members expressing the value that

specialist space should be preserved. In comments about this year, one member noted that “Dr. Ash failed to inform the School Committee that some elementary schools currently do not follow one of the School Committee’s criteria for dedicated specialist space at all schools. The School Committee learned of this discrepancy from public comments made by one such school’s principal during a School Committee meeting (Sept 2014). When asked if he was aware of this practice, he replied yes but had no comment on why the School Committee was not informed.” Part of addressing family concerns in an “equitable, effective and efficient manner” can be interpreted to bring known community concerns to the attention of the School Committee.

Another noted: “The superintendent demonstrated proficiency in many areas of family engagement. In my judgment he would move to a rating of exemplary if he gave more weight to the concerns of families whose concerns do not rise to the level of his personal priorities. Overall, Dr. Ash has been highly engaged in some very specific areas with a few important committees.”

One member noted exemplary because “Dr. Ash served on the Ad Hoc School Master Planning Committee and worked closely with SMMA to address recommendations of that committee that addressed over-crowding at all levels of the schools and met with PTA/PTOs monthly as well as individual schools.”

Standard IV: Professional Culture E: Shared Vision – Proficient

Successfully and continuously engages all stakeholders in the creation of a shared educational vision in which every student is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and careers, and can become responsible citizens and community contributors.

The School Committee also referenced IV-F from last year: Managing Conflict as it was requested as a carry-over to this year.

Employs strategies for responding to disagreement and dissent, constructively resolving conflict and building consensus throughout a district or school community.

The preponderance was proficient.

Ratings included: Needs Improvement, Proficient, Exemplary

Member comments included:

“The development of a mission/vision statement was lengthy and inconsistent. While the creation of such a document is understandably not a priority of the day-to-day operations of the district, the process by which the document was drafted and revised could be improved.”

“Participated in drafting Mission/Vision statement.”

“Dr. Ash gave the green light to the group who worked to merge the administration’s original draft of a Mission, Vision statement and the School Committee’s amended version. This group included Laura Lasa, Carol Pilarski, Mary Anton-Oldenburg,

Margaret Coppe and Jessie Steigerwald. Dr. Ash did not participate in this group. I think it would have been helpful if he had participated and based on his write-up of this goal, I had expected that was his intention.”

Since he was leaving the district we can understand if he felt that he would rather have representatives from the administration who intended to remain.

Member comments focused more on the Mission/Vision but there were also more general references, including comments relating to the managing conflict indicator:

Dr. Ash demonstrates high expectations for all students’ achievement. He has successfully helped in negotiating a new 3 year contract with the LEA (Lexington Education Association). He has worked well in a number of settings with groups and individuals in his role as superintendent, but in situations involving conflicting opinions he occasionally responds less than collaboratively and respectfully.