

First Term Summation

Listen, Learn, Lead with Balance
December 1, 2015

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Lexington Public Schools

Introduction

When I began as Superintendent on July 1, 2015, I provided my 90 day plan that indicated my goals and activities for understanding the culture of the Lexington Public Schools and the community. This report is a brief synopsis of what I have learned in my first five months. It is an informational report only, no conclusions or proposals are provided. Rather, it is a beginning for future discussion and planning, as we consider a long-term strategic plan for the Lexington Public Schools.

There are a number of people I would like to thank:

- Town Manager Carl Valente for his preparation, meeting attendance and efficiency over the summer. Carl provided a notebook of all town departments including department heads and contact information that was instrumental in acclimating me to Lexington.
- The School Committee for their guidance and collaboration as we work together to continue the strong work of the past and plan for the future.
- Central office administration, principals and a special thank you to Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Miriam Sousa for their assistance.

Goals

- Develop a general understanding of the culture, values, and beliefs, which define the Lexington Public Schools.
- Establish a presence in the community to ensure confidence across all constituencies.
- Examine critical issues within the school and community to learn how issues and concerns have been handled and identify processes and procedures which affect how the system may function in the future.
- Develop strategies and goals for improvement that emerge from data.
- To be visible and approachable in the schools and in the town.



Constituent and Stakeholder Meetings



- School Committee
- School and Town Administration
- Teaching and Support Staff
- Teacher Association and Other Employee Associations
- Students, Parents, and Community Members
- Town and State Officials, including Board of Selectmen, Appropriations Committee, CEC Committee and PBC Committee members
- Community Organizations and Programs
- Student Groups
- Town Department Heads

Document Review

- District Goals and Initiatives
- Student and Staff Data
- School Committee Policy Manual
- Budget Information and Trends
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Curriculum Standards
- Facility Studies
- Capital Improvement Plans
- Building Project Plans
- Enrollment Projections
- School Improvement Plans
- Community Historical Data



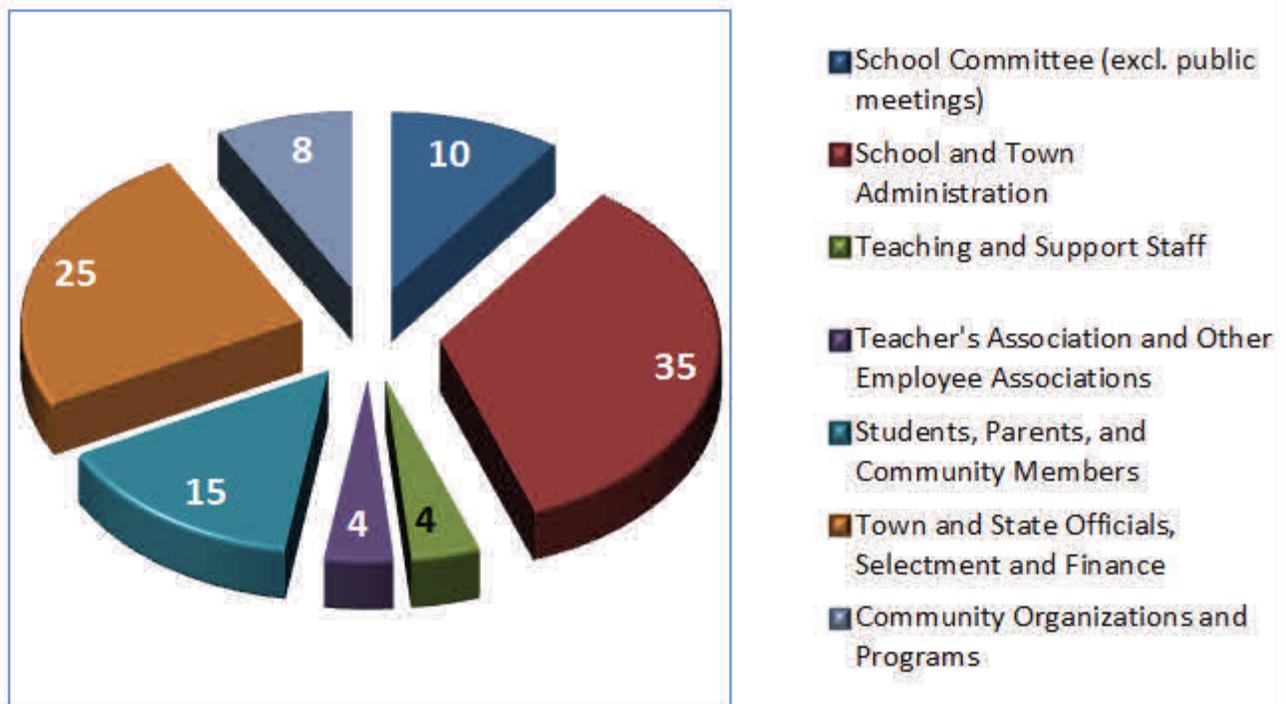
Summer 2015

July, August and September were busy months! The total number of meetings by month:

- July—45
- August—28
- September—28

The chart below displays a breakdown of the various meetings with constituents.

While my goal was to visit 2 schools per month, I have found myself immersed in many meetings related to building projects, residency, enrollment and appropriations to name a few. It is important to me to visit our schools and to talk with students and staff about what is happening in our schools and classrooms. Students are the focus and purpose of our work and having those interactions is essential to our success.

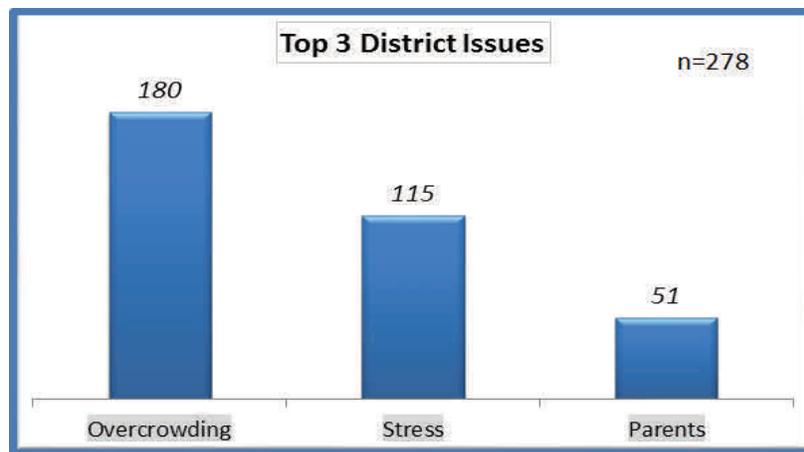


Listen, Learn, Lead with Balance

At the beginning of each school year, I like to have a theme that exemplifies the focus of our work. Since I am new to Lexington, I chose the theme of "Listen, Learn, Lead with Balance" for a number of reasons. As I mentioned earlier:

- Listening to all stakeholders is important feedback to any organization
- Learning about the school system is crucial: its culture, values and beliefs and critical issues
- Leading the school system with a continuous eye towards high quality education
- With Balance is important for our students and staff in managing stress and daily living

To address the "Listen" component, I conducted a survey of parents asking a series of questions related to district issues, communication and expectations. The top three issues facing the school system are shown below.



Lexington continues to address overcrowding and stress issues and both are reflected in the goals of the School Committee, District and Superintendent for the next year.

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right thing."

- Peter Drucker

By way of surveys, house calls, conversations, meetings and other venues, it will be a continuous learning process for me to understand the successes and challenges we face. This phase of listening and learning will quickly turn to the *leading* phase as we work to accomplish our goals.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

- John F. Kennedy

Feedback: Staff, Parents, Community

- “I loved your opening day presentation, I confess it made me a little teary. Your whole welcome was extremely inspiring.”
- “I would like to share with you that in all my years here of first day speeches, it was refreshing to hear you speak. You have wonderful energy and a student-centered focus.”
- “I wanted to say a quick hello and thank you for your personal summer greeting letter.”
- “Prepare your Teflon suit!”
- “You are a breath of fresh air.”
- “You introduced a bold plan yesterday evening, and although I think there will be pushback from some communities, I appreciate your courage and creativity to take a fresh look at the capacity problem within realistic budgetary constraints.”
- “Thank you so much for attending our Word study session today at Lexington Learns. It was wonderful to see you digging in alongside us.”
- “Thank you so much for a wonderful, warm opening morning. The entire ceremony was very energizing and felt so real and authentic.”

Observations and Reflections

- Students, staff, school committee and parents take great pride in their schools.
- There are incredible educational, enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities for all students.
- There is a fear of failure among staff to meet high expectations.
- We need to lower the stress level while maintaining high standards.
- The richness of our diversity is not being fully acknowledged or utilized. It is not used to educate or enrich the lives and opportunities of our students to be more prepared for a global environment.
- There is a real sense of collaboration among staff within the district.
- As one student’s button said at the youth summit “Collaborate Rather Than Compete.”
- Engage in difficult conversations around diversity and unhealthy competition.
- Reduce the constant state of ‘frenzy.’ We are a victim of our own success.
- There is a real dedication of volunteers who serve on committees and boards for the school system.
- High anxiety and stress on our students is impacting their well-being.
- Too much conversation can be an impediment to achieving consensus.

Relationships

One of the first documents I reviewed was the Leadership Profile Report written by Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates and in particular, the 'Desired Characteristics' section. That section highlighted two key topics for me: establishing a culture that acknowledges the importance of building relationships and considering different points of view.

I am a strong believer in communication and the importance of relationships in all aspects of education. The role of Superintendent involves building and sustaining relationships with many stakeholders. Those stakeholders have a voice in the educational future of Lexington students. From the School Committee to bus drivers to support organizations, each individual or group plays a role in the success of our students and staff and all have an opportunity to participate in the dialogue. Through our employee organizations, PTA/PTO, public meetings and Superintendent House calls, district and community members can contribute to the process.

Challenges

Five areas have become very apparent in the past few months:

1. Perception that every item brought to my attention requires an immediate plan or resolution
2. Multitude of meetings with various stakeholders often leads to misunderstandings and misinformation on complex issues.
3. Excessive volume of emails
4. Inability to visit schools and classrooms
5. Meetings need to include all of the stakeholders for effective collaboration; Chair +1 is not inclusive

My ability to manage the district on a daily basis has been affected by a perceived sense of urgency by a variety of constituents. I will be working with various groups and organizations both inside and outside the school district to determine structures and procedures that will allow me to more effectually manage the district.

Recommendations for Additional Support

Specific to the Superintendent's Office are areas that pinpoint the need for additional support regarding:

1. Residency issues
2. Central registration process
3. Creation of a new position: Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Communication, Residency, Central Registration & Special Projects

During the months of October and November, 42% of my work days involved evening meetings and approximately 40% of my work days are comprised of meetings. To fully perform the job for which I was hired, there is a need for a Special Assistant who will work directly with me on residency issues, preparing materials and documentation, and projects. High expectations and standards in Lexington require a greater degree of collaboration and inefficiencies need to be eliminated.

Being a new Superintendent, I will be building relationships with a new administrative team, new leadership team and community organizations. It is important that we work together to develop appropriate goals and communication structures. Of considerable importance in my role as Superintendent is to be a presence in our schools to observe classrooms, look at instruction and meet teachers and volunteers.

Collaboration and trust are the foundations of a positive culture and successful relationships. I believe that we can achieve great things working together and improving some of our processes.

Superintendent Goals

Based on my Listen, Learn, Lead with Balance theme, I have identified a number of goals that will be my focus for the upcoming year. A few highlights that I will address will include:

- Space capacity
- Increasing student enrollment and overcrowding
- Construction of new buildings and/or facilities
- Organizational structure of the Technology department
- Collaboration with the School Committee on clarifying defining roles and responsibilities
- Reduction of stress levels and building resiliency
- Instructional observations in schools and classrooms
- Cultivating a presence in the community

Click here for the complete list of [Superintendent's Performance Goals for 2015-2016](#)

Next Steps

It has been my distinct pleasure to meet so many wonderful people who work and live in the town of Lexington, who have opened their homes to me and have shared their thoughts and ideas for our school system. I have enjoyed participating in school and community meetings and greatly appreciate the invitations that have been extended to me. It is very clear to me that Lexington fully supports and values its school system.

This report is just the beginning of a process to develop a strategic plan for Lexington Public Schools. A plan that will encompass:

- Student performance (academic, behavioral, social /emotional stress)
- Partnerships (school committee, support organizations, Lextended Day, LEF)
- Equity (overcrowding, facilities, resources)
- Identification of Priorities
- Unite cultures of diversity among the community



Stakeholders/constituents included:

- School Committee
- Town Leaders
- Community members
- PTA/O/SBSC members
- Business leaders
- Parents
- Students