

# SUPERINTENDENT TOM FLANAGAN

## 100 DAY ENTRY PLAN

### REPORT



## Introduction

The [100 Day Entry Plan](#) articulates my philosophy for education that is grounded in three core areas of belief - Equity, Engagement, and Deep Learning. The plan frames my priorities for my first days in the position within these areas and articulates a series of activities that the District will accomplish to begin to actualize these priorities. The plan has three phases. The first phase was from April of 2020 - July 2020 and was focused on building relationships and learning about Burlington School District (BSD) from the perspective of stakeholders. The second phase was from July 2020 to October 8, 2020; in this phase, we began implementing twenty-one activities that formed the backbone of the plan. The third phase continues beyond my first 100 days and transitions the activities of the plan to the creation of a new, five-year strategic plan.

## PHASE 1 - Listening and Learning

In the first phase of the plan, I focused on engagement to build relationships and to learn about BSD. In this phase, I held more than 50 1:1 "Listening and Learning" meetings with central office staff, board members, principals, teachers, families, students, community leaders, and the Vermont Agency of Education staff. I asked everyone what they thought were the District's strengths, areas for improvement, and promising opportunities.

## Feedback from the Community

In response to the question of strengths, several themes arose. I heard loud and clear that Burlington School District:

- has a talented and committed staff
- has an environment that is warm and supportive
- values the diversity of the students and is open to conversations about equity
- and is a part of a community that is deeply engaged in the outcomes of the School District and committed to supporting the schools

When asked about needed improvements, there was more diversity of thought. However, there were several overlapping themes:

- reducing the opportunity gap and prioritizing services for students who qualify for free and reduced-lunch (FRL), multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students of color
- listening to student voices and including them in decision making
- creating role clarity and decision-making within central office and among the board and central office
- communication to schools and the community
- creating trust within the leadership team, between schools and central office, and between central office and the board
- developing consistency in practices across schools, particularly related to instructional practices
- creating more clear systems and processes

- communication and collaboration with the unions
- accountability

Finally, I asked about the promising opportunities for BSD. These are the areas where the District has traction and can focus efforts to make clear improvements in the short term. Themes included:

- using data to set goals and make decisions
- building on the foundation of restorative practices
- our people (both in our schools and in our community) are ready to address issues of race and equity
- communication systems are improving, and these are important to continue to build
- principals working together in professional learning communities (PLCs)
- schools working together in PLCs for instructional planning
- fostering and promoting student voice
- Connecting with multilingual families and including them in decision making

In my "Listening and Learning" sessions, I heard pride in the work that BSD has accomplished, honesty about where improvements are needed, and optimism about what can be accomplished if we work together effectively. I was inspired by these conversations and struck by the deep convictions evident throughout my conversations about the importance of a public education system that serves all students. I was also reassured that people wanted to build relationships and were open and fully engaged in our conversations.

## **PHASE 2 - Early Actions**

These "Listening and Learning" conversations led me to prioritize three areas for the 100 Day Entry Plan - Equity, Engagement, and Deep Learning. In doing this I also decided to reorganize Central Office leadership to reflect these priorities. I created a Coordinator of Engagement position to lead our engagement efforts and I created an Office of Equity, with a Director and a dedicated staff to lead our efforts to prioritize equity. Additionally, I created a Cabinet inclusive of all of the Executive Directors, Directors, and Principals and established this group as the core decision-making body for the District. The Cabinet replaced the Executive Committee, a decision-making body previously composed of a smaller number of directors and senior directors. The creation of the Cabinet as a larger decision-making body allows for deeper buy-in, engagement, and diversity of thought as we strive to achieve District goals.

In addition to these strategic decisions, I also developed three operational priorities:

- building systems for organizing our key work, emphasizing role clarity, collaboration and accountability
- being intentional about building a core leadership team with a broader set of BSD leaders, including principals

- communicating and engaging with the community frequently

These three operational priorities were particularly important as we planned to open school during a pandemic. I identified our Executive Director of Finance and Operations as the project lead and we used a project planning tool to organize the work, create role clarity, and create open planning and accountability. We used the expanded leadership team, which we now call the Cabinet, and the Reopening Taskforce, to distribute the responsibility throughout the organization and to create broader collaboration. This project highlighted our ability to work together and also highlighted areas where we can improve our collaboration, planning, and accountability for our individual work. Overall, our planning for school reopening was a success, and accomplishing this complex project outcome was a big win for the leadership team and the District.

While planning for reopening took center stage in my 100 Days, the team also balanced this work with the long term work of the 100 Day Plan. The following is a reflection on each area in the plan.

## Reflection on 100 Day Activities

### EQUITY

#### **1.1 Launch a race and equity workshop series with central office leaders and principals.**

We held a two-day retreat with our newly formed Cabinet to focus on issues of race and equity, and to reflect on our role as leaders addressing systemic racism. Shane Safir, the author of *The Listening Leader*, and her partner, Jamila Dugan, facilitated this professional learning and team-building experience. We explored bias and systemic racism, and how we can be leaders who have the courage to listen, to facilitate learning, and to create anti-racist systems in all of our schools and departments. This collaboration with Shane and Jamila will continue throughout the year with three more day-long workshops and 1:1 coaching for key district and school leaders.

#### **1.2 Conduct a review of data systems to understand what information we have and what we need to know to understand the opportunity gap and where we need to target efforts to erase inequity.**

The Data Systems Coordinator provided an initial review of data systems to the Superintendent and Executive Director of Teaching & Learning. We used these to co-construct the following shared set of goals as a Cabinet.

- 1. Our schools are restorative and equitable communities.**
  - Schools suspend African American students, students with disabilities, and students who qualify for FRL less frequently.
  - Staff report increased use of restorative practices.
- 2. Students are at grade level in reading and math by the end of third grade.**
  - % proficient improves for students who qualify for FRL.
- 3. Students are at grade level in math by the end of 8th grade.**

- % proficient improves for students who qualify for FRL.
- 4. Students graduate from high school having **successfully completed Algebra II**.
  - We will increase the % of students who complete Algebra II.
- 5. AP, Honors, and dual enrollment completion and successes **reflect the demographics of the high school**.
  - We will increase the % of students of color who take AP, Honors, and dual enrollment courses.
- 6. Faculty and staff are a **mirror of our student population**. They are highly skilled and set high expectations for all students.
  - Increase the % of our teaching faculty who are teachers of color.

We [presented](#) these goals to both the Cabinet and the Board of School Commissioners at their respective retreats in August. We will use these equity-focused goals to drive our efforts and track our progress in the 2020-21 school year, while we also develop a strategic plan with the community..

### **1.3 Complete a school-specific student academic achievement and equity analysis, and conduct goal setting with every school leadership team and the District office to set measurable targets for SY 2020-21.**

School teams are in the process of setting school-specific goals for SY 2020-21. These goals are part of their comprehensive school improvement plans. From the student academic achievement perspective, the Data Systems Coordinator is currently reviewing internal data walls and the AOE Snapshot to determine how to best move forward with regular, ongoing review of data that is used to support decisions aligned to budgeting, behavior/discipline, course scheduling, and service delivery models. All goal setting will be aligned to the district goals. The Equity Office is also conducting an equity analysis that will further inform our goals and our actions to meet our targets.

### **1.4 Conduct a review of our special education budget and services to develop a plan to provide excellent and inclusive services to students.**

An RFP was developed and posted in order to secure an outside organization to analyze our current service delivery model and provide recommendations to improve efficiency, communication, and inclusive services. A vendor will be selected to begin this work by October 21, 2020. The Executive Director of Teaching and Learning is also connecting with local experts in the field of special education to assist with how to best create a budget development plan that is framed around equitable and inclusive services.

### **1.5 Develop a plan to ensure the ongoing implementation of Restorative Practices (RP) in all schools in BSD.**

Each school has developed an operational Restorative Practices (RP) Leadership Team, including BSD's Central Office and Afterschool teams. Currently, all building administrators and leadership

teams are finalizing their annual RP plans, which will be supported by the District's RP/PBIS Coordinator. The Restorative Practices Collaborative will meet again this year. This group is composed of members from all of our building leadership teams and provides RP leaders an opportunity to access training and share resources and experiences with each other. The group is holding monthly virtual meetings.

### **1.6 Visit key historic sites on the Vermont African-American Heritage Trail with my family and city and state leaders.**

On Saturday, October 3rd, BSD Cabinet members, Board members, students, and family members (including my oldest daughter) visited the Rokeby Museum in Ferrisburg, VT. This four-hour event was educational and very moving. The tour provided us an opportunity to better understand the historical context of abolitionism, racism, and the Underground Railroad in Vermont. Our Office of Equity led a restorative circle designed to discuss various aspects of the tour and how BSD can continue to move our anti-racism and equity work forward.

### **1.7 Launch a book study with the high school student advisory council to discuss issues of equity, race, and power in the United States, Vermont, and Burlington.**

This book study will be an important way for the BHS principal, the Director of Equity, and me to connect with high school students, see students in person, and foster student agency and voice. This work had to be delayed due to the closing of BHS, but the first convening is set for the final week of October.

### **1.8 Establish a working group to review and develop a comprehensive equitable budget and staffing model for SY 21-22.**

The Equitable Budget & Staffing workgroup has been established and is led by the Executive Director of Finance and Operations who will provide regular updates on the progress of the workgroup to the school board's Finance Committee. The first meeting of the group is scheduled for October 16. Establishing the workgroup is the first step in a process that will likely require the full school year to complete.

The goal of this work is to develop equity-informed and transparent standards for the distribution of resources (money and staff positions) across BSD. Achieving this goal will help BSD move away from the inherent inequities associated with advocacy-based budgeting, toward budgeting that is driven by the strategic assessment of District needs. Additionally, BSD administrators will benefit from a more predictable budgeting process that will support long-term planning and investments.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

### **2.1 Meet individually with each School Board member to better understand the District and collaborate with the school board on a retreat to establish shared values, expectations, and targets for 2020-21.**

I have had the honor of meeting 1:1 with all but one school board member at least one time, and as a group, we engaged in a successful school board retreat on August 8th and 10th. At this retreat, we read and discussed the first chapter of *The Governance Core* and discussed our moral imperative. We also established our targets for 2020-21 and came to a set of shared expectations for operating and collaborating; I look forward to continuing to work as a team towards our goals.

## **2.2 Hold two Town Hall meetings to engage families, community members, and others to learn about their priorities for the District.**

In my first 100 days, Town Hall Meetings were a major theme. My team hosted Town Hall meetings for staff and parents regarding the reopening of schools, including five separate Town Halls for families of English Learners. Additionally, we hosted a Town Hall regarding BHS and the discovery of PCBs, I participated in a City of Burlington Town Hall as well as a Burlington COVID-19 briefing led by Mayor Weinberger, and I joined most school principals for school-based Welcome Back Town Halls at the beginning of the year. These town halls were extremely important in engaging with the community, articulating the priorities of my 100 Day Entry Plan, hearing feedback from the community on our reopening plan, and communicating our progress.

While many of these meetings were centered around the need to reopen schools safely, all provided time for questions and comments and I believe families and staff have been able to share their thoughts regarding District priorities. As we move forward with the strategic planning process, it will be important to continue to employ Town Halls as a way to receive input regarding the future goals of the District.

## **2.3 Hold four “Living Room Chats” to visit with families and to hear their ideas about the District’s strengths, needed improvements, and promising opportunities.**

Due to COVID-19, the Living Room Chats were repurposed as backyard/tent community meetings. As mentioned earlier, I held several community meetings with our multilingual family groups and had a follow up “tent chat” with a group of Somali families. They asked many important questions about how we plan to better serve their students and community. I have deeply valued my time with these families and the multilingual liaisons who have interpreted and brokered the conversations. This was an opportunity for me to hear directly from families in a more informal setting and I feel an intense sense of responsibility to respond to their concerns, do better to collaborate with them as a District, bring them into District parent groups, and serve their children in a way that they feel is empowering and holds high expectations for their learning. This will always be a key area of focus of my work.

I also had the opportunity to meet under tents with community leaders, and with the Seahorse Pride in a backyard. These meetings have reinforced for me that the Burlington community is committed to the success of our schools. Our team is actively considering hosting additional chats, including one scheduled for October 21st at the Boys and Girls Club.

## **2.4 Initiate a Labor Management Council where BSD and BEA leadership meet regularly to hold collaborative, solutions-oriented conversations.**

The Labor Management Council (LMC) has been meeting regularly since July for the purposes of planning the reopening of Burlington schools. In addition to the LMC, we have also started a BSD/BEA joint committee and a grievance committee. We have established a strong working relationship with our labor partners, the BEA, AFSMCE, and BAA units through open communication and collaboration. Our work together this summer led directly to a smooth reopening, including the co-creation of an MOU to support our employees during the return. I believe strongly that students benefit when unions and District leadership work together, and I will continue to prioritize the collaborative relationship.

## **2.5 Convene advisory groups for students, families, and educators that meet regularly to advise the superintendent on key issues.**

The request for applicants went out to each of these three groups on September 16. The deadline for applying was September 30 and we received almost 90 applicants. The next step is to choose 12-16 of the applicants from each group to serve, communicate with all applicants, and hold the first of these meetings in October.

## **2.6 Meet with City Council and the Mayor and establish a regular meeting with the Mayor and his staff.**

I have met with the majority of our city councilors and have met regularly with Mayor Weinberger. I have enjoyed my meetings with councilors and have established a positive rapport with our Mayor. We are a small, tight-knit city with shared interests and I have appreciated the welcome and support from the Mayor and City Council.

## **2.7 Visit every Burlington school and facility to meet with students, parents and guardians, teachers, and support staff.**

I have visited every school multiple times in the first month of school. Before school began, I met with the staff at every school and program. Since school has started, I began my meetings with student and parent groups at each school. So far, I have met with Integrated Arts Academy and Edmunds Middle School, and I have every school scheduled. These meetings allow me to hear directly from staff, families, and students about what they think are the strengths of the school and the areas of needed improvement.

## **DEEP LEARNING**

### **3.1 Develop a cross-functional workgroup to safely reopen schools in Fall 2020.**

In order to resume in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, we established a Reopening Taskforce that met throughout the summer. This Taskforce was led by the Executive Director of Finance and Operations with close oversight from the Superintendent. Taskforce membership included principals, directors, executive directors, and BSD's lead nurse and communication specialist. The Taskforce divided its work into various workgroups made up of

additional instructional and school leadership staff. Schools reopened safely and on-time on September 8.

The Reopening Taskforce continues to meet in preparation for expanding elementary attendance in October. Decisions by the taskforce are driven foremost by the health and safety of BSD students and staff, with strong consideration given to the instructional and social-emotional impacts of the challenging choices we are required to make. We are pleased that the reopening has been executed without any confirmed COVID-19 cases in our schools, but we recognize that the virus remains a presence in the greater community and continued vigilance is necessary, especially as we increase the number of students in attendance at the elementary level.

### **3.2 Develop a comprehensive professional development plan for SY 2020-21 that prioritizes student learning and student well-being.**

The Executive Director of Teaching and Learning developed a professional development plan based on administrator and teacher feedback and alignment with current strategic plan goals and the primary funding source, Title IIA. The plan was originally shared with Cabinet in July and again in September after an updated section for RP was included.

Our professional development plan started in August with a focus on blended and remote learning, trauma-informed practices, and developing curriculum alignment plans to focus on reentry in a hybrid model. Throughout the year we will expand our professional learning to include continuous improvement plan priorities for math and literacy instruction. K-12 Instructional Coaches continue to play a critical role in our professional development plans, allowing us to support teachers by embedding professional learning opportunities directly into their school-day experiences.

### **3.3 Establish a curriculum workgroup that will develop recommendations to create deep, rigorous learning for all students across the District.**

The Executive Director of Teaching and Learning has created a workgroup inclusive of our schools and roles. The workgroup's first priority is to develop an instructional framework for K-12 that reflects deep learning and culturally responsive teaching. Members have already provided valuable perspective through their participation in District and school level reentry planning. Moving forward, the perspectives of workgroup members will influence action steps for BSD initiatives and the development of strategic plan priorities.

### **3.4 Implement instructional rounds in collaboration with the BEA to determine our areas of focus for instruction and to foster a learning community.**

The practice of instruction rounds requires educators from across schools to observe classrooms together. Due to COVID restrictions that currently limit school access for people from outside the District, we are tentatively planning for a 2021 start to the implementation. When it does start, administrators, instructional coaches, and classroom teachers will be involved in the training and

practice of instructional rounds. The instructional rounds process is a constructivist practice that will sharpen our observational practices, allowing us to develop patterns from our observations and identify problems of practice to address. To prepare for implementation, the team will begin to read and reflect on best practices for launching the instructional rounds process and how this process is connected to the current walkthrough model.

### **3.5 Visit every school to observe classes and student learning with the leadership team.**

In K-8, I have visited every school and walked classes to meet students and teachers and to observe classes with the principals at least one time. In these initial visits, we have conducted informal observations and have debriefed the visit to discuss areas of instructional initial foci for the school. The next level of work is for the Executive Director of Teaching & Learning to join me, the building administrator, and the instructional coach to observe classes together and share feedback on best practices to build on and areas to focus professional learning efforts across the school and district. I believe the core work of principals and superintendents is to support and improve teaching and learning, and so we will prioritize time in classrooms moving forward.

### **3.6 Spend time engaging with students in hands-on learning, such as Burlington City & Lake Semester (BCL).**

I had a wonderful visit to the BCL program this fall. I observed students debriefing a discussion with community organizers and preparing for a discussion with our Chief of Police to gather a balanced, first-hand perspective of the protest in Battery Park. This program is a shining example of deep learning and one that I plan to promote, expand, and replicate. Thankfully, BSD is committed to expanding the student-centered experiences for students as part of the Deeper Learning experience. The District's relationship with various community partners provides an opportunity to expand our learning environments for students and allow for the transfer of content to practical, real-world experiences.

## **PHASE 3 - Next Steps**

I am grateful for the multitude of joyful, challenging, and rewarding experiences of my first 100 days. I prioritized listening and learning and building relationships, and this work will continue.

While the first 100 days is meant to be a time to learn about the organization, given the circumstances of opening school in a pandemic and managing a health and facilities crisis with PCB's at the high school, I had to make a number of high stakes decisions in my first few months in the position. I am thankful for the support from the school board, my mentors (Carl Cohn, Tom Fowler-Finn, and Winooski Superintendent, Sean McMannon), from Secretary of Education Dan French, the BSD Cabinet, and my family throughout this foundational time. I have found the work rewarding and affirming, and have appreciated the warm welcome from the community.

While not how I envisioned spending my first few months learning about the organization, I have learned a lot and have clear ideas for our path forward. I believe we must focus efforts in the following areas if we are to be successful as a district:

1. Continue to prioritize equity, engagement, deep learning.
2. Focus intensely on the core work of ensuring deep student learning.
3. Continue to build cohesion among District leaders and our board.
4. Continue to forge strong relationships with the union partners.
5. Implement regular systems for feedback, reflection, and improvement.
6. Utilize project planning systems across all District work to clarify roles and responsibilities.
7. Modernize systems in Human Resources, Finance, Data, and Operations.
8. Be intentional about engaging multilingual families.
9. Communicate openly and honestly.
10. Keep race and equity at the forefront of all of our decisions.

As we enter the last year of our five-year strategic plan, we need to engage the community in a strategic planning process. This process should involve a commitment to listening to the experiences, ideas, and hopes of the entire district, and it should articulate a clear, measurable, equity-focused plan that builds on the previous strategic planning that has happened in the District. I look forward to engaging with community members towards this work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom".

Tom

Cultivating caring, creative, and  
courageous people. [Join the journey!](#)