



LISTENING, OBSERVING & ANALYZING: A Learning-Based Entry Plan for Cambridge Public Schools

Dr. Kenneth N. Salim, Superintendent

August 2016

CPS

Cambridge Public Schools

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

I am thrilled and honored to begin my role in Cambridge as Superintendent of Schools. In preparation for my first year in Cambridge Public Schools, I have developed a plan for my entry that outlines key activities that I will undertake in order to learn as much as possible about CPS. This plan is grounded in the belief that a critical task for me as a new member of the Cambridge Public Schools is to learn from students, families, community and staff so that my decision making will be informed by a deep and broad understanding of CPS as well as my past experience.

Through a series of one-on-one conversations, focus group discussions and forums, I hope to learn about the successes, challenges and opportunities in the school district from a variety of perspectives. I will also spend a full day at each school to observe classrooms, shadow students and see our educators and young learners at work. Finally, I will review documents, reports and data from the district and from all schools to inform my understanding of the entire school system.

Discussions and direct observations are the first steps of this year-long plan. Another important step of the entry process will be the opportunity for me to check my understanding and test my assumptions. Therefore, in addition to the entry activities of listening and analyzing, I also will be working with several important groups in my entry process: the Cambridge School Committee, CPS district and school leaders, a Transition Team representing a range of stakeholders, a Teacher Advisory Committee, and an External Advisory Team comprised of national education experts. These groups will also be important supports during the entry process. As I identify patterns in the data, I will make sense of these entry findings through a collaborative process which will help me to test and revise information based on ongoing feedback.

The results of this process will be the basis for an Entry Report that I will present to the School Committee in January 2017. This report will include findings and patterns of data that will serve as a foundation for drafting district goals, developing a strategy and creating a district plan in the spring and summer of 2017.

I thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts and honest feedback. Together, we will build on the strong foundation that exists and develop the Cambridge Public Schools into a model for equity and academic excellence for every student.

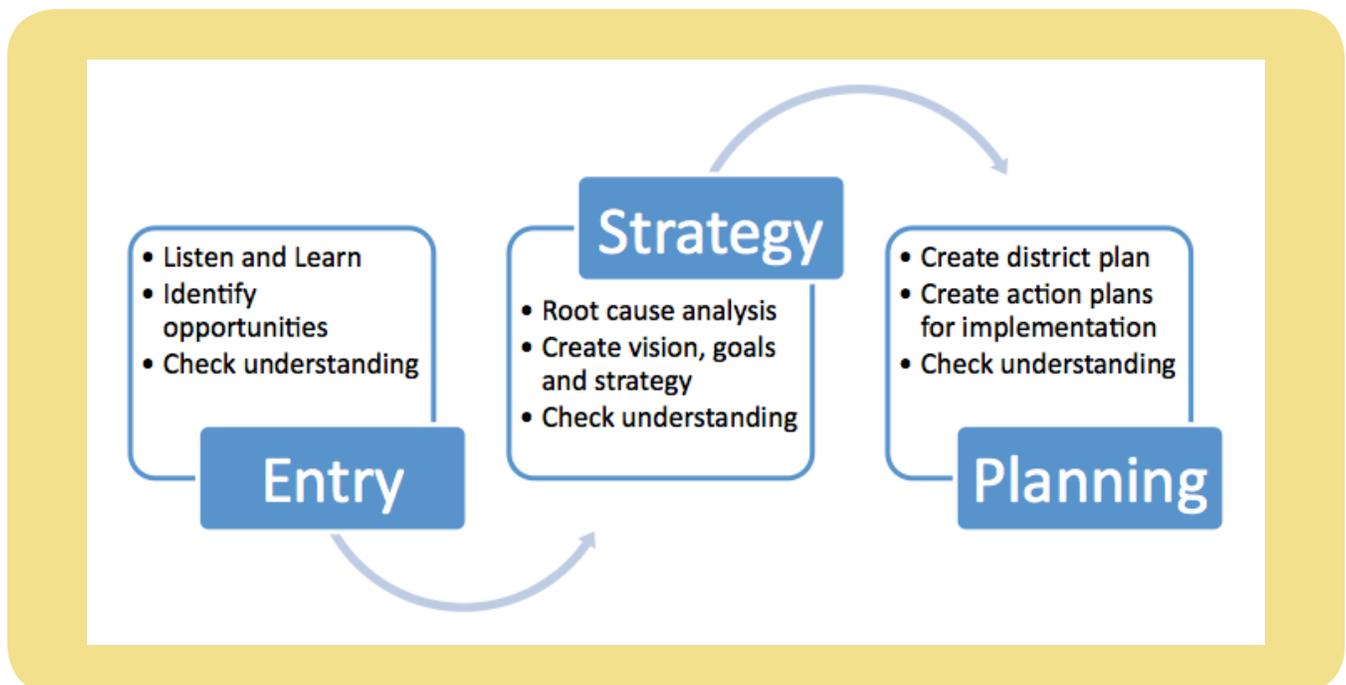


Kenneth Salim, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



ENTRY PLAN STAGES

The Entry Plan process is designed to have three stages. The first stage focuses on data gathering through listening, observing and analyzing. The second stage includes an inquiry into the root causes of significant district-wide challenges and successes, and the subsequent development of vision, goals and strategy. Finally, the third stage includes the creation of a district plan for implementation and progress monitoring to put the strategy into action. At each stage of the plan, there will be opportunities to check for understanding and make sense of data and analyses through a collaborative process before making final decisions about the plan.





Phase I: Listening, Observing & Analyzing

The first phase of the Superintendent's Entry Plan will focus on discussions with school committee members and staff including teachers, administrators and support staff as well as forums and focus groups with current and former students and families, and a range of community partners including elected officials, city government, community-based organizations, faith-based community leaders, business, higher education and foundation partners, and the media. This list is not exhaustive and will be revised as part of my learning process.

Conversations, focus groups and forums will serve as a vehicle for gaining a deep understanding of the successes, challenges and opportunities in Cambridge Public Schools. Questions for different groups of people will vary, but will include similar types of questions.

Discussion Questions and Areas of Inquiry for Conversations and Focus Groups:

1. Tell me about your background to help me get to know you better.
2. What do you think are the greatest successes that Cambridge Public Schools has achieved? What are the core strengths of our school system?
3. What do you think are the most significant challenges in Cambridge Public Schools?
4. What do you see as the one or two key issues in your position/role? In the school district?
5. What is the most important recent history of the system? What has been the impact of these events?

The first phase will also include visits to schools to examine school facilities, as well as observe classroom instruction, school-based meetings and other events. These visits also will include "student shadowing" to allow me to experience a portion of the school day partnered with a CPS student. Visits to schools will be book-ended at the start and end of the day with voluntary "Superintendent Chats" to meet with staff at each school. Observations of educational programs run by community-based organizations and city partners in the community also will take place during the entry process.

Preliminary Schedule of Conversations & Observations

PRE-ENTRY – SUMMER 2016

- School Committee Members (Individual Conversations)
- Superintendent's Cabinet - District Administration (Individual and Team Conversations)
- School Principals (Individual and Team Conversations)
- City Manager and Department Heads (Individual and Focus Group Conversations)
- Union Leadership (Individual Conversations)
- Superintendent Search Committee / Transition Team Meeting
- Members of Press (Individual Conversations)
- Examination of school building facilities
- Observations of school-based and community summer programs

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2016

- School visits, classroom observations and “student shadowing”
- Superintendent Chats at each school site
- Teacher Advisory Committee Meeting
- CRLS student government and student leaders (Focus Group Conversations)
- Assistant Principals/School Operations Managers/Deans (Focus Group Conversations)
- City Councilors (Focus Group Conversations)
- School Council and Parent Committee Representatives (Focus Group Conversations)
- Community Engagement Team and Family Liaisons (Focus Group Conversations)
- Community and Religious Leaders (Individual and Focus Group Conversations)
- State and Federal Elected Officials (Individual Conversations)
- Community-based Family Forums (Focus Group Conversations)

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2016

- School visits, classroom observations and “student shadowing”
- Superintendent Chats at each school site
- Cambridge Parent Advisory Council on Special Education (C-PAC) and Citywide School Advisory Group (CSAG) Members (Focus Group Conversations)
- Instructional Support Staff / Paraprofessionals (Focus Group Conversations)
- Custodians and Maintenance Staff (Focus Group Conversations)
- Food Service Employees (Focus Group Conversations)
- School Clerical Staff and District Support Staff (Focus Group Conversations)
- Business Leaders / Chamber of Commerce (Individual and Focus Group Conversations)
- Foundation and Philanthropic Partners (Individual and Focus Group Conversations)

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2016

- School visits, classroom observations and “student shadowing”
- Superintendent Chats at each school site
- School Committee Presentation: Entry Plan Findings Update
- Higher Education Partners (Individual Conversations)
- Instructional Leadership Teams (Focus Group Conversations)
- Recent graduates from Cambridge Public Schools (Focus Group Conversations)
- Observations of out-of-school time and early childhood programs
- Ongoing Monthly Roundtable Meetings with teachers, students and families

Data Analysis & Document Review

Data analysis and document review during the entry process will include: a review of data related to student performance, attendance and behavior, demographics, and program enrollment; staff reports, surveys, program reviews and evaluations; and district curriculum documents, policies, handbooks, improvement plans and budgets.

Analysis of Data

- Local, state, and national student performance data
- District demographic and achievement data
- Student and staff surveys
- Program evaluations
- District and school budgets
- Department reports

Document Review

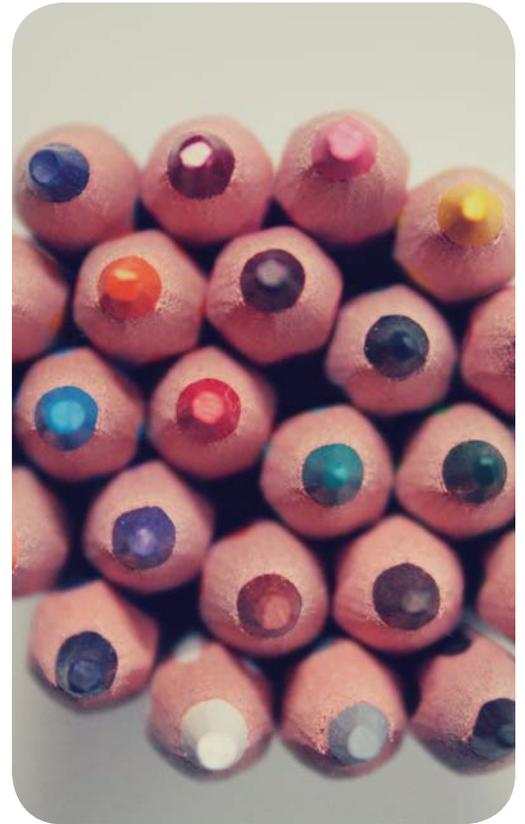
- School improvement plans
- Accreditation, operations, and finance reports
- Curriculum and Instruction documents and resources
- Professional development plans and reports
- Other task force reports



Phase II: Strategy Development

The purpose of the first phase of entry is to listen, observe and analyze data while simultaneously checking with others for understanding and making sense of patterns of data. This process will require careful analysis of the data gathered from conversations, focus groups and review of documents. Patterns, themes and trends that are identified from the dozens of conversations and numerous documents will form the basis for an Entry Report which will be given in January 2017.

In the late winter and spring of 2017, we will engage in the second phase of entry. Building on the findings and opportunities identified in the Phase I Entry Report, this next phase will include a series of “root cause” analyses – which often take the form of a “five why’s” series of questions – to unpack and assess the underlying reasons, as opposed to just symptoms, for performance gaps and challenges. This period also will include collaborative learning, consideration of successful approaches from within the district as well as from other district settings, and feedback discussions which will provide data for the development of draft goals and high leverage areas of focus that will be a part of the district’s strategy moving forward.



Phase III: District Planning for Implementation & Progress Monitoring

The final phase will begin in late spring through the beginning of the 2017-18 school year with the development of a district plan that identifies short and long term goals for strategy execution and a process for monitoring progress and achievement of milestones. The development of district strategy in Phase II aims to produce a few well-informed objectives that focus work district-wide. The creation of a plan to execute on this strategy includes the identification of outcomes to be achieved and how they will be measured. Similar to the previous two phases, the district planning phase will be an iterative process that includes collaborative sense making and testing of assumptions before codifying a plan for execution and measurement.





This Entry Plan represents key transition activities as I begin my tenure as Superintendent in Cambridge Public Schools. There are three distinct phases which allow me to hear from different stakeholders, observe practice in our schools, make sense of the current work underway, identify important themes and review my findings with others in order to develop a longer term strategy and district plan: 1) Listening, Observing and Analyzing; 2) Drafting Goals and Strategy; and 3) Planning for Implementation and Progress Monitoring. The rigorous collection, analysis and review of data are important first steps before we develop preliminary goals and strategies for Cambridge Public Schools. Only then, and only together, will we be able to build a model of equity and educational excellence for all of our students. I look forward to learning with you and becoming a part of the Cambridge community.

References

Curtis, R.E. and City, E.A. (2009) Strategy in Action: How school systems can support powerful learning and teaching, Harvard Education Press, Cambridge, MA.

Jentz, B. with Wofford, J. (2012), The EntryPlan Approach: How to begin a leadership position successfully, Leadership and Learning, Inc.



159 Thorndike Street, Cambridge, MA 02141
www.cpsd.us | 617.349.6400