



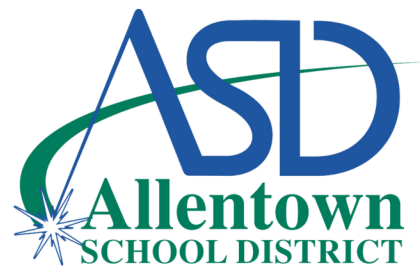
Learning and Leading Plan

Dr. Carol D. Birks
Acting Superintendent

November 1, 2022 *(updated January 2023)*



School Board of Directors



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Dear Allentown Learning Community:

I want to share how proud and humbled I am to serve as your Acting Superintendent. Thank you for such a warm welcome to this great community!

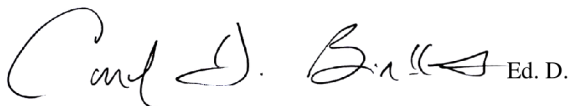
In my role as Acting Superintendent for the Allentown School District, I will have the challenge and the unique opportunity to listen and learn, utilizing the Entry Planning process, to assess how the schools are working toward meeting the district's goals and vision for school improvement. This approach is a researched-based framework, designed to counter the forces that trigger unilateral rather than collaborative decision-making. The Entry Planning Process is a sequenced set of activities that assist a new leader in building trust and does so by confronting complexities and by leading organizations in producing the collective new thinking required for successful change efforts. (Jentz,1980).

The answers to three questions will be addressed throughout the first 90 days of this plan and throughout the remainder of the 2022-2023 academic year: (1) What beliefs, structures, and practices must be collectively embraced and operationalized by all stakeholders in order to ensure that Allentown School District's core values of putting children first is evident throughout the school district and the overall learning community? (2) How do we know if students are learning? (3) How will the community work collaboratively to embrace the vision of the incoming Superintendent and continue to move the district's schools along a path of continuous improvement and thus ensure that all schools are viewed as high-performing schools that provide equity, diversity and access for students and educators?

Over the next 90-days, this *Learning & Leading Plan* is designed to efficiently gather information about the Allentown School District. It will also provide me with a framework to engage multiple stakeholders and key constituents in an intentional, purposeful, and strategic transition of leadership to Allentown. This plan will begin to assess the strengths and areas of growth of the organizational culture, systems, and practices; create a sense of urgency; determine quick wins, and identify key priorities.

One of my major priorities is to create the conditions for every young person and adult in our learning community to feel safe, valued, empowered, and loved. I look forward to our partnership as we embark on this journey to reimagine Allentown School District together.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Carl J. Ballew'. To the right of the signature, the text 'Ed. D.' is printed.

Acting Superintendent



This *Learning & Leading Plan* is steeped in a three-pronged inquiry approach that will guide our thinking and identify goals, outcomes, and actions to influence a complex system focused on continuous improvement, talent management, and development.

The phases include the following: (1) Transition: (Pre-Entry), Listen and Learn; (2) Entry: Focus and Frame, and (3) Planning: Empower and Accelerate.

Phase I:
Transition

Listen & Learn

October 31, 2022 –
December 31, 2023

Phase 2:
Entry

Focus & Frame

October 31, 2022 –
January 31, 2023

Phase 3:
Planning

Empower &
Accelerate

February 1, 2023 –
March 31, 2023

Phase I: Listen & Learn - Conduct listening and learning tours to include one-on-one meetings and focus groups with various stakeholders, including, students, families, teachers, administrators, staff, community, elected officials, collective bargaining union leaders, corporations, and philanthropic community to get to know them and to gain their perspectives on the following:

(1) What are the strengths of the Allentown School District? (2) What are the areas of growth? (3) What do we need to start doing? (4) What do we need to stop doing? (5) What gifts and talents will you contribute to help lead Allentown School District on a path of continuous improvement? (6) If you were Superintendent, what would you do first?

Understanding that previous administrative leaders did embark on a similar path, I want to honor and build on the work of the past and use that to learn.

Phase II: Focus & Frame - Conduct targeted document review of Allentown School District's school continuous improvement plans, *Strategic Framework* (2107-2021), collective bargaining agreements, teacher and administrator evaluation processes, and school board policies. Review existing and proposed initiatives to promote diversity and equity throughout schools and the District. Conduct a deep dive of student academic outcomes of school districts throughout the state, tenure and demographic make-up of educators, and other quantitative and qualitative data points. Target key patterns in performance, beliefs, operations, health and safety, systems, structures practices, and present those findings to stakeholders.

Phase III: Empower & Accelerate - Enable action by building on the organization's strengths, including human capital to build capacity in our schools. Remove barriers to form a change vision that is strategic, and systemic, puts students at the center of learning, and further engages families toward academic excellence. Inspire innovation and a dual operating system to create strategies for organizational coherence, alignment, and development.

The remainder of the *Learning and Leading Plan* will briefly describe the phases of the plan and identify thinking and acting on a complex system focused on building on the past to lead to large-scale improvement. It will include the Plan's goals and a 90-day plan that includes goals, outcomes, and actions as related to the community structure of:

- Governance Team
- Learning & Teaching (Student Achievement)
- Organizational Capacity and Alignment (Cabinet & Central Office)
- Family and Community Partnerships / Engagement
- Organizational Efficiencies and Effectiveness

GOALS

This *Learning & Leading Plan* is designed to address the following goals:

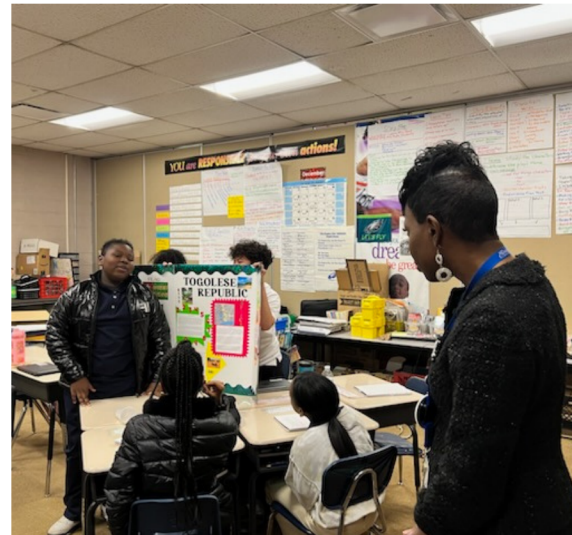
- Serve as a learning strategy to establish transformational urgency by honoring and building on current practices.
- Establish and foster a productive, trusting, and collaborative Governance Model with the School Board of Directors.
- Proactively enlist the voices of multiple stakeholders, not just those who typically collaborate with the school district, and include them in the process of continuous improvement.
- Cultivate public trust, commitment, and confidence through transparent, clear, and open communication with all stakeholders.
- Assess systemic structures, operational processes, and policies to gain a more thorough understanding of Allentown School District.
- Conduct a needs assessment of the District's learning and teaching, fiscal operations, human capital management, organizational systems, and design, pre the COVID-19 pandemic, and the current state of the district.
- Gain a greater understanding of the hopes and needs from a wide variety of internal and external perspectives to identify emergent themes and key priorities.

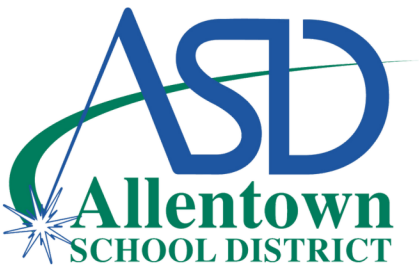


OUTCOMES AND DELIVERABLES

The expected outcomes of the *Learning and Leading Plan* include:

- 90 Days School Report on the observations and findings of the Listening and Learning Tours and the analysis of the targeted document review and student performance.
- Outline a strategic planning process to develop a three-year strategic plan which will build on the strengths of the organization to empower, accelerate and inspire organizational coherence to improve student outcomes. This plan will include measurable and defined strategies to form a change vision to put students at the center of their learning.





Desired Outcome: To establish and promote effective district governance by building a productive and collaborative relationship with the Board of Directors.

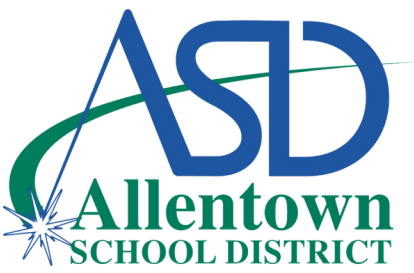
30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Share the <i>Learning & Leading Plan</i> for feedback, suggestions, and guidance with the School Board of Directors</p> <p>Establish one-on-one meeting schedule with Board President for reviewing and constructing agendas.</p> <p>Meet with the Board Officers & Committee Chairs to determine how they work in partnership with the Superintendent and Cabinet.</p> <p>Schedule retreat with Board of School Directors.</p> <p>Establish and engage in one-on-one meetings with the School Board of Directors to deepen relationships and to broaden perspectives.</p> <p>Meet with elected officials and determine how we will work in partnership with the school district and School Board of Directors.</p> <p>Initial meeting with Allentown Education Association leadership.</p>	<p>Establish regular meetings with Allentown Education Association’s (AEA) leadership to build relationships and clarity of understanding of leadership vision and theory of action.</p> <p>Schedule meetings in partnership with AEA to meet union representatives from each building.</p> <p>Administer the <i>Gallup Strengths Finder</i> and or the <i>TTI Emotional Quotient</i> to gain a more objective perspective of Board members strengths so we can multiply our collective impact.</p> <p>Conduct breakfast/lunch/dinner meetings with School Board members, elected officials to continue to build positive and productive relationships.</p> <p>Identify a facilitator and work with Board Officers to construct agenda for Board Retreat.</p>	<p>Conduct a retreat with Board in order to establish a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, expectations, and communication systems to promote effective and positive working relationships with the Board.</p> <p>Develop a process, structure, and timeline to measure current Strategic Focus and begin Strategic Planning Process timeline.</p> <p>Provide updates on the school’s continuous improvement plans, the school district’s current expenditures and the 2023-2024 budget process.</p> <p>Discuss Board Policy Audit and Bylaws.</p> <p>Invite Board Members to participate in Instructional Rounds and school visits.</p>

Organizational Capacity and Alignment



Desired Outcome: To increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency and ensure high performance and support to schools.

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Research the <i>Gallup Strengths Finders</i> and/or the <i>TTI Emotional Quotient</i>.</p> <p>Establish meetings with Cabinet and Central Office Departments including Curriculum and Instruction, Special Education, and English Language Learners Faculty, and Operations.</p> <p>Request briefing papers from Cabinet and Extended Cabinet Members and overviews of their current areas of responsibility, major initiatives underway with projected timelines, a review of significant or potential problems in each area of responsibility, and major decisions to be made in one month, three months, and six months.</p>	<p>Conduct a retreat with Cabinet and Extended Cabinet to review Strategic Goals, School Continuous Improvement Plans, recent achievement data, current or anticipated vacancies in Central Office or principalships and discuss leadership team structures and practices.</p> <p>Administer <i>Gallup Strengths Finder</i> and/or the <i>TTI Emotional Quotient</i> to gain a more objective perspective of Cabinet members' strengths.</p> <p>Determine how communication and decision-making will occur with Cabinet and Extended Cabinet, establishing meeting protocols and systems designed to focus on increasing student achievement and continuous improvement.</p> <p>Determine how communication and decision-making will occur with Cabinet and Extended Cabinet, establishing meeting protocols and systems designed to focus on increasing student achievement and continuous improvement.</p> <p>Review our critical documents, including an organizational chart, handbooks, policy and procedure manuals and student achievement data by school.</p> <p>Lead a productive Administrator Retreat that focuses on unity goal setting and district mission and vision.</p>	<p>Initiate plans to establish or review key metrics and service goals for each functional unit to ensure the performance of central office can be determined and measured in alignment with core function and support for student achievement.</p> <p>Plan a second retreat with Senior Leadership Team to review accountability plans for all functional units, clarify process and progress toward improvement with Strategic Plan and District Improvement Plan, set clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, expectations and systems for mutual accountability, and review current and future budget issues and current organizational structures.</p>

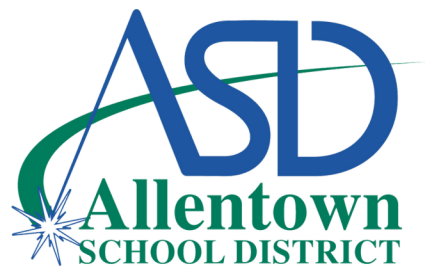


Desired Outcome: Ensure that the academic program is designed so that students are prepared for college, careers, and life beyond high school.

Ensure instruction is occurring at high levels and that teachers have access to rigorous K-12 instructional curriculum, processes, and tools to monitor students' progress, opportunities and resources to provide appropriate interventions to address achievement gaps and interrupted learning.

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Meet with the Chief Academic Officer and Curriculum and Instruction Team to discuss and review current efforts to create systems to align the written curriculum, delivery of instruction, instructional technology and formative assessments; Professional development tied to that alignment, high-quality learning the District's academic priorities.</p> <p>Convene COVID-19 Transition Task Force to monitor academic programming, interventions, and social emotional learning supports.</p>	<p>Meet with the Special Education Department to review and discuss the district's student support systems (gifted, EL, and students with disabilities) with the student support team.</p> <p>Meet with the Student Services team to discuss and review current systems that impact culture and climate, family and community engagement, PBIS, counseling, etc.</p> <p>Analyze patterns in student achievement data and achievement gaps to evaluate learning and teaching.</p> <p>Establish Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.</p> <p>Establish Executive Leadership Learning Academy.</p>	<p>Review district's most recent Curriculum Audit to determine what steps have been taken to address the findings.</p> <p>Meet with Curriculum Development & Review Committee (CDRC) to become familiar with the CDRC process and phases.</p> <p>Meet with the Executive Director of School Improvement to discuss and review corrective action outlined in Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) Plans, Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) for lowest performing schools and subgroups within schools.</p>

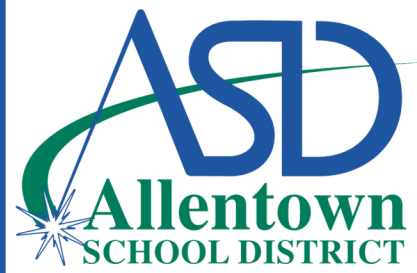
30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Meet with student focus groups to build relationships and learn about their schooling experiences.</p> <p>Review instructional audits and determine follow-up next steps.</p> <p>Analyze patterns in student achievement data and achievement gaps to evaluate the current state of learning and teaching.</p> <p>Meet with Assessment Office staff for briefings on student academic and behavioral data, including special populations.</p> <p>Review academic programs, including instructional technology to determine use and blended learning opportunities and assess impact on student outcomes.</p>	<p>Schedule meetings with Allentown Education Association’s leadership, elected officials, and union representatives for administrators and support staff, to forge relationships and partnerships to improve academic outcomes and identify student and staffs’ needs.</p> <p>Meet with Executive Directors to review achievement data, individualized learning goals, and adaptive challenges to assess learning, teaching, vision, values, and organizational systems and structures as part of the listen-and-learn phase.</p> <p>Review and assess professional learning offerings for principals, teachers, and central office staff; determine the degree to which opportunities are job-embedded, differentiated and student-directed.</p> <p>Review District’s programming for special populations, including students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and high-performing learners.</p>	<p>Submit Executive Leadership Learning Academy curriculum to the Pennsylvania Department of Education <i>PIL ITQ (Principal Inspired Leadership Invitation to Qualify)</i> so that leaders can obtain Act 45 credits for ELLA participation.</p> <p>Finalize vendors for Curriculum approval.</p>



Cultivating Family and Community Partnerships

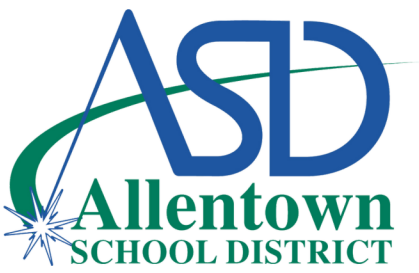
Desired Outcome: Build public trust, social capital, and community confidence through open and transparent communication, and foster positive relationships.

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Conduct Family & Community Forums to introduce myself to the community and gain the community's perspectives on the current state of the school district and respond to stakeholders' questions.</p> <p>Schedule "Snacks with the Acting Superintendent" as part of the Listen and Learn phase.</p> <p>Establish bi-weekly meetings with Mayor Tuerk.</p> <p>Meet with Allentown Police Chief, and Fire Chief to build relationships.</p>	<p>Schedule meetings with Presidents at local colleges & universities.</p> <p>Meet with locally elected officials as well as leaders from community organizations, and businesses.</p> <p>Contact a multitude of stakeholders and establish routine meetings, communication protocols, and reciprocal dialogues, focusing on increasing student achievement and continuous improvement.</p> <p>Initiate open, honest, & transparent dialogues with the goal of strengthening/improving strategic partnerships.</p> <p>Meet with parent groups to engage them in conversation and support district and school improvement.</p> <p>Convene clergy to enlist their support of schools.</p> <p>Identify partners to serve on Strategic Planning Task Force.</p> <p>Review and discuss the district's communication strategy, methods, and platforms with the Communication Team.</p> <p>Review proposals for new website.</p>	<p>Hold Community Forums/Coffee Conversations.</p> <p>Meet with select corporate partners, nonprofit organization leaders, and elected officials to build relationships and to enlist support for schools.</p> <p>Identify private funding and grant opportunities for schools.</p> <p>Use the district's established direct and indirect communication channels to provide updates, share lessons learned, status of schools, and our way forward.</p> <p>Develop Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council (SPAC).</p> <p>Establish Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.</p> <p>Identify additional university and community partners.</p>



Desired Outcome: Review the structure of Operational Departments (Facilities, Business office etc) to develop a cohesive unit committed to the accomplishment of our shared vision.

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Meet with the Facilities Team to review facilities to ensure that schools are clean and safe for occupancy and aligned with health and safety protocols.</p> <p>Meet with the Executive Director of Talent and Team Experience & Human Resources team to review and discuss the district’s talent management system and strategies (recruitment, onboarding, development, retention, performance management, compensation, and career pathways).</p> <p>Review school budgets and conduct one-on-one meetings with direct reports and principals to review budget, operations, and human capital.</p> <p>Schedule regular meetings time with Interim Business Managers.</p>	<p>Hire Chief Operations Officer.</p> <p>Hire Chief Finance Officer.</p> <p>Establish one-on-one meetings with Operations and Finance Teams.</p> <p>Review the district’s financial projections, resource allocation and budgeting process; assess how the district’s budget and budgeting process are aligned to support student achievement.</p> <p>Conduct one-on-one meetings with all department leads, ensuring that departments determine their support to schools.</p> <p>Develop a maintenance checklist, strategies, and reporting structure to advise School Board members and all stakeholders of the status of schools and all facilities.</p>	<p>Hold meetings with legal counsel and Talent Office to discuss labor and legal cases, and contract negotiations.</p> <p>Meet with Special Education staff to review and to discuss current legal proceedings and recommendations.</p> <p>Examine structure of learning management systems.</p> <p>Meet with health networks to discuss Athletic Sponsorship Proposals.</p>



Organizational Efficiencies & Effectiveness

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
<p>Review 10-year Feasibility Study to review and discuss immediate capital projects, including facilities.</p> <p>Meet with the Grants team to monitor ESSERS Funds and private and federal grants to ensure determine status of expenditures and fidelity of grant requirements.</p> <p>Begin search process for Chief Financial Officer and Director of Safety and Security.</p>	<p>Analyze fiscal resources and programs and develop a protocol that measures and analyzes success to determine appropriate levels of equity and access across the system.</p> <p>Analyze the budget to determine allocations for and the assessment of professional development.</p> <p>Begin budget development process.</p> <p>Meet with the school improvement and grants team to discuss and review current systems and processes, protocols and district school improvement strategies.</p> <p>Meet with staff of all departments to discuss how to best support their work.</p>	

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this *Learning & Leading Plan*, the first 90 days of my tenure as Acting Superintendent, I would have listened to and learned, built relationships, and had conversations about the beliefs, structures, and practices of the Allentown School District's learning community that will guide our school improvement efforts.

Such learning will facilitate a transparent summary of findings, decision-making in practice, and opportunities to accelerate continuous improvement. By identifying the strengths of the organization and additional learning, we will multiply our opportunities to improve student outcomes.

This *Learning and Leading Plan* is the foundation for our New Beginning. It will guide us in discovering solutions, implementing best practices, and accelerating progress. This plan provides strategies for interventions, remediation, and enrichment.

