

Dear Staff, Students, Parents, and Community Members,

I am writing this report as a summary of the thoughts and ideas shared during entry plan meetings from July 1, 2017 to May 10th, 2018. An entry plan is a process for new leaders to learn about the organization and community by meeting with constituents one on one or in small groups. I have met with over 100 people, with each meeting lasting between 1-2 hours. In these meetings, conversations, and observations I have been looking for answers to the following three questions:

1. What is working for Sanborn Regional School District?
2. What needs to be improved?
3. What ideas and recommendations do constituents have for improving issues?

At the time of writing this document, I have met with the following constituents/groups:

1. School Board and Budget Committee members for individual interviews
2. School administration for individual interviews
3. District staff (teachers and paraprofessionals) in Professional Learning Communities (small groups of teachers)
4. Students
5. Parents
6. School Board Meetings
7. Budget Committee Meetings
8. School Walkthroughs
9. Staff Meetings

All constituents were notified that the conversations would be kept confidential and participants talked openly and freely during this process. This process has yielded clear direction for many areas of the district. For organizational purposes this report contains the following categories:

1. Facilities
2. Instruction
3. Student Discipline
4. Budget
5. Safety
6. Technology

This document is intended to be a summary, not a transcript of the information shared with me. Some concerns and recommendations not included in this document are still being considered. Some thoughts were not included because they may be too specific or the concern was not shared by the majority of the people I interviewed.

I hope you find this report useful and engaging. I have been very impressed by the tone and professionalism of every person I have interviewed. It has been a pleasure and a wonderful experience.

## **1- Facilities**

The Sanborn Regional School District has facility needs that vary from one building to another. The High School is the newest of the district's facilities that has some needed repairs such as work on the boiler system. Snow removal is a challenge due to the flat roof. The Middle School is the most challenging building because of the age of the facility. The Bakie and Memorial Schools have been renovated and maintained and are in good working order. Each building has some repair needs and concerns. Here is a brief list of some of the issues to address:

1. Provide equity with regard to climate control in each building. Some buildings have full climate controls (cooling and heating), others only have heating.
2. Move the main office at the Memorial School to the previously proposed location (this recommendation falls under school safety as well).
3. Consider the future use of the Middle School and the feasibility of updating the school.
4. Create a realistic and manageable district Capital Improvement Plan.
5. Budget emergency lines for unanticipated facilities cost.

The district has engaged New England School Development Council (NESDEC) for a long term planning study of facilities use and enrollments. This process will help the district when deciding a direction for the future. Planning for the future use of each facility will also guide the District's conversations regarding the extent of renovation and repair necessary to meet programmatic needs. For more information regarding the NESDEC study please click [here](#).

## **2- Instruction**

Instruction is an area of strength for Sanborn Regional School District. The district has an aligned curriculum with regard to standards and the rubrics necessary for assessment and planning student work. Teachers appreciate flexibility in instructional practices and are committed to meeting the needs of every student. In my interviews and meetings the following themes emerged:

1. Lack of adequate intervention staff for Math and Reading. Parents and staff have expressed concern that "students only get help if they have an IEP" (Individual Education Plan used to address the special instructional needs of a student with a disability). This is an important issue to address as we strive to improve student achievement.

	October 1st Enrolments	Reading Intervention Teachers	Math Intervention Teachers	Reading Intervention Paras*	Math Intervention Paras
SRHS	644	1	0	0	0
SRMS	335	1	1	1 (Title 1)	0
Bakie	354	1	0	1 (Title 1)	1 (Title 1)
Memorial	268	1	0	1 (Title 1)	1 (Title 1)

\* Paraprofessionals

2. Self Management of Learning and Assessment

Staff are comfortable with the core philosophy that seat time is no longer the constant, learning is the constant. They spoke in support of the overall vision of ensuring students are adequately prepared for post-secondary life. Some concern has been expressed regarding the current practices that support a student’s ability to self-manage their own learning including (but not limited to) meeting deadlines, and engaging in reassessment in a timely manner. Many staff and parents spoke of the need to learn an appreciation for working within deadlines and timeframes (as is the case in the workforce) while simultaneously supporting the goal of providing the time necessary for individual students to master concepts and skills. Staff and parents feel strongly that students should be allowed to reassess to ensure that skills have been mastered, but are concerned that reassessment has developed a culture where students know they have “10 more” days to complete an assignment after a due date. Stakeholders interviewed would like to see schools develop a plan to hold students more accountable for assessments and assignments that have clear due dates. A further concern that was expressed was a lack of consistency with regard to teachers administering assessments in a timely manner, entering grades in to the gradebook in a reasonable amount of time, and consistent expectations for work completion.

3. Student Engagement and Cell Phones

Student engagement is an issue every teacher faces daily. The information era has made this task exponentially harder than it was in the past. Staff are employing a number of strategies to address this issue but have expressed that there is still a lot of work to do in this area. They recommended cell phones be universally addressed in a consistent manner. Staff would like to see a uniform set of procedures developed and enforced by all teachers to eliminate cell phone use during instructional time. The current policy (JICJ) reads “Student use of electronic communication devices is strictly prohibited during instructional time. Such devices are to be

turned off and put away out of sight". Staff will have to work collaboratively to develop appropriate procedures to ensure this policy is enforced consistently.

#### 4. Professional Learning Communities

Teachers expressed great enthusiasm for the Professional Learning Community work. This is an initiative that is clearly working and should be supported. They have asked for more Professional Learning Community time to meet as Departments and K-12 vertical groups. Meeting as a department and as a district vertical team, ensures that students have the skills they need as they progress through the curriculum and supports interdepartmental consistency in grading, assessment, and teaching practices.

#### 5. Shared Common Units

Staff report that the curriculum is clearly aligned with the State of New Hampshire and National standards. It is clear which standards students must master by the end of each grade level. Aligning the curriculum so that students are taught the skills necessary to meet the standards is no small task and it has been done very well at all educational levels throughout the district. The next step in this area is to create common units for each grade level balanced with flexibility to support student needs. The benefits of common units include, but are not limited to: staff sharing of materials, efficiency planning as a team, a similar experience for every student (regardless of the teacher or school), and a sequence of units that build on one another from year to year.

#### 6. Parent Communication

Many have expressed concern about the consistency of communication. Some teachers and buildings communicate with parents frequently and parents would like this to be consistent throughout the district. Establishing clearly defined minimum expectations for parent communication from the classroom and building levels will help to address this concern. Parent engagement is a challenge for the district. It is recognized that verbal communication may not always be possible. However, communication should be as proactive as possible. Therefore, in person or phone communication is recommended before any written notice is received whenever practicable.

#### 7. Grading

Parents generally do not understand the current grading system. The present system creates confusion and fosters mistrust toward the district. It is suggested that the district develop a team of parents, teachers, and administrators to work on this issue.

## 8. Academic Rigor

Many feel the overall academic rigor is not high enough. Staff and parents at the high school expressed concern that currently students must achieve a 1.5 on a four point scale to be considered basic proficient. Staff would like to have a discussion about raising the minimum passing grade (Basic Proficient) from a 1.5 on a four point scale. It is important to note that the number assigned is not the key to this issue, it is the expectation attached to the number that defines success that is most important. This is an area that needs to be explored. It is recommended that a committee of teachers, parents, students, and administrators make recommendations to the administration and the school board.

## 9. Attendance Issues/Parent Involvement

Attendance is a very complex issue. Staff have reported that attendance is a major issue which needs to be addressed. Tardiness also needs to be considered in addition to absences. Parent involvement has been reported as a significant challenge by many.

## 10. Professional Development

Sanborn has done an amazing job providing meaningful and effective professional development with a very small budget. Teachers would like more choices regarding the professional development. The district would benefit from engaging in surveys of staff for professional development needs and plan differentiated opportunities based on district goals and teacher feedback. The District spends a great deal of time training staff and developing capacity for leadership. This is an excellent strategy for combating high turnover rates to sustain our growth

## 11. School Pride

Staff have reported that school pride has improved over the past years. They shared stories about the past and talked about how they rarely hear students speak negatively about Sanborn. They talked about the accolades and awards Sanborn has received and they would like to see the community support, recognize, and engage in the important work staff have been doing. The recognition that Sanborn receives as a result of the awards contributes significantly to the sense of pride throughout the District.

## 12. Standardized Testing Scores

High school staff, parents, and community members have all expressed concerns about the district's test scores. The highest level of concern is regarding the SAT scores. This problem is complex and is attributed to (but not limited to) the following:

- Student engagement-students who are not attending a four year college are not engaging fully in the exam

- Turnover at the high school-many teachers have left the district (particularly in the Math department) this makes it very difficult to improve standardized test scores
- Message to the students needs to be consistent and very clear from all staff: the exams are important
- Parent engagement - if parents do not value the assessment, students will not value it
- Rigor - the district must hold students accountable to a high level so they will have the skills they need to perform on exams
- Intervention - students need additional help at the moment they fall behind
- Instruction - students get good at what they do: we must teach them to work independently with full ownership in the work

### **3- Student Discipline**

Staff are aware of the complexities of student discipline and feel that they are supported in matters of discipline. All of the above mentioned issues are a component of discipline because students who are engaged and focused on learning tend to display positive behavior. Staff would like more professional development with regard to managing challenging behaviors. At the high school the staff would like to see fewer students in the halls as a general rule. They expressed concerns that discipline is not consistent among staff (classroom to classroom) and sometimes between administrators. Student consequences should be reviewed and applied without being so rigid that the specific needs of each situation can't be considered. Staff and administration need to work on developing a common understanding of how fair is not always equal when it comes to discipline. Balancing consistency and equity is difficult to achieve and will take time, communication, patience, and effort.

### **4- Budget**

The school budget has been a difficult topic for the residents of all three communities. There has been one consistent message: The success of students is paramount. Community members have shared concern about the cost per pupil and the overall budget. The school board recently engaged the services of NESDEC to study the districts demographics, facilities use, and needs. This study should provide direction and context for the next steps in budgeting for the future. The school board and communities as a whole will need to consider many variables including but not limited to teacher salaries, capitol needs, student enrollments, intervention programs, and the ability of the community to fund the budget to provide a strong educational environment and experience for the students. Continued analysis of the the current resources is critical to find efficiencies wherever possible. The development of budgetary lines to cover emergencies in the regular instruction, special education, technology and facilities departments can help alleviate the financial burden of unanticipated cost when they occur.

## **5- Safety**

Sanborn Regional School District should continue to evaluate and plan for safety needs. The Superintendent's Safety Advisory Team has met and will make recommendations to the School Board and the communities. Additions this year include improved communications between buildings, Central Office, and first responders. Fifty percent (50%) of the funds for this project were grant funded. The district needs to continue working on safety concerns and engage in a cycle of continuous improvement with regard to best practices in school safety.

It is important to consider the age and condition of buildings and building support systems (i.e. boilers, roofs, HVAC, etc.) of all facilities owned by the District when developing a safety plan. The ability to provide a healthy, safe learning environment is impacted by the physical condition of the facility for those buildings in use. For buildings not in use, hazardous conditions can develop putting staff and others at risk when trying to service a vacant building if it is not maintained properly.

## **6- Technology**

Technology is an integral part of any school district. Currently, the district has one to one devices for all staff and students. The network is well maintained and functional. The primary areas of growth for technology are in the areas of maintenance and software. The district has too many software programs and should work to minimize the number used by the staff. Staff feel that there is "too much" to do with regard to software and they report that the number of programs is overwhelming. In addition to software analysis the district should develop a technology plan that can be funded annually and an account to provide for emergencies regarding technology.

## **Youth Risk Behavior Survey Summary**

The survey is an anonymous feedback tool which monitors behaviors and experiences which contribute to the leading causes of death and disability. 85% of students at the high school responded to the survey.

- Mental health continues to be a significant concern in our community.
  - 20.5% have engaged in self-harming behaviors (114)
  - 32.6 % would meet the criteria for a depression diagnosis (175)
  - 16.2% have seriously considered suicide in the past year (88)
- Marijuana and Alcohol continue to be the most common drugs used
  - 37% of the students have consumed alcohol in the last 30 days (202)
  - 30% of the students have used marijuana in the last 30 days (164)
- Trauma continues to be impacting many of our students
  - 9.1% of our students report they have been forced into sexual intercourse (50)
  - 8.9% of our students report they have an immediate family member in jail (44)

- 1.5% of our students report being homeless during the past year (9)
- 33% of our students report living with someone with a drug or alcohol problem (181)

Sanborn's averages are on average 4% higher than state and national trends.

The National Child Stress Network reports that "Signs of traumatic stress include fear, anger, withdrawal, trouble concentrating, digestive problems, and nightmares. Behavior disorders and "acting-out" can also be symptoms of trauma. Academic failure, lower dropout rates, higher rates of absenteeism, expulsion and suspension are associated with students' exposure to community violence."

Additional options for extra curricular activities will support students who are exhibiting at-risk behavior. Mental health services will continue to be critical for the success of future students.

### **Summary**

Overall, Sanborn Regional School District consists of dedicated, hardworking, and creative staff. All employees are sincerely committed to supporting each individual student. I recommend the following items as critical steps to improving student achievement:

1. Craft the definition of student success and build a plan to support that vision.
2. Continue to support analysis of data, goal setting, and collaboration by continuing to support the work of Professional Learning Communities.
3. Increase the number of intervention staff (Paras and teachers) and focus the intervention through the analysis of data and best practices in instruction
4. Provide significant professional development that supports curriculum alignment, differentiation of instruction, and student ownership of their work.
5. Careful budgeting through the analysis of current staff, configuration of the district facilities use, and reallocation of resources based on enrollment and needs.
6. Uniform and timely expectations for communication to parents and the community.
7. Increase the rigor of across the K-12 system.
8. Increase the number of extracurricular offerings
9. Reach out to the community (particularly the senior citizens) and increase the volunteer base K-8 to mirror the hundreds of people already working with the high school.

These steps are a summary, and there are many small components to each of these steps. Time and financial funding to sufficiently implement these recommendations are important for successful outcomes. I encourage the communities to consider all of the above mentioned needs as we enter into the next budget season.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me any time.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Ambrose  
Superintendent of Schools  
Sanborn Regional School District