

People

Goal 1: Establish more direct relationships and communication channels between and among building administrators and teachers, students, and our community.

What Went Well

Prior to the pandemic that closed our school and much of the nation in mid-March, our school district was going through the growing pains of a much-needed transition in the way we operate, in fact who we are. Changes to administration, facilities, finance management, and student programming were beyond transformational. Under the banner of our three pillars of **Success and Connection**, **Opportunity and Access**, and **Teaching and Learning**, we were able to recreate our student experience, from first-class facilities to the opportunity for our students to graduate with an Associate's Degree free of charge. The work we have completed for our kids and our community has created the conditions for true generational change. An expanded partnership with Bloomsburg University prior the pandemic, and our work to establish a stronghold in post-secondary vocational opportunities with Luzerne County Community College reflect our passion and drive to continue this work. In the context of shaping the values and standards of the organization, we have clearly established ourselves as a student-centered organization that progressively pursues **Opportunity and Access** for our kids and ultimately our community. Through our work with our community partners not only on academic programming, but also on building the floodwall in a manner that accentuates our programs, partnering with the Bloomsburg University Foundation on a scholarship fund, and managing contractors, architects, bankers, and bond attorneys, we have set a standard for central Pennsylvania. Rather than operating in isolation, we formed multiple partnerships connecting our schools to our local and extended community.

With my own professional development in Secretary Rivera's Superintendent Academy, which concluded last fall, and now my work in the *AASA National Superintendent Certificate Program*, our organization has received both regional and state-wide recognition for our work and allows our administrators opportunities to interact with educational leaders across the Commonwealth.

Limitations

At this point in our time together, I think it is fairly well understood that as an organization we do well with the sometimes-hard work of connecting with community partners. That said, over the summer in a meeting with two board members, perhaps the most influential comment was made, likely as an aside, yet allowing for profound reflection on my part as it clearly and plainly reflected the disconnect between how we interact with our community and external partners as compared to our own faculty and staff. The comment, "*if our teachers felt we were doing a fraction for them what we have done for our kids and our community, they would build a statue.*" As noted in the section above, I am clearly proud of our work and our ability to connect our work to our community through our work with our partners. I have always viewed faculty and staff morale as the work of our building leadership team, with my work being to connect our organization to the meaningful outside with our external partners, including the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and now the Department of Health. We have almost exclusively hired our teachers for administrative positions, going so far as adding several teacher leaders across the district, which unfortunately, did not go as planned.

By focusing on building our leadership team from within and relying on their communication with faculty and staff, I was explicitly delegating that which should not be delegated: our three-pillar vision of **Success and Connection**, **Opportunity and Access**, and **Teaching and Learning**. Given the significant changes in our organization over the past four years, it is essential that our people hear directly from me on who we are, what we are doing, and most importantly, why we are doing it.

It is evident that I have done a poor job with internal management and communicating and building our vision from within. The actual goal, to improve building level communication, is flawed which is implicit in its wording, **between and among building administrators and teachers, students, and our community**. I am delegating that which is my responsibility.

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Moving Forward

While there truly is nothing positive about a worldwide pandemic, there are opportunities to test and define who we are in the face of extreme challenge. I will be forever changed by the conversation with our board members, and for that I am grateful. With honest reflection that it is my fault and my responsibility that some of our faculty and staff may not feel part of our **success and connection** culture we have a platform to address our communication gaps and limitations.

Written Communication: In early August, I began providing daily written updates to our teachers regarding where we were with our re-opening status. These messages continue today, with messages on Sunday providing an overview for the week, and on Thursday providing context for our Friday Act 80 Day. Should we have an issue arise or new information to report, we will send an additional message and, on several occasions, schedule virtual listening sessions to add additional points of connection and clarity. The benefit of the dialogue, conversation, and sometimes open debate that comes from this communication cannot be overstated.

Zoom Follow-up Meetings: As needed, we host open Zoom sessions on topics that need more immediate feedback than waiting until our Friday meetings, or on topics that require direct access for all staff. There is not a great deal of two-way conversation in these sessions, but they do often lead to follow-up dialogue in small group or individual sessions with building administrators and/or teacher leadership.

In-Person Meetings on Friday: We have established a weekly set schedule for meetings with our faculty at each building. The dialogue has led to significant changes to our plans and has allowed our re-opening to be the exemplar for the region. Examples include:

- Moving lunch from classrooms to the gyms.
- Development of a child care option for our teachers should we move into the red phase.
- Changes to the expressive arts schedule to address expressive arts teacher overload.
- Re-posting of our special education supervisor position/assignment of full-time principal to W.W. Evans.
- Re-assignment of teachers to support Accelerate program.
- Request to maintain four-day in-person teaching schedule
- Adopting *SeeSaw* Learning Management System for K-2 to better align with child development. Blackboard is now for grades 3-12.
- Flexible teaching assignments for individuals who are members of vulnerable populations.

Daily K-5 Administrative Zoom Meetings: I meet with Josh, Kim, Michelle, and Melissa to work through daily issues with the management of our in-person and online programs. The opportunity to focus on specific issues, rather than abstract management concepts and book studies has helped the development of all. The opportunity for consistent time and feedback, for two-way dialogue amongst this team, as with teachers, is beneficial for our team development and consequently for our programs as well... My lesson is, I need to do a much better job modeling and mentoring rather than merely assigning and telling.

The three-pillar vision of **Success and Connection, Opportunity and Access**, and **Teaching and Learning** are more than words to me. I live and breathe this vision. It was an error to delegate the identification, interpretation, and application of that vision. For the meetings with faculty and staff post-pandemic, the transition back to normalcy will require scheduling some modifications to keep the two-way dialogue active. Our quarterly state of the district presentations are fine, but definitely not dialogue.