Charting our course together

Unify • Strengthen • Ensure

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On November 8, 2017, I began my service to Henry County as Superintendent of Schools. Being new to Henry County, I established four key objectives that guided my activities during the Entry Phase of our work together. During this time, I have focused on listening and learning. I have grown to understand the values of our community and am beginning to see some gaps that require attention. Four key objectives are:

- Governance Team
- Systems of Learning
- Organizational Operations
- Family and Community Engagement

This analysis to the Board and the community summarizes my Entry Phase objectives and activities. Additionally, this analysis outlines my key findings and our 2018-19 Strategic Priorities. This will now guide my ongoing collaboration with the board, district and school staff, and community members to develop our 10-year strategic plan that will drive district and school effectiveness for the benefit of each and every student.
Dear Henry County Community,

Let me begin by first expressing my deep appreciation for the opportunity to join this thriving community and to lead in this outstanding school district. I am humbled by the trust that the Board of Education has placed in me, and I take quite seriously the responsibility of ensuring an exceptional education for every student, every single day.

Throughout the course of my first three months in Henry County, I have had the opportunity to meet and listen to thousands of members of this community, and I have learned that I am joining passionate, committed, and optimistic people who care deeply about our children, our schools, and our future. I have joined dedicated professionals who have been leading transformative work in public education, and I am building on an extensive legacy of leadership as I follow the many distinguished and accomplished Superintendents of Henry County.

In this document, you will find a summary of my Entry Phase, the themes that emerged, and the Strategic Priorities that will most immediately clarify and guide our work heading into the 2018-19 school year.

Thank you to each and every person who shared their story with me. Thank you for your optimism and your honesty, your generous devotion of time, and your welcoming and collaborative spirit. We are unified by our relentless dedication to our youth, our appreciation of the past, and our audacious belief in what is possible. I look forward to building our next chapter together.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Davis
Superintendent’s Entry Activities By The Numbers

- **50** School Learning Sessions
- **261** Instructional Classrooms Visited
- **142** Leadership Conversations

- **123** Students in Focus Groups
- **47** Parents in Focus Groups
- **86** Teachers in Focus Groups

- **15** Bus Drivers & Monitors in Focus Groups
- **52** School Council and Community Members in Focus Groups
- **35** Paraprofessionals in Focus Groups

- **120** Cafeteria Staff in Focus Groups
- **29** Front Office & Support Staff in Focus Groups
- **41** Exceptional Student Education Teachers in Focus Groups
High performing districts are led by highly effective Board-Superintendent Governance Teams. The role of the Board and the role of the Superintendent is clearly articulated, understood, and executed. Members of the Board of Education are equipped to envision the future of the school system and pursue transformative work through policy development, while the Superintendent is responsible for managing the daily operations of the school system. TOGETHER, they work toward a common goal of improving student outcomes.

During the Entry Phase, my first objective was to understand the current status of the Board-Superintendent team by examining the current practices, culture of productivity, efficiency of business, and underlying mechanics of supporting the work together.

High performing districts have reliable systems in place to ensure that high levels of learning happen every day for every student from classroom to classroom and school to school.

During the Entry Phase, my objective was to learn the current organizational systems that support the core business of teaching and learning and to evaluate the effectiveness of the tools that are in place to monitor student learning. I visited every school and met with school leadership teams, students, teachers, parents, support personnel, and community members to listen to the voices of those that have a stake in student learning.

The core business of student learning is made possible only through the efficiency and effectiveness of all accompanying operations in the school system.

During the Entry Phase, my objective was to understand and evaluate the current systems and processes that support our Financial, Transportation, School Nutrition, Human Resource, Technology, and other backbone services and to consider the readiness of the organization for scale and growth in the coming years.

The health, strength, and long-term stability of any community rests largely on the success of the public school system.

During the Entry Phase, my objective was to reach out to business leaders, civic leaders, faith-based leaders, elected officials, and community leaders to begin the important work of envisioning the future of our school system and the role of our school system as a catalyst for growth in the future.
Themes that Emerged

- There is a strong desire for a collaborative, professional, productive, and visionary Board-Superintendent Team.
- We need to ensure we have an agreed-upon framework for governance and well-defined responsibilities for the Board of Education and the Superintendent.
- School leaders and district leaders both desire increased clarity regarding local autonomy and systemic expectations.
- It is important that we have clear channels of communication for constituents and many opportunities for community stakeholders to participate in shaping the future of the district.
- We have the opportunity to stabilize our systems for teaching and learning, along with operations, through sound policy development and review.

Our Opportunity

- Define a Framework for Governance
  - Reform Governance in Action
    - The Board of Education and Superintendent Team will study and apply Reform Governance in Action (RGA) as a framework for governance. RGA prioritizes the essential role of boards of education in the long-term stability of the organization through policy development, establishing short-term and long-term performance goals to be met by the superintendent, and passing a balanced budget. Additional focus includes the role of the superintendent to manage the daily operations of the school system, design the strategy to meet the performance goals established by the board, and prepare and execute a balanced budget.
  - Theory of Action
    - Through the Reform Governance in Action model for Board-Superintendent Governance teams, we will begin to clarify our Theory of Action, which determines the way in which we balance district systems and local school autonomy.
    - Our Theory of Action must first and foremost define the essential expectations for the core business of student learning: what teachers teach, what students learn, how we know they learn, and what we do when they don’t or do.
Constituent Relations

○ Community Conversations
  ■ The Board-Superintendent team will seek opportunities to host “Community Conversations” related to prominent or pressing topics on an as needed basis. This venue will be designed to foster and welcome community perspectives and input on matters important to Henry County Schools.

○ Advisory Groups
  ■ The Superintendent will establish the following Advisory Groups to provide stakeholder input and feedback regarding matters impacting Henry County Schools.
    • Parent Advisory
    • Community Advisory
      ○ Faith-based leaders
      ○ Elected officials
      ○ Business leaders
    • Principal Advisory
    • Teacher Advisory
    • Student Advisory

“We have been elected by the people with the responsibility to make decisions that are best for our students and our community.”
- Josh Hinton, HCS Board Chairman
Themes that Emerged

Teaching Talent and Capacity

- Henry County has dedicated, hard-working, and talented professionals in teaching positions, leadership positions, and support positions. Everyone is really working tirelessly to do the right thing for students every day.

- There are some stress points on our teaching population that are intensifying and require our immediate attention.
  - Interest in a one-stop shop for resources.
  - Interest in curating current digital resources (locally developed and purchased) for easy access and navigation.
  - Interest in staying dedicated to the current initiatives and seeing them through.
  - Interest in avoiding new initiatives or competing initiatives.
  - Interest in reducing paperwork and duplication of work.

Personalized Learning

- While many districts are scrambling to define personalized learning and find ways to ensure every child's learning needs are met, Henry County has done it. Learning does not look stagnant or cookie-cutter in any classroom in Henry County. District leadership, school leadership, and classroom teachers really deserve accolades for what they have accomplished to authentically initiate a transformative model in education.

- After several years and many lessons learned, the hard work and the sweat equity of educators can now transition into a new normal. We can have honest dialog about what has worked, what has not worked, what unintended consequences now need to be addressed, and how we ensure that unprecedented student learning occurs consistently from student to student, classroom to classroom, and school to school.

- There are some prominent topics that many stakeholders have expressed need clarity.
  - Teachers
    - A one-stop-shop for resources
    - Clarity on the role of the teacher
    - Well-aligned formative assessments
  - Students
    - Less time on the computer
    - Increase the speed of the computer
    - Too much time on pre-tests
  - Parents
    - Screen time
    - Clarity on what my child is learning, how my child is progressing, and how I can help
Systems for Teaching and Learning

- There is no more important decision that local communities make than what children will learn. An effective school system must have clarity and consistency on what teachers teach and students learn, how we teach, how we know students have learned, and what we systematically do when they don’t / do.

- There is an eagerness among all stakeholder groups to better clarify our core business of student learning. We as an organization need to determine the role of standards and the role of competencies and clarify precisely what students learn. We as an organization need to be clear about the teaching of reading and writing, how to do so, and what digital and print resources we use. We need to ensure that students and teachers have access to high-quality digital and print text. We as an organization need to clarify what formative learning data matters most, and we need to ensure that we have a mechanism for accurately measuring both reading proficiency and mastery at high levels.

“ I love taking students’ fear of math and turning them into storehouses of knowledge that have great application skills.”
- Erica Fletcher, Math Hampton High

- Conversations about rigor were pervasive across the district. There is evidence of using Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) as a way to measure rigor across the district. We as an organization need to pursue a culture of high expectations for all students and need to evolve the role of DOK as a tool to determine instructional rigor. We need to teach to the language of the standards and use DOK as a metric to evaluate assessment items. Students at all grades and all abilities need access to advanced content opportunities. We need to increase the number of students participating in accelerated math, enrolling in GA Tech distance calculus, earning high school credits in middle school, earning post-secondary courses in high school, and reading and writing at grade level or above level in every single grade.

- There is tremendous appreciation for the one-to-one technology, and the devices are getting great use at school and at home.

- I asked every principal what he or she expects to see when we step into classrooms and almost every one said “student engagement.” We have an opportunity to really define student engagement as learning engagement, including what it looks like and how we use student feedback to determine evidence.
Learning Outcomes

• Currently we lack consistency and clarity regarding what formative data points matter and how we hold every employee accountable for every child’s performance.

• There are differences from school to school as to how we measure student reading proficiency and establish expected growth for reading in an academic year. There is little evidence that we are successfully accelerating the growth of any student that falls below grade level in reading proficiency.

• There are differences from school to school as to how we measure mastery of state-standards formatively throughout the year.

• There are differences from school to school as to how Milestones and CCRPI inform the leadership and the focus of a school.

Our Opportunity

Clarify the Core Business of Student Learning

• As an organization we need to refine our personalized learning model to include a balance of digital learning with print exposure, student-pacing with teacher-pacing, and student-determined learning environments with teacher-delivered instruction.

• Our teachers cannot continue to independently create everything that they use for personalized learning; we need to develop a one-stop-shop of digital resources (including curating locally-developed, publisher/vendor-purchased, and open-education resources).

• Our teachers, students, and parents value a balance of print resources being available alongside the digital device.

• As an organization we need to put the concept of competencies on hold until they are fully developed and clear. In the meantime, we will clarify what teachers teach and students learn heading into the 2018-19 school year.
  o We need to teach the grade level standards, to the level of the language of the standard.
  o We need to develop Learning Targets aligned to the grade level standards.
  o We need to ensure high-quality resources are available and aligned to the standards.
  o We need to begin the development of a Flexible Formative Assessment system in ELA and Mathematics that will allow for a bank of district items to be available for local schools to use on their collaboratively designed local assessments.
Themes that Emerged

- All classified employee job families play an essential role in the organization. We have passionate, enthusiastic, and student centered professionals dedicated to Henry County Schools.

- The facilities, campuses, and athletics fields are in good condition. It is important to address security measures on school campuses, particularly the open campuses at high schools.

- SPLOST funds are essential to the maintenance, renovation, and upkeep of our buildings.

- The technical infrastructure and roll-out of devices for every student and teacher are healthy and reliable.

“I love the family atmosphere and the respect shown to me by my administrative staff.”
- Stephanie Mays, ARE Office Clerk
• There are new stressors emerging on our general fund revenue sources that will compromise our long term financial health if not addressed quickly. This year alone, the increase in employer-required TRS contributions and the decrease in state equalization funds require us to decrease current expenditures in order to prepare a balanced budget for FY19.

• The bus fleet is aging and our maintenance facility requires updating.

• The partnership with the Sheriff's office is strong and the role of School Resource Officers is valued. Given recent national events, growth of the partnership and an increase in SROs is important.

• Our classified employees enjoy their work for the school system but also recognize that competitive pay is essential.

Our Opportunity

• The preparation of the FY19 budget has required adjustments to local school and district office expenditures.

• Cyclical reviews and timed updates to our bus fleet, equipment, and resources will be developed.

• Competitive salary and benefit packages for all certified and classified employees must be addressed in future budget years.

• No-cost improvements in our safety and security practices will be implemented quickly.

• Future legislative priorities for the Board of Education must include added funding for School Resource Officers (currently HCS receives no state or federal funding for safety and security) and new revenue sources through adjustments to the SPLOST program.
Themes that Emerged

• Families are appreciative of their school community and love their children’s teachers.

• There is a sense of small community and close-knit culture in our large district.

• Families are not feeling connected to their children’s learning. Parents would like guidance on how to help their child with their learning, both on how to use the chromebooks and where to find information about what their child is learning.

• Families do not feel informed of their child’s progress throughout the year. Elementary school parents indicated that the report card is difficult to understand.

• Families do not feel consistently welcome at their local school.

Our Opportunity

• We will begin the development of a parent portal for parents to have easy access to their children’s grade-level standards, classroom grades, and historical assessment data, as well as resources to support learning at home.

• We will evaluate the alignment of the report card to the grade level standards and use parent focus groups to verify that the information is understandable and clear.

• We will evaluate current Board Policies and internal practices regarding teacher-parent communication, academic concern notifications, and the opportunity to support the parent as our student’s first teacher.

“Impact Academy is the hidden jewel of Henry County Schools with a caring staff that communicates well with parents, and makes everyone feel welcomed to be part of their student’s education.”

- Trenda Jones, Parent and School Council Member
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Strategic Priorities

2018-19 Strategic Priorities

• Unify Henry County around excellence in public education.
  o Foster strong parent and family relationships.
    ■ Embrace parents as the first teachers and family as key in learning.
    ■ Build reliable systems for communicating student learning progress and gaps.
  o Foster strong community relationships.
    ■ Protect and promote a community school culture.
  o Invest in our workforce.
    ■ Pursue competitive salary, benefits, and a positive work environment.
    ■ Develop leadership capacity at all levels: district, school, teacher, student, and community.
  o Share the story of learning.
    ■ Ensure common messaging, strategic narrative, and attentive branding.

• Strengthen our core business of student learning.
  o Clarify what we teach and what students learn.
  o Clarify how we teach and how students learn through a personalized learning model.
    ■ A balance of digitally-directed, student-directed, and teacher-directed instruction.
    ■ A balance of student-paced, teacher-paced, and system-paced learning (balance the ownership of learning outcomes between student, teacher, leader, and district).
    ■ A balanced approach to literacy instruction.
  o Clarify how we know students are learning.
    ■ A district infrastructure for student progress monitoring.
  o Clarify district resources for teachers and students.
    ■ Define a digital and print combination of locally developed, open resource, and publisher purchased resources by grade level and standard.
    ■ Develop a one-stop-shop that curates locally developed resources and provides access to all legacy and purchased resources.

• Ensure a high performing environment for all students.
  o Ensure a high performing Board of Education – Superintendent Governance team.
    ■ Study and apply Reformed Governance in Action.
    ■ Define the role of the Board of Education in preparing the district for scale and growth.
    ■ Establish 2-year, 5-year, and 10-year performance objectives.
    ■ Clarify our theory of action to balance system expectations and local autonomy.
  o Ensure every student is reading at or above grade level in every grade.
  o Ensure every school is a high performing school among benchmark schools.
  o Ensure Henry County is a high performing district as indicated by student learning outcomes.
  o Establish national metrics and performance expectations.

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