DATE: May 30, 2014

MEMO TO: Salem School Board

FROM: Michael W. Delahanty, Superintendent

RE: Analysis of Goal Status

The following represents the Superintendent’s status review of the Board’s 2013-2014 goals. A goal assessment should help with the Board’s discussions and decisions at the goal setting session scheduled for Saturday, June 7, 2014.

This document reflects the Superintendent’s understanding of our efforts and related accomplishments from the time the Board set these goals a year ago. This look back will update and assess the four strategies of the District’s Strategic Plan. As noted a year ago, three of the four strategies are consistent with three of the Board’s five principle goals. These principles have appropriately sustained much of our work for many years. With the adoption of the Strategic Plan last June, it’s as important as ever to maintain the principles.

Every school district’s priorities should be its responsibilities to the students it serves. Identifying those responsibilities is often a challenge due to competing opinions of policymakers. Where those responsibilities are concerned, the Salem School District is fortunate to have likeminded people in important decision-making positions. While there are competing ideas among the Board concerning how goals can be achieved, our primary responsibilities have consistently addressed the critical elements of instruction and assessment; an environment to facilitate learning; the effective application of technology; and using effective communication to engage community support. This year, the Board added a principle related to recruiting and retaining the best people. Effective organizations hire and keep very good employees, and the Board was wise to include this as a priority this year.

It’s the practitioners’ responsibilities to manage the operation by taking necessary action steps and making as much progress as possible toward achieving the goals. This school year, a significant team lead by the Assistant Superintendent concentrated squarely upon instruction and assessment by focusing elementary and middle school literacy and mathematics curriculum content and then applying consistent instructional practices across the elementary schools. Additionally, a team identified and administered specific common assessments, and teachers at all levels created competency assessments intended to inform their next step instruction.

Our technology team became more complete as the year progressed, with careful attention paid to each candidate’s qualifications. The Director’s attention was squarely on getting the best people and providing reliable and dependable service to support curriculum and instruction goals. Each of the initiatives undertaken by our technology team resulted in successful completion as evidenced by business continuity. Finally, as explained later, the Director also has advanced the technology related initiatives of our strategic plan.
The culture for learning remains strong. We have weaknesses but have been able to address personnel problems with appropriate care for students and attention to a proper professional culture. As a result of actions taken this year our staff knows that professional performance expectations remain high.

The importance of the fourth principle again was demonstrated during our high school renovation effort. Communication was effective, and support was overwhelming. However, there is work to be done toward achieving and maintain a strong public relations program. This will be a significant key to ongoing support and future success.

Finally, the entire leadership team is aware of the significance of hiring quality personnel. Individuals have a remarkable impact on the organization’s collective quality. A tremendous effort is placed on assessing current staff performance quality and determining the favorable attributes of candidates joining the district staff. This is an important principle goal for our organization.

The following provides a snapshot of my assessment of our progress this year. The Board will want to consider integrating the current principles and capital goals with the strategic plan goals. It will be important to be clear and focused regarding the direction we will take as the goals form the basis of our plans and our day to day work.

MWD: ldc

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Analysis of Goal Status
2012-2013 SSB Goals

Principles:

1. To continue to improve the delivery of all instruction, including non-traditional instruction methods, with priority on literacy and mathematics instruction, and to quantify the educational performance of all students through a multi-dimensional assessment model.

Rating – Developing

We continue to remain focused on mathematics and literacy. Not only has the Board concentrated on these important curriculum areas, but they remain the emphasis for statewide testing. Although a central focus of district-wide curriculum and instruction work, the emphasis is not at the expense of other content areas. Our elementary teachers continue to provide instruction in science and social studies and curriculum content is regularly updated at the middle and high school levels. Nevertheless, our instructional models reflect delivery of mathematics and literacy skills.

For this past school year we added two individuals with very specific skill sets to help inform our professional development efforts. A district wide reading specialist with a professional development background has visited teachers and classrooms in all district schools. Her primary responsibility has been to work with individual classroom teachers and assist with their implementation of a workshop instruction model. This model of instruction is intended to meet students at different performance levels; to enrich or otherwise instruct at an appropriate skill level and challenge all to improve their understanding. A district wide math specialist also met teachers, observed them teach, and provided specific performance feedback regarding their math instruction using a workshop model. Because this person does not have the same breadth of additional content support, she was limited to very specific classroom observations. However, she also introduced new math resources to all teachers at the elementary and middle school level. She also researched and developed a 2014-2015 math pilot for a supplemental program called ST Math (for Spatial-Temporal), which is a visual math program designed to address some students’ unique learning needs. The math specialist also has been working with the eighth grade teachers to show them how math instruction can be elevated for all students.

Our early release and late arrival times were used to develop common literacy units at the elementary level and develop common assessments at the middle and high school level. The common literacy units are designed to align with college and career ready standards and to emphasize a well-structured vertical curriculum alignment. Further, the units of study will be used across all schools next year. Though we’ve had consistent curriculum for years, consistent units of study, as well as eventual specific lesson plans, will further ensure stable programming across our district.

Common assessments were refined at the middle and high school level and follow-up summer work will further develop assessments that will be administered by teachers of the same subjects and courses. Common assessments can help to identify patterns of learning gaps as well as differences in instruction from teacher to teacher. An expected outcome of this initiative is an
opportunity to review student results, determine if students in one classroom are outperforming students in another, and using that experience to improve all teachers’ instruction. It’s an initiative that has been in development for quite some time, and it soon will be necessary to issue a directive to have all common assessments completed by a specific time period.

Our teachers also have administered the i-Ready math and literacy exams to students in grades 1-9. Principals have established “data teams” within each school to review the i-Ready results, and a consistent analysis tool was applied this year to help identify opportunities for improvement. More specifically, the administrators worked with their teams to identify groups of low performing students and provide those students with additional instructional supports. We’ve learned that our assessments provide a wealth of data that is difficult to analyze due to the breadth of results. Therefore, the Assistant Superintendent worked with others to identify a procedure for classroom teachers to use whereby they predict how their students will do, analyze the results, and then identify next steps as a result. The overwhelming amounts of data have restricted us to generalizations by school and then identifying low performing students and writing prescriptive improvement plans for them.

I fully expect that our data management tool, Pulse, will provide us with significant data analysis support. We have to determine how to use the tool on a small scale and then ramp up its use as administrators and others learn its capabilities.

This principle should remain a significant point of concentration within the district.

2. We will sustain an environment conducive to learning whereby students show respect to staff and fellow students, and that school district personnel model and expect such conduct and promote student self-worth.

Rating - Developing

The wording of this principle was modified for 2013-2014 to reflect progress made within the district “to develop” an environment conducive to learning. Now we want to sustain an environment conducive to learning. Although we have such an environment, it’s necessary to continuously work at “sustaining” it. Therefore, this specific principle will always be developing. Our policies include strongly worded expectations for professional behavior, but it’s the actions of administrators that ensure these behaviors are routinely practiced among teachers and other personnel. When the expected behaviors aren’t met, it’s important to act swiftly and decisively to ensure that there is no uncertainty about the consequences for unprofessional or disrespectful behavior. If not addressed, behavior that does not promote student self-worth will become broadly acceptable and the entire environment will begin to break down. It’s important to maintain focus on this principle and react consistently when deviations occur.

By establishing and maintaining clear behavior standards for staff, we are able to retain a stable environment for learning. While there are still outliers, almost all our teachers are respectful of their students. In turn, students are respectful of each other. At the elementary level, maintained for some years now, there is an emphasis on strong character traits and taking time each year to teach and re-teach the types of traits found in healthy environments. Teaching our students these traits early transfers to the middle school and then to the high school, where teachers need to expect elevated behavior standards but only as a reinforcement of earlier
learning. With consistency in the system and agreement about expectations within the community, we will be able to sustain a culture and environment conducive to learning.

However, in a time when students are tormented by others by way of social media and other types of messaging that provides a measure of anonymity, it’s important that we take time to update strategies that work. One example is the “Kindness Matters” effort at Salem High School, and another example is the community service requirements among middle school and high school clubs and athletics. Still another example is the SHS and Woodbury TIPS programs where otherwise marginalized students are extended concrete opportunities to succeed.

We continue to have individuals that skirt the limits of propriety, but as discussed earlier, our policies and contracts share consistent expectations, and we issue reprimands and even harsher consequences to individuals who act contrary to expectations. We’re fortunate to have broad agreement among staff about appropriate behavior standards.

Maintaining this principle will keep attention properly focused on the importance of, and high value placed upon, respectful adult and student behavior.

3. To continue to appropriately infuse technology into every aspect of how the Salem School District operates and delivers services to students in the learning process, to teaching staff in the instructional process, to administrative staff in the way we do business, and to the community outreach and informational efforts.

Rating - Developing

This is another principle that will be continuously developing. Many years ago the Board recognized the imperative of a technology rich environment, and we’ve been making efforts to achieve such an environment ever since. A new infrastructure at Salem High School this year; a wireless pilot program that is scheduled to be expanded across the elementary schools next year; the introduction of short throw “smart” projectors to all of our elementary classrooms next year; and an ongoing encouragement to use web-based instructional opportunities exemplify how technology is used within the instructional process.

The ongoing use of Aesop, a substitute personnel system, and Applitrack, a job applicant tracking and recording program, exemplifies our efforts to infuse technology into the way we do business on a day to day basis. In addition, the Assistant Superintendent and her secretary have worked very hard this year to bring a program called “My Learning Plan” to our district, which is intended to eliminate a significant paperwork burden from certified staff and the support personnel required to track that paperwork. My Learning Plan will be a significant addition to our repertoire of web-based management programs designed to achieve greater work efficiency. As the result of a very competent central office support staff, and the introduction of these management tools, we have been able to eliminate a secretary position from the central office team for the 2014-2015 school year.

Our student information system continues to provide access to records not before accessible to parents and students. Students and their parents are able to track grades, discipline, and attendance routinely. This has elevated communication efforts between home and school. Available at the middle and high school level, while not perfect, students can attend more readily to their progress. We hope to add access at the elementary level in the not too distant future.
With the help of our web operations specialist and through our community engagement efforts, we’ll be introducing “ParentLink” in the late summer and early fall. This program will allow us to “push out” information rather than require parents to visit our web site to get information. We also intend to use Facebook and Instagram as primary media alternatives through which to deliver information about the school district and individual schools. This is still in the development stage, but as mentioned, should be ready to go in late summer or early fall, 2014.

4. To foster community support and engagement through effective communication and partnership.

Status - Beginning

During much of the 2013-2014 school year, we demonstrated that we can foster community support and engagement by identifying a clear need and providing key messages for communicating that need. Earning overwhelming support for our high school project was quite telling. Nevertheless, a clear and sustainable strategy for effectively communicating information about our schools and programs is still in the beginning stages.

As addressed previously, our community engagement committee, as a goal within our strategic plan, has already generated ideas that we hope to launch later this summer and in the fall that will begin to address the expectations of this goal. Our group met throughout the school year in an effort to meet the indicators as outlined in the strategic plan.

Our student information system, Infinite Campus, provides a significant measure of information critical to a core constituent group. Parents want information about their greatest interest – their children. We’re continuing to grow this element of our communication strategy. However, our community engagement committee is the most critical opportunity to develop a public relations plan that captures the essence of this goal.

Though we’ve been at it very intentionally for almost a year, this effort remains in the beginning stages.

5. To employ methods of recruitment, training, compensation, evaluation, and retention of Salem School District personnel to attract and retain employees committed to advancing the school district in areas of student achievement, technological advancement, and business operations.

Status – Developing/Secure

This principle is new for 2013-2014, but it was formerly a non-capital goal. As such, it has been an area of emphasis for some time, and though we continue to refine our practices, we have been quite successful in all elements. Nevertheless, it’s important to maintain it as a principle because personnel will always make or break an organization. Attending to the need for quality personnel at all levels of the organization reflects the importance of putting appropriate people in appropriate circumstances.
We have been quite intentional in our efforts to recruit, train, and evaluate our professional staff. In the past few years we began to use training programs for administrators and teachers designed to improve their understanding of performance expectations. In turn, this has helped our teachers to understand the behaviors we expect and upon which administrators will be evaluating their performance. Having a common language that reflects good teaching is supportive of newer personnel and removes the likelihood that an administrator will impose an unanticipated expectation. Our use of technology expanded to the evaluation process because some of our administrators are using Teachscape tools to record observations and share them immediately after watching a classroom for several minutes. This was imposed as a pilot project this school year. We’re still evaluating the effectiveness of this tool, but some administrators have said they found it useful.

In the process of elevating our expectations and narrowing the definition of effective performance, we have been able to provide more succinct and specific feedback to veteran teachers. A clear set of performance standards, and a common understanding of the terminology within those standards, will help everyone.

Non-Capital Goals:

- To actively pursue opportunities to enhance the skills and qualifications of the district paraprofessional staff and provide compensation appropriate to those enhanced skills.

Status – Beginning/Developing

This goal has a relationship with Principle 5. However, we have not previously been as intentional about providing training to paraprofessionals. This year, and specifically during the early release and late arrival days, efforts were made to direct specific information to the paraprofessionals to help them to better understand their roles and responsibilities within the organization.

Through the collective bargaining process, the Board acknowledged the need to provide appropriate compensation by elevating the opportunities for more individuals to qualify for and obtain affordable health insurance. This benefit will begin for the paraprofessional staff on July 1. Due to the high cost of this benefit, and the corresponding impact to the operating budget with the success of this particular warrant article, there was not a substantial hourly rate pay increase. Nevertheless, the Board acknowledged the impact of certified educational assistants and offered that employee sub-group elevated pay for the additional certification. It’s expected that the additional benefit and the elevated pay for this sub-group will attract qualified individuals to assistant positions.

An area that is only in the beginning stages is some type of formal planning for skill enhancement or educational development. With all our paraprofessionals, additional training will only benefit our students, which is their explicit purpose as part of our staff.
• To inform and educate Board members of current national and local educational initiatives, legislative changes, and legal issues that impact the district.

Status - Beginning

Wording of this goal was adjusted for 2013-2014. Several opportunities were discussed at Board meetings related to matters such as statewide assessments; Common Core and the state’s “waiver” with regard to restrictions of NCLB; and teacher and administrator evaluation requirements.; We kept the Board up to date with the State Senate and House deliberations as well as legal matters such as the Affordable Care Act. The Board negotiated five contracts this year and much attention was placed on those efforts as well as the high school bond. Regarding general national and local initiatives, more can likely be done. Consequently, the status for this particular goal is considered to be in the beginning stages.

• To develop 3-4 year budget projections to help guide near term budget decisions and support the process of obtaining approval for Salem High School renovations.

Status – Secure

If this goal isn’t secure, the Board will have to provide specific direction. Although we did not develop full budget projections that included, for example, scenarios illustrating the potential impact of collective bargaining, we did provide budget impacts of several different bond scenarios. Additionally, meeting with local bankers to get a clear sense for appropriate bond rate estimates provided the basis of our projections. This helped elevate confidence levels in the provided estimates. Bringing the scenario out to 2018-2019, when the full impact of the bond strategy will be known, helped local taxpayers to determine whether or not the high school project was affordable. Earning voter approval was an indication that our projections and illustrations were sufficiently transparent.

• To provide the necessary resources to support and achieve the objectives and key results of the district’s strategic plan and specifically to meet performance indicators identified for the 2013-2014 school year within each strategy.

Status – Beginning/Developing

Although many of the performance indicators for this school year have been achieved, it’s also true that the indicators became elements within the work done toward achieving other goals. The strategy related to 21st Century Learning is directly related to the first principle. A second strategy related to technology is directly related to the third principle, and a third strategy, community engagement, is directly related to the fourth principle. The fourth strategy, facilities, is related to our capital goals. A tremendous effort has been placed on achieving the initial indicators. Included for the school board is an indicator list that includes pale blue shading for indicators that have been completed achieved or started, and pale green shading if the indicator was expected to be started sometime during the 2013-2014 school year but was not. Many of the indicators span the entirety of the three to five years of the strategic plan. Those not shaded are not scheduled for this school year. We will remain diligent in our efforts to achieve these goals.
Capital Goals:

1. To support the Facilities Master Plan and the Strategic Plan by developing plans and building public support for the completion of comprehensive renovations to Salem High School for presentation to voters in March, 2014.

Status – Secure/Met

All the efforts culminated in an affirmative and favorable vote on March 11. It was one of the most challenging goals the Board has set, and it was achieved. We only have to be mindful that success will be measured less by the construction of a new high school than by our capacity to achieve our principle goals.

2. To fund Capital Improvement renovations to all district buildings in accordance with the systematic evaluation of district facilities (including buildings, exterior facades, grounds, and landscaping), recognizing such expenses are a necessary and ongoing (annual) budgetary expense if the community investment in such facilities is to be preserved, with a goal of 2% of the facilities’ value in FY 2013-2014.

Status – Developing

For the upcoming school year, the Board included much less than the 2% of facilities’ value, but the amount dedicated to capital improvement was reduced as a result of the high school bond effort and the knowledge that success would allow us to address multi-millions of capital needs funds for that one school.

As we look ahead to 2015-2016, the Board will want to be mindful that three of our schools were completely renovated in 2011; two others in 2014; life safety issues were addressed in another; and the high school is undergoing a complete refurbishment/rebuild. The first phase schools will have four years of wear and tear as 2015-2016 gets underway. Woodbury will have some significant deficiencies, but many capital needs cannot be addressed through modest upgrades or equipment replacements in that building. Nevertheless, we’ll have to invest some money in that school.

The Board should consider the routine maintenance costs, particularly for the Phase I elementary schools, and determine whether or not 2% remains the most appropriate figure.