DATE: May 29, 2013
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 2012-2013 goals. A goal assessment should help with the Board’s discussions and decisions at the goal setting session scheduled for Saturday, June 1, 2013.

With the adoption of a Strategic Plan, the Board will decide how the four major strategic plan goals can be integrated with the 2013-2014 Board goals. Members will note that three of the strategic plan goals are also long-standing principle goals of the Board. They are not stated verbatim, but the substance of the strategies is consistent with three of the principles. The fourth strategic plan goal is directly consistent with the first capital goal and advancing a facilities master plan.

The principle goals serve to focus the district’s efforts on student achievement. Not only do they establish a focus on learning but they also focus on conditions for learning. Maintaining an appropriate learning environment is not addressed in the strategic plan, and the Board will have to determine if this expectation is now a part of our culture or if this should be a separate expectation.

Improving and refining district curriculum documents continue as a focus for administrators and teachers. The Assistant Superintendent spends a great deal of time discussing releases of state and national documents that serve to inform priority content. Although we have always chosen to adapt rather than adopt the content of the national and state documents, we want to be sure that our students are fully advantaged. These documents inform our instructional strategies, and our staff is becoming more sophisticated and refined about the strategies they use and how those strategies influence learning. This continues to be the core of our work.

The learning environment, addressed within the second principle, emphasizes respect. There are infrequent lapses in our expectations within student to student; student to teacher; and teacher to student expectations. Given the number of interactions occurring on a daily basis, I believe the incidents are few in number. We have a strong culture for learning, and we continually reinforce the expectations. Students are held accountable for their behavior, and staff members’ behaviors are always addressed. This expectation for accountability has assisted in establishing that culture of respect.

Technology is available on a broader basis than was true in the past. With the purchase of teacher laptops and now student laptops, access to technology grows. However, we have to maintain attention to the benefits and opportunities afforded by technology and not diminish the
attention we’ve paid to this. We’ve discovered some weaknesses in our infrastructure and hopefully will address the weaknesses in the coming months to further improve opportunities. The application of technology can offer some level of efficiency, and as our enrollments decrease, technology should be a way to maintain a level of course offerings without the significant associated personnel costs. Technology overlaps the first principle goal insofar as web-based assessments provide a measure of student learning. While these assessments will not provide a complete picture of student learning, the assessment results can inform our curriculum and instruction decisions.

The importance of the fourth principle was demonstrated once again during the successful campaign to win voter support for our school renovation article. We were not successful in every respect, but we would not have had any success without a supportive public. As Board members are aware, I’ve admittedly struggled with this principle outside the parameters of a single or focused purpose that provides some measure of personal interest for the public. The structure of the strategic plan should assist in this respect. Though we’ve attempted several strategies for promoting public involvement, it appears that success with a principle such as this requires a focused purpose. Regardless, we will continue our efforts to improve communication.

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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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

The four principle goals continue to be the core of the school district’s work. Certainly the strategic plan reflects the fundamental importance of the work related to all four goals. The focus has been mathematics and literacy because the Board realized the importance of these content areas years ago and nationally these two areas are outlined within the Common Core. A great deal of work has already been done to ensure that our content is appropriately aligned with grade level emphasis but also that instructional strategies most appropriately advantage our students. Assessment provides the information directing students along an achievement continuum, and we continually search for assessments that provide good information efficiently. Many district initiatives are dedicated to exploring our best instruction options.

As we’ve begun the transition to the realignment of skills and concepts, we’ve reviewed the resources and strategies for teaching them, particularly at the elementary and middle school level. We will introduce a new math resource in the fall, a resource to which the teachers have already been introduced, and we’ve also emphasized a “workshop” model for math instruction. The focus here is to provide instruction to students based upon their learning needs rather than on a content sequence. As teachers become more familiar with the strategy, more students should exceed performance expectations. A similar strategy was adopted several years ago with literacy. Our elementary teachers, and our grade six teachers, adopted a reader and writer workshop model and we’ve transitioned from a reliance upon basal reading books provided by national publishers to a series of literature books available to each grade level in our schools. In this way, students can be provided with appropriately leveled reading content while working on similar skills at different degrees of sophistication.

We continue to supplement our print resources with web-based software that has been provided in some schools as a result of designations as Schools in Need of Improvement. For other schools, as a result of the student benefits derived from the programs, our operating budget is supporting their availability. Once again, we continue to seek opportunities that will advantage students.

An example of this is a partnership with Granite United Way in the use of Reading Plus, a web-based reading improvement program that was introduced at all levels this year. While primarily available for special education students, we’ve also used the program with non-identified students that struggle with the acquisition of reading skills. The program has shown promise with some students, and we will continue this relationship for at least two more years. Our Director of Literacy has been instrumental in ensuring that the program is used with integrity throughout the grade levels. Our efforts were acknowledged by Granite United Way.
Another effort that has shown promise is an after-school “supplemental education services” (SES) program that is a result of Title I requirements. We were obligated to provide under-performing students with access to supplemental reading tutoring, and Dr. Marshall developed our own program that ensured Title I funds that otherwise would have gone to private providers, were directed to our staff using our resources. The anecdotal feedback has been positive.

We continue to support teacher professional development by structuring a Learning through Colleagues (LTC) program for groups of elementary school teachers. Unlike past years, this year’s efforts have focused on mathematics and strategies for implementing Common Core skills and concepts. Our teachers’ continued involvement is evidence that this model of professional development works.

Along with our competency based assessment initiative, we use several web-based assessment tools. These include Progress Toward Standards 3 (PTS3) and i-Ready Diagnostic. We also use the aforementioned Reading Plus to assess reading gains, and we now have individual fall and spring reading assessments for all students through grade six. With the recent availability of an Infinite Campus data warehouse, we expect student level data to be more readily available and useful.

Finally, as a professional development tool, we contracted with a company, Teachscape, to provide us with a library of teacher lesson videos that are scaled and rated against performance standards similar to our own. These videos are based upon thousands of lessons delivered by teachers of all skill levels and were used to engage our teachers in conversations about what good instruction looks like. The videos and the conversations have helped to deepen many teachers’ understanding of good instruction.

2. That an environment conducive to learning requires that students show respect to staff and fellow students, and that school district personnel should model and expect such conduct and promote student self-worth.

Rating - Developing/Secure

By expecting school and classroom behavior expectations and by setting clear behavior standards for staff, we are able to maintain a stable environment for learning. There are teachers who don’t arrive at school every day expecting to treat students or other adults with respect, but when examples of improper behavior arise, the principals address the problem and/or they refer the problem to me. Through action with some, the message is clear throughout the district, we’re expected to be the adults and treat everyone with respect. This is a critical step toward ensuring an environment that is conducive to learning.

This standard establishes a foundation for the way schools are operated, the day to day expectations for student and adult conduct, and responses to incidents of misbehavior. I have been pleased that our schools have a majority of teachers and other employees who represent a high standard. We do have a share of individuals who skirt the limits of propriety, but district documents and contracts all share consistent expectations and reprimands are issued to individuals who act contrary to expectations. As I’ve stated in past years, sometimes students or
parents object to an adult’s behavior and staff object to students’ behavior. However, for the most part we have standards with which people comply.

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

Using technology to support the work of the district continues to be imperative. Whether for business continuity, efficiencies, or to improve opportunities for students, technology enhances options. To that end, we have made a substantial investment in software and hardware intended to address this important and critical goal.

Most recently, we expanded our use of Infinite Campus to provide greater parent access to their children’s school information. This has not been without difficulties and challenges, but it represents a different way of thinking for our staff and consequently has required patience. We have to be mindful of the increased communication requirements this imposes and the more routine parent contact that results. In and of itself, this is not detrimental to students, but it’s a matter that can result in resentment and a half-hearted effort from staff. To date, few problems have been brought to my attention, and we’ve been able to address most of those with little or no difficulty. We will need to continue to extend some measure of understanding as we escalate our expectations and broaden our accessibility reach to the elementary schools.

Our ongoing technology purchase plan through a lease to own schedule provides an opportunity to address performance while also gaining hardware access. Particularly as federal and state standards impose new requirements, we need to ensure that we can provide necessary opportunities to our students. Requirements such as new on-line testing will necessitate a review of current priorities and may force us to elevate our technology related budget requests.

A technology plan as directed by the Strategic Plan will help to structure our needs and a schedule to meet those needs. A plan has been a weakness, and this weakness will be addressed this upcoming year.

Our website continues to offer opportunities, and we need to do more to take advantage of those opportunities. Difficulties within the IT department resulted in diminished attention to web site improvements, but with greater attention placed on marketing efforts, the web site will get greater attention in the coming months.

Our efforts to expand our use of technology have not been exemplary, but this goal remains critical, as established within and defined by the strategic plan. Finally, I believe we have the personnel in place to help us to advance this effort effectively.
4. To promote public involvement in school and district issues.

Status - Developing

As addressed in the cover letter the support of our primary renovation warrant article is an indication that public involvement is critical to the success of our initiatives. The Board has been successful with four significant issues in five years. These include Kindergarten in 2009; the renovation of three elementary schools in 2010; voter support of all collective bargaining agreements in 2012, despite not passing our renovation bond article; and a primary renovation article in 2013. These are substantial and all required an intense grass roots effort. Nevertheless, routine and common marketing and public relations are not the norm.

Our strategic planning effort provided a measure of involvement opportunity for more than a hundred individuals who strongly support the Strategic Plan, or at least the work of their committee. However, the principle goal has loftier expectations than providing individuals with opportunities for direct district involvement. The objectives of the Strategic Plan outline specific action strategies that will expect ongoing promotion of district activities, successes, and initiatives. This goal expects the district to share good news about what we do and why, and we need to have a specific strategy to make this happen.

Although some efforts have been made, particularly by rolling out parent access to children’s information sooner than anticipated, our efforts to specifically promote involvement and awareness have been inadequate and must improve. The strategic plan can help with this shortcoming.

Non-Capital Goals:

- To continue current and create new partnerships with interested groups to fund the Athletic Facilities Trust Fund in order to renovate and maintain the district’s athletic facilities.

Status – Beginning/Developing

In the past, I’ve labeled this effort as developing. In some respects we’ve regressed, insofar as no formal effort is underway to create new partnerships. Funds are annually deposited into a trust fund set up for athletic facilities’ improvements, and the Board has indicated its support by accepting a gift of two new scoreboards and by approving the expenditure of funds to have the scoreboards installed. However, we have not established a specific effort dedicated exclusively to improving our athletic facilities since the effort to install a turf field fell short. Nevertheless, we work with community youth groups and the Salem Recreation Department to explore potential partnerships to improve facilities such as a new storage shed near our softball field and a new batting cage near Bryant Memorial Field.

More could be done to help achieve this goal and perhaps an effort to renovate Salem High School can spark another attempt to generate support to improve our high school and middle school fields and related structures.
To examine and enhance 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

Our most recent efforts to replace members of the leadership team have been successful. In part, this is a result of our efforts to groom successors to current members of the team, and in part, it’s been a result of the Board’s acknowledgement that a particular salary is disproportionate to the market. Assistant principals at both the high school and middle school and a Math/Science Coordinator are recent hires, with one hired from outside the district and two from within. The compensation for both was sufficiently attractive to maintain our offers within budget parameters. A third position, IT Director, required the Board to consider an increase to the originally appropriated salary amount to secure a qualified and quality individual. This flexibility gave us the opportunity to hire an individual with infrastructure knowledge as well as an understanding of the education side of IT. The salary, combined with clear expectations, a structured environment, and a respectful culture all contribute to our ability to retain individuals who are committed to advancing student achievement. Notwithstanding the compensation side, we also have provided clear performance requirements and the training necessary to be successful. This has resulted in a Leadership Team that is committed to the school district’s goals and objectives.

We have not been as concerned with the hiring of other professional staff members as there seems to be a good pool of candidates, and Salem provides a favorable professional work environment. Nevertheless, it’s important to provide strong and clear performance expectations and a support structure that includes clear feedback on day to day execution. Our evaluation system has been an exercise in continuous improvement as we’ve worked to develop our administrators’ performance evaluation skills and our teachers’ understanding relative to expected levels of performance. To that end, we’ve trained all our administrators through a rigorous development program called Teachscape, which is patterned after the district’s teacher professional performance standards, and we’ve provided probationary teachers with programs designed to show samples of teacher work performance. The combination of training and lesson vignettes has resulted in good discussions and a deeper understanding of good teaching.

Our paraprofessional staff continues to present some difficulties because our training time is limited and our hiring practices aren’t as thorough. This personnel area provides the strongest opportunity for improvement as we continue to examine our practices.

To develop and implement a plan to inform and educate Board members of current national and local educational initiatives, legislative changes, and legal issues that impact the district.

Status - Beginning

We have discussions about legislative matters that impact the school district as time permits and as it’s relevant. This fall we had a session with several of our legislators, but at the time it was uncertain as to what priorities would be advanced in the House or Senate. The
outcome of this current session is still uncertain, and an August meeting with our legislators might provide a re-cap of this current session as well as some insight into the anticipated priorities for the 2014 session.

On a national level, Congress remains gridlocked relative to education. We have little or no insight into when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (aka NCLB) will be reauthorized or what the associated priorities will be when it is reauthorized. The elements of NCLB continue to drive the national and state conversations as we grapple with new iterations of student testing; programs that support early interventions for underachieving students; and evaluating school personnel in a manner that assures retaining good professional staff members.

Other than scheduling a meeting with local legislators, I believe Board members are up to date on national and state level priorities, including such matters as a transition to the Common Core; expectations for on-line testing; and using data to inform decision-making.

- To evaluate the educational impact kindergarten has on succeeding grade levels. Further, to put an emphasis on offering full-day kindergarten and additional benefits to increase the enrollment of typical peers in our SEED Program, both funded through a tuition basis.

Status – Developing

The first part of this goal, the educational impact of kindergarten, has been a priority for a couple of years. We identified data sources that can be used to distinguish and differentiate the performance of our first few kindergarten cohorts with the students who didn’t benefit from our public program. One of those sources is the benchmark assessment, and some data was shared with the Board during this school year to illustrate the greater gains in literacy levels over groups that did not have public kindergarten. Simultaneous to the introduction of kindergarten we introduced early supports and interventions at the primary grade level, and we introduced instructional models such as readers and writers workshop. It will be difficult to draw a one to one correspondence to the kindergarten program, but I’m confident we’ll be able to show achievement differences as well other measurable differences as we grow our data warehouse and define how we can show these differences. I hope to have something more definitive by fall.

Regarding the second part of that goal, to grow the full-day kindergarten program, we have scheduled a fourth full-day session to begin in the fall. I believe we can offer at least one additional full-day session once we have available classroom space and no interference from renovation projects. The program has been popular and well-received.

Efforts to find or recruit typical peers for our SEED program have not been successful. We have had sporadic interest with a maximum number of enrollees of six during any one semester, and these have been siblings of program students or have been children of district staff who support the typical peer concept. If we are to be successful with this program, we need to learn more about what other districts do and the types of schedules they maintain in order to attract and retain their typical peer populations. We have some work to do in this regard, and with attention, and perhaps renovated space, we should be able to meet this goal. It’s worth maintaining.
Capital Goals:

1. To continue advancement of the Facilities Master Plan by completion of renovations to elementary school facilities needed to address current and future enrollments, assuring equality of opportunity for all the District’s elementary students, and to that end, proposing and seeking public support for renovations of one or more schools in 2013-2014.

Status – Secure

The facilities master plan has been one of the Board’s successes. Though there continues to be work to do, we have two committees advancing the work of the overall plan, and regardless of the outcome of a high school project vote there can be no doubt that the Board has maintained a focus on renovating existing facilities. Although we still must address Woodbury School, and we’ll have to confront the future of Haigh School, we have attended faithfully to the master plan and the schools’ improvement needs. I have every confidence that we will not deviate from our planning needs and will “continue advancement” of the master plan. With that stated, I believe this goal should be maintained while we address planning needs.

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

In the 2013-2014 operating budget, the Board provided almost $1 million to address capital projects. The 2012 facilities audit identified several million dollars of capital needs, but a proposed high school renovation should address a significant number of these needs, and so it was understandable to fall short of the entire 2% goal in this effort. Nevertheless, the funds included in the operating budget represent an almost doubling of the historical amount. Information within the facilities audit will help us to identify the priority projects so that we can follow a responsible course of action.

Further, last year we introduced a web-based preventative maintenance program to help track maintenance activities as well as to identify required maintenance work. Now, all our mechanical units as well as electrical and plumbing systems have been entered into this program. Also, district assets such as landscaping equipment and vehicles have been entered into the maintenance system. The program identifies the routine equipment maintenance needs and alerts district officials to upcoming required work. This program and system will help us to maintain our equipment and mechanical systems so that we can avoid problems associated with not addressing routine maintenance needs.

There has been additional attention paid to our grounds and landscaping maintenance. New strategies for keeping up the exterior appearance of our schools were imposed last summer in an effort to more effectively and efficiently address our needs. These practices will be maintained, but there is more we can do. Our Director of Maintenance is aware of this Board goal and provides necessary attention.
Maintaining this goal of achieving a capital repair line of 2% of our facilities’ value is appropriate. Though a great deal of effort has been made to identify and structure our needs, the goal should be retained.