DATE: May 9, 2012
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 principles, non-capital goals, and capital goals for 2011-2012. This assessment is intended to inform the Board’s upcoming discussions and decisions regarding establishing or re-establishing goals for the upcoming school year. The Board has contracted with consultant Jay Vogt to facilitate a strategic planning process to begin in August, 2012. Mrs. Berry and Mr. Campbell will be the Board’s strategic planning team representatives. The strategic planning process, expected to take up to a year to complete, is coming at a fortunate time. Significant attention from national policymakers is directed to education matters, and state officials continually react by modifying qualifying standards for federal grant awards; adjusting academic performance standards requirements; and revising required curriculum content. Simultaneously, professional staff evaluation standards and procedural aspects of evaluation continue to shift. The aforementioned changes only begin to scratch the surface of anticipated changes, and this elevates the necessity for strategic focus on the fundamental basis for our work, which is student learning.

The Board regularly has maintained four principle goals, and these are related to curriculum, instruction; and assessment; creating an appropriate learning and working environment for students and staff; maximizing opportunities presented by technology and technology related advances; and promoting public involvement. These principles help sustain forward movement and avoid pronounced deviation from an essential focus on student preparedness for the next level of learning.

We continue to advance our district curriculum standards as well as our instruction and practices. If the school district were a formal business, these elements would represent our core. This first principle reflects a belief in the centrality of the classroom; the focus on essential work. Appropriately, it has remained a significant priority. This principle has driven initiatives for several years. From a focus on developing our elementary and middle school teachers’ understanding of mathematics to today’s emphasis on designing assessments and measuring student progress, we don’t lose sight of the priorities. Now, the Common Core State Standards will necessitate significant time and attention as we address the important content on which the next generation of state literacy and math testing will be based.

The second principle, emphasizing an environment appropriate to learning, also is central to our daily work. Learning won’t occur without proper conditions. We’re fortunate to have supportive parents who, for the most part, expect good behavior, and staff who set high expectations for their classrooms. Bullying training has also helped with our school
environments and an emphasis on mutual respect. Further, we have elevated our expectations for teachers and administrators convey those expectations more regularly.

Our use of technology continues to improve, within the learning process, the management process and the information process, but we have to sustain this emphasis because it’s a field that changes more regularly than anything we’ve seen. Our infrastructure is more robust, and technology used as a management tool is significantly more reliable than in previous years. We’ve come to this through some trial and error, but we’ve focused planning for hardware purchases and for such advances as a new student information system. We continue to use several web-based instructional support applications in the schools. Our intent with these programs is to assess the impact on students, determine the most effective, and introduce the programs across the schools. I remain convinced that technology is a strong opportunity to provide extensions of learning; reinforcement of content; and more practice with concepts.

The principle of promoting public involvement continues as a challenge. In past years I’ve indicated that issues that get attention are personal. As evidenced by the turnout generated for the bond vote, and regardless of the failure, when we work in partnership with key stakeholders we generate involvement and support. We have other recent examples of engaging people in projects when there is an issue of interest. This doesn’t mean we can’t continue our efforts to improve communication efforts, and I advocate for maintaining this goal as a principle.

As you will note in the following, most of the goals continue to be labeled “developing”. I want the principles to continue as written as I believe they continue to stand up to constructive scrutiny, but they also provide foundation language for the core values the Board will establish as we begin the strategic planning process.
Analysis of Goal Status
2011-2012 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**

All four principle goals are critically important to student academic success, but this first principle is at the center of the district’s work. Notwithstanding the necessity of other content areas as well as arts and physical education, literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to academic growth, advancement, self-sufficiency, and later success. Assessment provides the information directing students along the path. Consequently, many of our initiatives have been dedicated to advancing teachers’ and principals’ related skills.

Everyday Math is our primary resource program for kindergarten through sixth grade and Connected Math is the primary resource in grades seven and eight. The content emphasis in each of these programs has been the New Hampshire Department of Education published grade level expectations (GLE) and grade span expectations (GSE). However, we are in the process of transitioning to a curriculum emphasizing the common core state standards (CCSS), to which New Hampshire has already committed and on which our students will be tested beginning in 2015. Though our math resources continue receive criticism from time to time, no print or electronic resource is considered the standard bearer. Therefore, until such time as we have a compelling reason to change our instructional materials, we will continue with those we have, updating them with new editions as necessary. We will supplement the print resources with electronic support applications such as Study Island and Education City, which provide online re-teaching and reinforcement on an as-needed basis. Finally, a few of our Schools in Need of Improvement (SINI) are learning more about and practicing a math workshop model for instruction that helps to address individual differences in the classroom. This differentiation has always been an expectation, but some success with our reading model has prompted an effort to replicate the model with math instruction.

In reading and writing, our Director of Literacy, Jenny Marshall, coordinates the reading specialists to ensure a consistent and focused literacy program. We continue to use a workshop model as an instructional strategy for both reading and writing, which emphasizes the use of specific literature within each classroom as students prepare for greater levels of complexity. This is a shift from the longtime practice of using a basal reading program as a foundation to build reading and writing skills. Teachers have embraced the strategy, and despite the protests of a few, consistent practices are used throughout the school district.

To support our teachers, we continue to promote a professional development opportunity, *Learning through Colleagues* (LTC), in which nearly all our elementary teachers participate. Though the reading specialists are involved, the project is facilitated by teachers. LTC provides teachers with an opportunity to discuss student progress, books used, strategies developed, successes and failures, and share ideas that have worked. The continuing involvement of so many of our teachers is evidence that this model of professional development works.
We continue to partner with Measured Progress in training sessions designed to help staff organize content for the purpose of developing strong assessments used to determine students’ understanding of the content taught to them. Further, we want students to be able to explain what they’ve learned in such a way that it’s clear the students truly understand what is expected. While at one time students could regurgitate facts successfully and earn passing grades, now students should have to explain their learning to an acceptable depth of understanding. Our teachers are learning necessary and appropriate strategies for gauging student knowledge and understanding. Concurrently, our teachers are using different types of learning measurement tools. At the elementary level, these include benchmark assessments, spelling inventories, and Progress toward Standards (PTS3) tests. At the middle and high school levels the teachers are using common exams and PTS3 tests. We continue to search for opportunities to improve our assessment measures.

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

Rating - Developing

We don’t succeed every day in providing an environment conducive to learning, but teachers and administrators respond swiftly and aggressively when the environment is disrupted. We are communicating more than ever with parents of students who are upset by something at school or who intentionally harm others. Students cannot learn in an uncomfortable environment, and this principle acknowledges our responsibility to vigilantly monitor student and staff behaviors as well as reactions to behaviors. Coupled with policies that articulate expected behaviors, professional performance standards, school and classroom rules, and evident support on occasions when students or staff make missteps, our schools’ standards for behavior set appropriate expectations.

School administrators respond quickly to student violations of expected standards, and this response elevates behaviors exhibited by everyone. Additionally, when staff misstep we respond quickly and with documented standards. The staff member is expected to change behaviors but further steps are taken by administrators when necessary. This limits criticisms that adults can “get away” with inappropriate behaviors and reinforces statements that all are held accountable.

Bullying occurs but on a limited basis. With a strong policy in place, and training coordinated or facilitated by Mrs. Soley last year, we have consistent expectations throughout the district. We’ll never eliminate bullying from our schools, but we can react aggressively to circumstances and thereby diminish the likely occurrence. With the support of our School Resource Officers, as well as consistent expectations, we’ve been able to keep our school environments strong. However, as previously stated, this principle goal helps to maintain a focus on this significant cultural variable.
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

The Board’s principle goals are not intentionally ranked in priority order, however after literacy, math, and assessment, and providing a respectful environment, the use of technology offers opportunities to achieve our core purposes. As a consequence of the Board’s attention to technology, we have an advanced infrastructure that supports the latest business and education software at reasonable costs; we provide all staff laptop computers with the versatility to help design strong instructional lessons and perform routine business functions; and we have distributed student workstations that enable access to instructional support applications, research, and presentation design. While there remain students with access to better technology at home, the vast majority of our students benefit from what’s provided in our schools.

A technology purchase plan has provided an opportunity to add as well as replace hardware on a cyclical basis. At one time our hardware aged and was not replaced due to cost. By establishing a leasing process on a three-year cycle, we have an opportunity to avoid this problem. Technology changes quickly, so the district might require a large purchase at a future date, but our leasing cycle diminishes this need.

Our district web site is evolving, and our Web Operations Specialist oversees the advancement of that site as well as individual school sites. A new iteration was introduced this year, and a new staff intranet has provided opportunities for efficiencies. Human Resource forms and information can be found on the intranet and some of our professional development work can be found as well. A few staff forms can be completed electronically with an expectation to expand such options. On the district site, parents new to the district soon will find a registration form that allows them to enter information directly. More such efforts will be introduced.

On the business side we continue to seek ways to create or add efficiencies. The transition to BudgetSense continues to prove beneficial, and soon we will integrate the elementary schools into the program. Also, Infinite Campus, while not new in other school districts, is providing significant benefits. The middle and high school staffs have been able to roll out features much more quickly than we anticipated. The teachers and administrators have utilized opportunities with a vision of providing more information more quickly to both parents and students. The high school was able to offer a controlled opportunity for students to complete on-line course registrations for 2012-2013. Parent access to Infinite Campus provides much more robust information than the district has ever been able to provide.

Finally, the move to utilize a portal for school board members is an example of Board members exemplifying a use of technology expected within the district, which in previous years was not possible.
4. To promote public involvement in school and district issues.

Status - Developing

The public should be involved in district issues and several recent opportunities exemplify what has been done to promote this effort. First, our District and School Improvement Plans provided an opportunity for involvement, albeit for a small number of individuals. Next, our facilities planning process provided a level of involvement. Consistent with facilities planning, our efforts to secure a favorable bond vote provided several opportunities to engage the public in a district initiative. Although unsuccessful, we were able to generate a great deal of involvement in the effort.

Also, our student information system, Infinite Campus (IC), provides a unique form of parent involvement. As we expand access to the elementary level, all students’ parents will have greater levels of timely information about their students’ progress than has ever been possible. Finally, the development of our district website has been an opportunity to disseminate information and thereby promote involvement.

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 - Developing

Funds deposited to this Trust Fund are derived from athletic event gate receipts and facility rentals. Softball and baseball leagues communicate ideas or recommendations through our Director of Maintenance, Jack Messenheimer to assist with suggested improvements including fence upgrades and turf material replacements. The recreation groups will contribute time and materials as well as equipment to which their players generally share access, but the groups are unlikely to contribute money to a Fund over which they have no control or for which there is no specific purpose. Donations typically will be made by individuals who want to contribute to project specific opportunities, such as the turf field project. Our efforts to bring about a turf field have waned, but our Athletic Director continues to discuss opportunities with potential contributors to that specific project. The project eventually will be kick-started by a large donor. The current trust fund balance is just over $37,000, and we will continue to place gate receipts and facility rental monies into this fund.
• To examine and enhance methods of recruitment, compensation, evaluation, and retention of leadership team members to secure and retain leadership committed to advancing student achievement in the Salem School District

Status - Developing

We are focusing internally for leadership vacancies in the district, but we’re also recruiting outstanding teachers that might prove to be future leadership candidates. Consequently, next year we are moving a teacher with a solid academic background and track record in Salem into a key leadership role. However, we are not limiting our leadership searches to internal candidates. This year we not only advertised vacancies but actively solicited candidates from administrator preparation programs. Newly certified administrators can prove to be excellent candidates as was demonstrated with recently hired assistant principals.

Retaining all of our administrators likely will depend on two significant factors. First is the opportunity for advancement. Many administrators, regardless of the level, aspire to roles with greater levels of responsibility. Second, is the environment the district provides and whether or not leadership team members are valued and provided opportunities to grow their professional skills. We feel we’ve been offering those challenges.

A new principal evaluation tool will be introduced this coming year. The Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education will be introduced to the principals and, if the opportunity proves worthwhile, we will expand the process to other administrators in subsequent years. Good administrators appreciate and value worthwhile and constructive performance critiques, and hopefully this tool will do just that.

• To implement a modification of the administrative structure of the central office leadership to build in support for key leaders and assure continuity in succession.

Status - Developing

The Board persevered with a decision to add a director of finance position, for which an individual has been identified. With other changes within the current central office leadership structure, we have not been able to achieve the entire planned re-organization, but as personnel transition plans unfold, we eventually will achieve a previously envisioned organization chart. With the personnel changes for 2012-2013, the Board should have confidence that a succession plan of key leaders is possible.

• To continue to improve the methods used to negotiate and secure approval for collective bargaining agreements, including negotiating team composition, the appropriate terms for such agreements (multi-year) and maximizing efforts to secure community support for approval.

Status - Developing

The Board can take some measure of satisfaction in not only the successful negotiation of our recent contracts, or for gaining voter approval, but for being the first governing body in the town to initiate discussions about multi-year agreements. As Board members are well aware, this concept is new to Salem, but by establishing voter confidence with candid and sincere explanations of the benefits associated with such agreements, voters supported the proposals.
Board members can continue to consider methods used to negotiate collective bargaining agreements. In past years the strategy of problem-solving negotiations was introduced. However, as mistrust developed between the parties this process was abandoned because so much of its success is based upon trust. Nevertheless, utilizing a combination of traditional bargaining strategies from past years and the services of school district counsel, the Board was able to settle five bargaining agreements with only one to negotiate in the fall. The Board should continue to use thoughtful consideration to determine appropriate negotiating strategies that considers the needs of each bargaining unit.

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

Status – Beginning

While we have had discussions regarding legislative matters that impact the school district as well as the impacts of legal issues, we have not structured substantive discussions of current national and local educational initiatives. Tangentially, all our discussions about the district’s primary initiatives, including curriculum work; instruction programs; DINI and SINI plans; our assessment project; and efforts related to technology; directly relate to contemporary national and state initiatives, but we have not discussed them specifically within such a context. The Board has had opportunities to meet with school district counsel at one or more planning meetings to discuss relevant issues, most notably a required policy resulting from enacted legislation. More support should have been provided to the Board, and greater effort can be made to correct this failing.

- 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

Our second grade cohort completed our first year of public kindergarten. We have comparative data that suggest these students had higher benchmark reading scores as entering first grade students and entering second grade students when compared to earlier primary cohorts. Similarly, this year’s first grade students entered with higher fall benchmark scores than earlier cohorts. The benchmark scores provide an opportunity to draw comparisons, albeit with limited reliability. Anecdotally, primary teachers report that the first and second grade students have been stronger than previous cohorts, which has prompted some curriculum adjustments. We are purchasing an Infinite Campus module, along with accompanying Tableau application software, to provide our own data warehouse and data visualization tools. Once in place, more specific relationship information can be provided.

During the second year of implementation we created two full-time kindergarten classrooms. Next year, we will add a third full-time classroom. We will continue to seek opportunities to expand this option within available space.

We currently have six SEED program typical peers. This represents as many as we’ve had, but these students are siblings of current SEED students or children of staff members. We need to do a better job of promoting an integrated pre-school program. With that stated, there is
some risk related to the need for additional space and insufficient tuition funds to accommodate costs of expanded space. Typically, at this time of year, we have between 50 and 55 SEED students. This year, we have 53. The state minimum is 12 students per session, and we exceed this number. However, all the students are rarely in the classroom simultaneously. We will have to begin discussing a plan for the possibility of more than 60 SEED students at any one time. As Board members are aware, the program is available for three and four year olds, and all year long children are experiencing a third birthday thereby becoming eligible. It’s expected that our numbers will be higher at the end of the year. However, as indicated, this year’s number is consistent with enrollments for the past two years at this time.

- **To support continued evaluation of instructional delivery at Salem High School, including analysis of the impact of the Freshman Program, retention/modification of block scheduling, and any modification to the timing and/or length of day. To receive reports on such evaluations for the purpose of coordinating the Facilities Master Plan and to prepare for the next round of high school accreditation.**

  We did not initiate a formal evaluation study of Salem High School. We do have data from almost two full years of Freshman Program study to share with the Board at an upcoming meeting. Preliminary information indicates some improvements have resulted from the structural changes. These changes include the time students spend with their core content teachers on a daily basis, the length of time dedicated to each content area, structured study supports provided to each student, and consistent expectations from team teachers for student behaviors.

  During the 2009-2010 school year, a committee led by Karen Cox and Joe Early reviewed block scheduling practices and surveyed high school staff members. When, and if, there is interest in reviewing the conclusions, we can invite high school officials to share results. A consensus was limited interest in modifying the current block scheduling structure. However, rather than undertake another study or review of the practice it would be helpful to share the most recent information. The current NEASC steering committee will be using much of this data in their planning for an anticipated spring 2015 site visit.

**Capital Goals:**

1. **To support the Facilities Master Plan by finalizing the first phase of the elementary school renovations, and from that process, developing plans (including revisions from lessons learned) for and building public support for, the completion of the second phase of elementary school renovations in 2012-2013.**

**Status –**

The Board has initiated action to have an enrollment projection report completed by the fall. Information will be available for budget planning activities and identification of next steps to initiate an effort to pass a successful bond vote for elementary school renovations. Alternatively, once enrollment information is available and assessed, Board members might want to explore alternatives to a traditional bond strategy. This should be discussed during a goal setting session.
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.

Status – Developing

With forethought, the Board budgeted funds for 2011-2012 for an updated facilities audit. This audit was completed by the Turner Group, which identified several projects at the middle and high schools, as well as the central office. Deficiencies should be addressed within the next several years, depending upon the level of priority and any renovation projects planned and initiated. Immediate needs have been identified and will be addressed this fall and summer, and we have sufficient funds in our 2012-2013 budget to address several additional projects.

The $500K included in our operating budgets for several years have served our facilities, but not to the level we need. Nevertheless, the Board routinely struggles with deciding a strategy that addresses needs right away or a strategy that acknowledges a possible renovation project. To date, the Board has selected the latter and ensured minimal risk that projects addressed today will not be undone by a renovation project tomorrow. Without a crystal ball, the Board has done well to inspire confidence that a sum of money is needed within our operating budget to address construction service projects.

Maintaining a goal of achieving a capital repair line of 2% of the facilities’ value is reasonable, given all the priorities confronting the Board.