DATE: June 1, 2011

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 2010-2011. This assessment of progress is intended to serve the Board’s discussion and decisions regarding establishing or re-establishing goals for the upcoming school year. Also included with this document is a summary of past efforts to establish and sustain a strategic plan, or, absent a formal strategic plan as was the case in the spring of 2005, to prepare for upcoming issues.

 Appropriately, our principle related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment has remained a significant priority. I believe this principle reflects the important thinking that the importance of the classroom is a central core value. Furthermore, it has driven the initiatives that we’ve sustained now for several years. Staff at all levels understands that improving student math achievement is a priority and the development of teacher capacity to understand better instructional strategies has stemmed from this first principle. Our literacy initiative and the resources in which we’ve invested are also driven by our effort to continually improve the delivery of instruction. Finally, the assessment initiative that’s been underway for three years will provide clarity regarding what students will learn in our schools and how they will demonstrate that learning.

 The second principle, emphasizing an environment appropriate to learning, is also central to our daily work. Without an expectation that students respect adults and vice-versa or that adults are respectful of one another, we would diminish the ability of students to learn and teachers to teach. This emphasis is one central factor that results in staff and students considering the Salem School District a special organization.

 Although we’ve had our problems with technology, and it seems that every year a new problem arises, I remain convinced that technology is our best opportunity to provide extensions of learning; reinforcement of content; more practice with concepts learned; and alternatives to the more routine practice of relying on additional support or professional staff. While teachers and paraprofessionals will always be necessary, the available software and applications today offer a wide variety of reliable alternatives. I’m also confident that our infrastructure provides opportunities of which we haven’t been able to take full advantage. The introduction of such software programs as Write to Learn, Education City, and Study Island, as well as our efforts to engage in regular online student assessments has demonstrated the potential and possibilities of these ever-evolving opportunities.
Finally, I want to provide a brief comment on the principle of promoting public involvement. As I’ve indicated in past years, the issues we address and for which we want to engage community members seem to be issue specific. Unquestionably, the Board successfully engages the public when individuals in the community understand and have a passion for the particular project or effort. An example is the turf field project. We engaged individuals who don’t generally become directly involved in school district activities. Another telling example is the recent Facilities Committee and the development of a Master Plan that lead to an entire cadre of folks who helped execute a public relations campaign to garner the community’s support. I believe individuals don’t want to become involved for its own sake, but they become and stay involved if there is personal interest.

Many of the goals continue to be labeled “developing”. I hope to see the principles continue as written because I believe they not only will stand the test of time and stand up to constructive scrutiny, but they also provide foundation language for core principles the Board will consider establishing when we engage in Strategic Planning.

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Analysis of Goal Status
2010-11 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

This principle continues to receive the highest of priorities as well as most of our professional development resources. Math, literacy, and assessment initiatives are well underway and several additional programs stem from these primary initiatives. To improve our delivery of math instruction, we provide teachers with training in Developing Mathematical Ideas. We continue to use Everyday Math as our primary resource program, and though it is sometimes criticized, the program has our teachers’ support. Additionally, we’ve introduced software support programs Study Island and Education City that our elementary teachers use to reinforce concepts and provide student practice. Both are web-based programs that provide the flexibility of adjusting to a student’s learning level.

To advance opportunities for literacy growth and development, under the guidance of Diane Reynolds we introduced a professional development program, Learning through Colleagues (LTC). Nearly 100% of our elementary teaching staff participated in this collegial learning and discussion opportunity as they advanced their use of a Readers’ and Writers’ Workshop strategy at all grade levels. Combined with Phonics and Word Study, Words Their Way, and Leveled Literacy Intervention that uses reading coaches to address the early needs of underperforming students, the contemporary literacy strategies should serve our students well in coming years. We are measuring literacy growth through such electronic assessments as Children’s Progress and Progress toward Standards 3 (PTS3), and through an individualized student assessment system called benchmarking. For the first time, we are recording and tracking the benchmark assessment scores of all our elementary school students. Further, this upcoming school year we will bring the assessment training we’ve done at the middle and high school levels to the elementary schools. This training, provided by Measured Progress, identifies very specific learning standards for all our students as well as common assessments to be used by teachers. We hope this professional development will bring clarity to what we want students to know and be able to do.

At the middle and high school levels, our math strategies have included introducing direct instruction to small groups and utilizing full year courses for students that have performed poorly in middle school classes and on middle school NECAP exams. We are also offering the Algebra software support program, I Can Learn, for students that need reinforcement of basic math concepts. Finally, we are offering alternatives to traditional courses through Virtual High School and Virtual Learning Academy distance learning programs. This provides greater flexibility to students with schedule conflicts or who are interested in courses not offered at Salem High School.
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

A quality learning environment is something we work to achieve every day, yet it’s one of our biggest challenges. Without question our teachers expect students to be respectful, and we are fortunate that the vast majority of our students know what is expected of them and behave accordingly. As a consequence of legislative changes last year, the Leadership Team identified bullying as one of our top priorities, and a small group developed consistent expectations as well as consistent reporting procedures. Administrators took time throughout this school year to chase down the slightest of rumors and reports. The issues have ranged from actual verbal threats made via cell phones and social networking sites among high school students to elementary children calling names on the playgrounds. By addressing such issues aggressively right away, we hoped to put a stop to most of this type of behavior and establish a high standard at each school.

Further, our Assistant Superintendent, Edith Soley, planned and scheduled several different staff trainings to elevate everyone’s understanding of how bullying is defined and the types of behaviors staff should address. Not only was our professional staff introduced to new information, but Mrs. Soley delivered training to all of our support staff people and visited First Student to deliver training to our bus drivers as well.

Despite the attention paid to bullying and the discomfort caused to students who are victims of intimidating and threatening behavior, we are just as concerned with elevating all of our school’s environments so that our students learn the importance and benefit of strong character and demonstrating the best of personal values. Personal character and integrity are regular points of emphasis for several school-wide themes as well as classroom learning units.

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 support of a technology purchase plan intended to provide replacement hardware on a three-year cycle will help to advance this principle in coming years. With the pace of technology development, we would always be catching up our systems or have a budget spike every few years to accommodate appropriate technology purchases. In the past several years we have added support structures to create business efficiencies for processing applications and for securing substitute teachers. We’ve also developed a district intra-net to which staff members are directed for employee information. This year our web operations specialist, David Halpin, developed the first of what we hope will be several standard forms that can be completed and directed on line. We hope this will increase our efficiencies while decreasing printing expenses. In the coming weeks, the Board will see even more evidence as to how the current technology can support our technology integration efforts.

As previously mentioned, we continue to introduce web-delivered software support programs to reinforce student academic skills. Some of these programs, such as Study Island, are available to students from their home computers, and administrators are encouraging parents to schedule evening opportunities.
where children spend time with the software. The time that students spend can be tracked by district officials, which offers another data point for identifying a strategy that supports learning. We also use technology to provide grade-wide assessments to students, and though these assessments have sometimes been logistically problematic for us, even the occasions when we have been unsuccessful have provided us with information to help improve future testing. There will be more and more assessment options developed for the education market, and our experiences will position us to avail ourselves of those tools. Finally, we are using Constant Contact as our communication vehicle, and this program has allowed us to sort parent groups for specific information delivery or to combine groups to send out district-wide parent messages.

I continue to believe strongly in technology and the opportunities it presents.

4. **To promote public involvement in school and district issues.**

**Status - Developing**

We want the public to be involved in our efforts, and we know that strong support can be the difference between success and failure. I’d like to think that the failure of our collective bargaining unit warrant articles, despite the budget committee’s support for them, was a factor of the economic woes we still face and not reflective of any limited confidence in the district or its employees. We know that people will step up to help us if we convince them of the need, or if we involve a broad group and let that group help us decide the best course of action. Regardless, the Board has made a commitment to involve the public in district issues, and this should continue as a principle.
Non-Capital Goals:

- To continue our partnership with third party facility users and other interested groups to fund the Athletic Facilities Trust Fund in order to renovate and maintain the district’s athletic facilities.

Status - Developing

Community recreation groups regularly express interest in helping to improve district facilities, and generally ideas are communicated through Jack Messenheimer and to me. Actual funds for the Athletic Facilities Trust are not as easily generated. Through we deposited approximately $15,000 in the fund within the last year, the only regular revenue is gate receipts. While community recreation groups will contribute time and materials as well as types of equipment, 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 generally 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 during this school year, but I suspect the effort will kick back up once we get at least one large donor. We continue to search, but we haven’t been able to find that one individual or group. Again, the donors are targeting their money for a field project and not specifically to the Trust. We will continue to put gate receipts into this fund.

- To support the Superintendent in the transition and organization of leadership team members in 2010-2011, and to examine/evaluate current methods of recruitment, compensation, evaluation, and retention to secure and retain leadership committed to enhancing student achievement in the Salem School District.

Status - Beginning

There was anticipation that the upcoming school year would bring more transition than currently is true. Now, the timeline appears directed to 2012-2013 as some key leadership figures in the district will change. Any plans that are outlined should be necessarily fluid to consider the nature of personnel dynamics, and the ease with which choices and options can readily change. For example, this year I learned that one individual slated for a more prominent leadership position lost interest after more closely observing the challenging nature of that more responsible position. Economic conditions and general priorities within the district must also be factored into the direction and focus of this goal. Candidly, evaluating and retaining personnel appear lesser challenges than adequate compensation. Recruitment is also challenging, but recruitment can be served by a compensation level that is informed by the marketplace of similar levels of responsibility. I believe I know the direction the Board wants to go with this goal, but it may require several discussions and efforts before realizing a new organizational structure.

- To continue our relationship with State and National School Board Associations, with an emphasis on contemporary board development topics that can be cost-effectively presented locally.

Status - Beginning

This goal was re-directed from previous years when the intent was to have members attend the NSBA national conference. Contemporary development topics can be identified by reviewing information that regularly comes from the national association or through readings done by individual members. Current topics in demand are related to advancing student achievement in an era of accountability; using data to
support decisions; emphasizing strong professional development programs; and attracting strong district leaders. Ideas for Board development might come from a review of the most recent NSBA annual conference held in April. The conference program is still available at www.nsba.org and linking to conferences.

- **To evaluate methods the district employs in conducting collective bargaining to include method of bargaining, negotiating team composition, and submittal of agreements to district voters, including approval of multi-year Collective Bargaining Agreements.**

**Status - Beginning**

The Board made good efforts to gain agreement on multi-year contracts with several bargaining units, and for the first time, the Board used an attorney to help negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the teachers. These efforts reflected the purpose and intent of this goal, and it is most unfortunate that voters failed to approve the warrant articles. The fact that multi-year agreements were on the warrant in the first place is evidence that the community is prepared to see such multi-year agreements. The greater challenge for the Board will be discussing negotiations in the context of busy personal schedules and five contracts scheduled for re-negotiation this fall. In considering team composition, will the Board use the services of an attorney for more than one of its agreements?

- **To develop a plan (including timing, method, and metrics) for a comprehensive evaluation of delivery of instruction at Salem High School, including final evaluation of the Transition Committee recommendations following withdrawal of Windham students, an evaluation of the new freshman program, retention/modification of block scheduling, timing and length of the school day, and modification of facilities to assist coordination with the Facilities Master Plan, set staffing requirements, and prepare for the next round of high school accreditation.**

**Status – Beginning**

The high school principal has provided the Board with information about the freshman program and how it is being evaluated. One telling statement is the interest of the current freshman teaching staff to remain with the program. As the program was planned, there was tremendous criticism and little interest among staff members. Though program data hasn’t all been favorable to the new structure, there is sufficient positive information to maintain the program for at least another year or two.

The principal has spent time during this school year reviewing the work of a scheduling committee that reviewed the current block schedule format but could not agree on a final recommendation. Consequently, committee members decided that the current 4 X 4 schedule should remain in place. Mrs. Palmer has spoken with committee members who shared insights as to their final recommendations. Also, Mrs. Palmer is looking at data from old block scheduling evaluation reports to try and compare some of that information with what is true today.

The principal has also corresponded with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and will work this next school year to begin preparations for the 2014 accreditation process, which is approximately the date that our Facilities Master Plan would call for a high school renovation project to get underway.

A copy of an abridged version of the original 2006 report of the Transition Committee is included with this material. Board members will note that the Committee’s timeline went through this spring, and all preparation activities have concluded. The report was last updated in the summer of 2010 in preparation for budget review.

Some time will be needed to advance the work that began under Mrs. Palmer’s leadership earlier this year, and to consider any budget implications for the 2012-2013 school year as further enrollment reductions will likely be realized.
To develop a plan for evaluating and reporting the progress of the kindergarten program with an emphasis on the impact of this program on succeeding grade levels. Further, to continue the effort to offer full-day kindergarten on a tuition basis as space is available and to incorporate plans for further expansion for kindergarten in phase two of the elementary school renovation project.

Status – Beginning

This school year we conducted benchmark assessments of all our kindergarten students, and we intend to continue conducting these assessments in future years. Additionally, we have assessments of our first and second grade students, which provide data for children that participated in our public kindergarten program last year and a group that did not participate in a public program. We also have information regarding students that participated in the leveled literacy intervention service program and will be able to compare results of the work done with students who participated in our kindergarten program with those who did not. Additionally, we’ll be assessing our curriculum expectations with each group of students that enter first grade from our kindergarten program to determine when we’ll revisit our content standards.

We had sufficient interest in a full-day kindergarten option to offer classes at both Fisk and North Salem Schools. However after offering two sections this year, we felt it was important to maintain current staffing levels and experience another year of the full-day program before expanding. We’ll make accommodations for additional classes within our proposed 2012-2013 operating budget with revenue coming from parent-paid tuition. It should be noted, too, that North Salem School will open this fall with three half-day kindergarten sessions – requiring two classrooms – and no extra space for a full-day classroom.

Capital Goals:

1. To support the Facilities Master Plan by first overseeing the approved 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 for 2012-2013.

Status – Beginning

The district’s master plan has been introduced, but the upcoming summer will be telling as we do everything possible to ensure an on time and on budget first phase. As the summer progresses and we know the outcome of this three school project with more certainty, the Board and administrators can assess the project and make definitive plans for the next phase. Establishing more than an expectation to advance to the next phase might be premature.
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

Our existing facilities audit is quite dated, though it certainly helped to earn public support for several capital projects and for the first phase of our Facilities Master Plan. Now, with an updated audit of the middle school, high school, and central office building scheduled for completion this upcoming fiscal year, the Board will have further information to reinforce the conditions of these existing facilities and the need to undertake more renovations or revitalizations. Maintaining a goal of achieving a capital repair line of 2% of the facilities’ value is reasonable given the Board’s most recent success toward earning public support.

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