


**MEMORANDUM**

**James G. Feil**  
*Superintendent*

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*Executive Assistant*

**To:** Board of Education  
**From:** James Feil   
**Date:** December 10, 2009  
**Subject:** SUPERINTENDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

Only for your information, I included the feedback from which I will use to set my personal goals for improvement. This feedback is derived from my self-assessment, which was initiated with the understanding of the board as a developmental tool. The survey instrument was administered to representatives from all constituencies. This self-assessment included a confidential survey instrument requesting feedback from 82 individuals representing various TCAPS' stakeholders. This initial process has its shortcomings in that recipients reported to Keena that they were not aware that they were on the list until after the survey window was closed. These missing recipients included a board member along with a number of staff, parents, and community members who voiced their interest after reading their names in the newspaper. There was also a report that another board member completed the document twice. I felt it was helpful nonetheless.

This process was also extremely beneficial in spite of the high visibility and exploitive nature of some to put a wedge between the board and its administration as a result of unnecessary union posturing and reaction to these dire economic conditions. The speculative nature of how I selected individual respondents is a case in point. I intentionally selected teachers who I believe are highly credible instructional leaders; some have held union leadership positions and many have conveyed their strong union leadership alliance. Their selection was important to assess perceptions and the impact of past negotiations.

I also selected parent and community leaders who have expressed strong opinions regarding past deliberations and decisions (e.g. school closing, new math curriculum, gifted and talented offerings, trimesters, grade configuration changes and other high profile public debate issues). I selected these individuals not to featherbed the results, but to further assess the impact of our decisions on the district and what I can do to improve as district superintendent. The results of this group are particularly important because they are the group we are here to serve and engage in partnerships.

In carefully considering the self-assessment data along with District performance results and personal reflection, I am pleased to share some key observations of my ability to lead

the district in its efforts to increase and accelerate student achievement and growth for ALL students served by this great district.

- The board's administrative team of executive and instructional leaders collectively possess the most experience and influence to positively engage faculty, staff and community to create clarity and constancy of purpose (student achievement and development). I am pleased and a bit overwhelmed by their across the board high marks. A reform superintendent needs this level of trust and support to lead the team in capacity building efforts to raise district performance levels far above those imagined or achieved in the past. This group is whom the Superintendent has the most influence and direct responsibility for developing. It is also where I have strategically spent the majority of my initial time for reasons so noted.
- The corresponding high marks on student achievement from administration, support staff and parents/community confirm the effectiveness of my strategic efforts to put student achievement and development at the center of all discussions and decisions regarding the important work of this district. Teacher responses were not as supportive suggesting a need for greater levels of reassurance and higher levels of engagement as we attempt to raise the rigor, relevance and relationships of our work throughout the district.
- A number of respondent references to distributed leadership reflect an understanding of my strategic efforts to increase our capacity to do more with less by encouraging and empowering staff to promote a culture of high collegiality and professionalism. This strategy will enable staff to become both self-directed and interdependent thereby shortening the time for improved results. A few teacher comments suggested an eagerness for their inclusion. This is the direction of my vision and corresponding work to increase the time of teachers in professional learning communities. It should be the ultimate engagement goal of this district.
- A cross-section of comments highlighting the importance of high standards and data-driven decision making were somewhat offset by comments suggesting a greater need for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills encompassing deeper understanding, greater critical thinking skills, innovation, and project-based learning. These comments support my belief that it is not one or the other but the careful integration of new understanding into our instructional core and supporting values and beliefs. The implementation of new but different curriculum can have negative consequences if not carefully managed. The district's elementary math curriculum is a case in point. The strongly associated benefits of our elementary math curriculum were partially offset by the resistance and time loss defending rather than improving upon our new and evolving understanding of what works.

Based on the feedback and personal reflection, I propose four developmental areas that would significantly enhance my ability to engage all stakeholders in the hard work necessary for TCAPS to thrive and students to succeed into the future.

1. Superintendent/Board Relations:

This is a problematic area needing the attention of the Superintendent. This Board in less than a month will with the exception of one individual have totally turned over. This change brings about new ideas and new responses in how to govern and manage the district. This upcoming newly formed Board deserves the opportunity to regroup and reset direction. The Superintendent needs to be highly visible and supportive in helping bring this about.

2. Board Policy Development:

In conjunction with improved Superintendent/Board Relations I would like to help and support the board in communicating and elevating their theories of action for improvement. This is best done with reform policies that can give direction to the superintendent and all employees of the district. The significant number of standard operating procedures while important can tend to blur the focus on what critical reform policies are needed. A concerted effort in this area will go a long way in communicating our vision, setting priorities and bringing about greater improvement. The superintendent needs to play a key role and assist with the development and communication of these intentions along with the necessary reform policies and guidelines to execute.

3. Teacher Support:

Teachers are one of three essential building blocks to our instructional core. The other two are students and content. District surveys suggest that teachers are feeling overall support at their building sites. I need to move significantly beyond my instructional leadership team to demonstrate my personal understanding and support of the quality of work they perform day in and day out. I also need to elevate across the district our interest in observing, discussing, and sharing best instructional strategies and practice.

4. Improved Communications:

Two-way, personal, face-to-face communications are critical as are communications that are concise, empowering and effective in promoting TCAPS. The superintendent plays a key role in this arena. I need to concentrate on improving my ability to effectively connect and communicate in person, face to face, at all boundaries within and outside of the district.

In closing I would like to again acknowledge the value of using this survey feedback mechanism to gain a better understanding of what I can do to further enhance my ability to elevate our collective efforts to improve student learning and development. We have made great progress in meeting and in many areas exceeding the board approved performance indicators under my leadership but we are far from being finished. In this regard, I acknowledge the work of our great staff for the results achieved and accept responsibility for any shortcomings. Continuous learning and stretch goals are needed and they should begin with me. An index to the survey instrument and feedback follows. I look forward to hearing from you next week during my review.

Attachment

/klt