

Westwood Public Schools

Superintendent's Report to SC

November 16, 2023

Superintendent's Entry Plan Report

Key Questions

- **What are the strengths of our school system?**
- **What the biggest challenges that we face?**
- **What is important that we protect (or maintain) in our system?**
- **What are our biggest opportunities for growth in the future?**

Entry Plan Process

- Review of District Documentation
 - Strategic priorities, assessment data, budget documents, CBAs, etc.
- Staff and Stakeholder Meetings
 - District and school staff
 - Students
 - Families
 - Municipal officials and committee members
 - Other community leaders
- School and Classroom Visits
- Public Meet-and-Greets

Strengths

- High degree of community support for the schools
 - “We moved to Westwood for the schools”
 - Traditionally strong financial support
 - Support for Pine Hill School construction
 - High level of community pride
 - Active PTOs
 - Engaged families

Strengths

- High quality teaching staff and teaching across the district
 - “The teachers” consistently identified as a strength in interviews
 - Classroom visits show high quality instruction
 - Supported by strong allotment of time for professional development
- High levels of student academic performance
 - MCAS, SAT, AP, Advanced Course Completion, etc.
- Strong district leadership team
 - Members are highly reflective about their practice
 - Regular structured opportunities for collaborative problem solving/learning
 - Staff indicate feeling high levels of trust from administrators

Strengths

- Strong special education department
 - High levels of satisfaction in interviews
 - Robust programming to address student needs in-district
- High-functioning School Committee
 - Focused on strategic goals and committed to students
 - Budgeting that maintains class size and provides social-emotional support for students
- Robust process for periodic curriculum review

Equity - Strength and Opportunity

- Belief in equitable outcomes and opportunities for all students
 - Commitment to inclusive practices for children
 - Demonstrated commitment by conducting equity audit
 - Belief that the current equity work underway needs to be protected
- Continued need for equity training for staff and implementation of practices
 - Need to ensure a sense of belonging for all students
- Need to implement highlighted recommendations from equity audit
 - Equity Communication Plan
 - Equity Decision-Making Framework

Equity - Strength and Opportunity

- Need to implement highlighted recommendations from equity audit
 - Equity Communication Plan
 - Equity Decision-Making Framework
 - Equity Data Collection, Tracking, and Reporting Plan
 - Director of Human Resources
 - Equity-Aligned Professional Learning Plan

Challenges/Opportunities - Tiered Supports

- While Westwood students demonstrate strong performance on the whole, that very strong performance for most can mask significant struggles for some
 - Both academic and social-emotional needs
- There are many effective supports for students in the district, but not currently a consistent and coherent structure of how tiered supports are provided to students in the general education environment
 - Structures are better established in academics than for social-emotional needs
 - Significant increase in % of students receiving SPED services
 - Some progress monitoring; need for better use of data
 - Student absenteeism and chronic absenteeism is on the rise

Challenges/Opportunities - Educational Vision

- Opportunity to create a new educational vision for the school system
 - Interviewees consistently referred to the strength of the school system; however, when pressed on why, answers were generally about test scores/rankings/college admissions, and not student skills
- Opportunity to develop vision focused on transferable skills through a more inclusive, community-based process
 - Vision and strategy traditionally developed centrally with limited external input

Challenges/Opportunities - Municipal Collaboration

- Opportunity to improve collaboration between the school system and municipal government
 - Strong relationships current exist between the schools and some municipal departments (e.g., Youth and Family Services)
 - Recent positive examples of collaboration include funding of Pine Hill and common procurement of long-range master plans for schools and municipal buildings
 - Continued collaboration will be essential to address significant facilities needs, particularly at Sheehan and Thurston
 - Opportunity to strengthen relationships between schools and public safety

Challenges/Opportunities - Human Resources

- There is not a coherent Human Resources structure in the district. This has an impact on recruiting, onboarding, and support for current employees
 - Responsibilities are currently shared between school department and town
- Focal point for school HR is in the Assistant Superintendent office
 - Limits dedicated support for Human Resources
 - Draws personnel resources away from focus on curriculum and instruction
- Current challenges in hiring and retaining support staff, both in the classrooms and in operations
- District equity plan also calls for hiring Director of Human Resources

Challenges/Opportunities - Communication

- There is an opportunity to create better coherence in the district's communication strategy
 - While families report receiving regular communication from schools, there has not been a clear, consistent approach to communication from the district level either in frequency or format
 - Community members without children in WPS report a gap in communication about school issues that may impact the broader community
 - District's equity audit calls for the creation of an Equity Communication Plan

Challenges/Opportunities - After-School Care

- There is a challenge with availability of after-school care options for students
 - Demand for school-based Extended Day far exceeds the capacity of the program, and demand is significantly higher post-COVID
 - Challenge with existing registration process for school-based Extended Day; district commitment already made to improve for 2023-2024
- Given that after-school care is not part of the core mission of the school department, there is an interest and opportunity to support efforts that lead to additional options for care in the community

Next Steps - Vision and Strategy

- As the district's current strategy runs through the end of the current year, these entry plan findings aid in developing a new strategy for 2024-2025 and beyond
- Need to create an updated vision that sits in the center of the strategy, with a focus on identifying transferable skills for students
 - Imminent procurement of facilities plan provides a funding mechanism to facilitate development of the vision in an inclusive process
 - Visioning process to be done in late winter-spring 2024
- Visioning work informs development of new district strategic plan
 - Develop a one-year bridge plan this spring with goals/priorities for 2024-2025
 - Multi-year strategy developed during 2024-2025 school year