



FIRST 100 DAYS

June -September 2022

LISTENING & LEARNING

Tony B. Watlington Sr., Ed.D.
Superintendent



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
PHILADELPHIA

A Message from Superintendent Watlington

As I embrace the incredible honor of becoming superintendent of The School District of Philadelphia, my first priority is to listen and learn. For my first 100 days on the job, I will engage in strategic, thoughtful, and equity-focused conversations and actions to identify what is currently being done well and what needs improvement. Building on a collaborative and results-oriented leadership style, I will engage with a wide range of Philadelphians to learn about this great city's history and to hear about what is needed to achieve the School District of Philadelphia's Goals and Guardrails.



Philadelphia is a vibrant city with extraordinary talent and collective resources. This city, known for its historical commitment to equality, brotherly love, sisterly affection, and activism, can be the place where all children accelerate their learning and recognize their innate giftedness, regardless of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or economic status. As superintendent, I will work with a fierce sense of urgency, collaborating with our students, families, staff, city and state leaders, unions, universities, activists, grassroots organizations, and business leaders so together we can bring focus, energy, and creativity to our most complex challenges to improve the life outcomes of the 198,645 children that we serve. Whether a child is learning in our traditional school setting or within our charter school community, we, the adults, will be there to provide them with the resources, love, and commitment necessary to see them flourish. The work will be hard, but our children are counting on us to create life-changing opportunities and outcomes for them and their families.

During my first 100 days, you will see, hear, and feel my commitment to learning about this city and School District. I will build strong and meaningful relationships with our Board of Education, so we are clearly aligned on our moral purpose and act with focus and intentionality. We will also expand our engagement with our community so we can all actively contribute to our school system's success and achieve the Goals and Guardrails.

This Listening & Learning Tour focuses on five priority areas that reflect the Goals and Guardrails and are the beginning of a long and collaborative journey toward excellence. This process will result in a report with findings and recommendations that will help guide our work together. I look forward to a successful journey such that when we collectively ask "How are the children?," we will have evidence and confidence that the answer is "All the children are well!" Any other answer is simply unacceptable.

Thank you in advance for this opportunity to work in partnership with you. Our best days are ahead.

Tony B. Watlington, Sr.

Trust | Partnership | Equity | Excellence | Learning

Priority areas for listening and learning to accelerate achievement of the Goals and Guardrails

These five priority areas for listening and learning will help to inform my thoughts and ideas as we work together to achieve the Goals and Guardrails in support of all of the students we serve. Learn more about the Goals and Guardrails by visiting philasd.org/goalsandguardrails



Priority Area 1

Assess Student and Staff Well-Being



Priority Area 2

Engage Our Stakeholders and Build Trust



Priority Area 3

Assess Teaching and Learning



Priority Area 4

Assess District Leadership Capacity and Alignment



Priority Area 5

Assess District Operations, Facilities and Finances



Priority Area 1

Assess Student and Staff Well-Being

The Goal

Students and staff cannot flourish if they are not physically or emotionally safe. As a school district, we must approach issues of well-being and safety as a collaborative effort, convening key stakeholders from the Mayor's office, City Council, the business community, our neighborhoods, and our schools to create a safety net for students and staff to learn and grow. Our approach to student well-being and safety will offer our students an invitation and access to increased opportunities to engage in healthy, meaningful activities which will help them foster positive mindsets. We will work to ensure that our students see the wealth of opportunities Philadelphia offers them to become productive citizens.

Action Steps

- 1.1** Hire a community liaison that reports to the Superintendent to coordinate grassroots communication and responses to community issues, including student and staff safety issues.
- 1.2** Review the structures in place to convene key city and community leaders around issues of chronic absenteeism, homelessness, emergency supports, and out-of-school time.
- 1.3** Assess possibilities to expand summer, after-school, and co-curricular programming activities in collaboration with city agencies, grassroots organizations, and key stakeholders.
- 1.4** Review how we receive feedback and respond to feedback from students, staff, parents, and community members regarding school climate and school safety issues.
- 1.5** Review and assess our school/district suspension and expulsion data, with a particular focus on violent offenses within and around our schools.
- 1.6** Review individual school climate data.
- 1.7** Review our approach to student and staff mental health support and determine whether we are appropriately investing in coordinated mental health supports and services for students and staff.
- 1.8** Assess the investments that have been made to restorative practices and positive behavior, intervention, and support programs.



Priority Area 2

Engage Our Stakeholders and Build Trust

The Goal

Building trust starts with listening to understand, and then collaborating and communicating effectively as partners in the work of helping all students succeed. It is essential for us to understand the hopes and dreams of our community, including students, families, staff, city and state leaders, unions, universities, activists, grassroots organizations, and business leaders. In addition, we must ensure that we have strong, collaborative structures and evaluate how we are communicating internally and externally.

Action Steps

- 2.1 Launch a listening and learning tour to understand the exact priorities and needs of all communities.
- 2.2 Increase collaborative structures with the Superintendent.
- 2.3 Meet with key leaders in consultation with the Board of Education President and Vice President, Mayor, City Council, state officials and legislative delegation, faith-based community, business leaders, and community members.
- 2.4 Host town hall sessions in-person and via Zoom meetings with teachers, administrators, support staff, other school-based staff, and central office employees to understand what is working and what are areas of stress/anxiety.
- 2.5 Initiate discussions and communicate with our union partners to establish a culture of respect and trust.
- 2.6 Evaluate internal communication protocols, including social media strategy, to determine how system-wide messages are understood by board members, principals, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, and central office staff.
- 2.7 Schedule Board of Education retreats to review communication protocols, year 1 priorities, and the superintendent evaluation process.
- 2.8 Assess the current state of the district's communication and engagement efforts, as well as evaluate the quality of the school district website and schools' websites.



Priority Area 3

Assess Teaching and Learning

The Goal

Teaching and learning that results in improved academic achievement and reaching the Goals and Guardrails is our core work. Covid-19 has caused serious disruption in student learning, and we must now begin to strengthen coherence in our instructional program to ensure that our teachers and schools have what they need to prioritize high-quality teaching and learning. Ensuring that all students not only graduate from The School District of Philadelphia but are also college and workforce ready is the goal and responsibility of all district employees, contractors, and volunteers.

Action Steps

- 3.1** Develop a process for frequent and structured school visits to observe and support school improvement efforts.
- 3.2** Assess the current process of school improvement planning (including School Improvement Plans) and ensure that schools have a clear multi-tiered system of support for students.
- 3.3** Assess current professional development efforts to support administrative, instructional, and non-instructional staff and how the budget emphasizes an investment in staff development.
- 3.4** Assess the coherence of the district's literacy and mathematics instructional frameworks.
- 3.5** Focus on areas of academic under-performance and ensure strategies are in place to address root causes of student achievement trends.
- 3.6** Determine how comprehensive and research-based the current curricula are and to what degree they are aligned to standards and allow for student achievement/growth.
- 3.7** Assess student and staff attendance rates, student drop out rates, and student graduation rates to support progress toward the Goals and Guardrails.



Priority Area 4

Assess District Leadership Capacity and Alignment

The Goal

It is essential for The School District of Philadelphia to have a high-performing, collaborative, and results-oriented culture. To make sure that we operate as a highly effective team with a professional culture, we will be intentional about assessing and building the capacity of our leadership to achieve the Goals and Guardrails. As author Jim Collins states, we will ensure that we have the right people on the bus and in the right seats. We will not get to excellence by accident. It will be by design.

Action Steps

- 4.1 Conduct one-on-one interviews and review resumes and briefing papers with all direct reports.
- 4.2 Administer leadership assessment inventories to get to know executive leadership better.
- 4.3 Establish a transition team comprised of members of the Philadelphia public school community, local leaders and K-12 national experts.
- 4.4 Conduct a retreat with senior staff to review the district's priorities, most recent achievement data, review current and anticipated vacancies, and discuss leadership team structures and practices.
- 4.5 Review current office structure, alignment, and capacity to achieve the Goals and Guardrails.
- 4.6 Assess the autonomy and authority of school leaders (Principals) in the current organizational structure.
- 4.7 Plan a second retreat with senior staff to review accountability plans and organizational structures to achieve the Goals and Guardrails.



Priority Area 5

Assess District Operations, Facilities and Finances

The Goal

To meet the needs of all students in The School District of Philadelphia, it is critical that operations and finance align with Board policy, and represent excellence and transparency. Each division will be appraised to determine how they maximize support and services to schools using a continuous improvement model. Additionally, we will assess the depth of our facilities issues.

Action Steps

5.1

Conduct one-on-one meetings with direct reports on operations, human resources, and budget, including use of ESSR funds and how local, state, and federal grants are being utilized and evaluated.

5.2

Review the district's fund balance, financial projections, resource allocation and budgeting processes; assess how the district's budget and budget process are aligned to support student achievement.

5.3

Conduct one-on-one meetings with the Office of General Counsel to review any recent/current legal proceedings or outstanding judgments against the district and to provide a briefing on state education code with attention to statutes currently impacting or likely to impact the district.

5.4

Review the assessments of the District's facilities conditions and actions to determine alignment with improving student achievement guided by the Goals and Guardrails and the facilities planning process.

5.5

Receive an update on any foundation activities and how those funds support schools.

5.6

Review key district financial materials, budget, most recent audit, grants, and any other reports and audits provided by the Office of the Inspector General and Board's Office of Auditing Services.

5.7

Review current labor contracts and schedules.

5.8

Assess the extent to which the District balances the centralization of budgets and services.



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