



Shrewsbury Public Schools

Joseph M. Sawyer, Ed.D.
Superintendent

April 10, 2019

To: School Committee
Re: Establishment of Position of Assistant Superintendent for
Community Partnerships & Well-Being

In my State of the District report in January 2018, one of the key points I made was that “realizing our vision, priorities, and goals will require the resources to do the job.” Relative to our strategic priorities and goals, I identified the following areas as places where additional capacity would enable us to execute our plan:

- establishment and coordination of partnerships with community resources, including businesses, higher education, service agencies, alumni, etc., in order to create more experiential learning and career awareness opportunities for students;
- development of systems that promote family engagement and culturally proficient practices within an increasingly diverse community;
- coordination of social emotional learning strategies and programming for students, along with professional development to build staff capacity to address students’ social, emotional, and health needs; and
- developing and implementing a comprehensive well-being strategy and corresponding programming for staff.

At that time, after consideration of these new strategic priorities and goals to be carried out by 2022, I proposed a new Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being position because I believed that we would need additional leadership capacity at the district level to successfully achieve the goals under the priorities of “Connected learning for a complex world” and “Enhanced well-being of all.” Due to financial limitations in Fiscal Year 2019, I ultimately did not recommend that the position be established. However, at this time, funding for the position through a generous sponsorship by Shrewsbury Federal Credit Union is available to bring this position on board, to be fully funded in the first year and subsidized over the following four years, with the district assuming the cost over time. As also stated in the memo regarding the

proposed Colonial Connections program, the full cost of the salary for this position would be paid for by the sponsorship in FY20 (\$145,000), followed by subsidies of \$85,000, \$50,000, \$30,000, and \$15,000 in the subsequent four fiscal years. This would translate into additional funding needed to sustain the position of approximately \$63,000 in FY21, \$101,000 in FY22, \$124,000 in FY23, and \$142,000 in FY24. For context, with modest assumptions for the total town-appropriated School Department budget in those years, the amount of the position's salary funded by the School Department would represent approximately 0.10% of the appropriated budget in FY21 and increase to approximately 0.20% by FY24 (i.e., one-tenth of one percent in FY21 to two-tenths of one percent by FY24).

Additional context regarding making an investment in district-level administrative leadership is that, as of the most recent state statistics on per pupil expenditures, SPS ranks in the bottom 7.4% of districts in the state for investing in administration. A Central Office administrator has not been added to our district since 2000, and the district's student population has grown by 30% since then, with significant increases in staffing to oversee and significant changes in the volume and intensity of administrative responsibilities. As you know, the recent draft report and presentation to you from the UMass-Boston Collins Center indicated that the span of responsibility for the role of superintendent is too wide, which this role would address; further, the report indicated that the overall administrative capacity of the district is insufficient to achieve what is required and expected. In any case, my professional judgment is that adding any additional significant responsibilities to district administrators or principals is not feasible given the existing administrative load.

The Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being position will provide leadership capacity in key areas. I anticipate that in the first year, the following will be areas of focus:

1. connecting with businesses and other organizations to foster partnerships for ways to get students out into other environments (career interest trips, internships, etc.) and to get people from these organizations into our schools (providing authentic audiences for projects, sharing information on careers, etc.);
2. developing a district-level parent engagement strategy to create more effective ways to welcome new families and connect existing families where there may currently be cultural barriers;
3. improving district-level communications with parents and the community regarding the district's strategic priorities, including leveraging cable television and online video to tell stories of successes and challenges;

4. working with the Coordinators of Volunteer Activities & Development to build an alumni database, in order to build business/career connections, to help us reach more potential donors for the Colonial Fund and special projects, and to be able to get better information regarding how alumni are faring in life after high school and how we might better prepare them;
5. given the identification of stress being a major issue among staff, working to develop specific ways to address staff well-being, including creating opportunities for stress-reduction education and programming and promoting physical fitness and self-care; and
6. advancing the district's planning for addressing the social and emotional learning needs of students by working closely with other leaders to meet the district goal of creating a district-level implementation plan for effective social and emotional learning expectations and practices, and then subsequently playing a leadership role in implementing that plan.

What about metrics for the position's success?

I have given much thought to this question. I understand that it would be helpful to find a way to measure impact in advance. That said, the metrics for the success of any administrative position under the supervision of the superintendent are determined as part of the supervision and evaluation process and are established between the superintendent and the administrator. This evaluation of school administrative positions is governed by state law and DESE regulations. However, the School Committee does have the opportunity to exercise its influence and authority regarding metrics for the success of the district and the superintendent's work. I would expect that the next iteration of the district goals, which would be from 2020-2022, would establish criteria for success in areas where the new assistant superintendent position would have responsibility, including metrics. Such goal metrics might be related to improving student outcomes related to number and type of business and other community partnerships; documentation of student learning experiences outside of the traditional school setting, or through outside partners coming in to the school environment; health surveys or other measures of social emotional health; family engagement and satisfaction data; etc.

Why an assistant superintendent-level position?

An assistant superintendent role signals an appropriately high level of importance being placed on the strategic priorities and goals to be addressed. Whether seeking meetings with business or higher education partners or rolling out internal initiatives with principals and staff, an assistant superintendent position has both formal authority and informal standing that will help move things forward effectively. Additionally, if position(s) at a level below assistant superintendent were added to attempt this work, this would not take

pressure off of district-level leadership responsibilities, and would likely create more pressures among the superintendent and assistant superintendents to coordinate the work of others, since director-level position(s) would not have the level of authority to move initiatives forward. While it is clear that the range of responsibilities for this role is significant, as is the case for all Central Office administrators and principals, I believe that there is a high degree of connectivity between them, and time and effort focused on certain elements will ebb and flow depending on circumstances.

Are there positions like this in other districts?

There are some Massachusetts districts that have district-level leadership roles that are not traditional assistant superintendent positions, such as Framingham's Assistant Superintendent for Equity, Diversity, and Community Engagement, Boston's Assistant Superintendent for Social & Emotional Learning & Wellness, and Newton's District Leader for Social Emotional Learning. We are part of the state's ExSEL Coalition to improve social and emotional learning, and we are finding that member districts are devoting more specific administrative resources to that kind of work. Web searches also reveal that districts across the country have assistant superintendent positions with "community partnerships," "community engagement," or similar terms in their title. I am not aware of a position that explicitly connects both the elements of community partnerships and well-being in its title, although it is likely that these responsibilities come under various district-level leadership positions depending on the district.

That said, this is not a typical role, but I believe that in our efforts to innovate we can and should move forward with solutions that may be different but are a fit for the strategic vision that has been established. In fact, the new report from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development makes the following one of their central recommendations for action: *Align resources and leverage partnerships in the community to address the whole child.* The report goes on to recommend the following specifically, which I think encapsulates the thinking regarding the need for this position for our school district:

Fund dedicated positions in schools and districts to intentionally engage partners:

Partnerships don't just happen. They require an intentional outreach and engagement strategy that ensures the right partners are coming together to accomplish shared goals for the young people with whom they work at every level—classrooms, schools, districts, youth development organizations, faith-based groups, community partners, health, mental health, and social service organizations, universities, and businesses. This requires collaborative planning, open communication, intentional coordination, and putting young people at the center in order to ensure a consistent and unified approach toward youth development. At the district and school levels, this requires allocating resources to support a dedicated, full-time, culturally competent person who understands the community and the school district, and who can manage and promote partnerships with

youth development organizations, as well as those providing health, mental health, and social services. To promote efficiency and alignment, this dedicated person should liaise with existing provider networks where possible.

- *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope, Report of the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, 2019*

I strongly recommend that you vote to establish the position of Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being, as I believe it will provide much-needed leadership capacity to accomplish work that will significantly benefit students and staff for the reasons stated above. I look forward to discussing this with you and answering your questions.