

An Entry Plan for the Superintendent-Principal of the Sherman School



Presented by Jeff Melendez

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Purpose

During one of my interviews, the Board asked that I prepare and present a Strategic Plan. The plan that I developed consisted of four parts, each guided by an essential open-ended question. The first question, “Where are we now?” was designed to help us (as a school and community) to reflect on our current status and to honestly assess our strengths and needs. Personally, the process of asking and answering this question would allow me to appreciate the complexities associated with the pragmatics of school operations, and understand the political and social issues that influence the school’s and community’s culture. Although it is quite natural for a new leader to desire to have an immediate, positive impact in his new position, I made a commitment not to hit the ground “running,” but rather to hit the ground “listening.”

As it relates to the Strategic Plan, this Entry Plan¹ will help me to formulate a comprehensive picture of where we currently are as a district. It is important to acknowledge that the Sherman School has an embedded mission which serves to guide its present work. The mission is to “...create an educational environment that encourages all children to reach their potential as self-confident, responsible and caring citizens, equipped to succeed in a rapidly changing society.” The beliefs that undergird this mission and the actions that manifest it have made the Sherman School what it is today. I enter the Sherman School and community with a sense of respect and reverence for the history, values and traditions that have contributed to Sherman’s success and ethos.

Understanding the many facets of the Sherman School and community is only an intermediate goal. My ultimate goal as a collaborative leader is: to obtain a comprehensive understanding of where we are, to help define where we want to be, to assist in determining how we will get there, and to continuously assess if we are, indeed, on target. Embedded in our work together is the notion that each student, parent, teacher, administrator, Board member and stakeholder will share in the responsibility for determining and ensuring we achieve our goals.

Entry Plan Goals

While I strive to answer the question, “Where are we now?” this Entry Plan will help me:

- (1) To get to know, personally and professionally, members of the Sherman School and community, with a specific emphasis on building trust and comradery.
- (2) To identify the key issues in Sherman’s past, how these issues were handled, and to understand and help to shape norms for addressing future issues.
- (3) To make sense of the various perspectives that will be shared through scores of personal interviews so that I can discern these data appropriately.

¹ I would like to credit the following sources in the development of this plan: Jentz, B. and Wofford, J. (2012). *The EntryPlan approach: How to begin a leadership position successfully, Education edition.*, and Watkins, M. (2003). *The First 90 Days: Critical success strategies for leaders at all levels*: Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.

- (4) To begin to determine common goals that will move us forward.
- (5) To begin to establish priorities among these goals to determine an order in which to address each one.

Process

Although my responsibilities do not officially begin until July 1, 2016, this Entry Plan affords me the opportunity to connect with individuals several months in advance. Doing so is advantageous as it would not be feasible to devote all of my attention to this process when other responsibilities require my time and consideration. While adhering to the details established in this plan is a high priority, I may need to adjust the timeline, reschedule or even cancel meetings, in the event that pressing needs are identified.

Interviews

Great effort has been expended to ensure that representatives from every conceivable constituent group, and in some cases all members of a particular group, are invited to meet with me for personal interviews. The interview questions for each group can be seen in the Appendix. These questions are published in advance to ensure transparency and efficiency.

The following stakeholder groups have been identified and will be invited to participate in interviews:

Stakeholder Group	Format	Estimated Timeframe
Board of Education	Individual members	May - August
Administration	Individual members	May - August
Union Leaders	Individual members	May - September
Faculty and Staff	Individual members	July - February
Office and Support Staff	Individual members	July - February
SPTO Leaders	Individual members	July - February
Parents of Current Students	Individual members, at will	July - February
Parents of Former Students	Individual members, at will	July - February
Current Students	Individual and group, at will	September - February
Sherman Alumni	Individual, at will	July - February
Community Leaders and Members	Individual members, at will	May - February
Community Organizations	Individual, at will	July - February
Feeder High School Administration	Individual members	July - August
Local University Administration	Individual members	July - February
Local Press	Individual members	May - August

Interpreting Data

Although each interview will be strictly confidential, the answers to the questions provided by each individual within a group will be processed for patterns and themes. Once entire cohorts have been interviewed, I will administer an electronic survey to validate the data with each cohort. Only members of each cohort will receive the survey to affirm the validity of that information. For instance, once all teachers have been interviewed, I will organize the content by patterns and themes and then send an electronic survey to the teachers that will allow them to validate the data.

Each group will rate the theme identified along a Likert scale which ranges from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree,” thus confirming or disconfirming the data within that set. In instances where there are low levels of agreement, a group meeting may be held to clarify understandings. This process will ensure the data are reflective of each group’s beliefs.

Sense-Making Sessions

It is very likely that the collection of vast amounts of information, from various sources, will yield further questions that require clarification. In such cases, I will contact individuals or groups to verify understandings or clarify where misunderstands exist.

On Confidentiality

As one of the primary goals of this Entry Plan is to build trust with members of the Sherman School and community, and since an absence of trust will likely inhibit individuals from sharing honestly, it is imperative that interviewees know that what they say will be held strictly confidential. The last ten minutes of each interview will be spent reviewing what I believe I heard, and offering the interviewee the opportunity to redact and/or amend any comments. Once again, individual names will not be disclosed; only patterns and themes will be validated before they are shared publically.

Reporting Results

Once each cohort has been interviewed and has completed the validation survey, it will be appropriate to share the results with the Board and public. These data will serve as a foundation for our future work together. Please note that some questions are designed to help me better know the interviewee, and to understand individual preferences, interests and norms. Therefore the results of those questions will not be validated or shared publically.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that these interviews will allow me to be a highly informed leader for the Sherman School. As Superintendent-Principal, this Entry Plan will allow me to understand with acute detail the strengths, needs and key issues in the district. By meeting with every stakeholder group, I will be able to obtain a broad perspective on a complex and multi-faceted organization. This knowledge will serve as a resource as I lead the district in a strategic planning process which will determine the future of the Sherman School.

Appendix

Following are the questions that will be discussed in each interview. With the exception of question # 1, the order in which they are discussed will be at the discretion of the interviewee. Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes, but may end sooner; we will not fill time. The last 10 minutes of the interview will be dedicated to reviewing what I believe I heard to ensure accuracy.

Board of Education

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What motivated you to serve on the Board of Education?
3. What has been the most fulfilling part of your work on the Board? What has been your greatest challenge?
4. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
5. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
6. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
7. What should the Sherman School look like in 3 months? 1 year? 10 years?
8. What can I do to best support you in your role?
9. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Administration

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What accomplishments are you most proud of during your tenure in Sherman?
3. What administrative tasks are yours alone? What tasks do you share with other administrators? What areas of responsibility are unclear?
4. What is the most satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do more of? What energizes you?
5. What is the least satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do less of? What drains your energy?
6. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
7. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
8. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
9. What can I do to best support you in your work?
10. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Faculty and Staff (*for Union Leaders Only)

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What is the most satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do more of? What energizes you?
3. What is the least satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do less of? What drains your energy?
4. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
5. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
6. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
7. What can I do to best support you in your work?
8. *Describe a time when the school was in great conflict. How did this conflict arise? How was it resolved? Could there have been a better way to handle that situation?
9. *Describe what you would consider to be a positive relationship between the union and administration.
10. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Office and Support Staff (*for Union Leaders Only)

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What is the most satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do more of? What energizes you?
3. What is the least satisfying part of your work? What do you wish you could do less of? What drains your energy?
4. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
5. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
6. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
7. What can I do to best support you in your work?
8. *Describe a time when the school was in great conflict. How did this conflict arise? How was it resolved? Could there have been a better way to handle that situation?
9. *Describe what you would consider to be a positive relationship between the union and administration.
10. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Parents of Current Students (*Questions for SPTO Leaders Only)

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
3. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?

4. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
5. How do you perceive your role in your child's education? What responsibilities belong to the school alone? What responsibilities are shared?
6. What can I do to best support you in your role?
7. *What prompted your desire to serve in this leadership capacity?
8. *What has been your most significant contribution(s) to the school as a result of being on the SPTO?
9. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Parents of Former Students

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
3. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
4. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
5. Which High School did your child attend? Why?
6. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Current Students

Interview questions:

1. What grade are you in and how long have you been a student at the Sherman School?
2. What are the three best things about Sherman School? Why?
3. What three things do you wish we could change or improve? Why?
4. If we were going to make a change or improvement, where should we start?
5. What can I do to best support you as a student?
6. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Sherman Alumni

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. What about the Sherman School and community gives you the greatest sense of pride?
3. In what ways are you still connected to the Sherman School?
4. What three things should we preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
5. What three things should we change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
6. What should be the top change or improvement priority?
7. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Community Leaders and Members

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. Please describe your history with the Sherman School and community.
3. What about the Sherman School and community gives you the greatest sense of pride?
4. What is the most important thing to preserve in the Sherman School? Why?
5. What is the most important thing to change or improve in the Sherman School? Why?
6. What individuals or groups have the most influence within the school and community?
7. How effective is the school's communication with residents in the community? What would help us to improve our communicative efforts?
8. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Community Organizations

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. Please tell me about your history with the Sherman School and community.
3. In what ways do you interact with the Sherman School?
4. Under what circumstances do you discuss the Sherman School with other people?
5. What opportunities for partnerships might exist between your organization and our school district? What would be the benefit to you? To us?
6. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Feeder High School Administration

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. How familiar are you with the Sherman students who attend your school?
3. In what academic, social, athletic areas do you believe our students are strongest? Weakest?
4. How are 9th grade expectations communicated to Sherman staff? If they are not, what would be the best way to do so?
5. What would an ideal partnership between your school and ours look like? Who would be responsible for making that happen?
6. What does your school do to ensure our students feel like they are part of your High School community? Are those efforts effective? How do you know?
7. Why do you think our students choose to attend your school?
8. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Local University Administration

Interview questions:

1. In which programs have Sherman students enrolled at your University?
2. From your perspective, what prior experiences does a student need to be successful as a college student? In a career?
3. What opportunities for partnerships might exist between your university and our school district? What would be the benefit to you? To us?
4. What do I need to know that I did not ask?

Local Press

Interview questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself to help me know you better.
2. Describe the types of stories related to education you typically cover.
3. What do you believe your customers would like to read more about?
4. As the one responsible for the happenings in the Sherman School, how can I be of service to your newspaper?
5. In terms of communication, what works for you and what does not?
6. What do I need to know that I did not ask?