

**Superintendent's Entry Plan**  
**Kirk Downing**  
**Nashoba Regional School District**

Dear Nashoba Regional School District Community,

Since I was first announced as the Superintendent of the Nashoba Regional School District, I have been welcomed with kindness and generosity of spirit. I am very grateful for the warm welcome I have received. The tone of partnership and positivity has been set and I look forward to working with you in the coming days, months and years.

An important part of taking on the leadership of the Nashoba schools is to learn about all of the things that make it great as well as all of the things that need improvement. The entry plan process is designed to educate me on the values, traditions, challenges and desires of all sectors of the organization. It is through that process that I will know what is important to the school community for the benefit of our students, staff members, and community.

During the summer months I began the entry process by interviewing staff members, community leaders, and parents. Those conversations were just the start of many conversations I will have with students, staff, families and local community leaders. The entry process does not stop there. In this plan you will find opportunities to engage with me through community forums, surveys, and office hours. It's through those conversations that I will discover what is important to all stakeholders in Nashoba.

The process does not end there. I will take a deep dive into learning data, budget, student services, leadership, community service, and much more through a document and artifact study. By studying year over year documents, I will be able to understand trends and processes over time to know how to proceed as well as to identify processes and protocols that need change. It will take me several months to undergo these endeavors and I look forward to the work.

Thank you for engaging with me in this entry process. Your participation will provide me with the formative knowledge I need to serve you well as your Superintendent.

Sincerely,

Kirk Downing

## Introduction

The purpose of this entry plan is to outline the process I will use to learn more about the Nashoba Schools in my new role as Superintendent. I intend to use this process as the foundation of what will ultimately become a multi-year strategic plan that is crafted by a cross section of constituents across the towns of Bolton, Lancaster, and Stow. This process will allow me to learn about all sectors of the organization and foster meaningful relationships with all constituents. The entry plan will build my understanding of the culture, climate, strengths, challenges, and areas of opportunity and improvement for the Nashoba Regional School District.

To understand my entry design and ultimately the findings that will come it is important to know the core values under which I operate:

To promote and protect the well being of all students under my care I believe in:

- 1) **Building and fostering meaningful relationships** - The key to engaging students to be motivated learners who are inspired to make their communities better today and in the future is by building trust through meaningful learning experiences. Every trusted adult a student has in their life is an asset to their growth and development. Those assets are important to helping our students grow the skills and competencies they will need today and post graduation.
- 2) **Treating others with respect and dignity** - the old adage of treating others as you would want to be treated comes to mind here. Treating others with respect and dignity are common values for many. In the context of education for all students I have to remind myself that my experience is not necessarily a common experience for all of our students, staff and community members. Starting from a default stance of respect and dignity gives me an opportunity to engage others and hear the truth they are bringing to me.
- 3) **Creating trust through honesty and integrity** - As the steward of the Nashoba Regional School District, is it important to recognize that I have a duty to execute the responsibilities of my position. Engaging in constructive conversations and debate on important issues requires transparency and accountability. That does not mean all situations will be presented for public consumption as I cannot reveal information for which I am restricted by law. Rather, it means I will put forward what I know to be the truth.
- 4) **Engaging with empathy to understand others** -In its purest form, empathy is simply trying to understand others. Through understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, I am better able to understand people. It does not presuppose agreement on an issue or the sharing of a common perspective. Empathy is a value that helps create pathways for mutual agreement or compromise. It's through empathy the problems can be solved collaboratively in the interests of all parties.

## **Context and Background**

Other than the research I conducted during the superintendent search, I came to NRSD with no background knowledge or history within the district to inform my entry design. As a result, I bring an objective viewpoint based on my professional experience over the last 27 years from three high performing school districts, Cherry Creek School District #5, Dover Public Schools, and the Natick Public Schools. Through the years I have developed a broad set of skills and knowledge in the following areas.

- Student growth and development
- Social emotional learning
- Curriculum and instruction
- Facilities
- Budget and transportation
- Human Resources
- Special education services
- ELL instruction and services
- Community engagement
- School and town partnerships

The focus of this entry plan is to devise a strategy that will help me identify the strengths and areas for growth in the Nashoba Regional School District as it relates to those topics. I will examine the resources, structures, methodologies and communication strategies relative to the goals of the school system. This entry plan will be the foundation for a multi-year strategic plan that engages a cross section of school, town and community leaders in forming a long term vision for the school system.

For approximately the next six months, I will gather and synthesize information across all sectors of the organization. After March 1, 2022 I will present my findings to the school committee at the direction of the chair. I will keep the School Committee informed of my progress throughout that time as tentative findings may develop that need a more immediate response

## **Key Questions**

The sources of data mentioned below should provide insight to these key questions.

1. What are the strengths of our school system and our community that are important to recognize and leverage for the growth of students?
2. What do stakeholders desire for the future of the school system?
3. What are the barriers and challenges that will potentially impede our progress to reach our goals?

4. What actions of the superintendent are needed to overcome the barriers and challenges getting in the way of progress.
5. What is the current state of diversity, equity and inclusion as it relates to race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability, or economic status

The report presented after March 1, 2022 will provide a summary of trends based on what I notice in the data sets, questions I am wondering about that need more clarity, and recommendations for next steps in the strategic planning process. In addition, I will bring forward my plan for launching the strategic planning process with a scope and sequence of deliverables.

My entry plan will incorporate data from the following sources as a way to deeply understand the school system.

### **Observations of Schools and Classrooms**

Our core mission is steeped in teaching learning. To understand a school district's value I need to understand the quality of instructional practice amongst our educators as well as the skills and talents of our student body. Essential to that understanding are three questions; how do we know what we should teach, how do we know students have learned it, and what will we do when students struggle to learn what is taught? Added to those questions is another question, what will we do for students that know the content and curriculum before it is even taught?

To find the answers to these questions I will conduct a series of observations coupled with evaluator analysis protocols. Those observations and conversations will help me understand areas of strength and areas for improvement in regards to teaching and learning.

### **Leadership Team – Instructional Leadership**

The District leadership team is composed of three tiers, the cabinet team, the principal team, and the NRSD leadership team. The cabinet team includes the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Director for Human Resources, Business and Operations Manager, Director Pupil Personnel Services, Director of Facilities and the Coordinator of Health Guidance and Wellness. The larger district leadership team includes the principals as well as district curriculum coordinators, department directors, principals and assistant principals.

New to the team this year will be Kathleen Boynton, principal of Nashoba High School. She will join an experienced and talented group of principals from the other five schools.

The cabinet team, the principals, and the leadership team will be important influences in my growth in understanding the school system. Already, I have hosted individual interviews (29) with every member of the team to gather historical knowledge and learn the hopes and expectations of each individual.

Upon entry I learned there was not a formal cabinet structure in place to discuss the weekly business of the school system. Immediately I instituted weekly cabinet meetings where the leader of each department presents the prevailing issues of the day as well as projections for the work to come. These meetings will provide valuable insights into the systems, processes and procedures of the school system in the coming months

The leadership team will meet every other week throughout the school year. Principals will attend every meeting and all others leadership team members will attend once per month. These are the meetings where we will examine instructional practice, evaluation, budget development, community connections and much more.

### **Key Documents**

The following documents have been or will be reviewed for contextual knowledge. Please note I anticipate adding more document sources as the entry plan progresses.

- School Improvement Plans
- District Strategic Plan
- School and District Report Cards (DESE)
- School Discipline Reports (DESE)
- District/School MCAS, AP and SAT Analysis
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Reports
- Special Education Program Evaluations
- Coordinated Program Review
- School Safety Plans and Emergency Response Protocols
- Superintendent Search Survey Results and Report
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Budget Documents (FY21) – School and Town
- Financial Audits
- Capital Improvement Projects and Facilities Data
- Grants
- Policy Manual
- Administrator Job Descriptions
- Curriculum Guides
- School Handbooks
- Faculty Handbook

- Review School Committee Minutes from previous meetings

### **Stakeholder conversations**

To learn first hand from constituents and begin forging relationships in the community I will host meetings, office hours, focus group conversations and interviews to learn more about Nashoba. The following list outlines the constituencies I have identified for the entry conversations.

#### **Students / Parents / Community**

- Students (Groups by School)
- Parents/Guardians (Groups by School)
- Parent Support Organizations (PTA, Booster Clubs, SEPAC, Plymouth Schools Music Association, School Councils, English Learner PAC, etc.)
- Town Administrators
- Finance/Advisory Chairs
- Select Board Members
- Public Health Department Director
- Police Chief, SRO, Fire Chief
- Local media (Old Colony Memorial, WPLM)
- State Representatives (individually)
- State Senator (individually)

#### **District Faculty / Staff**

- Teachers (Groups by building)
- Paraprofessionals (Groups by building)
- School nurses (by group)
- Food service personnel (both individually and in small groups)
- Secretarial staff (Groups by building)
- Custodial staff (Groups by building)
- Central office staff

#### **District Leadership**

- NRSD school committee (Individual Meetings)
- Administrative team (Individual Meetings)
- Nashoba Regional Education Association Leadership

#### **Sample Interview Questions for Stakeholders**

1. Before COVID-19 forced the district into remote learning, what do you believe were the most prominent strengths of the school system?

2. What have you learned about the school district as a result of entering into hybrid/remote learning during the 2020-2021 school year?
3. What do you value most about the Nashoba Schools?
4. How do you define success for the school system?
5. How can we be better?
6. What has the district done to address issues of equity, racism and opportunity/achievement gaps?
7. What do you value in a Superintendent?
8. What are the top two challenges you see the district facing in the coming years?

### Phases, Tasks and Timeline

Phase	Tasks	Timeline
<b>Planning and Preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write draft entry plan</li> <li>• Share draft plan for feedback</li> <li>• Schedule interviews and forums</li> <li>• Create survey questions for stakeholders</li> </ul>	July - September August - September July - December August - September
<b>Information and Data Gathering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Conduct interviews</li> <li>• Hold forums and focus group meetings</li> <li>• School site visits</li> </ul>	July - December
<b>Process Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesize information to identify trends and themes</li> </ul>	September - January
<b>Next Steps and Action Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to school committee on emerging themes</li> <li>• Present findings to the leadership team</li> <li>• Present findings to the school committee</li> </ul>	November - January  February  March
<b>Development of District Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a Nashoba strategic planning committee to design a five year strategic plan</li> <li>• Conduct a strategic planning process</li> <li>• Present the Nashoba five year strategic plan to the school committee</li> </ul>	April-June  Summer 2022  Fall 2022

### Expected Outcomes

The execution of this entry plan will provide the following outcomes.

- 1) A summary of the feedback obtained from the stakeholder conversations during the “listening and learning” meetings outlined in this entry plan
- 2) Summarized findings from all audits, reviews and evaluations of the district’s organizational structure, programs, process systems, human resources, learning and working environments and finances
- 3) Assessment of executive leadership and organizational structure and identification of any design/staffing changes needed to ensure optimal productivity, efficacy and efficiency
- 4) Build foundational understanding to begin facilitating short and long-range planning in identified key areas

### **Conclusion**

As the leader of our learning organization, I will continue to engage all sectors of the organization and the community at large beyond the conclusion of this entry process. Learning is a dynamic construct that changes as new information, new technologies and cutting edge pedagogy enters the environment. It is my intention to keep the connections established through this process for many years to come. By working together our school community can exceed all expectations for the benefit of our students.