
To: Arlington School Committee
From: Dr. Elizabeth C Homan, Superintendent
Re: Evaluation Self-Assessment 2021
Date: 9/23/21

Dear Arlington School Committee,

One component of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation includes a self-assessment against indicators in the Superintendent's Evaluation Rubric. As a component of the evaluation for all educators, the model system includes the self-assessment in order to promote reflective practice and to ground educators' goals in their areas of strength and skill and their areas for growth and improvement.

In an effort to model the sort of reflective practice that I hope to see from the leaders and teachers in our organization, I include this self-assessment aligned to focus indicators with my 2021-22 Goals for your consideration and feedback.

First, I would like to share how I arrived at the goals and focus indicators for my evaluation this year. I began with a needs assessment for the district using data acquired thus far in my entry process, as well as reflections on my own areas of skill and growth as I enter the superintendency. I also closely examined the District's Overarching Goals and the goal objectives set by our curriculum and central office teams last spring. The resulting district improvement goals for my first year of superintendency are designed to specifically articulate what it is I will do as a new superintendent to support and facilitate a successful school year for all of Arlington's students.

I identified a few areas of need for the district, which I used to develop the three district improvement goals that will guide my actions this year:

1. Building a Collaborative and Equity-Focused Leadership Culture;
2. Improving and Streamlining Transparency, Family Engagement, and Communication;
and
3. Ensuring a Safe and Supportive Pandemic Return and Recovery.

By identifying these "areas of need," I do not mean to indicate that APS does not already demonstrate significant strength in these areas. Instead, I am suggesting that attention to these areas will accelerate the work ahead; specifically, strategic planning and pandemic recovery.

From these areas of need, I identified goals and focus indicators by reflecting on the skills I bring to each area of need and the domains in which I hope to grow in my own leadership practice as a new superintendent. Identified focus indicators and reflections are below.

Standard I: Instructional Leadership

I-E-1. Data-Informed Decision Making

I believe this is an area of strength and skill for me, as well as something I am always striving to improve upon. Arlington educators have multiple and varied sources of data from which to base instructional and operational decision-making. It is my goal to model data-informed decision-making for Arlington's leadership teams, and to develop their abilities to model such practices with educators. It is also important that we develop

systems and structures that allow time for educators to make thoughtful decisions through examination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Prior to the pandemic, APS made significant investments in order to set aside the time and resources for teachers to collaborate and make data-informed decisions, particularly at the elementary level (ACE Blocks). Now that we have returned to schedules that embed this time for educators and invested in the leadership necessary for coaching and effective instructional leadership, it is time to refocus attention on building the capacity of leaders and teachers in this area.

I-E-2. Plans and Goals

I identified this focus indicator because it aligns with some of the work that I believe will be central to my first year as a superintendent. Arlington has established practices for goal-setting which provide a strong foundation for long-term strategic planning. We are also challenged to set aside the time for routine reflection on progress towards those goals, using student-level and organizational data to measure progress against benchmarks.

A proficient superintendent in this area: "Involves stakeholders in creating district improvement and annual action plans comprised of focused, measurable goals informed by evidence-based assessments of organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and the growth, learning, and achievement of all students. Regularly monitors and shares progress with the community. Supports principals to align school improvement goals to district plans and goals."

I hope to learn from and through the development and sharing of principals' School Improvement Plans this year, because this is a process I have never directly supervised in my previous roles. I would also like to develop myself and the leadership team around the development of "focused, measurable goals" and the routine monitoring of progress towards those goals. Action steps linked to district strategic planning (District Improvement Goal #2) will also allow me to demonstrate proficiency towards this indicator, and my participation in NSIP will support my development in this area.

Standard II: Management and Operations

II-C-2. Time for Collaboration

This indicator is at once a strength and a challenge in my practice; I enjoy and have experience with designing opportunities for leadership collaboration and shared problem-solving. It is also challenging to bring busy leaders all over the system together for learning and collaboration that feels relevant to and has the potential to impact all leaders and areas of the district.

This indicator is aligned with I.E.2 above, because it is a necessary condition of setting meaningful goals and monitoring progress. The work of *"Establishing norms for effective collaboration, and preventing or deflecting activities that may interfere"* has already begun in our August Leadership Workshop, and will continue throughout the year in administrator learning sessions that will include visits to schools, walkthroughs, and facilitated workshops for administrative teams. These opportunities for ongoing professional learning for leaders and calibration across the leadership team have not been in place in Arlington in previous years, and so may need to be adjusted in their design and implementation as we move forward.

II-A-3. Student Health and Safety

I chose this focus indicator because ensuring student health and safety promises to be a central focus - and challenge - of my work this school year. I bring the skill and experience of 18 months of district leadership during the pandemic to this year's work;

however, I did not gain this experience with Arlington's educators, and so I face the added challenge of mapping what I have learned about pandemic schooling onto the experiences of a new school system and community.

It is worth noting that this indicator is not only about students' physical safety, but also their emotional safety and in making decisions that provide for a safe and supportive learning environment: a proficient superintendent *"Regularly checks for implicit bias in decision-making procedures, and provides training for administrators to uphold these expectations."* There is no leader - myself included - who does not enter the work of leadership with implicit biases and blindspots to uncover. It will be important for me to partner with district leadership, including and especially our new Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, to meet this expectation.

II-E-1. Fiscal Systems

I include this indicator because the FY23 budget will be the first budget that I build in collaboration with the APS Leadership Team. We will be trying some new internal processes and a new approach to sharing budget needs with the School Committee and the community, which I appreciate already having the School Committee's support to implement. These new processes include linking budget requests to school improvement planning and developing a collaborative and comprehensive internal structure for budget proposals.

I intend for this focus area to be one that spans multiple years as I work with my team to develop a budget-building process that ensures APS's financial stability as we come out of the pandemic and also looks ahead to future town needs and district projects. We will surely learn from our new approach and have things that we wish to adjust in future years, and I look forward to the committee's feedback on our budget-building process as we move through the year.

Standard III: Family and Community Engagement

III-C-1. Culturally Proficient Communication

I firmly believe that all families should be able to gain easy access to: (1) information about their child's education, (2) leaders who will partner with them in solving problems for their children, (3) schools that support the whole child. As such, I bring strength and skill to this indicator and see it as an area of growth and opportunity for myself and APS.

A proficient superintendent in this indicator: *Sets clear expectations and supports administrators to provide regular, two-way, culturally proficient communications with families about student learning and performance. District-wide communications to families are provided in multiple formats and reflect understanding of and respect for different families' home languages, culture, and values.*

Through my supervision and development of leaders and my own communications from the district and with families, I will strive to meet this high expectation and build multiple opportunities for two-way communication and collaboration with families, both across schools and as a district.

III-B-2. Family Support

One of the biggest challenges of the year ahead will be quickly ascertaining what supports students and families need and ensuring that we can implement them immediately and effectively. It will also be important for us not to deny students access to core instructional time while providing any extra support that students may need, because doing so has the potential to exacerbate learning disruptions. The Pandemic Recovery Plan articulated a need for APS to develop and define our multi-tiered systems

of support, which begins with Tier I (“what all students get”) and then flexibly provides Tier II or III supports as needed.

A proficient superintendent in this indicator not only supports educators in developing excellent tiered systems, but also *“helps families (a) understand district and school-based policies and resources that support student learning and development, and (b) access as needed necessary services within and outside of schools to meet students’ learning needs.”* This is challenging because it requires me to both (1) know and understand the services offered in APS so that I can support families in understanding how the system is structured and what services are available, and (2) identify where services that support students and families may be missing or inappropriately allocated. This will be a core focus for me as I get to know the system and as I develop a budget that will support the needs of all students and the community.

Standard IV: Professional Culture

IV-F-2. Consensus Building

We have suffered through a year and a half of divisive politics, disconnection, and disrupted education. People rarely talk about “consensus” and “superintendency” in the same breath, but I chose this indicator for that precise reason. In order for the Arlington community to emerge from the pandemic with resilience and restored connections, I must lead with a commitment to consensus-building.

We have had some early success in this area through the process we undertook to convene stakeholders in the development of our Pandemic Recovery Plan, and I intend to continue to include the voices of families, students, teachers, leaders, and community members in our district initiatives and planning moving forward. This approach will not always lead to total consensus, but does allow for us to hear and integrate the voices of many stakeholders into our planning at the building, department, and district levels.

IV-B-1. Policies and Practices

This indicator is focused on how superintendents *“Develop and implement culturally responsive policies and practices that acknowledge the diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges of administrators, students and staff.”* Equity and inclusion are either supported or unsupported across all aspects of our system, and it can be challenging to identify those policies and practices that unintentionally (or intentionally) exclude certain students or families from participation.

I chose this indicator as an area of constant growth for me as a systems leader. It is important for me to uphold and develop practices in our leaders, teachers, and support staff that are asset-based and draw upon the wealth of knowledge and expertise that all members of the Arlington community bring into our schools. It is incumbent upon me to ensure that we do not put policies in place that exclude certain members of our community from the excellent work that happens in our schools. Attention to the ways in which the school system’s operations may contribute to achievement or opportunity gaps will allow me to make adjustments in ways that support students and families.

I hope these reflections help you to understand how my goals for the 2021-22 school year are designed to support the work of this unique school year. As Arlington’s new Superintendent, I am committed to completing a thorough entry process even as I dive headfirst into the work of district leadership. This school year, I will be focused on inclusion, strategic planning, and putting systems and structures in place to build continuity and shared vision so that we can propel all of Arlington’s students towards their bright and promising futures.