

Editor's Notes: This entry plan was developed by an experienced superintendent moving into a new school district. It was developed after getting the position. By the writers own admission it was "over built," taking much more of the new superintendent's time than necessary or prudent, based on the other commitments of a new superintendent. It violates the base rule of, "Under promise, over deliver."

I like the letters of introduction. This entry plan is typical of many entry plans, with long lists of questions. Probably three or four of the right questions will open a dialogue and get you into the areas you want to discuss.

J M Merrins, Ed.D.

LETTER OF DIRECTION TO THE SUPERINTENDENT'S SECRETARY
[Name] SCHOOL DISTRICT

Administration Building

TO: [Name - Secretary to the Superintendent]

FROM: [Name – New Superintendent]

RE: Entry Plan

DATE: [Date]

As we discussed briefly attached for your information and reference is a copy of a memorandum to the Board of Education describing the draft Entry Plan I have developed. I will need you to begin to schedule interviews as the plan describes. At this point, I would ask you to schedule meetings beginning the second week of [Month] with the individuals in the groups referenced in Plan. When contacting current Board members, be sure to ask them to provide you with up to three names of former Board members/Key Communicators. Once we have a number of recommended individuals, we will determine which ones with whom I will meet. Names of most others to schedule (those to be determined later are noted) are included in the Plan.

Please schedule each person for 1 1/2 hours (I'm planning on one-hour meetings). Try to schedule no more than three meetings during any one day. Evening meetings are okay; use non-Board meeting evenings for individuals who are interested and available during evening hours. One or two in an evening, beginning at 5:00 PM would be fine.

After early September we will examine my calendar and discuss scheduling the representatives of secondary student organizations, certain Shared Decision-Making teams, and the recommended former Board members/Key Communicators. In addition we will plan the building visits and the informal discussions with those associated with the District. At this point, please schedule the individuals listed within the following groups:

- Current and Former Board of Education Members;
- Central Office Administrative and Selected Support Staff;
- Building Administrative Staff; and,
- Presidents of Each of the Employee Labor Organizations.

The Entry Plan packet also includes a sample confirming (and thank you) letter that we will use which should save us time, particularly once the interviews are completed. Thank your for your assistance with this important part of my introduction to [District name]. I welcome any suggestions you may have as you review the material.

Attachments

LETTER TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

[Name] SCHOOL DISTRICT

TO: Members of the Board of Education

FROM: [Name – New Superintendent]

RE: Entry Plan

DATE: [Date]

As I discussed with you during the interview process, it is important that the Superintendent of Schools develop an understanding of the history of the District in order to be successful in that position. In addition, all those with whom I have met both prior to and since my appointment, have stressed the importance of and need for careful communications at all levels within the school system and the community. With these two important initial objectives in mind, I am preparing currently for the first few months on the job.

My first priority is to better understand the school system and to meet those who work in it. To this end, I will be conducting a series of individual interviews with each of you and a few former Board members, the central office administrative and selected support staff, the building administrative staff, the presidents of each of the employee labor organizations, representatives of secondary student organizations, representatives from certain Shared Decision-Making Teams and recommended former Board members/community members (current or potential Key Communicators). These interviews will focus on such sample topics as each person's history in and association with the schools; their feelings about the effectiveness of the instructional program; their thoughts about areas of strength, as well as areas in need of improvement within both instructional and noninstructional areas; their personal feelings about priorities for the future; and their perception about how important decisions are made in the District.

Also, I will be meeting with others who have a relationship with the District on a less formal basis in order to learn more about their current association with our schools. Sample individuals in this category include those listed on the attachment to this memorandum labeled as such. While there could be some overlap with the individuals in this group and those you recommend as former Board members/Key Communicators for conversations with me, I think this effort only will enhance my ability to learn more about the District more quickly and open additional lines of communication in an even more productive fashion.

In addition to these structured interviews and informal discussions, I want to learn about the schools and the instructional program by spending time with faculty, students and support staff in each building. Early in [Month] and possibly in conjunction with the scheduled visits with members of the Board, I intend to stop by each school simply to meet staff. Following that first visit, and during the first year, I will return to spend portions of a few days in each of the schools. Understanding the size of the District and in order to maximize the use of my time, I will be asking each administrator to plan an orientation to his/her school or program which is to

include time to talk with employees in each building. These orientation visits will be designed so I can observe and discuss further substantive issues with people in the District. Especially important, I will be visiting classrooms and talking with students and classroom staff.

These interviews and orientation visits to each school and program area most likely will last throughout the school year. During that time, I also will be administering the school district, while working to ensure a successful 20[]-20[] school year and planning for the 20[]-20[] school year.

Transitions can be difficult if we do not manage them effectively. This is an exciting time for us with much work and important decisions ahead and too little time for me to meet new colleagues. However, I am determined to spend a considerable portion of my time during this first year meeting people associated with the District, getting to know its history and learning more about the instructional and other programs. In order to make this all happen in an effective and efficient manner, it is my intention to use the information I will collect also as a basis to initiate discussion about long range goals as well as specific goals for the 20[]-20[] school year, for the Board's consideration and approval. With this important objective of establishing clear direction for the District in mind, I will be asking the Board to commit to a one or two day workshop next July or August to allow me to review my entry activity findings, to provide time for us to begin to prioritize specific areas in need of attention for the next five years and to review and finalize District goals for the 20[]-20[] school year.

Enclosed with this memorandum please find sample questions I will be asking people with whom I meet and tentative listings of those individuals by group. I also have enclosed a sample copy of one of the confirming (and thank you) letters to be forwarded to each individual once appointments are finalized. Confirmation letters will be modified as appropriate. [Name - Secretary to the Superintendent] will be contacting you directly to schedule your meeting with me. She also will be asking you to provide me with up to three names of former Board members/people in the community (potential Key Communicators) with whom you believe I should speak as part of my initial entry plan in order to assist me in reaching my initial objectives of learning about the District and developing open lines of communications. While I will not be able to meet with all of those whose names you provide, I will compare your suggestions and use that input to determine those with whom to meet as part of my entry plan activities.

It is my intention to monitor regularly this plan and make modifications where necessary in order to ensure its effectiveness in achieving its stated purposes. I am excited about getting started and working with you to lead the District into the 21st Century in a manner which emphasizes quality, focuses on our students' needs and continues the many fine [District name] traditions.

attachments

Sample Interview Questions for Board Members/Former Board Members

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including your reasons for joining the Board.
2. What were your general impressions of the schools when you first joined? Now that you have been (were) on the Board for ____ years, have those perceptions changed? If so, how?
3. In general, what do you believe to be the strengths and the areas in need of improvement for the following employee groups in the District?
 - a) Administrative/Supervisory Staff
 - b) Teaching Staff
 - c) Support Staff
4. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
5. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
6. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence either you or the Superintendent?
7. Describe a time when the District experienced heightened conflict. How was (were) the issue(s) resolved? In retrospect, what suggestions would you have to improve the way in which the matter was handled?
8. What do you want to preserve most about the Williamsville Schools? Why?
9. What leadership has the Superintendent provided to the schools during the past five (5) years? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
10. Discuss with me your feelings about how the Board operates. Describe activities you would like continued and those you would like changed, indicating suggestions for change and why you believe the change(s) to be appropriate.
11. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

Sample Interview Questions for Central Office Administrative, Supervisory and Selected Support Staff

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including previous positions you have held and some of your personal as well as professional goals.
2. Which Central Office tasks are your responsibilities alone? Which tasks do you share with others on the Central Office staff? Are there areas where the overlapping of responsibilities occurs and role responsibility is unclear?
3. What is the key issue this year for your own work and area of responsibility? Why do you believe it to be so important?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues (and they may not include your own area of responsibility) the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
5. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
6. Describe for me your general feelings about the instructional program in the District. If you could change or meaningfully influence one of its components, which would it be and why?
7. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence you, the Superintendent or the Board of Education?
8. Describe a time when the District experienced heightened conflict. How was (were) the issue(s) resolved? In retrospect, what suggestions would you have to improve the way in which the matter was handled?
9. Describe a very difficult work-related decision you had to make since you have been at Williamsville, preferably during the last three years. In retrospect, would you change your decision now? If so, why?
10. What were your general impressions of the schools when you first came to Williamsville? Now that you have been here for ____ years, have those perceptions changed? If so, how?
11. What do you want to preserve most about the Williamsville Schools? Why?

12. What leadership has the Superintendent provided to the schools during the past five years? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
13. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

Sample Interview Questions for Building Administrative Staff

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including previous positions you have held and some of your personal as well as professional goals.
2. Which tasks are your responsibilities alone? Which tasks, if any, do you share with others on the administrative team? Are there areas where the overlapping of responsibilities occurs and role responsibility is unclear?
3. What is the key issue this year for your own work and area of responsibility in your building? Why do you believe it to be so important?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues (and they may not include your own building responsibilities) the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
5. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
6. Describe for me your general feelings about the instructional program in your building. If you could change or meaningfully influence one of its components, which would it be and why?
7. Describe how your Shared Decision-Making Team functions. If you could make one change in the way in which it operates what would it be and why?
8. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence you, the Superintendent or the Board of Education?
9. Describe a time when the District experienced heightened conflict. How was (were) the issue(s) resolved? In retrospect, what suggestions would you have to improve the way in which the matter was handled?
10. Describe a very difficult work-related decision you had to make since you have been at Williamsville, preferably during the last three years. In retrospect, would you change your decision now? If so, why?
11. What were your general impressions of the schools when you first came to Williamsville? Now that you have been here for ____ years, have those perceptions changed? If so, how?
12. What do you want to preserve most about the Williamsville Schools? Why?

13. What leadership has the Superintendent provided to the schools during the past five years? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
14. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

Sample Interview Questions for Presidents of Employee Labor Organizations

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including previous positions you have held and some of your personal as well as professional goals.
2. What is the key issue this year for your own work and area of responsibility in your building? Why do you believe it to be so important?
3. What do you believe to be the key issues for your unit (and they may not include your own building responsibilities) the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues for your unit the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
5. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence you, the Superintendent or the Board of Education?
6. Describe the history of the Union-Administration-School Board relationship in Williamsville. How was the most recent contract dispute ultimately resolved? In retrospect, what could have been done differently to avert the conflict?
7. What in the current labor agreement is important for me to know? Are there any issues which remain unresolved?
8. To what extent has the formal grievance procedure in the labor agreement been used in the past?
9. What has been the nature of your contact with the Superintendent? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
10. What has administrative leadership provided to the District in the past? What would you like it to provide for the future?
11. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with your unit and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

Sample Interview Questions for Representatives of Secondary Student Organizations

1. Please tell me about your organization, including the goals of the group and the activities in which you are involved.
2. How do you work currently with teachers and administrators in your building?
3. What has been the nature of your contact with the Superintendent of Schools? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues for your building the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
5. How do you feel about your Williamsville education to this point in your school career? If there was one component you could keep and one you could change which would they be and why?
6. What are some of the challenges facing students in your building today? Please rank those in the order of importance as you see them. Is your organization addressing these challenges in any way and, if so, please describe.
7. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with students and their families?

Sample Interview Questions for Representatives of Certain Shared Decision-Making Teams

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including how long you have lived in the community and your relationship with the District, including the length of time you have served on the Shared Decision-Making Team.
2. What were your general impressions of the schools when you first joined the Shared Decision-Making Team? Now that you have been associated with that group for ____ years, have those perceptions changed? If so, how?
3. What do you believe to be the key issues your building and the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues your building and the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
5. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence school policy?
6. Describe a time when the District experienced heightened conflict. How was (were) the issue(s) resolved? In retrospect, what suggestions would you have to improve the way in which the matter was handled?
7. What do you want to preserve most about the Williamsville Schools? Why?
8. What leadership has the Superintendent provided to your group during the past five years? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
9. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about your building, the District and community and which will improve communications with your group and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

Sample Interview Questions for Recommended Key Communicators in the Community

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including how long you have lived in the community and/or your relationship with the District.
2. What were your general impressions of the schools when you first moved here? Now that you have been associated with the District for ____ years, have those perceptions changed? If so, how?
3. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must address for the 2005-2006 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
5. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence school policy?
6. Describe a time when the District experienced heightened conflict. How was (were) the issue(s) resolved? In retrospect, what suggestions would you have to improve the way in which the matter was handled?
7. What do you want to preserve most about the Williamsville Schools? Why?
8. What leadership has the Superintendent provided to you and/or your group in your and/or its relationship with the schools during the past five years? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
9. If you are familiar with the functioning of the Board, discuss with me your feelings about how the Board operates. Describe activities you would like continued and those you would like changed, indicating suggestions for change and why you believe the change(s) to be appropriate.
10. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with you and/or your group and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

**SAMPLE CONFIRMING (AND THANK YOU) LETTER FOR STRUCTURED
INTERVIEWS**

[Date]

Dear

This letter is to confirm our meeting on [Day, date] beginning at [Time] to be held in my office in the [School Name] School. The purpose of this meeting is to assist me in learning about the history of the District and in becoming better acquainted with the many people associated with the [District name] Schools. I am interested in your feelings about the District and what you believe to be priorities for the future. As a (an) (long time resident; experienced Board of Education member, administrator, teacher, member of the support staff, etc.), there are many areas where you can provide me with important information from your perspective which will assist me as the new Superintendent of Schools.

Sample questions which I will ask are enclosed and it is my hope that these questions will lead to productive discussion. Our meeting will be treated as confidential. Once all of my entry interviews are completed, it also is my intention to use the information I collect as a basis to begin to develop both long and short range goals for the District.

I look forward to meeting with you and getting to know you better. If there is any difficulty with the time and date of our meeting, please contact my secretary, [Secretary to the Superintendent name] to reschedule. Thank you in advance for your time assisting me in becoming more familiar with the District and helping me to plan for the years ahead.

Sincerely,

[Name – New Superintendent]

Attachment

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR STAFF DURING BUILDING VISITS

Sample Interview Questions for Selected Teaching and Support Staff

(To Be Used During Building Visits)

1. Please give me a brief autobiographical sketch, including previous positions you have held and some of your personal as well as professional goals.
2. What is the key issue this year for your own work and area of responsibility in your building? Why do you believe it to be so important?
3. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must address for the 2004-2005 school year? Can you rank these issues in priority order?
4. What do you believe to be the key issues the District must face over the next five years? Why is each so important?
5. What groups or networks of people either within the schools or the community try to influence school issues? Who are the key people within those groups or networks and how do they operate to influence either key groups within the District, the Superintendent or the Board of Education?
6. Describe for me your general feelings about the instructional program in your building. If you could change or meaningfully influence one of its components, which would it be and why?
7. What has been the nature of your contact with the Superintendent? What activities from the Superintendent's Office would you like to see continued and in what areas is there room for change and/or improvement?
8. What has administrative leadership provided to the District in the past? What would you like it to provide for the future?
9. Is there any other information you would like to share with me which you believe will be helpful to my learning more about the District and community and which will improve communications with employees and among all levels in both the school system and the community?

INDIVIDUALS TO BE SCHEDULED FOR STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Current and Former Board of Education Members

Central Office Administrative, Supervisory, and Selected Support Staff

Building Administrative Staff

Presidents of Employee Labor Organizations

Representatives of Secondary Student Organizations

Representatives of Certain Shared Decision-Making Teams

Recommended Key Communicators

SAMPLE INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DISTRICT
POSSIBLY TO BE SCHEDULED FOR INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS

District Architect
District Construction Management Firm
District Superintendent - B.O.C.E.S.
(former) Superintendent of Schools
School Attorney(s)
School Physician(s)
Owners and Editors of Local Newspaper(s)
NYSUT Field Representative
Chief of Police
DARE Officer(s)
Fire Department Chief
Administrators of Private Schools Located in the District
Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce
President, District PTA
N.Y.S. Senator and Assemblyman
County Legislator
Town Supervisors
Mayor
Leaders of Churches and Synagogues Located in the District