



Gateway Regional School District



Superintendent Entry Plan Findings Report

2021-2022



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Executive Summary

Gateway Regional School District is a community with many strengths. All stakeholders speak positively of the hardworking staff and the variety of programming offered to students, even with our small schools. There is a clear commitment to developing a positive experience for our students, and because we are a small rural community, staff need to wear multiple hats to deliver the variety of opportunities presented. Individualized support for students is delivered through a variety of personalized special education services, and the district is praised for its strong programming for students with disabilities. Similarly, English Learner (EL) programming is robust for a small incidents district.

The community has a solid relationship with the Gateway schools. The culture of pitching in and doing what you can to make a difference that exists within the schools also is a strong factor in our six towns. Many families grew up in the hilltowns and care about preserving the traditions that currently exist, but are also interested in developing new opportunities and connections. There is a vested interest in the state of our schools, as it is the single largest expenditure for all towns, so there is an acute awareness of how school spending affects the communities. With that being said, town officials and community members are supportive of the schools' development and encourage innovative thinking and problem solving to ensure students can succeed.

Within the past five years, Gateway has begun to shift its focus to the academic experience for students. Statewide test scores, audits, and accountability reports all point to this being a major priority for the district. In surveys for students who elect to go to other districts, the academic experience is cited as the main reasons why students opt to leave. The district needs to ensure that students are receiving a rigorous, engaging, and equitable learning experience at every grade level. This will require targeted and high-quality professional development for all staff, the selection and adoption of high quality instructional materials, intentional alignment of instructional practices, the creation of a safe learning environment for all students including those in marginalized groups, and data-driven decisions to ensure students are appropriately challenged at their grade level. This work will be challenging but will ensure that students have access to the post-secondary experiences they deserve and will be important to keeping students enrolled at Gateway Regional.

Introduction

The Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents' (MASS) New Superintendent Induction Program recommends that the new leaders conduct a formal process of gathering data and developing recommendations and themes for the district upon arrival. I created and presented my entry plan in late August and shared it with the Gateway community. The goals of this plan was to learn about the Gateway Regional School District and develop a deep understanding of the strengths and areas of improvement in order to create a comprehensive and transparent district strategy plan. I am pleased that the entry plan process provided a structure to gather data in a systematic manner in order to build my knowledge and appreciation for Gateway and clarify next steps for student achievement.

Review of the Process

Over the past seven months, I have engaged in a comprehensive review of the district that includes collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data. I looked for information related to the following themes:

1. District, school, and community culture and core values
2. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment of student learning, particularly rigorous and equitable grade-level experiences for all students including students with disabilities and students in identified subgroups
3. School leadership, governance, and management
4. Fiscal systems
5. Partnerships and collaboration with our six towns
6. Partnerships and collaboration with families
7. School operations and systems including transportation, technology, facilities, cafeteria, and human resources, and equitable practices and policies
8. School safety

Data was collected through meetings and conversations with stakeholders groups including administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, families, students, school committee members, selectboard members, police chiefs, boards of health, community members and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education staff members who work with the district.

In addition to these discussions, documents and reports reviewed include:

- District Strategic Plan and School Improvement Plans
- DESE School and District Report cards
- Discipline Data
- MCAS, AP, and SAT data
- Assessment data from schools
- Budget Documents for both the school and towns
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) Report from 2017
- The District Review Report from DESE's Office of District Reviews and Monitoring (ODRM) from 2020
- Literacy Audit for Gateway done by the Green River Literacy and Learning Center in 2018
- Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) Report from 2017
- Collective Bargaining Agreements and individual staff contracts
- Current regional agreement and notes regarding the process of updating this document
- IEP Referral data, special education IEP staff allocations, and Special Education Program Evaluations
- Coordinated Program Reviews

- School Safety Plans and Emergency Response Protocols
- Job descriptions and previous staff evaluations
- Documented curriculum taught in schools and Professional Development Plan
- All school handbooks

Finally, I observed classrooms, programs, and selectboard meetings in order to round out the information collected throughout the district.

Priority Recommendations

Based on the data collected, the priority recommendations are listed under each theme in bold.

The recommendations fall under several main themes. All of the themes connect to the larger area of concern regarding student enrollment across the district. Working on these priorities will ensure that we are addressing the areas that are identified as why families decide to leave Gateway Regional.

It is clear that the school community needs to anchor its work with a strong, solid, and unwavering purpose centered around teaching and learning. The district needs to engage in the process of defining or updating a mission statement, vision, and core values for how we should be operating. Decisions for program adoption and resource and time allocation needs to be tied to this purpose. Then a district strategy plan to make progress towards the purpose, grounded in core values, needs to be developed and implemented. Other initiatives that are not directly aligned to this purpose need to be reevaluated and tabled. Targeted professional development will be important to ensure that the administrators and staff have the skills to advance the district's mission.

The district has the advantage of being small, so students have the unique opportunity to have a personalized experience. Reviewing structures and systems to maximize this opportunity will ensure that there is a meaningful process for students to be connected to our community. One structure for consideration is the elementary leadership structure: one principal at each elementary school would provide a more personalized level of support for staff and families rather than a principal and assistant principal for both schools. At the secondary level, the constant change in scheduling does not allow staff and students to feel grounded in their routines and develop best practices. Staff and administration need to come together to determine how to best develop structures that are student-centered and deliver high-quality time on learning. With this in mind, the development of a safe and supportive learning environment needs to be prioritized. Systems, protocols and expectations need to be clear so all students and staff, including those from marginalized groups, feel safe at Gateway. This was another area of concern for families who left, and that sentiment was echoed by current students and staff.

Finally, the connection between the district and the community needs to be strengthened and prioritized. The school district should be the hub of community activities for towns at Gateway. All should feel welcome at Gateway, including students and families, but also community members who may not be connected to the school district. From a budgetary perspective, the school district needs to continue to engage with select boards and finance committees in a proactive manner to hear all perspectives and work together to ensure that the school can provide a high-quality education to students within the constraints of the towns' ability to finance this experience.

Current Conditions and Opportunities for Growth and Reflection by Theme

1. District, school, and community culture and core values

Current Conditions:

- Many staff, students, administrators, and families report feeling a sense of pride in the Gateway community.
 - Students are generally happy with their classroom experience and opportunities provided to them at Gateway. Specifically, students cite their great teachers for creating positive memories for them, even in the past few years of the pandemic.
 - 92.3% of staff strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree that Gateway is a great place to teach and learn.
 - Families cite mostly positive experiences with the district and also reference hard working staff.
 - A number of students and alumni took the opportunity of meeting with me to share personal stories about feeling marginalized, harassed, and discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, gender expression, and race or ethnicity. They cited not feeling safe at school due to their perception of the cultural expectation that reports are dismissed or underplayed. Specifically, students reported numerous microaggressions in the hallway and in classes, originated by their peers and further enforced because staff members are not equipped with how to respond. Staff have echoed this sentiment and reported a sense of helplessness at adjusting the culture without a clear vision and expectation for respect.
 - For example ELL teachers report that students' names are routinely mispronounced.
- 74.4% of faculty strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree that staff are treated and respected as educational professionals at Gateway Regional.
- 87.3% of faculty strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree that the school's culture is collaborative.
- The school community enjoys their school-wide celebrations and all are able to access and participate. Notably, the high school looks forward to student council-run Reindeer Games, the elementary schools have classroom celebrations throughout the year and the middle school enjoys Snowman Games.
- Schools have unique cultures with their own "personalities" that are largely built by the staff and student population.
- Atmosphere for student learning is mostly positive, as observed and reported in the literacy audit 2017-2018 and MARS Report of 2017.
- Teachers clearly drive the classroom experiences, and teachers care deeply about their students.
- Administrators note that the district is able to "put people first", particularly around taking care of one another and being so small. This sentiment is echoed in other family and staff conversations. The district's strategic plan notes putting the "whole child" at the center of their work.
 - Some staff cite a clear divide between how regular education and special education staff are treated by different administrators.
- Students, staff, and families struggle to identify or cannot identify the mission, core values, or vision of the district when asked.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- **A clear mission, vision, and core values need to be identified/updated for the district.**
- **All students and staff need to feel safe and supported, including individuals who are in minority groups. Systems, protocols, and staff and student engagement need to be prioritized for this environment to be created and maintained.**
- Families cite an opportunity for a stronger culture of collaboration between home and school with more frequent and relevant communication from the district, school, and classroom.
- Additional school-wide events that are inclusive of families would support a more collaborative culture such as accessible field trips for all, community events, an outdoor graduation for all to attend, access to athletic events, etc.
- In the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools (MARS) report from 2017, they recommended developing a formal process to conduct exit surveys to document and track trends as to why students were leaving, which is not currently in place.

2. Curriculum, instruction, and assessment of student learning, particularly rigorous and equitable grade-level experiences for all students including students with disabilities and students in identified subgroups

Current Conditions: Student learning, performance, and engagement

- Enrollment data for the district is declining for all schools in all grades, with a notable exodus between the 8th to 9th grade.
- MCAS scores for Gateway are a highly concerning data point that demonstrates students are not performing at grade level compared to their peers.
 - In 2021, the MCAS scores for Gateway Regional are consistently below the state average in every subject and in every grade 3-8 except for 5th grade science and 6th grade math even though Gateway students were in school in person a significant amount of time last year compared to many districts in Massachusetts.
 - 6% of Gateway's fourth graders earned a meeting or exceeding expectations in math compared to the state level of 33% of students meeting or exceeding expectations.
 - Third grade scores are lower than the state average in both ELA and Math. This means that our students are already behind their peers from other schools at the onset of their MCAS testing.
 - In 8th grade, 12% of students were meeting or exceeding expectations in math compared to 32% statewide.
 - In 2019, the MCAS scores look the same where every subject in every grade was below the state average except in 5th grade science and 7th grade ELA.
 - In 2018, the MCAS scores for Gateway students were below the state average in every subject at every grade level except for 4th grade English and 6th grade Math.
- Gateway students who take AP tests have a passing rate between 45-65%, which is lower than the national average.
- Students cite wanting more opportunities to be actively engaged in the classroom experience at the middle and high school where many lessons are teacher directed or lecture based.
- In the [District Review Report for Gateway](#) from DESE's Office of District Reviews and

Monitoring, it is stated that the level of student engagement and higher-order thinking varied across the district and were not consistently embedded in lessons (less than 50% of the 46 observed classrooms).

- The program of study offers unique electives such as woodshop and graphic arts and students may also elect to participate in Chapter 74 programs within their school day.
- The elementary school offers high-interest mini courses in addition to the wrap around program.
- The middle/high school offers high-interest electives for students in their after school program.

Current Conditions: Programming, Curriculum, and Assessments

- ODMR for Gateway from 2020 cited the following areas of challenge:
 - The lack of a coherent, comprehensive K-12 curriculum aligned to Massachusetts' DESE Curriculum Frameworks standards
 - The lack of professional supports for teachers to implement high quality curriculum
 - The district does not have a vision or process for professional learning
 - The lack of rigor and inconsistent instruction
 - Higher order thinking engagement was observed by reviewers in 36% of elementary classes, 33% of middle school classes, and 19% of high school classes
 - Students engaging in challenging tasks was observed by reviewers in 64% of elementary classes, 33% of middle school classes, and 19% of high school classes
 - Teachers using a variety of instructional strategies was observed by reviewers in 57% of elementary classes, 26% of middle school classes and 13% in high school classes
 - The lack of systematic data collection to inform instruction
 - The lack of using data to inform instruction
 - The lack of articulated best practices to share progress monitoring with families
 - The lack of a comprehensive system of support to address needs of all students
- Special education programming is meeting state expectations. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) report had no findings as a result of the district's Tiered Focus Monitoring process conducted in the fall of 2022.
 - Many students are supported within the district due to diverse programming to meet students needs. Students are entitled to be educated in the least restrictive environment with their neighborhood peers, and Gateway is committed to this model.
- The English Language Learning programming is meeting state expectations. The DESE report had only three findings as a result of the district's Tiered Focus Monitoring process conducted in the winter of 2022. Given that Gateway is a low incidence district, it is notable that we are meeting students' needs and supporting them appropriately.
- Students in grades K-8 are learning a new math curriculum with high quality instructional materials. Staff are committed to using this program with fidelity, and collaborate around its implementation.
- There is a clear and rigorous selection process to determine how to move forward with purchasing curriculum for the district.
- Teachers are cited as being hard-working and positive in entry interviews with the school committee, parents, and students.
- The district is currently using iReady as a diagnostic and benchmark assessment tool to collect data on student performance and growth.

- Students are offered a variety of electives including chorus, band, STEM, art, health, PE, and Spanish, which is impressive for a small district
- Staff at the elementary level, the Elementary Assistant Principal and the Director of Curriculum are engaging in AVMR (Add+Vantage Math Recovery) classroom and specialist level training to provide high quality interventions for students
- The Response to Intervention process is robust, streamlined, and used with fidelity in elementary schools.
- Teachers at the elementary level meet with the Principal to review data and make plans for student achievement on a regular basis.
- The newly formed intervention program at middle school level is producing results where students are making gains in their identified areas of need based on their iReady data from the beginning and midway point assessment scores.

Current Conditions: Professional Learning

- The professional development committee began meeting this year and contributed to the topics and focus of teacher and support staff training.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Statewide System of Support team helps the administrative team conduct leader and teacher learning walk-throughs to look for specific measures of student engagement and grade-based instruction at the secondary level. These walk throughs are met positively by staff and administration.
- Professional development for support staff may be disconnected from the instructional staff's focus, particularly because only one administrator, the Director of Curriculum, is primarily responsible for running professional development for the district.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection: Student learning, performance, and engagement

- Leadership should review the survey data as to why students and families cite their reason for leaving the district.
- A comprehensive program of study evaluation may determine that students are hoping for updated and relevant course opportunities like career preparation, personal finance, psychology, criminal justice, and CPR.
 - This study should include determining specific reasons why students leave the district for other educational programs and addressing those needs to the district's ability.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection: Programming, Curriculum, and Assessments

- **A clear vision for teaching and learning needs to be developed, communicated, and supported with stakeholder input. This vision should drive all aspects of the work in the district including the selection of initiatives, professional development and the educator evaluation process. Without this direction, staff, students, and administrators do not have a clear picture of how to improve outcomes for students.**
 - **The district needs to be committed to this vision in all actions and expenditures.**
 - **The Director of Curriculum should be a full year position to provide direction and support to building leaders for this important work.**
 - **There needs to be a process to evaluate current and future initiatives to determine if they align with the vision for the district.**
- The district needs to solidify a formal scope and sequence and unit plans at each grade level for vertical and horizontal alignment
- The district needs to prioritize rigorous, engaging, grade level instruction to support all learners.

- Use of iReady should be reviewed and assessed to determine if the tool is providing staff with useful information to adjust their practice. Particularly, students and staff cite concerns about the length of time required to complete the assessment with fidelity and the demeaning tone of the repetitive directions.
 - Students need to be engaged in their own results for increased engagement.
- Conversations about student data and growth are not present in a systematic way at the high school. There is not common time, training, expectations or facilitation for this to occur. Centering staff collaboration around data may yield exponential growth and also will support responding appropriately and systematically to intervention needs.
- Issues of equity and access are present in how the district provides access to curriculum and instruction. Notably:
 - Tracking in math in 8th grade becomes problematic for accessing classes later in students' high school career.
 - Access to classes because of scheduling constraints limits students to what they can take.
 - Secondary students cite wanting access to more AP courses. The district should consider developing clear guidelines and support for AP programming that includes test preparation outside of classroom time and ensuring access to AP courses with a reduced or eliminated fee structure to students.
 - Elementary students cite wanting more library programming.
 - Anecdotal evidence suggests students struggle to access more competitive post-secondary options due to the opportunities and limitations of their experience. This should be reviewed and the district's approach to post-secondary planning should be adjusted to ensure that students can access higher education opportunities that align with their goals, ability, and coursework.
 - Grading and assessment practices need to be reviewed and adjusted based on a model of student mastery and achievement rather than timely work completion.
 - A homework policy may be adopted to ensure consistency, define clear expectations for students working outside of the school day, and to improve clear communication of expectations with families.

Opportunities for Growth and Reflection: Professional Learning

- **In order for student achievement to be the focus of our work, the district needs to build the capacity of the administrative team through increased and targeted professional development. From there, all administrators should collaborate on developing and implementing systems to support staff.**
- Teachers require targeted feedback and coaching to improve their instruction. 23% of staff disagree with the statement that they get feedback to improve student learning.
- Based on the literacy audit from 2017-2018, teachers cite needing more professional development in instruction around centers, phonics, and programs used. There is inconsistency with knowledge and PD of literacy curriculum and instruction.
- All administrators should play a role in professional development for the staff.

3. School leadership and governance

Current Conditions:

- Administrators in the Gateway Regional school district have been in their positions for multiple years. The familiarity within and among the leadership team permits

individuals to work well together, capitalizing on strengths and supporting individual areas of growth.

- Because of this, leaders have an opportunity to form relationships with their students and staff based on past experiences.
- Each school leader brings a unique skillset to the table and contributes to the leadership teams' effectiveness.
- The size of the district allows for personal connections within the school community. The small size also requires members of the leadership team to take on multiple roles to benefit the district and have expertise in a number of areas to run a successful operation. Because of this, protocols exist but are not followed with fidelity and there are inconsistencies with implementation.
- There is a clear and undeniable commitment to positive student outcomes on the leadership team.
- The leadership team works collaboratively to make decisions for the district around staffing assignments, programming, and resource allocation within limitations provided.
- Leaders demonstrate respect to staff members and provide the autonomy needed for staff to do their jobs without micromanaging or overdirecting.
- With the central office being located on the main campus within the high school, there is an opportunity for consistent communication and collaboration on matters.
- New staff onboarding occurs through the Curriculum Director's Office.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- **Schedule and assignment changes due to our small size and contractual teacher preparatory obligations are not student-centered and likely contribute to the less than ideal student outcomes. The administration's professional responsibility includes creating and maintaining a master schedule that maximizes blocks of uninterrupted instructional time across all content areas and eliminates unnecessary interruptions to instruction and makes adjustments to the schedule based on student data to meet the needs of all students. This should be reviewed alongside the contractual obligations for teacher preparation.**
- **A district strategic plan will support the selection of a limited number of initiatives that are best suited to drive improvement, as students, staff and administration cite that there are too many initiatives and all cannot be done well**
- **Elementary families and staff, particularly in Chester, cite a desire for more consistency in building-based leadership. The district needs to consider changing the structure of the elementary leadership model to be more effective and sustainable.**
- Leadership roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined and assigned to ensure more effective and efficient operations and improve morale.
 - Specific roles and responsibilities that need to be clarified include the Director of Technology, the Evaluation Team Leader, the management of grants, and the staff evaluation process.
 - All job descriptions should be updated and aligned to the professional responsibilities of the positions
- District protocols should be also be clarified, especially around:
 - Hiring process
 - Contract negotiations
 - Termination process
 - Disciplinary/reporting process

- Building-based leadership responsibilities
- Families and staff cite a request for more consistent and transparent communication from district leadership
- Because of the multiple hats that administrators take on, the communications position at the central office would be better utilized as a program coordinator for the district. This position could manage communication for the district while also promoting and developing programs. This position would be more targeted at supporting families staying in our district and would help address the enrollment decline.
- The leadership team may consider setting up monthly meetings with staff representatives to hear concerns for increased collaboration.
- Students and staff cite seeking more visibility of administration across the board
 - Administrators and teacher leaders should consider shadowing a student for a day to get a new perspective for the school's operations, curriculum, and instruction.

4. Fiscal systems

Current Conditions:

- The fiscal systems for the district are up to date, in compliance with federal and state guidelines, and are fully implemented at Gateway Regional.
- Transparent communication is provided through Clear Gov, an online system that gives all community members access to information regarding the district's revenues and expenditures.
- Community engagement and understanding of the budget process is strong due to prior collaboration.
- The financial audit speaks to the effective practices in place throughout the district
- Accounting staff is diligent and thorough in paperwork for the district.
- The agreed upon alternative assessment provides communities with multiple options for funding the district's budget.
- The district's procurement of competitive grants is impressive and supports the district in many initiatives.
- Within the past few years, the presented budget has been supported by the towns, and the increased assessment level has been determined based on a collaborative process.
- The state's new Chapter 70 funding formula is determined based on a number of factors including enrollment and low income status of families in the district. The calculation is resulting in a \$30 per student increase or a .4% total increase to our state funding. Meanwhile, other schools are receiving a 10-40% increase in state funding.
 - Because of this, our current system of developing a budget will be challenging to sustain.
 - Rural school aid does help close the gap between our needs and revenues without assigning the costs to towns.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- **A high priority in this area is to continue to engage all six towns in the budget process, including an ongoing commitment to the new regional agreement and alternative assessment calculation conversation.**
- Historically at the request of the town officials, the district has worked backwards to present a budget where assessments increase no more than 2%. At times, this may result in an outcome where a total budget increase is low relative to the district's needs. This is

due in part to negligible increases in state and federal aid. This model is not sustainable with fixed costs and cost of living expenses increasing at a higher rate.

- The district should do a thorough review of programming, staffing, and expenditures to determine how to allocate resources in the most meaningful way possible.
- The newly formed capital plan for the district should be maintained and shared regularly with towns for transparency and planning purposes.
 - There may be opportunities with the towns for shared costs, which should be reviewed. For example, a wheelchair accessible vehicle shared between town COAs and the school district.

5. Partnerships and collaboration with our six towns

Current Conditions:

- Members of all towns' Select Boards have been open and welcoming. They have all expressed a desire to collaborate and have provided feedback to strengthen the relationship between the town and school district.
- The Huntington Police Chief and Chester/Blandford Police Chief have been particularly collaborative to support the communities and provide a wealth of knowledge about the local community. They both offer support and exhibit strong leadership in the community and within the schools.
- The Council on Aging in several communities have initiated conversations regarding a partnership with the school district. Many seek opportunities for students to engage with the older population and others would like to develop more systematic ways to work together.
- The Library Director from Blandford shared ideas to connect students to their town libraries and are offering specific student-based programming.
- Students in the summer program enjoyed time at a local campground, which is a strong partnership between the community and district.
- The six town regional agreement is progressing nicely with input from all stakeholders along the way.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- Continuing to build on all of the partnerships listed above will be vital to the success of the district.
 - The district should consider developing a more systematic way to engage students with the community and vice versa. Ideas could include offering a number of excused absences for community engagement, hosting community service days where entire classes, other community service opportunities, grade levels or schools give back or engage with the community in some capacity.
 - The district can also identify ways to encourage more volunteerism within the school from the community. Multiple school committee members and Select Board members pointed out that people would be happy to help if they were asked.
- The district can continue to share the good work being done within and around the school to support a growing positive image of Gateway Regional.
- **Gateway Regional should be the hub of the six towns where events, programs, and the entire community feels welcome.**
 - It is notable that one school committee member cited not being welcomed on the committee when he was elected a year ago. A process for the superintendent or a

district representative to reach out to engage with community members could help with increased interest in these positions.

6. Partnerships and collaboration with families

Current Conditions:

- Families are respectful of school systems and staff and report being mostly satisfied with what is offered by Gateway Regional.
- Families specifically cite the wrap around program as beneficial due to the flexibility offered to parents and guardians before and after school.
- Families share information with one another on a “Parents of Gateway” facebook page. A number of staff and students are also on the page and it allows for dialogue and reminders.
- Meetings of the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) occur with fidelity and provide families with resources and networking opportunities.
- The intake process for PreK, facilitated by the Director of Pupil Services is thorough and welcoming to new families in the district.
- Due to the small nature of the district, there are many positive opportunities for individualized experience between teachers and families.
- The Hilltown Community Health Center is a fantastic partnership to draw families into our schools and collaborate with them for health services.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- **Even though there are many opportunities for family engagement, there is no systematic approach to ensure that the staff initiates communication with families to have a positive interaction regarding their child’s development. A strong, systematic process for family outreach needs to be developed and implemented.**
- Additional opportunities for families to build relationships with a point person for their child is critical for development. At the elementary level, this can be the child’s classroom teacher or counselor and at the secondary level, this should be the child’s counselor or liaison. Families should know who they can reach out to at the school to ask for help and support without question.
- There are currently limited to no opportunities for students to lead a conversation with their families about their own learning. This is an opportunity for the district to explore in the future.
- Increasing opportunities for families to engage with their child’s education could include culture building activities as well, and should be encouraged. Hopefully this is likely to happen with COVID restrictions being lifted.
- The district should continue to explore the best way to communicate with families and share information about how to get involved regularly.

7. School operations and systems including transportation, technology, facilities, cafeteria, and human resources, and equitable practices and policies

Current Conditions:

- School operation management is shared between all administrators.
- Transportation routes and scheduling is done in the Central Office with a part time position.
- Technology is managed with three staff members assigned to all district operations. Prior to my arrival, the technology director was also the superintendent, and that position has been absorbed into the current three roles.
 - Given the increased technology use from COVID, the work has shifted and teacher and student readiness has also changed.
- Facilities are managed centrally by a facilities director supervised by the assistant superintendent.
 - Grounds and buildings are well maintained with dedicated staff and projects are completed quickly and efficiently.
- The cafeteria is managed by a longstanding cafeteria manager-operations run smoothly to serve all students lunch across the district. The cafeteria manager is knowledgeable on federal and state regulations for food services.
- Different members of Central Office and building based leaders pitch in to take a role in supporting the human resource aspect of the district.
- In a salary analysis of districts in western Massachusetts, Gateway has a lower starting and ending rate for teachers and paraprofessionals.
- The policy committee is currently in the process of reviewing each section of the policy handbook. The newly formed Equity Task Force plans to review policies for recommended adjustment to ensure equity.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- At times, it is unclear who is responsible for managing different aspects of school and district operations. Roles should be clarified to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. An example is the management of building based maintenance needs located in the high school. Additionally, roles in relation to human resources should also be clarified.
- The salaries for teachers and paraprofessionals should be reviewed for fair market rate to stay competitive in our community.
- Cafeteria-students, families, and school committee members cite wanting a longer lunch for students at the secondary level. Lunch is currently 23 minutes. There are also requests for more robust vegetarian options.

8. School safety

Current Conditions:

- Currently, the school adjustment counselor in Chester is the district's school safety facilitator. She is skilled at her work and has built a strong partnership with the state and local police. Gateway is known as a model district for school safety because of their collaboration.
- Safety protocols are in writing for administrators to utilize.
- Facilities are designed so the school secretary or security staff member has a line of vision for visitors to each school building. The security staff member located at the main complex is utilized well and heads off issues proactively.
- Multiple students cite bullying is not an issue in their focus groups, particularly some with disabilities that could potentially impair their ability to connect with peers.
- The main campus has a complex arrangement of surveillance cameras with tracking mechanisms for intruders.

- As stated under culture, some students and staff identify needing more support and a focus on a safe learning environment due to feeling marginalized, harassed, and discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, gender expression, and race or ethnicity.

Opportunities for Growth or Reflection:

- With the retirement of the district's safety coordinator, protocols should be reviewed and new assignments should be made to ensure a smooth transition for the district's emergency management plans.
- **The leadership team needs to determine how to ensure that all students and staff feel welcome at Gateway and create systems, policies, protocols, and provide professional development for all staff to focus on this priority.**

Next Steps and Conclusion

Throughout the spring and into the summer of 2022, the findings of this report will be used to develop a district strategy plan. The strategy plan will include up to five strategic priorities that will drive the schools' work for systematic improvement. Stakeholders from all groups will be consulted to develop this plan, and a comprehensive and thoughtful process of obtaining input will be conducted. When completed, the strategy plan will include our goals for systematic improvement and student achievement and detailed, logical steps to achieve those goals.

There is an emerging sense of urgency to ensure that the priority areas identified in this report will be addressed without delay. This work will occur as the district strategy plan is developed. The leadership team will partake in professional development and protocols that will ensure our current actions are aligned with the plan, and we will continuously reflect to adjust our practices to meet our goals.

