



Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools

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Mid-Year Report on the State of the HOH Public Schools

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INTRODUCTION

It is good to reflect on progress, especially in education. Reflection is best achieved relative to a hoped for direction, path, mile markers and an agreed destination. Reflection should consider the journey towards the destination – which may rightly take twists and turns, sudden detours followed by recoveries – not just the outcome.

This report is a mid-year reflection on the progress of the Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools during 2021-22. Written as an overview, the report uses the Leadership Team Goals 2021-22 as Hastings' approximate direction, path, mile markers and destination for this school year. I stress "approximate" in that the goals for this year were designed as a first step at establishing a direction and destination for the district this year. In this mid-year report, as will be true in the year-end report, the Leadership Team goals are a checkpoint, but not the sole structure, for reflecting on progress.

Let me also stress "written as an overview." The report takes what might be called a balcony-level review of the past several months. Drawing directly on school, department and district leaders, I share the headlines and summary points of reflections. Supporting details are provided, but for the sake of an "overview" the general statements stand for themselves. We provide a broad set of reflections, which can be addressed in more detail as necessary.

LEADERSHIP TEAM GOALS 2021-22

The Leadership Team¹ developed a set of goals for the year at its August 2021 Retreat. The goals address academics, social-emotional learning and operations. It was the first time in at least several years that the Leadership Team had established a coherent set of goals for the year. As such, the goals intentionally are preliminary, intended to be modified as necessary across this year. Indeed, since each goal speaks to a multi-year endeavor, it is essential that this year the goals are points of organization for considering long-term practice, even if they are not fully accomplished this school year.

The Leadership Team Goals were organized into a single document:

 10.8.21 Leadership Team Goals: Academic, SEL, Operational 2021-2022 . A Venn diagram is used at the outset to depict the essential crossover (coherence) of goals across schools, departments and the district as a whole. Following the Venn diagram are action steps with short descriptions.

The Leadership Team Goals were reviewed by the Board of Education on September 29, 2021 at its BOE Goals Workshop (September 29, 2021). In coming years, hopefully as soon as 2022-23, the goals of the Leadership Team will be tied to a BOE-established strategic plan, “North Star–What Education Should Be in Hastings.” The BOE will be launching an inclusive strategic planning process to set Hastings’ educational North Star.

MID-YEAR REFLECTIONS

Hillside Elementary School – Amy Cazes & Michael LaRocco

Social Emotional Learning –

Though COVID-19 has been of great concern to our faculty and staff, they have kept the spirit up for our children. Students enjoy being at school and it feels like business as usual in the day-to-day operations, with masks and distancing included.

Faculty and staff are supporting each other on a daily basis as they navigate the stresses of COVID-19 both professionally and personally. We have held faculty breakfasts, raffles, a kindness cart, a loudspeaker dance party, and various themed days. We have even added fun morning announcements on Fridays which everyone looks forward to.

¹ Leadership Team: Bill McKersie, Melissa Szymanski, Maureen Caraballo, Amy Cazes, Michael LaRocco, Jennifer Spirelli, Ken Cotrone, Lou Adipietro, Melissa Hardesty, Laura Sullivan, Tesfa Stewart, Jeanette Kocur, Drew Wendol and Joe Martorana.

Teachers continue to flex with both in-person and remote instruction, always focused on doing what is best for children. Teaching in both environments continues to be challenging for teachers who want to give their students the best educational opportunity.

Support staff are always willing to jump in to help and provide coverage where needed. Their positive attitude allows us to be creative in keeping all of our classrooms staffed. This, however, has resulted in greater inconsistency in classrooms.

Our secretaries have managed to support our staff and families through challenging times, often working extra hours to communicate COVID needs.

Our nurses have more than doubled their workload. In addition to caring for our children as they typically do, they have become our contact tracers, communicators, medical guides for families and staff, liaisons to medical directors and the WCDoh and Test-to-Stay administrators. They have literally worked around the clock, including nights and weekends. Their team attitude and commitment to our community is unmatched.

Our custodial team continues to do stellar work in routinely cleaning the high touch surfaces and responding to any building needs. They can always be counted on for help with a smile.

Our security staff has ensured that our building is safe and that our systems run smoothly. They have become valued members of our team.

Hillside families have been supportive and appreciative of the efforts that we have made to keep school open and engaging for students. Most of the phone calls that nurses, secretaries, and administrators have made for quarantining have been met with understanding and compassion.

ELA- Word and Language Study –

Grades 3 and 4 teachers are kicking off Word Study using the *Words Their Way* program. This launch comes after months of preparation through professional learning and classroom observations.

Grades K, 1 and 2 are immersed in the beginnings of language study with a lens on vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation. Through shared reading and shared writing, teachers are navigating a unit of study and incorporating these structures into their daily instruction.

Diversity –

Teachers are working in collaboration with Jenice Mateo-Toledo on revising units of study to be even more culturally responsive.

After administering a needs assessment to staff, we recognize that we have work to do in the area of enhancing our classrooms, hallways, and school with posters or pictures of individuals and cultures that present non-binary or non-traditional images of gender. This will become our focus in the coming months.

Our CARE committee continues work around identifying *Glow and Grow*s at Hillside in alignment with the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education Framework.

Our teachers continue to share strategies and tools to support diverse learners. Our annual Intervention Café was a wonderful opportunity for teachers to engage in professional conversations aimed to support our children.

MTSS –

We continue our work around interventions in the areas of reading, math, and social-emotional learning. The STAR screener has been a valuable tool to assist us in analyzing our student data.

Our MTSS team has helped us to support students across grades K-4:

MTSS Program	Total number of students in program	Tier 2	Tier 3	Percentage of HES Students
Reading	53	31	22	9.46%
Math	32	19	13	5.71%
SEL	102	95	7	18.21%

*Note: Percentages stand individually, as there may be a student(s) receiving Reading, Math, and SEL.

Our next step is to create a supplementary Hillside Learning Program to further support our students in need of “urgent intervention.” This program is possible due to the federal grant received to support student learning.

Farragut Middle School (FMS) – Jennifer Spirelli & Ken Cotrone

MTSS –

FMS improved protocols and procedures for Tier 1 interventions. We have implemented a clearer, more defined system, along with detailed procedures, for providing interventions to students that are struggling. Students are working through a system of support to demonstrate growth while teachers and counselors monitor their interventions.

School Culture –

FMS is working hard to improve its school culture by bringing back student school socials, unifying the school with student run morning announcements, and having our TV announcements show upcoming events, photos of students and staff, and messages of positivity. We are also resurrecting and starting new faculty traditions and encouraging opportunities for staff social functions.

Social Emotional –

Our school counselors are more available than they ever have been by pushing into more classes and supporting students with opportunities to build confidence, reflect, and advocate for themselves.

In addition, FMS is bringing families together for new learning opportunities through a Family University evening event where workshops and education around Drug Prevention, Self Confidences, and Neurodiversity. This is a new event for FMS that will occur in May.

PBIS –

We have launched a PBIS committee to re-introduce a framework for promoting positive behavior by offering incentives for good decision making. Further, the committee is working closely with grade level teams to identify targeted areas for behavioral improvements, both in and out of the classroom.

Big Ideas - Math Work –

Big Ideas, a priority for FMS this year, will be discussed from a district-wide vantage point later in this report.

Hastings High School – Lou Adipietro & Melissa Hardesty

General Ethos (Despite COVID-19) –

We have been able to keep schools open and teaching and learning is at the forefront. Students are happy to be in school. In spite of COVID, teachers and students are for the most part engaged. Overall, we would underscore the continued dedication and willingness of administration, staff and faculty to go the extra mile when necessary.

Academics –

A priority has been the ongoing work with the mathematics and science curriculum.

While January Regents exams have been cancelled, the high school will be sticking to our plan to offer limited midterms. Regents exams will be back and our students need to be exposed to similar exams in preparation.

We have been able to pivot easily and offer both remote and in-person learning. Faculty and staff have made excellent efforts to change co-curricular activities so students have these experiences regardless of COVID.

Social Emotional Learning –

A priority has been Challenge Success. The committee has been revived and is discussing the implementation of a High School Advisory program in the future. A similar priority has been “Freshman Seminar,” which the school counselors instituted to ease the grade 8-9 transition.

The High School is again planning for the Family University program for students and parents. The program has provided essential guidance and support regarding mental health, drugs and alcohol. The program is scheduled for the evening of March 2, 2022.

At the High School, the counselors have increased their attention to individual needs due to the impact of COVID-19. They continue to support students individually with managing emotions, coping with feelings, and setting goals academically and emotionally.

Administration & Leadership –

The administration team is working well together and are communicating effectively as a team. Communication with the community has been a priority and is going well. This has been bolstered by streamlined and timely communications from the Central Office.

Decision making has been collaborative within the high school, across the three schools, and with the Central Office. Teachers are appreciative of the apparent collaborative approach and the leadership's willingness to make decisions and articulate thought processes.

We must highlight the Nurses and health office as the year's shining stars – their dedication is incredible, literally 24/7.

Areas of Concern –

All units are feeling the stresses of COVID. There is a general feeling of anxiety and nervousness among administration, staff and faculty with continued COVID concerns/pressures/safety issues/ever-changing procedures and protocols.

The administration is feeling overwhelmed due to the job now being seven days a week. Similarly, nurses and clerical, while rock stars, are overworked and stressed. We are hopeful that contact tracing will cease.

Community and parent pressure is understandable, yet at times beyond what is reasonable. We have good partners with PTSA and SEPTA leaders, and other parent groups, yet managing the demands of the community and parents is increasing.

Special Education – Laura Sullivan & Tesfa Stewart

Administration & Staff Coordination –

Internal committees (K-12) are underway in special education. The first meeting was held on January 12 and focused on unpacking the district's *Glows and Grows*. We want to take a deep dive into areas where we are performing well and explore those variables needing improvement. Moving forward, the committee is looking to review our continuum of services and communication.

Administration & Staff Capacity Building –

Successful CPI Training continues district-wide for all applicable staff. The feedback to date has been extremely positive. Laura Sullivan and Tesfa Stewart are both Certified

Crisis Prevention Intervention Instructors/Associates through Nonviolent Crisis Intervention®.

“CPI training equips you with skills, confidence, and an effective framework to safely manage & prevent difficult behavior. From children to teens to adults, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention® training helps de-escalate tense situations with people of all ages.”

In December, we successfully trained 36 staff members to be fully trained in verbal, non-verbal, and physical de-escalation strategies. Moving forward, we will be working with each building to design crisis teams to help support students and staff who require these techniques and interventions.

Professional learning has been underway K-12 to increase capacities with Wilson Reading. Across three buildings, four special education teachers – Emily Isidori, Donna Gamble, Britney Skultety, and Erin Dolan – are going through the practicum to become certified Wilson Trainers. Teachers were able to go to a three-day training during the summer in order to prepare for this practicum. Teachers are working one-on-one with students before or after school for this certification. In addition, there are 95 hours of coursework to support teachers in learning new strategies to support all learners. Teachers have reported that they are excited for this opportunity to continue to grow so that all students can continue to be successful in our buildings.

The Leadership Team has been participating in seminars at least once per month led by Laura and Tesfa on a range of topics essential to improving our collective leadership and management of special education. These have been a part of the Leadership Team’s twice-monthly coordination meetings. It was agreed during the August 2021 Retreat that capacity building in special education should be a priority this school year. Topics include:

- Data Review
- Staffing Information
- Committee on Special Education (CSE) Process
- Roles and Responsibilities of CSE Members
- 504 vs IEP
- 13 Classifications
- IEP Review/Break Down of Sections

Communications & Outreach –

The first Special Education Newsletter in recent years has been developed and issued. The first edition was sent out to families and staff on December 21, 2021.

Planning is underway for the second year of *Walk in my Shoes for FMS*. Aiming to build on the success of last year, the first planning meeting was being held on January 20, 2022. For reference, copies of last year's materials can be reviewed [HERE](#).

Areas of Concern –

There has been an increase in parent and staff anxiety and a growing range of needs, much of it tied to the impact of COVID-19 the past two years. There has been a significant increase in parental requests for referrals and program reviews to the CSE centered on student needs academically, behaviorally and emotionally. We have also received numerous parent referrals not based on the need for special education services, but tied to concerns about learning loss as a result of COVID-19.

Availability and flexibility of staffing due to Covid absences has been a concern. Parents have raised concerns about students being supported by substitute teachers due to COVID-19 absences.

District-wide – Curriculum & Instruction – Melissa Szymanski

Academic Screener: STAR Renaissance –

This year we have been using a new resource, STAR Renaissance, as a diagnostic screener in grades K-8 to support our understanding of students' strengths and areas for growth in reading and mathematics. This screener will be administered three times this year to students in grades K-8: once in the fall, once in the winter, and once in the spring. Our first two screening windows will be complete as of January 21. We are delighted to have identified a software solution to make parent reports available through the eSchool data portal starting February 4.

SEL Screener: Panorama –

Melissa Szymanski, Jeanette Kocur and members of the faculty selected and implemented the Panorama SEL screener to ensure the monitoring and support of the social and emotional well-being of students grades K-12. In grades K-2, areas of focus are *emotion regulation, social awareness, social perspective-taking, and self-efficacy*.

In grades 3-12, multiple measures related to *student competency and well-being* and *student supports and environment* are investigated . Results were shared at the December 6, 2021 Board of Education meeting, which included a [formal presentation](#) and a [detailed appendix](#) containing disaggregated data for demographic subgroups of students. The next screening window will take place in February.

Curriculum Review Cycle –

The Professional Learning Committee is creating a Curriculum Review Cycle, as reported on at the January 10, 2022 Board of Education meeting. The Committee has been exploring the purpose of a Curriculum Review Cycle and investigating examples of cycles that exist in other districts. Having this cycle will support our ability to prioritize our curriculum efforts over multiple years, strengthen our annual Professional Development Plan, and enhance opportunities for learning during Superintendent Conference Days.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogies –

In her full time role as the district Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator, Dr. Jenice Mateo-Toledo has been hard at work bringing to life the Year One goals established with administrators and teachers. These goals take into account the State guidance and the voices of Hastings educators. Some examples of the goals she has been actively working on are: (a) unpacking the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education Framework and analyzing practices and opportunities within the curriculum with grade level teams; (b) providing direct support to new educators around culturally responsive pedagogies; (c) strengthening understanding of strategies for addressing issues with students; and (d) spearheading Racial Equity Days and beautification efforts.

K-12 Mathematics Committee –

The K-12 Mathematics Committee reconvened for the 2021-22 school year. Participants' early work has included setting priorities for the current school year and continuing with the rubric development that began during the spring of 2021. Intended to foster a growth mindset among teachers, the rubric identifies the essential stages of teaching and learning practices in mathematics. Nearly final, the rubric now is accompanied by shared definitions for potentially ambiguous terminology. Lesson study will be the next step of the group, which will involve teachers designing, analyzing, and refining lessons together.

Middle School Mathematics –

Our middle school mathematics team has been implementing *Big Ideas*, a new curricular resource for Grades 6-8. Melissa Szymanski has been working with the Math Department to understand their learning needs related to the new instructional resources. Professional learning has been ongoing in partnership with a consultant from *Big Ideas*. Key areas of focus have included the development of shared implementation agreements, enhancing familiarity with teacher and student resources, working with the Dynamic Classroom digital platform, and developing an understanding of resources for student performance analysis.

March Tri-State Visit –

Hastings is a member of the Tri-State Consortium, an alliance of public schools working together as critical friends and partners. One of the benefits of being a member district is the opportunity to periodically enlist the fresh eyes and input of colleagues from throughout the region to support our continuous improvement efforts in service to students. Hastings is fortunate to have an upcoming visit from Tri-State colleagues from March 9-11. Our Chair Council identified collaboration as the focus of inquiry for the Tri-State visit. Strong, collaborative efforts are critical to foster a professional community that promotes student success and well-being. Through document reviews and interviews with stakeholders, the visiting team will examine essential questions designed by Hastings faculty. Special thanks to the Tri-State Steering Committee for planning this visit.

Technology Plan Development –

Development of the Technology Plan is underway. A Technology Plan Committee, including administrators and staff, has been providing input on drafting the plan. Beyond Committee contributions, the plan is being informed by parent and student focus groups and a faculty survey. The Technology Plan should be completed by [February 28th](#), with a presentation to the Board of Education to follow.

District-Wide – Business & Operations – Maureen Caraballo

Solar Contract –

The district has contracted with G & S Solar on a solar project. The district was made aware of a program through Sustainable Westchester to partner with G & S Solar to rent roof space to install solar panels. The energy produced from these panels would return to the grid and be available for Hastings residents to opt into using. This is a win-win for Hastings as it provides new revenue to the school district while also providing solar energy to its residents.

Capital Bond Work –

It has been an exciting year with many of the long-awaited capital projects either completed or are close to completion. Highlights include:

- The infrastructure improvements for Hillside and the Farragut Complex have been completed. This includes new roofing, repointing of different parts of the Farragut Complex, a newly restored cornice, new flooring at Hillside as well as new windows in certain sections of Hillside.
- The Hillside Addition is 80% complete and we anticipate substantial completion by the second week in March.
- The Music Suite construction renovation at the Farragut Complex is complete, including the final cabinet installation. The space has been completely redesigned and some of the improvements include a soundproof acoustical ceiling and lighting.
- The MS Auditorium project is in full swing and we anticipate the completion of this space by the end of March. The room has been completely gutted and updated to provide a fun, inviting space for our students.

CONCLUSION

Student growth – intellectual, creative, social, emotional, and physical – must be the destination for the educational journey in Hastings. The journey towards that destination is the focus of this Mid-Year Report, highlighting the priority initiatives underway in each school and across three district-wide divisions. From this reflective narrative, a series of themes emerge, many of them grounded in the Leadership Team Goals established at the start of the school year.

1. Intellectual and Academic Focus – A new effort to establish a guiding Curriculum Review Cycle, joining with ongoing curriculum initiatives in several disciplines, indicate a sustained focus on intellectual and academic progress.
2. Social-Emotional Learning – Concerted efforts are being made to attend to and address student wellness across the buildings.
3. Culture – Building leaders are paying careful attention to the climate of their schools and taking varied approaches to keep things positive.

4. Diversity – Running throughout our work is a fundamental commitment to a shared standard: **To embrace the full diversity of who we are as an educational community, and to do so in a fashion that is thoughtful, inclusive and a path to dignity and respect.** I have been impressed by the rigorous and relevant care brought by administrators, faculty and staff to the development and implementation of curriculum, courses, programs, and special initiatives intended to move us closer to meeting this standard. The Board of Education has been a notable force in the process, revising the Code of Conduct to be stronger on diversity, and now moving with good deliberation to adopt a new policy on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, shaped in collaboration with administrators and teachers.
5. Gauging Progress – The STAR Screener has helped guide attention to academic performance, bolstering the information administrators and teachers have to refine teaching and support for students. MTSS has been boosted by the new analytical capacity. Similarly, the Panorama Screener has provided insights on SEL and culture, helping administrators, counselors, specialists and teachers attend to pressing needs. The subsequent administrations of the two screeners ensure we will draw on multiple points of evidence across the school year.
6. Professional Learning and Capacity Building – We are committed as professionals to “raising our game” whenever possible. We have sought this first half year to increase our capacities as teachers, specialists and administrators in various disciplines and special education.
7. Communications – Apparent in each school and district-wide is the priority to improve the efficacy of communications. Internally, we have sought to provide regular, timely, clear guidance and updates on situations, pending decisions and ultimately actions. We have sought to have administrators and staff hear first, so they are able to support students and families. Externally, we have aimed for similar consistency and clarity in communications. Central to our actions this first half year were surveys of staff and families, which underscored the efforts underway to improve the district’s website, consider how to streamline email and other electronic notices, and develop the “*Whom to Contact?*” framework. In a coordinated effort, the Superintendent’s Friday Letters and Assistant Superintendent’s monthly Curriculum & Instruction Highlights have drawn regularly on the “Tall Seven,” which were shared at the start of the year as guiding principles for at least 2021–22.
8. Collaboration – We have sought to foster effective collaboration among staff, administrators and families. Collaboration ideally fosters commitment to our

shared goal of student growth. More effective communication is part of the effort, but our systems and processes for jointly considering and addressing challenges as administrators and faculty must be responsive, reflective and productive. The upcoming Tri-State visit will help us understand where we must improve to ensure that collaboration is producing commitment.

9. Quality Educational Facilities and Settings – We have marshalled the capital resources of the district and Village to make significant progress this half-year towards completion of building additions and renovations that will substantially advance educational opportunities and programming for many years. Each project is an investment in the existing infrastructure so that it can meet the evolving educational and developmental needs of Hastings students.
10. COVID-19 – The ebb and flow of the pandemic continues to be a stressor, creating new and additional work, as well as anxieties for families and members of the faculty. To ease stress and anxiety, and to maximize health and safety, we worked with the public health and medical frameworks of the state and county, consulted closely with area superintendents and our Medical Directors, revised (and kept revising) procedures, developed focused manuals and regular updates (which we sent out regularly, often a couple of times per week), and we kept reminding students, families and staff of the basic steps to keep **Us** healthy and in school. As a result, we overcame the myriad of COVID challenges since September to provide quality in-person schooling for all students, with a continued focus on intellectual growth and social-emotional well-being.

While we are confident that our energies are focused on areas of promising leverage for student growth, this Mid-Year Report does not attempt to draw causal or correlational connections of impact. Future analysis will have to test our belief that these initiatives are having a positive effect. We are committed to understanding the efficacy of our work on student progress and well-being. We also want to understand the impact of initiatives and programs on faculty and administrators.

We will present an *End-of-Year State of the District Report* in June 2022. At that point, we will bring to the fore the multiple measures of progress and growth that have been gathered this school year. It will include results from the full set of administrations of the STAR and Panorama Screeners, evidence of performance on various assessments (Regents, SAT, PSAT), and other valid qualitative indicators of student growth – intellectually and academically, creatively, socially, emotionally, and physically. To ensure a comprehensive view of Hastings as an educational community, we also will share insights on the impact of initiatives and programs on faculty and administrator capacity, commitment and well-being.