



SUPERINTENDENT'S ENTRY PLAN

Summative Analysis and 2024-25 Key Priorities Report

MARY ELIZABETH DAVIS, SUPERINTENDENT



Cherokee County
School District

May 16, 2024

PLAN OBJECTIVES

Discovering, Experiencing, and Valuing the Cherokee County Community:

My entry plan was designed as an intentional period of study to learn from CCSD employees and the entire Cherokee County community. While the initial timeline was 100 days, I determined that, in order to align with our 2024-25 School Year/FY25 Budget, a summative report and immediate priorities were needed by the May 16, 2024 School Board meeting. This report's publication does not mean an end to listening and learning from our community ... as that critically important work will continue throughout my service to CCSD.

FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS

1

GOVERNANCE

2

STUDENT LEARNING
& ACHIEVEMENT

3

SCHOOL & DISTRICT
CAPACITY

4

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL
ENGAGEMENT

KEY QUESTIONS

1. What are your beliefs, expectations, and aspirations for education in Cherokee County?
2. What are you most proud of and where could we improve?
3. How would you measure growth and success in Cherokee County schools?

ACTIVITIES OVERVIEW: *By the Numbers*

A group of three women in professional attire are standing and talking in a school setting.

25

Teacher Group Meetings

A woman is interacting with a group of students around a table filled with snacks and water bottles.

7

Student Group Meetings

A woman is talking to a student who is sitting at a desk.

110+

Classroom Visits

A woman is sitting at a table with a student, looking at a book.

55

School Visits

A woman is talking to a group of students in a hallway.

3,077

Survey Responses

A woman is talking to a group of men in a meeting room.

74

School and District Leader Meetings

A group of people are working together at a table with various materials.

14

Community Meetings/
Events Attended

A woman is talking to a man in a meeting room.

4,500

Meeting Feedback Comments

A woman is smiling and talking to a group of people at a table.

26

Parent and Partner Meetings

2,000+

Stakeholders Met

ENTRY PHASE ANALYSIS

Dear Cherokee County Community,

After just a few short weeks, I have grown to appreciate the incredible professionalism of school leaders, teachers, and support staff across the Cherokee County School District. I have seen a depth of expert skill and breadth of personal effort that is unparalleled in public education today. Coupled with the extraordinary team of professionals at every level, students in CCSD are impressive. I have met so many young people who remind me of why we can have so much confidence in our future as a community, a state, and a nation. I have also interacted with so many families who are proud of their child's school and see evidence of a quality education, positive relationships, and opportunities to be involved. This tradition of excellence is nestled in a beautiful community that champions public education and is eager to see sustained success for generations to come.



Woven through the fabric of this excellent school district, I also discovered insights and perspectives that pave the path for us to get even better. There is a pervasive readiness from classroom to classroom, school to school, and throughout every corner of the county that CCSD be the highest performing district in the state of Georgia where students thrive, families are connected, and the community remains confident and proud.

The following Entry Phase Analysis includes a Summary of Observations derived from listening through small group meetings with 600 employees, 70 students, 300 family and community members, and additionally supported through more than 3,000 responses from listening surveys. The Summary of Observations is then fol-

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lowing by Key Priorities that are designed to build on the tradition of excellence for which the Cherokee County School District is widely known; and they are directly drawn from the insights and perspectives most widely shared by teachers, leaders, staff, students, families, and community members.

These priorities will drive our work as an organization over the next 18 months to two years. Progress will be regularly reported through School Board meetings, and success delivering on these priorities will pave the way to the future development of a long-range strategic plan.

On a personal note, I want to thank the thousands of people who so generously shared their thoughts and ideas with me. I have tucked every nugget, every recommendation, and every wondering inside my head with a commitment to remember your story and draw from it as we build our future together. I have treasured this season of Listening to Understand, Leaning in to Remember, and Learning in order to Lead and I commit to continue building on the culture of seeking insights and perspectives that inform the future of the Cherokee County School District.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Davis

SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

The 100-Day Entry Plan was an organized set of activities built around four critical buckets that set the framework for how I thought about the information I gathered as a newcomer to the Cherokee County community. The four buckets included: **(1) Governance** – A high-performing school district starts with a high-performing School Board, and high-performing School Boards are clear about their governance framework and how it drives the quality of education in every classroom in every corner of the community; **(2) Teaching, Learning, & Student Achievement** – The core business of CCSD. I sought to understand if teachers are clear about what they are to teach and to determine whether they have the toolkit of resources necessary to bring the standards to life in quality instruction and if students and families have what they need for students to learn; **(3) School & District Capacity** – If the core business is teaching, learning, and achievement, I aimed to understand if all other organizational systems function in a way that amplifies the effectiveness of the school leader and the classroom teacher; and **(4) Internal & External Engagement** – Do employees experience their perspective incorporated into the work of the organization and do students and families feel the same? And do employees, students, families, and the greater community feel informed about the work and direction of the organization?

What follows is a summary of my observations for each of the four critical buckets that framed my entry activities.



SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

GOVERNANCE

Known for its long-standing exemplary status and 2021 honor as the State's Governance Team of the Year, the Board of Education is comprised of seven devoted school board members who care deeply about the success of schools, the achievement of students, the satisfaction of employees, and the confidence of families and the community. Currently, the Governance team honors the role for Boards of Education as defined in O.C.G.A. 20-2-61; which states . . .



The fundamental role of a local board of education shall be to establish policy for the local school system with the focus on student achievement. The fundamental role of a local school superintendent shall be to implement the policy established by the local board . . .

Local board of education members should work together with the entire local board of education and shall not have authority as independent elected officials but shall only be authorized to take official action as members of the board as a whole.

The key to this legislatively designed role is that, unlike any other elected body, school boards are elected as individuals but are required by Code to function as a unit. In order to accomplish that, the current structures for the CCSD Governance Team are steeped in traditions that stem from comprehensive CCSD policies that have historically served the organization well. Throughout this Entry Phase, I have concluded that there is a desire among the serving school board members to evolve our traditions and elevate the governance by strengthening consistent processes for information exchange, expanding the transparency of district progress through board meetings, balancing the time studying and discussing the core business of teaching, learning, and student achievement, and defining our CCSD Governance Framework.

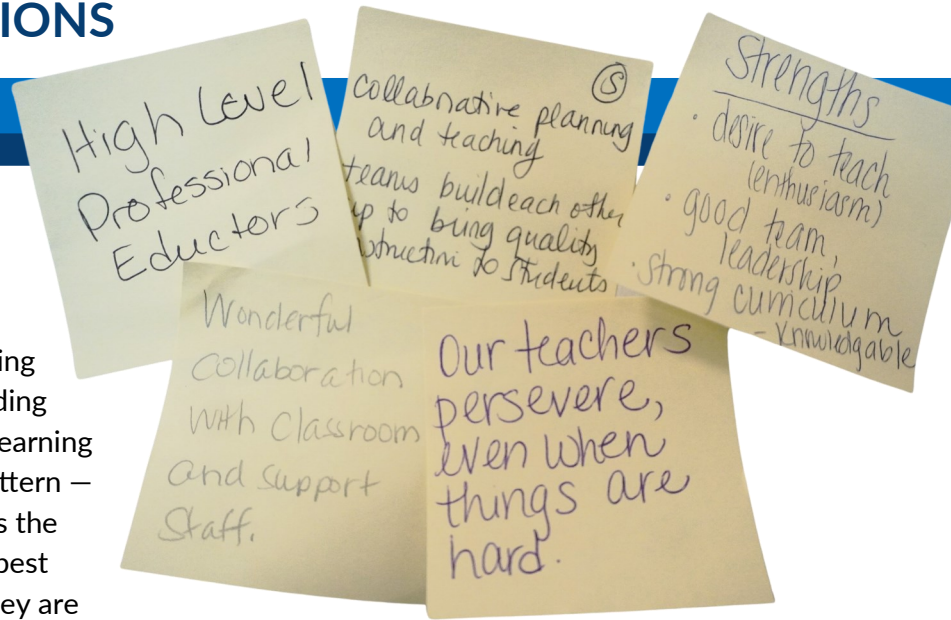


SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

TEACHING, LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

Every single outlet that was constructed during this 100-Day Entry Plan aimed at understanding our status of our core business of teaching, learning and achievement revealed a commanding pattern – the most prominent strength in this district is the quality of teachers. Students described the best part of their education as, “my teachers – they are really strong in their content area but really, really care about me.” I heard this sentiment time and time again. This combination of impressive professional skill coupled with a culture of commitment to students has been inspiring. I personally witnessed this rare combination as I made my way from classroom to classroom and from school to school across the county. I always wanted to stay longer, experience the rest of the lesson, and learn more. I also learned from teachers how much they value their colleagues and the professionalism of the work they do in CCSD. There is evidence of camaraderie and an investment in building up the profession and positioning students to achieve.

While this strength became apparent, I also detected a craving for a narrower focus defining what matters most and a re-calibration of the autonomy between the classroom teacher, the school, and the district. Over the course of the activities associated with this 100-day plan, I heard a wide range of instructional initiatives, conflicting directives, and fragmented resources. Broadly speaking, there is compelling evidence that CCSD will benefit from defining its Aligned System of Teaching & Learning – clarifying the standards that teachers teach and the pace at which they are taught across the district, defining the tightly aligned instructional resources available in the teacher’s toolbox (and in the student’s toolbox), and narrowing the tools we use to confirm that students are indeed learning at the level of the standards. Teachers can then rely on their professional insights, skills, and colleagues to develop the methods to teach the standards, and teachers can determine the most appropriate ways to bring the standards to life in their classroom.



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SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

TEACHING, LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT (cont'd)

The 2024-25 school year instructional focus:

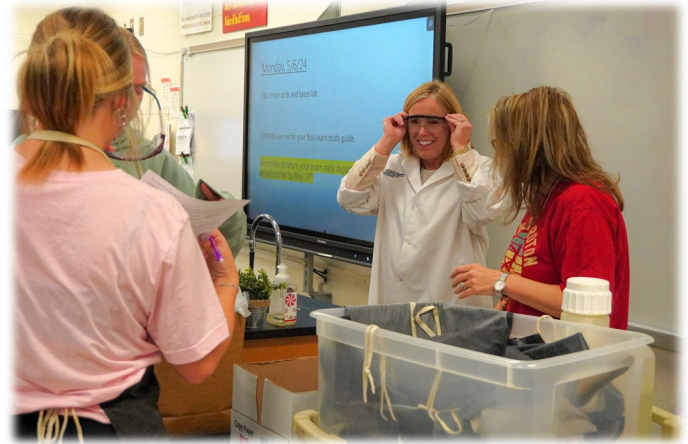
- Teaching standards at the rigor-level of the standard.
- Planning for the use of a variety of engaging activities that lead to mastery of the standard and the use of effective instructional strategies (focus on reading and annotating text and quality student work with feedback).
- Monitoring that students are learning the standards.

The 2024-25 school year instructional focus will crystallize the current instructional framework:

- **Design**
 - ◊ Unpack Standards
 - ◊ Plan lessons using a variety of classroom activities
 - ◊ Incorporate effective instructional strategies
 - 1) Students reading and annotating text
 - 2) Quality student work and feedback
- **Instruct**
 - ◊ Opening
 - ◊ Work Session (small group, students working, differentiation)
 - ◊ Closing
- **Assess**
 - ◊ Student Work
 - ◊ Progress Monitoring
- **Reflect**
 - ◊ Identify and plan re-teaching needed
 - ◊ Identify and plan further small groups or extended learning needed

Teacher teams, Instructional Lead Strategists, and school leadership teams will focus on the following:

- What evidence do we have that this lesson/activity has led to mastery of the standard (at the rigor level of the standard); what do we need to adjust?
- How much of the instructional time is the student doing the thinking and the work compared to how much time the teacher is modeling the thinking and



the work? Are we releasing academic ownership to students and fostering quality student work?

There is also an underlying theme that emerged that focuses on elevating each student's capacity to reach his or her own academic potential and develop a healthy sense of academic ownership. This will require our Board of Education to consider our policies as a district around grade reporting, promotion, retention, late assignments, and make-up work.

Families repeatedly report that they chose Cherokee to raise their family because of the quality of the schools. In order to honor the expectation of the families relying on our teachers, our leaders and our education, we will need to elevate the excellence to the next level across the organization. This includes evaluating the distractions that have entered the learning environment and achieving consistency across schools in personal device management and appropriate attire. In preparation for the 2024-25 school year, we will define the role "bring your own learning device" (cell phones and digital devices) play in classroom instruction and student learning and illuminate best practices exemplified by schools for appropriate attire, including aligning the expectations to various career and post-secondary environments.

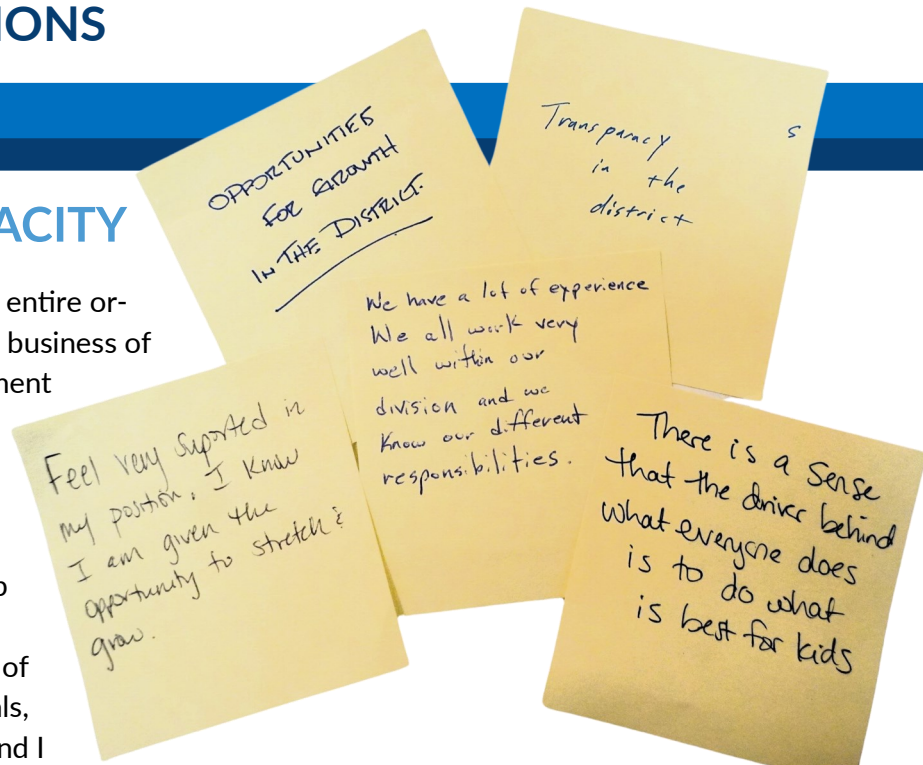
SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

SCHOOL & DISTRICT CAPACITY

The opportunity to assess the capacity of the entire organization is linked to the belief that the core business of the district is teaching, learning, and achievement which happens in the classroom. As a result, my assessment of the district's capacity is aimed at discerning how aligned the resources, initiatives, efforts, and direction is from the board room to the district leadership throughout each school and classroom in the organization. I was able to meet with groups of school leaders, groups of support professionals, and each of the division's leadership teams, and I was once again astounded by the caliber of professionals in leadership and support roles across the organization. I believe that right here in CCSD, the most talented, skilled, and educated individuals are serving in roles designed to support the teaching, learning, and achievement that happens in the classroom.

While I experienced the awe of talent in each professional role, I also learned that there is an opportunity to elevate our organizational clarity, alignment, coordination, and support. Well-intended efforts functioning in isolation (or in silos) is dampening the overall impact that district systems can have on the core business of teaching, learning, and achievement. As a result, this coming year we have the opportunity to align the organization's professional staff and elevate the coordination and collaboration among the leadership of each division. A strong, high-functioning district team is essential to mitigating the breadth of responsibility that falls on schools. By introducing an updated and better aligned organizational chart, coordination and synchronization expectations among district professionals, and planning out workflow in advance, we can aim to improve the communication to schools, the systems that are predictable and reliable for schools, and, in turn, amplify the effectiveness of the classroom and the school.

Aligning the organization also requires the identification of clear goals and monitoring systems to achieve those goals. With the development of an accountability department and developing the role of the principal and area supervisor, we can grow our muscle around achievement and adjusting when we do not meet our goals.



SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

This season of saturating myself with the insights and perspectives of our professionals, our students, and our families has been so encouraging. It is clear that there is pride in every corner of our community and there is confidence in the information that flows through our district channels. CCSD does a spectacular job celebrating students and staff and engaging widely across the community to keep the quality of education front and center. There are positive relationships with all the six cities and the county officials and senior staff and evidence of coordination across the county for services that focus on students and families together. There is also collectively a huge heart that is on display from the business and civic community to partner with schools and provide for the needs of teachers and students.

As I sought to better understand how we can continue to get better as a district, I see tremendous value in building a strong culture of listening and then incorporating what we learn from staff, students, and families into our improvement efforts. It also appears as though the communication that families receive about their child's learning progress can be evaluated and improved. Teachers also expressed a desire for more time to communicate with families individually while families desire more avenues to get to meet teachers and school staff.



As we head into this next school year, this can be a platform for further discussion as we seek the most effective tools for communication and create new traditions that support relationships with families and school personnel.



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SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

CLOSING

This brief summary of observations serves as only the beginning of how we seek to understand the recommendations and the suggestions of our community. As your Superintendent, I am invested in the continued practice of listening and learning to inform a culture of continuous improvement across the Cherokee County School District. As we close this successful 2023-24 school year, celebrate this accomplished Class of 2024, and set our eyes on the school year ahead, we will be guided by the following key priorities that emerged from the insights and perspectives most commonly generated through these first 100 days.



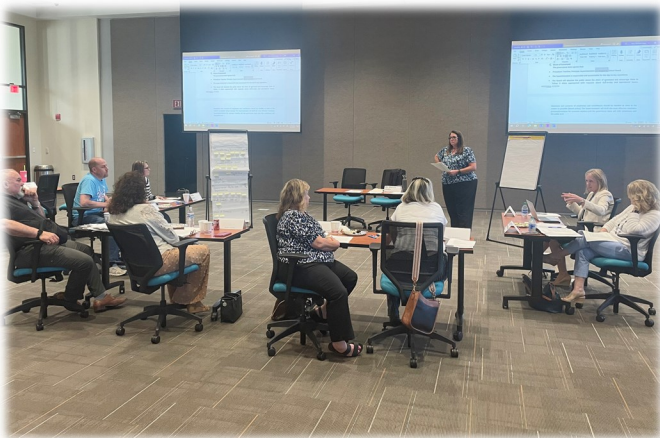
2024-26 KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTION STEPS

ELEVATE THE EXCELLENCE

From classroom to classroom, school to school, and throughout every corner of the county, there is a pervasive eagerness for CCSD to be the highest-performing district in the state of Georgia where students thrive, families are connected, and the community remains proud.

The following priorities are designed to build on the tradition of excellence for which the Cherokee County School District is widely known; and they are grounded in the insights and perspectives most commonly shared by teachers, leaders, staff, students, families, and community members.

These priorities will drive our work as an organization over the next 18 months to two years. Progress will be regularly reported for our community through the School Board meetings, and success delivering on these priorities will pave the way to the future development of a long-range strategic plan.



1

Elevate the Excellence in academics and achievement for all students.

- a. Clarify an aligned academic focus grounded in standards, tightly aligned resources, monitoring/assessing student learning, and targeted intervention.
- b. Unify the current literacy investments into a cohesive K-12 CCSD Literacy Model.
- c. Clarify the cohesive literacy model with a focus on highly effective practices for students with disabilities.
- d. Clarify the cohesive literacy model with a focus on highly effective practices for students with a home language other than English.
- e. Audit all current teacher resources to determine most effective investments, gaps in investments, and develop a resource management, replacement, and growth plan. (Audit, Assess, Abandon, then Acquire)
- f. Establish shared student achievement goals that narrow our focus and unify our organization's efforts/resources and grant schools the resources and balanced autonomy to achieve these goals.
- g. Improve the communication of student learning to parents.

2

Elevate the Excellence in effective School Board-Superintendent Governance.

- a. Develop a cohesive, high-performing School Board Governance Model based on shared core beliefs, aligned through the Superintendent's evaluation, defined by core policies that advance excellence, and focused on clear accountability for student outcomes.
- b. Structure school board meetings to promote meaningful discussion and public transparency around the business of the board (i.e., Finance, Capital Outlay, Academics, and Accountability).

2024-26 KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTION STEPS

3

Elevate the Excellence in the district's coordination and alignment of goals, systems, and processes.

- a. Establish performance indicators for district support systems.
- b. Align the organization's district office to ensure resources are as close to the classroom as possible and services/supports amplify the effectiveness and balanced autonomy of schools.
- c. Develop an Accountability & Performance team that monitors progress toward goals, makes data readily available to school leaders, informs school improvement, and makes school and district performance data readily accessible on the website.
- d. Evaluate the impact of financial investments to overcome future revenue strain and aggressively position CCSD to be a competitive employer so that students continue to have access to the best professionals in public education.

4

Elevate the Excellence by embracing a pervasive high-quality school environment defined by high standards, effective supports, and consistent practices.

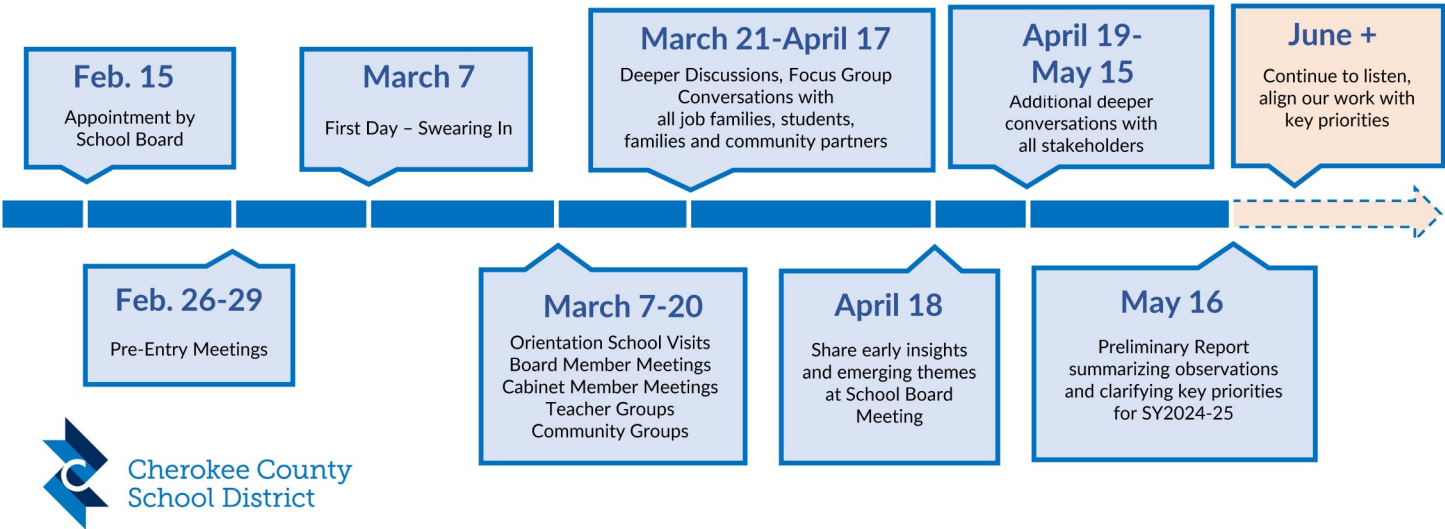
- a. Explore strategies to elevate student course/grade achievement, student skills, and student motivation in middle school.
- b. Develop each student's capacity to reach his or her own academic potential and develop a healthy sense of academic ownership.
- c. Review facility conditions and maintenance processes.
- d. Review furniture and equipment condition (classroom furniture, learning rugs, band equipment).

Execute on Mission Critical Objectives:

CCSD Kronos, CCSD Employee Benefits, CCSD Sub-Finder (Red Rover), CCSD Student Information System (Synergy), and CCSD Custodians.

TIMELINE

100 Days



Entry Plan Implementation and Next Steps

