



Sweet Home Central School District Board of Education MEMORANDUM

To: Sweet Home School Community Members
Re: Board of Education Focus Goal Areas: 2020-21
Date: January 20, 2021

At its voting meeting last Tuesday night, the Sweet Home Board of Education approved its goal/ focus areas for 2020-21.

In 2020-21, the Board wanted to focus on developing a strong organizational culture. To that end, the Board members spent time visiting and meeting with school communities and departments to seek insights into the state of our organizational culture. That came to a sudden end when the COVID shutdown occurred in March.

Earlier this year, the Board engaged in conversations focusing on important topics especially pertinent during this special year: keeping people safe and schools open, ensuring learning for all kids and how to help prevent "burnout." Those conversations also recognized larger issues related to fiscal planning and accountability and the need to discuss issues related to diversity, equity and systemic racism in terms of their impact on the experiences our students have in our schools and community. While important in the context of the pandemic, each goal can also be closely connected to the Board's Organizational Culture Frame that it developed last year(see attached).

Here are the five key Board goal areas the Board established for itself in 2020-21 and a short rationale for each:

- *Goal Area #1: The Board of Education will collaborate with the school community to keep our schools open for the entire year (unless closed due to state or regional conditions beyond school district control.). (BOE Culture Area: Foundations: Safety)*

The most important goal this year is to implement a sound plan to re-open schools, keep our kids and staff safe and, if successful, keep our doors open to learners for the entire year. If we do have to shut down for any period, it would be because of outside factors that might call for the state to shut us down such as widespread increases in positive testing rates or locally high transmission rates that establish "hot zones" established by zip code. The Board's key question: What can the Board do to ensure that we can maintain this safe environment especially as we head towards the indoor/ winter months ahead?

- *Goal Area #2: Students will experience academic success as evidenced by critical local measures of learning. (BOE Culture Area: Accountability: Results Focus)*

Once in school with sound protocols that are keeping everyone safe, we will need to ensure that kids are learning. Rather than focus on state tests that may or may not happen, the Board would like to focus on important local measures of learning. The Board has not yet identified any specific measures but will be asking us for input and thoughts on what this could be. The key BOE questions for this area: What is most important for kids to learn or achieve this year? What can we as a Board do to best support student success this year?

- *Goal Area #3: The Board of Education will monitor and support efforts to maintain or improve the emotional well-being of all school community members- students, staff, parents, administrators. (BOE Culture Area: Foundations- Safety; Relationships- Connectedness/ Belonging)*

The Board frequently mentioned the concept of "burnout" in its discussion. The Board is worried that people in every role are working harder than they ever have and often in ways they've never worked. Everything's harder" is a familiar refrain or sentiment from across the District. The Board members rightfully worry that the stresses and strains each of us encounter can be overwhelming at times and deprive us of the energy, commitment and dedication that we normally invest in our kids. This goal area asks, "What can the Board do to support everyone in the learning process this year in hopes of avoiding "burnout?"

- *Goal Area #4: The Board of Education will establish a three-year budgetary plan that includes a clearly defined set of programmatic priorities allowing the District to maintain the most effective school program possible in the face of many variables related to both expenses and revenues. (BOE Culture Area: Foundations-Support/ Autonomy;)*

One of the most critical of Board functions is its fiduciary responsibility to provide a sound education for all students while maintaining fiscal prudence and responsibility. That role has been clearly magnified by the conditions created by the pandemic. Expenses specific to providing for student and staff safety have sharply escalated. Simultaneously, anticipated revenues are likely to shrink with projections varying widely not just for this school year but for years out as well. The net result is a fiscal landscape likely to pose significant constraints in our efforts to maintain the educational program our school community has come to expect.

The decisions made in the budget process this year must be seen in a broader context of fiscal challenges likely to stretch well beyond the 20-21 school year. Meeting these challenges will demand thorough discussion of our beliefs and priorities to inform a long-term plan driving short term decision making. These forces will demand even greater focus by the Board of Education than that demanded by its normal fiscal oversight responsibilities.

- *Goal Area #5: The Board of Education will engage in an extended public discussion of issues related to diversity, educational equity, systemic racism and their potential impact on our school community and the student experience. (BOE Culture Area: Relationships- Connectedness/ Belonging)*

The clear intent of this goal is to specifically focus on studying the role that diversity and systemic racism plays in the education we are able to provide all Sweet Home students. The Board hopes, as all educators should, to provide our students an education that treats each of them with equity, dignity, and justice. However, events taking place throughout the past year have made clear that our nation's and our community's citizens possess very different perspectives on these events and lack a shared understanding of what the terms equity, dignity, and justice entail. The Board feels compelled to begin a community dialogue around what has happened throughout history, in the past year and in the past month and the role that it can play in helping to forge a greater sense of shared understanding of the impact of racism and mutual respect for the varied perspectives held by members of our community.

“The Board of Education will monitor and support the growth of a sound, positive organizational culture.”

Identity • Are we proud to be part of this school community? • Do we feel part of something special? • Are we committed to our work?		
Foundations	Relationships	Accountability
Safety • Do we feel safe? Physically? Emotionally?	<u>Connectedness/ Belonging</u> • How much do people care about each other? • How connected are we to each other? • Do people feel a strong sense of belonging and acceptance?	Results Focus • Does each of us take ownership for the results we are expected to produce and how those results impact our students?
Order • Is our school/ department orderly? Have we eliminated things that get in the way of doing our work?	Collaboration • Do we regularly work together to improve our effectiveness?	Continuous Improvement • Do we study and try new ways to improve the results of our work?
<u>Input</u> • Do others have opportunities to provide input before decisions are made or programs are created?	<u>Celebration</u> • Do we regularly take time to celebrate our successes and what we do well?	Acknowledge Gaps and Shortcomings • Do we take responsibility for gaps in our results and mistakes we may have made?
<u>Support/ Autonomy</u> • Do we have the resources we need to do our job? • Are we trusted to do the things that we think work best?		