



Central Administration

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MEMORANDUM

To: Valley Collaborative Board of Directors
From: Dr. Chris A. Scott, Executive Director
Dr. Lori Likis, Principal Consultant, Creative Coaching
Date: June 9, 2022
Re: Valley Collaborative District Improvement Plan Update

In SY21-22, Valley Collaborative continued to implement its Bridge Plan, having postponed the development of the next multi-year district improvement plan due to the pandemic and a Coordinated Program Review. The Bridge Plan, which consists of the four initiatives below, continued to serve the collaborative well:

- 3.1 Strengthen Outreach and Two-Way Communication with Students and Families: Improve the use and effectiveness of the Aspen Family Portal
- 3.2 Ensure Valley Offers Programming that Meets Student Needs: Improve the use and effectiveness of the Referral System
- 3.3 Support Student, Family, and Staff Sense of Belonging During the Pandemic: Administer Sense of Belonging survey in winter and spring and use data to improve stakeholders' experience
- 3.4 Ensure Valley continues to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization: Develop a DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) committee and plan

Brian Mihalek and Karen Rowe, the project managers overseeing this work, have documented the progress of these initiatives in detail and once again, I applaud them for their leadership.

For SY22-23, Valley Collaborative will continue under the Bridge Plan, with a focus next year on implementing three Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. These strategic initiatives focus on DEI in the areas of:

1. Curriculum
2. Professional Development (based on Sense of Belonging results)
3. Human Resources

Action planning of these three initiatives will occur in the fall of 2022. I will facilitate two action planning workshops with the DEI Committee in October, where that team will build first draft actions plans. We will then host a joint meeting of the DEI Committee and Valley's Leadership Team by November, where both groups will work together to review, revise, and complete these action plans for implementation beginning that month.

At a meeting in May, the Leadership Team began the broader work of applying a DEI lens to the collaborative, reviewing Valley's foundational elements—mission, vision, and current strategic objectives. The Leadership Team used some DEI definitions provided by the DEI Committee to guide its work. The team revised these foundational elements as shown below.

Current Valley Mission

To work collaboratively to create a structured learning environment that empowers individuals to lifelong learning and to navigate confidently and with optimal independence in their community.

Revised Mission

To work collaboratively in order to create a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and responsive learning environment that recognizes individuals and empowers them to navigate confidently with optimal independence in their community and fosters lifelong learning.

Current Valley Vision

Valley Collaborative partners with families, districts, and the community to provide innovative programming that empowers students and adults to discover their individual strengths, interests, and abilities. In doing so, students become responsible contributing members of society.

Revised Vision

Valley Collaborative partners with families, districts, and the community to provide innovative programming that empowers all students and adults to discover their diverse individual strengths, interests, and abilities. In doing so, those we serve become self-actualized members of society who contribute in a responsible manner.

Current Valley Strategic Objectives

1. All students and adults will be prepared for successful adult living
2. Valley Collaborative will provide professional development to build capacity and retain high quality staff
3. Valley Collaborative will foster a sense of belonging and engagement in the Collaborative community for all stakeholders (students, adults, families, staff, districts, community partners)

Revised Strategic Objectives

1. All students and adults will be empowered to discover their individual strengths, interests and abilities to be best prepared for successful adult living.
2. Valley Collaborative will provide professional development to build capacity and retain high quality staff while fostering and promoting a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment.
3. Valley Collaborative will foster diversity, equity and inclusivity to promote a sense of belonging and engagement for all stakeholders (students, adults, families, staff, districts, community partners).

SY22-23 promises to be an exciting one for Valley Collaborative as it further advances its DEI work and I look forward to the planning ahead with Dr. Scott and her team. Congratulations to the Valley Collaborative community for their many accomplishments this year and their ongoing commitment to continuous improvement.

Required Action:

None

Attachments:

2020-2022 District Improvement Plan – “Bridge Years” Update

2020-2022 District Improvement Plan – “Bridge Years” Update

3.1 Strengthen Outreach and Two-Way Communication with Students and Families: Improve the use and effectiveness of the Aspen Family Portal

Staff training was completed at all school programs. Teacher pages were created for all programs. Correspondence went out to families with detailed instructions on how to utilize the X2 Aspen Family Portal. Student IEPs are now being updated into the portal. The Blackboard Mass Notification system has successfully launched and was utilized for snow day closures this year.. Blackboard Mass Notifications will be used for power outages, snow days, or district wide correspondence. Future functions could include utilizing Aspen for attendance, progress reports, classroom resources, health information, transcript information, discipline, assessment scores, student schedule, enrollment history, and classroom activity updates through the Aspen portal, all of which will be tailored by each Principal.

3.2 Ensure Valley Offers Programming that Meets Student Needs: Improve the use and effectiveness of the Referral System

The existing referral database was completely overhauled, expanded and modified to collect data related to the diagnosis and profiles of students being referred, programmatic information from sending districts, referral outcomes, and communication. The database was outfitted with tools for sorting and charting the data collected, which will enable Valley to evaluate and identify trends in order to anticipate programmatic needs as they develop and maintain a running record of current referrals. Data collected from the referral database will be analyzed on a yearly basis or throughout the year as needed. For the 2021-2022 School Year Principals will collect the following information from referrals: name, sending district, and whether or not they were accepted into the school.

***Before the Pandemic, Valley was originally working on a one year “Bridge Plan” but in March 2021, Valley was informed by DESE that we were entering into our Coordinated Program Review for the 2021-2022 school year. As a result, the ‘Bridge Plan’ has been extended for an additional year.**

3.3 Support Student, Family, and Staff Sense of Belonging During the Pandemic: Administer Sense of Belonging survey in winter and spring and use data to improve stakeholders' experience

The level of support all students, families, and staff received during the pandemic was assessed through student, family, and staff surveys. The Student Survey was designed to target indicators including impressions of the culture, peer relations, policies and protocols that have been implemented to keep them safe, access to technology, and areas that might need improvement. The Student Survey was administered from April 27th through May 10th 2021 and was completed by 237 of 379 students/individuals for a participation rate of 62.5%. The Family Surveys were administered from May 3rd through May 14th 2021. The survey was intended to gather feedback in the areas of safety, remote learning plans, communication, safety procedures, and their satisfaction related to progress. 106 Family Surveys were completed. The Staff Surveys were administered from April 27th through May 10th 2021 and completed by 151 of 242 staff members, for a participation rate of 62.3%. The questions on the staff survey addressed indicators including culture, technology, impressions of policies and protocols that have been implemented, communication and support.

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, 90.1% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that they felt supported by their building administrator. In order to maintain positive staff culture and prevent staff turnover during the second wave of the pandemic, Valley focused on staff appreciation. The district enhanced employee benefits through longevity pay, salary schedule adjustments, cost of living adjustments, increased paid time off, and self-care professional development including Restorative Yoga. In addition, each school held staff appreciation events (breakfasts, lunches, Valley school spirit giveaways, and snack and refreshment offerings) throughout the month of February.

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3.4 Ensure Valley continues to be a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization: Develop a DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) committee and plan

In developing a DEI committee, all staff were invited to join and at this point our committee consists of 6 staff members which includes administrators, therapists, teachers and paraprofessionals. The Leadership team Committee created the following DEI vision statement for the Collaborative,

In examining HR practices, including the hiring process, the committee concluded that Valley's workforce has diversified within the past year. In the 2021-2022 school year, 30% of new hires identified as non-white. The Human Resources Department has enhanced Valley's recruitment strategies by expanding the reach of its job postings to connect with more diverse job seekers. Valley Collaborative utilizes the online job posting sites of School Spring, Indeed, and Teacher's Lounge in its recruitment practices. All of Valley Collaborative's job postings includes our non-discrimination statement. In addition, the Teacher's Lounge is specifically designed to recruit educators of color. As stated in their vision statement, "The Teachers' Lounge serves as a space for educators of color, and friends, to convene monthly to learn about opportunities and resources available to them".

Valley Collaborative's Adult Services Program serves individuals who are supported through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Part of this Adult Services programming is to assist these individuals in acquiring employment. Valley Collaborative actively recruits from its own Adult Services MRC program

Valley's Student and Family Handbook and Policies and Procedures Manual contains a "Nondiscrimination in Vocational Programming" statement. Each Valley enrolled student and his/her family is provided with a copy of the handbook and must return an acknowledgment of receipt stating that they have read and understand its contents.

During the 2021-2022 SY there have been 2 professional development trainings, that specifically targeted DEI, "Supporting Transgender Youth" facilitated by Mass Partnership for Youth as well as a training on recognizing forms of bias in instructional

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materials led by the Valley Collaborative Principals. Our plan to counteract any bias found includes developing activities, leading discussions and/or providing additional material for balance and context.

The data from the 2020-2021 Sense of Belonging Surveys indicates that 93.4% of staff agree or strongly agree that their principal/administrator promotes a culture that affirms and values individuals' cultural, linguistic, racial, gender, and other identity differences. 81.6% of students agree or strongly agree that their teacher treats all students respectfully, regardless of a student's race, culture, family income, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. We have concentrated our efforts to maintain these strengths during this second year of the pandemic. Upcoming work will include additional professional development recommendations that will support staff in building DEI skills and mindsets and sustain our culturally responsive school climate. Additionally we will look to collaborate with students from our student government clubs and GSA's.

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