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ENTRY PLAN FINDINGS



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January 13, 2025

Dear Board of Trustees, Employees, and Community,

From the moment my boots hit the ground in Rock Hill, my first priority has been to understand Rock Hill Schools through many different perspectives—students, educators, school leaders, employees, families, community members, and the Board of Trustees. The 100-day entry plan was designed to establish strong relationships and two-way communication as the foundation for enduring partnerships as I learn the district.

I have been intentional in spending time in schools and classrooms, prioritizing the people and places with the greatest impact on student outcomes. I have also made deliberate decisions to hold roundtables at times and locations most likely to be accessible to participants with a wide variety of perspectives.

Each conversation, paired with a careful review of data and district documents, has informed a clear view of our assets, barriers, and the high-leverage actions needed to accelerate student achievement and strengthen district operations. In every roundtable and meeting, I heard deep pride in Rock Hill Schools and a strong desire to see our district reclaim our place as a top-tier education system.

I appreciate the candid conversations about areas we must improve—ensuring consistent, high-quality instruction in each classroom; reducing initiative overload and frequent shifts in direction; strengthening two-way engagement in decision making; rebuilding trust after leadership transitions; and addressing concerns related to mental health, behavior, and operational consistency. These perspectives shape the work moving forward.

Rock Hill Schools has a strong foundation—and now is the moment to be ALL IN. Outcomes will not change unless our actions change. This work will require commitment, courage and collective ownership. There are many things we must keep doing and a number of areas where doing the same things will not lead to the opportunities and outcomes that our students deserve. Each one of us has a role in strengthening trust, aligning our efforts, and remaining relentlessly focused on student outcomes. Let's roll up our sleeves and move forward together to build momentum and ensure that every student thrives—from crayons to commencement.

Kind regards,
Deborah Elder, Ed.D.

ORGANIZATION OF REPORT

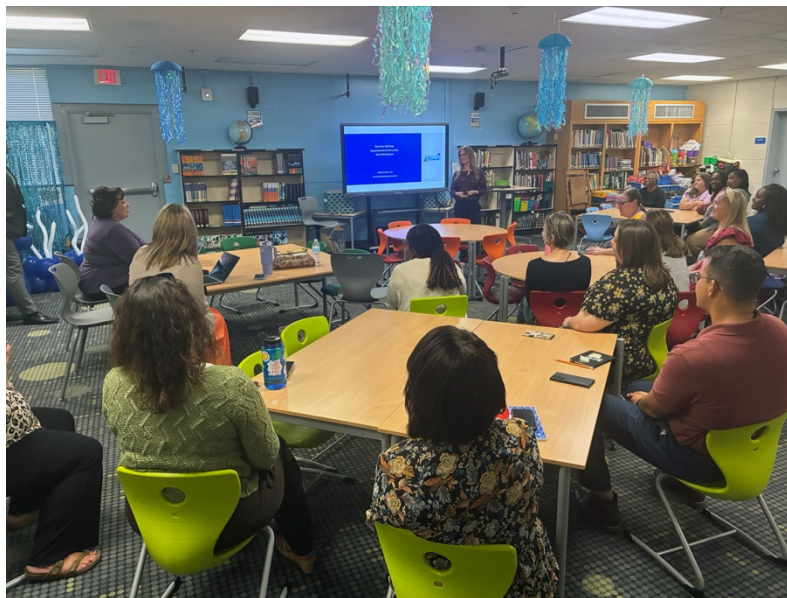
The five community-identified Superintendent Change Priorities described in the Leadership Profile by Zeal, the search firm that facilitated the Board of Trustees' hiring process, form the organization of this report.

- Student Achievement
- Community Relations
- Mental Health and Safety
- Accountability and Leadership
- Manage the Budget

The 100-day Entry Plan also included sections for Board/Superintendent Relations and Superintendent Leadership Development, as these areas are foundational to success. These areas are included following the Superintendent Change Priorities.

Key findings are presented in each area, including assets, barriers, and actions.

Each section of this report also includes an account for each item identified in the original entry plan.



100-Day Entry Plan: Engagement & Listening Process

24 Principal Walk-and-Talks Additionally assessing facilities	90 Classroom Visits	24 School & Program Roundtables
8 Parent & Community Roundtables	Attended Multiple Student Advisory Council & Teacher Forum Meetings	Districtwide Division Roundtables

Leadership Walk-and-Talks:

Twenty-four individual walk-and-talks were completed. These visits focused on identifying strengths and challenges, meeting key leadership and support staff, and reviewing facilities and grounds.

Classroom Visits:

Approximately 90 classroom visits were conducted in partnership with principals, with 3–5 visits at every school and program.

School and Program Roundtables:

Twenty-four on-site roundtables were held, supported by the Communications team. Cabinet members were invited to all sessions and attended as available. Approximately 480 staff members participated.

Parent, Community, and Student Engagement:

Eight parent and community roundtables were conducted, including sessions at schools and with community partners (Emmett Scott, Catawba Nation, NAACP, Knowledge Perk) as well as a virtual option, reaching approximately 120 participants. Additionally met with Student Advisory Council to provide input and perspective.

Department and District Office Engagement:

Engagement sessions were held with the Maintenance and Transportation, along with six District Office roundtables representing each division.

Community Presence:

Participation included approximately 45 community, school, and athletic events.

Student Achievement

Goal: Listen and learn in visits to every school, setting a precedent of two-way communication and building relationships with students, principals, educators, and staff while observing the District's Instructional Model in classrooms.

All stakeholders place a high value on student achievement as the means to individual success beyond high school, recognizing that students have many paths available to choose in their future. School staff shared inconsistency in instructional practices and systems, frequent initiative changes, and lack of communication between school level and decision makers. Teachers and parents highlighted concerns that students with Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs do not consistently have access to instruction and services to support optimal growth. Stakeholders want to see Rock Hill Schools rebuild the consistency, high expectations, and commitment to quality that will elevate community pride.

Assets

- Overall student achievement data is on par with statewide results, with notable gains in report card categories over several years.
- Wide variety of opportunities for students (Related Arts, ATC, Dual Credit, Multilingual Learning)
- Dedicated educators and school leaders
- Strong sense of teamwork, collaboration, and loyalty
- High quality core instructional materials in ELA and math district-wide
- District tools and resources to promote rigorous, consistent instruction

Barriers

- Instructional time is interrupted by extensive local assessment requirements
- Initiative overload with frequent shifts in instructional priorities
- Limited communication and staff input during instructional changes
- Unmanageable volume of technology tools with frequent changes
- Over-reliance on intervention, small group instruction, and technology to mitigate a lack of defined high-quality Tier I instruction
- Student access to rigorous learning is variable and dependent individual teachers
- Inconsistency in instructional systems: tier 1 instruction, MTSS, and vertical articulation among levels

Actions

- Engage teacher leaders and principals to:
 - reduce local assessments that are not clearly leading to positive instructional shifts
 - refine district instructional systems (assessment, professional learning, MTSS, and vertical articulation among levels)
 - define essential elements of high quality, rigorous Tier I instruction, actively engaging with grade level appropriate High Quality Instructional Materials, integrating Dr. Richard Elmore's research on the instructional core
 - focus professional learning on focus Tier I instruction, emphasizing job-embedded learning and coaching
 - establish a district vision of developmentally appropriate technology in education
 - inventory and assess the utility and interoperability of technology tools
 - review effectiveness of current Exceptional Student Education systems
- Provide support for implementing systems and ensure shared accountability
- Commit at all levels to support multi-year implementation of a manageable set of cohesive instructional priorities with aligned implementation support



Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Meet with student advisory (quarterly)
	Principal 1:1 visits on school campus (24)
	Classroom visits with principals (24 schools, 3-5 classrooms per school)
	Roundtables with every school staff (24)
	Reviewed district and school level data
	Reviewed spring 2025 professional learning survey results
	Reviewed district renewal plan and school improvement plans

Additional Action Items	
	Opened two additional ESE classrooms to relieve overcrowded classrooms
	Initiative inventory with principals
	Established regular meeting time to consult with the Teacher Forum
	Established designated time with principals during monthly principal meetings

Community Engagement

Goal: Establish a highly visible, actively involved, consistent presence with parents, community members and organizations that interface with Rock Hill Schools, ensuring inclusiveness of all community perspectives.

Participants describe Rock Hill as a community that cares deeply about children, schools, and relationships. Pride and commitment are strong, and expectations for excellence are high. At the same time, frequent leadership changes have created fatigue and uncertainty. Stakeholders expressed a desire for stability, consistency, and shared direction to rebuild confidence in the district.

Assets

- Widespread commitment from families, community, and businesses to support schools
- Family engagement at the elementary level and high school athletics and activities
- Partnerships with businesses, faith-based communities, and local organizations
- Dedicated school staff facilitate engagement opportunities
- School events, especially in elementary schools, are well attended

Barriers

- Family engagement declines in middle school
- Fragmented communication across multiple technology platforms
- Lingering post-COVID practices are perceived as barriers to access schools

Actions

- Coordinate partnership efforts at the district level to reduce duplication
- Elevate connections between classroom learning and workforce opportunities
- Establish a consistent cadence for district and school communications
- Enhance communication and engagement entry points with community members who do not have children in schools but are invested in the district
- Expand engagement with local businesses in a strategic approach to growing career awareness

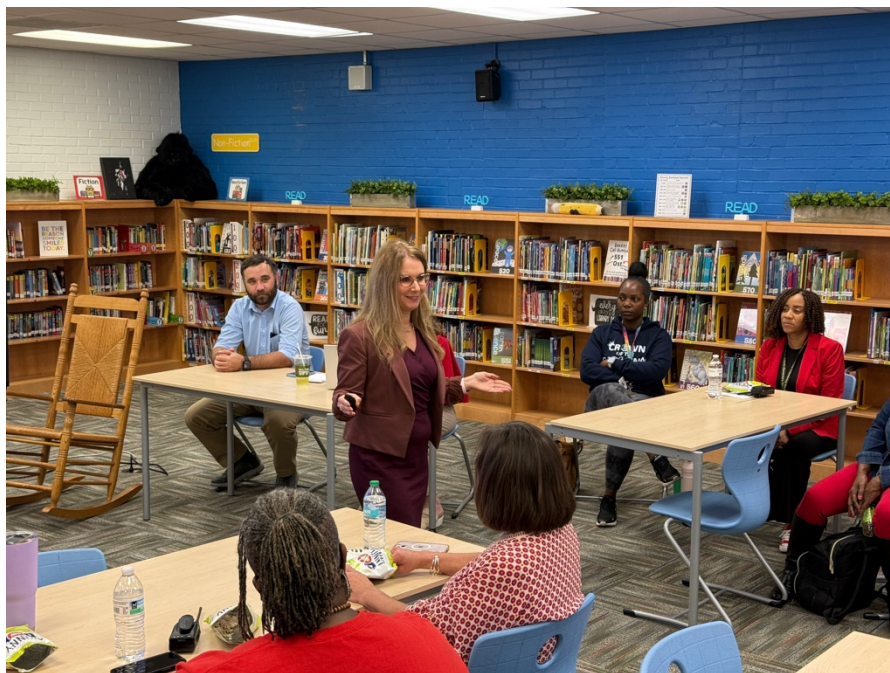
Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Attend community events, school activities, and athletic events Community Events: NAACP Freedom Gala, Mayor's Breakfast, Day of the Catawba Festival, City Council Meeting, Early Learning Partnership of York County, Christmasville breakfast, Rock Hill Council of Neighborhoods and Catawba Roundtable School and District activities: OEC Band Competition, Performances (SPHS, NHS, RHHS, Elementary Honor Choir), Career Day Events, YMCA Swim Lessons, CCDC Trick-or-Treaters, Arbor Day Celebration, Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration, Of the Year Banquet Athletic Events: football, volleyball, tennis, basketball
	Establish a Superintendent's Student Advisory Council with representation from all high schools (already in existence, established quarterly meetings)
	Visit with partners to foster collaboration and support for college success: Clinton College, Winthrop University, York Technical College
	Meet with workforce development and business community stakeholders: York County Regional Chamber "Seat at the Table", Rock Hill Economic Development Committee (RHEDC), Catawba Regional Education Center Advisory Board Member, Founder's Credit Union
	Hosted 8 evening/ weekend family and community roundtables: 3 at middle schools, Emmett Scott Center, Catawba Nation, NAACP, Virtual, and at Knowledge Perk

Additional Action Items	
	Introductory visits with Government Officials Catawba Tribal Executive Committee, County Council Chair, Mayor, Rock Hill City Council
	Media engagement WRHI, Herald, WSOC, WBTV, WCNC, PBS Charlotte

●	Sustained Board support for additional Dual Credit opportunities through USC Lancaster and Project Lead the Way
●	Collaborate with and attend events in support of two support Foundations



Mental Health and Safety

Goal: Clearly understand the range of needs, supportive structures, and resources.

Stakeholders described the connections between mental health, school safety, and student behavior as critical to the learning environment. Overall, all role groups report feeling safe at school. School staff expressed concern about escalating mental health needs as student behavior impacts quality instruction. Staff deeply experiences the impact of the reduction of district funded mental health support personnel. Ensuring safety procedures, mental health supports, behavior systems, and facilities are aligned and adequately resourced is imperative to ensure students and staff are successful and build a positive narrative in the community.

Assets

- District has established a behavior team to establish consistent systems
- Staff has a high level of awareness of student mental health needs
- Shared commitment to student well-being
- On-campus access to Medicaid funded supports for eligible students
- Collegial school culture promotes staff sense of belonging and mutual support
- Consistent district-wide systems for emergency response
- Strong relationships with law enforcement agencies
- Students and staff indicate feeling safe at school

Barriers

- Increasingly frequent and intense student mental health needs outpace capacity
- Access to mental health care online is not perceived as effective as in-person
- Variation in student behavioral expectations and adult response within schools and district-wide
- Lack of consistent approach and training for prevention and early intervention
- Lost instructional time for all students in the classroom when one student exhibits persistently disruptive behaviors
- Attention to chronic student behavior needs exceeds capacity within the classroom

Actions

- As a district-wide MTSS system is developed, ensure corresponding behavior systems and supports are established and consistently implemented
- Focus on district-wide implementation of the discipline matrix to promote consistency and reliability
- Increase awareness of existing mental health resources

- Provide educators with support and training in prevention and early intervention strategies
- Implement support protocols to rapidly intervene in urgent student behavioral health crises
- Develop and train post-event protocols

Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Review key data and policies, including discipline data, bullying policies, student handbooks, behavior intervention plan data
	Engage with students, employees, parents, and principals to gather feedback on how the school/ workplace currently fosters a culture of mental health, belonging, and well-being (included as a discussion topic in all roundtables)
	Assess effectiveness of existing resources, identify gaps, continue to work towards solutions

Additional Action Items	
	Hosted breakfast to meet all law enforcement partners including York County Sheriff, Rock Hill PD, Catawba, State Police
	Held and participated in FEMA Training with school and district leaders
	Initiate a convening of local leadership in juvenile justice

Accountability and Strong Leadership

Goal: Learn how the district is organized, how it communicates, and how the Superintendent can best provide support with accountability.

Stakeholders emphasize that strong leadership needs to create stable, aligned systems that keep students at the center of every decision. Participants noted that frequent turnover in the superintendent role has contributed to instability, initiative fatigue, lack of focus, and lack of accountability across the district. As in case in many districts, the perceived disconnect between school priorities and DO priorities has eroded trust over time. Across groups, there was a clear call for sustained, visible, accessible leadership that aligns governance, district support, and school priorities with students at the center.

Assets

- Widespread agreement that Rock Hill Schools is not meeting full potential to student success.
- Knowledgeable leadership in district and schools.
- Principals demonstrate strong advocacy for staff and students.
- Collective willingness to individually contribute to advancing organizational excellence.
- Broad agreement on the need for organizational coherence, consistency, and focus.

Barriers

- Too many priorities dilute quality, reduce impact, and undermine accountability.
- Lack of organizational focus on supporting principals as instructional leaders, building leadership pipelines, and tapping teacher leaders to strengthen systems.
- DO divisions perform key functions without adequate coordination, creating competing priorities and timelines for school staff.
- Principal workload lacks consideration in division planning and coordination

Actions

- Apply the Board/ Superintendent communication plan principles of “students first” and “no surprises” to the relationship between DO and schools.
- Operate as a highly effective cross functional team that demonstrates the highest professionalism, responsiveness, proactive planning, and service to internal and external stakeholders.
- Align DO and schools through a shared focus on student outcomes and stakeholder service.

- Build project and performance management systems across divisions.
- Prioritize principal support to lead impactfully and equipping teachers to improve instruction
- Align DO organization to Board of Trustees goals and administrative action plan
- Ensure shared understanding of need and rationale for changes
- Identify current practices, programs, and processes to discontinue

Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item (Discussion topic in every roundtable)	
	Superintendent's Cabinet: weekly Cabinet meetings, monthly Leadership meetings, held roundtables with each division's leadership team
	Facilities: met with maintenance department, attended holiday meal, met custodians and viewed each facility at each school in summer walk and talk visits with principals
	Communications, Legal, and Policy: Communications team attended and supported every roundtable, reviewed all current and pending litigation with legal counsel, review Board policies and SC requirements routinely
	Human Resources: procedure reviews, roundtable with leadership, participate in legal consultation as needed

Additional Action Items	
	Requested and reviewed extensive background information from each division and principal prior to the July 1 start date.
	Met with YCEA (York Co. Education Association)

Manage the Budget

Goal: Engage with experts to understand the current fiscal state of the district, future goals, and unique context of SC school finance.

Participants expressed the desire to better understand how financial decisions are made to support classrooms, staffing, and safe, well-maintained facilities. Transparency in connecting budget decisions to organizational goals and priorities will be critical as we enter the FY27 budget season.

Assets

- Internal controls are in place for general fund transactions
- District audit
- Board approved GO Bond for capital improvements
- Facilities are clean and maintained with pride
- Teacher salary schedule is highly competitive, supporting recruitment
- Program options to attract and retain students and families seeking specialized learning experiences are available.

Barriers

- Multiple years of declining enrollment present forecasting challenges
- Stakeholders across the organization present legitimate rationale for additional resource requests.
- 58% of school facilities have exceeded the 50-year lifespan for public buildings
- The district lacks a long-term strategy for reactive and preventative maintenance, facility enhancement, and replacement.
- Monthly paychecks create financial burden on employees
- No clear system exists to predict pay raises, leaving employees to wonder why some role groups receive raises when they do not.
- Lack of a clear vision to leverage program options with zoned schools for a cohesive system of choice to attract and retain students in a competitive environment.

Actions

- Increase public transparency with newly established quarterly financial reports
- Complete a comprehensive facilities and demographic study
- Establish a long-range facilities master plan
- Begin bi-monthly pay periods first for classified employees, ultimately for all employees
- Complete a comprehensive salary study

- Review and revise the budget process to ensure principals have autonomy, guardrails, and accountability in allocating school-level resources
- Prepare the FY27 budget to align to prioritized organizational goals
- Launch a student recruitment and retention effort, highlighting all the Rock Hill Schools and opportunities for students
- Leverage Alternative Education structures to increase student retention and bring students who have dropped out back to school to complete their diploma

Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Review the district's financial status, including the current budget, revenue streams, audit, and compliance with internal controls
	Analyze alignment between resource allocation and strategic plan goals
	Evaluate federal funding opportunities
	Understand short, mid, and long-range state budget outlook
	Familiarize with locally generated revenue
	Understand the role of program options in maintaining and increasing enrollment

Additional Action Items	
	Initiated quarterly financial reports to promote transparency with the Board of Trustees and public.

Board/Superintendent Relations

The foundation of Rock Hill Schools' success is built upon the relationship between the Board and Superintendent. To this end, the Board and I have taken actions to establish a firm foundation for long-term effective Board/Superintendent relations, ensuring mutual clarity on the Board's unified direction and expectations.

Assets

- Established a Board/ Superintendent communication plan to ensure effective governance, strong leadership, and the success of all students
- Jointly committed to the working principles of “no surprises” and “students first” in all actions and communications
- Established shared understanding of roles in terms of Policy CB, Policy BCA, Policy BDD, and Policy BBA/BBAA—the Board of Trustees fulfills the governance role and the Superintendent fulfills the chief executive officer role
- Ensured that diverse stakeholder perspectives throughout the community were actively sought and welcomed per Board advisement.
- Stakeholders recognize and are encouraged by the Board of Trustees' efforts to work more cohesively, demonstrating shared support and a unified commitment to elevating the district.

Barriers

- Engrained patterns of procedures prior to the emphasis on following role definition in policy surface periodically

Actions

- Continued investment in building mutual accountability to communication plan procedures and Board policy governing roles and responsibilities.
- Board establishes broad organizational goals, Superintendent establishes strategy and actions plans aligned to Board goals.
- Develop second semester's Superintendent evaluation criteria, timeline, and deliverables.
- Support employees to problem solve issues closest to the source to ensure efficient resolution of concerns and building trusting relationships

Summary of Board Work Session to Establish Organizational Goals November 11, 2025



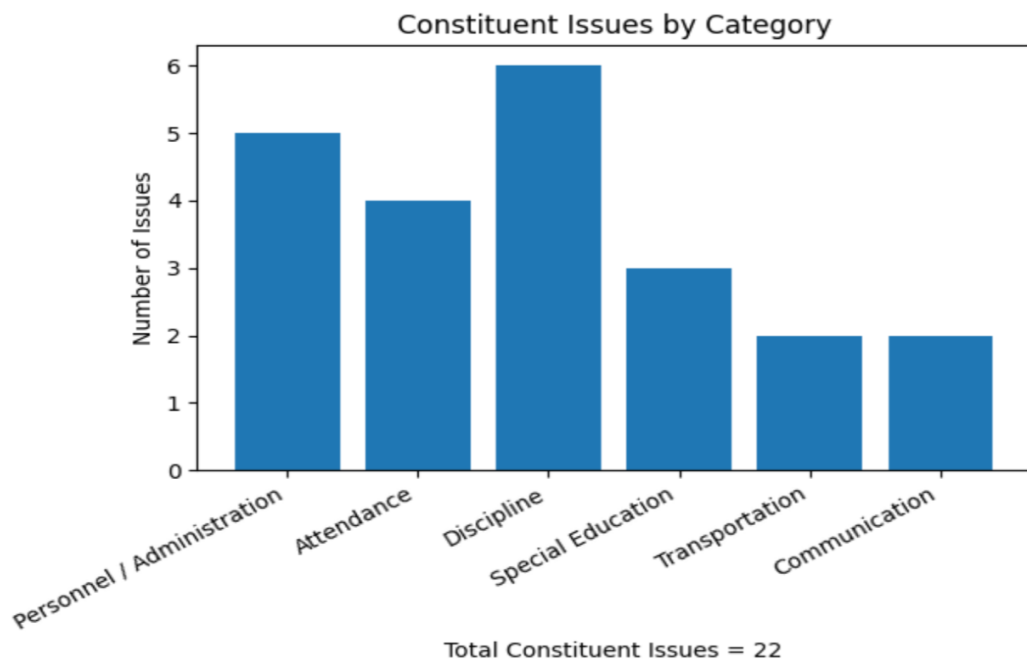
Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Meet with Board Chairperson - plan an entry retreat and establish transparent communication channels
	Ensure clarity of the Board's success criteria, expectations for evaluation, timelines, and deliverables (Entry and Communication plan implementation)
	Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with Board Members
	Review all Board of Education policies

Additional Action Items	
	Established weekly individual phone check-ins with Board members
	Published Who to Contact guide to support implementation of Policies BBA/BBAA, BDD, and CCB
	Responded personally to 22 Board constituent issues and 25 Board info requests
	Attended SCSBA's Law conference
	Organized two facilitated Board Special Called Meetings, first for Communication Plan, then Goal Setting

Summary of Constituent Issues August-December



Superintendent Leadership Development

Goal: model the continuous professional learning I encourage in others as I connect with the South Carolina educational community.

Assets

- SCASA New Superintendent sessions
- Coordination between SCDE, SCASA, SCSBA, and SCHSL in meetings
- Meet routinely with executive coach and SCASA-assigned mentor
- Developing relationships with other superintendents, both in and out of state

Barriers

- Scheduling conflict first semester with SCASA and Board of Trustees small group meetings resulted in missing several SCASA meetings

Actions

- Join selected local organizations to strengthen community ties
- Move Board of Trustees small group prep meetings to Tuesdays prior to the next meeting
- Continue efforts to learn the SC policy and financial landscape
- Continue efforts to contribute to state and national opportunities
- Continue collaboration with York County and state-wide Superintendents.

Entry Plan Action Status

-  Complete (may be ongoing)
-  In Progress
-  Not Started

Entry Plan Action Item	
	Participate in Executive Coaching (weekly)
	Participate in statewide events and leadership organizations: Olde English Consortium (monthly), SCASA New Superintendent's Cohort (3 per semester), SCASA Superintendent's Roundtable (monthly)

●	Establish working relationships with superintendent colleagues in York County (ongoing communication)
●	Maintain active involvement in national professional organizations (AASA)
●	Contribute to state and national efforts to improve public education (Excel in Ed)

Additional Action Items	
●	Met with SC School Boards Insurance Trust
●	Meet with SCASA assigned mentor as needed
●	Direct contact with SCDE as needed
●	Attended SCSBA Legislative Advocacy & Delegate Assembly



CONCLUSION

Of the Board-approved Entry Plan document action items, 99% were complete, and one is in progress. Additionally, twenty-one additional action items aligned to each category were completed. Each item contributed to a more robust understanding of the current state of Rock Hill Schools and informed action steps.

The fruition of the entry plan reflects my deep commitment to Rock Hill Schools, our students, families, and staff. Student success is my guiding principle in all that I do, and prioritizing time in schools above all else these first months was a deliberate choice. There was no other way to learn the district through the perspective of students and those closest to them. I will continue to hold students and schools as my top priority as I keep working to get to know the whole Rock Hill community. My efforts to build relationships and understanding will continue throughout my tenure in Rock Hill.

Moving forward, expect more opportunities for engagement and communication. As decisions are made to elevate our students, we must be disciplined and honest about our limitations. Over and over again, stakeholders voiced initiative overload and change fatigue as a result of many leadership changes. I recognize that time, attention, and resources are finite. We will, together, make some thoughtful and sometimes hard decisions about what we stop, what we do less of, what we do more of, and what we start doing. We cannot improve outcomes by overcommitting our minutes and dollars, nor by spreading our focus too thin. Instead, we will maximize our impact by aligning our efforts and investing deeply in what matters most for our students.

The Board of Trustees and I have invested considerable work to align roles as defined in policy and implement those roles through the Communication Plan. We must continue to have regular Board of Trustee/ Superintendent open and honest discussions about communication and role alignment. We are off to a great start. Like any long-term relationship between employees and employer, this will require continuous work.

The next phase of this work begins with the Board of Trustees finalizing the district's broad, long-range organizational goals. Once established, I will align actions, budgets, and personnel to ensure that our resources directly support our shared goals. Some changes will happen quickly, while others will require sustained effort over multiple years. Both are necessary.

I am fully committed to working side by side with our staff, families, community, and the Board of Trustees to rapidly and sustainably elevate Rock Hill Schools to bring out the

highest potential in our students every day, every hour, and every minute. There is no time to wait, the future of our community is in today's classrooms.

To many of you who said, "We hope you stay a while..."
I reply, "That is my intent...from crayons to commencement."

