



Dlane DiGiuseppe
Superintendent
100 Day Transition/Entry Plan Report

Introduction:

Before my official arrival at Verona Public Schools District, I challenged our team to be innovative and focused on the elements to support student achievement. On May 15, 2022, I provided the Board of Education with an ambitious [100-Day Plan](#) to take immediate actions to support Verona Schools while devising the foundation for the work ahead, including the preparation for the development of our 2023-2027 Strategic Plan.

With the core beliefs of equity, collaboration, and excellence, we embarked on four essential goals: Develop a strong, collaborative, effective relationship with the Board of Education, ensure an effective, efficient, and orderly transition of leadership, with the focus on increased student achievement for all children; listen broadly and deeply to a multitude of stakeholders and gain a comprehensive understanding of VPS, focusing on student SEL, staff morale, and community trust; Identify and execute activities that must happen immediately to ensure an outstanding beginning to the school year; and Build excitement and momentum for VPS's vision, mission, and future strategic plan, while also establishing the commitment to engage in any needed improvements.

I am proud of the work that has taken place across these goals, and I remain steadfast in my commitment to the work to come.

During my first 100 days, I made it a point to meet with as many stakeholders as possible. I meet regularly with the Administrative Cabinet, which consists of the Central Office Administration, Mr. Cruz, the Business Administrator, Dr. Miller, The Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Dr. Mauriello, Director of Special Services (before his departure), Mrs. Ackerman, Director of School Counseling, and Mr. Ballaj, Chief Technology Officer regularly. I met with every principal individually and have continued to meet with them regularly in various situations over the past several months. I met individually with the STEM, Humanities, and Special Services Supervisors, with teachers and staff and attended each Back to School Night. I met with neighboring districts' superintendents, Verona Council members, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the Township Clerk, members of the Verona Police and Fire Departments, members from the Department of Public Works, and parents involved in the School Community Associations (SCAs), the Verona Education Foundation (VFEE), the Verona Public Library Board, members of the Verona Municipal Alliance (VMAC), members of the Verona Multicultural Inclusion and Accessibility Advisory Committee (MIAAC), members of C.H.I.L.D/Verona Schools Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), and many parents.

I listened to our dedicated staff, who currently serves as the backbone of our organization. I visited various businesses, community partners, and neighboring universities. Finally, we conducted a comprehensive review of the district and all schools. All in all, I was impressed with everyone's

willingness to be open about the district’s strengths and opportunities for growth. Those conversations have given me a great understanding of our current reality and what must be prioritized to support student success and close gaps. I am grateful to all our staff members who have the skill, will, and deep commitment to our students and school communities. I am also grateful for the students, families, staff, and civic partners who offered their voices. Please know that the conversations we had and the work in the 100-Day Plan are not “one and done”; it is just the beginning.

It was imperative to understand the perspective of as many stakeholders as possible. Only through active listening is it possible to gather information regarding the needs and desires of the district.

To reach the discussed goals of the entry plan, I utilized the following process:

- **Listen:** Spend time with students, teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, community, and business members to hear about significant accomplishments and greatest challenges.
- **Learn:** Analyze and study student achievement data and other performance data. Review and evaluate existing district policies.
- **Share:** Help the community get to know me by sharing my educational philosophies and core values. I will strive to present a positive tone and responsive nature.
- **Build:** Strong working relationships and rapport with the Board of Education, employees, community, and local leaders.
- **Plan:** Review and report findings to the Board of Education to assist in creating the 2023 Strategic Plan for future success.

I began this process in April 2022 with the following activities:

- Viewed/Attended VPS Board of Education meetings
- Attended Administrative Cabinet meetings
- Attended Administrative Council meetings
- Visited each school to conduct building walkthroughs
- Worked directly with the current Interim Superintendent to ensure a smooth transition

The First 100 Days

Goal	Develop a strong, collaborative, effective relationship with the Board of Education to determine the goals, expectations, and foundation for VPS Strategic Plan 2023.
Status	Accomplished

To accomplish this, I met with each Board member individually and communicated regularly with the Board president. I meet with Board members in several monthly committee meetings (Mrs. Drappi and Mr. Wacha for the Education/Special Education Committee, Mrs. Freschi and Mrs. Priscoe for the Athletics/Co-Curricular Committee, Mr. Day and Mr. Wacha for the Finance Committee, Mrs. Drappi and Mr. Day for the Buildings and Grounds Committee, Mrs. Freshi and Mrs. Priscoe for the Community

Resources Committee, and most recently Mrs. Freschi and Mrs. Drappi for the newly formed Policy Committee).

We developed a framework for clarity improvements to the Board of Education Agenda format from a consent agenda to a non-consent agenda. Consent agendas are used to facilitate approval of noncontroversial, routine, or technical matters with a single motion, based on the belief that the materials sent to Board members in advance of the meeting adequately explain what is required for each item, and discussion is not required, there may be items on the agenda that are not routine and require discussion. Without a work session meeting, items may be voted upon without adequate discussion. Moving to a new format allows for more focused discussion and greater transparency with the community.

While I will continue to work on internal processes for the Board of Education Agenda production and communication, I believe I have established a strong foundation and an effective relationship with the Board of Education.

Goal	Ensure an effective, efficient, and orderly leadership transition, focusing on increased student achievement for all children.
Status	Accomplished

Dr. Furnari and the Administrative team in Verona opened their doors to me as early as April 2022 by inviting me to join the Administrative Cabinet and Administrative Council meetings. This helped facilitate my meeting with the ten-and-a-half-month administrative staff and learning about the elementary schools and the STEM and Humanities Departments. Dr. Furnari, Mr. Cruz, and Dr. Miller were in regular contact with me during this transition to ensure an orderly transition. Mr. Cruz arranged for me to have tours of each building to review the layout of the schools and make my introductions to the teaching and support staff who would not be available in the district after July 1.

In July, the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment prepared a comprehensive review of student performance data from the 2015-2016 school year through the most recent data from the 2022 Spring New Jersey Student Learning Assessment. The analysis included data based on currently available subgroup information on gender, ethnicity, and students with disabilities. A review of student outcomes between schools of comparability (Brookdale Avenue, F.N. Brown, Forest Avenue, and Laning Avenue Elementary Schools) was also conducted. New Jersey no longer provides District Factor Grouping (DFG) comparison data, but a review of Verona Schools' performance was compared to state averages. One of my first administrative decisions was to engage the building principals to generate student achievement goals in addition to the requisite administer goals they produce each year to satisfy the requirements of the AchieveNJ Principal Evaluation System. Student achievement, especially post-pandemic, must be at the forefront of all we do. This focus on student achievement will drive the development of a new Strategic Plan.

The Board of Education approved Grand River Solutions as a Consultant to research current practices and provide feedback and recommendations regarding Verona Schools' climate and

culture and hiring, recruiting, and retainment practices through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Dr. Miller and I met several times in July and August with Ms. Jody Shipper, Co-Founder & Managing Director, to review the preliminary report, seek clarification in some areas, and review methodology before accepting the final report. There were many recommendations for growth in the GRS Final Report, which will be prioritized and presented to the Board for consideration.

In August, we began a review of Board Policies and Regulations, some of which required updates and revisions. As a result of this review, the Board has established an Ad Hoc Policy Committee to review policy systematically.

Goal	Create opportunities for the new superintendent to listen broadly and deeply to many stakeholders and gain a comprehensive understanding of VPS, focusing on student social-emotional learning, staff morale, and community trust.
Status	Substantial progress made

As was mentioned in the introduction to this report, during my first 100 days, I made every effort to meet with as many stakeholders as possible, to attend as many functions and events, and to listen broadly to stakeholders to build a comprehensive understanding of Verona and Verona Schools through the lens of student social-emotional learning, staff morale, and community trust. [Log of my 100-day Entry Plan](#)

I meet regularly with the Administrative Cabinet, which consists of the Central Office Administration; Mr. Cruz, the Business Administrator, Dr. Miller, The Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Dr. Mauriello, the Former Director of Special Services (before his departure) and now Mrs. Tania Symmons, Director of Special Services, Mrs. Ackerman, Director of School Counseling, and Mr. Ballaj, Chief Technology Officer regularly. I met with every principal individually and have continued to meet with them regularly in various situations over the past several months. I meet regularly with the STEM, Humanities, and Special Services Supervisors, with teachers and support staff, and attended each Back to School Night. I met with current and past VEA leadership, neighboring districts' superintendents, Verona Council members, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, the Township Clerk, members of the Verona Police and Fire Departments, members from the Department of Public Works, and parents involved in the School Community Associations (SCAs), the Verona Education Foundation (VFEE), the Verona Public Library Board, members of the Verona Municipal Alliance (VMAC), members of the Verona Multicultural Inclusion and Accessibility Advisory Committee (MIAAC), members of C.H.I.L.D/Verona Schools Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), many parents, and student representatives. I have attended several football games, volleyball, and tennis matches. I attended the Festival of Bands, the Verona Food Truck Festival, the Verona-Cedar Grove National Night Out, and school-based functions like Author Day, Icecream Socials, and Halloween parades and celebrations.

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district's strengths and opportunities for growth. Those conversations have given me a great understanding of our current reality and what must be prioritized to support student success and close gaps. I am grateful to all our staff members who have the skill, will, and deep commitment to our students and school communities. I am also grateful for the students, families, staff, and civic partners who offered their voices.

There were some key insights that emerged. The first insight is a strength we should continue to build upon, the strength of the community atmosphere in Verona. At each school staff meet and greet, the theme focused on the community of each school building; the staff at each school is collaborative and supportive of each other. They feel supported by the families in Verona and care deeply about the students.

Another positive insight is that the staff is strong and dedicated to being the best they can be. This is not a typical attitude, as teachers across the country are struggling with post-pandemic exhaustion and mental health struggles. According to *Education Week*, students need more help to recover academically and emotionally from pandemic disruptions. Staffing shortages mean more teachers are overworked and overwhelmed. And many still come to school at risk of illness from COVID-19. All those stressors take a toll on teachers' mental health. Regardless of whether they taught in person or online, teachers have experienced significantly higher rates of anxiety during the pandemic,... according to a new study published in *Educational Researcher*, a journal of the American Educational Research Association based on a survey of millions of American workers conducted over seven months in 2020 and 2021¹. The Verona staff I spoke with across all six schools were overwhelmingly positive about working in Verona and their dedication to the students and community.

Another common theme was improved communication quality between the Superintendent and staff and, to some extent, the building administration and staff, although this varied from building to building. The theme of communication quality was also discussed with parents and students as indicated by the surveys conducted by Hazard, Young, and Attea, the Superintendent Search Consultants hired by the Board to find a new Superintendent, and the Grand River Solutions surveys conducted with students.

While there were some challenges in addition to improved communication listed by many, there were none other than school security and safety and the Verona budget that reappeared several times.

Listening broadly and deeply cannot be completed in 100 days, and as a result, I don't feel as if this goal was accomplished fully. I made substantial progress, but this is an area I will continue to work on as my plans to hold further meet and greets/coffee with the superintendent events with parents and staff and focus groups with students as I continue to learn about the strengths and challenges of the Verona Schools.

¹ Sparks, Sarah D. "Pandemic Anxiety Was Higher for Teachers Than for Health-Care Workers." *Education Week*, 15 Nov. 2022.

Goal	Identify and execute activities that must happen immediately to ensure a smooth beginning to the school year.
Status	Substantial progress made

My 100-day plan outlined the following objectives to open schools smoothly:

- Ensure staffing is complete.

The teacher and support staff shortage prevailing in NJ and the United States didn't skip Verona. We struggled and continue to find it difficult to find staff, especially leave replacement teaching staff, replacement educational services staff, and paraprofessional educators. At the date of this report, we are fully staffed with certificated teaching and educational service staff but are still understaffed in the support areas. Paraprofessionals, lunch aides, and substitute staff are in critical need.

- Ensure the buildings are clean and ready to open.

Mr. Narutile, the Director of Facilities, and the custodial and maintenance staff worked very hard to ensure our buildings were ready to open for our students resulting in a smooth facilities opening.

- Ensure all professional development planning was completed for opening schools.

Dr. Miller, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and the Curriculum Department had professional development planning completed for the New Teacher orientation in August, mentor teachers in September, October, and November, new teacher academy in September and November, all-staff professional learning in October and November, and individual professional learning days for specific staff in math (Bill Jackson - Dimensions and Amplify), MAP Growth, ELA (Balanced Literacy - Dana Clark and LETRS - Claire Duffy) and an EdCamp in October. Professional Learning opportunities are also planned for later in the school year that, includes DEIsessions with Ken Shelton for administrators, staff, parents, and students.

- Ensure instructional resources have been received or completed and are ready for distribution, including any summer curriculum development.

Dr. Miller, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and the Curriculum Department and building principals had materials and resources ready to start the school year.

- Ensure that the Administrator Checklist is up to date and that District Administrative Council is clear on important dates for SGO development and approval, Teacher/Staff PDP development and approvals, Administrator PDP plans, and state-required submission dates are clear.

The Administrator Checklist and associated resources were ready and provide to the administrators in August. It is updated regularly to reflect adjustments in requirements by the NJ Department of Education.

- Ensure all new technology resources are in place and all users have been properly trained.

Go Guardian and Parent Square was unveiled for staff, and training was offered during the EdCamp on October 31. Mr. Cruz provided professional learning in the use of the Employee Portal and the information located there for staff.

- Ensure the community has the information regarding the school calendar, opening activities, 1:1 Chromebook initiative, student schedules, and communication protocols.

The following represents a portion of the communication that was distributed to families in advance of the opening/early in the school year:

[Chromebook Notification and Information](#)

[Welcome Back to School - Community Letter](#)

[Safety Starts with You - A video message from Verona PD](#)

[Updated COVID-19 Protocols for the 2022-2023 SY per the CDC and NJDOH](#)

[Open Special Education Parent Advisory Council \(SEPAC\) Meeting Tomorrow](#)

[Week of Respect and Safe Schools Week](#)

[2023-2024 Approved School Calendar](#)

[Assessment Presentation this Evening at Verona Board of Education Meeting](#)

Goal	Build excitement and momentum for VPS's vision, mission, and future strategic plan, while also establishing the commitment to engage in any needed improvement.
Status	Progress made

My 100-day plan outlined the following objectives to build excitement and momentum:

- Establish a positive, productive, and trusting relationship with the district administration, staff, and the community.
- Build trust through transparent and honest communication.
- Celebrate successes often in a variety of ways.
- Be a visible member of the Verona community.

I have begun to make inroads to this end; please refer to my [spreadsheet log](#) of the first 100-day Entry Plan. I have begun to build trust across the staff, administration, Board, and community.