

New Jersey Department of Education/ Jersey City Public Schools
Highly Skilled Professional Report
January 28th, 2020

District Current Status

With the hiring of the new Superintendent the operation and Administration of the District has improved drastically. The new Superintendent is a veteran of 46 years and has the support of all stakeholders that effect the delivery of education to the students of Jersey City. Another encouraging factor is the election of a new Board President whose administrative style is very complimentary to the current Superintendent. At this time, the morale in the District is exceptionally high and all of the Departments are operating effectively.

Fundamental Considerations

In completing the Accountability Scorecard report for the dates November 1st, 2018 to October 31st 2019 please note that my input began in May which gives me five months of participation. Below are the list of the major problems the District was involved in.

1. Transitional Board of Trustees: Several Board Members were in transition (newly appointed this year) and there was a lack of unity in their approach to the business of the District.
2. Instability in the Superintendent's Position: this was due to the board placing the previous superintendent on administrative leave and all the legal ramifications that came along with the process. The appointment of an interim Superintendent while the District was in complete reorganization.
3. Severe Budget Crisis: This was the result of severe State aid cuts and resulted in hundreds of staff being laid off and total pandemonium in the District.
4. Contract Negotiations: While contracts are being negotiated there is always a hostile environment.
5. Various Legal Suits were going on: District suing the State, former Superintendent suing the district, the Commissioner's former representative in Jersey City suing the District and individual Board members etc.
6. A Harry Moore School in Transition: Due to structural damage to the A Harry Moore School building students had to be transferred to another school (Regional Day) for the rest of the school year. New Jersey City University expressed a lack of interest in continuing to be the Program Manager for the school which caused quite a stir for all involved.
7. Distrust of the State: The Board members' perception of the Commissioner's former representative in Jersey City and other Department employees created a lack of trust in the State, which was a barrier that I had to overcome.
7. Low Morale in District: Because of the above incidents there was a very low moral throughout the District.

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Governance

I met with the Board President and explained to him the importance of being a good Board President, not only with Board projects and problems but also with the interaction of Board Members. I described to him the Governance component is the key to creating an effective educational model that leads to a District of Excellence. Once we achieve the District of Excellence status we can then qualify for the “High Performing District Status” that would get us out of total State control. He agreed that the primary goal should be to achieve the “High Performing District Status” and the Board Members should lead the way. It was important for me to get his buy-in first because he was a very strong Board President and active in all aspects of the District. I needed his support in order to implement the Transition Plan. He immediately created a Transition Plan committee of two Board members to work with me in this process.

To effectively implement the Transition Plan, I met with each Board Member individually to review its goals and objectives of the transitional plan and asked for their support in its implementation. The Board President also introduced me to the public and explained the purpose of my position and the importance of the Transition Plan. We also discussed some aspects of the of the Transition Plan at Caucus meetings. I explained to the Board members that their role is to work hand in hand with the Superintendent in the administration of the District and to make sure that they didn’t cross the line by micromanaging or undermining the administration. I explained to them the State is looking for a professional democratic process that can be sustained in addressing the educational needs of the District. I have been very successful so far in eliminating the public unprofessional behavior of Board members at Board meetings. I eliminated any rude behavior from one Board member to another and required them to be respectful to all presenters even if the presenters were disruptive. Sometimes it’s important to address the intangibles in order to be effective with the tangibles.

Another major hurdle was overcoming an ideology which conflicted with what I was charged to do. The District was under the impression they were no longer under State control and the Transition Plan did not apply to them since all five of the components were under local control. I also had to challenge the Board President as to what the HSP role was and the importance of implementing the Transition Plan. Eventually I was able to develop a strong working relationship with the Board President, Superintendent and his level one Staff Members of trust.

Due to the above major hurdles, the Board President was very combative with my role and challenged me initially on various occasions for the first two months. He was adamant that the State was to blame for everything that is wrong in the Jersey City Public Schools and therefore I represented the enemy. It took me awhile to convince him my interest was strictly to assist the District in following the Transition Plan and getting the District out of **Total** State control. Eventually we developed a functional working relationship which allowed us to agree and disagree on the issues. Another accomplishment was getting him to work effectively with the Commissioner’s office in a more professional manner. Instead of constantly attacking the Commissioner’s office legally, verbally and administratively. I convinced him it would be more productive for him to communicate through conference calls or to submit written communications on his opinion for consideration. This effort also assisted me to influence the professional quality of interaction among Board members at Public meetings and Committee meetings. Eventually after a few months I was able to eliminate the hostility among Board members through my experience in the use of good team building skills. I arranged unofficial meetings with Board Members and the Superintendent on various occasions at homes and in restaurants to discuss educational philosophies and

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committee agenda items. I spent a lot of time with the Governance component because it's such a critical part of the educational process however the work that I have accomplished in this area has to be reinforced with all of the new Board members.

A major accomplishment was my facilitating the two day "Back to School Board Retreat." During the retreat I did two presentations, the "Transition Plan" and "Setting Up Board Goals and Objectives."

Instruction and Programs

The first step that I took to address Instruction and Programs was to facilitate a meeting with the Superintendent and the Board Trustee that is responsible for the Committee of Educational Programs. This Board Sub-Committee drives all the instructional initiative for the District. We met and discussed the direction that the District was going in instructionally for five hours with Superintendent presenting his vision and the Board Trustee sharing her vision. They were able to agree on many items and this turned out to be a very productive start for the new Superintendent.

The next step was to convince the Superintendent and the Board President that the District should have a Grants Department and having worked in Newark for almost two decades I knew that their Grants Department was exceptional. I arranged through the Newark HSP to visit the Newark Public Schools and have a presentation on their department structure and how effective it was. The presentation was very impressive, and the Superintendent returned to the District and was able to create a Grants Department and hire a Grants Director. To date the Grants Department has been able to secure 82 grants totaling over 6.5 million dollars in less than six months.

Other instructional initiatives that I have been directly involved in my first six months are:

1. Cursive writing program: I was very instrumental in getting this initiative off the ground. The Board members were very adamant about the need to provide cursive writing to the students of Jersey City. I was able to get her the support she needed administratively to get this program implemented.
2. Sondag Phonics: This is a program that was developed by the new Administration with full Board support.
3. Expansion of Accelerated Learning
4. CTE middle school plan: Directly involved in assisting this administration in the program development and budgeting for this new initiative.

Overall the Teaching and Learning aspects of the District is functioning very well. Administrators and Board members are working very effectively in trying to improve the District's student achievement scores. As a matter of fact, this year the District because of its instructional success (increase in scores) was in position to choose whether it was going use the Equivalency process for QSAC or not.

Fiscal Management

This component requires constant communication with the Superintendent and Business Administrator. There was a serious budget crisis this year which resulted in hundreds of staff members being laid off due to lack of funding. Fortunately, the city was able to provide a substantial amount of aid through the payroll tax program. I was very involved in the day to day activities that were associated with

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this process. It required me to communicate with Community representatives, Elected Officials and a tele conference meeting with the Commissioner and Legislators concerning the inner workings of the budgeting process. I was in a very dubious position because the Board was blaming the State for its budget short fall and I was the State representative. My projection for this year's budget is there will be a short fall similar to last year and the same circumstances will have to be addressed. In reference to the day to day budgeting procedures the District is in compliance and is very cooperative in trying to be as fiscally responsible as possible considering the circumstances. A major hurdle was the civil service area. It appears there was a lack of due diligence in recording of staff positions into the CAMPOS system. At each Board meeting Board members are discussing any budget issues and I am privy to this information.

Personnel

Based on the metric score the District is performing effectively in this area. This is the most difficult area constantly advising Board members of their role when it comes to the day to day business of Human Resource. Board members are responsible for scrutinizing every employee that they vote on to the point where it sometimes undermines the recommendations of the Superintendent. The role of the HSP becomes that of a mediator and negotiator on every monthly Board agenda to ensure that both Administration and Board are working to support the Superintendent's recommendations.

I was constantly involved in the reinforcement of communication with the County Superintendent and contract submittals.