



Newfane Central School District

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Michael J. Baumann
Superintendent of Schools

"Together We Can"

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Dear Colleagues:

As we near the end of the school year, and start thinking about where we go from here, it's fitting to talk about our final goal, which focuses on creating a comprehensive structure that gives greater voice to all constituent groups in helping plot the trajectory for the District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Baumann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael J. Baumann
Superintendent

Board of Education Goals

1. **Advocacy** - Initiate advocacy efforts with local and state legislative members on behalf of our District and our region.
2. **Policy Review** - Complete a comprehensive review and update of the Newfane Central School District Policy Manual.
3. **Professional Development** - Engage in a systemic effort to participate in and take advantage of Board of Education professional development opportunities to facilitate growth as a governance body.

District Goals

1. **Student Achievement**-
 - (a) Initiate activities to increase the percentage of students who take and pass the third year of Regents level mathematics (Algebra 2) prior to graduation from the 2015-2016 level of 37% to 45%.
 - (b) Initiate activities to ensure that 85% of our students will participate in a college-level (Advanced Placement or local college-articulated) course prior to graduation.

A tremendous amount of debate, both amongst the board members and within the administrative team, went into the creation of these two goals. While they may seem on the surface to be geared towards pushing more of our students to a college experience, the structure and intent behind these goals is not that simplistic. For me, it is more about providing our students with the opportunity to develop the skill set necessary to be successful in whatever they choose to do in their post-Newfane CSD life, not about pigeon holing them into any one or two particular paths. We want our students to graduate believing they can accomplish anything they put their minds to- that they can be anything they want to be. No student should look at their future and think, "I wasn't a good student- I can't go to college; I can only dig ditches." They should be leaving here saying "I could go to college if I wanted; I know I could handle it. But I really like digging ditches; I'm going to pursue that career." There have been a number of studies that have found a very high correlation between young adults who successfully completed a third year of Regents math in high school and who then successfully completed their higher education experience- whether it be a two or four year degree. Essentially, the studies found that students who completed three years of rigorous math in high school are more likely to complete college. But the key word in there is "complete". If you accept and complete the challenge of Math 3, you can meet and complete any challenge in your future- boot camp, apprenticeship, college. That's the message and intent behind 1a. Goal 1b is an extension of that precept- "you can do it". We have so many wonderful opportunities for our students to prove to themselves that they can do college level work- with levels of rigor stretching from community college to AP- that no child should leave here believing they are not capable of doing college level work. It doesn't mean they have to; or even that we expect them too. But they should graduate from Newfane with a sense of "I can if I want too."

2. **Technology**- Develop a comprehensive multiyear plan, utilizing the smart schools monies as a primary resource, to create a technological infrastructure within our district and community that better prepares our students with a solid technological knowledge base for the future.

This goal is probably one of the easiest to defend and explain. We are one of the few, if not only, school in WNY that does not have wifi capacity in the buildings. As a result, we are not doing what we need to do to prepare our students for the wifi world they will be living in once they graduate. Whether it be a work environment or in college, our students need to be prepared for a world that increasingly relies on web-based technology. And thanks to the Smart Schools Grant, we have access to funding to help us at least establish ourselves in the 21st century. The Smart School Investment Plan Task Force (SSIP Task Force) has been meeting since last year to meet the grant requirements of a "stakeholder developed" spending plan for the \$1.6 million in funds available to the District. We presented the spending plan to the Board last Tuesday night, and it will be posted on the District website for everyone to review. There will be a public hearing on February 21, prior to the board meeting that night, and hopefully we'll have the plan submitted to SED for approval immediately after that.

In terms of "where we're going", the end game is to have the infrastructure and capacity for 1:1 use of technology in instruction in every classroom. Professional development in the use of 1:1 technology will be an important part of attaining this goal, as will the decisions the task force will make around which devices and learning management systems are best for our district.

3. **Professional Development**- Establish a thoughtful, articulated and well planned professional development program focused on identified District and building level curricular and instructional needs based upon student performance and District initiatives.

One of the things I discovered very early on in my time here at Newfane was that if we provided anything in the realm of professional development, it would be well received. After a couple years of not having a district-wide focus, anything direction looks like the right direction. After close to 30 years in the game, one of the things I've realized is that good teachers crave opportunities to get better at their craft. And left to their own devices, they will find opportunities to grow in those areas that

are important to them as individuals. And that's not a bad thing- we all have different strengths and weaknesses, we all teach differently, we all have different interests and needs. So we certainly don't want to eliminate the ability of the individual professional educator to identify and participate in professional development activities that meet their needs. But we have to also recognize that we as individuals are a part of something bigger- we are part of a team, a department, a grade level, a building, a District. And those larger "collectives" will have focus areas for professional development as well- i.e., our District-wide focus on math this year, or the K-5 focus on ELA/Writer's Workshop planned for this coming summer.

So as we look at developing plans to address this goal, we know that the "thoughtful, articulated and well planned" program has to provide for both the needs of the individual and the needs of the collective.

There is also a fiscal aspect to professional development that I won't pretend isn't there. The NTA contract provides teachers with the opportunity, through professional development, to earn money beyond their regular salary. That is a substantial investment on the part of the District. But we believe professional development is important- and if something is important, you have to be willing to invest in it. But that investment also brings with it a fiduciary responsibility on my part to make sure we're "getting something" for the money we invest (those in the business world call it "return on investment").

The other aspect of creating a professional development program that we need to consider is identifying the focus. Obviously, the general focus is on activities that will support and help us meet the District student achievement goals. The PD goal statement talks about identifying "curricular and instructional needs based on student performance and District initiatives." We have identified District Student Achievement goals for this year; hopefully, you have all engaged in identifying building level goals as well that support those District goals. Now the question becomes what do you need, as an individual AND as a team, department, building, etc., to meet those goals?

And while we often look at professional development strictly through the lens of the impact on achievement through instruction, we also need to be cognizant that there are many people here in the District who are not involved in direct instruction with our students, but who nevertheless work with them on a daily basis and have an impact on their achievement. We need to consider ways to accommodate the professional development needs of these people as well.

This is the point where this goal dovetails with how we hope to achieve goal #5. I have begun discussing with the Board and the administrative team about establishing a formalized structure within the District that creates a system of standing committees with clearly defined purposes to provide venues for stakeholder input into a variety of areas that are related to determining the focus and direction of the District. One of those standing committees ("Curriculum Committee"?) would have as a part of their responsibilities identifying and recommending appropriate staff development opportunities. Obviously, this would be based on their work in looking at and assessing achievement data from each of the buildings.

This past year, the PD plans have been generated predominantly by the administrative team. We need to expand that model to create a system that provides for greater input and leadership from the "trenches" as we move forward. We've made some great strides in that direction (the TCI training being offered by Nadine Kurial and Alicia Traverse, the "Just One Kid" book study being led by Lisa Fletcher, Christina Roach leading the math work at the Middle School); I look forward to more of our instructional staff becoming leaders in our professional development efforts, both in the grass-roots planning of PD and in the delivery of it.

4. Fiscal Management- Initiate activities to review the budget development and implementation process in order to ensure a multi-year approach and the involvement of all internal stakeholders.

This is probably the most vague of our goal statements. The budget development process is a study in contrasts. We try to present it in a straightforward, easily understandable way so the members of the public, who don't deal regularly with the intricacies of a school district budget, can wrap their heads around the fiscal needs of the school district and how we hope to provide for those needs. But one look at the 60 page line item spending plan that governs the District's expenditures gives a startling glimpse into the depth and detail of fiscally running our District. All of which is done in an annual maelstrom of uncertainty- what will we get in state aid? What will the tax cap be? Will we have employee retirements? Will the assessed value of the property in town go up or go down? And typically we don't get answers to these revenue questions until after we have to adopt a spending plan for the next school year.

A school district budget has two basic parts- expenditures, or how much money we need to run the district, and revenue- where that money will come from. A big part of this goal is to move in the direction of bringing a higher level of site-based input into certain expenditure decisions at the building level. Obviously, there are some expenses that are driven by legal and contractual obligations. Personnel costs and special education funding are just two examples of what we consider non-discretionary expenses. But in budget areas like materials and supplies, equipment, curricular materials, etc., we want the building leadership to have a greater voice in telling us what they need, as opposed to us telling them what they can have. It sounds like a simple change, but in reality it places a tremendous amount of responsibility on the building leaders. There are NOT unlimited funds- we all know that- so the decisions on how to spend the funds available in a given year have to be made

within a much larger context that takes into consideration not just this year, but the next several years. And that leads right into the multi year approach to budgeting.

Attempting to budget into the future is incredibly frustrating. There are so many significant expenditures that we have no ability to control costs on- health care premium increases, TRS and ERS contribution rates, gas and diesel pricing. On the revenue side of the budget, state aid typically accounts for more than half our budget- but education aid is a political football and you never know for sure how it's going to bounce. The tax cap varies year to year, and that controls to a great extent our ability to generate funds from the tax levy (the public).

With so many variables in the equation the importance of those items that we can control, both on the expenditure side and the revenue side, become even more crucial. Materials and supplies, technology, equipment, personnel- these are areas where we can control spending. And typically, these are also the areas that most directly impact classroom instruction and student achievement. And therein lies the crux of what makes the budgeting process so difficult, and why it is so important to get greater input and feedback from those on the front lines in our buildings with our kids.

5. Communication & Community Involvement- Establish a framework for District and building level shared decision making and leadership development; and to establish structures that will strengthen both communication and involvement of employees, families and community members in District shared decision making.

As the current school years quickly draws to a close and we finalize our planning for the summer and the next year, I feel like we are in the perfect position to begin moving forward with the fifth District goal adopted by the Board back in January. This goal focuses on two areas that are very easy to overlook- communication and community involvement. Even though I talk to and with dozens of people every day, that doesn't make me an effective communicator. As I look back at the information I've shared with you previously about we came to these goals I realize what a poor job we've done communicating to you about how we are progressing with them. And that is just one example; there are so many others- great things that are going on here in the District as well as challenges we are facing- that only those who are in the midst of them really know about.

And you can't talk about improving communication without including the community. And by community, I mean everyone and anyone who is directly or indirectly affected by the District. Not just parents, students, teachers, etc- but townspeople, higher education reps, shop owners, retirees- not just those who benefit from the District, but all those who also support it. In my experience, one of the things that I have found to be a crucial component in establishing, and maintaining an effective communication network is having a structure in place that is built around positional responsibilities, not the interests or skills of the individual. In other words, structures that will continue to function regardless of who is in the position associated with the structure.

The attached schematic outlines one vision of what this kind of structure might look like. It is based on a couple of core premises:

- *The **standing committees** have a clear set of annual core duties and responsibilities. There is always a reason to meet because they each are responsible for addressing issues that are ongoing. Additional things can always be included and/or addressed; but their core responsibilities never go away. Standing Committee leadership and membership is established by position, not by person. For example, regardless of who the Director of Curriculum is, that person will always be responsible for co-leading the curriculum committee. The CFs will always be involved in that committee's work, regardless of who actually fills those positions.*
- *The **Building Leadership Teams** will have a consistent structure and mission as well. There is currently some inconsistency there, and that will be something we need to address as we move forward.*
- *These seven groups feed into the **District Leadership Team**. The purpose of the DLT is to serve as a gathering point for information sharing from all the standing teams and committees, as well as the building teams, and as a reporting entity to the Board. Once this structure is in place and functioning, the mission of the DLT will be to synthesize the information that is shared, and then use that information to identify and establish District Goals for the next school year. Then it should become a cyclical process that takes on a life of its own- goals established in the summer, updated throughout the year, assessed in May, and then decisions made about renewing, adjusting, or establishing new goals the following summer.*

A couple of things to consider: standing committees and teams always exist, because they are responsible for topics/issues that don't get "solved" or end. Periodically, there may be a need to establish a "task force"- a group focused on addressing a specific, time-bound issue. This group may pull from several committees, or be comprised of people who are not currently on committees. But they are pulled together to perform a specific task; once that task is completed, the task force would then disband. A good example of this would be the Smart Schools Implementation Plan Task Force. That group came

together to write the plan that needed to be submitted to SED for this particular grant. Now that the plan has been submitted, once it is accepted and we begin implementation, the monitoring of the implementation would fall to the Technology Committee.

The other point is to remember that while we talk about "annual goals", there is nothing that says the goals must be completely accomplished in one year; indeed, our current goals were specifically designed as 18 month goals; but some may take significantly longer. Or new goals may very well grow out of the current ones. The Technology Goal was to establish a plan- that has been done. A follow-up goal could very well focus on the timeline for implementing that plan.

As always, I am very open to feedback. The chart I shared certainly isn't written in stone- there may very well be things I have missed. I have gotten limited feedback from previous goals, but what I have gotten has been really good and helpful. If there is a standing committee you would be interested in serving on, let me know. My hope is to have the board approve the standing committees (both their existence and their membership) at the re-organizational meeting in July. I'd also like to hold a District Leadership Team meeting in early August- if you'd like to serve on that Team, please talk to your building principal.

I know this is a very busy time of year, and I appreciate the time you've taken to read through this. Have a great June, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mike Baumann