

# LEARNING – TO BUILD COMMUNITY

## Celebrations and Challenges Superintendent's Entry Plan Summary November 11, 2015

### INTRODUCTION

Dr. Jubal C. Yennie started as the Superintendent of Albany County School District #1 on July 1, 2015, and shortly thereafter outlined an entry plan process with the school board and the community to listen carefully to the needs of various stakeholder groups. Dr. Yennie established a timeline for personally meeting as many stakeholders as possible in order to achieve the following entry plan goals:

- To become acquainted with the district operations and identify key issues that must be addressed immediately.
- To begin to develop key relationships with school district and community stakeholders.
- To identify formal and informal policies, procedures, and communication strategies within the district.

This summary report provides some outstanding celebrations for ASCD#1 and some Challenges and Opportunities. The title, "Learning – to Build Community" directs our attention to two very important themes found in this report: Albany School District #1 is first and foremost about learning and everyone at every level should be consumed by learning—student learning, teacher professional development, and administrator leadership growth. The report also focuses our attention on building community through expanding partnerships and collaboratively working with agencies and organizations throughout the community to serve our children and prepare future generations. These two themes become one driving focus for ACSD#1—to continually learn in order to better prepare our community for the future.

"We have a deep pool of highly dedicated and creative professionals who passionately care about young people, their emotional and academic wellbeing."

ACSD#1 Teacher

## CELEBRATIONS

### Celebrations—Outstanding Wisdom and Learning

I started to celebrate and recognize the contributions of many outstanding educators at our first school board meeting, and we are continuing to recognize accomplishments by visiting schools and presenting special recognitions for our employees. An OWL award is a pewter lapel pin that represents Outstanding Wisdom and Learning. An OWL award signifies a special acknowledgement of a job well done and a recognition for demonstrating or gaining wisdom through learning and persistence. The recipient of an OWL pin is a person who has made a special contribution to teaching and learning in Albany County Schools.

Albany County School District #1 is one of the higher performing school systems in the state, and during my first few months visiting various stakeholders I learned that Albany County School District#1 is a special place for students and families. I am honored to recognize the following areas for celebration and certainly worthy of an OWL award:

❖ **Extensive support and engagement from the school board**

Albany County schools has an engaged school board who care deeply about the community and the school system. School board members are active in the schools and work tirelessly on community initiatives that support our youth and community. I wrote recently in an editorial for the newspaper that "I suspect that Albany County has a long history of electing outstanding school board trustees who desire nothing less than the very best for our students. I have been favorably impressed with the devotion to the work that Albany County school board members have demonstrated during my brief time in Laramie, and I am honored to be working in a school system that highly values education and supports our schools unequivocally."

❖ **Community commitment to the schools is tremendous**

I ask people who are new to the community or people around the state about their perception of Albany County Schools, and they often lead with "high expectations and high academic performance." ACSD#1 is perceived as an exceptional school system, which is attributed to the communities' commitment to education and our schools. Our community supported a number of enhancements to the new high school opening next fall by voting to support the bond.

The community also emphatically supports our youth by establishing agencies and programs to serve our youth. I was enthusiastically impressed that the community has a number of programs to support our students and their families. The United Way, Big Brother, Big Sisters, the Youth Crisis Center, and the Parks and Recreation departments are all exceptional examples of programs we create and sustain for our youth.

❖ **High expectations from parents for their children’s educations.**

Parents hold our schools to a high standard by communicating expectations to teachers, administrators, and school board members. Parent choice for choosing their child’s school is a large part of what makes Albany County schools excel at a high level. Albany County supports parent choice through the University lab school and public school charters, and special program offerings afforded to students and parents.

❖ **Quality academic, athletic, and related arts programs.**

In addition to academic excellence, our community supports and expects our co-curriculum, arts, and athletic programs to be excellent and afford quality opportunities for our students. The school board is committed to providing funding to support personnel and program expenses for our arts and athletic programs, and we challenge ourselves to improve facilities, resources and programs. The enhancements to the new high school are certainly specific evidence of the type of athletic and arts programs our community supports and desires.

❖ **Outstanding teachers.**

Close behind the awareness that Albany County has high expectations for its students is the acknowledgement that we have outstanding teachers. We work closely with the University of Wyoming to prepare pre-service teachers, and often we enjoy the opportunity to select the best teachers for our school system. The University of Wyoming also provides opportunities for accompanying spouses who have husbands or wives enrolled at the University to gain employment with Albany County schools for the few years they live in our community. We welcome the diversity and experience we gain by having some turnover in our professional staff each year.

Teachers also work hard to improve their craft through professional development opportunities in our district and the district’s ongoing support for teachers to earn National Board Certification. A significant percentage of Albany County teachers have earned National Board Certification, and we will continue to support this quality program.

❖ **School system provides an extensive system of support for students.**

The Albany County special education department provides significant support for our students with disabilities. We address specific needs by allocating human and program resources for individual students. Albany County maintains low class size and allocates paraprofessional support to provide the best education we can offer our students and families.

❖ **Resources and facilities provide opportunity for all learners.**

The advent of the Wyoming State Facilities Department several years ago certainly was a game changer for Albany County schools. The community desires quality facilities and opportunities for our children, but without capital construction funding provided through

the Wyoming State Facilities Department, Albany County would not have been able to renew the educational infrastructure. The new high school will be a wonderful facility for the community, and the new Slade elementary school will continue to improve the educational facilities we have in this community. The *K-8 Study and Master Plan* outlines the upcoming challenge to meet capacity needs, but the past commitment demonstrated by this community will certainly carry forward and encourage future generations to support and invest in our facilities.

❖ **Meet and Confer/IBB process is in place for building trust and respect**

I have heard that communication has been a concern for many of our employees, but I recognized very early that Albany County had a solution in place to help ensure that all of our employees had a forum to share concerns. The Meet and Confer process has started slowly, but deliberately, because I am confident that representatives and administrators desire to make sure that this process is done well. The overall objective is to honor and respect all of our employees, and I appreciate the time that employees will contribute to seek answers and work hard to solve problems.

The process is already shaping up to have many challenges, but early successes of communicating regularly and following through with commitments will build trust. One of the early concerns was trying to guarantee that all employees were provided an email that could be accessed, so that all employees could communicate with representatives of their chosen employee group. The Meet and Confer committee will start to work on non-salary items at its next meeting at the end of November. I sense a willingness by all employees to learn about the process, to understand employee needs, and seek solutions.

❖ **Professional Development and Learning**

Albany County teachers have noted several times that they value the professional development team and the value that Instructional Facilitators bring to students in buildings where they are assigned. In addition, there is a desire for continued learning that is apparent with all of our employees—I attended a celebration for the winner of the bus rodeo at Transportation Department; principals are actively learning during principal's meetings; and teachers seek professional development opportunities to improve their skills.

Please keep being a "people" person,  
and show that you value and appreciate  
the hard working people in this district.  
Thanks again!

ACSD#1 Teacher

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The most important part of an entry plan is establishing relationships with as many stakeholders as possible during the first 100 days. The first part of this report details some major themes and celebrations I discovered while completing the entry plan, and we also discovered areas that needed to be addressed immediately—many we have already addressed or set processes in motion to resolve. For example, improving communication processes with weekly school board briefing, the executive E-briefing, and ensuring all employees have emails.

### ❖ **AdvancED Accreditation and Required Actions**

I mentioned earlier in this report that we had to move immediately on some issues that were identified during the entry phase. Albany County School District #1 was accredited in 2013, and the final report required that the school system address three “Required Actions” as listed on page 34 of appendix B by December 2015. The required action items included the following:

1. Implement and routinely evaluate system-wide processes for internal and external communication.
2. Establish ongoing processes to ensure horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum.
3. Deploy a system of grading and reporting that represents consistent standards for attainment of curriculum goals across grade levels and courses.

AdvancED Accreditation requires that we have these areas addressed in a final report in early December 2015. We have done significant work in these areas already this year, and we will finish the report to AdvancED in the next few weeks. We have implemented processes to improve communication with the Meet and Confer process; we are using the curriculum mapping tool for curriculum alignment; and we are establishing consistent grading practices to address the final required action item. We will share the final report with the school board at the December board meeting.

### ❖ **Board policy manual update and revision of policies**

We have made significant board policy changes in the past two months. We approved changes to chapter nine at our last board meeting, and we are addressing changes to chapter seven at our November regularly scheduled board meeting. In addition to the revised chapters we also have a subcommittee working on a transgender student policy and a subcommittee working on reformatting the structure and alignment of the board policies. This is an important goal for the school board to address this year, because many of the concerns regarding processes and procedures will be addressed by formulating updated policies. We realize that this work will not be easy, but I am confident that school board members are willing to address this challenge.

❖ **Extend community, university and state partnerships**

The school board has asked me to be visible in the community and at the state level through participation in community committees, civic organizations, and participation with meetings at the state level. The intended goal is to collaborate effectively with community partners, University programs, and state committees. We have started to establish relationships with community partners through participation on two community boards (United Way and Laramie Business Alliance) and civic clubs. We have members of the lead team attending committee meetings at the city level (Juvenile Services Board) and at the University (UW Partnership). I anticipate additional opportunities to work at the state level as well. I volunteered to serve on a College, Career, and Military task force that will be established by the Wyoming Department of Education, and I look forward to collaborating with Mark Stock on presentations with WYCEL (Leadership training at the state level).

❖ **Professional learning and administrator evaluation**

I highlighted the learning of our teachers and administrators in the celebrations section, and we have already started to revise evaluation procedures for our principals and central office administrators. School board members have suggested that we need to revise all of our evaluation documents and processes, and I feel strongly that we need to begin the work at the leadership level. We will need to start with revising the superintendent's evaluation, and then we will continue work on principal and central office administrator evaluation. A part of the ongoing strategic plan will be establishing timelines and a work flow to revise and prepare job descriptions and evaluation documents for all of our employees.

❖ **High School and Middle School Transition**

I have stated several times that our most important work this year will be the transition of our secondary schools. The new grade configurations at both schools will require extensive realignment of curriculum and instructional processes as well as the need to address logistical changes. We have established transition committees at the district and school building levels, and we will continue to work on the established plans and communicate results to as many audiences as possible. The weekly Owners, Architects, and Contractors meeting will continue as scheduled, so we can ensure that the critical path is maintained, but there is significantly more involved in the move to the new high school and the reconfigured middle school than simply moving students to a different location in the fall of 2016.

I am honored and proud to be serving Albany County School District #1, and I have enjoyed the past few months as I have started to establish working relationships with our stakeholders. I look forward to our continued work on these challenges and opportunities.

Sincerely,



Jubal C. Yennie