



SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION: DR. SARA AHERN

“The true test of leadership is how well you function in a crisis”

- B. Tracy

It is important to note the extraordinary events and challenges confronting Dr. Ahern in the time span of this evaluation. Dealing with a once in a hundred year global pandemic was not included in Dr. Ahern’s plans for the past school year. Before the pandemic, the town was already dealing with a fiscal challenge, but faced additional challenges with the potential of underfunding at the state level. A dramatic, sudden shut down of all in-person learning was also not included as part of the overall plan. Social and racial justice issues took on new significance and emotional reaction across the country. Overseeing the potential closing of a beloved elementary school and all of the emotions involved added to the challenge of leadership. Additionally, five collective bargaining contracts needed to be settled in a time when town funds were dwindling.

It is through this lens that we as the Franklin School Committee assessed the performance of Dr. Sara Ahern. Dr. Ahern’s evaluation is based on the evidence provided for six Performance Goals and six Focus Indicators under the categories of Instructional Leadership, Management and Operations, Family and Community Engagement and Professional Culture. The ratings and comments were reviewed and compiled in public meeting.

PERFORMANCE GOALS RATING: **SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS**

FOCUS INDICATORS RATING: **PROFICIENT**

FINAL COMPOSITE RATING: **PROFICIENT**

GOAL RATINGS

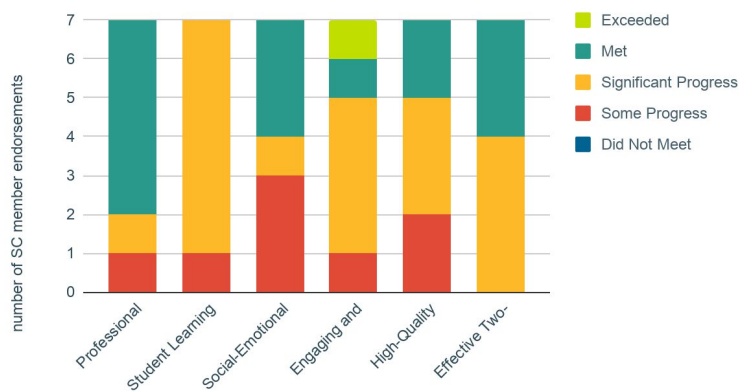
Each of the 7 Franklin School Committee members rated the superintendent's progress on the 6 performance goals and the 6 focus indicators. Individual ratings were compiled in public meeting and averaged to obtain one group rating for each goal, as detailed in the charts below:

PERFORMANCE GOALS: average ratings	
Professional Practice Goal	Met
Student Learning Goal	Significant Progress
Social-Emotional Well-Being of Students and Staff	Significant Progress
Engaging and Rigorous curriculum	Significant Progress
High-Quality Instruction to Meet the Academic & SEL Needs of Each Learner	Significant Progress
Effective Two-Way Communication to Support Student Learning	Significant Progress

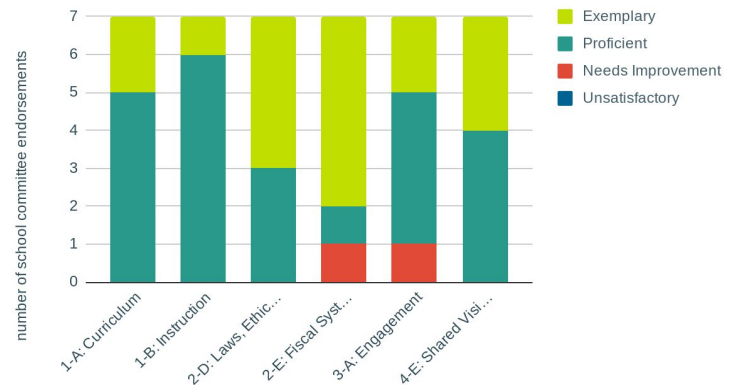
FOCUS INDICATORS: average ratings	
1-A: Curriculum	Proficient
1-B: Instruction	Proficient
2-D: Laws, Ethics, and Policies	Exemplary
2-E: Fiscal Systems	Exemplary
3-A: Engagement	Proficient
4-E: Shared Vision	Proficient

Though these average ratings are important when we're summarizing the superintendent's performance over the previous year, it is also valuable to see how the individual ratings show consistency in many areas but discrepancy in other areas. The distribution of individual ratings are shown in the graphs below:

Performance Goal Ratings: FY20



Focus Indicator Ratings: FY20



The quantitative ratings on pages 1 and 2 are important standardized measures on which to base our evaluation of the superintendent. However, there is a plethora of qualitative information that helps to enrich the numerical data and is an equally valuable part of this evaluation. These narrative comments provide specific feedback on progress toward each goal as well as help to identify possible goal areas for future consideration. School Committee members were encouraged but not required to include comments to supplement their rating of each goal. All narrative comments were read aloud and documented during a public meeting.

The anecdotal information documented below and on the following pages represents a summary of the evidence gathered and all the narrative comments written by individual Franklin School Committee members during this process. Though this is a summary (i.e. not direct quotes from individual members), the subcommittee has worked to ensure integrity and inclusion by checking that all topics are reflected here in some way.

PERFORMANCE GOALS

1. PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE GOAL: Continue to develop skills in strategy development, data analysis, and instructional leadership by completing the third year of the New Superintendent Induction Program.

Dr. Ahern attended eight sessions this past year of the New Superintendent Induction Program and participated in four regional consultancy groups. She and her team have attended a number of conferences throughout the year.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

*Continue to share specific initiatives and insights that have resulted from your participation in Professional Development.

2. STUDENT LEARNING GOAL: By the end of 2020-21 school year, district scores within the three indicators (environment, safety, and engagement) on the Views on Climate and Learning Survey (VOCAL) will increase by 5-7 points.

The Student Learning Goal relative to the three indicators (environment, safety and engagement) as measured on the VOCAL survey, which had a specific goal of increasing ratings by 5-7 at the end of 2020-2021, was interrupted by the pandemic. The survey was not able to be given as MCAS was suspended this past spring.

Evidence reveals significant foundational work toward this goal in the form of surveys, professional development seminars, district leadership meetings.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

none

3. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS AND STAFF: To help students develop connections to school, support positive behaviors, and increase academic achievement, The FPS will enhance programs and practices, while promoting the well-being of staff, to enable each student to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills associated with the core competencies for social-emotional learning.

As students suddenly last spring were forced to learn in a remote setting, one of Dr. Ahern's first messages to families was to state that her priority was for faculty and staff to connect with students, to focus on relationships and children's social/emotional well-being. That message is in line with the priorities of the district plan.

Increasing counseling staff and focusing on the strength of the Instructional Support Team is further evidence.

The Substance Abuse Task Force that met monthly up until school closure focused on both a school and community focus in support of substance use disorder and underlying mental health issues. The vaping detection and prevention initiative is ongoing.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

*Focus on multi-tiered systems of support for SEL, including restorative practices, including outlining resources and staff to support students with varied needs in academics and/or SEL across each tier.

*Work to get feedback from students, regarding their current school experience (e.g. pressures, concerns, etc.) particularly after months of being away from school.

* The goal had been to gather perception data through focus groups, survey, exit interviews, attendance data, recruitment and retention data, to establish a baseline relative to staff well-being. It will be critically important, given the stress levels with which staff is dealing, to complete work in this area, which was interrupted by the pandemic.

4. ENGAGING AND RIGOROUS CURRICULUM: To ensure that students are provided with rigorous learning opportunities that foster the development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they will need in their future college, career, and civic endeavors, the FPS will offer an engaging and rigorous curriculum that focuses on preparing students for a rapidly changing, technologically advanced, globally interdependent future.

Dr. Ahern's focused and passionate work in gathering data for the Portrait of a Graduate is to be commended. A community-wide focus on outlining the hopes, aspirations and dreams Franklin has for its young people is a huge step in creating a new, influential vision for our schools. Portrait of a Graduate will be an "umbrella" under which to organize current initiatives and a beacon to guide future initiatives. After synthesizing hundreds of data points from a variety of stakeholder groups, the areas of focus emerged:

- Confident and self-aware individual
- Empathetic and Productive Citizen
- Curious and creative thinker
- Effective communicator and collaborator
- Reflective and innovative problem solver

It is evident based on all of the School Improvement Plans that curriculum and instruction is being aligned according to the POG. The work on POG was interrupted by the pandemic, but will continue.

Dr. Ahern led the pivot to remote learning and is commended for her calm, focused leadership. Through all of the stress related to transition, Dr. Ahern did not lose focus on teaching and learning. We appreciate the fact that she kept a focus on curriculum work during the pandemic.

The work on the Understanding by Design initiative is so important. It is clearly in harmony with the POG vision. The backward design model is one that will allow the overarching goals of POG to guide all instruction and assessment. It works to identify desired results, determine acceptable evidence and then plan learning experiences and instruction.

Franklin adopted the Illustrative Math Curriculum at the middle level and in the Algebra I and II courses at FHS. Professional development is now being provided at the elementary level as well. This math program is one of the most highly rated in the country. To have a highly rated math program instituted system-wide provides continuity, alignment and is to be commended.

Under Dr. Ahern's leadership, the new Social Studies standards are being implemented district wide. The Social Studies committee has been out in front of this initiative, working on professional development for the last two years. The Primary Source material provides students the opportunity for students to hear individuals throughout history to tell their stories,

to encourage empathy and understanding. Discovery education materials at the middle level, an inquiry framework utilizing primary documents, interactive maps, and project-based learning promotes curiosity and encourages critical thinking (in line with POG).

The expansion of the Keys to Literacy with a focus on adolescent literacy is very important. Students need to read more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level and form independent conclusions based on evidence. This approach incorporates the teaching of literacy in all subject areas with a focus on vocabulary, comprehension and content writing. Struggling readers are given support in decoding and fluency.

Adding the Seal of Biliteracy to the high school experience recognizes the accomplishments of those students who possess the skills to communicate in more than English.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Continue to work on alignment of curriculum across all schools, particularly at the elementary level.

- *Continue to work on educating the public in the spirit of openness and transparency about the rationale for various school staff positions (e.g. administrators, specialists, interventionists). It's helpful for all citizens to understand why such positions are needed in support of the District Plan and POG vision.

5. HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION TO MEET THE ACADEMIC AND SEL NEEDS OF EACH LEARNER: To ensure that each student is supported and challenged to reach their full potential, the FPS will align curriculum, instructional practices and varied assessment opportunities to personalize learning and meet individual needs.

The Devereux Student Strengths Assessment, a strength-based behavior rating scale that is used to both inform and assess in line with the SEL Competency framework, continues to be piloted. Assessed traits include self-awareness, self-management; social awareness; relationship skills; goal directed behavior; personal responsibility; decision making and optimistic thinking. This assessment is an area that has been impacted by the pandemic, but data gathering will continue.

The district is aligned through implementation of the monthly SEL competency focus for students, staff and families.

The Big Day for Pre-K program, in addition to providing a rich array of fiction and non-fiction materials, a focus on math, literacy, science and the arts in a way that feels like play, also weaves eight social skills into every activity: kindness, responsibility; attention; initiative; self-awareness, curiosity and persistence.

The work on cultural proficiency for the district leadership team through 12 hours of professional development is an important initiative.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

*Continue the important work associated with DESSA in establishing a cohesive plan that collects data on social emotional behavior. It will be important to analyze the data, use the data to implement interventions and provide necessary supports. Monitoring progress of these interventions is essential.

6. EFFECTIVE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION TO SUPPORT STUDENT LEARNING: To ensure that all stakeholders are engaged with the school community in support of student achievement, the FPS will enhance opportunities for two-way communication between and among all students, families, staff, administrators and the community.

Dr. Ahern is commended for both her written and verbal communications: always respectful and inclusive. Use of ReGroup, Connect with Us, an easy to navigate FPS website, a seasonal district newsletter, and availability for interviews (podcasts, radio) in many forums is noted. Use of the Communications and Marketing Specialist has been effective in improving communication with the public.

Pandemic-related communications to all families (March 13, March 17, March 25, March 28, March 31, April 21, May 26, June 5th and June 15th) provide evidence of her extraordinary outreach to families, covering both budget and Covid updates/information. She is to be commended for seeking input from all stakeholders when these tough decisions needed to be made. At budget time, she devoted many extra hours to respond to the many parent/staff emails she received.

The committee-based work in the district (e.g. SEL committee) is organized so that representatives participate in the committee then bring information and ideas back to their individual buildings (this helps promote consistency and teamwork). Bringing staff together on the first day of school, to hear an inspirational message focused on the importance of their work, helps bring about a team spirit. Dr. Ahern set the tone noting the importance of relationship building, empathy and getting to know students and families.

Dr. Ahern has created a ceremony to recognize staff who have earned Professional Teaching Status. The ceremony is a thoughtful way to communicate the importance of achieving that milestone. Staff are honored with a heartfelt speech from their supervisor as well as a small gift and certificate.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

*Continue focus on two-way communication with students, teachers and principals to determine how everyone is handling the dramatic changes to their lives.

FOCUS INDICATORS

1-A. CURRICULUM: Monitors and assesses progress across all schools and content areas to ensure that all instructional staff implement effective and rigorous standards-based units of instruction consisting of well-structured lessons with measurable outcomes.

As noted, the Understanding by Design model is an important curriculum addition that addresses the above goal.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

*Continue to improve and develop consistent methods to assess the impact of our curriculum and student achievement.

*Will be important to identify ways to diagnose any learning gaps as a result of the pandemic and its impact on “normal” education.

*Focus on equitable alignment of curricula and instructional practices across all elementary schools.

1-B. INSTRUCTION: Monitors and supports principals and instructional staff through observations and feedback to ensure that instructional practice in all settings reflect high expectations regarding content and quality of effort and work, engage all students and personalized to accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.

Dr. Ahern undertook the pivot to emergency learning in a global pandemic with a strong focus on engaging students and maintaining connections. She has made a commitment to visit classrooms frequently across the whole district, providing feedback to teachers and principals. Certainly in dealing with the pandemic, those visits were not quite as frequent.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

none

2-D. LAWS, ETHICS AND POLICIES: Understands and complies with state and federal laws and mandates, school-committee policies, collective bargaining agreements and ethical guidelines and provides the resources and support to ensure district-wide compliance.

In a time of limited funds, Dr. Ahern led contract negotiations and successfully negotiated five contracts! She led the negotiations with guidance from the legal team in a calm, authentic, transparent way. Her bimonthly meetings with the FEA leadership team have resulted in an overall feeling of trust that allows for diplomatic agreements in times of crisis and uncertainty.

She has a thorough knowledge of SC policy and religiously adheres to those policies in her decision making. Dr. Ahern attends virtually every SC subcommittee meeting, following up on every request for information.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

none

2-E. FISCAL SYSTEMS: Develops a budget that supports the district's vision, mission and goals; allocates and manages consistent with district/school level goals and available resources; and effectively communicates budget rationale to staff, community members, municipal stakeholders and the school committee. Provides regular updates on implementation of the budget.

Dr. Ahern, with feedback from all key stakeholders, created a budget in support of the District Improvement goals and vision for what is best for our students to compete successfully in the 21st century. In an open and transparent way, she provided fact sheets outlining our standing relative to the state in spending; budget gap closing measures, programs previously cut, the impact of unfunded mandates; mitigation strategies, etc. When the pandemic hit, local and state aid was up in the air; the result a 3.4 million dollar need for reduction with the possibility of further reduction from the state (5.4 million dollars).

Dr. Ahern calmly and efficiently went about making the tough decisions, working cooperatively with the Finance Committee and Town Council to make the necessary cuts. In that time, she

respectfully kept the staff in the loop, meeting (virtually) with those individuals who would be impacted by cuts before they were announced publicly. She kept families informed of exactly what would be happening, encouraging them to stay involved and responded promptly to all requests for information. Through the budget subcommittee and superintendent's report at all meetings, the SC was kept informed and input sought. Through the meetings of the joint PCC's, Dr. Ahern provided information and sought feedback every month.

She sought funds by writing to our Legislative Delegation, making sure they were aware of the devastating impact cuts to local aid would mean to Franklin.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Continue to provide consistent updates for the SC and the community, identifying pending budget challenges or opportunities.

- *Continue looking for long-term cost savings and efficiencies, a projection and forecast to the budget for 3-5 years, citing specific areas for improvement, cost savings and potential revenue.

- *Continue to inform and educate the public about the need for certain positions, such as administrators, specialists, so taxpayers understand the rationale and their importance in meeting 21st century goals for our students.

- *Continue to focus on the long-term budget needs for the district, reminding people of the vision and what it will take to make sure our kids have the skills and resources they need to succeed.

3-A FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Engages in regular, two-way, culturally proficient communication with families and community stakeholders about student learning and performance, that is provided in multiple formats and reflects understanding of and respect for different families; home languages cultures and values.

Dr. Ahern and her team have created an open door, collaborative environment that encourages input from community members and stakeholders. She attends meetings held by numerous organizations, spends time within each of the schools and attends many extracurricular events. She has worked hard to have a noticeable presence in the community.

Dr. Ahern was instrumental in getting funding for The Ride Home, an important resource for the community.

When Dr. Ahern, as outlined in SC policy, recommended that DT be considered for closing, she immediately involved families and staff who would be impacted by hosting several meetings. She conveyed empathy and understanding for how difficult these conversations must be for all involved.

The ease and confidence Dr. Ahern exhibits reflects the growth she has shown in this position.

School Councils have renewed importance in the district. Dr. Ahern has encouraged their participation in building budgets, creating School Improvement Plans and supporting site-based management.

The emphasis on family education: social media, sleep research and vaping are evidence of her community outreach.

Her written and verbal communication is respectful and inclusive, understanding the diversity of family structures, and sensitive to the variety of home languages, cultures and values.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- *Continue to create more opportunities for students and families to have direct interaction with district leadership (social media accounts with regular updates, coffee hours, Q & A sessions on a monthly basis).

- *Continue to schedule community forums and events (Parent Education Series); looking forward to Superintendent Blog.

- *To ensure equity of resources across all schools, continue to focus on the ability of PCCs to provide consistent and equitable enrichment opportunities for all students.

4-E. SHARED VISION: Continuously engages all stakeholders in the creation of (or commitment to) a shared educational vision focused on student preparation for college and career readiness, civic engagement, community contributions and responsible citizenship.

Dr. Ahern's mentoring of the new members of the SC has been invaluable. She has demonstrated strong communication skills both in her role as a leader for the entire District and staff, as well as establishing a relationship with SC members. Dr. Ahern holds herself, her leadership team and the entire staff to a high standard of excellence and is consistent with that theme. FY 21 presents an opportunity for a renewed focus on the overall goals and shared vision for the District, working collaboratively with the District staff, community members and the School Committee.

Also see comments in Performance Goal #4, on all of the work done on Portrait of a Graduate.

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

none

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

*Her strong work ethic and devotion to the students and families of FPS. A role model for our staff and students. Staying calm and measured in face of a number of challenging situations.

*The community outreach in creation of the Portrait of a Graduate. Will provide a powerful vision around which to frame budget and curriculum.

*Keeping focus on development of curriculum and professional development up to and including onset of the pandemic. Her commitment in support of rigorous, highly researched-based curriculum.

*Her leadership in navigating the FY20 budget process and skill in negotiating five contracts in challenging fiscal times. Diplomacy in working with the Finance Committee and Town Council in advocating for a budget to support the vision.

*Her leadership in transition to remote learning and dealing with all the unknowns associated with the pandemic. Seeking guidance from CDC, DPH, MA and FEDERAL Govt's, DESE and the local Board of Health reassured the public that she was considering all relevant information when making decisions.

*Frequent communication provided to families during budget preparations and remote learning plans. Responding quickly and respectfully to the feedback/emails from parents, students and staff. Respectful communication reflecting home language, culture and values.

*Knowledge of School Committee policy and using that to guide all decisions. Her mentoring and guidance for new members. Advocacy for funding to our Legislative delegation.

<p style="text-align: center;">SUMMARY OF AREAS FOR CONTINUED FOCUS (most of which were interrupted by pandemic)</p>

- *Continue gathering data relative to staff and student well-being so that baselines are established and growth can be measured.
- *Work on development of multi-tiered systems of support to outline resources to support students with varied needs in academic and SEL, including restorative practices.
- *Realizing we have lost the diagnostic information provided by MCAS, will be important to assess levels of academic achievement. Need to determine strengths and weaknesses, particularly in this time of more remote learning.
- *Follow up on previous work relative to financial equity of PCCs, ensuring equitable enrichment opportunities for all schools.
- *Establish some measurement of “communication between and among” staff and admin during the challenging FY21
- *Focus on equitably aligning curriculum and instructional practices across all grade levels, particularly at the elementary level.
- *Continue educating the committee and the public about the need for administrative staff and the role of specialists. Make sure there are clear expectations for their roles which are made known to the committee and the public.
- *Continue focus on long-term forecast for the budget, seeking long term cost savings, specific areas for improvement and potential revenue.
- *Continue building parent education series and scheduling more community forums. Continue creating opportunities for consistent, regular updates and more opportunities for students and families to interact with district leadership.