



# **Salem High School Redesign Progress Report to the School Committee May 2018**



# BACKGROUND

During the 2016-2017 school year, under the leadership of Superintendent Margarita Ruiz, the district engaged in a comprehensive planning process that included four working committees focused on how to best educate and prepare Salem's students for success in college, career, and civic life. Input and feedback was collected through multiple community forums that involved various stakeholders. This process concluded in spring 2017 when the School Committee approved a multi-year strategic plan to guide the district in charting a path forward.

As part of this plan, the School Committee adopted the following vision and mission for the Salem Public Schools:

## VISION

*All students will be locally engaged, globally connected, and fully prepared to thrive in a diverse and changing world.*

## MISSION

*We are a diverse and welcoming community that promotes the academic, social, emotional and physical development of each student through the equitable delivery of challenging, relevant, and joyful learning experiences. We empower all students to chart a personalized path to success that includes a commitment to the common good.*

In order to actualize this new vision and mission, the strategic plan laid out four pillars of work, each with accompanying strategies and action steps to be carried out during the next few years.

## SALEM PUBLIC SCHOOLS PILLARS

- Create a vibrant K-12 teaching and learning ecosystem
- Reimagine the high school experience
- Nurture staff leadership and empowerment
- Strengthen family and community engagement

The *Reimagine the High School Experience* pillar was influenced by a community survey conducted during the planning period. The survey data included consistent feedback that the high school needed to do a better job of ensuring that every student finishes high school ready for college, career, and civic life. Survey respondents felt that students needed increased access to out-of-school learning experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, community service), as well as opportunities for student voice and empowerment. The community identified six skills and dispositions that have become increasingly important in today's world; these are competencies that respondents hope that every Salem High School graduate will have:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Effective oral and written communication
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Curiosity and imagination
- Initiative and goal-setting
- Appreciation and celebration of diversity

The strategic plan outlined three broad targets for reimagining the high school experience:

1. **Restructuring for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning**  
Redesign programming and the instructional core around student-centered learning principles to better prepare students for college and career in the 21st century.
2. **Student Empowerment: Voice and Leadership**  
Implement structures and processes to ensure that every student has a voice and opportunities for authentic leadership in and out of school.
3. **Equity and Access to College and Career**  
Create a college and career culture throughout Salem high schools by facilitating college and career awareness activities.

This section of the strategic plan was expanded into a more detailed *Future of High Schools* work plan.

## **PROGRESS IN REIMAGINING THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE IN SALEM**

**This report provides the School Committee with a progress report of work completed and work remaining at the one-year mark.**

In August 2017, high school principal David Angeramo convened a district-wide, 18-member high school redesign team, consisting of Assistant Superintendent Kate Carbone, other central office administrators, teachers from Salem High School, Salem Prep, and New Liberty High School, a student, parents, Salem State University, community representatives, and the Salem Teachers' Union president. The team's charge included the following:

- Further delineate the *Reimagining the High School Experience* goals, strategies, and action steps within a four-year implementation plan.
- Identify, plan, and implement “early wins” that can be instituted in the first and second implementation years to generate momentum and enthusiasm.
- Build faculty, parent, student, and community buy-in to the *Reimagining the High School Experience* goals, strategies, and action steps.

The Redesign Team has met monthly throughout the school year, engaging in spirited discussions about each of the team's responsibilities, and resulting in some foundational action steps.

### **Step 1: Building Buy-In: Faculty and Community Forums**

The key to successful implementation of any school or district initiative is ensuring community and faculty buy-in; people who support a change are more likely to implement the design with greater fidelity and follow-through.

In October 2017, an early release day was used to engage the entire Salem High School faculty in thinking about the future of the high school, both as a means to generate specific ideas on how this

could be accomplished as well as to build ownership of the strategic plan's vision of the high school. After providing an overview of the high school section of the strategic plan, the Redesign Team and other recruited teacher leaders facilitated small group sessions in which faculty discussed the following two questions:

- *What can we imagine for future high schools in Salem?*
- *What do these answers mean for me in my role as a high school educator in Salem?*

Common themes that emerged were more engaged, active, and interdisciplinary learning for students, a conscious focus on the six competencies of a high school graduate, flexible scheduling to enable internships and apprenticeships in the community, and caring, trusting relationships between students and adults. Staff noted that for this transition to occur, teachers will need increased time to collaborate and plan with colleagues as well as professional development prior to taking on new roles.

*"We need a greater connection to community through internships as well as work and career opportunities for students."*

*"All students should feel connected to more than one adult in the school."*

*"Adults want students to be active participants in school (all aspects) and trust they can handle it."*

*"Families and the community are an integral part of the school."*

*"Diversity of all kinds should be celebrated."*

In November 2017, a community forum was held to engage parents and community members in discussion on parallel questions:

- *What can we imagine for future high schools in Salem?*
- *What do you see as your role within this redesign process? What do you need in order to feel engaged in this process over the next two years?*

Approximately 80 parents and community members participated in this event, signaling great interest in high school redesign. Emerging themes were encouragingly similar to that of the faculty session: a belief in all students' capacity to excel; increased opportunities for experiential and active learning (including internships and apprenticeships in the community), development of students' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, positive relationships among students and staff, and culturally relevant curriculum. For the redesign to be successful, parents and community members noted that it could not be a solely top-down initiative; parents and community members needed to be engaged in the process. They reaffirmed that teachers need ample support in the transition.

In both the faculty and community forums, the tenor was generally positive and supportive of the initiative to improve the district's high schools, while taking into account concerns about ensuring a thoughtful, inclusive process in implementing change.

## **Step 2: Early Wins**

The Redesign Team felt it was important for there to be some "early wins," that is, steps that are taken in this first year of the district's strategic plan implementation that signal moving forward with high school design. Led by the Redesign Team's Restructuring for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Committee (see more about committee work below), an *Invitation to Innovate* initiative was launched, inviting teachers to apply to test out innovative ideas they propose within one of three areas of the strategic plan:

- Project-based learning with embedded real-world experiences to promote student engagement
- Opportunities for students to have voice and choice in their learning within the realm of social justice and civic engagement
- Engaging students to solve complex problems through the use of technology

Eleven teachers were selected based on the creativity of their proposals; over the remainder of the school year, they have received training, ongoing coaching support, and a stipend to implement their proposed ideas. At the end of the school year, each teacher will be invited to present at an end-of-year event in order to share some learnings about their innovative and experimental practices. The goal is to continue to support the Innovator Group into next year as a means for strengthening student-centered practices across the high school.

### **Step 3. Further Delineate the Reimagining Salem High School Implementation Plan**

In order to translate the *Reimagining, the High School Experience* goals and strategies into a multi-year implementation plan, the Redesign Team established four committees which have been meeting regularly over the course of the school year. Each committee's charge has been to identify a set of tactics to implement over the next year to build momentum toward deeper redesign strategies.

#### **Subcommittee 1: Restructuring for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning**

The aim is for Salem high school classrooms to be places where students are actively engaged in making sense of content by connecting what they are learning to the world around them. They apply skills and knowledge to formulate opinions, take a stance on issues, solve complex problems, and innovate new ways of doing things. The committee has launched (or plans to launch) the following:

- *Engage stakeholders in defining "student-centered learning"*: Partnering with KnowledgeWorks, a national nonprofit organization, the district convened a district-wide, cross-functional group to engage in a discussion about the future of work and its implications for what and how students learn. The kickoff event took place on March 6 and was attended by more than 50 people.
- *Provide opportunities for faculty to take a lead role in the redesign process through an Invitation to Innovate initiative*: (see Early Wins above)
- *Establish Lab Classes to support shifts toward deeper student-centered learning*: The Innovation Teachers' classrooms will be used as lab classroom sites; they will open their classrooms for peer observations by other high school faculty.
- *Newcomer Academy*: The goal of this academy is to meet the needs of newcomer students, prevent isolation, create inclusivity, and support transition to a new school and community. A committee of English as a Second Language (ESL) and Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) teachers will be established to ensure that there are academic and language supports in place across all content areas for newcomer students, both within the Academy and as they are integrated into mainstream classes.
- *Seal of Biliteracy*: A task force composed of World Language and SEI teachers, parents, students, Salem State University faculty, and community members was convened to create a proposal for implementation of a Seal of Biliteracy, which was enthusiastically approved by the School



Committee. Qualifying students in the 2018 graduating class will receive the Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas.

- *1:1 Device Pilot:* A 1:1 pilot for all ninth graders is being planned for next school year. A proposal for scaling up to grades 10-12 is being considered in collaboration with district leaders and the School Committee. The Director of Digital learning is offering summer and school year professional development on applications and platforms that will enhance the use of Chromebooks as a teaching and learning tool in a 1:1 learning environment.
- *Standards-based Practices for All:* Standards-based grading is being piloted this year in the ninth grade. Grade nine teachers will continue to hone standards-based practices next year. These early adopters will also help grow standards-based practices across other grade levels in the coming year.
- *Internships:* Salem High School's recently hired Internship Coordinator is focused on expanding the number of placement sites within the community (higher education, business, community organizations), while continuing to develop the foundation for a robust internship program. An emphasis will be on forming strong relationships with larger institutions, including the city and North Shore Medical Center. The goal is to have 50-60 seniors participate in an internship in the 2018/19 school year.
- *Project Lead the Way (PLTW):* This high-quality program is currently in place at Collins Middle School and will be expanded into the high school next year. There are three possible high school pathways: Engineering, Biomedical Science, and Computer Science. In the fall of 2018, introductory courses in the Engineering and Biomedical Science pathways will be implemented. PLTW provides students with access to real-world, applied learning experiences that empower them to gain the skills that they need to thrive in college, career, and beyond. Students develop in-demand, transportable skills – such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, collaboration, and communication – that they will use both in school and for the rest of their lives, including on any career path they take. Independent research studies show that PLTW students outperform their peers in school, are better prepared for post-secondary studies, and are more likely to consider careers as scientists, technology experts, engineers, mathematicians, healthcare providers, and researchers as compared to their non-PLTW peers.
- *Revitalizing our high school library:* Printed books still play a critical role in supporting learners, but digital technologies offer additional pathways to learning and content acquisition. Students and teachers no longer need a library simply for access. Instead, they require a place that encourages participatory learning and allows for co-construction of understanding from a variety of sources. The vision is that the SHS library will be able to serve as a “learning commons” instead of as a simple repository of materials. There is much work to be done to position the SHS library as the hub of learning and collaboration, including updating the digital and print collections and reframing the space to support small group work and collaboration. A small working group has been formed led by the SHS librarian to plan next steps.

## Subcommittee 2: Equity and Access to College & Career

To strengthen equity and access to college and careers for every high school student, the committee has set the following strategies to implement over the course of the next year:

- *Repurpose the student advisory to focus on college and careers:* An Advisory Committee will gain feedback from students and staff on rethinking the vision, purpose, and activities of advisory for next year. Based on the revised vision, the committee will reorganize the schedule, groupings, staff assignments, and curriculum, while determining the professional development that will be needed to adequately prepare staff for implementing the newly conceived program.
- *Restructure guidance through a redesigned College & Career Center (CCC):* Guidance is strengthening its focus on preparing every student for making thoughtful decisions about college and career. A clear goal of the CCC is on supporting low income and aspiring first generation college students to prepare for college. Over the coming months, activities will include re-thinking and revising the counselor job description as well as determining and developing the curriculum and structures that counselors will use in engaging with students.

To reflect the refined focus on college and career readiness, the CCE physical space will be redesigned to be more inviting to students, parents, and community members, including updated furniture and interior designing, space for one-to-one and small group meetings, and state-of-the-art technology.

The CCC curriculum will focus on having every ninth grader work with their counselor or advisor to develop a four-year plan using Naviance, a technology platform that aligns student strengths and interests to postsecondary plans and helps them to set benchmarks to reach their goals.

In subsequent grades, the CCC curriculum will center on career guidance and self-awareness for tenth graders, post-secondary planning for eleventh graders, and decision-making and transition for twelfth graders.

- *Early College Opportunities:* The CCC has submitted a grant in partnership with Salem State University (SSU), LEAP for Education (LEAP) and the North Shore Workforce Investment Board (NSWIB) to support the implementation of a dual enrollment and early college program. This allows students to access college-level courses prior to graduating high school. The goal for the first year is to have an estimated 35 juniors and 15 seniors taking semester classes mirroring the university schedule, co-taught by a team of high school teachers and university professors. A one-week summer orientation will be provided by LEAP in August; starting in September college classes will be held at Salem High School two days per week. During the school year, LEAP and NSWIB will team up to provide 90 minutes each week of college and career advising and will lead college and career workshops in the weeks after Salem State's fall and spring semesters end. In year two, seniors will be transported to the SSU campus for their courses while a new group of juniors is added. Participating students will be eligible to earn 12 college credits by the end of their senior year. Guidelines for an inclusive recruiting process are built into the grant, so that all students including those with special needs and English Language Learners (ELLs) have access to this opportunity. It is a requirement of the grant that students participating in the program reflect the demographics of Salem high school students overall.

- *100 Males to College:* Also, in collaboration with SSU and LEAP, Salem High School is participating in a statewide *100 Males to College* initiative – an initiative designed to break down the barriers that prevent young men of color and low-income males from applying and enrolling in college. Called *Brothers for Success*, a cohort of twelve young men meet with a Salem High School teacher, an SSU peer mentor, and an SSU faculty member at LEAP twice a month throughout the school year. For the last two years, this program has been funded by LEAP. Now, with funding from the state and a partnership with SSU and SHS, this program will be expanded to a larger number of students who will participate both locally and collaboratively with cohorts from Lynn and Lawrence.
- *Engage parents in students' college and career plans:* Students are more likely to pursue meaningful college and career when parents/guardians are engaged in the process and aware of the opportunities, including financial aid. A Parent Advisory Committee will advise the College & Career Center staff on parental outreach and communication. Student-parent-teacher conferences will be planned for next year in which students share their work and progress with their parents/guardians. Increased outreach efforts (including provision of childcare and translation services) will be used to encourage parents/guardians to participate in events such as Junior Guidance Night, counselor coffees, and community meetings.

### **Subcommittee 3: Career Technical Education (CTE)**

This committee of central office and school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members has been reviewing current CTE programming. Using data such as current labor market projections, student interest surveys, and physical space assessment, the committee will make recommendations on expanding CTE programming to new areas, strengthening current CTE programming, and, if needed, eliminating current CTE programs. The survey course that allows students to explore a range of interests and think about potential future careers will be strengthened.

### **Subcommittee 4: Student Empowerment: Voice & Choice**

Developing student agency (the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative) is as important as developing content knowledge and skills. At present, opportunities for authentic and ongoing student voice and leadership in Salem public high schools are limited and enjoyed by too few students. Thus, the goals for this committee are to:

- *Broaden and diversify opportunities for students to actively engage in school decisions and governance that will improve initiatives and conditions at their school*
- *Ensure that all students take the initiative to participate in all aspects of the school*
- *Thoughtfully develop student leadership skills*

The committee is examining data (e.g., Panorama survey results) to assess the current level of student engagement in the school, which will then be used to identify areas in which students do have voice and those areas in which students have little. As part of this work, the committee will examine current student representation on decision-making bodies in the high school. The Director of Community-School Partnerships will work with teachers in the Innovations project to help them think through how to embed greater student voice and choice in their projects.



## Looking Forward & Lessons Learned

**To sum up, some initial and exciting steps are underway within the context of the high school redesign process, but significant work remains.** As we work toward equity and excellence across our high schools, deeper review and analysis of current practices such as tracking, the block schedule (and the degree to which it supports student-centered learning), equity of student engagement in extra-curricular activities and sports, and the use of culturally relevant instructional practices is needed. In addition, there is work to be done in exploring other high school models and how these might inform larger-scale change within and across Salem high schools. In order to maintain momentum for positive change and reform, the following next steps are recommended:

1. *Engage a partner to help facilitate the change process*—We have learned that planning for large-scale change while also leading day-to-day operations of the school and district poses significant challenges. We need an expert change facilitator who will lead teacher and student teams in data analysis, a review of promising models, and development of a bold high school reform vision. It will be critical to expose stakeholders to innovative, effective high school models and practices in other districts that can be used to craft a bold vision for Salem’s future.
2. *Cast a wider net to include many more stakeholders within the redesign process*—The redesign process needs to be informed and owned by a broad stakeholder group, including students, staff, parents, and community partners. As we move deeper into the redesign process, we are committed to ensuring broader stakeholder involvement.
3. *Build a stronger partnership between Salem high schools*—We seek to more thoughtfully engage faculty from all three district high schools within the redesign process. While much of the redesign will likely focus on Salem High School, there are aspects of the work that will be transferable across all three high school models within the city. Having the consistent involvement of Salem Prep and New Liberty Innovation School faculty and staff is essential to ensuring that outcomes of the redesign process benefit all of Salem’s high school students.
4. *Continue to pursue funding for High School Redesign*—The district seeks to build relationships with possible funders and is watching for grants that will support our high school redesign work.
5. *Stronger, more consistent communication*—We recognize that we can do a better job with communication of the redesign effort as it unfolds. While we hope to have many more stakeholders involved in this work going forward, not all faculty, students, or parents will play a direct role. Therefore, it is essential for us to have a multi-dimensional communication plan through which we can disseminate information about the redesign process using a variety of communication tools and formats.
6. *Provide the School Committee with regular updates*—The SHS principal and redesign team will keep the School Committee frequently updated on developments throughout the course of next year. As priorities emerge, there may be a need to adjust roles and shift funds to support redesign work. We are committed to keeping the School Committee abreast of the work as it unfolds.