



# Update from the Superintendent

To: All BDS Employees

From: Mark McQueen, Superintendent

Date: January 26, 2024

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*This is a copy of the Superintendent's weekly message that is sent to parents/guardians. We want to make sure you have the same information as well, so you're in the loop :)*

I am grateful for the warm welcome and support I have received from this incredible community during my first six months as the Superintendent of Bay District Schools. Working alongside our dedicated Team of Teams to shape the future of education in our district is a privilege and a commitment I am determined to execute to the best of my ability. This week, I am excited to provide you with an update on our progress and outline our priorities for the coming months.

## **Priority One: Ensuring Campus Safety**

The safety of our students is our top priority. During the past six months, we have implemented several measures to enhance the security of our campuses. From upgrading security systems to conducting regular safety drills, we are committed to creating a safe and secure learning environment for every student. And yet, there is more that we can and will do to ensure the continued safety of all.

## **Priority Two: Putting the "A" back into Bay District Schools**

Currently, Bay District Schools is ranked 29th in the state, but we're on a journey to a top-ten position. We are dedicated to providing a world-class education for our students and intend to significantly improve our state ranking and the overall academic achievement of our students. This involves an intentional, focused and aspirational recasting of our vision, our mission and our overall strategy - work that is already underway. I am confident that, working together, we will put the "A" back into Bay District Schools.

## **Priority Three: Valuing Our Team of Teams**

Our Team of Teams is the backbone of BDS, and it is crucial that we recognize and value their contributions. A comprehensive salary study is underway, and we hope it will highlight ways to improve compensation for our dedicated educators and staff. Competitive salaries play a key role in our ability to attract and retain the top talent needed to provide an exceptional education to our students. It is incomprehensible to me that 70 percent of our support employees currently make \$15 an hour. As a school system and as a community, we must address this while ensuring that our other salaries are the best they can be.

## **Priority Four: Comprehensive Policy and Salary Review**

A comprehensive overhaul of BDS policies is already in progress. Did you know that, just last year, there were 72 laws changed in the state of Florida that relate to education? That means, at a minimum, 72 policies must be revised and aligned with new state statutes. While this, in and of itself, would be a herculean task, the reality is that many of our policies need to be improved. Working with a consulting company, we will ensure that our policies align with the evolving needs of our students, educators, and parents and that they are aligned with State and Federal law. We are committed to transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness in developing these policies.

## **Long-Term Priority: Building Trust and Planning for the Future**

Establishing and nurturing trust in Bay District Schools is an enduring commitment that spans various facets. Our pursuit of excellence in safety, education, policy reform, and employee support is integral to cultivating a strong sense of trust within our community. We are proud of our robust partnerships with the Bay County Chamber of Commerce and the Panama City Beach Chamber of Commerce. These collaborations signify the unwavering support of our business leaders, who are prepared to address the challenges that lie ahead.

In addition to our valuable business alliances, we acknowledge the pivotal role played by the numerous non-profit agencies in our community. Their dedication to supporting our children and families is a cornerstone of our collective efforts. Rest assured, we are dedicated to harnessing every available resource on behalf of our stakeholders, fostering an optimistic outlook on the collaborative work that awaits us.

Simultaneously, we are committed to championing community-wide initiatives such as affordable housing and expanding our community's childcare network. Prioritizing the stability and well-being of our employees and families is paramount, and we are grateful to the community leaders who are driving these essential initiatives.

Looking ahead, I am resolute in ensuring that Bay District Schools remains well-positioned for the future. With a notable influx of residents to our area, proactive planning is imperative to meet the evolving needs of our community's children. As certain areas in Bay County experience explosive growth, our strategic planning extends to establishing several new schools within the next 5-10 years. Recognizing that each school is a substantial investment ranging from \$50 to \$90 million, we are committed to thorough assessments of needs and identifying optimal locations for these new schools. This forward-thinking approach ensures that Bay District Schools meets current demands and continues to thrive in the years to come.

By working collaboratively, we will continue to make Bay District Schools a place where every student thrives and every educator excels. We want you to be proud of us and to join us in celebrating our achievements. Thank you for your dedication to our students and our shared vision for a bright future.