



# August 2022 EWSD Instructional & Operational Update

## Superintendent's Message

It is August, and we are ready for students to fill the schools. The Directors of Instruction and Operations spend the summer planning, diving into projects, and supporting our school communities. August 2022 feels different than the last two summers. There is excitement and joy back in all of us. We all took some vacation days this summer and are ready for the school year to begin. We look forward to working with staff next week as we continue preparing for students on August 31st. During our August retreat, the EWSD Instructional Leadership Team focused on our Response to Intervention System, our Teacher Growth Model, and our Youth Truth Survey. We spent time as instructional leaders learning, laughing, and collaborating. We were fortunate to have EWSD's Chief Operating Officer, our Director of Finance, and our Director of Facilities & District Safety join us. This was significant for the team because the district office needs to understand and appreciate our principals' impact on student success.

This summer, getting ready for this year's monitoring of Executive Limitation Policies has been a major focus. Along with the policy work, we have been working with Battelle for Kids to facilitate our Portrait of a Graduate. We are looking forward to engaging the community in this work.

As superintendent, a focus of mine this year is to have happy and proud students and staff. I am curious about this. I will ask questions and engage with students and staff on what we need to do to ensure everyone is happy and proud to come to EWSD every day.

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## Learning & Instructional Impact

Over the summer, we updated our web pages to reflect the most recent work that has been completed on our Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. We have also added a multi-lingual web page that reflects our current work and updated practices in this area. Our most recent multi-lingual program newsletter can be found [here](#). We held our first ever EWSD Curriculum Camp in June. We had 75 EWSD PK - 12 educators engaged in two days of teacher-led projects that led directly to enhancements and improvements in curriculum, assessment, and instruction. We also worked to improve our health curriculum (PK -8 )to ensure alignment with our equity policy and the education quality standards.

This year we will enhance our assessment and data system with the use of a common universal screener and progress monitoring tools for reading and

mathematics. These tools will be used across all of our K-12 schools.

We will continue to support our Professional Learning Community and Response to Intervention work through ongoing training, monitoring, and support of systemic implementation in each EWSD school. With the implementation of ACT 173 on the horizon, we have worked (and will continue to work) very closely with student support services to ensure we have the systemic components in place to meet the needs of all students and educators as we execute these changes.

Our professional development institute continues to grow, and we have many opportunities to share expertise in EWSD through teacher-designed and led professional development opportunities in the coming school year.

## Equity & Inclusion

Our equity focus continues to guide our work and create change in EWSD through each and every sector of the organization. The Equity Procedure will be posted to begin the year. Each school will be developing an Equity Team to support the implementation of the action steps recommended by the EWSD Equity Advisory Committee. This will serve as a structure for comprehensive implementation of specific action to move toward the goals outlined in the Equity Policy. The intersection of Instructional Leadership and Equity Driven Leadership was a theme of the EWSD Leadership Retreat this summer and integration of equity into the EWSD Teacher Growth Model was an outcome of this focus.

Many structures have been put into place to support the needed changes toward an equitable educational system. Moving from policy, procedure, structures, and awareness, to instructional, environmental, and cultural change will be front and center this school year. The Annual Equity Report will be published in the fall, along with an action planning document to support equity-driven leadership and staff growth. The concrete bodies of work will be evident in these documents and support our community in the work this school year.

## Social Emotional Learning & Wellness

Similar to how we practice with our academic standards, we have embraced a reflective and growth mindset in the development and revision of the SEL standards. Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, SEL coaches reached out to stakeholders for feedback and made some adjustments and enhancements to the SEL Essential Standards for 2022-2023. K-5 standards were amended to ensure closer alignment with the Second Step curriculum (a curriculum tool we use to support direct SEL instruction K-5). 6-8 standards were consolidated and revised to increase utility across the different content areas. Additionally, as standards were updated, coaches continued to cross-reference the [Social Justice Standards](#) and integrate language where there was overlap. All of our updated SEL Essential

Standards can be previewed [on our EWSD website, here.](#)

## Student Support Services

As we bring in the new school year, August is spent planning for a year of professional learning as well as organizing systems to ensure implementation of IEPs and 504 plans for EWSD students. In addition and in support of the implementation of Act 173, the Vermont Special Education Rules were recently revised and a number of significant changes were made. Many of these changes went into effect July 1, 2022 and additional changes will go into effect July 1, 2023. Training for staff will ensure a working knowledge and capacity to implement the newly minted rule changes. As a part of these changes, a strong focus on Response to Intervention, in coordination with the office of learning and instructional impact, will take center stage at the beginning and throughout this school year. Professional development to continue and build an intentional and robust set of available interventions across EWSD is also of importance.

While less tied to the specifics of the implementation of instructional programs, EWSD is in the midst of moving from one special education and 504 management system to another. We will be focused on training, data transition, and addressing unanticipated challenges that are inevitable when shifting such an impactful system for EWSD. The office has spent much time this summer working toward this transition.

## Early Childhood Education

This summer, the early childhood team got off to a great start for the coming year by attending a two-day retreat together. Our goals for this time included developing our collective commitments, envisioning an exciting future for early childhood in EWSD, determining some immediate and long-term action steps that will help us realize our vision, and beginning to align our systems and processes across all EWSD preschool locations. We ended our two days together feeling energized and

excited about our work as a collaborative team moving forward.

### Early Education Program Commitment

*The EWSD Early Childhood Education program is a collaborative, interdisciplinary program that honors and celebrates children, families, and staff in our unique school community. We work to foster a safe and fun environment where everyone can take risks, learn, and grow.*

Wendy Cobb is thrilled to be working with this dynamic, highly skilled, dedicated early education team. We are happy to welcome to the team Corinn Haker, an additional early childhood educator/special educator, increasing our number of preschool classrooms across the district from five to six. This additional classroom, located at Essex Elementary School, opens up another twenty slots for Essex preschool children. We are also fortunate to welcome to the team Lynn Varley, SLP, and Meg Pechenick, ELL educator.

This year we will continue to align our work and processes across all preschool locations, including but not limited to, curriculum and instruction, refining identified early learning essential standards for social emotional learning, math, and literacy, assessment through play, and developing a system of interventions. Most importantly, we are looking forward to building strong relationships with our children and families and ensuring the growth and development for all students in our care.

### **Policy Implementation & Project Management**

Policy Implementation and Project Management works to provide a clear throughline with the EWSD Mission, Vision, Goals, and systems that strengthen our work to support all learners. This includes strategic planning of our comprehensive programs that supports the work of our organization along with family engagement strategies allows us to have a consistent and sustained focus on our Continuous improvement Plan and District Goals. This work includes how we support our students

and families on regular and consistent attendance in schools. We are working towards a streamlined and equitable reporting system of student attendance and a response process that provides resources to families to increase student attendance. This position supports the Superintendent in ensuring that our policies and procedures center on the needs and experiences of all community members.

### **Technology & Innovation**

The Technology Department finds the summer to be our busiest time of year. This year is no exception. As you are aware, we signed a new contract for our printers/copiers and have delivered about 85% of the new machines at this time. Supply chain issues have delayed the remaining devices into the end of August and early September, but we anticipate being fully delivered by Sept. 7. So far, we have been very pleased with the performance of Symquest, our new vendor. An attractive piece to our new contract is a product called Papercut, which gives us, and users, much more control over print jobs. Reducing our paper use is a key focus and it also allows us to provide “private” printing, delivered with the swipe of a badge.

We continue to support teaching and learning and are focusing our integration staff more on Digital citizenship skills and the ways that students communicate and interact with one another. Additionally, we are supporting the Curriculum Dept., with a new assessment tool provided by Renaissance Learning and expecting a Fall rollout. We also welcome a new Education Technology Integration Specialist (ETIS) at the High School, Renee Langevin. Renee comes to us from the Mount Mansfield District and is filling the role left by Carrie Malekoff’s retirement. She has been prepping up all Summer to jump into this new role.

Along with bringing in the new copiers/printers, we are slowly phasing in new technology in the form of Interactive Boards, essentially a large touchscreen TV. These are being phased in exclusively at the K-8 schools as an older technology (Smartboards) starts to reach

end-of-life. Training and support will continue through early Fall to integrate the new technology.

A continued focus in the Department on the technical side is cybersecurity. We are penning a Cybersecurity Incident Response Plan and are applying for grant funds through the Agency of Education to support this work. We did some good work last semester, as we engaged with our leadership team on a Table Top exercise meant to simulate a cyber incident so we could explore how best to deal with something like this, should it occur. We did well in the exercise but see some areas to improve and will focus our Response plan on some of these aspects.

As always, during these challenging times, we are positioned to assist families struggling with access to the Internet. We continue to have hotspots available to those that can avail themselves of their use, and our Helpdesk is always open to family questions about the use of technology. We are available each day at 802-857-7777 or email support at [helpdesk@ewsd.org](mailto:helpdesk@ewsd.org)

## Finance and Payroll

The summer months are a busy time for our finance and payroll departments. Payroll is focused on processing all of our year-end separations and retirements, setting up our 200+ summer assignments, updating contracted staff pay rates for the new year, and getting our 200+ new hires and reassignments set up for the next school year. In addition, the contribution rates for the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System (VSTRS) changed effective July 1, 2022, and all of our licensed staff needed to have their contribution rates recalculated and adjusted in our payroll system.

The finance staff is focused on closing out the fiscal year and preparing for our annual financial statement audit. Our audit firm, RHR Smith & Co, spent a couple of days on-site in June to do some preliminary audit work, and they are returning the week of September 5th to wrap up their audit work for the fiscal year 2022. In addition, year-end is a time for many filing deadlines with the State Agency of Education. We have to file our final

Special Education spending report, the annual StatBook financial report, the annual Medicaid reinvestment report, and the annual ESSER Maintenance of Equity report and Annual Performance Report.

Our banking relationship with Peoples United Bank is also undergoing some changes due to the recent merger with M&T Bank. We are migrating to a new online banking system, and we have issued all new credit cards to our leadership staff across the District.

On top of all of that amazing work, we also began configuration on a new payroll/human resources module called Position Control in our eFinance system. Position Control provides us with numerous features for planning, budgeting, and reporting on staffing levels and vacancies. Position Control will allow us to set occupancy limits for positions and apply specific budget allocations for salaries and benefits. We look forward to the improvements this module will bring to our budgeting work for FY24.

Finally, we welcomed Brittany Ouellette, our new Assistant Director of Finance, to our team at the beginning of August. Brittany comes to us with school district experience and is an Essex High School graduate. Brittany has hit the ground running and is working on learning EWSD systems, processes, and procedures.

## Human Resources

HR has been short staffed by 2.0 FTE this summer due to turnover and a long-term absence.

We are implementing Applicant Tracking, which is part of our Power School System. Recently they informed us that we need to implement Records before implementing Applicant Tracking for full functionality and efficiency. We are scheduled to start the implementation of Records in January 2023, creating a delay in the implementation of Applicant Tracking.

As of 8/12/22 we have off-boarded 99 employees, and have hired 152 employees (including 9 rehires and 61 reassignments) for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

The number of vacancies as of 8/12/22 was approximately 67 FTE. Only 1.5 FTE of this is for licensed educator positions that were recently added using ARP ESSER funds.

## Transportation

Transportation is in the sign-up phase for generalized and specialized routes, and #s are comparable to last year at this time. 1150 students have been signed up by families for generalized service routes. Barring any last-minute driver attrition, 22-23 will start with fewer, longer generalized service routes, but no 1-day cancellations. This school year marks the first year with a single bus contractor, STA/Mountain Transit, who will operate all of our generalized service routes. They have 18 of 23 home-school route driving positions filled, but virtually no dedicated extra/co-curricular drivers or substitute drivers.

In 22-23 EWSD will self-operate all of our specialized bus and minivan routes. To date, 50 students have been signed up by case managers, which is roughly half of our average annual specialized registration. EWSD has 5 of 8 driving positions filled, and one trainee. EWSD received delivery of 3 new specialized school buses and awaits delivery of a minivan able to transport passengers in wheelchairs.

Based on a significant uptick in student behavior reports last year, we are investing a significant amount of our start-of-year training in behavior and conflict management.

## Facilities & District Safety

### Facilities

This spring, each of the school building's Lead Facility Technicians created and posted their summer cleaning and project lists which are the guiding worklist for the summer at each school. This information was shared with all staff for planning purposes. Deep cleaning of classrooms, floor scrubbing, general maintenance, and painting with specific timelines is our goal. All of our

buildings remained open all summer for camps and summer classes.

A new work order system, MasterLibrary, which was implemented during the 21-22 school year, has also helped determine the priorities of work to be completed while being mindful of creating a long-term consistent budget management system.

EWSD has also implemented a new scheduling system software, MasterLibrary, for all of the spaces that allow all users to see when a space is open and available.

### Safety

We continue to implement the Department of Homeland Security's Run-Hide-Fight/Resist protocol, so we have consistent terminology and standards for students as they move from school to school. Each school has a safety team and will update its Emergency Operation Plans in the fall. The Director of Safety regularly meets with the Essex Police Chief, and we continue to have a strong working relationship with the Essex Police Department. The Essex Police District Liaison Officer provided a written report of all the 21-22 incidents in which he assisted EWSD.

We continue to follow the AOE's guidance and schedule of evacuation and egress drills related to school safety. We also developed a EWSD specific Crisis Response Procedure Guide book that will be distributed to each school.

Over the summer, work was performed to update our security cameras and radios systems to ensure our systems are in-line with industry standards.

## Child Nutrition

The Child Nutrition team is gearing up to implement Vermont's Universal Meals Act. In order to satisfy the Federal and State requirements, we are collecting F-R meal applications. The application process is critical to the successful implementation of Universal Meals, as such, we have been working hard and supporting district-wide efforts to maximize the rates of return on

applications. To date, over 300 families have returned applications, which is significantly higher than in pre-covid years.

To help meet the record-keeping demands of the state and federal agencies that supply funding for Universal Meals, we'll be reintroducing the point of sale in our cafeterias. These will be for record-keeping purposes only as it relates to students. The intention is to ensure accurate meal counts and avoid double counting. Under the Universal Meals Act, students are allowed one breakfast and one lunch each day.

As we transition back to our pre-covid style of service, we are focusing on reimplementing our reusable plates and trays as well as utensils. While making these transitions, we will continue to work towards our goals of expanding scratch cooking, increasing the scope of local purchasing, implementing share coolers, developing more culturally inclusive menu days, and serving all students in the most equal and equitable way possible.

## Communications

The EWSD is celebrating its fifth birthday this year (officially turned five on July 1). A [logo](#) was created, and we will be celebrating online, and as part of this creating a 'history of EWSD' page on our site. The EWSD Handbook will be going to the printer this week and be available prior to the first day of school.

After spending the last few years as the Communications Coordinator/Executive Assistant at EHS, Arielle Boutwell was hired as the new Communications Assistant for the District on July 1. The Communications Assistant position is taking the place of what was formally known as the District Web Manager. Ben Dickie will be taking on the majority of the duties formally held by the web manager. This change will allow us to be able to better serve the needs of those both internally and externally. The efficiency and forward thinking will improve as Arielle will focus more on the day-to-day responsibilities, while Ben will oversee the websites and bigger picture items.

We are starting to look at the process of changing website providers (from Blackboard), as we feel other companies currently on the market provide better services and resources for both the end user and those creating the content, with a possible shift taking place starting on July 1, 2023. We are also looking at working with a local company that helps businesses meet and maintain web accessibility standards to achieve ADA and AODA compliance.

Since taking over the day-to-day website duties, Ben has worked to continue to build consistency across our pages. Over the summer, he has worked with Tamara Eklöf-Parks and Wendy Cobb to improve the [Multilingual Learner Program](#) and Early Education sections, as well as working with EMS principal Kevin Briggs on improving the school's communication/outreach with families.

Ben is also in the process of reaching out to local realtors and providing them with information on all that the EWSD offers so that when families are moving to Vermont, or within Vermont, this information can be shared when they ask about the local school system(s).