It is my pleasure to share this narrative of the observations and findings from my first 100 days of school as Superintendent of Rock Island-Milan School District #41. To clarify, I will be sharing information from my first 100 days of actual student contact that covers the period from July 31, 2019 through January 28, 2020. I was very fortunate and thankful that the Rock Island School Board gave me the opportunity to begin my term as Superintendent a month earlier than expected beginning on June 3, 2019.

The saying goes that one will never forget their firsts; first bike, first car, first born and so forth. For me, July 31, 2019 will go down as one of the most exciting days of my life because it served as an important first for me; my first official student contact day as Superintendent of Rock Island-Milan School District #41.

Preparation for that first day began early during the summer of 2019, where I had the opportunity to begin visiting various businesses around Rock Island and Milan. It was very nice to be able to move around the community incognito, where a majority of people had no idea of who I was. It allowed me to move freely through the grocery stores, restaurants, and gas stations without being asked what my plans were for moving the district forward. It also gave me sacred time needed to begin building relationships with members of the school board, my cabinet, school principals and staff members at the administration center. Additional opportunities to participate in community events such as Red, White, and Boom, Ready to Rock, and my Community Meet and Greet served as important reminders of what will be expected of the incoming Superintendent.

These actions align with my entry plan and serve as an integral part of this report. The following information will give a deeper dive into my observations of the district as it relates to 3 main priorities: Increasing Academic Achievement through a Commitment to Equity, Enhancing Family and Community Engagement, and Sustaining Systems for Effective and Efficient Operations. In addition, this report will share actions taken thus far as well as, help me to continue formulating ideas and strategies to strengthen, intensify, and build upon the district past successes.
I. Increasing Academic Achievement through a Commitment to Equity

To ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education that builds on their strengths, addresses their needs, and prepares them for college and career readiness. This plan will provide students with equal access to opportunities and resources to advance their learning.

Observations

The mission statement of the current 2017-2020 Strategic Plan is to provide all students with a quality education. In my initial school visits, my focus was just to familiarize myself with each individual building, introduce myself to staff members, students, and support staff for the first time. I observed students that were excited about being in school and eager to meet the new superintendent. Students greeted me by stating their name and giving me a firm handshake. Others asked questions about “where I came from” and “what a superintendent really does within a district.” Staff members were welcoming, inviting, and excited about the new journey that could be provided with a new superintendent. Teachers shared information about their connection to Rock Island High School, as well as their connection to the City of Rock Island and their length of time within the district. Teachers took pride in sharing best places to visit and dine within the community such as, Whitey’s, Hungry Hobo, Cool Beans, and Happy Joes. I took their advice and visited all of the locations mentioned, several times of course.

After the initial school visits, I informed my executive assistant to begin scheduling designated school walkthroughs on my calendar. These school visits gave me the opportunity to speak with the principal about their goals, challenges, and support needed from the district prior to visiting individual classrooms. The focus of these walkthroughs were to observe interactions between students and teachers as well as, students and their peers. I observed classrooms where procedures and routines were well developed and understood by students as they moved freely to spaces within the classroom designated for group and individual activities. Students appeared to be engaged in the lessons being taught by their teachers as they participated in project-based activities along with healthy dialogue and conversation. Expectations for student learning was evident as students could tell me what they were learning and why it was important. Teachers moved around the classroom asking students questions in an attempt to check for understanding. In some classrooms, teachers pulled small groups of students to more directly address their needs and provide additional academic support and opportunities for differentiation. This allowed the teachers more time to focus on individual student needs.
Actions Taken Based on Observations

Based on my observations, here are a sample of the actions taken within my first 100 days of service:

● Visited all district schools multiple times

● Visited a majority of classrooms to observe (i.e., instructional practice, expectations for learning, procedures and routines, student engagement, classroom climate and climate)

● Met with area legislators to discuss and promote public education (i.e., Headstart, Pre-K, Preschool For All)

● Met with principals during monthly professional learning community meetings (individually and as a group) for professional leadership development

● Met with all administrators (district administrators, principals, assistant principals, deans) during monthly professional learning community for professional leadership development

● Met with Cabinet weekly to analyze past and current status in all focus areas (i.e., teaching and learning, financial, technology, special services, community partnerships, enhancing opportunities for our students, human resources, communications)

● Continued the Cultural Competence (CQ) work and meet with the CQ Team Lead monthly

● Participated in weekly cabinet meetings designated to improving academic achievement (priority area #1)

● Engaged in regular communication with Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning (T & L) around professional development, work with Lead Teachers in the areas of ELA and mathematics

● Engaged in regular communication with Director of Grants, Assessment and Accountability around utilization of Title grant funding

● Participated in joint school visits with Board Members

● Became a United Way Educational Commission Board Member and participated in monthly meetings focused on various topics in education (i.e., access to Pre-K and early childhood education, student attendance)
● Met with RIHS Principal and team to discuss issues regarding graduation rate (i.e., targeting classes with high failure rates, students off-track for graduation, apprenticeship programs)

● Met with Dr. Monica Smith, Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Augustana College regarding equity and inclusion information for future strategic planning

II. Enhancing Family and Community Engagement

Building relationships will be established with stakeholders to listen to their ideas and share district plans to secure their feedback. This plan will provide students with equal access to opportunities and resources to advance their learning.

Observations

I have a strong belief that it is important to include all stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, school community, businesses, organizations, colleges, and universities) in helping with the work of educating our youth. This is formally known as collective impact. According to Kania and Kramer (2011), Collective Impact is an organized commitment of a group of people and institutions to a common agenda. In layman's terms, that means it is not just the responsibility of the school district to educate our students, but also the responsibility of the city and community that we live in.

In my first week of moving to Rock Island, it was evident that there was a lot of community support for the Rock Island-Milan School District, more notably Rock Island High School. Being that RIHS is the only high school in Rock Island, it serves as the final destination for all students that attend any Pre-K, Elementary and Junior High School within the district. During my first community event, a meet and greet at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center, a variety of former educators, city officials, community members, teachers, students, and faith-based community representatives, came to meet my family and me. Many of them wanted to come and see who I was firsthand, while also sharing their support for moving the district forward. I was reminded of the great history and pride felt by those who graduated from RIHS, of which many were born and raised and still reside in the area. This initial event led to a variety of opportunities for me to dialogue with local businesses wanting to develop new relationships as well as, increase opportunities provided by organizations with current district partnerships.

In some of my individual meetings with members of the faith-based community as well as longtime residents of the city, I observed a sincere interest in wanting to ensure that all students, regardless of their ethnicity or where they live, are given access to all the great programs offered within the district. There was a keen interest in wanting to ensure that students are prepared for their lives after high school simply because not everyone will go on to college. There was a shared understanding that all families desire a great school for their children and would like for the district to assist in uplifting the reputation and perceptions of the city.
Actions Taken Based on Observations

Based on my observations, here are a sample of the actions taken within my first 100 days of service:

● Met with local faith-based organizations/pastors to introduce myself to the community (i.e., Quad City Baptist Pastors Convention)

● Facilitated the State of School Address for the joint Rock Island Rotary and Kiwanis meeting (September 2019)

● Met with a variety of community organizations to gain insight on current partnerships and areas to expand services (i.e., Quad City Symphony Orchestra, Girl Scouts, Quad City Botanical Center, United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Two Rivers YMCA, Junior Achievement, Spring Forward, and Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center)

● Became a member of Rock Island Rotary

● Became a board member for United Way Education Commission, Junior Achievement, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Two Rivers YMCA

● Attended athletic events and activities including but not limited to fall and winter sports, music events, theatrical productions, district fundraisers, etc.

● Reviewed 2018-2019 school-wide parent engagement activities per individual school

● Held monthly Superintendent Parent Advisory Council and Teacher Advisory Council meetings to provide opportunities for feedback

● Established new Superintendent Student Advisory Council at the high school level to provide opportunities for student feedback

● Met with Blackhawk Region Superintendents to network, brainstorm, and share ideas with one another

● Provided the school board with quarterly updates on the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan

● Lead the District Leadership Team in the first semester of our current strategic plan and received board approval to begin creation/revision of a new strategic plan for the future
● Attended in-house, local, state, and national conferences to assist our district in furthering our successes and strengthening our challenges (i.e., Large Urban District Association (LUDA), IASA/IASB/IASBO, and National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE))

● Applied for a joint Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program with Augustana College to recruit, prepare, and retain STEM Teachers

● Served as the district representative on a variety of community committees (i.e., Rock Island Census 2020, NAACP Education Committee, Blackhawk College Adult Education and Literacy Area Planning Council, Quad City 2030 Education Focus Group)

● Met with various media outlets in the Quad Cities to promote RIMSD and establish routine communication protocols

● Attended quarterly IASB Regional meetings with School Board Members

● Conducted frequent “check-in” meetings with individual School Board Members

● Organized “Listen and Learn Tour” opportunities to receive feedback from stakeholders regarding district strengths, areas for improvement and specific needs

● Participated in ribbon cutting ceremonies (i.e., Edison Jr. High School, Earl Hanson Elementary School, Horace Mann Early Learning Center, Rock Island Library Book Mobile)

● Participated in individual meetings with designated groups (i.e., Rock Island Education Association) as needed

● Participated in bi-weekly School Board Meetings to provide educational information to the public

● Facilitated parent meetings and responded to individual parent letters and phone calls

● Participated in various community events (i.e., Ready to Rock, Red White & Boom, MLK 32nd Annual Family Fun Day, Rock Island Labor Day Parade, Rock Island County NAACP Community Day Celebration, Trunk-R-Treat Program at MLK Community Center, 37th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Service, etc.)

● Attended “Unpack the Backpack” events at various schools within RIMSD
● Met with various college and university representatives to build relationships around opportunities for students (i.e., Augustana College, Black Hawk College, Western Illinois University, and St. Ambrose University).

● Met to discuss RIHS apprenticeship program opportunities (i.e., John Deere, Rock Island Arsenal)

● Met with Dr. Monica Smith, Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Augustana College regarding equity and inclusion information for future strategic planning

III. Sustaining Systems for Effective and Efficient Operations

Examine and gain a deeper understanding of the district’s current fiscal condition along with operational efficiency, strategic plan, and facilities and maintenance. This plan will help to determine how support to schools is provided along with opportunities for improvement.

Observations

As a new superintendent, what I feel was one of the most important steps to take in learning more about the systems in place, was to meet with members of my cabinet. I was fortunate to have met with this group prior to my first 100 days of school, being able to attend cabinet meetings with the former superintendent both in person as well as with the use of technology. These initial meetings gave me the opportunity to meet individually and hear directly from each member about the work that they were responsible for and what they were currently working on. It also gave me the opportunity to hear a little about the history of the district through their lens. Many of them have worked for the district and been in their current positions for 4 years or more. I found these conversations to be very beneficial in enhancing my knowledge of the district and the various systems that were in place. It allowed us to begin looking at ways to become more effective and efficient as we move through the first half of my first year as superintendent.

Similar to my process of meeting individually with cabinet members, I took on the important task of meeting with individual members of the School Board. During our meetings, I gave a set of scripted questions that ranged from personal introductions, to purpose and reason for becoming a board member, to sharing their knowledge about the school district and the Community of Rock Island. I gained useful knowledge about a community where the school district, especially Rock Island High School, is the focal point of pride, culture, and history in the city. It was evident that while education was important to all along with increasing academic achievement and providing access and opportunities for students, it was even more important to ensure that students leave our district ready for life after high school as not all students will select the path
to college. To create a better understanding of my job responsibilities and to promote a positive working relationship with the School Board Members, we all attended a board retreat early in the school year. This was a very enlightening experience that helped to educate us as a cohesive group, working to ensure that processes, procedures, and communication between the board and superintendent are in alignment and appropriate. This prior training has led to efficiency within our job responsibilities.

Along with meeting individuals that were closely connected to the district, I also had the opportunity to visit every school building and additional piece of real estate that makes up RIMSD. From walking through the halls of our elementary, junior high and high school buildings, to walking on the turf field of our storied RIHS Football Stadium, to visiting the closed school buildings that we still utilize in some shape or fashion, it was important to know of where we are with facilities and maintenance and where we hope to one day be. Funding from the 1% sales tax has become a reality and coupled with a balanced budget for the first time in several years. The district has experienced some much needed upgrades and is poised to complete many more projects in the near future. The opportunity for effective and efficient operations across the district is possible.

**Actions Taken Based on Observations**

Based on my observations, here are a sample of the actions taken within my first 100 days of service:

- Implemented new district employee code of conduct
- Met with cabinet members and their departments to discuss current work, duties, responsibilities, processes and procedures, and areas of needed support
- Increased opportunities for district level communication (i.e., Usage of Remind App, district web page, Twitter, Facebook)
- Implemented updated emergency notification protocol for school administrators
- Created draft documents for effective operations (i.e., Caring for your Building Manual, crisis response guide)
- Shared superintendent expectations of building level accountability with administrators during All Admin PLC Meetings
- Brought a balanced budget to the School Board
- Reviewed opportunities for improving online student enrollment process
- Participated in program audit for effectiveness (i.e., EL program audit, Special Education audit)
- Brought forth board approved bonding process for future building projects
- Analyzed processes and procedures for efficiency (i.e., Maintenance requests
procedures, technology requests, student information system)

- Analyzed past and current academic data from both district and state results, etc.
- Altered the administrator evaluation plan and continue to review and refine
- Participated in one-on-one meetings and a retreat with School Board Members
- Reviewed and updated district organizational chart (draft form)
- Observed past board meetings to familiarize myself with the existing organizational structure and communication protocols

**Results from the Listen and Learn Tour**

The Listen and Learn Tour was an opportunity for me to gather input from the community, parents, staff and students about the direction of the district. Information collected from the survey questions would then be shared with the Rock Island Community as a part of the Superintendent 100 Days of School Report. There were 3 scheduled events during the month of November which gave participants the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the superintendent. It is worth noting that the events were scheduled in different locations throughout the community (Hy-Vee in Rock Island, Rock Island Library-SW Branch, Rock Island High School) in order to obtain feedback from our stakeholders regardless of where they live. For the courtesy of families that were unable to attend the meetings, a link was created on the district webpage where the survey could be taken online prior to the start of the winter break.

Participants were asked to respond to the following survey questions:

1. What do you perceive as positives/strengths of the Rock Island-Milan School District?
2. What do you perceive as areas for improvement within the Rock Island-Milan School District?
3. What specific requests/actions are needed to enhance the educational and academic experience for Rock Island-Milan Students?

Upon completion of collecting all submitted responses, I began the work of analyzing the results. This process included working in collaboration with my Communications Director to read the survey responses in their entirety, making notes as we explored and interpreted the data, then documenting the overarching themes across all groups and questions. It is worth noting that there were a total of 173 participants who took part in submitting responses of which include both celebrations and challenges that have an impact on our school district.
**Question 1:** What do you perceive as positives/strengths of the Rock Island-Milan School District?

There were 3 overarching themes: Teacher/Staff commitment to teaching and learning, Extracurricular/supplemental program offerings, Diversity

**Teacher/Staff Commitment to Teaching and Learning**

Participants believe that teachers/staff are passionate, dedicated, knowledgeable, caring, and hardworking. They are team-oriented and exhibit district pride in setting high expectations and standards for students to be successful. Teachers and other staff work as a team, from administration to custodians, working for the same purpose - to promote a positive learning experience for students in a safe environment.

**Extracurricular/Supplemental Program Offerings**

Participants were pleased that the district offers a variety of extra-curricular programs which provide opportunities for every student to participate (i.e., athletics, band/orchestra, and clubs). Participants expressed their appreciation of supplemental programs like LEAD, the Leader in Me, and AVID.

**Diversity**

Participants feel that our diversity and cultural awareness is a strength within the district. Educators are supportive, mindful and flexible of the multicultural differences shared among our staff, students, families, and community stakeholders. They feel that staff are supportive of one another and have great relationships with students.

**Question 2:** What do you perceive as areas for improvement within the Rock Island-Milan School District?

There were 2 overarching themes: Facilities, Communication

**Facilities**

Participants shared excitement over the past projects completed with the 1% sales tax (i.e., high school tennis courts, secured entrances, library and classrooms). They look forward to using future funds to fix, repair and improve our facilities, bringing them to a level that is conducive for learning and whose physical appearance is appealing to current and future families.
Communication

Participants expressed a need for transparency, accountability and clearer lines of communication at all levels within the district (i.e., district, department, school). They want to develop a better understanding of how to effectively navigate through the system (i.e., consistency in messaging, clear process for understanding and implementing policy and procedures). Participants stated that everyone should feel respected and valued when educational issues are brought to light.

Question 3: What specific requests/actions are needed to enhance the educational and academic experience for Rock Island-Milan Students?

There were 2 overarching themes: Curriculum/Grading, Discipline

Curriculum/Grading

Participants agreed that they would like to see additional coaching support and professional development with current and new curriculum (i.e., improve differentiation, interventions, and assessment). They also shared that more discussions and opportunities for dialogue are needed regarding grading practices. Additional curriculum offerings were also requested (i.e., art education, STEM, cultural relevance, health care, and vocational education).

Discipline

Participants believe that there needs to be more consistency in enforcement of school rules and protocols at the school and district level. Parents need to be more informed as issues arise. Students need to have a level of accountability in their own actions. Participants further suggest a need for more professional development (i.e., Response to Intervention, Social Emotional Learning, Trauma-informed care, and Restorative Justice) to maintain a safe and respectful learning environment.

In closing, I want to thank all of the participants that took time to complete the Listen and Learn Tour Survey. The information provided is vital to the current and future improvement of Rock Island-Milan School District #41. The goal of this activity was not to provide on-the-spot solutions, but to collect information that would be analyzed, summarized, and then used to support our efforts as we revise our strategic plan for the future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Reginald Lawrence II,
Superintendent