



# Superintendent's Entry Plan

## Allan J. Mucerino

### July 1, 2018



*"To know the road ahead, ask those coming back."*

Chinese Proverb

*"People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Maya Angelou



## Our Promise

*All students will realize their unlimited potential*

# Introduction



I am honored to be the new superintendent of the William Alvord Unified School District, and to partner with our students, staff, families, and community to ensure we meet the district's promise that all students will realize their unlimited potential and succeed in college, career, and life.

As you will see, I am deeply committed to this charge and excited to learn all about how our mission is being implemented in our schools. This is an exciting time to be an educator as the education landscape is being shaped by waves of change on virtually all fronts, from technology to politics. This period will not serve as an historical footnote in the pantheon of school reform. Instead it will be seen as the beginning of a new normal in education. The era of choice is driving reform in a way that state and federal programs never have been able to accomplish.

As your new superintendent, I am grateful for the opportunity the Board of Education has given me to be Alvord's next leader. The comprehensive hiring process and the transition period working with interim superintendents' Ecker and Thome provided me with the luxury of learning about our school district by listening to the voices of our community - students, parents, teachers, principals, administrators, staff, board members, residents, and civic leaders. We have achieved success on many levels. It is my intention to build upon the strong legacy that the school district and its community have established for our students.

Similar to many school districts serving diverse communities like ours, an opportunity gap that our entire community needs to address persists. As I study our organization, our community, and our stakeholders, I will learn about our strengths and weaknesses, our opportunities, and whatever challenges pose a threat to our promise to prepare our students for the future. My first phase of service will include the elements structured in this entry plan. It will guide my work. I want to know what is and what is not working for our students. I also want to know what is and what is not working for our teachers, support staff, and leadership team. Every single adult in our schools plays a vital role in the education of our children and deserves to work in the same environment we strive to create for our students: healthy, safe, and supportive.

School districts are complex systems operating within the contexts of states, regions, and communities. To underestimate the complexity or not take the time to understand it is to move blindly and without purpose. If we are to make Alvord Unified a great (not just good) place to get an education and a great (not just good) place to work too, it will be because we focus on fostering intrinsic motivation of our staff (and subsequently of our students). Powerful motivation and enhanced skills on a systemwide scale will position us to be great. Our children deserve no less.

## My Promise

*All staff will realize their unlimited potential*

# Values & Beliefs



Here I am with my father. Alexander Joseph Mucerino was a Teamster, Local 282. He worked for the same construction company for his entire career. G. W. Clark & Sons built roads. “Big Al” dug ditches and drove a dump truck. He completed the 8th grade before leaving school to help support his immigrant family of eight, interrupted only by WWII when he joined the US Army and fought in Germany.

He and my mother, a high school graduate before heading to the workforce, instilled in my sister and me a work ethic that above all has served us both well. We exceeded our parents’ dream of attending college and “making something of ourselves” as they always insisted that we do, without complaint.

My passion for equity and my mission to help students just like me whose trajectory was not headed to the top of the pyramid is a fire that burns deeply in my soul. If I could do it, then so could every

other hard-working person who is given direction, resources, and a helping hand when needed. I have always assumed that my students do not all have the same level of direction, resources, and support or perhaps none at all. Schools are the modern engines of social justice. When our schools fail, we as a people and a country fail. The mission to embed social justice in schools is just and necessary. Highly qualified teachers should teach all of our children, and the most disadvantaged pupils need the most highly of highly qualified teachers. Until we value teachers and educators and compensate them appropriately, we as a society are at the least partially complicit in failing our youth.

I view school districts through the lens of a learning organization. The value of learning by individuals and organizations for continuous improvement and adaptability to the ever-changing environment is the primary driver in successful school districts. The learning organization concept originated in the business world. As a member of the Education Leadership faculty at California State University, Fullerton, I prepare education leaders to use the four integrated aspects of learning organizations - organizational learning, learning at work, learning climate and learning structure - as a framework for analysis.

**DWYSGTD**  
*Do What You  
Say You’re  
Going To Do*

Regarding teaching and learning, both are active, constructive processes that are understood within the context of the learning environment as well as the overall environment. Effective teaching is a deliberate and planned activity: it involves a purpose (goal-oriented), it is coherent (structured), it is meaningful (creates cognitive dissonance), and it is functional. New knowledge is acquired in relation to previous knowledge. As the lead learner, it is my responsibility to support a system that enhances teaching and learning. Among the most successful frameworks that enhance teaching and learning are Professional Learning Communities (PLC). PLCs have proven to be effective drivers for improved student achievement. Based on the principles of teamwork, trust, and strong leadership, highly effective PLCs create an environment where individuals feel valued and are willing to work together to learn and thrive.

Finally, politics at the board and superintendent level plague all school districts. Our board has assured me that they are committed to the five key principles for organizational success: (1) Clarify roles and expectations for board members and superintendent; (2) Establish and implement a clear process for communication between board members and administration; (3) Actively work to build trust and mutual respect between the board and administrative team; (4) Evaluate the whole team; and (5) Actively work on improved decision-making.



# Leading the Leaders: Asking the Right Questions

Leaders in education and beyond have come to the conclusion that they can no longer rely on their past experiences as future indicators. The world has become increasingly too complex for such simplicity. The future leader must be agile, but also curious and more interested in asking questions rather than answering them. As the lead leader, my goal is to build a team of leaders who are purpose-driven and adaptive. Leading with questions leads to constructive conversations and invites the level of dialogue that translates into engaged, innovative, and inclusive leadership. Through one-on-one and small group meetings, I aspire to find answers to a series of questions that will shed light on the relationship between school district policy, programs, and practices and their impact on student and adult learning. The questions are listed below and are divided into four focus areas: Quality Teaching and Learning, Effective Leadership, Support for Systemwide Improvement, and Clear and Collaborative Relationships.

*“We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself.”*

**Lloyd Alexander**

## Focus Area 1: Quality Teaching and Learning

- ✓ How has AUSD communicated high expectations for adult performance?
- ✓ What processes has AUSD used for accountability and to provide feedback to staff?
- ✓ How has AUSD monitored reform and change to maintain pressure for improved learning?
- ✓ Have AUSD learning standards been aligned with state standards and assessments?
- ✓ Are AUSD’s policies aligned with curriculum and assessment?
- ✓ What are AUSD’s processes for coordinating curriculum district-wide?
- ✓ How does AUSD build capacity in the district and the school to improve instruction and student learning?
- ✓ How does AUSD reflect research-based professional development practices?
- ✓ How does AUSD ensure coherence across professional development, policies, and teaching and learning practices?
- ✓ What is AUSD’s vision for “good” instruction?
- ✓ How do teachers develop the knowledge and skills described by AUSD’s vision?
- ✓ How are AUSD principles of learning implemented in classrooms?
- ✓ What guidance for instruction does AUSD provide to schools?

## Focus Area 2: Effective Leadership

- ✓ How has AUSD developed and shared our focus on improving student learning?
- ✓ How do we know that our focus and mission are shared?
- ✓ What is the central focus of senior administrators and other leaders in AUSD?
- ✓ How have our leaders demonstrated their commitment to student learning and improved instruction?
- ✓ How have our leaders created political will and moral responsibility and what actions has AUSD taken to provide equity and excellence in learning for all students?
- ✓ How have our leaders demonstrated persistent and continuous improvement?
- ✓ How have our leaders established a partnership between finance and instructional leaders?
- ✓ How have our leaders developed principles and policies to guide the budget process?
- ✓ How have our leaders evaluated and prioritized the use of resources to enact its instructional priorities?
- ✓ How have our leaders applied cost analysis to the budget process?



# Leading the Leaders: Asking the Right Questions

## Focus Area 3: Support for Systemwide Improvement

- ✓ How does AUSD make data available for use in schools?
- ✓ How are our school leaders trained to use multiple measures and analyze data?
- ✓ How does AUSD support classroom teachers' use of data in making instructional decisions about individual students?
- ✓ How do resource allocations reflect AUSD policies?
- ✓ How are our human, social, physical, and financial resources developed, managed, and allocated across AUSD?
- ✓ How does AUSD determine the adequacy of resources needed and provided to improve student learning?
- ✓ How does AUSD ensure equity in allocating resources to close the achievement gap?
- ✓ How does AUSD ensure coherence in policy across district programs and operations?
- ✓ How does AUSD policy reflect the goals of equitable and excellent learning?
- ✓ How do operational systems in AUSD reinforce learning goals?

## Focus Area 4: Clear and Collaborative Relationships

- ✓ How is AUSD building a professional culture that supports high standards for students and adults in the system?
- ✓ How does AUSD build trust, mutual respect, and competence among stakeholders in the system?
- ✓ How does AUSD provide opportunities for peer support and collaboration and develop professional learning communities?
- ✓ How does AUSD balance district authority and school autonomy?
- ✓ What are district-level responsibilities and prerogatives and how are they determined?
- ✓ What are parameters for school-level decision making and how are they determined?
- ✓ How are different roles for central office and schools developed, communicated, and monitored?
- ✓ How does AUSD interpret state and federal policy to schools and assist with implementation?
- ✓ How does AUSD involve family and community in school district affairs?
- ✓ How does AUSD balance the need to buffer schools from external distractions while opening schools for family and community involvement?

*Adapted from Shannon, G. S. & Bylsma, P. (2004) Characteristics of Improved School Districts: Themes from Research.*

# Phase 1: Site Visits

**May  
2018**

This phase consisted of visiting school sites and meeting with students, site leaders and their staff, and some of our children's families. This initial phase was informal since I was not officially in the position. My intention was to begin the process of building trust within our community because it alone is a foundation for all healthy and productive relationships.



As we build Alvord moving forward, the elaboration of management structures, processes, and procedures, both within our organization and in relationships between the myriad of organizations and sectors that support our students, will be a focus of our work. As I come to understand our school district I will come to understand how I can move us forward in the interest of our students and of our community. I will rely on staff to guide me.

I think we can all agree that we have beautiful children who deserve the very best we have to offer. I've also learned that we have dedicated teachers and staff ready to do great things for those deserving children. As a researcher, I am accustomed to peeling away the layers until I see a clear picture of reality. Only then can I act in good conscience, knowing that I am acting in our students' and our organization's best interest. We are often rushed in education and as a result of addressing the urgent at the expense of building capacity for the future. I try to think about today as much as I do about tomorrow, while the entire time thinking about yesterday to ensure that we learn from it.



**Building capacity  
refers to any effort  
being made to  
improve our abilities,  
skills, and expertise as  
educators**

Our organization has been in flux. That much is clear. We have experienced a whirlwind of change in the last year or so. I can only guess but I believe it is a tribute to our hard-working staff that we have continued to serve our students despite challenges that may have crippled a weaker organization. We are Alvord strong and I am privileged to take over the organization at this pivotal period in its long and illustrious history.

**June  
2018**

## Phase 2: Listening and Learning

**June**

**2018**

Meet with stakeholders and stakeholder groups in no particular order:

- ✓ *School Board Members*
- ✓ *Student Leaders*
- ✓ *Parent Groups and Organizations*
- ✓ *District Leadership Team members*
- ✓ *Bargaining Unit leaders*
- ✓ *District Committee Chairs*
- ✓ *Principals and Site Leaders*
- ✓ *Elected Officials in both the cities of Riverside and Corona.*
- ✓ *County Department of Education Officials and Staff*
- ✓ *Chamber of Commerce in Riverside and Corona*
- ✓ *Local Realtor Associations*
- ✓ *Civic Groups Advocating for Safe Schools and Communities*
- ✓ *La Sierra Business Council*
- ✓ *Rotary, Kiwanis, and Other Service Organizations*
- ✓ *Riverside County District's Superintendents*
- ✓ *Higher Education Leaders (UCR, RCC, NCC, LSU)*
- ✓ *Local and Regional Media*

**Aug**

**2018**

- ✓ *Foundations and other Grant-funding Sources*
- ✓ *Friends of Alvord*

*"Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence."* Abigail Adams

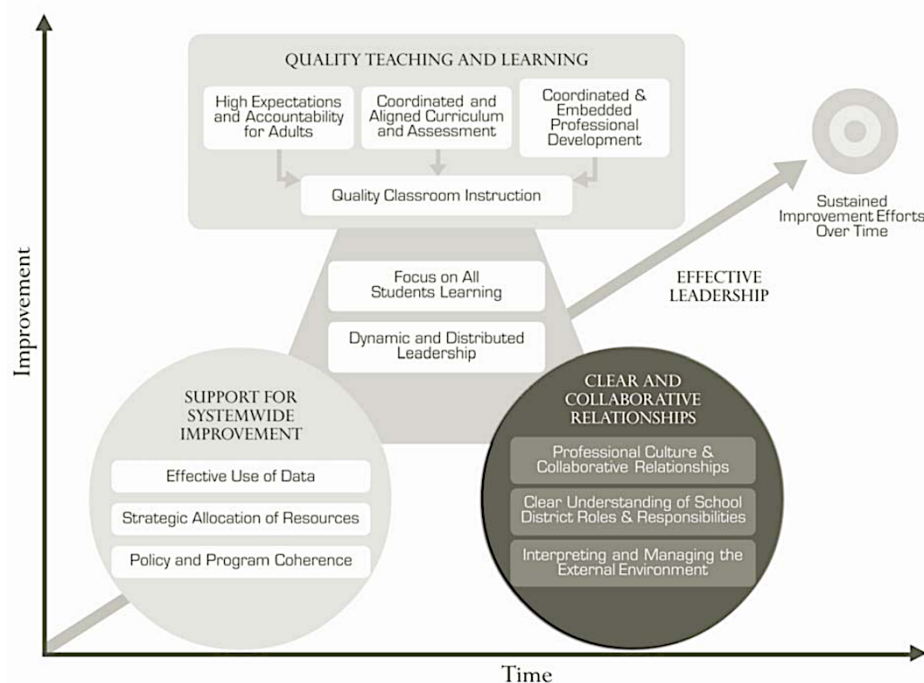


# Phase 3: Deliverables

**Aug  
2018**

## Analyze and Plan

The data collected throughout the information-gathering process is largely anecdotal. However, student achievement data (California Dashboard Data) and the lived experience of staff are not anecdotal. The combination of formal and informal data serves as a powerful analytical tool to evaluate our condition. The link between the District (governance and leadership and support teams) and our school sites is among the findings I expect to drive much of our first-year work, which I anticipate will focus on creating structures and incentives for system-learning that supports student and professional learning. A strategic planning process will emerge based on the culture of the organization. Whether the approach is organic, conventional, issue-based, or some other model - it will all answer the same question: Where are we going? The following conceptual framework<sup>1</sup> will serve as a lens to study the information and data.



## Build Leadership Teams

Provide support and training to leaders in all stakeholder groups.

## Conduct Study Sessions

I will conduct a series of Board Study Sessions ranging in topics.

## Set Board Goals and Superintendent Goals

I will work with the Board to set Board/District goals and Superintendent goals.

*"One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. 'Which road do I take?' she asked. 'Where do you want to go?' was his response. 'I don't know,' Alice answered. 'Then,' said the cat, 'it doesn't matter.'"*

Alice in Wonderland

**Dec  
2018**

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Shannon, G. S. & Bylsma, P. (2004) *Characteristics of Improved School Districts: Themes from Research*.

# Conclusion

Open communication leads to transparency of purpose. Transparency of purpose leads to trust. Trust leads to mutually supportive relationships. My entry plan is designed to support my commitment to build mutually supportive relationships with all stakeholders and stakeholder groups. In education, success is measured by student achievement. My success is predicated on the success of the many “leaders” in our organization who touch our students’ lives daily, in one way or another.



As the identifier of the *Good to Great* principles of great organizations, Collins found that disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined actions were typical and common in great organizations. I have no doubt that while I am learning about Alvord and setting the stage for future work, that I will find examples of greatness. I also have no doubt that I will also find examples of opportunities to achieve greatness with a strategic and disciplined approach.

The adage “Go slow to go fast” addresses the most common dichotomy in education: urgency v. building capacity. The long-term implications of not building the capacity of an organization far outweigh the immediate gratification to address its urgent needs. Building a successful school district is an exercise in patience, an important trait for a leader (and anyone dealing with kids). Patience has long been a hallmark of my approach to leadership.

Patience is among the requirements for healthy relationships. Healthy relationships are a requirement for successful organizations. The school board (pictured above) of the Alvord Unified School District have shown great confidence in me by selecting me as their next leader of leaders. Now it is their patience I seek as we embark on the journey from good to great.

*“Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

I hope this Entry Plan provides a window into my philosophy of education, as well as my intentions to serve our students, staff, and community with passion and to the best of my ability.

Thank you for reading it. I appreciate it and I look forward to working with each and every one of you.

