

# SUPERINTENDENT ENTRY PLAN

## BENTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT



James Geffken

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## OVERVIEW

*"The aim [of education] must be the training of independently acting and thinking individuals who, however, see in the service to the community their highest life problem."*

-Albert Einstein

The purpose of this Superintendent entry plan is to establish a set of activities that will guide my transition into the role of Superintendent of the Benton Area School District.

The Superintendent must be able to lead the District into achieving its vision as outlined in its mission and belief statements.

### Mission Statement

The Benton Area School District's mission is to provide an excellent education in order to maximize the potential of all students and prepare them to meet the challenges of work and life in an ever changing world.

### Belief Statement

- Student learning is the chief priority for the Benton Area School District.
- All students can learn.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- Students learn in different ways and should be provided with a variety of instructional approaches to support their learning.
- Teachers, administrators, parents and the community share the responsibility for advancing the school's mission.
- Exceptional students require special services and resources.
- Curriculum and instructional practices should incorporate a variety of learning activities to accommodate differences in learning styles.
- Ongoing professional development of staff is vital



As the Chief Executive Officer, the Superintendent strives to ensure that every child experiences the highest caliber progressive education. The Superintendent should secure and manage the best staffing while responsibly managing the District's finances and assets. This Entry Plan is designed as a blueprint to fulfill the mission, vision and values of the District by meeting with key constituents, identifying emerging themes, and developing a plan of action for the future.

Working in local Pennsylvania Public Schools over the past 11 years has provided the opportunity to immediately build upon the many relationships and assets offered to me from the community at large. Being a local citizen, having grown up in the Benton Community and having attended Benton High School, I have established lifelong relationships within the community that will aide in advancing our school's mission with a constant eye on our values. This is a District with rich traditions and a beloved history. It is my intent to work toward shaping our future while honoring our past.

It is my intent to have a slow roll out while taking the leadership role at Benton. Although there are some issues which will require immediate attention, I plan on spending most of my time gathering information and developing a deeper understanding of the root issues facing the District. Throughout the first 180 days the entry plan will be used as a guide so that critical time and attention is focused on collecting, analyzing, and acting on information from stakeholders within and outside of the organization. I will focus on creating and nurturing a network of contacts and resources in order to improve Benton Schools and ensure equity and opportunity for all.



- **To ensure a smooth and orderly transition of leadership.**
- **To create venues that enable the Superintendent to listen and learn and expand my understanding of the Benton Area School District.**
- **To develop effective District governance policies and structures focused on student achievement through the formation of effective and positive School Board/Superintendent relationships.**
- **To evaluate the state of the Benton Area School District in all major areas.**
- **To hone my understanding of the Benton community and its experiences with, perceptions of, and expectations for, the Benton Area School District by meeting and having meaningful conversations with critical internal and external stakeholders.**
- **To lay the foundation to build trusting, productive and collaborative working relationships with internal and external stakeholders, including staff, faculty, administrators, parents/guardians, students, union officials, higher education institutions, elected officials, religious groups, and community organizations**

# EXPECTATIONS



It is anticipated that the implementation of this entry plan will result in the following outcomes, thereby enabling the superintendent to make informed decisions and recommendations to the Board of Education:

- A summary of the feedback obtained from the stakeholders engaged during the activities set forth in this entry plan.
- Summarized findings from all reviews and evaluations of the District's organizational structure, programs, processes, systems and finances.
- Assessment of executive leadership and organizational structure and identification of any changes needed to ensure optimal district performance and efficiency.
- An informed and unified community committed to working together to do what is best for Benton's students.

During the first few months, I will spend time working toward a smooth transition with the business office and administrative staffs. I will research all aspects of the District from curriculum, and special education to maintenance operations and purchasing practices.

My early entry process will be focused on the following activities, although this list is not all-inclusive:

- Meeting with each Board member individually.
- Introductory meetings with each administrator and other key employees.
- Summer administrator meetings.
- Formation of Academic and General Administrative meeting schedules.
- Meetings with key community members.
- Back to school events.
- Attending state educational meetings to represent Benton Area.
- Attending training and professional development events with district staff members.

During my first 180 school days as Superintendent, my work will revolve around core activities. Along with managing the day to day functioning of the school district, I will focus on building relationships with three main groups: Board, School and Community. Although I plan to be a hands on manager, I will also rely heavily on existing administration to maintain the daily operations of the district in order to give me time to focus on accomplishing the entry plan objectives. The time spent building of key relationships will provide a foundation for the future success of our school district. The approach for each group is outlined on the following pages.

## 2017-2018



**BOARD:** Establish an effective and collegial working relationship with the members of the Benton Area Board of Education and solidify a cohesive board superintendent leadership team focused on improving the achievement levels of all students.

- Schedule a meeting with board president (and others, as appropriate) to discuss a format and agenda for board-superintendent meetings.
- Schedule individual meetings with each board member for one-on-one time to discuss expectations, roles and needs.
- Take time during board meetings to address: Clear understandings of roles, responsibilities, expectations, board meeting protocols and systems for the board-superintendent team. Create regular and appropriate communication systems with board members in the form of writing, phone calls and/or meetings. Plan a timeline for reviewing, updating or developing district vision, mission and beliefs as needed.
- Visit various regions with the individual Board member who represents that particular area of the district to get a better understanding of the Board member's perspective and the constituents he or she represents.
- Establish individual and district goals that the board can use to evaluate me and agree upon a performance evaluation format.

## BENTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

**SCHOOL:** It is my goal to build and enhance meaningful, positive and authentic relationships with all facets of the Benton Area Public Schools, which include: students, faculty, staff, administration, families, PTA groups, and contracted services. To be successful, relationships must be built in the spirit of transparency, honesty and collaboration. To be sustainable, effective channels of two-way communication must be mutually agreed upon and utilized regularly.



I believe that spending time in schools and classrooms provides the best foundation for learning about the district. As the key component of relationship building, I will make myself a constant presence within the schools.

I will ask the principals and staff to open their doors and allow me to experience each school as a learner. I plan to visit all classrooms and interact with staff and students. By the end of my first 180 school days, my goal is to have visited every classroom in the district.

**COMMUNITY:** I plan to actively listen and gather input from community supporters, business partners, faith leaders, elected officials and media representatives. My hope is that these interactions will be a foundation for authentic relationships and collaborations to benefit students. I need to hear firsthand from our stakeholders to understand the priorities and needs of our community and its schools. I hope to establish communication protocols with the different groups so an open dialogue can be attained.



Meetings or informational interviews will include, but are not limited to the following list:



- Educational Stakeholders
- Students, such as existing student government and leadership groups, recent graduates, recent dropouts and students enrolled in traditional and non-traditional programs.
- Families, such as district and school-level Parent Teacher Association leaders, parents who have children with special needs, booster groups, those already serving on district advisory groups, families who have chosen to home school or send children to private school.
- Staff, union representatives, and employees from various departments and job classifications in the school district.
- Government partners, such as elected officials at the town, county, state and national levels, local housing and health agencies, safety and emergency management officials.
- Educational partners, such as retired educators, Vo-Tech leaders, community groups committed to educational programming, state education leaders, private school and supplemental service providers and higher education officials from area colleges and universities.
- Business partners through the Chamber of Commerce.
- Civic, nonprofit, philanthropic and other local service organization partners, such as the Central Susquehanna Community Foundation and the Northern Columbia County Community Center.
- Faith-based organizations focused on the Benton Area Churches
- Media partners, such as reporters, editors, publishers and general managers of radio, television, print and online news organizations.

I will accept as many invitations as possible to speak at school and community gatherings.

I will drop by meetings at schools, including faculty meetings, Parent-Teacher Association meetings, grade level meetings, professional development activities and teacher planning sessions. During these visits, I will just be there to observe and learn about issues, activities and efforts throughout the district. My intent will not be to evaluate or interject. I will make myself present to learn, serve as a resource and be a liaison to the Board.

Aside from establishing and building relationships, I will also dedicate time to research. I will perform the following information gathering, document review, data collection and analysis.

I will review studies, reports, surveys and audits by outside agencies, such as:

- Government Audits
- Social Media postings
- PIAA / Title 9
- Newspaper articles, editorials
- Television news stories,
- Special education compliance audits
- Survey data



I will also review internal documents, such as:

- District facilities plan
- Dropout and graduation rate data
- Employee contracts
- Employee handbook
- Financial projections and budget processes
- General fund
- Requests For Proposals
- Job descriptions
- Legal proceedings
- Middle and high school athletic guidelines
- Organizational Chart
- Student code of conduct and student handbooks
- Personnel procedures
- Press releases
- Professional development plans
- Program evaluations
- Professional Staff Data
- Safety and emergency plans
- Salary schedules
- School Board Policy and Procedures
- Student assessment results including:
  - Keystone scores
  - PSSA scores
  - ACT scores
  - SAT scores
  - SPP scores
  - Advanced Placement (AP) scores
  - Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data
- Any other forms of data collection utilized by the District

I will focus on operational awareness by:

- Evaluating key programs and major initiatives.
- Reviewing major responsibilities and initiatives in each district department.
- Reviewing the operations of departments in context of how they support academic achievement.

This Entry Plan will afford me the opportunity to listen, observe and learn from a variety of community members while furthering my understanding of the local context of the town and the school system. Through this process I will formulate ideas and frame strategies to improve our school system so that we increase student achievement and maintain financial responsibility.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, the information I gather during this entry plan process will culminate with the development and presentation of a Summary Report in 2018. I will share my findings, observations and thoughts about future development strategies with our board of education, employees, students, families and community.

Through my interactions with stakeholders, I hope to define direction for our school district within the community. My aim is to raise expectations for ourselves and our students and ensure the future success of the Benton Area School District at all levels.

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