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To: Pelham School Board  
From: Chip McGee  
Re: Action Plan - Culture of Belonging Task Force  
Date: March 6, 2024  
Cc: District Leadership Team  
Culture of Belonging Task Force Members

### **Summary**

This memo outlines an action plan regarding the recommendations of the Culture of Belonging Task Force. The task force identified three factors that are holding the District back - trust, communication, and belonging. They will form the foundation of our work moving forward. We are confident our culture of belonging will improve when we take these actions:

- Follow up with course corrections.
- Collect, analyze and report data using a more reliable and objective survey tool.
- Trust our teams to provide effective ways to implement feedback.
- Provide professional development to all staff.
- Learn from our previous experience.

I am seeking Board input and support for this action plan. Thank you for supporting this work. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

### **Goal of the Task Force**

The goal of the task force was to help us reset our work on a culture of belonging. After working on this goal from 2021-2023, the District was struggling to measure improvement in this area well and to determine whether we were improving. The task force was charged with identifying the key factors that are holding the District back from a better culture of belonging and recommending an improved process for collecting, analyzing, reporting, and acting on information.

### **Follow Up Items**

In order to move forward, several items from the task force presentation require "course corrections" so we can continue to make progress on this goal.

1. Recognize this is a starting point: The task force was a starting point. In the report, their observations came across as conclusions, which they are not. There is still a lot of work to be done. It will be important to include input from the full staff moving forward.
2. Share generally: The key factors the task force shared are important and appropriate to share with the School Board in a public session. Comments about individual situations do not belong in a public

meeting. In hindsight, I apologize for any comments in the presentation that were understood as being about specific individuals.

3. Include context: This work will benefit from being set in a larger context. Of course, Pelham has areas to improve. All school districts do. The difference is that Pelham is willing to face them in order to get better. At times, staff members will have to make some decisions that are difficult or unpopular for others. In order to be fair, consistent, and equitable, that will continue to be the case.

These items are shared to recognize we were heading off course, to acknowledge it, and to steer the District back on course. Our goal is to build a culture where people can lower their defenses and freely share knowledge, skills, and perspectives, and work together to take the right next steps. To get there, we want to build on trust.

## **Recommendations**

The Task Force made three recommendations. After reviewing the recommendations with my leadership team, I propose moving forward with all three. I also propose adding a fourth - professional development.

### Recommendation 1: Collecting Data

The task force recommended that we survey the District twice per year utilizing an anonymous survey tool such as Survey Monkey and focus on simple and direct questions.

Proposed Action Plan:

1. Identify an outside organization to provide a survey for staff that improves reliability and validity, provides a greater assurance of anonymity, is for all District employees, and can be organized by staff role or by school.
2. Set the expectation that not every suggestion will be followed, and that the focus is on finding ways to improve rather than on airing past grievances.
3. Pilot the survey in April of 2024 to include all staff. This will allow the District to test and improve the deployment process for future surveys.
4. After the pilot, commit to having the whole District use the survey starting in the fall of 2024.

### Recommendation 2: Analyzing Data

The task force recommended that the District create focus groups charged with creating action plans based on survey results and that these groups meet quarterly to report on progress.

Proposed Action Plan: This action plan proposes renaming the focus groups as “Action Teams” and for them to meet more quickly than quarterly.

1. Start with having the District leadership team review the survey results.
2. Share the survey results with all members of the staff.
3. Form “Action Teams” using volunteer participants to quickly provide insights into the opportunities for improvement and input on how to put the idea into action.
4. Implement those actions and share implementation with the full staff.
5. Pilot this process in the spring of 2024 using the pilot survey data for a district wide opportunity for improvement and Action Team.

### Recommendation 2.1: Analyzing Data

The task force recommended that the District continue using retention as a measurable outcome.

Proposed Action Plan:

1. Continue to use retention as a measurable outcome.

### Recommendation 3: Reporting

The task force recommended that the District share survey results and action item progress with all District team members and the School Board.

Proposed Action Plan (restated from above):

1. Start with the District leadership team reviewing all survey results.
2. Share the same results with staff to identify opportunities for improvement.
3. Share the implementation of actions with all District staff members.

### Recommendation 4: Professional Development:

In addition to the recommendations from the task force, the leadership team recommends providing professional development for staff.

Proposed Action Plan

1. Continue with training on trust, communication, and belonging with the leadership team next year.
2. Expand this training to include all staff.
3. Focus on helping work teams (such as the SAU, building administrations, PLCs) build trust.

### **Previous Experience**

In the fall of 2022, the leadership team attempted a similar process, but several parts did not work as well as we would have liked. This previous experience illustrates both the steps and the changes needed to make the process more effective.

- The Superintendent developed a district-wide culture survey through a Google form. The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent analyzed the data. One finding was that staff valued their colleagues very highly. Staff wanted time to work together in cross-disciplinary groups.
  - Change needed: The surveys in 2022 were not reliable, objective, or anonymous, and the results went right to the Superintendent. This created some anxiety and distrust among those completing it.
- The Superintendent decided to ask principals to create cross-disciplinary groups.
  - Change needed: The Superintendent identified how to put the idea into action unilaterally without input stakeholders (i.e. no "Action Teams").
- The Superintendent reported this as an action item to staff in a Friday Update.
  - Change needed: More staff need to be invested in the work before it is reported.
- The Principals adjusted their PLC meeting structure to allow for cross-discipline meetings.
  - Change needed: Very few people knew the connection between this change and the survey.

While this previous experience is not comprehensive, it does provide concrete illustrations of the work we are attempting and the elements that need to change, based on the feedback from the task force.