

Gloucester Public Schools

Evaluation of the Superintendent of Schools Christopher Farmer June 30, 2008 Consolidated School Committee Evaluation

Chairperson Greg Verga
Vice Chairperson Amy Beth Healey
Mayor Carolyn Kirk
Secretary Val Gilman
Melissa Teixeira
Michelle Sweet
Nancy Harrison

STANDARD ONE: POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Focus 1 Policy

- Presents policy options along with specific recommendations to the school committee when circumstances require the committee to adopt new policies or review existing policies.
- Provides recommendations based on an analysis of data and research.
- Assists in establishing clear direction for the School Committee by providing agendas and support materials that allow for reasonable policy formation and informed decision making.
- Is familiar with relevant laws and regulations, and ensures that the district is in compliance.

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
3.4 Average

Comments

Mr. Farmer's presentations, policy drafts, and suggestions are almost always stated through researched based knowledge on an issue. He consistently provides the School Committee with an abundance of documentation and reports to aid in decision making. The Superintendent is good at passing along new laws and regulations to the committee via email or at meetings in order to keep the district in compliance. Examples of policy and governance accomplishments in this past year include the EQA report, special education policy, and school admissions policy.

There are times when the Superintendent opted to delay the presentation of topics while waiting for finalization of a policy final draft, i.e. teen pregnancy. As a result, the School Committee and district was caught off guard when this situation escalated in late May, 2008. It would have benefited us all if we had been given to thorough briefing of this situation prior to a policy being presented for approval..

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.4	2	4	3	3	4	4	4

Focus 2 Governance

- Serves as the school committee's chief executive officer and principal educational advisor in all efforts of the committee to fulfill its school system governance role.
- Serves as a catalyst for the school system's administrative leadership team.
- Proposes and initiates a process for long range and strategic planning that will engage the committee and the community in positioning the school system for success in ensuing years.
- Ensures that the school system provides equal opportunity for all students and staff.
- Encourages and supports the development of site councils as part of the governance structure.

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
3.64

Comments

Christopher Farmer is viewed as the CEO of Education in the district, as he should be. He exhibits strong planning and leadership skills in the area of governance. He is forthright with the issues at hand while at the same time proposes long term solutions. He has developed a comprehensive strategic plan for the district

and has pushed it forward under tough economic situations. He is also not afraid to admit that he made a mistake, i.e. Fuller vs. O'Maley middle school decision with the past School Committee. Upon listening to his staff, he took the necessary action to bring this change of event forward to the public and the School Committee for evaluation. The Site Based Councils meet regularly and participate in hiring of principals and decision making.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.64	4	3	3.5	3	4	4	4

STANDARD TWO: LEADERSHIP AND DISTRICT CULTURE

Focus 3 Leadership and District Culture

- Maintains a focus on the district mission and its associated principles.
- Maintains a focus on the development of a learning community characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity and collective responsibility.
- Encourages and requires data-based decision-making.
- Maintains a district focus on teaching and learning.
- Maintains a focus on quality, value for money, and improving services to children and families.
- District personnel and the community have a positive perception of district leadership.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
2.86

Comments

Christopher Farmer is focused on the mission, educational improvements, and encourages data based decision making. In spite of plan setbacks and distractions, he continues to be focused on teaching and learning and looks out for the best interest of our children.

However, at a high level, many parent advocates and community partners do not experience a strong sense of collaboration and partnership in his leadership style which is frequently described as abrupt and controlling. While his written and verbal communication skills are strong, his interpersonal skills sometimes fall short. Mr. Farmer's negotiation style at times is very positional or viewed as black or white by people sitting across the table. This positional style can breakdown discussions about options, compromise and solutions, which is necessary in today's business relationships. During these critical times here in Gloucester and throughout Massachusetts, Mr. Farmer will need to become more and more reliant on community relationships including City Hall, the GEF, School Connections, GFAA and business communities. In addition, similar partnership skills will be tested as we research ways to consolidate city and school services where appropriate. Success in these areas will require compromise and collaboration, areas that need improvement.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.86	3	3	3	2	3	3	3

Focus 4 Advocacy

- Engages in effective advocacy on behalf of students and their schools, and promotes the benefits of a public school system to the community.
- Collaborates with other administrators through national and state professional associations to inform state legislators, members of Congress, and other appropriate state and federal officials on local concerns and issues.
- Works with local and state officials to garner support for a fair and sound school budget that encompasses jointly developed committee-administration goals and priorities.

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
3.5

Comment

Christopher Farmer is a tireless advocate for public policy. He continuously supports Gloucester Public Schools in local newspapers as well as corresponding with legislators for support of our schools. He stays connected with associations and officials and is responsive to upcoming concerns and issues regarding public policy and funding.

While his efforts are tireless and his opinions are supported with facts, they can be perceived as defensive by interest groups, i.e. Charter School Advocates. This defensiveness and perceived anger can break down important dialogue and understanding with advocacy groups.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.5	4	4	3.5	3	3	3	4

STANDARD THREE: ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Focus 5 Structures and Support

- Develops and maintains a comprehensive strategic plan focused on the district’s Mission
- Establishes effective management structures to support the development of policy advice and coordinate the work of the district.
- Provides appropriate and timely support for line managers.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
2.86

Comments

Mr. Farmer does a good job holding regular department meetings with his staff, even during crisis situations. Many staff members have commented that he motivates them with his vision and drive. While he remains steadfast and focused on the mission, his appropriate and timely support of ALL direct supports is questionable. For example, if a school is in crisis, i.e. Beeman this past year, district issues went on longer than one would have hoped, leading to dissatisfied parents and teachers. Some staff members would have benefited from more frequent casual conversations in order to seek advice in a way that helps solve pending problems before they escalate.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.86	2	4	3	3	3	2	3

Focus 6 Communications and Participation

- Maintains open communication systems within the organization.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
2.71

Comments

Mr. Farmer is solid with district communications. He is a careful listener which often results in a keen analysis to the discussions. It appears that his door is open. The Superintendent responds to email questions regularly and maintains a work ethic that is second to none. While his reliance on electronic mail is notable and works with many constituents, this vehicle is not always the best for providing open and two way constructive dialogues. At times, Mr. Farmer’s responses are very direct and intimidating to the receiver. This breaks down communications. Further, mingling at community events would allow him to be perceived as more approachable. Subsequently, this would improve open communications between the district and the community. In terms of verbal communications and dialogue with members of the district staff, being more empathetic to their needs and suggestions would benefit greatly. Sometimes the district staff feels that they are not “heard” by administration. More frequent casual and impromptu visits to the schools might allow the Superintendent to witness daily occurrences and manage more by “walking around”.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.71	3	3	3	2	3	3	2

Focus 7 Accountability

- Delegates operational leadership appropriately and in accordance with statute.
- Holds managers accountable while providing support.
- Provides reports which enable the community to assess the performance of the district.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
2.79

Comments

At a high level, Mr. Farmer has made most principals responsible for their respective schools and has given them room to make their own decisions. He sets a high standard for his principals and staff and sets the bar high. This is a strongpoint. However, when direct reports are not performing to your expectations, proactive performance plans should be set up with measurable goals and results expected. Also, in regards to dealing with community interest groups, i.e. GEF, there is an appearance that too much must pass through the Superintendent’s office. More effort should be made to empower subordinates.

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Finally, regarding report sharing to assess district performance, although Mr. Farmer quickly released MCAS results to the community, it would be beneficial to report positive information such as 81% of this year's graduating class going to 2-4 year colleges and/or military.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.79	2	3	3.5	3	2	3	3

Focus 8 Equity

- Promotes equity, and monitors compliance with statutes and regulations.
- Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
- 3.79

Comments

Excellent. The Superintendent keeps the district in full compliance with statues, circuit breaker intricacies, and regulations. This is a constant challenge because of lack of funding and unfunded mandates. The Superintendent works within the budget and keeps the School Committee informed of actual or potential compliance issues.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.79	4	4	3.5	4	4	4	3

Focus 9 Finance

- Develops a timeline and recommends to the school committee the system's educational goals and annual school budget.
 - Develops budgetary advice through an open, participative process.
 - Oversees the operation of the annual school budget.
 - Provides periodic updates to school committee.
 - Provides early notice of any potential budget overruns.
- Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
- 3.79

Comments

Christopher Farmer deserves credit for finding a capable and competent CFO. They work diligently to keep the School Committee up to date and consistently update our committee on budgetary matters and possible shortfalls. As a team, the CFO and Superintendent work tirelessly to operate our district adequately even though funds continue to diminish due to state shortfalls in Chapter 70 funding. They pay close attention to the data and make appropriate recommendations regarding educational goals and decisions. Mayor Kirk commented that, "The Superintendent is an exceptional budget manager, moving the district forward with high expectations for staff performance....." Finally, the process of involving the site based councils from each school to participate in a "bottoms up" budget process is second to none.

Although our current software package has limitations, it would be helpful to see our operating expenses, i.e. energy costs, line item expenses to date, summarized on one document to help us to continue to be transparent with our community. As discussed, this modification will be suggested for School Committee consensus at an upcoming B and F Meeting.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.79	4	4	3.5	3	4	4	4

Focus 10 Technology

- Encourages the use of information technology.
- Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
- 3.64

Comments

Mr. Farmer clearly encourage use of Information Technology throughout the district, even with limited resources. He is very supportive of the use of email for interoffice communication and use of the district website has become more frequent. The Superintendent initiated the use of Power Point slides which adds extra professionalism to our district presentations. Tammy Morgan, under his leadership, has begun to conduct divisional surveying using our IT resources. Recently, this technology was tested when we were able to put our district survey on line.

However, the School Committee believes that we can expand our use of our district website. We hope to encourage this with the introduction of Ed Net. We need to continue to work hard to make sure that we take the lead to communicate information. It does not help out the district when the newspapers initiate the

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 communication flow and the information is not 100% accurate. Also, it would be helpful to ask the district staff to be required to respond to emails from parents, students, and community members within a certain timeframe to be determined by the Superintendent and his staff.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.64	3	4	3.5	3	4	4	4

STANDARD FOUR: HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Focus 11 Personnel

- Appoints, disciplines and discharges administrators, principals, and staff not assigned to particular schools.
- Reviews and approves principal's recommendations for appointments of personnel assigned to a particular school, consistent with district personnel policies and budgetary restrictions.
- Initiates or reviews and approves discipline or discharge of staff.
- Supports school administrators in the management of personnel casework.
- Implements the evaluation arrangements agreed by the School Committee.
- Serves as a resource to the School Committee in collective bargaining.
- Handles personnel casework in a timely and appropriate manner.
- Recruits, retains and develops talented staff.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
 2.71

Comments

Christopher Farmer's input was extremely helpful during the recent collective bargaining process. He provided the district's negotiating team with valuable insight and suggestions. He has handled a large amount of difficult situations during tough times and multitasks to juggle many priorities. He has also made some tough decisions regarding district personnel which were not always popular. Without a district Human Resources Director, Christopher has been required to wear this hat as well as many others.

However, despite these improvements, an area that did not meet expectations in the opinion of the majority of School Committee members was in the area of performance management for his own reports as well as all district personnel. On time and objective/accurate performance reviews for all district personnel needs to be a top priority. Further, if a direct report and/or member of the district personnel are not meeting expectations, performance plans with clearly defined and measurable goals need to be developed in a timely manner. It is important to note that Mr. Farmer has made headway in his tenure in the area of performance reviews.

Conversely, the district can do a better job recognizing our best employees with public or peer recognition. If a teacher has a unique and successful "niche" curriculum that is working, sharing it district wide for that grade level would not only recognize an outstanding and creative teacher, but will support intra district educational excellence. Finally, it will be important for the district to follow through with the development of employment applications and job descriptions in the upcoming year.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.71	4	3	3	2	2	2	3

Focus 12 Professional Development

- Ensures the preparation and implementation of the district's professional development plan.
- Ensures that appropriate professional development activities are available to all school department employees.
- Participates actively in personal professional development

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
 3.57

Comments

There is a great deal of work going into professional development with a focus on teaching and learning. We are glad to see the work to include cafeteria workers into such a program. The district has implemented a comprehensive professional development plan under Christopher Farmer's leadership with limited resources. It is important that we make sure that all personnel are following through with their required development plans. In addition, it is important that Mr. Farmer takes advantage of his own professional development plan that is aligned with some of the areas for improvement discussed in this year's appraisal.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.57	4	4	3	4	4	3	3

STANDARD FIVE: COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Focus 13 Communications and Public Relations

- Keeps all school committee members informed about school operations and programs.
- Identifies and articulates the needs of the school system to the school committee.
- Provides all school committee members with appropriate background information in advance of each committee meeting.
- Develops and implements a continuing plan for working with the news media.
- Shares responsibility with the school committee for open communication and honest discourse.
- Maintains open communication between the community and the schools.

Level 1 Level 2 ↓ Level 3 Level 4 No data
2.57

Comments

Christopher is accessible to community members and works hard to juggle his schedule to accommodate meetings. He does a good job communicating to the public via his Superintendent's reports and keeps the School Committee well informed most of the time. He prioritizes his emergencies well and does his due diligence to stay abreast of important developments.

Areas requiring improvement include getting minutes/reports to the School Committee in advance of meetings so we can be better prepared. We also struggled during the recent pregnancy issues without a media plan in place. As a result, School Committee members were unaware of some meetings that were held with you and the press, as well as other members of the district. Finally, many parents and community members continue to describe your social style as intimidating and condescending. Working on ways to modify your social style would be very advantageous as we look at ways to enhance the district leadership's reputation throughout the community.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
2.57	2	4	3	3	2	2	2

STANDARD SIX: VALUES AND ETHICS

- Ensures that policy development and operational decisions are founded upon principles and values adopted and held by the district.
- Makes decisions and develops advice based on the developmental needs of children.
- Behaves in an ethical way at all times.
- Provides advice based on data and experience rather than an assessment of what people wish to hear.
- Holds personnel accountable for behavior which is not compatible with the district's values and principles.

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
3.92

Comments

Mr. Farmer's values and ethics are of the highest standard. His high ethical standards illustrate a sincere commitment to our public schools and the education of our children. His recommendations and solutions are almost always based on data and experience vs. the popular vote. The Superintendent also has an incredible work ethic that sets a high standard for all employed in the district.

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.92	4	4	3.5	4	4	4	4

STANDARD SEVEN: GOALS SET BY THE COMMITTEE

- Achieves goals set by the committee from time to time.
- Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 ↓ Level 4 No data
3.14

Summary of 2007-2008 District Goals

- Goal 1 to meet the academic, physical, social, and emotional development needs of all students in partnership with families and the community**
- Goal 2 to raise expectations and levels of achievement and growth to above the state average and meet AYP**
- Goal 3 to recruit, develop, and retains highly qualified staff and volunteers**
- Goal 4 to provide adequate, safe, clean, efficient facilities which are fit for purpose**
- Goal 5 to obtain funding sufficient to support the district's mission, and use available resources efficiently and effectively**
- Goal 6 to develop a coherent Pre-K through 12 systems which enjoys the confidence of students, employees, and the community**

Comments

Christopher Farmer's personal goal, to continue to deliver the plan of Effective Learning Communities was successfully met. We are on track and ready for the final phase of the transition plan. Great job.

Regarding the goals set by the committee, Christopher has worked hard under tough economic situations to prevail. The fact that he was able to stabilize our district this year is a true reflection of his due diligence, drive, and determination. As things begin to settle down, and the district moves from crisis to control, we should be in a position to become more proactive and collaborative with our future challenges and goals. The district wide satisfaction survey will be a useful tool to assist with determining priorities, identifying opportunities, and developing goals for the 2008-2009 school year..

Average	Kirk	Verga	Healey	Gilman	Teixeira	Sweet	Harrison
3.14	3	3	3	3	3	4	3

PERFORMANCE LEVELS

Level 4: Performance exceeds job requirements and/or expectations: performance considered outstanding/excellent.

Level 3: Performance fully meets the job requirements and/or expectations: performance considered good/solid.

Level 2: Performance generally meets the job requirements and/or expectations: some need for growth: performance considered satisfactory.

Level 1: Performance needs improvement; performance does not meet the requirements of the position.

(Performance rubric adapted from the Salem School District)