



To: Jairo Arellano, Superintendent Trona Unified School District

From: Ann Cummins Bogan

cc: Sarah Bogan

Subject: District Needs Assessment October 5-7, 2021

Date: October 20, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to visit Trona Unified School District on Oct 5th-7th. Ann Cummins Bogan and Sarah Bogan met with seven teachers, district and school office staff, paraprofessionals, union leaders, parents, students, cafeteria staff, and the Board of Education. Conversations were primarily one-on-one to gain individual perspectives on roles, responsibilities, and an understanding of school and district priorities.

The specific goals of our visit were to learn about the following:

- The current structures for collaboration between the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and Union Leadership to determine ways to enhance the relationships, processes, and structures to positively impact district culture and climate and to ensure positive outcomes for students.
- Gain an understanding of district goals and the vision for teaching and learning and the ways teachers and support staff work to engage learners
- Understand the current level of collaboration teams to promote ongoing reflection on practice and data-driven cycles of inquiry to determine the impact of strategies and initiatives on student outcomes.
- Learn about partnerships with families and the community to ensure the school district is responsive to their needs and leverages the assets and contributions families and communities make to the students of Trona Unified School District

While the Trona community and the school district face many challenges, the overall tone of the visit was one of hope. There seems to be a desire by all with whom we met to find ways to work more effectively together, build mutually supportive relationships, and positively impact the lives of all students in the Trona Unified School District.

There is an enormous amount of expertise and capacity across the district to collaboratively develop a shared vision for the district, determine specific goals and strategies for improvement, and create leadership structures to systematically monitor growth toward goals. Developing clear priorities and strategies for continuous improvement will contribute to significant changes in the culture, climate, teaching, and learning in TUSD.

Some previous goal-setting work was done under the direction of a previous superintendent and can be found on page 6 of the 2021-2022 of the Student/Parent Handbook. Reviewing this work might be a good place to begin the work of establishing a shared vision and goals for TUSD.

District Overview

Trona Unified School district has been in a state of transition for the past several years with turnover in the role of Superintendent and other cabinet positions, as well as the retirement of several long-standing faculty members. The earthquake that devastated the community in 2019, followed by the COVID pandemic, have added strain to an already stressed system. As a result, relationships among leaders, including the Board of Education, members of Cabinet, and school-level personnel are dysfunctional and in some of the worst cases, can be described as toxic.

While Trona Unified School District operates as a K-12 system, there is a clear division between the K-6 elementary school and the 7-12 middle/high school. Teachers and staff from the high school shared that the relationships among staff are collegial, mutually supportive and that there is the feeling of being part of a family. The middle school and high school staff feel the principal is a positive leader, accessible, and responsive to their needs.

We had more limited access to the staff at the elementary school, but the general perception here is that there may be a lack of unity and collaboration among the staff at k-6.

The principal has designated 50 minutes each day to be available to elementary teachers and staff, but it was unclear how often teachers use this time. We consistently heard that the loss of the elementary coordinator has resulted in a sense of disconnect between the elementary site and the larger system. There was some discussion of revisiting the possibility of reestablishing this position.

District

The district leadership has undergone several staff transitions in the past 6-7 years, including the recent shifts in the makeup of cabinet, reducing members from eight members to four in an effort to streamline the work of supporting faculty, staff, students, and families in Trona Unified School District. Specific roles and responsibilities are emerging, and it is unclear if individuals understand how their work is integrated among common goals.

There is a weekly meeting including both the elementary and high school secretary, maintenance and operations, the school counselor, and the principal. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure everyone is informed about upcoming events. It seems this is an effective method of communication and ensuring everyone is included in the day-to-day operations of the schools.

The role of the superintendent is another area of significant turnover due to the temporary fillings of the role. The current superintendent wants to do what is best for all students in Trona Unified School District and staff generally reported that they can tell he is passionate about student learning. Due to the pandemic and distance learning, there have been limited opportunities to build relationships among the superintendent and staff. Staff expressed a desire to get to know him better personally and professionally.

Board of Education

The Board of Education is highly engaged in school operations, including day-to-day decision-making related to student discipline. The majority of the board members have been in place for several years and are committed to the district. There are concerns about the boundaries of the board members and their involvement in site-based decisions. CSBA has been contracted to provide training and help them to establish roles and responsibilities. Allowing the superintendent to have more autonomy and discretion in managing personnel and engaging staff in shared decision-making will help to promote a more positive climate across the system and foster trust among all stakeholders.

Teacher's Union

The union leadership has transitioned this year, and for the first time there are members from both the elementary and secondary schools on the executive board. This is an opportunity to create cohesiveness within the district and to establish new collaborative structures and processes for reflecting on teaching and ensuring all students are successful in TUSD.

Teachers

While teachers report collegial relationships, time for professional collaboration is limited, and each teacher has unique responsibilities in the delivery of content and subject matter. All teachers at the high school level teach multiple courses and have limited time for planning which may affect the effectiveness of instruction and impact on student learning. Teacher collaboration could increase to improve the consistency of teacher expectations across classrooms.

There are several innovative ways scheduling of classes might be explored to ensure highly engaged and differentiated instruction as well as time for professional collaboration to analyze assessment data and differentiate instruction to effectively meet the diverse needs of all students.

IReady data is available as a district-wide benchmarking system to inform instruction and monitor growth and learning for all students.

Student Support

There is an SST process in place, which seems to be focused mainly on behavior interventions. There have not been meetings so far this year. Weekly BOOST time has been established to provide additional support for students who may be falling behind in assignments and elective opportunities are provided for those who are demonstrating proficiency and completing classroom assignments.

There is a weekly staff meeting that takes place during the early release for students. This seems to be mainly focused on school operations, with some time allocated to determine student activities during BOOST. There does not currently seem to be a concrete emotional support system for students.

The elementary school uses iReady data as a benchmark assessment which is administered 3-4 times a year. The fall 2021 data shows a large majority of the students are well below grade level in both reading and math. The teachers and staff who met with us seemed open and excited to find innovative ways to improve student learning at all levels.

Special Education

Leadership in Special Education was unclear and we did not gain a true understanding of how students are identified for services or how IEPs are managed. We observed a classroom where the special education teacher worked with students during general education, Tier 1 instruction.

There is a county program housed on campus that serves students with more severe disabilities SELPA visits the district 2X/week. The county program is isolated from the rest of the school and our understanding was that students in the program do not engage with the rest of the TUSD students or staff.

Recommendation for Next Steps:

- Review the current mission, vision, and goals in the Student/Parent Handbook and engage the full staff in refining these to build shared commitments to improve teaching and learning for all students in TUSD.
- Determine roles and responsibilities of all Cabinet members and how their work connects to the broader goals for TUSD.
- Establish clear boundaries with the Board of Education to build a culture of trust and transparency, and strong, collaborative leadership among administrators.
- Engage the staff in a review of student data to determine key priorities for students.
- Develop innovative strategies to meet the diverse needs of all learners through professional collaboration among staff.
- Establish opportunities to build relationships and foster trust among leadership and model collaboration for all staff.

Proposed Supports from ACB Consulting 2021-2022 SY

Ann Cummins Bogan Consulting proposes the following plan for the remainder of the 2021-2022 SY to support the development of shared goals and strategies for continuous improvement, establishing collaborative relationships, and improving teaching and learning to positively impact the growth of all students in TUSD.
