

**Evaluation 2019-20 School Year
Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent
Natick Public Schools**

District Goals

This evaluation of Dr. Anna Nolin, Superintendent of Natick Public Schools, was conducted in July 2020. It includes a review of the work done during the 2019-20 school year.

Consistent with documented state procedures for evaluating school superintendents, this evaluation includes four main components:

1. Evaluation of achievements in the four district goal areas, as outlined in the district strategic plan created in August 2018.
2. Evaluation of professional practice goal.
3. Evaluation of standards established by DESE for superintendent evaluation. Dr. Nolin was evaluated on seven indicators that were chosen by the School Committee in November 2019.
4. Evaluation of school closure period due to COVID-19 pandemic. This piece of the evaluation is not required by DESE, but is an essential component to consider when evaluating the 2019-20 school year.

District Goals

Goal Area #1 Teaching and Learning & Assessment, Accountability/Assessment and Evaluation - **EXCEEDED**

A highlight of this year was the completion of the NEASC accreditation process. The final report provided the high school and the entire Natick community with documentation of strengths and challenges we face at the 9-12 grade levels. Rather than viewing the NEASC process as a "chore," the high school leadership and district administration embraced the process as an opportunity to identify work that should continue and areas that should be improved - both academic and social and emotional.

The Committee was pleased to see the Profile of a Graduate extended to include the development of a Profile of an Educator. This provides a framework by which to create common expectations for all Natick educators and to identify a consistent set of expectations and evaluation protocols. Similar to the Profile of a Graduate, the Committee looks forward to seeing this work continue and to viewing the products that come from this work. We expect this will provide Natick educators with clear expectations, as well as an understanding of the opportunities for growth in the district.

The audit schedule laid out at the beginning of the year provided the Committee with a clear understanding of the cycle of the audits. Despite school closure in March, both the Writing Audit and the World Language Audit were complete and the Committee heard presentations for both in June. Both audits provided an understanding of deficiencies and areas for improvement. However, in contrast to past audits, the Committee was less clear on action steps that would be taken over the next few years to address the challenges and areas for improvement. The Committee was unsure if the identification of action steps for improvement was delayed because of school closure. ***The desire for the 2020-21 school year is to gain a clear understanding of the specific action steps that will be taken to address the deficiencies identified in both the Writing Audit and the World Language Audit. We would ask Dr. Nolin to provide these action steps as an addendum to the audits or within the context of the goals work that will occur in the summer of 2020.***

In addition to the academic audits, the district applied for and was accepted into the DESE self-audit pilot program. This provided an opportunity for the district to utilize a process designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular program and we applaud Dr. Nolin for taking advantage of this opportunity. The preliminary data showed the audit process was promising and would provide solid information on the effectiveness of our RTI program. ***However, as with the Writing and World Language Audits, the Committee would like to see and understand the specific action steps that will be taken to improve, revise, and adjust the RTI program in the coming months and over the next few school years.***

During the 2019-20 school year, many steps were taken to address the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A significant step was the acceptance of two Natick administrators into the Influence 100 program, a state program that seeks to increase the number of diverse candidates in leadership positions in Massachusetts public education. We applaud Dr. Nolin for seeking out this program and for identifying promising administrators in our district who would benefit from the opportunity and expertise offered by the program. This demonstrates Dr. Nolin's real commitment to elevating and mentoring administrators of color. This was further evidenced by Dr. Nolin's appointment of Robin Welch as interim principal at Lilja Elementary. It is significant to the Committee that the commitment to diversity in leadership is not just stated on paper, but is put into action in real and meaningful ways.

In addition, the district began the challenging work of implementing a strategy to understand inherent bias in the system and to take steps toward being an anti-racist district. Evidence this year showed professional development at Wilson and action steps with students. A component of this effort is also community engagement, evidenced through the screening of the I'm Not a Racist film and community conversation. ***While the professional development, student engagement, and community outreach pieces are steps in the right direction, the Committee would like to better understand the overall strategy for addressing issues of race, culture, and inclusion in the Natick Public Schools. How do all the pieces fit together and how will the work be carried forward to all teachers and staff and what will this work look like for students?***

The Committee was pleased to see so many accomplishments in the Fine Arts department, which is a direct result of partial implementation of the audit recommendations identified a few years ago. This is an important example of the value of audits and the impact of implementing the recommendations. It is disappointing to not be able to fully implement the fine arts audit with the addition of a technical theater program given budgetary constraints. It is also difficult to not be able to fully realize the civic engagement strategic goal of the Capstone program at the high school because of the same budgetary constraints.

The Committee is very pleased to see the evolution of the Global Citizenship program and the potential for the World Language Audit to add value to that program. The only concern the Committee had about the Global Citizenship program, and it is a concern that could be applied to other activities and programs, is to ensure that the messaging about access to opportunities is clear, no matter the financial situation of families. The Committee wants to ensure that all families know that, no matter the financial resources, all programs and activities are accessible to all families and the district will work to make participation possible for all students.

Goal Area #2 Teaching and Learning While Nurturing Connections (SEL - develop a systematic, developmentally appropriate SEL and healthy living framework for student learning and parent engagement and partnership - EXCEEDED

Given the lack of a coherent Social and Emotional Learning Framework in the district prior to Dr. Nolin's appointment to superintendent, the challenge of Goal #2 is significant. The Committee was pleased to see so much progress made in this area prior to school closure in March. The establishment of a draft continuum from PreK-12 was a significant first step in establishing the expectations for social and emotional learning at each grade level. It appeared in the continuum that some of the steps were still under development, which we assume was a result of school closure and shift to online learning. The professional development opportunities provided within this goal appeared useful and appropriate. In addition, the use of the CASEL walk-through forms for evaluation of SEL in the classroom made it clear that SEL would be a valued piece of classroom work moving forward.

A significant accomplishment this year was the development of the "Calling it Quits: Vaping" vaping program curriculum. This program was the first of its kind in the state and was developed as a pilot program in partnership with University of Massachusetts Medical School. The use of the Metrowest Health Survey data, which showed 36 percent of students had tried vaping in their lifetime, demonstrated a real commitment to acting upon data collected. A significant increase in vaping led to the development of a program to address this public health crisis for teens. The program is built upon a solid foundation and is positioned well for implementation in the 20-21 school year should the school structure and focus allow. The Committee looks forward to identifying other data from the Metrowest Health Survey that is actionable and can address some of the health issues identified as challenges for our district.

The Committee expects that the SEL work was somewhat interrupted by school closure. Therefore, we would like to better understand the specific action steps that will be taken in the 2020-21 school year within SEL - action steps that were not achieved in 19-20, were interrupted by the pandemic school closure, or are the next steps in the implementation of a core SEL program in the district. We also look forward to the development of the RTI (tiered approach) to SEL. The Committee also wondered about the continuation of the parent book club and whether that would be an action step for 20-21 or would be replaced by a different form of family engagement.

The Committee wanted to highlight the student speakers at School Committee meetings as an important component of social and emotional learning in the district. The Committee was impressed not only with the speakers themselves, but also with their educators for promoting and fostering students' passion for worthwhile causes, public speaking skills, self-confidence, and local government.

The accomplishments in social and emotional learning this year simply cannot be described without highlighting the work that was done in school closure. The focus on student health and well-being during closure was essential and extremely well-executed. We applaud Dr. Nolin, her team, and all the teachers for putting the social and emotional health of students first. This could not have been done without an existing culture of care and prioritization of the mental health of students. During closure, every effort was made to ensure students were engaged, were checking in, and were navigating remote learning. The continuation of athletics, student clubs, and other activities provided students with continued access to trusted adults, which has been a critical component to the district's social and emotional work over the past few years. The "check-ins" as part of remote learning not only provided academic support, but served as critical social and emotional support for students.

Goal Area #3 Assessment, Accountability & Evaluation (Excel in strategic planning and financial management) - EXCEEDED

Dr. Nolin has continued her pursuit of excellence within goal #3. She is deeply committed to a transparent budget process and continues to explore the best way to present school financial information to the Finance Committee, Town Meeting members, and the community as a whole. The adoption of the meritorious budget format, a nationally recognized format, was a significant step forward. Given feedback from the Finance Committee, there may be room to "personalize" this national model to Natick specifically so that it is providing the Finance Committee and Town Meeting members with the information they need to evaluate the school budget. The Committee expects Dr. Nolin will collaborate with the new Education Sub-Committee next year to refine this new budget format.

The enrollment and space study has been difficult to finalize. The format may need to be revisited so that the end product is clearly defined and articulated. With the facilities director in place now, we expect progress to be made on assessing the space needs. A thorough analysis

of enrollment trends will require additional funding and we will need to determine if this is possible in the 20-21 school year. The anticipated outcome should be a clearly defined enrollment projection, as well as long-term facilities plan that addresses the space needs, as well as the building needs, of the district over the next several years.

The Committee continues to be impressed with the technological capacity of the district, both the devices available and the commitment to data privacy and security. This understanding of technology and the commitment to security allowed the district to quickly pivot to remote learning in the spring. Without this foundation, Natick would not have been nearly as successful. In addition, the Committee was impressed by the district's ability to stay on track for the conversion to PowerSchool despite the technological needs that arose as a result of school closure. Maximizing the use of PowerSchool will be an important piece of both data management and school communication moving forward.

Dr. Nolin is to be commended for her role in hiring Mr. John Gadsen, the new facilities director. He has already made a significant impact on the Town of Natick facilities department, identifying cost savings during school closure, beginning work on a long-term facilities plan, developing standard operating procedures for his department, and playing a critical role in the Kennedy Building Project. While it continues to be difficult to jointly manage the facilities department because of municipal actions, the Committee is very pleased with Dr. Nolin's support of Mr. Gadsden and ensuring he is a strategic partner in the management of school buildings.

The Kennedy Building Project is ahead of schedule and under budget. This project continues to take a significant amount of time to manage, especially with the recent order of furniture, fixtures, and equipment. Dr. Nolin has strategically managed this process, working closely with Kennedy staff to ensure the building will meet the educational needs of students. Managing the procurement process is a challenge and we commend Dr. Nolin for her ability to solve problems when they arise. We are looking forward to moving the students in at the beginning of January and launching the next phase of the project!

A significant challenge for the school finance department is the MUNIS system. We commend Dr. Nolin for initiating an audit by MUNIS to determine Natick's use of the system. The outcome documented what we suspected, which was that Natick is under-utilizing the product. This is an ongoing frustration for the district's finance department. It is also of deep concern to the School Committee because lack of access to MUNIS means the Committee cannot receive regular, updated information on the budget. The Education Sub-Committee has expressed interest in assisting the school district in resolving this issue with the comptroller's office. We hope they will act to assist Dr. Nolin, the School Committee, and community members. Simply put, there is not much more Dr. Nolin can do to resolve this situation

Goal #3 cannot be fully evaluated without taking into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic. In March, after four months of budget discussions, Dr. Nolin was forced to completely remake the FY21 budget because of the pandemic. The first budget season was acrimonious and the

Committee admires Dr. Nolin's resilience and stamina throughout the process. The creation of a new budget due to reduced revenues was extraordinarily difficult. Dr. Nolin clearly communicated the options before the committee and the community. She handled the community dialogue thoughtfully, acknowledging the difficult decisions that needed to be made. She also made difficult decisions, including furloughing employees, when it was necessary to do so. She also met often with the Town Administrator in an attempt to collaborate. Ultimately her excellent relationship with the EAN and all Natick staff allowed us to achieve a budget that avoided layoffs or pink slips and saved critical buildings and programs. The good relationship and its foundation in trust made this possible. We commend Dr. Nolin for managing this budget process with compassion, strength, resilience, and skill.

Goal Area #4 Nurturing Connections (establish communication procedures and philosophy that build trust, transparency and engagement) - EXCEEDED

Dr. Nolin continues to show considerable strength and leadership in communications. She consistently explores ways to improve communication and demonstrates a real willingness to listen to feedback from the community. Notable achievements this year include the development of the new RTI and Parent Academy webpages, streamlined NPS Engage email, and templates for communication on RTI and the Gifted/Talented Learner programs. Communication on the budget issues was exemplary. The budgets were clearly communicated in ways families could understand and digest.

The effort was made last year to find ways to improve teacher communication with families, which was included in the most recent EAN contract. Questions related to implementation of this contract piece arose in the fall, but were mostly alleviated given the communication that had to happen during school closure. Some members of the Committee would like to better understand how teacher communication will be measured and evaluated in the future so we can gauge progress in this area.

Like in other goal areas, the goal cannot be fully evaluated without acknowledging the pandemic. Communication during school closure was outstanding. Information was shared regularly and there were opportunities for live discussion and feedback. The development of a one-stop shop for all district information related to materials, schedules, and resources during closure was instrumental in helping families navigate and manage school during the closure.

There are two areas to consider within communications moving forward. The first is to find ways to ensure critical information is read by families. This might include more concise email messages in which the key action item is clearly stated and defined. Another area is to find better ways to incorporate the principals into communications. While families like to hear from the superintendent, they also like to connect with the principal(s) at their school(s). Feedback from some during closure, and during this summer, has been that more visibility, communication, and interaction with school principals would be helpful.

Student Learning Goal - EXCEEDED

Excel in academic achievement and implement Profile of a Natick Graduate competencies for all groups and sub groups of students. (District Goal #1)

Significant progress was made within Goal #1, both within the programs already in place and the audits completed to identify areas of improvement. The Committee looks forward to discussion of more specific action steps in areas of writing, world language, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Professional Practice Goal - EXCEEDED

Dr. Nolin participated in the second year of the New Superintendent's Induction Program and earned at least Proficient ratings on each major assignment. The Committee was impressed with Dr. Nolin's commitment to the program. She embraced both the structured learning times and the opportunities to consult with her mentor on a regular basis. The achievement level was elevated to Exceeded this year because Dr. Nolin was asked to present at the New Superintendent's Induction, which indicates a level of expertise beyond the traditional new superintendent.

Standards/Indicators - 7 Selected for Evaluation in the 2019-20 School Year

I-B. Instruction: Ensures that practices in all settings reflect high expectations regarding content and quality of effort and work, engage all students, and are personalized to accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.

EXEMPLARY

Dr. Nolin demonstrates a commitment to high expectations for all students. The continued refinement of existing programs, for example the new electives in senior year English, indicates a willingness to evolve the educational program to fit student needs and interests. The continued focus on writing and literacy, both through the Caulkins curriculum and the writing audit, shows an understanding of the core skills students must develop in K-12 education. Engagement in the DESE pilot program to evaluate the RTI program shows a willingness to determine the success of programs in place and determine ways to improve should the data demonstrate the need. Pursuing the high school Capstone program, as well as the Thrively pilot at the middle school shows a commitment to engaging students in areas of their own interest, while tying it to important skill-building.

II-A. Environment: Develops and executes effective plans, procedures, routines, and operational systems to address a full range of safety, health, emotional, and social needs. EXEMPLARY

There is perhaps no better example of Dr. Nolin's commitment to this indicator than her performance during the school closure period and the subsequent planning for the 20-21 school

year. Dr. Nolin consistently seeks to document plans and protocols, which has been especially apparent in her work with the Board of Health this spring. She utilizes tools to monitor communications, develops processes that can be implemented easily, and clearly communicates these processes to relevant stakeholders. We know that the systems, procedures, and collaboration processes developed and demonstrated by Dr. Nolin are emulated by other districts and she is often invited to share her expertise with them.

II-B. Human Resources Management and Development: Implements a cohesive approach to recruiting, hiring, induction, development, and career growth that promotes high-quality and effective practice. EXEMPLARY

The Committee is particularly pleased with Dr. Nolin's commitment to hiring, retaining, and elevating candidates of color into the Natick Public Schools. She consistently demonstrates this commitment through her actions within the district and in her participation in programs at the state level. While not yet fully implemented given the current budget environment, we are confident that Dr. Nolin will continue to pursue this goal.

II-E. Fiscal Systems: Develops a budget that supports the district's vision, mission, and goals; allocates and manages expenditures consistent with district- and school-level goals and available resources. EXEMPLARY

Dr. Nolin developed two full budgets this year with tremendous skill and leadership. While full realization of the strategic plan is stymied by available budgetary resources, Dr. Nolin makes partial progress by leveraging the skills of professionals within the district and the resources that exist outside of the district. She carefully tracks the budget and deploys funds in strategic ways that maximize investment. Of particular note this year was Dr. Nolin's strategic fiscal management during school closure resulted in significant savings, which in turn allowed the school department to fund its FY21 budget in part through the savings realized. This strong fiscal management was of significant benefit to the town as it sought to manage a significant revenue loss and the uncertainty in the future.

III-A. Engagement: Actively ensures that all families are welcome members of the classroom and school community and can contribute to the effectiveness of the classroom, school, district, and community. EXEMPLARY

Regular meetings with families, community members, and town leaders demonstrate Dr. Nolin's commitment to ensuring a school district that is welcoming and inclusive for all. Dr. Nolin is consistently asked to participate in town working groups (e.g., Town Meeting planning) and community groups. Dr. Nolin's participation in the recent online forum sponsored by Natick is United called "Advancing Racial Justice" showed her commitment to this work in the schools, as well as her position in the community as a leader on this issue. Her contribution is sought out and valued because of the relationships she builds. She understands that strengthening the school system relies upon strong support from all stakeholders. The Parent Academy Town Hall is an illustrative example of inviting families to

more deeply engage them in the work of the district and to give them the opportunity to provide real and meaningful feedback. In addition, the work to reach ELL families during school closure by identifying translators within the community demonstrated a real commitment to ensuring all families were engaged.

III-B. Sharing Responsibility: Continuously collaborates with families and community stakeholders to support student learning and development at home, school, and in the community. EXEMPLARY

As stated previously, Dr. Nolin goes above and beyond to engage with and respond to families on a consistent basis. Her relationships with town department heads result in unique partnerships that benefit the entire town. She has excellent working relationships with Chief Hicks and Jim White. The partnership with Jim White was particularly critical as the school nurses assisted his office during the height of COVID-19 infections in Natick. In addition, Dr. Nolin is often invited to other districts to share information about team-building within organizations, as well as the partnership between Natick Public Schools and Natick Police related to security. This type of creative thinking leveraging of resources, and leadership in the regions, benefits not only the district, but also the entire Town of Natick.

IV-B. Cultural Proficiency: Ensures that policies and practices enable staff members and students to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment in which students' backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected. EXEMPLARY

Dr. Nolin has begun the process of training faculty to recognize cultural bias and reflect upon the processes and practices that impact our ability to be a true anti-racist district. Pieces of the strategy are already in place, including professional development for teachers and staff, training of students in small groups, and hiring practice that increases diversity within teaching staff and among leadership. The Committee looks forward to an expansion of this practice and a more strategic approach that will impact all members of the Natick school community.

Conclusion/COVID-19 Pandemic

An evaluation of the 2019-20 school year would not be complete without a review of the superintendent's performance during school closure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the foundation Dr. Nolin provided and supported prior to the pandemic, the district was able to quickly pivot to a remote learning environment. The strong foundation in technology allowed quick distribution of devices and utilization of tools already in use in school buildings (Google classroom, etc.) The commitment to social and emotional learning placed the emphasis on the well-being of students and a continued connection to school during the trauma of quarantine. The commitment to equity ensured all families were connected and cared for with mobile hotspots, translations, food service, and mental health supports. The strong relationship with our unions ensured that teachers felt valued and understood and students received the education, consistent schedule, and new learning they needed to make real academic progress.

The Committee has heard from other districts that Natick was a model for remote learning during the closure and was held up as an example of a district that achieved significant success.

We are proud of the success Dr. Nolin achieved in remote learning, leading her team to completely recreate learning within the span of just a few days. This gives us great confidence in what Dr. Nolin will be able to accomplish as we face another difficult year in which she will need to remake systems and reimagine learning during a worldwide pandemic.