

District Leadership Interviews – Warren Township – May 2018

I am Robin Miles from Meridian MS. I have met most of the district leadership team in Warren Township having visited the district on two occasions – as a visitor from MS and as an inquirer seeking to learn about your leadership culture and your models of instructional support that have impacted student learning to a high degree in the Township. My intent is to capture the transformation of teaching, learning, and leading in the district from your basic skills orientation to personalizing learning.

This set of interviews are geared toward district leadership primarily – there are few studies of district leadership – most notably – Young, 2016, Honig, 2006, 2008, and 2012, and Rorrer (2008) and the work of the Wallace Foundation which you are all familiar with I believe. We believe Warren Township falls in line with a theory of change advocated by the Berkana Institute, the home of Margaret Wheatley. The two loops model has been a fundamental piece of The Berkana Institute's theory of change. As one system culminates and starts to collapse, isolated alternatives slowly begin to arise and give way to the new. We have appropriated the model to explain how Warren was a leader in Indiana in standards based teaching driven by external accountability and state assessment. This we believe is the first loop became the descending model of change culminating and starting to descend. Slowly since 2010, Warren has been engaged in an on-going inquiry (the ascending change model) or the move to personalizing learning using integrated technology and station teaching models embedded in the Common Core standards.

As one thinks about the culture of leadership In Warren, in my earlier visits, I found it palpable. I could feel it and almost taste it in my interviews with instructional specialists and your principals. Our interview with Ken Hull, a neighboring superintendent confirmed his perception of the district leadership as excellent models of instructional driven leaders with good ideas that work within challenging district socio-cultural-economic context of the east side of Marion County.

With that as an introduction, we are asking each of you who make up the Superintendent cabinet to join us in capturing the district leadership culture and how you got here. We hope to capture your thoughts and reflections and incorporate them into a book form. Your interviews will be analyzed by both myself and Dr. Burrello and organized into themes that emerge over your ten years of work together as cabinet members. Each contribution to a theme if used will be identified by each member of the team.

We are asking to interview –

Deputy Superintendent Tim Hanson
Assistant Superintendent – Ryan Russell
Assistant Superintendent – Pam Griffin
Assistant Superintendent – David Holt
Assistant Superintendent – Brian Simkins
Director of Student Support – Allison Woods

References

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- Rorrer, A. K., Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (2008). Districts as institutional actors in educational reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(3), 307-357.
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**First Interview
Deputy Superintendent Tim Hanson**

Let us begin by congratulating you on your ascendance to the superintendency here in Warren starting very soon.

Tim you have the most unique perspective of the top leadership of the district since and David Holt are the only one who have been in two cabinets over the past ten to twelve years and two or more sets of Board members terms.

Let us begin with:

From your perspective, what do think have been the most significant critical incidents in the district over the past ten years spanning both superintendents?

Let me be sure to prompt you to the following: Can you add a significant topic?

- 1. 2009-2010 re-districting of schools and closures**
- 2. Transitioning of superintendents – 2011 to 2012 and Re-constituting the district leadership team**
- 3. High school's reluctance to join the District core instructional practices**
- 4. Race to the Top Grant – and its three initiatives**
- 5. Teacher Evaluation Tool**
- 6. District Framework and Core Initiative**

If you agree with this list, what would you add? And why are they critical?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?
How would you characterize Dena's leadership through these events? What stood out to you?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

You have lost good teacher leaders and principals to neighboring districts – how have you replaced them and brought on board the new staff?

As you look to the future, what do you see as the challenges to you, the Board, and the district will face?

How is your own transition going? How has Dena been helpful?

What will be her legacy here?

Second Interview
Assistant Superintendent – Ryan Russell

Do you know what your new role will be after the transition?
How will it be different or the same to you?

You have been through at least two transitions since leaving the principalship in Warren – how did they evolve and what support did you receive from Dena?

From your perspective, what do think have been the most significant critical incidents in the district over the past ten years spanning both superintendents?

Let me be sure to prompt you to the following –

- 1. 2010 re-districting of schools and closures**
- 2. Transitioning of superintendents – 2011 to 2012**
- 3. Re-constituting the district leadership team**
- 4. Race to the Top grant and its three initiatives?**
- 5. Teacher Evaluation Tool**
- 6 – District Framework and Core Initiative**

If you agree with this list, what would you add?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?
How would you characterize Dena’s leadership through these events? What stood out to you?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

What are the student expectations today in the district? What are your expectations for teachers in the district today?

You have lost good teacher leaders and principals to neighboring districts – how have you replaced them and brought on board the new staff?

Your baby for the past four years as being the leader of instructional support specialist?
How has that role best been implemented? What continues to be their course and work focus?

You have a particular perspective on the Race to the Top grant – what about its originals – operations – and results can you share? Again what role has Dena played in its development and implementation?

From a principal perspective how did the central office appears to you from 2006 to 2012?

What impact did the District Framework have on your work in your school?

What do you see as the continuing challenges facing the district in the future?

Third Interview

David Holt, Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs

David you have the most unique perspective of the top leadership of the district since you the only member who has been in two cabinets over the past ten to twelve years.

Let us begin with:

From your perspective, what do think have been the most significant critical incidents in the district over the past ten years spanning both superintendents?

Let me be sure to prompt you to the following –

- 1. 2010 re-districting of schools and closures**
- 2. Transitioning of superintendents – 2011 to 2012**
- 3. Re-constituting the district leadership team**
- 4 – Race to the Top grant and its initiatives?**
- 5. Current Referendum**
- 6. District Framework and Core Initiative**

If you agree with this list, what would you add?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

How would you characterize Dena's leadership through these events? What stood out to you? How has the district leadership team evolved? What are its strengths?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

What do you attribute the success/failure of the operating and hopefully, them this Spring?

What do you see as the challenges facing the district in the future?

Fourth Interview

Pam, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education

As you started your new job, what direction did you receive from Dena? What were your marching orders?

What did you come to find out were the major challenges at the middle schools-academies versus the high school?

What were some of your first steps? What kind of support have you received from Dena to do your job?

You have a particular perspective on the Race to the Top grant – what about its originals – operations – and results can you share?

Again what role has Dena played in its development and implementation?

From a principal perspective how did the central office appear to you from 2008 to 2013?

What impact did the District Framework have on your work in your school?

What are the student expectations today in the district? What are your expectations for teachers in the district today?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?

How would you characterize Dena's leadership on your district team? What stood out to you?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

What do you see as the continuing challenges facing the district in the future?

Fifth Interview

Brian - Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources

From your perspective, what do think have been the most significant critical incidents in the district over the past ten years spanning both superintendents?

Let me be sure to prompt you to four or five—

- 1. 2010 re-districting of schools and closures**
- 2. Re-constituting the district leadership team**
- 3. Personnel recruitment and retention**
- 4. Race to the Top grant and its initiatives?**
- 5. District Framework and Core Initiative**
- 6. Teacher Evaluation Tool**

If you agree with this list, what would you add?

Brian, you and Dena have had a unique relationship having to deal with personnel matters over the course of her tenure here? Can you identify the key issues the two of have had to face and manage?

What are the superintendents key dispositions and skills?

How do you judge the performance of the superintendent and her cabinet?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?

How would you characterize Dena's leadership on the district team? What stood out to you?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

What do you think is your unique perspective in the evolution of the office of Human Resources?

What do you believe are the district challenges in the future?

Sixth Interview

Allison – Director of Student Services

How do you characterize your role in the Superintendent cabinet? How is it different or the similar than your peers in neighboring districts?

From your perspective, what do think have been the most significant **critical incidents in the** district over the past ten years spanning both superintendents?

Let me be sure to prompt you to four or five:

- 1. 2010 re-districting of schools and closures**
- 2. Transitioning of superintendents – 2011 to 2012**
- 3. Re-constituting the district leadership team**
- 4. High school never getting on board**
- 5 – Race to the Top and its three initiatives**
- 6 – District Framework and Core Initiative**

If you agree with this list, what would you add?

Can you describe how the district team functions with regard to these incidents?

How would you characterize Dena's leadership through these events? What stood out to you?

What is the secret to Warren success? Persistence? Open to change? Direct support for principals and teachers? Core values seeing them through?

You have played an unique role in the Race to the Top grant – can you identify that role and the impact of the grant on your departments? Kids with special needs?

What are the student expectations today in the district? What are your expectations for teachers in the district today?

How is special education unique in this district? How is special education more integral to the district's direction and operations?

In what ways is your relationship to your superintendent special as compared to your peers?