

A Lived Experience of Opening a New High School: A Descriptive Case Study

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Surface

Omaha, Nebraska

October 2022

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University of Nebraska, 2022

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## **Abstract**

As a descriptive case study this research reports on the factors that are needed when opening a new high school. The purpose of this study was to discover the processes, variables and systems needed to open a new secondary school. The researcher used emerging themes from the data to find the commonalities that lead to the effective opening of a new high school. This descriptive case study was done through the lens of the activity director assigned to a new high school. This research finds the most common themes that lead towards effective practice when opening a new high school.

## **Acknowledgments**

To Cynthe, you have always been my biggest supporter and every day I am thankful for your love and our life.

To Mom and Dad, you are the example that I continually follow and I am so thankful for the guidance you have provided and continue to give.

To Ella, Noah, and Ava, work hard in everything you do. Never believe that someone else is better than you and never believe that you are better than someone else.

To Dr. Surface, thank you for your support and guidance through this entire process. It would not have been possible without you.

To Supervisory Committee, thank you for your work and feedback to promote and allow this work to impact other professionals in the future.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Overview**

Public education is a vitally important resource available to our communities and country when considering the best option to shape and grow our leaders for tomorrow. It is imperative that a free and public education is available to all citizens and to that end leaders must continuously work to offer quality education for all. As the country's population continues to grow educators must be diligent in creating new public education spaces to meet the needs of all citizens. When opening a new school there are many natural considerations that educational leaders must ponder. On the surface, these considerations seem simple but when one digs a little deeper the complexity is very nuanced. Leaders need to maintain a pulse of the community and the expectations of those involved must be taken into thoughtful consideration. When the situation arises where a new school needs to open these dynamics must be contemplated. What is the value system of the community and how might it be impacted by a new school? What is the demography and geography of the school district and how must this be considered when selecting the space to build the new school? How might this school serve as a public resource and what needs of the community need to be met? It would be wise for these questions to be reflected upon during the planning process before construction begins.

When examining the values of a community there are several indicators that should be taken into thought. The size of the school is an important factor. School leaders

must determine capacity limits and make decisions to that end when a student population is nearing the limits of the building. Depending on the community, the ideal population could vary. In large metropolitan areas, it is quite common to see student populations of a building in the thousands, and conversely, in more rural areas the ideal size of a school would vary drastically. It is the educational leader's job to understand the values and demands of the community and position the student populations of the buildings to meet the expectations of the community being served. Another value that should be considered is the curricular offerings. There is a large array of curricula to offer students, and again depending on the community, it is the educational leader's job to identify those offerings that are most important and make decisions on how this might be impacted by a new school. Magnet schools, vocational opportunities, college credit courses, and other content-specific opportunities must be identified and acted upon when a new school is potentially needed. Student opportunities are a vital part of the student experience and should be weighed when planning for a new school. As schools grow, specifically at the high school level, the opportunity to be involved in multiple clubs, sports, and other activities begins to dwindle due to the level of competitiveness and number of students needing to be served. When opening a new school these opportunities will increase and give more available options for students if planned for appropriately.

The geography and demographics of a school district must also be taken into consideration when school leaders are examining building a new school. Land selection is the first logical step to study when choosing the location. How does one go about choosing the best site for a school? School leaders would need to identify the land that is currently available and the growth patterns that dictate the need for a new school. Is it a

metropolitan area that is fully developed and the school district needs to repurpose land? Is it a rural area that needs to transition an agricultural space into an educational space? The school leaders would also need to examine the municipal zoning regulations and confirm that they are following the guidelines set forth by the city and state in which they are located. In some instances, eminent domain might need to be utilized. This is the process where a government entity can take control of land for a public good after appropriately compensating the current owner through a mediation process. The school leaders must also work to estimate the cost of building a new school and communicate to the community how the structure will be paid for. Depending on local and state regulations the community can utilize fiscal tools to pay for such a large project.

Another consideration that the school leaders should ponder is how this new school might be positioned as a public resource. Again, it is important that the leaders have a pulse on the community and understand the local expectations that need to be served by this public entity. It might be important for the community to have a new fitness center incorporated within the school that can give the community access to the strength and wellness equipment as a public good for all. It is quite common for schools to have a service such as this that provides a wellness factor for the community that it is serving. This type of public good also helps the human relations piece when educating the public that a new school is needed. If a large portion of the population will benefit from the construction of this new school the public support will increase proportionately. Within the realm of health and wellness, an aquatic center might also be an option that school leaders should consider as a public resource. Aquatic centers have many positive aspects but are quite costly to independently construct. Many schools have a natural need



for this type of space but also have large portions of the day where it is not being utilized. Combining the school's needs with the public needs could serve as a public resource that the community would benefit from greatly. Public outreach centers and childcare needs are also public resources that should be evaluated when opening a new school. These types of services benefit working families that need after-hours childcare while the parents are still working. If a new school is needed it would be wise to consider this type of resource for the community.

For this descriptive case study, the educational leaders of this suburban school district took these considerations into account and applied them to best serve the needs of all students and the community. As the leaders examined the student population it was apparent that a new school needed to be constructed. The student population was growing from 6-8% on an annual basis and that level of growth was going to quickly overwhelm the structure and would not be able to physically accommodate the students attending. The leaders noted that as the population increased in size the congestion in the hallways and lunchroom was where it was felt first. The community shared that this level of congestion within the building was not ideal and wanted to see the problem alleviated if possible. The leadership also analyzed the curricular offerings as they aligned with community expectations and the feedback received was the community wanted a similar educational experience regardless of the school the student was attending. Through surveys, the community shared that they wanted the curriculum to be aligned throughout the school district so that each student had an equal opportunity for any academic pursuit they chose. The community also shared strong positive feedback regarding the number of opportunities for students to participate in curricular and extracurricular clubs, teams, and

activities. A common misnomer with this suburban school district is that new schools are constructed to allow the student populations to remain at a level that allows them to stay highly competitive within the athletic arena. On the surface, it is easy to understand how that inaccurate belief has been sustained over time. However, the true reason is that this community highly values the opportunity for students to participate in these activities, and as schools grow in number the opportunities diminish. As student populations grow the level of competitiveness to be a member of a team or organization becomes more difficult because students are competing with one another for a spot on that team. As a new school is constructed more opportunities are created and for this reason, this community continues to support the construction of new schools to allow students to participate and engage in high percentages. This feedback regarding the values of the community was extremely helpful for the leadership team as the plans for the new high school or being solidified.

The general considerations regarding demographics and geography were also analyzed by this suburban school district as plans were made to build a new high school. As stated earlier, the school district was undergoing a tremendous student population growth and due to this new home construction was also taking place at a high level. With this as the reality, it was important to be diligent when selecting the location for this new school. Large portions of the district that had been previously used for agricultural purposes were being repurposed for residential living. This required the district to work with local and state authorities to identify and construct this new school to meet the regulations set in place. The school district analyzed the housing trends and hired a demographer to help locate the best possible site to meet the needs of this changing

demographic need. Future capacity limits needed to be identified to provide proper spacing between schools to serve the community at a high level. Building a new school is a very expensive enterprise and it is important to fully communicate to the community the cost involved and how these needs would be met. In this area of the country, new school construction is primarily paid for by utilizing government bonds. This fiscal tool would add to the local property tax and to ensure transparency the district leadership team conducted neighborhood forums to explain and educate the community to this end. This question-and-answer time allowed community members the opportunity to gain the information needed to justify the cost of building this new high school.

The final consideration as it relates to schools serving as public resources was not as complicated as other schools might experience. The most important and prevalent feedback that the leadership received was the need for creating space and opportunities for students to continue to grow and thrive. This suburban school district had been undergoing positive student growth for more than 20 years and during that time numerous buildings had been constructed and school bonds had been voted upon. Due to this, the tax burden was higher for this community than the average school district in the state. Based on this piece of information it was important for the community to construct this school in the best possible fashion but also be fiscally responsible. The addition of a community fitness center or aquatic center would have added a considerable amount to the overall price tag and thus raised the tax burden even further. It was decided that these items would not be pursued to try and alleviate some of the tax pressure created by building new schools. It is vitally important for school leaders to know the community and gauge the expectations.

In January 2019, the administration for the new high school was selected that would be tasked with opening the school in August 2020. The existing high school had gone through a tremendous amount of growth and the level of congestion warranted the need for a new school. This overgrowth was felt throughout the hallways, lunchroom, classrooms, and activities. Opening a new school is an exciting opportunity and at the same time a daunting task. Where does one start? Whom does one turn to with questions? Is there literature available that would help guide one through this process? At the time of this school opening, there was a lack of best practice research in this area. Of course, there is a great deal of research regarding instruction and learning. There is also research analyzing the optimal size for a high school. Lee and Smith (1997) summarized the four main conclusions highlighted are: high schools should be smaller in scope than they currently are; high schools can be too small; ideal size does not vary by types of students in attendance, and size is more important in some types of schools. The study did find that achievement rises as school size rises to about 600 students, holds steady to about 900 students, and then drops off. These findings are extremely helpful but did not address the how of opening a new school. Kahne et al. (2008) examined a group of schools in the city of Chicago that converted large traditional high schools into smaller independent schools. The study analyzed data from surveys and found that the smaller schools reported being more interconnected and dedicated to teacher situations and academically supportive student settings. Superior instruction was not supported by the evidence, however, there was evidence of decreased dropout rates and increased graduation rates. The research does indicate that smaller schools have the potential to be more effective and this was encouraging but it still did not explain the process. What

happens when it becomes necessary to open a new school because there are too many students walking through the doors? The initial response is simply to open a new school, but it is not that easy. There are numerous challenges and tasks that need to be completed in the days, months, and years preceding the opening day of school. This January Board meeting in 2019 will be a memory that I will forever cherish. The principal and author were the first two members to be selected and tasked with opening this high school. When the author realized that there would not be educational resources to lean on during this process, he was determined to utilize this experience and hopefully provide insight and reflections to others that find themselves in the same situation in the future. Stake (1995) states that “A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. We study a case when it is of special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts.” (p.11) This was the desired pursuit and the principal and author needed to get to work right away and moving forward he documented every conversation, email, phone call, meeting, and process that was involved with opening the school. A descriptive case study served as an excellent tool to navigate the complexity of opening a new school. The Encyclopedia of Case Study Research states “the findings from descriptive case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions. At the same time, as with expert knowledge-makers across methodologies, descriptive case study researchers thoughtfully consider whether their findings have implications elsewhere. Teasing out such implications, in part by examining rival interpretations, helps other researchers posit better questions, inspect data more closely, entertain new possibilities, and conceive the once inconceivable” (Mills, Durepos, Wiebe, 2010). The new school’s mascot was the wolves and from the beginning, the team would pack together to conquer the challenges and opportunities of

this exquisite endeavor. The team frequently utilized Rudyard Kipling's quote "for the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack." There are many roles a case researcher can use, and in this study, the case study is a participant observer and a storyteller (Stake, 1995, p. 91). Over the course of three years, from the spring of 2019 until the spring of 2022, the author took meticulous notes, memos, and journaling compiling all these experiences into one expansive reflection of the process.

### **Statement of the Problem**

A good educator will continuously research and read about educational best practices that will translate to high levels of student achievement. This was the author's first reaction after receiving the opportunity to help open a new school. What research and best practices have been documented and shared throughout the academic community regarding opening a new school? Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) examined 57 empirical studies post-1990 that analyzed school size effects and an assortment of outcomes dealing with academic achievement. The research collected favored smaller schools at the elementary level and the secondary level. Findings suggested that the student groups that benefited most from smaller schools came from low SES households and/or were students that traditionally struggled in school. Secondary schools with a diverse student population or underprivileged populations should limit the school size to 600 students. Secondary schools with students of higher SES and relatively advantaged should limit size to about 1000 students. This was encouraging to our scenario because we would open our school within these ranges. We also understood that a smaller school would allow more opportunities for student engagement. Recent research suggests that participation in extracurricular activities may increase students' sense of engagement or

attachment to their school, and thereby decrease the likelihood of school failure and dropping out (Finn, 1993). In the past, the common belief was that a larger school could offer more variety in curricular offerings, and this variety could be offered at a lower cost than a smaller school with less diversified staff. In recent years it appears that the cost savings provided by large schools have had a negative effect on student achievement and graduation rates. As schools get bigger, student achievement declines and larger schools have higher rates of absenteeism, dropouts, and discipline problems. In addition, Lawrence (2005) studied 25 different small schools across the nation and found that, on average, small schools spent 17 percent less per student than comparable schools in their districts while achieving equivalent or better results.

The administrative team understood that opening a new school would provide great potential to positively impact student learning but continued research found little evidence supporting agreed-upon strategies needed to complete the task. It seems that some of the most mundane aspects of life come with an operator's manual, however, when opening a new public school there is not a large amount of research dedicated to opening a new school. Recently, a new trend in the United States has been the opening of charter schools to give students and families more choice of what school to attend. Ten thousand new schools opened in the last two decades, both a literally and physically groundbreaking development in American education. About a quarter of these new schools were supported by charter management organizations and another quarter by nonprofit school developers working with school districts (Murphy, 2013). Resources are available for those interested in opening a charter school, however, very few of these are peer-reviewed. Many of these charter school plans devote a great deal of attention to

recruiting students, marketing the school, developing business partners, recruiting teachers, and working to ensure funding is available for the management of the school. All these parameters are unique to the charter school movement because they are a for-profit enterprise and start from scratch. Charter schools must ensure they have a well-conceived strategy, secure financing, identify a site, obtain a charter, develop a financial model, secure a governing board, and hire principals and teachers (New Schools Venture Fund, 2007). A new public school, on the other hand, has a varying set of obstacles that are different from the charter school process. Within the public education setting a new school is often needed because the student population has risen to the point where they have exceeded the capacity of the current facilities available. In these situations, the financing is set, a large portion of the educators have already been hired, the governing board is in place, and recruitment is not needed because an excess of students is the reason why the new building needs to be constructed. It becomes obvious that this paradigm is drastically different than the charter school movement.

A vast amount of research does support the premise that smaller schools allow educators to be more effective as they deliver instruction. Darling-Hammond (2002) analyzed the study of the Coalition Campus Schools Project in New York City. The intent was to create smaller schools that would be a part of a network of reformed-oriented schools, rather than the “factory model” of much larger schools. As a group, the schools had better performance in reading and writing assessments, higher graduation rates, and substantially better attendance. Factors influencing the schools’ success were: small size; structures that allowed personalization; a well-constructed curriculum; teachers focused on academic skills; a school-wide assessment system; and strong



teachers that collaborated. The administrative team knew that these indicators would be the driving force behind the decisions made and the systems created but the guidance on timing, processes, and other strategies for opening a school was lacking. One piece of advice that does apply to all scenarios is “Know your goals, objectives, and the people responsible for each. Check in regularly and make sure you are on target. Course correct if needed. Ruthlessly prioritize” (Vander Ark, 2016). Effective management of opening a new school is crucial to the success of future students and a planning process based on best practice research is a logical first step. The problem this study will try to address is how to open a new public school. What are the steps, procedures, common problems, reoccurring obstacles, and other matters that need attention when opening a school?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to discover the processes, variables, and systems needed to open a new secondary school.

### **Significance of the Study**

Proper planning for school facilities is critical for all school districts no matter how large or small, whether major construction is in the works, or the district is managing enrollment declines. When school districts properly plan for their school facilities they have better schools, more public use in higher value for public spending (21st Century School Fund, 2015). Educational leaders have a vast array of evaluation guides to help them through the facility master plan process. However, very few of these master plans give detailed strategies and steps to complete with the opening of a new school. Too often the planning of a school facility stops when the mortar dries and the

human elements, students, and faculty, occupy the facility without the benefit of a plan or the awareness of how to deal with the problems that inevitably arise. In fact, the planning for a school facility usually does not even consider the actual opening and occupation of the school facility (Lane, 2008). It is imperative that educational leaders be mindful that physical completion is just one component. The reason the project began in the first place was to provide a better environment for students to learn and grow, and this is not a process that will occur naturally. Hattie's (2009) synthesis of meta-analytic research affirms the value of teaching strategies when they are used thoughtfully to achieve clear instructional purposes. He concludes that students are most apt to learn at high levels when teachers clarify learning intentions, use several different teaching strategies, and provide appropriate feedback to reduce the gap between where the student is and where they need to be. Studies such as this are tremendously helpful when focusing on professional development opportunities for existing teaching staff, but what if there is no teaching staff? When opening a school, it is necessary to navigate the selection and hiring of brand-new teaching staff. This study will explain the process we used to accomplish this task and the above research helped direct us in the selection process.

How do leaders utilize the human resources and systems needed to ensure the new school will be a high a highly engaging educational environment? The opening of a new school requires an organized, well-planned, and logical approach to the actual occupation of the facility. A new school does not begin its first day of classes without prior preparation. The success or failure of how a new school opens or is perceived to open, depends in large measure upon the ability of the administration to organize, prepare and communicate effectively with teachers, parents, students, community, and central office

administration (Lane, 2008). There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with the effective opening of a new school. Very few peer-reviewed articles were available discussing systems, strategies, effective practices, and overall research-based items that would assist in opening a new school. Due to this current reality, the author's focus will collect and explore data during the process of opening a new school to better support leaders in the future as they navigate this process.

A great deal of research has been conducted over the course of the last 30 years focused on examining the attributes of effective schools. Goodwin (2010) identified those areas that, when addressed properly, are most likely to have positive effects on student success. The components of the framework that he described were guaranteed challenging, engaging, and intentional instruction, insured curricular pathways to success, provided whole child student supports, created school cultures with high expectations for behavior and learning, and developed data-driven systems. This information is well known and of course, would be implemented when selecting and training the staff of a new school. However, current research does not fully exhaust the process that building administrators must complete when opening a new school. How many teachers do you hire? How many students will you have? What strategies can one use to make this process efficient? The administration of a new building is responsible for everything from ordering to collaborating with building engineers and hiring a team of teachers that will provide a good learning environment for students. Ideally, the mission of every high school is to prepare students for a successful transition to the college environment and it is the school's responsibility to equip them with the skills needed to succeed. Success in college is enhanced for students who possess the knowledge and skills that enable them

to interact with a diverse population of professors, administrators, and others in that environment (Conley, 2008). This study will explore the processes that need to be completed when opening a new school to create an engaging school that promotes school pride amongst the students.

### **Operational Definitions**

Branding-this term will include the selection of a school mascot, color scheme, logos, signage, flags, and other items that help students and patrons identify with Elkhorn North High School. This type of imagery helps with the promotion of this new school and is not a form of advertising, but rather a distinctive design that will only be associated with this school.

Student engagement-this term will refer to the amount of attention and interest students show regarding their involvement with school activities. Student participation rates will be a key indicator of how involved the student body is when measuring student engagement. This will include athletic teams as well as extracurricular activities that take place outside of the instructional hours of the school day.

Community engagement-this term will focus on students, parents, and community members as they attend activities that Elkhorn North will be participating in. It will also include booster club activity and other organizations that have the sole mission of supporting athletics and activities at Elkhorn North.

Culture-for the purpose of this study the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development definition of school culture was used, and it states school culture refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together in a set of

beliefs, values, and assumptions they share. A positive school climate and school culture promote students' ability to learn.”

Activity-the activities that will be examined relating to student engagement will include academic decathlon, band, cheerleading, Deca, drama club, pep club, dance team, flag squad, foreign-language club, FBLA, FCCLA, Hale, journalism, mock trial, National Honor Society, one-act play, power drive, speech, robotics, vocal music, and yearbook.

Athletics-the athletics that will be examined relating to student engagement will include cross-country, golf, softball, tennis, volleyball, basketball, swimming and diving, wrestling, baseball, soccer, and track.

Traditions-this term will encapsulate the activities that students and parents participate in that help promote the culture of the school. Some examples that would pertain to this term but not all encapsulating include parent-teacher conferences, homecoming traditions, activities and assemblies that support the mission of teaching and learning, and other traditions that advance the mission of success for all students.

## **Methodology**

This is a descriptive case study that took place over the course of three years from the Spring of 2019 to the Spring of 2022. “Descriptive studies seek to reveal patterns and connections, in relation to theoretical constructs, in order to advance theory development. Some researchers refer to descriptive case studies as *intensive* or *focused* case studies; these are semantically helpful terms for directing the researcher's desired level of intellectual penetration of the phenomenon” (Mills et al., 2010) The author used constant comparison as the analytical method to develop the themes and ultimately generate

theory with this research. This frequently used analytical method of qualitative data analysis was a tool well positioned for this research. Savin-Baden and Howell's (2012) model of constant comparison is as follows. To begin the author identified categories, events, and behaviors during the process. The indicators were then named within the passage and the author coded them. The codes were then continually compared to find consistencies and differences within the data. These consistencies and patterns were then examined between codes to reveal categories. The author continued the process until the category was fully saturated and no new codes were identified. The author then determined which categories were the central focus and from this formed the core themes. As the process unfolded, the author worked diligently in the field to compile notes, pictures, journaling, student feedback, conversations, and meeting minutes to fully document the process of opening a new school. Attention was focused on the description of the entire process from start to finish. Sound record-keeping was essential to collect the raw data and analysis to allow the proper study of the audit trail. It was a time-consuming process, but it did allow the entire timetable to unfold with the opening of the new school. This experience over time allowed the author to naturally move through the process and gain as much exposure as possible to this dynamic situation. The longer the process evolved the more confidence was formed in fully documenting the process of opening a school. Gulsecen & Kubat state descriptive case study can be considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. It is recognized as a tool in many social science studies, the role of descriptive case study method in research becomes more prominent when issues with regard to education (Gulsecen & Kubat, 2006). It was realized that there were events that caused changes

that affected the data, but no evidence or data was omitted due to that circumstance. The opening took place in the fall of 2020 during the pandemic which did affect some situations, but these were meticulously noted within the data collection. Constant comparison was utilized to identify the challenge of opening a new high school. Within the constant comparison, process categories were identified in the events that transpired during the opening of the new school. After the author identified the categories, it was then essential to name the indicators within the data and code them. These codes were then continually compared throughout the data sequence to find the consistencies and differences that persisted throughout the work. From this data, the consistencies were examined and patterns that had naturally arisen between the codes began to reveal categories. This process continued until all the data was analyzed and the categories were fully saturated, meaning that no new codes had been identified. It was determined that the four categories that have been examined in this descriptive case study be the central focus and formed the core categories for the research. This research will have a high level of transferability as it can be applied to future situations when school districts open a new school. By utilizing this case study, one can increase their level of understanding of the multiple layers and processes of opening a new school. The level of dependability will be effective over time because this phenomenon is one that is routinely undertaken as school districts grow. The author documented the research context throughout the study to help make clear the changes that occurred and how the research would relate to future parties. The most significant characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation (Stake, 1995, p.8) The author remained neutral during the data analysis and interpretation. All data was collected as the process unfolded and analysis and

interpretation did not begin until the end of the second year of operation of the school. This descriptive case study was done through the lens of the activity director assigned to a new high school. The roles and responsibilities include scheduling, ordering, hiring certificated staff, hiring coaches, meeting with building contractors and architects, and purchasing academic and athletic equipment to outfit the facility. Constant comparison and reflection were utilized throughout the three-year process and when analyzing and triangulating these facets, themes began to emerge. Savin-Baden and Howell (2012) describe triangulation as cross-examination of multiple points of data collected, and this is what the author used as a guide during the process of opening the school. This data collection helped increase the level of credibility in the study as the author examined the timeline, spaces, persons, systems and processes, and all other relevant sources of information that helped with opening the school. This triangulation provided multiple data points to help broaden the understanding of the subject and lead to a deeper level of analysis. As the data was studied themes emerged. As data was sorted and analyzed through constant comparison these themes became very evident and were the backbone for all the tasks and obstacles that needed to be accomplished. Systems and processes, human resources, collaboration, and culture permeated throughout all phases of the work. These themes were explained in detail as they pertained to the different scenarios that arose when opening a new high school. The foundational frame of this study was analyzing the process of opening a new suburban school in the Omaha metropolitan area in the state of Nebraska. Listening, observing, and studying the themes that emerged helped to identify the key elements necessary when opening a new school. The most important factor in student learning and personal development is student engagement, or



the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes (Astin, 1993). All artifacts and data were collected and scrutinized when determining how they supported opening a school focused on student engagement and a positive culture.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the essential steps and systems educators need to utilize when opening a new school? How does one go about opening a new school? The question seems very simplistic at the onset but when digging deeper the variables that come into play and challenges that lie ahead seem never-ending. How does one go about establishing a new school culture? How do you build a team of educators that is high functioning and will serve the needs of all students? How do you promote student engagement and an environment where students will thrive and feel successful and included in the learning process? The scope of the research examined the experiences as they unfolded during the opening of a new high school and relied heavily on journaling, conversations, interviews, strategies, and other data that emerged during the process.

### **Profile of Data Collection and Analysis**

The data brought together from this study encompasses many of the educational facets discussed thus far. Beginning with the School Board meeting announcing the administrative leadership, to the conclusion of the second year of the new high school's operation, many themes continuously emerged from this data. As the data was examined over the three-year time period elements stood out in the data set including behaviors, events, activities, strategies, patterns, interactions, and conclusions to events. From these

observations, they were assigned a descriptive label that helped to capture the meaning of each segment within the data collection. Once the coding had been developed these categories were then converted into themes. These themes were unifying ideas within the data that got to the root of the data analysis process. By using constant comparison as the analytical method, the data analysis helped to develop the themes and ultimately generate theory. These themes that permeated the data set led to the conclusions of what matters most when opening a new school. The data collected was expansive and without the constant comparison process, it would have been very difficult to identify what mattered most. The following chapters will discuss in detail these themes and will include the strategies that were utilized to accomplish goals. The first theme analyzed how the management of systems and processes was routinely needed to organize and carry out tasks to meet timelines. There are many moving parts when opening a new school and this data will provide examples of high-priority needs. The second theme analyzes the human resources component. The staffing decisions of hiring teachers and coaches is a monumental task and the study will describe the timelines utilized and the teaching characteristics focused on when making these choices. Throughout the constant comparison method, the need for collaboration consistently emerged as the third theme. Each phase of the school's opening required high-priority decisions to be made and the study will describe the collaboration methods and groups that were used to foster shared decision-making. The fourth and final theme centered on elements related to culture. Each element of opening a new school offered the opportunity to highlight and instill cultural values that had not yet been formalized. This study will further explain these opportunities and offer insight as to how we attempted to leverage these opportunities for

student learning gains. In summary, this case study will provide a first-hand account of the challenges faced in the strategies used when opening a new school.

## Chapter 2

### Systems and Processes

As the team progressed through the process of opening the new high school there were clearly many variables that arose. One that continued to consistently arise was: How we would go about managing the human and physical needs of opening the new school? Processes and timelines needed to be implemented, communicated, and executed in a timely fashion to ensure that all building equipment needs are satisfied when opening day arrived. It was necessary to create and install systems to manage these needs and work with the team and develop a plan to get these jobs accomplished.

### Branding

One of the first tasks that need to be accomplished was the branding of the new high school. All schools have mascots, fight songs, colors, and traditions that the school takes great pride in as they compete in activities. When starting from scratch we knew that we needed to work on creating a branding locker for the high school. This would include the official school colors and various logos that would be used as the mascot. We partnered with a company and shared with them our vision of what we would like the mascot to look like. The School Board had gone through the process of selecting the colors for designating the mascot wolves. However, there are many different versions of wolves and many of which are trademarked. We wanted to have a unique logo that when one saw it, they would automatically recognize as our school's logo. Our team provided this information to the company that would be putting this job on the market for individual artists to have the opportunity to create artwork. The artist would create their

own rendition of the wolf head and then submit this image on the company's website. There was a deadline set and we would go in at the designated time and select our top choices. With the choices we selected, we provided feedback and the artist would then go back and make changes to their rendition to better suit and align with the vision that we wanted as the result. After revisions had been made, we then selected the choice that best fit our needs and vision. The company then took the selection and created a branding locker that included our official school colors and logos. These images would be trademarked so that legally we are the only ones that can utilize these images. However, as a school district, we made the decision that we did not want to financially benefit from other groups printing and making materials that would support our school. We decided that we would openly share these images with any business that requested access. The main driving force was that we wanted to have a unifying image and no variations of our logo. Giving open access to any party that requested, would help minimize other variations from arising.

The next step of the process was to take this branding locker and share the images with the company that we would be partnering with to purchase the equipment and uniforms for the new school. By utilizing one vendor we would have consistency in purchasing and streamline communication with the sales team to minimize mistakes. We obviously needed to ensure that we would outfit all teams and programs in an equitable fashion and the sales team would help us to that end. The company that we chose had done this type of work on numerous occasions and it was extremely helpful to bring their level of expertise and experience to the process. The company had created checklists from their previous experiences and these lists would help to minimize items that might

be forgotten. I must admit, one of my biggest fears was missing an obvious item and then not having enough time to order and have it delivered when it was needed. Small items such as end zone pylons and athletic tape are easily overlooked and the partnership with this company would help to negate the possibility of error.

### **Equipment Orders**

The Director of Business for the school district and myself, the Activity Director, were the ones that first began to meet with this business partner to order equipment and uniforms. One of the biggest hurdles that may be does not necessarily seem evident from the onset is that when ordering this large amount of equipment, it is necessary to have these items arrive exactly when you want them. If they arrive too early and the building is not complete you have no place for storing these items. If they show up too late it's obvious that the major concern is that you will not have the necessary equipment to begin operation. The ordering timeline became a common talking point to ensure that all equipment and uniforms were delivered in a timely fashion. We needed to coordinate all orders in an effort that these items will arrive after the district got official building occupancy from the final walk-throughs with the building inspectors. The system to manage the arrival of these purchased items was crucial. One advantage that we did have within our school district is that the building site is a shared campus with one of the middle schools. If we were behind in the construction phase, we could utilize the middle school during the summer months when school was not in session to store items until building occupancy had been granted.

On a monthly basis, the district administrative team would be with the architect that had been tasked with designing and working with the contractor completing the new

high school. During these meetings, the representatives present were the construction firm, a team of architects, the building Principal, the Activities Director, and the Director of Business. Each party had a clearly identified role and responsibility within the process and during these meetings the team would discuss building progress, delays, unexpected difficulties, and overall status within the timeline of the building process. It was during these meetings that we would get a better understanding of how the overall building process was going on the contractor side and we would in turn adjust if needed with the roles and responsibilities that we were charged. These meetings would help us understand where we would have access and push us to create backup plans for equipment delivery if we didn't have building occupancy.

### **Strength Equipment**

Perhaps the most expensive and largest item that needed this type of consideration was the strength and conditioning equipment that would outfit the weight room. These are very large and heavy items and quite expensive. We needed to ensure that we selected the proper equipment that would outfit the room to its highest level of efficiency and ensure that the delivery date was one that when it arrived, we had occupancy of the room and could start setting up. During the initial planning phase of this space, the Director of Business and myself met with a representative from the fitness equipment company and discussed the task that we needed to accomplish. We wanted to outfit the space with cardio and weight equipment. The business representative would then create some mockup options with potential equipment after receiving the blueprints for the room so that he had a full understanding of the square footage that could be utilized. The company has a software program that would place equipment in mockups so that the customer can

get a true feel for how the room would be organized. As I stated before, it is essential to get these types of items purchased early in the timeline because they are the most time-intensive with ordering and delivery.

In mid-August, we met with the strength and conditioning company to go over the initial mockups they had made for the weight room. The team involved in this process was the Director of Business, the Activity Director, and the lead strength and conditioning coach. At this point in the process, we did not have head coaches named but we did want to rely on the professional educator that had the most experience within the space and share how the equipment should be utilized.

Our first task was to identify the weight equipment that the team felt was essential and needed to be placed within the space. We then transitioned to the cardio equipment. It was in essence a large puzzle that needed to be put together. Some items need to be removed while other items need to be added but throughout the whole conversation collaboration and group, decision-making was imperative. It was also important to study the equipment that was currently placed in the other two high schools in the district to ensure there was not a drastic imbalance. Equity amongst our students is important and we wanted to be sure to create a great space but also keep it in alignment with our other weight rooms. The vendor then took all this feedback and created a final mockup of the room so that we could begin working on quote proposals for the bidding process. The team met again in late September and finalized a list of items that would be included in the request for purchase. This document would detail equipment specifications and provide specific examples of the equipment that would be priced. This ensures a fair



process for all vendors and protects the school so that the quality of the product meets the specifications, and a lower bid is not accepted with inferior equipment.

The Director of Business sent out a request for purchase for the weight room project in mid-October. Within this document, there is a time assigned to each vendor to present to the selection committee that was comprised of the same individuals that help build the purchase request. Within this process, the vendors would also present flooring options for the weight room. The flooring options became an important talking point because the proper amount of padding is needed to protect the structural integrity of the floor below the weight room. If the flooring is too thin, and weights are dropped on that concrete, it will begin to break up and compromise the integrity of the floor. The appropriate amount of cushion is also needed to protect the weights so that they are not damaged as they are being used. Some of the vendors would present only strength and cardio equipment while other vendors would only present flooring options. All vendors received the architectural file so that everyone had adequate information to put together their presentation. In total there were six vendors that replied and wanted to present to the selection committee. Each vendor gave a full presentation bringing samples and visual aids to help the team fully understand the quality of their product. The team was also presented with an itemized quote to fully understand the pricing and quality specifications. From these presentations, the team then made a final decision on the vendor that would be used and the equipment that would be selected to outfit the space.

### **Academic Furniture**

A similar need to the weight room area was the purchasing of classroom furniture for the academic wing of the new school. The previous year during the second semester

we had worked with three separate vendors on classroom furniture options, and they had provided classroom sets to pilot for that semester. There were different variations of desks, tables, chairs with wheels, teaching podiums, and other classroom furniture that we wanted to get teacher feedback regarding their level of effectiveness. This information helped us gather valuable insight into what best meets the needs of our teachers and students, and we then took this information into the purchasing process for the new classroom furniture. The team decided to move toward individual desks for all the classroom needs but we needed more feedback from the science department regarding their seating preferences. Science classrooms conduct numerous labs and initial feedback from the teachers was that they needed tables to conduct these labs but upon further review, they shared that if the individual desks were flat and could be organized in pods that would be sufficient for their needs. This would also enable us as a school to proctor the standardized tests that require individual student seating. After gathering all this teacher feedback, we felt that we were in a good position to move forward with the process.

The next step of the process was to have the furniture vendor meet individually with the varying departments so that they can provide more feedback and help the vendor fully understand their needs. These meetings took place in January and each department was assigned a timeslot that corresponded with their teacher plan time so that the department could meet with the vendor and provide this feedback. The teams that met were science, activities, art, food service, guidance, family consumer science, media center, theater, industrial technology, and special education life skills. Each of these groups had unique needs for their educational space and needed this one-on-one time to

provide feedback. These meetings were very helpful, and the vendor shared that these conversations were necessary for them to fully maximize their ability to outfit the educational space. At this point in the timeline, all teachers knew their teaching assignments for the following year. The team that was meeting with the vendor was the teachers that would be transitioning to the new school. By conducting these meetings in early January, it provided the opportunity to allow for feedback and give the vendor ample time to create purchase lists to ensure delivery times that are necessary. The following day the administrative team and the furniture vendor toured the new school to let them view the layout of the building and better understand the expectations and needs for the furniture that needed to be ordered. The vendors took this information and began creating the purchase list and these lists would then be confirmed by the school district through the Director of Business to begin processing.

### **Football Equipment**

Football equipment was another item that was a significant cost and needed study in preparation early in the timeline to allow for the vendor to provide the equipment on time. The difficult piece regarding football, especially helmets, is a school needs to have an ample supply of numerous sizes to be sure that all students are outfitted appropriately with the proper protective gear. To accommodate this need, it was essential that we had a good understanding of the number of students that would participate on the team early in the process. This needed to take place before the head coach for the new school was selected so I went to the current head coach and asked for the quantities that were currently on hand and any historical data to show the most common sizes needed for football helmets. A helmet's shelf life is 10 years. The goal was to purchase enough

helmets that would outfit the football team for years down the road so that we did not add large quantities of helmets each year as the new school grows. In early November, the Activities Director and Director of Business met with the two main football helmet vendors to look at options regarding all protective football equipment. The team decided to stay with the vendor that the other two high schools were currently using to ensure equity once again amongst the schools. We also chose the vendor that had the best safety record and the largest portion of the consumer market to help alleviate challenges with securing more equipment in the future. The vendor shared that in the United States, 86% of all college programs and 80% of high school programs utilize the helmet that we selected. The team also determined that all protective football equipment would be needed in the first week of June and this information helped secure the timeline for when the equipment needed to be shipped to the school. Key talking points in this decision-making process dealt with lifespan, warranty, insurance, quantities, and sizing. We determined that we would try and have 20% extra inventory within each size to be sure and have enough on hand when students are checking out the equipment. In the middle of December, the sales representative provided the school with a sample helmet of what had been requested and it was decided at that time to move forward with the purchase.

### **Band Equipment**

Equipping the band program was very similar to the football order due to the nature of the quantity, cost, and unique design. When purchasing the necessary materials for starting a band program one clearly needs to start with the list of instruments needed to be purchased and then quickly transition to marching uniforms, classroom needs, and other unique items such as a band trailer to move equipment for competitions. I met with

the Band Director early in the summer one year before the school opened to begin discussions of designing and ordering band uniforms. Topics of conversation included symbols of the mascot, color scheme, and copyright infringement with designs that we would want to use. Like the weight room process, we would ask multiple vendors to provide prototypes of their uniforms so we could gauge the level of quality, color, and overall functionality of the uniform. After making these requests the vendor sent us the prototypes and we examined all the points listed above. No two designs were alike so in this regard, it was much different than the weight room process. When we were looking at the weight room, we wanted the specifications to match exactly so that we can decide based purely on the quality of the product and price. With the band uniforms, we had to consider the artistic side of designing the uniform and how aesthetically it would look for the marching band. In mid-October, the Director of Business sent out the request for purchase to the vendors that we had been working with and asked for an official quote for 150 uniforms. At the end of October, the prototypes and quotes arrived, and the Band Director and I met to examine the quality of the product and the pricing. The Band Director pointed out the subtle differences and made helpful recommendations when analyzing the quality of the product. At the conclusion of this process, the team made the determination on what uniform best meets the needs of the school and the order was placed. The next step would be for the vendor to come out and work through measurements and fittings so that the fabrication of the uniforms could begin.

### **Facilities**

Other systems that need to be addressed with the addition of the new high school dealt with the sharing of facilities and utilization of services that are needed when

operating the school district. The first item to consider was the football stadium. With the addition of this new school, the district would be at three high schools. Before this, the two high schools had shared one stadium and the plan moving forward had been to add the third high school into the rotation of sharing this stadium. This clearly was a decision made before the bond proposal was voted upon by the public because if another stadium needed to be built it would have had to of been a part of the bond issue. The district decided to have one stadium to fit the needs of three high schools and the major change this would bring about is the increasing number of Thursday football games. It is not possible to play three home games on one Friday night. The talking point that continued to come up was the home high school that shares the campus with the stadium needed to be protected from distractions during instructional time as visiting teams entered the campus to play football. The district had made the decision to add a locker room space at the field level so that when a game is being played, that does not involve the homeschool, the teams can enter the facility without entering the school building. This decision allowed the highest level of efficiency to utilize the stadium while not negatively impacting the school that shares the campus with the stadium. This system of operation would save the taxpayers from making the large investment of building another stadium while meeting the needs of all three high schools.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge that we encountered with facility space was securing a site for our golf team to practice and compete. Clearly, when a new school is being built the facilities that do not fall under the scope of that construction are areas such as this. Relationships need to be formed and communication needs to be open early when trying to develop a partnership with a local golf course for a team to compete. Numerous

conversations were had and many phone calls were made to area golf courses. We did end up developing a partnership in securing a site, but I would highly encourage anyone tasked with a similar assignment to be mindful of this potential dilemma and address it as early as possible.

Regarding the theme of sharing facilities, we also encountered the challenge of finding out that the school would not be complete until late July before proceeding with the opening in August. This led to the challenge of how we would navigate weightlifting, summer band, and all other youth camps that are offered at the high school over the summer months. With the building not being on schedule, we had to work closely with the existing high school to manage a calendar that would allow essentially two high schools to operate from one location. This was quite a challenge but manageable as we looked at the hours of operation and what we had done in previous years. We worked to stagger times so that each group of students had ample time to meet and work together as they prepared for their upcoming seasons. We also utilized middle school and elementary school space in the district to alleviate some of the scheduling challenges that could not be worked out.

### **Fundraising**

Facilities were not the only topic of conversation when it pertained to sharing with the new high school. Booster groups are a positive force within the school system and need to be guided and managed in a thoughtful fashion. Technically, booster groups are separate entities that operate independently from the school system however the group does report back to the district employees that are leading the groups they are supporting. With that being said, the question arose of how the funds should be shared

and distributed with the new school opening. All the students at the existing high school had worked hard to secure and fundraise for their individual groups and this effort needed to be noted and addressed as these groups split. Considerations that were deliberated on were large one-time purchases, the number of students served by the group, fundraisers that had taken place, and funds that had been raised. I met with each individual booster group president and staff member overseeing the group and we concluded that we should look at percentages of students and where they would attend school when the new school opened. From the existing school, 60% of the students would remain and 40% would exit and attend the new high school. With this in mind, we decided that the funds should be apportioned based on these percentages. Meaning that 60% of the money would stay with the existing school in that booster account and 40% would transfer to the new booster account being created. Again, these were recommendations made and not directives given because the booster groups are their own entity. However, we are fortunate that the leadership amongst the booster groups agreed with this recommendation and philosophy and all finances were divided in a manner that was supported by all parents and students involved with these activities.

### **Transportation**

Another system of operation that needed to be analyzed and addressed was bussing and transportation. When adding the new high school this would obviously bring an increased demand on the transportation company that we utilized for bussing needs. The sports activity trips, field trips, and everyday bus routes transporting students to school would add a heavy burden on this service. The three activity directors and the Director of Business met with the executive team of the transportation company in late



September to discuss this topic. The group analyzed the number of trips anticipated that would be added along with the daily average increase of the number of trips. The transportation company shared that at the current time they would not be able to handle the increase in demand but would work to hire more drivers and add buses to accommodate the needs with the opening of the high school. At the conclusion of the meeting, all parties felt that the plan in place would adequately serve the needs of the school district and that the transportation company would make the necessary changes before the school opened the following August.

### **Student Enrollment**

One of the most important factors during this process of opening a new school was accurately identifying the students that would be attending the new school. Through conversations with other educational administrators, I learned that this process is done in a variety of ways. Within our district, we utilized hard boundaries that students adhere to with the school they attended. Some districts allow students to attend any school within their district if the enrollment is not at capacity. This was not the case with our District. There were concrete boundaries within our District that determined the school that the student attended. This was an incredible benefit regarding the process of opening a new school because as the administrative team began making decisions on staffing needs, class sizes, and logistical dynamics within the school we had quantifiable numbers to help make those decisions. In early September the district communicated important timelines for the upcoming school year with key personnel and curriculum decisions so that all staff members were fully informed of the processes that would take place. The document outlined the personnel and curriculum timeline during the 2019-20 school year.

In September 2019 the three high schools held a registration process for the following school year to help determine the staffing needs at all three high schools. This process in a typical year is done in January or February to create student rosters and compile the numbers for class sizes. Moving this process to the beginning of the school year gave us ample time to sort through the staffing needs and implications for adding the third high school. This was somewhat challenging because the counselors were talking with students about registering for classes just as they were beginning the current school year, which meant that class failures could cause potential problems but in the big scheme of things it was necessary for the other decisions to be made.

### **Staffing Timeline**

The timeline for staffing unfolded in this manner. In October certified staff and support staff submitted transfer requests for inter-district consideration to any school or position for the following school year. In November the new personnel and curriculum proposals were due to the Associate Superintendent and after going through the personnel and curricular process these additions would be enacted for the following school year. That same month the secretarial and custodial positions for the new school were posted and hired to allow these individuals to help with the work as the opening date neared. In December transfer requests would be determined and communicated to the teachers with their teaching assignments for the next year. In making these decisions, considerations of coaches, balancing curricular expertise within departments, and class section numbers were utilized to make informed decisions. The Board of Education acted on these staffing changes during the December meeting. Finally, in January and February, new staffing would be hired to adjust for growth. One common misconception is that when a school

district opens a new school all the teaching positions within that school are brand-new. That is not the case. When a new school opens the students that attend that school is for the most part currently attending another school within the district. There are some new positions that need to be hired but most of the staffing going to a new school are transfers from other buildings based on where the students are coming from. This again highlights how fortunate we were to have the hard boundaries in place within our school district. By having these boundaries, we knew exactly what students were staying and going and that in turn helped us make decisions on the number of teachers that needed to follow those students to the new school.

Another unique process that needed to be put in place early within this timeline was the second wave of students that would be arriving at the new school in year two. For the inaugural year, the new school only had freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The senior class was allowed to stay together and finish their high school experience as one class. This means that in year two the juniors would matriculate to their senior year and the eighth graders would move up to be the new freshman class. In year one the school had three grades and in year two the school was at capacity. The situation that arises from this point is that in year two the new school will add theoretically 25% more students to the building meaning the staffing needs will also significantly increase in year two. It was imperative that the district looks at middle school numbers and both high school numbers to gauge the enrollment levels for this second school year and balance those staffing needs within the buildings that are impacted. These staffing changes were not announced in December as the other staffing transfers had been, however, ongoing conversations were taking place so that staff members knew that there would be a smaller second wave

of transfers the following year. These processes and procedures helped the district fully maximize the staffing capabilities and insured that a healthy classroom environment with the appropriate student-to-teacher ratios was kept in check.

### **Athletic Enrollment**

Similarly, to the student registration for classes is the student registration for athletics and activities. In late July of the preceding year, the building administrative team met with the company that provides the online activity registration software. The team discussed that in the following year a platform would need to be created for the new high school. The timeline and content needed within the webpage were discussed. One of the major reasons the school district chose to open another high school is that smaller schools offer students more opportunities to be engaged with sports and clubs. Research shows that an engaged student is a higher achieving student and by maintaining lower student enrollments at the high school level there is more opportunity to participate. With that being said, the system needed to be installed to have the students register so that the administrative team could make decisions on the quantity of teams, coaches, contests, and spacing needs to plan for these athletic teams.

In early September I met with the vendor that provided the software for scheduling activities and registering students for activity participation. We discussed the specific pages and elements needed within the registration so that for liability and organizational purposes we had all the necessary information. I entered a new contract with this vendor so they can begin constructing the website that we would use in the following spring. The group agreed to meet again once the page was created to explore the website and ensure everything necessary was present. It was emphasized that this

page needed to be accessible no later than June 1st preceding the opening of the school to allow the students to upload all pertinent information before summer camps. This website also gave coaches the ability to access the rosters and view permissions so they know who can and cannot participate. Physicals, forms, and other fees are also collected so that it is user-friendly for the families of our community to register their children. In early May the team met once again, and I was assured the website would be active for the community to begin utilization at the beginning of June. Having this system in place was a great benefit to the school, coaches, and families.

### **Athletic Schedules**

Perhaps the most challenging task of the entire process of opening a new high school from the activity director's perspective was building the athletic schedule for the teams. The reality at that time was that we were a member of an athletic conference that only contained five teams. The reason this is challenging is that conferences exist to provide their member schools the opportunity to play guaranteed games with other members of the conference. With our conference being so small there were not very many games initially that were guaranteed within each sport season. This dilemma required me to begin making contacts with schools of similar size and geographic location to try and schedule contests for all our sports teams. The problem was that most of those schools were members of conferences that were much larger and there was a maximum number of games that a team could play within a season based on the limits that the state activity association places on its member schools. This was a major issue but to confound it further once you have a school that was a willing participant now the two must find a date that corresponds with openings to play a new contest. The element

that was most frustrating about this task was that no matter how hard I worked, the success of completing the task did not necessarily lie in the effort dedicated. I had to find a willing partner to commit to each of these games and when a school had a complete schedule there is very little incentive for them to go out of their way and help assist the new school.

Beginning in August of the year preceding the opening of the new high school I began to reach out to neighboring nonconference schools to try and schedule contests. I had success sporadically but worked on the schedules from August to December and at that point, I only had about half of the schedules full. The turning point took place in January. As we began to hire our coaching staff, I then would meet with each head coach and explain the situation that we were in. I asked them to reach out to head coaches of schools that they wanted to try and play during the inaugural season. At this point, many of our problems started to find resolutions. As coaches reached out to other coaches, they were sympathetic to our coaches and would agree to play a contest. That opposing coach would then go to their activity director and work to find a date that would be suitable for both teams. I also believe it is important for coaches to have feedback regarding the teams that they play during the season. Incorporating their help in this phase of the planning not only did it assist our ability to schedule games, but also gave the coaches the opportunity to provide feedback and create a preference list as it pertained to teams that would be on the schedule. It was an excellent and refreshing transition that took place and a worthy lesson to pass on to others that might be in a similar circumstance in the future.

After these schedules had been created, I began to reach out to individuals that would serve as our assignors. Assignors take your home schedule and assign officials and

umpires to ensure that you have appropriate coverage for the games that a school hosts. These relationships are critical because these individuals have a vast array of contacts that they utilize when scheduling these games. Each individual assignor is paid for their work so I needed to make contact and enter a contract with an assignor for each sport that we would offer. When these contacts were made, we discussed the responsibilities of both parties and the requirements and needs within the partnership. The most important thing within this relationship is communication. Any small change that was made by either side must be communicated or one will run into the situation of a game needing to be played and no official there to regulate the contest. After partnering with the head coaches and assignors the sports schedules for all teams were completed in early June preceding the opening of the school.

### **Online Resources**

A final major system that needed to be implemented was the creation of the new school's webpage. This platform was launched in June preceding the opening of the new high school. At this site parents could find pertinent information regarding classes and schedules, athletes and parents could gain access to all the schedules and registrations discussed above, and a store was opened on this webpage to allow the community to begin purchasing merchandise. This platform greatly assisted the community because it was a one-stop shop for any questions they might have. I also quickly realized the importance of giving the community the opportunity to purchase apparel. There is a lot of excitement and build-up as you near the date of the school opening and most families that are sending their children to this new school wanted to have clothing and apparel to show their support of this new school. I met with the vendor where we purchased all our

athletic equipment and designed an online store that contained numerous clothing items to help the community outfit themselves in apparel. When meeting with the vendor I wanted to know based on their previous sales the items that were their bestsellers and I also wanted to know the items they had that were currently in stock so that the turnaround time of delivery was quick. Knowing these two variables he provided me with a list of items that could be added to the school store. We then created the format and layout of the page and designed the delivery so that the clothing would go to individual homes rather than be delivered to the school. Opening a new school is an incredibly daunting task and these types of partnerships are essential to effectively complete the job. The level of expertise the vendor brought to the process was exceptional and working together we were able to provide a quality product and platform for the community to utilize. This helped develop school spirit and continue to build excitement for the opening of the school.

The systems and processes discussed above are what I believe are most essential for opening a new school. The ordering timelines, processes for staff selection, facility usage, and scheduling were critical to helping maximize our ability to effectively open a school. Timelines were critical and needed to be followed as closely as possible. These timelines needed to be clearly communicated to all vendors, teachers, and the community to be transparent and informative. This was also true with staff selection. Teachers are our greatest resource and we needed to be mindful to clearly communicate processes so they felt valued and fully understood processes with how their job location could potentially be impacted. Finally, the facility usage and scheduling required the help and



collaboration of multiple parties to effectively plan and utilize district resources in the most efficient manner.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Human Resources**

When opening a new school, it is imperative to build a teaching staff that will be excited about the opportunity because it is a tremendous amount of work. In this scenario, the new school was being opened because the existing high school had reached and surpassed the capacity student population for the building. The halls were overcrowded, the lunchroom had spread into the gym, the kitchen had a difficult time serving the students in the time allotted, bathrooms were overcrowded during passing periods and in general, there was a feeling of congestion. To alleviate this congestion, the students from this building would be divided half would go to the new school and the other half would remain. To begin, the leadership team needed to be named and in January, which was approximately 20 months before the opening of the new school, myself and a colleague were chosen to open this building. I would serve as the Activities Director and my colleague would serve as the building Principal.

#### **Core Team**

The first task that we needed to begin working on was selecting the core team members that would serve as the department heads for the new school. This group of teachers was named earlier in the process than the rest of the staff because it would be these teachers' feedback that we would be gathering as information was needed to provide architects, contractors, vendors, and other business professionals that were helping with the construction of the building. As we discussed characteristics for potential core members, we agreed that the teaching philosophy and educational expertise

would be critical elements for those teachers to possess. We wanted them to have an unwavering belief in student academic growth and we were looking for individuals that had demonstrated leadership capacity in this realm.

In late March, the administrative team met with the Director of Human Resources to determine the team members that would be selected for the core team at the new school. It was agreed upon by all parties that one team member from each department needed to be selected along with the media specialist and guidance counselor. The team believe that these were the essential stakeholders that would help begin the process of laying the philosophical framework for the new high school. As the building plans for the school would begin to unfold it would be these teachers that would provide input about curricular decisions, staffing selections, and other scenarios that would arise. Within the District, these positions were advertised to all secondary teachers and if a teacher was interested, they could submit in writing that they would like to be considered for this opportunity. These positions would be advertised for approximately one month before the administration would act. The administrative team met again with the Director of Human Resources in early May to make the determination of who would be selected as a core team member for the new school. Attributes discussed and considered during the selection process were leadership capabilities, past work experience and credentials, work ethic, decision-making practices, and overall qualities that will lay the groundwork for teaching and educating students at the highest level. We wanted teachers to possess and execute a desire to educate all students and continuously strive to push students to higher levels of learning. It was very important that all these teachers have a history of being strong advocates for student learning and were an interventionist when students struggle

to learn. We also discussed the need for balancing talent and curricular expertise so that each high school would have a strong and balanced teaching staff. This was a difficult process because as we were looking at letters of interest, we were reading the words of colleagues and close friends. There were many teachers that had applied and hoped to be core team members of the new school and the realization resonated that the conversations to inform the staff of selections was going to be very difficult. Many of the conversations were going to be challenging because the individual was going to be receiving difficult news. After we finalized the core team list, we discussed how these future conversations would look and how people would be notified about the selection process.

The conversations needed to take place before school dismissed for summer break so in mid-May we selected a day to meet with everyone that had submitted a letter of interest. We felt it was important to have face-to-face meetings with each teacher to provide time individually and adequately explain the decision-making process and next steps moving forward. We wanted to be sure throughout these situations that we were transparent in providing everyone with pertinent information so that no assumptions were made, and everyone felt valued. It was incredibly rewarding to inform a teacher that they had been selected as a core team member. I do not believe that the word elated is too strong of a descriptor. They were very excited and were looking forward to the opportunity to serve in this capacity and be a part of the process of opening a new school. The conversations with those that were not selected were difficult but manageable. We affirmed all teachers and tried to explain to them how difficult the process was because the talent pool was deep. We also reminded them that this did not mean they would not be considered in the future for a transfer, and we encouraged them to submit a transfer

letter if they wished to continue to pursue teaching at the new school. Perhaps the most eye-opening realization of the day was great care needed to be dedicated to delivering information and having discussions that did not create divisions within the existing school. We still had an entire school year where we would be working together to educate the students as one. The last thing a high-functioning school needs is to have divisions created amongst teachers and students. It is extremely important to take all necessary steps and precautions to try and prevent any divisions from happening. It was a successful day. Teachers that received difficult news were very professional and understood the process. At the conclusion of the day, the new school had a Principal, Activities Director, Guidance Counselor, English Teacher, Social Studies Teacher, Media Specialist, Math Teacher, Science Teacher, Fine Arts Teacher, World Language Teacher, and the Director of Student Services was serving as the point of contact for special education services. This team of teachers was invited to attend the School Board meeting the following Monday where they would officially be introduced to the community and the Board to make this information public.

### **Support Staff**

Another key individual that needed to be selected in this process was the head custodian. This person would be on site before anyone else working alongside the contractor and architect to learn the intricacies of the building and better understand the needs of taking care of and maintaining the new high school. The administrative team selected the head custodian of the existing building. The head custodian for a high school wears numerous hats and many situations arise that require creative thinking and fast action. By selecting someone that had already served in this role they would be able to

take this historical knowledge and apply it to the job of opening a new school. The administration also believed that the learning curve will not be as severe for the person that will serve at the existing building because invariably the new high school will have items that will arise unexpectedly that need to be problem solved and the team member that had already served in this role would be well-equipped to take on that task. The head custodian would now spend a significant amount of time at the new school as construction progressed. To expedite the timeline for opening the building, as contractors would finish their work in certain areas, he would begin the deep cleaning process to get that room ready for students to attend. This gave him time in the building before students arrived to learn the needs and better understand the tasks that the custodial crew would need to accomplish.

A similar role to the head custodian that needed to be selected as the administrative assistants that would be working in the office area of the new school. As with all positions these jobs were advertised and had candidates apply and submit letters of interest if they wanted to be considered for transfer. These positions are pivotal and require a high level of skill to meet the needs of the demanding job. There would clearly be a vast array of orders that would be placed and received to equip the new school to function. It would be the responsibility of these individuals to appropriately receive and document all items that had been ordered. When interviewing for these positions the panel was comprised of counselors and administrators that would be working with these individuals daily. With the selection of the administrative team, the teachers, the head custodian, and the administrative assistants the core team of individuals needed to open the school was complete.

## Teaching Staff

With the core team selected attention could now transfer to the selection of the staff that would be transferred to the new high school. As teachers returned from summer break the administration had a meeting with the entire staff outlining the timeline and processes that would be adhered to as the school year unfolded before the new school would open. Teachers were informed that a more detailed timeline would be shared as the school year got underway. It was also communicated that if the teachers were interested in a transfer, they could write a letter of intent to voice their preference regarding the school that they would like to teach. The group was told that all these personnel decisions would be made and acted upon during the December Board meeting to help the hiring process when January arrived. It was further explained that these letters of intent did not necessarily mean it needed to be a transfer request. The administration wanted to know the wishes and plans of all staff members including those that wanted to remain at the school they were currently working. Compiling this information, it would help the administrative team make the most informed decisions. It was also shared that this would be a piece of information that was considered as the administration made decisions on teaching placement with the understanding that balancing teacher expertise and skills would be paramount to delivering equitable instruction at both schools.

In early September, the administrative team met with the teaching staff once again to communicate timelines for key personnel and curriculum decisions so that staff members could be fully informed of the processes that would take place. All teachers received the document outlining the timeline. We explained to the teachers that we would be moving up the registration process for students from January to late September to

collect student information that would be the driving force behind the needs of teachers necessary at each high school. After collecting the student information, the teachers would then have the month of October submit their letter of intent to the district as a key point of consideration when looking at selecting staff members. After those letters were received the Associate Superintendent and the administrative team would begin deliberations about the transition and selecting staff members for both buildings. By the time we reached early December, the transfers would be determined and communicated. With this information, the School Board would act at the December Board meeting to prepare for the hiring season in January. The teachers were appreciative of receiving the timeline and numerous teachers shared how thankful they were for the transparency and communicated processes. These types of changes can create a great deal of anxiety, and this is minimized when people know the full extent of how and when decisions would be made. These are huge decisions that affect people's personal lives and must be navigated with great care. In early October the District began to formally accept transfer requests from staff members. As stated above, these transfer requests were accepted throughout the month of October and allowed employees the opportunity to express in writing their intent to be considered for another building or to maintain their status within their current teaching role. Often it is difficult to fully express oneself in a letter without the reciprocation that a conversation could bring so each staff member was also encouraged to have a conversation with their building principal, so details were fully communicated to both parties. Staff members were also encouraged to write a letter even if the position they desired was not available at the present time. Changes happen rapidly with enrollment changes and the administrative team wanted to know what the long-term



hopes and aspirations of the teaching staff were as well. This might have pertained to the second wave of teachers that would follow when the senior class arrived the following year or when dealing with curricular demands as student populations grow. Staff members understood that the new high school would receive priority when making staffing decisions and teachers understood that some staff members would be asked to transfer even if they did not apply. Many teachers shared they would teach wherever the district felt they would be best utilized and that type of devotion to their profession was a blessing as these decisions were made.

In late November the District team met to discuss the staffing proposals and letters of intent. The team consisted of the Superintendent, the Director of Human Resources, the principals for both high schools, and the activities directors to discuss the division of the current staff. The first item of consideration was dividing the talent of the teaching staff so that both schools would have equity in expertise and skill. We discussed tenure, curriculum specialties, and overall effectiveness as an educator. We looked closely at a teacher's ability to form strong student relationships, foster high student achievement, and proactiveness in communicating with parents when difficult situations arise. These teaching traits are highly valued within our District, and we wanted equity amongst both buildings regarding these skills. The second item the team discussed was the division of talent within extra duty positions that are assigned along with the teaching duties. Clearly, it was a high priority to fully staff the coaching vacancies at both schools and work to distribute that talent equally. This characteristic was of utmost importance to me because having a solid unit of current coaches that could step into a new role would help lay the foundation and carry the philosophies from the existing building to the new

one. The final piece of consideration was that the district team attempted to fulfill all requests that teachers had made with their teaching assignments. The team looked at the current offerings that the teachers taught and tried to balance the needs so that each teacher had an acceptable number of preps. Teacher burnout is not something that we wanted to happen, and this consideration would help minimize an increase in the amount of work with taking on new teaching preps. At the end of the day, almost all teachers that had submitted a transfer request were granted that option. The team kept in mind that the second year after the split would add a second wave of teachers as the senior class was added to the new building. The team began to have preliminary discussions on identifying teachers that would most likely fit the needs the second wave would bring. However, this was not communicated initially to the staff to allow flexibility with changes that could potentially happen. There was no need to make this decision early with the chance of unforeseen circumstances arising. The team concluded the day by looking at the administrative assistant team to divide talent and provide both buildings with an equal level of abilities to meet the demands of the school. The counseling center, the attendance needs, the activity demands, and the receptionist skills were all considered when dividing the talent of the administrative assistants. With the information that was collected from the early student registration and the division of the current teaching staff, we understood that we would need to hire nine new staff members beginning in January to meet the needs of our students. We determined we would also need four teaching assistants, an accompanist for the music department, and two more administrative assistants to work in the office area. It was an incredibly productive day and the

collaboration and discussion helped to ensure that the needs of all students were being met.

In early December, the Director of Personnel communicated that he and his assistant would deliver the transfer letters to the high school. The administrative team was instructed to have face-to-face conversations with each employee who is receiving a letter and these letters needed to be delivered and conversations had before the end of the week. Before the conversations happened, we were encouraged to read over the letters to ensure that there were no errors in the information shared. Only certified teachers, custodians, and administrative assistants that put in for transfers would be getting a response letter. If any of these individuals had submitted a letter, they would be receiving a reply. If an educator went through these days and did not receive a letter or have a conversation, they understood that their teaching assignment would not change when the new school opened. As we had discussions, we informed all parties that qualifications, available vacancies, number of transfer requests, balancing staff, utilizing staff members to maximum efficiency, and retaining the strengths and skills at each building were the key determining factors. As with all hiring practices it was very important to have communicated the processes clearly so that parties were informed. As the conversations unfolded, and the letters were delivered, we made sure to schedule the time so that the conversation would be uninterrupted, and the teacher would have ample time to ask questions if needed. The conversations varied greatly in content discussed. The majority left the staff invigorated because they were given the opportunity to teach at the location that they had requested. These conversations were celebratory and exciting to welcome the staff members to the team. The conversations that took more time and care were those

when you had to explain that a staff member was not able to transfer as they had requested. Again, we discussed balancing skills and reminded them that the following year would require a second wave of teachers and they would be considered during that time. Nothing was promised but the opportunity was highlighted to provide encouragement with the opportunity they had at their disposal. Perhaps the most difficult conversations were with those staff members that did not want to leave but were being reassigned to the new building. These staff members needed to be affirmed that their teaching talents were needed and even though they didn't get necessarily what they wanted our hope was that they felt encouraged that their talent was needed at the new school. With these conversations complete the School Board could now act the following week at the meeting to formally finalize these transfers.

At the December Board of Education meeting the intra-district transfers were presented to the Board and communicated to the community so that the staffing decisions were now public information. This timing allowed all staffing within the district to be completed which allowed the human resources department to move forward in January with the hiring process for all new employees. This helped our human resources department to maximize the hiring season and have a full pool of candidates that might apply for these new teaching and coaching positions. The Director of Human Resources presented to the School Board the list of teachers for both high schools and the list was then sent out to all teachers after the presentation. For the upcoming year the new high school needed staffing for approximately 600 students and the existing school would need staffing for approximately 900 students. It was explained to the Board this uneven split, regarding the lack of a senior class, would require a second wave of teaching

assignments the following year. With the current staff fully divided our attention could now turn to hiring new teachers and filling all head-coaching needs.

### **Athletic Coaches**

The hiring of head coaches was a very important task as we laid the foundation for this new school and built the sports teams. As I stated before, the head coaches from the teams at the existing high school began the process of transition as teachers were named as core teachers or transferring teachers. The head coaches that were named as transferring teachers moved into the head-coaching role at the new high school. As these conversations were taking place, I was discussing the roles and responsibilities that would be included in the activities and sports that we offer. Again, we wanted to maintain equity and balance as we divided the teaching expertise, and this was also true for the head-coaching positions. At the end of the process, we wanted to have a balance in talent and tenure so that both schools had strong head coaches leading their programs.

Throughout the process of dividing teachers, I was receiving contacts from parties that were interested in head-coaching opportunities at the new school. When these points of contact were made, I shared that we would not know the full list of our needs until January 2020 but encouraged all individuals that reached out to go through the application process. Their inquiry was affirmed, and they were encouraged to pursue a position but obviously, nothing was promised. There were so many variables that needed to play out that it was impossible to know the true needs until the division was finalized. However, each program regardless of where the head coach was going to teach was going to need a new head coach at one of the buildings. Some of our programs had strong assistants that would be good candidates for the positions.

At the end of October, leading up to the timeline of staffing and curriculum proposals, I needed to compile a detailed list of needs. My role during this phase of the timeline was to create a personnel proposal for all extra duty positions that would be needed for the activity's programs during the inaugural year. This proposal would be approved by the School Board for staffing considerations to outfit the extra duty needs for the new high school. This was a challenging assignment because we needed to make determinations on not only the offerings that we would provide but the number of teams within each sport. I needed to look at the number of students that would potentially be involved and determine the number of teams needed within each sport because this would directly dictate the number of coaches that needed to be hired. This also had big implications for the existing school because as the students moved from one building to another the existing school would have fewer participants because many of these kids left for the new school. So, in essence, this personnel proposal was not only for the new high school, but it also included the staffing reduction at the existing school when the students left. I worked closely with the current activity director to make fully informed decisions that were in the best interest of both buildings. We came to a consensus on what we felt was the best decision regarding the number of participants and coaches and because these two high schools would be very similar in enrollment, we wanted equity in the total number of coaches serving the programs. We decided that each team would have a varsity, junior varsity, and freshman team in the first year after the split. All reserve and secondary teams would be eliminated because we did not feel the numbers justified having an extra team. We were again very fortunate in this instance with the firm boundaries that the school district had in place. We had the opportunity to look at each

sports team individually and know exactly what players would remain and what players would leave to go to the new school. Having this concrete information made it very clear what was needed. The process was tedious but when you have this accurate information it takes away some of the fear of making a mistake because some of the guesswork had been removed.

When this collaborative work was finished, I formally submitted the personal proposals to the District Office. Like any school district, most of our resources go to paying our staff members. The amount of money needed to pay for these athletic and extracurricular positions was significant. To provide the most accurate dollar amount needed to pay for these positions I inquired of the District Office to provide the average step each coach on the pay scale was making at that time. It was my job to predict as closely as I could the amount of money that would be needed to pay for these positions, but the problem was that we did not know who these individuals were at the time the proposals were submitted. On average 75% of the students within our school district are involved with at least one activity so this proposal would be serving approximately 1100 students. However, many of these head coaches would not be named for months after this time and I felt it best to look at what we were currently paying our coaches and find the average of all those positions. A coach is paid based on tenure and graduate hours earned. By not knowing who these individuals were it was impossible to know their exact rate of pay but by finding the average, I could get very close to that anticipated amount. If I had submitted these positions and listed the coaches as coming in on step one of the pay scale the proposed amount and the actual amount would have varied drastically. I also met with the fine arts department to determine the necessary marching band assistants,

winter guard and drum line assistants, show choir, and assistant vocal music staffing that would be needed at both high schools. With this work done my primary mission of enhancing student achievement by sufficiently maintaining extra-curricular and co-curricular programs that were essential for the opening of a new high school were met. At the December Board meeting the certified staff member list was made public of who would be transitioning to the new school. That same list of teachers also indicated those head coaches that would be leading the new programs.

At this point in the timeline, it was necessary to begin interviewing external candidates for our head-coaching positions. When selecting the pool of coaches that would take part in the interview process, I would frequently select coaches that led teams that correlated with the season that we were interviewing. For instance, if we were interviewing a fall sport the panel of coaches, I would select primarily those other fall sports that would be working most closely with the new coach. The only time we did not have a formal interview for a head coach was when they were already head coaches of the program at the existing high school and were transitioning to the new high school. When an internal candidate expressed interest in a position that would be a vertical movement it was important to have an interview process. Transparency and fidelity within the hiring process are important and each position needs to be earned. This protects both sides. The administrator can share ownership of the selection with other members of the panel and the candidate can take great pride in earning their position in a professional manner.

In early January the administration met with the human resources department to discuss the timeline and processes for hiring the needed head coaches. This was a



dynamic situation because the district only has a certain allotment of teaching positions that can be paired with head-coaching duties. We were adding nine new positions for the high school, but we also had numerous openings at the elementary and middle school level that could potentially be paired with hiring these coaches. We do not have the ability to create teaching positions to match a potential coach teaching endorsement, so early in the process, we needed to leverage the openings that we had to fulfill all our needs. The district made it a goal to hire all the head coaches first to give us the greatest amount of flexibility with pairing teaching talents and head-coaching responsibilities. Keeping in mind we would always hire the best teachers because the best teachers for us historically have been our best coaches. The team went through the pool of candidates and determined the coaching positions that needed to be hired first because once a teaching position is filled that potentially would impact or eliminate the ability to interview another candidate that teaches in that same area. A tremendous amount of forethought went into this process to best determine the beginning and ending positions to hire based on need. For example, many head coaches are physical education teachers, and we had a small number of these types of openings, so we needed to prioritize the order that we hired.

As we began the hiring process for the external candidates regarding head-coaching positions we need to finalize the process that would be utilized. Each head-coaching position would be comprised of two rounds. The first round would consist of the Director of Human Resources, the Principal, and myself. Round two would be comprised of the Principal, Activities Director, and other head coaches that had been identified as a good fit for each candidate being hired. We were cognizant of the coaches

that we asked to be a part of the interview process because it did remove them from instructional time in their classrooms. In a typical year when one does not hire many head coaches this might not be an important detail but with the number of coaches being hired in this process, we wanted to be sure to balance this need so that certain coaches would not be removed from their classrooms and impact the learning of their students inadvertently. Throughout the interview process we maintained this balance as we asked coaches to help interview. The level of ownership within the decision should be shared by many and the coaches did an excellent job bringing their expertise and knowledge to this decision-making process. It was also refreshing to see how the most powerful underlying coaching philosophies continued to emerge during deliberations and these shared values were emphasized and sought after as we selected these coaches. As we navigated the process the timeline for hiring rapidly accelerated due to the nature of competitive hiring between school districts. As I stated earlier, we were trying to hire all head coaches first to give ample opportunity to pair teaching areas with potential coaches. This necessitated speed in hiring to respect the needs of the other schools that were hiring teachers during this personnel cycle. This was another reason why it was necessary to equally share the interviewing responsibility amongst head coaches because this tight timeline would have required a large amount of time out of the classroom if it fell on the shoulders of a few. Perhaps the most unique scenario that arose during the hiring of head coaches was the position where the district was looking for multiple head coaches within the same sport. For expediency, both schools interviewed the candidates at the same time and this debriefing then looked much different because of the need to have stakeholders from both high schools collaborating on this decision. The same process was utilized for

the hiring of all our head coaches and the last coaching spot was filled at the end of February preceding the opening of the school. With the head-coaching spots filled my attention turned toward helping these head coaches secure the assistants that would be supporting them.

### **Assistant Coaches**

As the process began with hiring assistant coaches, I encouraged the head coaches to reach out to any potential candidates that they would like to have interview. The head coaches must have a strong level of trust with their assistants and not be denied the opportunity to contact people they feel would be a good fit. The word of caution that I provided was that as they communicate, they must be sure to not imply or promise any position within these conversations. It is important to have a process of selection and interview with full fidelity. This process will help candidates understand that all interested have equal opportunity to compete for this position and no decision is made in isolation by one person. This type of contact will help with recruitment and positive messages about the process will help build a culture of trust and work ethic. The timeline for hiring the assistant staff would begin in early April. This gives all parties the opportunity to communicate and apply for positions of interest. As we approached the beginning of the interview process, I once again communicated with all head coaches regarding those parties that had shown interest in these positions to ensure I had a full list of parties to contact. At this point, I began to organize and extend invitations to those individuals that would interview. I organized the interview process based off the calendar as sports teams would compete. All fall sports teams were the priority because I wanted to get these individuals working with one another because their seasons would be upon us

very quickly. After those concluded, we would then proceed to the winter and spring sports teams. During the interviews, the coach would be listening specifically for strengths and area of expertise that would complement one another as they lead the teams, and I would be more inclined to listen for vision and philosophy to continue to enhance the culture that we are working to establish. With each coach, I calibrated with them on the needs of the program and areas of expertise that the group would be looking for. Most importantly though we were looking to identify and select coaches that align philosophically with our attitude toward coaching and strong communication skills. The script of questions that we utilized was identical for each candidate to keep the process fair and balanced. After the interview concluded we would debrief and wait a period to ensure that we check references and were certain of our decision. At that point the head coach would make the phone call offering the position to the new assistant coach and after I was notified, they had formally accepted I would make the phone calls to those parties that were not selected. With each of these candidates I would affirm and thank them for applying for the job and encourage them to continue pursuing opportunities for coaching. All assistant coaches were selected by the middle of May preceding the summer before we opened the school. This timeline gave each team the opportunity to hold team camps and bonding exercises over the summer with staff fully in place. Regarding timelines, this was of high significance for me because I wanted these groups to be fully intact to work with one another during the summer before the inaugural seasons began.

Teachers are our most important asset when educating our student body. When reflecting on the process for selecting our teaching staff I am reminded of the significance

of this process. As we selected the core team, support staff, certified teachers, coaches, and assistants it was imperative to take great care with each step of the process. It was important to continually articulate the value and importance of teachers with each conversation. Teacher families can be incredibly tight regarding relationships and when opening a new school, one must be cognizant of how these relationships will be altered. Nothing could be taken for granted and everyone needed personal time to fully communicate needs and processes. The timeline we utilized was efficient and worked very well. It allowed us to be competitive during the hiring season early with the data we collected to better understand the teaching needs when the new school opened. If we had to go back and do this process all over again, I do not think any of these processes or strategies I have shared would be altered in any way.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Collaboration**

Each phase of opening a new school ushered in new questions, scenarios, and circumstances that needed input and collective thinking as decisions were being made. The following content will describe many of the circumstances that required collaboration to ensure we were making the most informed decisions possible. As we completed tasks, we wanted two or more people working together to achieve the goals set forth. These structured methods of collaboration would encourage introspection of our behaviors and communication to increase the success of the team's efforts. We wanted all these collaborative relationships to be purposeful so that all parties strategically chose to cooperate with one another to accomplish our shared goals.

### **Branding**

Many of the elements involved with opening a new school dealt with creating a new image so that the group of students attending the school would have colors and symbols unifying all groups. Items such as school colors, mascot, school song, and other branding items needed to be agreed upon collaboratively. To begin the school district brought together a group of students, parents, Board members, and administrators that held numerous meetings deciding on the mascot and color scheme of the new school. These group discussions started with a broad range of ideas and as the meetings progressed the group started to narrow the vision and then brought forth the final three mascots to be voted upon. From these collections the group formally presented to the Board the options and choices and then the final decision. This structured method

allowed many parties and community stakeholders to voice their thoughts and opinions regarding the colors and mascot and this shared decision helped the final product success. With the colors and mascot determined we brought this information to the branding company that would help us finalize our branding locker with logos that were trademarked for our school. This was an intricate process that looked at the color schemes and balance of color with the varying logos that could be used on all our uniforms, flags, and other school items that displayed the school mascot. This branding locker also gave a specific pantone number for the color scheme so that the school colors are clearly communicated, and all signs and uniforms would not have a variation. In March 2019 we finalized the designs to be used for the school logo and color scheme. The company that helped us design these images then secured the copyright legalities so that these images would be officially owned by the school district. No outside agency would be allowed to reproduce these logos or images without the consent of the school. The Director of Business was involved with the finalization and shared these documents with the Board members for final approval. At each step of this process there were multiple stakeholders involved to garner community, student, school, and Board support. After the trademarks were secured, the vendor created for us a branding package. This included flags for the stadium, rugs for the hallways, sticker logos, a tent, and banners that can be hung in the parking lot. These items seem small but as we began to disperse and place these items a sense of school identification and pride was being built. The team moved to other school identifying elements such as the school fight song.

I approached the Band Director to discuss ideas with how this could come to fruition. Clearly, when writing a song from scratch our music department was the point of

contact most important to carry out the task. At this point in the process the Band Director had been named as a core teacher for the new building, but he was the only fine arts teacher at that time. We discussed the best way to go about creating this piece and decided it would be best if he brought in students from his leadership team to help craft and polish this musical piece. He would lay the foundation and then bring the students to collaborate on how to finalize the song. This writing process went back and forth numerous times between the Band Director, students, the principal along with me. It was time-consuming and took months to complete but the product was worth the effort.

### **Visitation**

Approximately 20 months before the school opened the Director of Business and me traveled to another high school that had just recently opened to discuss with them their experience and learn. One of the talking points surrounded the idea of signage, banners, and other school identifying items as they are placed throughout the building. Trophy cases, record boards, flags and other student recognition pieces within the athletic area are very important to help build school pride and identify your most outstanding students. We discussed signage, storage, equipment, flooring, seating, trophy cases, and record boards regarding utilization and placement. This conversation was incredibly helpful and spurred thoughts with collaborative opportunities amongst our staff. In February before the new school opened, I met with teams consisting of teachers, secretaries, coaches, and sponsors and gathered feedback on these items. I then had a design company put together proofs with the signage, banners, and record boards that we would utilize. From these proofs, I would then share these designs with the team, and we would collaboratively discuss the elements that we liked and what we wanted to have



changed. We also discussed areas in the new building where these would be displayed. These steps seem small at the time, but this groupthink helped produce a very successful product. On numerous occasions during activities, I have been approached by members of the community and they consistently share how much they like the designs that we chose. To take it one step further, I have had numerous schools reach out to me asking where we had our record boards made and who produces our student images that we hang for recognition. If imitation is the highest form of flattery this is a perfect example of that, and it could not have been accomplished without the collaborative process.

Small individual decisions can become large problems that affect many parties and without collaborative systems in place. One example of this was the painting of the gym floor. My feedback was asked for where the coach's box should be placed in the painting of the gym floor. This might seem like a small detail, but the ramifications are extensive. By doing this one is deciding where the coach will be, followed by where the team will be, which leads to where the scores table is located, impacting the direction that the home crowd is oriented, and this finally affects the orientation of the logo at center court. This one small detail has potential ramifications to affect the entire layout of the gym. Without asking the team of coaches that was comprised of volleyball and basketball this could have been a large error owned by one individual. Purposeful systems of collaboration helped to strategically make good decisions such as this.

### **Equipment Purchases**

Purchasing furniture was a major undertaking because financially it is very expensive, and it also affects the daily lives of our teachers and students. With such an important decision we knew it was critical to get teacher feedback supporting the choice

for the furniture outfitting our classrooms. Two years before opening the school we met with several vendors and asked for classroom sets to pilot in three separate classrooms for an entire semester. From this experience, our teachers and students were able to report back the things that they liked and disliked about the piloted furniture. This information was collected electronically and then utilized as we began selecting the furniture for our rooms. This structured method of collaboration helped empower the teachers to share their expertise as it pertained to how it impacted our classrooms. Durability, ease of transition, and ability to group the desks in pods were the biggest takeaways from this feedback. In November preceding the opening of the new school we began to meet individually with departments to seek feedback on casework, filing cabinets, teaching stations, and classroom desks. Meeting with each individual department, it allowed the administration, vendors, and teachers to fully discuss all options before purchasing. These teams met one more time in January before finalizing the purchase list to ensure the furniture arrived in the summer so that classrooms could be outfitted with furniture before school started. To give an example of the detail that took place within this collaborative process I offer the following. Science teachers had historically always had tables for their students to sit at during instruction. Tables offered a good platform for classroom labs and dissections to take place. However, when proctoring a standardized test tables are not able to be utilized because they do not meet the requirements for student spacing for testing security. The administration had always assumed that the science teachers preferred tables over classroom desks. During these meetings, this topic was discussed, and the science teachers shared that if the individual desks can be pushed together, and the entire surface is flat, the space would work well for both testing and lab

experiments. Again, this seems like a small detail but now when our school proctors a large, standardized test such as the SAT the science classrooms can now be utilized. Our school became more efficient without sacrificing any learning potential.

A similar situation arose when looking at the technology that will be placed in our classrooms that are computer-based. We needed to decide about the type of computer and lab set up that would be utilized in these classrooms. The curriculum that we were specifically analyzing was drafting in industrial tech, graphic arts in our art department, journalism, yearbook, newspaper, advanced placement computers, and software needed for writing music in the fine arts department. The team needed to decide what types of computers would serve the needs of the students and fulfill the curriculum in the best fashion. The Director of Business, Director of Technology, the Principal, and myself met with the heads of these departments to discuss and collaborate on the pros and cons of each device. The group concluded that we could outfit designated rooms in this new school and then transition these teachers into the spaces during the time that they needed to access the computers. For example, the yearbook is only one section a day which means if you were to outfit a classroom for that teacher with those computers they would be utilized sparingly. When we put the needs of all these groups together it was understood that if we outfitted two classrooms, we could support all our curriculum. This was a tremendous savings and maximized the efficiency of the purchase.

A similar purchase in scale and impact on the classroom was the ordering of weight equipment for the weight room. There is an even larger array of choices in weight equipment compared to furniture for classrooms and one could argue this has even more impactful potential on delivering a curriculum. To begin the process the Director of

Business had asked a strength and fitness vendor to create a mockup for a starting point to design the weight room. Each meeting involved the Director of Business, the Activity Director, and the lead strength and conditioning coach. The goal was to maximize the square footage of the room and it was clear early on that some machines were bulky and could serve very few students while others had multiple options so that students could work simultaneously. When looking at these options if we selected the equipment that can be used by many, we were not sacrificing instructional capabilities, rather we were enhancing them. We did want to be cautious of keeping equity amongst the buildings, so we examined the equipment at the other two high schools to make sure there was no disparity. The strength and conditioning coach brought a great wealth of knowledge and expertise to this process as he shared his thoughts as he inspected the equipment we were considering. In late October the strength and conditioning coach and myself traveled to three local high schools and colleges to inspect and have conversations about the new weight equipment these schools had just purchased. We narrowed our selection down to three brands and we wanted to see all this equipment firsthand and talk with those that were currently using these machines to get their feedback. This collaboration with the local schools was a purposeful relationship so that we could gain their insight and then strategically choose equipment that would fit our needs best. These visits were the most productive time we spent within this entire process. Putting your hands on the equipment and talking with others that are using the equipment cannot be replaced with graphics, pictures, and written testimonials. After this visit we had a firm belief in our selection, and we have been very pleased with how it has performed. I should also mention that during these visits we discussed the flooring options with these schools and that also

helped us decide what would be best for our needs. Talking points revolved around cost, durability, ease of cleaning, and functionality is a protected the subfloor related to the thickness of the rubber. Again, the feedback that we received was very helpful and this helped us affirm our decision.

### **Scheduling**

Scheduling of sports contests was also a high-priority area that needed collaboration amongst me, fellow activity directors, and coaches to build the competition calendar. This was a difficult process because most schools have completed schedules and there is no incentive for those schools to try and create an opening to add our new school as a competition. Often when a school is created, they join a conference containing many schools that are willing participants in creating a competition calendar for the new school. This was not our case because the conference we were joining was only comprised of five other schools. I collaborated with the activity director of the existing high school, and he encouraged me to work on reaching out to other schools at the conclusion of each season. When the season is finalized, schools are reevaluating the completed season and discussing with their coaches any potential changes they would like to make. He advised that reaching out within 1 to 2 weeks after the conclusion of the season would give me the best opportunity to make progress with securing new games. This was a very helpful suggestion and did lead to some success but was not near enough to complete the entire calendar. As new head coaches were being named, I had individual conversations with them about this dilemma. These conversations served two purposes. First, the coach and I had the opportunity to discuss the schools that they wanted to compete against. Dual ownership with the creation of the athletic schedule is important

for both sides and this collaborative process helped to fully communicate these goals and desires. The second point accomplished with these meetings was I asked them to individually reach out to the coaches of those teams they would like to compete. Many of these coaches had prior relationships and they would then leverage these relationships to try and convince these neighboring schools to enter a contest. This strategy finally helped break the gridlock and we, as a team, began to make positive strides in finalizing the athletic calendar.

### **District Resources**

Collaboration with the other activity directors within the district was ultra-important as we planned to bring the third high school online. In a district of our size, it was essential to share some facilities to maximize the funding for our athletic programs. The most public and impactful of this sharing is the district stadium where we play home football games. The cost required to build a new facility such as this is extremely high, and our district decided to have all three high schools utilize one field for our home contests. With that decision we needed to upgrade the facility so that it could adequately host this many games and number of spectators. The administrative team agreed the most important upgrades that needed to take place were to add visitor seating on the opposite side so that increased spectator capacity could handle the large crowds. Previously the one side had no seating and so by adding this dramatically helped with the level of congestion associated with large visitor groups. Another improvement that needed to happen was a locker room at the field level to allow visiting teams to occupy this space when they were competing. Previously, a team would be required to go inside the school and utilize the locker rooms associated with the gymnasium. The reason why this was an

issue is that when groups of this size enter the school it is a distraction and an undue burden on the high school that houses this facility. The activity association that governs our state sets the football schedule for all high schools. As we collaborated it became obvious that with three teams the necessity to play Thursday football games was going to become a common reality. Thursday nights are also a common night for home volleyball games. Along with this 4:00 football games were going to be needed with the addition of these home contests. A 4:00 game would bring a visiting football team into a school and be a severe disruption to the academic environment and a Thursday night volleyball game would be impacted losing locker room space. After fully discussing all these scenarios the School Board determined that seating and locker room space must be added to the district stadium to allow the third high school to utilize this facility.

Related to the district stadium the decision was also made to upgrade the scoreboard to better serve the community during these contests and provide financial support through the selling of advertisements. In January the activities directors met with the school foundation president and Board members to discuss this potential option. The timing was prudent with the other upgrades taking place inside the stadium and the team discussed how a new digital scoreboard could enhance the environment of the home football game. This team discussed the types of options that would be offered and purchasing packages. We also discussed a potential list of businesses that might be interested in selling advertisements. We examined different digital advertisements, stationary signage, pricing packages, the responsibilities of staff during contests, and other items pertaining to the installation of the new scoreboard. The group wanted to be sure that we keep the advertisements professional and did not distract from the

environment of the game by having a billboard taste. The team was able to narrow down the scope of the advertising and the foundation would partner in purchasing the board and selling advertisements. The next aspect we needed to consider with the scoreboard was regarding the speaker sound system associated with the board. The old sound system needed to be upgraded and the team needed to determine the location of the speakers as it related to the scoreboard and what angle would project the best sound quality with the addition of the new seating on the east side of the stadium. For this task, we needed to collaborate with a professional service that deals with sound quality and speaker installation. The feedback we were given was that the best solution would be to mount the speakers on the scoreboard so that the sound would project equally to both sides of the stands, rather than just being on the home side press box. The team looked at the configuration of other stadiums that were arranged this way and were satisfied with moving in the direction of only having the speakers on the scoreboard. We asked that the speaker vendor cooperate with the vendor of the scoreboard to safeguard that the two systems would work together well.

The final piece of collaboration needed regarding the utilization of the district stadium revolved around concessions being sold. An average home football game will have in attendance of anywhere from 3000 to 8000 people. Managing the concessions for crowds this large takes a lot of manpower and planning on the front end to execute successfully. The activities directors proposed a new position that would assist with this task. The team discussed with the new stadium renovations seating on the opposing side would add another concession stand and a whole new array of potential issues that could arise. With potentially three home games in the span of two days the job of managing the



football concessions had grown to the point where a person needed to be the point of contact so that all these events can be served in a professional manner. The activities directors proposed the position would oversee the management of the concession stand for all football games. This person would oversee ordering, inventory, stocking, supervision, and on-site management during the varsity football competitions. The activities director would work closely with this position and make sure that all schools are fulfilling the obligations and responsibilities. The human resources department agreed that this was a need and began the process of adding this position. The collaborative process was essential to make these enhancements to the stadium and the working communication amongst all groups from vendors, activities directors, central office administration, and the new concession stand manager would allow the school district to successfully operate all home football games from one location.

### **Uniform Design**

Uniform design and equipment purchases were also a large and expensive item that needed much collaboration. Each sports team needed to have their uniforms designed along with the cheer, dance, and band. The band uniforms were the first group to begin the process because of the extended length of time it takes to create the design and then produce the large quantity it takes to outfit a marching band. To begin I met with the Band Director that was also one of the core team members and we began to discuss the band uniform design. Elements we examined included utilization of the mascot logo, color scheme, and copyright infringement. Band uniforms are unique, and rarely will you find two that are exactly alike. We began the process by reaching out to multiple vendors to provide prototypes of uniforms to gauge the level of quality, color, and overall

functionality of uniform. I relied heavily on the Band Director's knowledge as it pertains to the subtle differences between uniforms. The band uniform would be the only one that did not have the stock logo that all other teams would utilize on their uniforms. The reason for this is again the artistic flair that band uniforms often possess. The prototype of these vendors would send back would give us the opportunity for hands-on contact with the product and see how the quality of one might separate itself from the rest of the choices. The Band Director shared the final uniform sketch to the three vendors that would build these prototypes. As with many of these tasks relying on professionals that do this type of work every day was critical. Their level of expertise and feedback made for a better product at the end. The Director of Business sent out the formal request for purchase that all three vendors that were competing for the contract. This included the quantity of 150 uniforms along with the sketch and color schemes that we wanted to incorporate. These companies would then use some of their artistic freedom to develop the prototype. In late October the prototypes had arrived and the Band Director and I met to examine the uniforms and inspect the quality. The Band Director pointed out differences that were very helpful when looking at the quality of the item. Items such as snaps, elastic bands, design, and fabric quality were all closely analyzed. We wanted to choose the uniform that would have the longest life, so these types of characteristics are helpful as the Band Director shared what ages well and what design options frequently break. All three companies that we worked with have strong reputations and generally produce quality items. Each uniform provided had a different cut as well as different sewing and construction aspects. The pricing for the three were all very similar and the teacher did an excellent job articulating to the Director of Business aspects of the uniform

that were appealing to him. Subtle differences like how the coat would fit in the shoulder area as kids marched with their instrument in their arms raised was an example. After looking at all three options one stood out from the rest, and this was our selection. The final decision is made at the beginning of December to allow the production and delivery for these uniforms on time. The next phase was when the company came to do the final measurements with the students for proper fitting.

Designing athletic uniforms for the sports teams was not near as time intensive. However, I did not want to create these uniforms in isolation, so I waited for each head coach to be named and then took an afternoon per team and created the uniforms. This collaboration was helpful because I wanted the coach to take some ownership with these uniforms and be excited about what their teams would be wearing for competitions. With coaches that are already in a head coaching position at the existing school I wanted to wait until their duties were complete so that it did not cause any kind of distraction to the current season. For example, a fall sport coach had no conversations with me until all their duties were finished with the current season. I wanted all their attention, time, and devotion to rest with their current team and then move to the next phase when their season finished. The only time that I wavered from this philosophy was with current head coaches that led a spring sports team. The timeline would not work for these individuals because if we waited until the end of May to create a uniform they would not arrive before the beginning of the next school year. With these coaches, we completed all the uniform designs before their spring season started. The coaches had great autonomy when selecting the style, cut, and overall appearance. The parameter that I set in place is that I wanted the school colors to be present in all uniforms and that no color outside of

the official three would be present in any of our uniforms. This process did not take a great deal of time with any one individual, so the coaches time commitment was minimal. However, it was a significant investment of time on my part to meet with each head coach for half of a day and design uniforms. The time was well invested, and I greatly appreciated the collaboration and conversation that we were able to have as the design progressed and the excitement of the new teams grew. Once we finalized uniform design the vendor would then take this and create a finished image for us to approve. This was a small step but a very significant step. When these proofs were sent back to us to verify and approve the jersey numbers, sizes, quantity, spelling errors, and overall design that we had created. Once the order was approved it would then begin through the process of manufacture and delivery. On the same day that we designed uniforms we also created the equipment list order for each sports team. We were very fortunate to work with the vendor that has gone through this process multiple times and they provided a checklist of items that had been purchased by other school districts. This all-encompassing list gave us the peace of mind knowing that we had not forgotten any item that a team may need to utilize. We had a budget that needed to be adhered to, but it was not difficult to stay within the parameters of the budget and select the high priority items that we needed to begin these programs. A list of needs and wants was quickly developed and when finalizing these equipment lists, we were provided a tentative arrival date to help us plan with accepting and processing these orders when we were able to occupy the building. Within these meetings the collaboration process between myself, the head coach, and the vendor helped us achieve our goal. This structured method of collaboration was

purposeful, and all parties strategically offered feedback and cooperated to accomplish a shared outcome.

### **Demographer**

The final piece of collaboration that I would like to note dealt with the school district partnership with a demographer to analyze and make informed decisions regarding district growth and building expansion. This demographer helped project enrollment forecasts, attendance boundary realignment, and other customized research topics to help with planning bond issues and preparing for growth. This type of demographic research is valuable when school districts need to make important decisions, such as whether to build a school, change an attendance boundary, or propose a bond issue for the community to handle growth. Growing school districts face a diversity of obstacles that require custom research to help their School Board govern and make staffing change decisions. The group that we worked with helped identify and provide the demographic information needed to make these types of decisions. This is the last collaborative topic within this theme but was the first to take place within the timeline of all these topics I have discussed.

To begin, enrollment forecasts help the school district better understand the advancement of existing students from one grade to a forecasted year. They adjust for migration into and out of the district and apply a growth percentage to try and more accurately predict the enrollment number. The forecast factors that they rely most heavily on include historical grade progressions that account for migration patterns and housing turnover. Another factor deals with birthrates within the district, and this helps to identify relationships between the lowest grade level enrollments up to the senior class. Our

school district is growing so quickly that we do not allow for inter-district transfers, so this is one factor that we did not utilize based off our current reality. The last thing they examined was the expected growth within the housing sector. This indicator is the most volatile for our school district due to the large number of lots that are being developed. Within the collaborative process, the demographer provided our school district with a range of enrollment forecasts to indicate the level of certainty within the time window that we were anticipating the need to open a new high school. They specifically analyzed our district for significant housing growth developments and forecasted within the district hotspots that would arise and would also provide dates within the timeline to help us forecast when a new elementary, middle, or high school would be needed. They shared that student yields varied by factors such as type, age, size of units, as well as the school district's reputation. Our district grows on average 6% annually and to put that in numerical terms that is 600 to 800 students each year. In our district this number is the size of an average middle school. So, in other words, each year our school district grows the equivalent of adding one middle school. With this type of pressure, the collaboration and feedback from the demographer is greatly appreciated because it helps us be better stewards of the taxpayer dollars and helps us plan and prepare in an efficient way to be ready for the new students that we need to educate. At the end of the collaborative process, the demographer provides the school district a computer mapping software that produces school-specific forecasts and analyzes the growth of the district visually. Within these images, the school attendance boundaries are outlined on the map and from this, it becomes very easy to understand where attention to new building construction needs to focus. By collaborating with this organization, the School Board, demographer, and

district administration can work together to achieve the goal of uninterrupted educational service for all students within the school district.

Collaboration is an essential component to help teams successfully engage and problem-solve scenarios that need attention. Within the collaborative process of opening a new school, many opportunities arose to bring groups together and collaboratively find solutions. Branding, purchasing, designing, sharing district resources, and planning for future growth were all significant goals that needed groups working together to problem solve. Within each of these strands, I was pleased with the collaborative process and encourage others to never make decisions in isolation when it can be avoided. Shared ownership and groupthink almost always bring forth better results and that was our experience as we opened this new school.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Culture**

During each phase of opening a new school, the administrative team realized that there were opportunities to establish a positive culture that would enhance the learning environment for all students. Within each one of these opportunities, we needed to thoughtfully plan and articulate the culture that we wanted to build. A student-centered mission to provide all students an opportunity to thrive and grow. We wanted every person, process, and system to align with the guiding beliefs and values that would help all students succeed. We wanted these attitudes, behaviors, and values to permeate everything that we did so that this underlying goal was the backbone for each task that needed to be completed. Within this topic, I will discuss factors that helped to shape our student identity, processes, and values that we communicated to our staff and coaches as they were selected. I will also examine scenarios that helped build student participation in athletics and extracurriculars to enhance the student experience. To conclude I will discuss topics related to student learning that we wanted each teacher and coach to share a conviction and the belief that all students can succeed.

### **Branding**

When a school is brand-new there is no identity for people to take pride in and identify with. As administrators it was our job to thoughtfully recognize these opportunities and look for ways to build school culture as they are developed. Every school has a mascot and student colors that alumni and students wear to show their pride in the organization and support their dedication to that institution. I have already



discussed within the collaboration process how the school colors and mascot were selected but I did not explain the why in making the final decision. Clearly in the athletic arena the school mascot is an emblem that displays aggressive and victorious attributes that a competitor would utilize during a competition to prevail. We also wanted this same outcome but were hoping to identify a mascot that would encompass this and affirm our belief in working together, selflessness, and an understanding that the work of a group will always supersede the work of an individual. The School Board agreed upon the wolf being the school mascot. Wolves are indeed aggressive and intimidating creatures that are often victorious in battle due to their superior physical qualities, but this mascot also offers more regarding how they work as a team to prevail as a group. As a school we want to continually preach the power of selflessness and working as a team to accomplish a goal. The power of the wolf pack is a great visual image for students, teachers, and the community to work and accomplish our goals as a collective group. This belief and value system permeates throughout our school and helps to affirm the culture. We also frequently utilize Rudyard Kipling's quote "for the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack." These ideas might seem gimmicky for some but in our experience, we found that they are powerful ideas and emblems that help support the culture we are trying to form. Early on as we hired and selected our head coaches, I used this phrase whenever we discussed the power of the team and the lessons that student-athletes can learn from the competition. Every home contest, as starting lineups are being introduced, we read this quote so that our student-athletes continually hear it, and it is also affirmed within our community. I have also shared the process that we utilize when securing our school logo and trademarking this image so that whenever someone saw our

logo there was no mistaking it for a different school. We also had a school mascot created and as we were going through the process of approving the final rendition I shared it with the coaches and asked for feedback on the design. It seems small but any opportunity that one can give to a group of people to take ownership and develop pride is worthy of consideration. The coaches shared that they thought the mascot should wear a uniform and the number of the uniform would be 20. The significance of the number is that this was the year the school opened and the foundation work that we all dedicated during the opening of the school would be remembered this way. It is subtle but I do think that small details such as the mascot's jersey number help to continue to build recognition and understanding of how important it is to be thoughtful with traditions and cultural norms that we established as we opened this new school.

Like the school mascot and colors regarding pride in this new institution was the song that would be identified by all students as the school fight song. As the administrative team and Band Director discussed this topic, we all agreed that we wanted a melody that was unique and original to our school. Many schools will utilize a song that is owned by another institution, often a university, because writing a song from scratch is not an easy task. However, we felt it appropriate and important that we take the time and effort to make something that was unique to only our school. We did not want someone to hear our fight song and have a connection with another school or institution. We wanted our team to put in the work and make something that only would be identified with our new school. The Band Director agreed that he would take this idea and begin creating this piece utilizing the help of the students. We wanted to develop a culture of pride of our school within the student body and by helping the Band Director create the

song these students would be the first recipients of taking pride in their work for the new school.

### **Community Connection**

A culture of pride and joint ownership was also fostered with the creation of uniforms and offering opportunities to the public to view and purchase school related items. I have previously discussed how the head coaches and myself went through a process to design the individual team uniforms for each sport but did not share the broader scope of how they were unveiled and shared with the community. As a new school nears the opening there is a great sense of excitement that builds within the students and community. We had the idea to create all our uniforms and keep these designs secret with a scheduled date to unveil these uniform designs to the public. We wanted to be sure to not create any divisions within the existing school during the last academic year before the split of the school. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we were not able to execute these plans because of pandemic procedures. We had planned to schedule a community gathering in the commons of the new school and have all the team uniforms displayed so that the community could come and tour the school and view the uniforms that we had taken so much time to design and create. We were also going to have a school store available on this day for the community to purchase apparel that they could wear in support as patrons and spectators. This would have been a tremendous opportunity to help build a culture of pride and continue to enhance the excitement for the opening of this new school but unfortunately it did not come to fruition. Even with the restrictions and problems the pandemic created there was still a constant request and need from the public to have access to and purchase apparel. When we realized that we

would not be able to have an in-person gathering to sell clothing and memorabilia we pivoted and created an online store that could be pushed to the community through our social media platforms and then shared so that purchases could be made, and deliveries would go straight to people's homes. The community response to the service was very positive and many parents took the time to personally thank the school for providing the service and the amount of apparel that was purchased was tremendous.

It would have been very easy to get caught up with the excitement in this process and inadvertently create divisions within the school before the split took place. From selecting the teachers, coaches, building plans, uniform designs, and all other related items that was causing excitement it would have been unfortunate to accidentally create animosity. The administrative team and core teachers continuously discussed a culture of oneness and that no divisions should be allowed to form. This was emphasized in the last year the school was together and following years after the split. An example of this was when the head coaches and I were designing the new uniforms. Many of the coaches wanted to solicit athlete feedback for uniform design and the types that they would like to wear. This type of feedback is very valuable, but I stressed with them that these conversations can only happen at the conclusion of the season so that divisions did not happen within the team. Strong teams cannot have separations, and this was a cultural belief that was emphasized throughout the process. This value permeated the process of purchasing all new uniforms and equipment as we were mindful of equity. We agreed that we would not make any purchases that would create inequity amongst our schools. All students should have equal access to the best we have to offer and attending a new school should not give one student an advantage over another.

## **School Pride**

However, we did want to build a culture of pride within our new school and a few of the items below helped to promote a feeling of pride and confidence. One of the first things that I did after the football schedule was released was to reach out and connect with a local news agency. As I have shared, adding the third high school to the rotation of home events at our stadium would necessitate frequent Thursday night football games. Each week there is a Thursday night football game televised on a local TV station and I wanted to share with this agency that we would be a willing host for one of those games. They agreed that they would televise our game, so we exchanged messages to make sure they had our official logo for the broadcast and other amenities necessary. This type of coverage creates a positive energy, and we were excited to host the event. Another thing that we did to create a public platform was an interview that we conducted with the local newspaper and all our new head coaches. Within the article it discussed the coaches experience, ambitions, and thoughts related to starting a new program. This served a similar purpose with creating a positive energy amongst our communities and readers of this news source and gave us a public platform to fully discuss our philosophical beliefs and values as it related to the culture we were trying to establish within our sports teams. Both instances were very beneficial and helped continue to build excitement for the first day of school.

Branding is the effort to have unifying images and artwork that help identify a specific organization or institution. I have discussed many steps that we took to secure and promote our brand throughout the community and one of the final steps that I took was ordering items that could be used by our teachers. For each classroom, I ordered

pens, stationary, and lanyards. As a brand-new teacher I also had the opportunity to serve in a new school and it was quite an experience. It seemed that everything that we did was creating a tradition or setting a precedent because everything was brand-new. As a new teacher I was given a pen and a lanyard as a gift and to help identify and push the brand of that school. Even though these items seem small it had great meaning for me and still to this day I have both items. Remembering this I wanted to give our teaching staff the same opportunity and memory that I was provided many years ago. Each step and decision we took had the potential to create a positive or negative culture and we worked hard to try and promote excitement and pride.

### **Student Learning**

When discussing culture, it is important to analyze the philosophical values and beliefs that the administrative team and teachers want to have set as norms within the school. Early in the process when the core team selection process was starting the principal and myself had numerous discussions about the teacher attributes and qualities that we wanted the leadership team to value and emulate. We agreed that the teachers needed to possess a desire to educate all students and continuously strive to push students to higher levels of learning. A fundamental belief that all students can learn at a high level was essential. It was very important to us that these teachers had a history of being strong advocates for student learning and were interventionists when students struggle to learn. We understood that by selecting teachers with these attributes the values that they hold would infiltrate all departments and areas of the new school. As the core team was selected, we had one-on-one conversations with each teacher about these qualities and emphasized the importance of carrying these thoughts and values to the new school. As a

member of the leadership team these teachers understood that their work was ultra-important and that this message to their department would help emphasize and reinforce these values exponentially. Being selected as a core teacher was a great honor but also carried great responsibility. It was up to these individuals to establish the framework for all teachers that would follow. We continuously utilized the quote “lay the foundation” as we discussed the actions and conversations that we have during this process will help establish a culture that will hopefully be present in the many years to come. The teachers did an excellent job taking this message to heart and took full responsibility with their leadership role and by doing so established the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values that would impact how the school operated. With these selections established returned our attention to the remainder of the teaching staff that would transfer to the new school.

Conversations carry great significance, and the administrative team took pride in having one-on-one conversations with each teacher that was selected to transfer. This was our opportunity to congratulate and welcome them to the new team. It was also an opportunity to discuss and emphasize the values and beliefs that would drive the decision-making processes. Student learning was always at the forefront of these conversations and all the attributes that we valued supported the enhancement of student learning. When the entire staff had been assembled, we collaborated on various topics to seek feedback and have continued conversations with how these topics of conversation could help enhance student learning. Some of the first conversations pertained to the building layout and classroom design to allow teachers the ability to provide feedback with the teaching space. The message that we enforced was we wanted to maximize the educational space and enhance collaboration amongst teachers. When constructing a new

building some areas are specifically designated for certain departments. For example, the fine arts, family and consumer science, science, and art have specific needs as it pertains to gas, water, and other unique features. However, many classrooms are generic in design and can house several department areas. English, social science, and math, are just a few of the departments that are interchangeable within a school's design. With that understood, we wanted to discuss with the departments the areas of the building and look at placement for departments and then individual teacher rooms. The building was comprised of three academic floors and the conversation began by examining what departments should be placed where. Enhancing instructional collaboration was the main emphasis and got the teachers thinking and discussing how this cultural value could be supported through these decisions. The conversation was invigorating and by establishing the goal early on that we wanted to maximize instructional collaboration it kept the meeting focused and productive. It was one more opportunity to emphasize our value and expected behavior as it pertained to collaboration.

In separate meetings with the same group, we also discussed with the furniture vendor the types of needs that should be addressed with the equipment and furniture outfitting the rooms. Again, to begin these conversations we emphasized that all decisions needed to enhance collaboration or student learning. By setting the standards early it greatly boosted the conversation. This shared ownership helped to empower the teachers and add value while at the same time gathering their expert feedback on how these types of items enhance student learning. The message that we consistently heard from our teachers was that the desks need to be able to rearrange quickly and efficiently. This allowed the teacher to structure their lessons for individual student work or group



work and not have instructional time lost during transitions. This helped to narrow our selections and move the process along efficiently. We also looked at teacher workstations and the teachers shared they needed to have the ability to circulate around the classroom and not be tied to the technology and teacher workspace at the front of the room. There were many furniture options that would help assist with this need. The teacher stressed that for them to better assess their student's level of comprehension they needed to be able to see them working and circulate around the classroom. By having this conversation, we were positively supporting our common belief that student assessment and feedback are important and this cultural value benefited from the process.

As the year ended before the new school opened, we offered tours of the building as it was nearing completion. This was the teacher's first opportunity to step inside the learning space they would be working in and gave them a first-hand experience of viewing this space that they had been helping to develop on paper during the preceding months. The excitement was memorable and as we walked through the space the conversations regarding collaboration and student learning were revisited once again. The teachers discussed how their proximity in classrooms would help them have time to discuss the common classroom lessons that they share and what was most exciting was that this energy would help make our school a high functioning academic area. One of the final things shared with teachers before the conclusion of the last year before the split was the teacher schedules. The administration had conversations with the teachers about the classroom preps they would be responsible for after the divide. The teaching staff would be at approximately half the size of the previous year and require educators to teach a larger number of classes. We needed to be cognizant that this could have a

negative impact on student learning if not handled in the right way with the appropriate amount of preparation. As we collaborated with the departments, we gathered feedback regarding teachers requests and kept the focus on how these decisions would either enhance or negatively impact student learning. By guiding the conversation with our cultural beliefs, it helped to keep our decision-making points focused on student learning and empower teachers to provide feedback regarding their expertise in the classroom as the administration made decisions on the master schedule. All these scenarios helped to positively enhance our school culture and these values and beliefs helped the school's operations when we opened.

### **Coaching Beliefs**

Selecting the certified staff and hiring of head coaches and assistant coaches provided the opportunity to have conversations regarding the culture that we wanted to develop within our sports programs. Each head coach interview provided the space to have debriefing conversations amongst head coaches on the panel and the talk would revolve around philosophy and values that we all would adhere to. During the very first head-coaching interview it was invigorating to hear the coaches discuss during the debriefing process the elements and philosophy of coaching that is most important to them. The group actively engaged in conversation and passionately discussed many ideas. A few of them focused on the recruitment of large numbers of athletes to participate on teams to enhance student engagement, the life lessons that can be learned through competition, the lessons they learned themselves as athletes, and the passion may have to provide experiences for these young adults to grow and learn lessons of their own. It was the essence of why we have extracurricular activities and sports. I was

reaffirmed in that moment that we had a tremendous start with the coaching philosophies of these individuals. After that first interview experience, I realized the power that each one of these interviews would bring and was excited to be a part of that process. In the following paragraphs I will discuss scenarios and opportunities where expected behaviors and values were reinforced and emphasized through conversations amongst this group of professional coaches.

### **Interviews**

With each head-coaching interview, I wanted to be sure to communicate the difficult process that was in front of us all. I wanted to share this not to intimidate or detract anyone, rather I wanted us to all be prepared for the challenges in front of us and look forward to meeting those challenges head-on. In the first year, we did not have a senior class. This meant that freshmen, sophomores, and juniors would be comprising all our sports teams and we would be competing in a varsity schedule without a senior class. Like anything in life, success helps people through difficult times, and I stressed with the group that we would need to be deliberate with celebrating small successful steps because accumulating victories in the win and loss column would be very challenging in year one. With that mentality we all understood that in essence we would have two years but one season. What I mean by this is that naturally with each year's passing you have students that graduate, and a new team chemistry must be formed with the changing of identities on the team. With our reality of not having a senior class we would have the continuity and chemistry of the exact same group of kids for two years. When we started to look at it in this way it helps to build excitement because we can look at year one as the first half of the season and year two the second half of the season. It would also be important to

communicate this reality to the students so that when adversity hit, they would be prepared and continued to fight and work to become better.

With each interview I also would lead the debriefing process by asking the group who they believed would be the best teacher in the classroom. In my experience, the best coaches are the best teachers because they can communicate and form relationships and then utilize these personal connections for the students to make gains. The process academically in my mind is the same as the process athletically. With that guiding principle the conversation would delve into the intricacies of instruction and coaching as it pertained to this topic. This is a value and cultural belief that I wanted all our coaches to understand and strive for. A coaches first job is always to be the best teacher they can be during the school day. By leading with this question, I affirmed this value, and the conversation that the coaches then led helped to reaffirm how one goes about executing this job. It is also very important in the interview process to ask questions that reinforce the cultural values that you want your candidates to possess. By asking questions that seek out characteristics that meet your values you are selecting those that will continue to unify the group and make us grow better together. During the deliberation process the coaches will discuss the answers to these questions and share tidbits of their own as it pertains to that cultural value and once again deliver a teachable moment that is genuine. Of all the processes that I went through opening the new school this was the process that I enjoyed the most. These genuine philosophical conversations with the coaches that would be leading our athletic teams was remarkable.

When the coaches had all been selected, we had one more opportunity to have a meaningful whole group conversation that fully outlined our cultural beliefs. We had

been contacted by the local newspaper to do an interview so that each head coach could be introduced to the community. As I arranged this conversation with the newspaper editor, we decided to have a whole group computer conference (due to the pandemic) so that each coach was present and sharing their ideas while others listened. I asked the editor if I could be the one to pose the questions because I saw the opportunity for him to witness some of the conversations that I had the good fortune to be a part of during the interview process. The questions that I asked the coaches to answer ranged from experience and history to the deeper understanding of why coaching is important to them. As each coach shared their philosophy and passions it once again reinforced all these core cultural beliefs that we had been establishing during the preceding months. My job was simple. I already knew the questions that would generate the most passionate answer that would help our community fully understand how remarkable this group of coaches were and it was a pleasure having the opportunity once again to listen to the group share why they love to coach.

### **Student Engagement**

The last cultural value that I would like to discuss is the power of student engagement as it pertains to academic achievement. Historically, when we analyze our school data it will tell us the most engaged students are our highest achieving students. In a typical year, more than 75% of our student body is a participant in at least one activity. As we look at the number of activities the student participates in and compare it to grade point average there is a direct correlation. It shows the more activities a student is active in the higher their grade point average. I wanted each of our coaches to understand that this was an important determining factor for our school district when opening a new high

school. There is a common misconception in our area that our school district opens new schools to remain in a lower class athletically so that we can have more success in the competitive arena. This could not be further from the truth. The true reality is that we understand that smaller schools provide more opportunities for students to be engaged in multiple sports and extracurricular activities. This will then lead to a higher performing student body because they have multiple opportunities to participate. The larger a school gets the more sports teams to require cuts from squads and the level of competitiveness rises to the point where it is very difficult to be a part of more than one or two teams. On the surface it may look like our school district wants to maintain a competitive advantage in the athletic arena but in truth we want to create the most enriching academic opportunity for the students that attend our schools. This message and cultural belief were discussed at length when interviewing head coaches and then again when head coaches were interviewing their assistants. I want our coaching staff to think long and hard when the topic of cutting students from teams arises. This unfortunately is necessary at times, but I want our coaches to struggle with the idea of turning kids away from being a member of the team. The head coaches and I had a mutual passion for developing team cultures that value all members of the team. If each student-athlete feels valued, and their role on the team is clearly communicated, the group will benefit, and extraordinary things will be accomplished.

All these beliefs and values formed the foundation for the culture that we were trying to build. Effective schools and teams happen when extraordinary teachers and coaches are leading students and athletes to lofty goals and through these conversations, we all had excellent opportunities to hear reaffirming messages supporting this statement.

Student learning was the goal that guided all our discussions and decisions and with that compass, in place all these opportunities to develop culture naturally blended.

## Chapter 6

### Recommendations

Reflections and recommendations on opening a new high school. As with many things in life learning by doing is the best teacher and I believe this statement to be true after being a part of an administrative team that opened a new high school. As I entered this process, I was not sure what to expect but I knew that the experience would be memorable, and I hoped that at the conclusion I would be able to share some of the lessons learned so that others may benefit. In the following text, I will share some of the most influential takeaways that came to my realization during this process. I hope that you find it useful and informative.

This research will have a high level of transferability due to the constant need for student growth demanding the construction of new schools. If we learned anything from the pandemic, it was that our educational institutions are essential for providing instruction for our youth. No digital replacement proved as effective as the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom. The need to educate students will never cease and the transferability of this work will be relevant for all school leaders that are tasked with opening a new school. The triangulation of the data collected is not bound by time. As this study unfolded, I had a mission to search and collect interview transcripts, field notes, journals, photographs, and documented interactions within the process of opening a new school. Utilizing constant comparison, I analyzed the data and identified categories encompassing the events and behaviors that took place as we opened the school. I then openly coded these indicators within the data to continuously compare the codes and passages and identify consistencies and differences. I then examined the consistencies



between the codes and categories began to reveal themselves. I continued through this process and extensively analyzed all the data until the categories were fully saturated and no new codes had been identified. From these, I determined which categories were the central focus and these became the core categories of the study.

### **Student Boundaries**

Time and again during this process I found myself immersed in gratitude that our school district had made the decision long before the opening of the school that we would have firm boundaries within our district. Often school districts will set capacity limits and then allow students the ability to transition to any school within the district of their choosing. That is not the case with our school district. We have firm boundaries that have been put in place for each of our elementary, middle, and high schools and a student must establish residency within those lines to attend the school of that zone. The reason this is so important when opening a new school is it gives the administrative team firm data to operate and make decisions. Throughout the process, I continued to appreciate the impact this one decision continuously impacted a multitude of scenarios. It had an impact on the hiring and selection of staff members, programming that would be offered, and scheduling within academics and athletics. These firm boundaries allowed us the opportunity to move the registration process up in the calendar year to September of the year preceding the opening of the new high school. With the firm boundaries in place this gave us concrete data to know what students would be leaving and staying at the existing school. When the registration process was complete, we then had accurate information to make staffing decisions so that we knew the number of teachers that would be necessary to fulfill all the section requirements within the academic schedule. This then made way

for us to follow the timeline set forth for our staffing needs so that when December arrived, the School Board could act upon the transfer request and then allow the human resources department to begin the hiring season in January. This allowed the district to recruit and hire the best possible talent for the new openings. Without firm boundaries it would have been a guessing game to know what students would stay and what students would leave. It also had lasting impact in year two after the second wave of teachers transitioned due to the adding of the senior class at the new high school. Again, we had a very good understanding of what population we would be dealing with and the section numbers that needed to be filled. I have seen other scenarios where school districts do have a senior class in the new school the first year, but it is a student choice, and this leads to conflicts that I believe could be prevented with the method that we utilized. I also think there is merit to allow the senior class to conclude their academic career together rather than breaking them apart for their last year of high school. This also had a positive impact on our athletic teams because we knew the student population attending so we could survey and discover who had an interest in playing on certain teams. This helped build the personnel proposal because we knew the quantity and level of teams and number of coaches needed to staff these teams appropriately. We also completed the registration for athletics in an earlier fashion so that new coaches could plan for summer camps and be better prepared for the level of participation. There are numerous school districts that are opening schools in our area currently and as I visit with those activity directors many of them are sharing frustrations because of the lack of registration and student participation because firm boundaries are not in place in their school district. Maintaining firm boundaries within a district takes time and energy but I believe this

forces schools to maintain equity and high levels of collaboration to ensure that all students have a similar educational process. We take pride in working toward the goal of providing the most similar experience we can for all students throughout our district and these boundaries are a form of accountability that are powerful and worthy. All recommendations that follow pale in comparison to the positive influence that this characteristic had on the process.

### **Teacher Selection**

Teachers are the most important resource within the equation of determining how effective a school educates the student population. We understood how significant the human resource needs were when opening a new school and the following are the major takeaways that I think others would benefit. From the beginning the administrative team needed to collaborate and agree upon the philosophical teaching values that we wanted the core team of teachers to possess. This group truly sets the tone for all staff members that follow and by identifying good leaders within each educational department this helped the administrative team bring forth the culture of student learning and high expectations. We wanted each teacher to have an unwavering belief in student academic growth and we were looking for individuals that had demonstrated leadership capacity in this realm. I would highly recommend administrators selecting their core team that aligns with their educational values to help that belief system permeate all departments within a new school. This opportunity should be advertised to all teachers within the school district that are interested and if need be, have an interview process to help your talent and leadership emerge authentically. We wanted strong leadership capabilities, previous work ethic, and decision-making practices that help students learn at high levels. We

wanted the teachers to be strong advocates for students and interventionists when students struggled. By clearly identifying the characteristics it made it clear when identifying these candidates for potential roles. I would highly recommend publicly announcing these positions at the conclusion of the school year, approximately 16 months prior to the school opening because this helps minimize distractions and division. The administrative team needs to keep a cautious eye on any obstacles or scenarios that could potentially cause division within the staff. We value unity and work tirelessly to try and minimize internal divisions and I believe this announcement at the end of a school year helped to not cause a distraction amongst the students when they discovered teachers that would be leaving. It was also extremely important to have face-to-face meetings with all staff members that wrote a letter of interest to transfer. Teachers are our most valuable resource, and they deserve our respect and dignity to have a conversation whether they are receiving the news they want to hear or difficult news. These conversations were powerful, and I believe this professional practice is very important to maintain a healthy level of respect and transparency. I would recommend that the core team of teachers include one member from each curricular department area and then the following school year the continuation and transfers of the remaining staff can take place. The timing of this I believe is also a good calculation to have at a time where there is a natural break to allow all parties time to process the information. We chose to make this announcement prior to the winter break when all staff and students are on vacation. This time to process helped minimize distraction and potential division when it became public knowledge where all staff and students will be the following year. This timeline also helped in early hiring practices at the beginning of the new calendar year.

## **Timelines**

Transparency and communication with all these processes are appreciated by the staff and provide a level of accountability for the administrative team in keeping with the timelines set forth. The timelines don't necessarily need to be concrete, but it is helpful to stay within these timelines for staffing and student considerations. At the beginning of the year preceding the opening of the new school, we explained the registration process moving up, the letter of the transfer window, the staffing selection announcement, and the new staffing that would be hired. Rarely with situations such as this are surprises welcomed and these timelines were very beneficial for us in navigating the staffing needs. It was also very important to divide the talent in an equitable fashion. Teachers should be able to voice their requests, but all decisions must be made by accounting for what would best serve student learning. The teaching, extra duty, and coaching vacancies need to be distributed in a somewhat equal fashion so that both schools are on good footing and have a strong base of teachers and coaches to help facilitate the culture of learning. Shared decisions and collaboration within the staffing process are essential to help make the most informed decision possible. Including district level administration, building level administration, and teachers within these interview and selection panels was very helpful.

## **Coach Selections**

Many of the coaching hires needed to go together with the hiring of the certified teachers because we had many head coaching vacancies that could not be filled internally. I would highly encourage districts to analyze the certified teaching vacancies against the head coaching opportunities and try and hire these positions first. The more

latitude a district has with trying to pair a teaching position with a head coaching position the wider and deeper the pool will potentially be. This process worked extremely well as we progressed, but it did take a great deal of planning and organization. Many of the positions that we interviewed for required a potential pairing with an elementary or middle school. Due to this dynamic, it was necessary to have middle school and elementary administration present during the first round of interviews so they could be part of the debriefing process as it pertained to their teaching abilities. As I stated earlier, we always wanted to hire a quality teacher first because the coaching duties come second. With this framing to guide us we ran into no obstacles with alignment as it pertained to our viewing and ranking of the candidates as they interviewed. The strong teacher always rose to the top. If this framing was not utilized, I see a potential pitfall with one party desiring to offer a job to a candidate and the other party being reluctant because they do not fulfill a preset characteristic one was looking for.

During the second round of interviews, I would highly recommend bringing in a variety of coaching combinations to help serve on the interview panel. I found it very helpful to have head coaches from both male and female sports teams, and most of them from the same sports season that the interviewee would be coaching, because these would be the individuals they would most frequently interact with. Framing is important in writing questions that guide the group to the desired destination. Interviewing is not an easy task and an individual that is novice in this practice needs direction to the fundamental values and philosophical ideas to be identified. This decision needs to be shared by many and the talking points that the head coaches shared were refreshing and insightful as it pertained to the demands and responsibilities of a head coach. These

deliberations also helped the group to share our core values and I saw it not only as an interviewing opportunity but also a professional development opportunity. As each coach shared, they were refining their thoughts and helping the others in the room sharpen their core beliefs. All parties were professional and looking back on our process I would not change any step. I would include two rounds of interviews. The first round would include central office administration and building administration to help narrow the field because within the second round interviews the process includes teachers that are missing instructional time. Coaches also would be missing instructional time and this needs to be protected. These coaches needed to be involved with more than one interview panel due to the number of coaches we were hiring. The process needs to be transparent and any person that is selected as a head coach needs to go through the process. Head coaches that were previously in the role can move laterally but if an assistant coach wants the opportunity to interview, they must go through the process against the other candidates to make the best selection. The hiring dynamic accelerates rapidly. Be cognizant of hiring these coaches as quickly as possible to allow the district not to get bogged down and move forward with the rest of the hiring of the certificated staff. It is necessary to be very organized with ranking needs and aligning the interviews in a manner that allows the district to stay competitive with all the positions. I would also recommend that assistant coaches are hired before the conclusion of the school year preceding the opening. This allows the teams to be fully intact for summer camps bonding exercises over the summer months. The last thing that I would highly recommend within the hiring of coaches was the experience that we went through during the newspaper interview. By having all those voices at the table, it was one more time to have a professional development opportunity

for all coaches to brainstorm together and talk about core principles and philosophy. It also provided the opportunity for the community to get formally introduced and learn about the culture we wanted to build. The coaches benefited, the newspaper benefited, the community benefited, and finally, the student athletes benefited which is the reason we put in the work.

### **Hands-On Experiences**

The following recommendations I would categorize as opportunities for hands-on experiences that will enhance a stakeholder's understanding, ownership, and wisdom as it pertains the topic being addressed. To begin I think it is very important early in the process to identify and construct the image for the new school. Mascots, colors, logos, and other items pertaining to the image of the new school need to have group ownership and discussion. In our process we utilized a focus group of students, parents, Board members, and administrators that held numerous meetings deliberating on mascot and color scheme. This group helped narrow the vision for the Board to eventually vote on, but the process was public from the aspect that the community realized the objective of the group and could have conversations with these individuals to voice more community feedback. The mascot that we eventually chose also provided a dual purpose that I articulated in previous text. The feedback from the community was positive and we would not alter the plan if we had to go through the process again. This allowed us to early on work with the vendor and secure a branding locker that could then be utilized for all other design phases and having this accomplished early was beneficial. I would recommend trademarking the logo so that the school district has full ownership and can



then decide how the image will be reproduced and what parties will have access to utilize the image.

I would highly recommend a school district take a visit to a neighboring community similar in geography and demographics that has just recently gone through this process. Our district mobilized a group of stakeholders that visited a district similar in size and growth and learned a great deal from those that had just recently completed the process. When the experiences are fresh in your mind it is easy to recall and have conversations about what went well and what things a district would do differently. Learning from others is good practice in all phases of life and it is true in this regard as well. Collaboration was a common theme that was repeated during this visit and shared ownership with major decisions is needed. Staffing, furniture, uniform design, layout, and really every major decision that is made during this opening needs groupthink and ownership. The taxpayers of the school district have entrusted a great deal of responsibility to the leadership team and that trust needs to be respected with questions and feedback. Speaking of this, piloting the classroom furniture two years prior to the opening of the school was outstanding. Teachers need to be able to use the furniture and have the students interact with the space to truly understand its strengths and weaknesses. I don't think anyone would consider buying a car without taking it for a test drive and the total bill for outfitting an entire building with classroom furniture is way more expensive than an automobile. Let the kids test drive the furniture and ask for your teacher's feedback to make an informed decision that will enhance the learning environment.

The same can be said for the weight room and technology needs. Ask for some devices that are being considered for the technology needs and utilize them for a semester

or more. Teachers and students will give you their honest opinion and this informed decision will have potentially a tremendous academic impact when implemented.

Another hands-on approach that was very informative was taking time to travel and visit weight rooms that had just recently been equipped with new equipment. Looking at images and specifications on paper is informative but one doesn't really get the true sense of the quality of the equipment without putting hands on it. This in person experience as we traveled to local colleges and high schools was the best time we invested in making decisions about our weight room machinery. What we eventually purchased was not the equipment that was our first choice before we visited these locations. Ironically enough, the equipment that we purchased was not the most expensive. As we visited and spoke with coaches and put hands on the equipment it became clear that one brand outperformed all others, and this would not have been understood without taking this time. The final hands-on experience is regarding uniform creation and design. A new school is spending a significant amount of money to outfit all the athletic teams and groups and I would highly encourage the administrators ask for prototypes and samples. Garments can range in quality, and it can be difficult to determine the level of integrity within the clothing without putting eyes and hands on the material. With each meeting the vendor, coach, and I had a large array of samples to inspect to make the best choice possible. To do this, you must have a good partnership with a reputable vendor so take the time to establish one.

### **Partnerships**

The next area focusses on the partnerships that would be advisable to form with outside business organizations to help aid in the process of opening a new school. One of

the first steps a district needs to take is to secure a logo, school colors, and mascot for the new school. The architect would like to have this information as soon as possible to allow their design team to incorporate these themes within their plans. There are several ways to create a school logo and some districts might prefer to have a community member or local artist help with the designs. There is no right or wrong within this process, but I was impressed with the methods our business partner utilized in helping us create our image. There is a web-based platform where a consumer can request a design to be made. Feedback is given and then artists from all around the world could create their own rendition of their artistic perspective of what we were requesting. These renditions were formally submitted and then we had the opportunity to select those that we liked best. It was then sent back to the artist one more time with feedback and after the second phase of this process, we selected the logo of our choosing. This process casts a wide net by utilizing numerous artists and gave us many options for selection. When the logo was trademarked, the next step was to partner with the company to begin purchasing equipment and uniforms. The amount of order that takes place was incredible and I would highly recommend selecting a vendor that has experience in delivering orders of this quantity. It is helpful to have many selections that can be utilized and delivered on time. It is also advisable that this vendor can create uniform designs utilizing software so that different characteristics can be added and taken away as the team designs these garments. I would recommend that multiple people have the ability to provide feedback within the process so that the uniform design is not owned by one person. Another thing that was very helpful when utilizing a vendor of this size was the checklists that they had created from past experiences. Choose a vendor that can provide a detailed list of needs

that previous schools have utilized when opening a new building. The checklists that we were provided were expansive and gave all of us the peace of mind that we were not forgetting an obvious item and again that the items would arrive on time. Vendors need to be able to deliver when the timeline is right because it would be a major headache to have this number of purchases arrive before the district has occupancy of the building. The last thing that I want to mention when purchasing sports equipment is the safety aspect related to certain sports. Football for example is a collision sport that needs to have the protective equipment that will keep the athletes as safe as possible. The vendor that we were working with did not carry or sell a certain helmet that we wanted to use for the football team. The helmet that we wanted to purchase was being used by the other two high schools within the district and outfits 86% of all college programs and 80% of all high school programs. Their track record of safety was what we wanted to secure for players, and this was one of the few items that we bought from a separate vendor. Don't settle for an item that you are not completely satisfied with. Be selective and if the vendor that you have partnered with does not offer a particular item don't accept an inferior product for the wrong reasons.

The construction of the building is a massive undertaking and very few people have the knowledge and wisdom to oversee this process to ensure that all construction methods are being met at a high level. I would recommend a district hiring a business partner to oversee and work as a liaison between the district and the construction company. A third party needs to be involved to hold the construction process accountable. The architectural firm that we hired served this purpose for our district and it was a great partnership. On at least a monthly basis members of the district

administrative team would walk the building and inspect the work that had taken place. It was very interesting to see the level of detail and facets of the construction process that the architect would point out. It was always an excellent use of time and this inspection and collaboration helped deliver a high-quality product and a building we were proud of. After gaining occupancy there were still numerous items that needed to be added to a punch list so that the construction company could resolve and correct these issues. This took place for an entire year after we formally moved into the building. I would recommend that a district encourage teachers to share anything they believe needs to be fixed because in a building the size of a school the more eyes you have noticing these types of potential changes is for the better. The district also needs to be aware of the warranty guarantees and communicate with the architect, the construction team, and district maintenance and custodial positions so that everyone understands where responsibilities belong.

Like the business partner designing uniforms and purchasing equipment, a district needs to partner with a company to outfit the fitness equipment in the weight room. This is an expensive space that needs collaboration and feedback to adequately outfit and meet the student's needs. To begin, I would recommend the district contact a company to help lay out the space. The district needs to provide the blueprints for the weight room and with this information the vendor can begin creating a list of equipment that will meet the needs of the space. This was the most time-consuming portion of the entire process because the vast array of fitness equipment can be configured in multiple ways to increase efficiency and maximize space. It is also essential to have the head strength and conditioning coach provide feedback because they will be your primary user.

Functionality is of utmost importance and by analyzing the image the software provides the team upon the final layout. Once the equipment is in the room it is too heavy to move so when this detail is finalized the district has fully committed to this design. From this itemized list the district can send out a request for purchase to multiple vendors and go through a bidding process to allow others the opportunity to secure the job. As I stated above, I would also highly recommend taking a visit to a school or university that has recently purchased the equipment you are considering so that the team can physically touch and examine the equipment.

Purchasing classroom furniture is very similar to the purchasing of weight equipment. It is a very expensive undertaking and requires the feedback of teachers in the classroom that will utilize the furniture and equipment daily. I would highly recommend a district forming a partnership with a furniture vendor that will provide numerous options and guarantee delivery dates in the needed window. The piloting of this furniture was an excellent use of time and energy, and I would recommend this practice to anyone that is opening a school. If the district is not able to pilot a classroom set the next best thing would be to travel to a neighboring school and inspect the furniture they have purchased. Ask to have a conversation with teachers that utilize the furniture. They have no incentive to mislead and will provide their unbiased opinion with how the furniture performs for their students.

The last business partner that I would highly recommend for a fast-growing school district is the utilization of a demographer. When a district is growing as fast it becomes quite challenging to analyze and make informed decisions regarding district growth and building expansion. There are companies out there that help project

enrollment forecasts, attendance boundary realignment, and other customized research topics that a school district will benefit from. This information is incredibly helpful and allows a school district to have a timeline in place based off these recommendations. Communities should not be surprised with a needed bond issue. Partnerships such as this help inform not only the administrative team of the school district but also the community as it pertains to the growing trends and building needs in the future. The group that we have partnered with has done an excellent job with enrollment forecasts to help us better understand the advancement of our student populations as they matriculate from kindergarten through their senior year. They also adjust for transitory students and try to accurately predict enrollment numbers. A business partner such as this helps to remove some of the guessing game that goes along with student projections. By collaborating with this organization, the School Board, demographer, and district administration can work together to achieve the goal of uninterrupted educational services for all students.

### **District Facilities**

The next area of recommendations that I would like to focus relate to the sharing of district facilities. The construction of the new school is very expensive and any time a district can save money and not sacrifice the quality of the product it is worthy of consideration. A stadium is a significant investment for a school district and the thought of building a new stadium for each high school seems excessive and a misuse of taxpayer money in my opinion. As our district has grown, we have moved from one to three high schools and along that journey, my belief in this practice has been affirmed. A typical high school football team will only play on average 9 to 10 football games a year and only half of those are home contests. So, in theory, the stadium is only utilized 4-5 times

a year by one school. Granted when a football game is taking place the crowds can be massive and it is essential to have a facility that can accommodate crowds of this magnitude, but this can easily be done with three high schools at one site. When our district had just two high schools it was very easy to accommodate the home games for both schools and this truth has remained intact as we have played home football games now for three high schools at one location. This allows a district to maximize the facilities and continually enhance those facilities without having to worry about equity among three high schools. The biggest caution that I would share is to be mindful of the school that is the host site for the stadium. It does create a burden to continually have an activity in the stadium and it is essential to have a maintenance and custodial crew that attend to the needs of the site. When we added the third high school, we built a locker room facility at the ground level of the field and added visitor seating on the opposite side. These two enhancements were phenomenal, and their impact helped lessen the burden on the host high school and allow all schools to utilize this facility. The three activity directors continuously collaborate on the needs of the facility, the taxpayers are not responsible for an undue tax burden of building two more stadiums, and our high school football teams have an excellent environment to play their home football games. It has been my experience that these scenarios have positive outcomes and very few if any negative aspects of sharing this site.

I would also recommend that when a district is going through the process of opening a new school that they devote attention to the plans for the summer preceding the opening of the school. If occupancy has not been gained there are many teams that need access to facilities to host camps, lift weights, and condition over the summer months. It



is everyone's hope that construction stays on track and that the facility is finished but if the scenario arises where occupancy will not be gained is essential to develop a plan with how to navigate these dynamics. The district should also devote attention to busing to ensure that a new school will be adequately served with the current transportation plans. From regular school bus routes, field trips, activities, and sports teams the transportation company or local busing will feel a tremendous effect when adding a new high school. On a typical day, one high school can generate anywhere from 5-10 trips and when this is added to all the other needs with the other buildings in the district the task can become overwhelming. Staying on the theme of sharing, it is wise to develop a plan early with how funds should be allocated within the different activity groups. Fundraising is a common practice at the high school level and if the district is responsible for the bookkeeping of these funds there should be a plan for division when the new school opens. Many of the students that help fund raise are leaving and their efforts within that fundraising should be recognized at the new school. It was our practice that we looked at the ratio of students that were leaving and staying and use that as our benchmark when dividing the funds. All parties agreed that that was the fairest solution, and I had no complaints from students or parents with our practice. These procedures that I have articulated regarding the sharing of district sites, equipment, and funds are worthy of consideration for any school district going through the process of opening the school.

To conclude by recommendations, I reflect on all the decisions that we made as a district going through the process of opening a new school and I continually come back to one decision point that helped bring clarity to anything we encountered. It does not matter what the task was. Whether it was hiring of staff, hiring of coaches, purchasing

furniture, designing classrooms, room assignments, or whatever the task, the decision had to come down to this question. How will it affect student learning? If you ask this question regarding any scenario or problem, in my opinion, the answer becomes clear, and your plan of action will be what is best for your students. When we had to make the decision to build a new school because the existing building was too crowded it came down to this question. The learning environment of the previous school was becoming too congested and was having a negative impact. The decision had to be made to open a new school. From that point on each scenario that we encountered; we always asked the question: How is it going to impact student learning? When your intentions are pure and everything that you do is dedicated to students and trying to help them have a good school experience the work becomes very enjoyable and rewarding. It was a tremendous pleasure going through this process and I hope that these writings and reflections will be helpful as others work toward the same goals within their own school district.

Rudyard Kipling in his *Law of the Jungle* referred to an expression describing a scenario where anything goes. I must say that during the process of opening a new school there are times when one feels overwhelmed and is just trying to survive. When one begins to feel overwhelmed it is essential to rely on your team to carry through and complete the mission. If one tries to go it alone it is almost certain they will fail but if they pack together and utilize their skills as one, success is within reach. We frequently utilized Kipling's writing with our students to emphasize this belief but truth be told we had to utilize this strategy as adults to lay the framework for our students.

Kipling's Law of the Jungle:

Now this is the law of the jungle as old and as true as the sky; and the wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the wolf that shall break it must die. As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk the law runneth forward and back for the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.

We wolves packed together during this endeavor and found success. It is my sincere hope that this research will benefit those in future situations where the mission at hand is to create an educational environment where students can thrive. Those individuals that pack together will find strength within their team and those that go it alone will succumb to the law of the jungle.

In conclusion, the general considerations that began this journey helped to focus the vision throughout the process. It is imperative that school leaders understand the values, demographics, and public needs when opening a new high school. We understood from listening to the feedback from our community that the school size, curricular offerings, and student engagement opportunities were of vital importance. Our community stressed that they wanted students engaged in activities and offered a rigorous curriculum so they would be adequately prepared for the college experience. The student population of the previous school was very congested and the appropriate selection of available land to meet the needs of a growing suburban district was paramount. With a transparent delivery, the educational leaders were able to articulate to the community that the added tax burden was necessary and worthwhile and approval was demonstrated when the community voted in favor of the school bond issue that would pay for the project. As a leader in this school district, I take deep pride in making all decisions based on what is best for the student. Life provides a variety of distractions and one can get lost

in the noise of these distractions without a concerted filter when making decisions. The simple question: What is best for the student? This phrase brings clarity to every situation that can arise with educational leadership. Effective leaders have the ability to guide and influence others in a positive direction for the public good. I believe that we accomplished our mission and continue to do so. The work is not finished when the paint and mortar dry after the construction of the building. The school that we opened is a high functioning educational system that we must work to sustain over time. My hope is that these reflections provide guidance and wisdom for leaders going through a similar process but also understand that this work is unending. Educators care about the future and that is why we work hard every day to give students the best experience possible. It is the best profession in the world.

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