

Steve Bliss has accomplished an extraordinary amount in the two years he has been our Superintendent. In addition to gaining passage of sound budgets for each of three school systems each year, he spearheaded a complete revamping of the professional growth and evaluation system, oversaw major improvements in curriculum design, reorganized special education administration to provide both more responsiveness and cost savings, shepherded a new teachers' contract to approval, entirely revised and negotiated contracts for all other employees, and hired outstanding personnel for several major administrative positions, including the high school headmaster. Throughout it all, Steve has led more than 300 employees in four schools across two towns, not to mention 16 school committee members on three separate and sovereign committees, with inspiration, unflagging enthusiasm, and an air of such supreme confidence and competence that he earned the deepest respect and admiration from stakeholders in every group, from town officials to teachers, from the lunchroom to the classroom.

The challenges Steve faced here were not the usual dispiriting ones of an under-funded and poorly supported school system; instead, they were to galvanize a high-performing system that, while running reasonably well, could be fairly said to be drifting, rather than pushing forward. Steve's charisma, personal energy, and clear love of doing important things well provided that spark, reminding us what leadership at the very top can look like. His example has, indeed, been galvanizing.

I was fortunate to sit with Steve on two long-standing committees—one to deeply revise the professional evaluation system, the other to consider a later start time for the middle and high schools, to allow our adolescents to sleep and learn on a schedule more attuned to their physiology. On both, I was able to see up close how Steve worked with his staff, his faculty, with parents, and with students. He impressed me with his genuine interest in how each individual was doing—a student's extracurricular activity, a parent's older child at college, a teacher's presentation at a conference. He was just as impressive in his ability to moderate discussion of sensitive topics with respect and consideration of multiple viewpoints, and to move each large group toward a decision when it was needed. In both situations, and throughout his tenure in our system, Steve's first priority has always been—"What is good for our students?"

I have also had the good fortune to talk at length with Steve one on one, and to see how his impressive public persona—collegial, prepared, comfortable in authority—is complemented by his more private side. In conversation, Steve's interests and ideas range widely, his opinions and judgments are sound, and he is both affable and wry in his sense of humor.

It was with great regret that I learned Steve would be moving on from our school system, but it was not the regret of losing an excellent prospect just as he was hitting his stride, but of losing an excellent leader who has already made an important mark here. While I am sorry to see him go, I wish him the very best in his next position, where, I predict, he will excel, and bring to his new constituency the same extraordinary talents for leading people and running complex systems that he demonstrated here.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I may answer other questions.

Sincerely,


Richard Robinson

Dover-Sherborn Regional School Committee, 2007 to present; Chair, 2013-2014