



MY FIRST 100 DAYS

DODEA'S STRATEGIC WAY FORWARD

THOMAS M. BRADY
Director, Department of Defense Education Activity

Introduction

When I became DoDEA's Director in March 2014, I developed and shared an entry plan, which served to focus my efforts during my first 100 days in office. The three focus areas I established in the plan are summarized below.

ENTRY PLAN - AREA OF FOCUS

FOCUS 1: UNDERSTANDING DODEA

To become familiar with the people, processes, partnerships and communities around the world which represent and comprise the DoDEA school system.

FOCUS 2: ANALYZING CRITICAL ISSUES

To identify and analyze the critical issues and student achievement data that present challenges and opportunities to maximizing student performance.

FOCUS 3: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY AND ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

To build effective communication and engage the community through responsive, open, and honest communication practices, encourage and promote community engagement, and foster productive relationships with key stakeholders by delivering timely, accurate information and using mutually beneficial two-way communication

As promised in the plan, I am following up to share with you what I heard, saw, and learned; my first impressions of the current state of our school system; and the direction I believe our school system must take if we are to become a model unified, college- and career-ready school system.

During my first 100 days, I made it a priority to meet with key stakeholders and see operations firsthand. I traveled more than 27,800 air and ground miles to visit with DoDEA's three area offices in Germany, Okinawa, and Georgia; eight of DoDEA's 14 Districts; and 79 of DoDEA's 190 schools in Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Georgia. During my visits I had the opportunity to conduct 27 faculty and staff meetings, 9 parent meetings, 11 command visits, 12 student meetings, and 7 meetings with union officials. I've also met with senior military spouses, members of our Dependents Education Council (DEC), and several organizations that have a vested interest in our schools to listen to their thoughts and perspectives. In short, I was able to meet with a large cross-section of the DoDEA community and establish a good understanding of what our stakeholders think DoDEA is doing well and what we must do to improve. Thanks to the candidness of our community stakeholders, I concluded my first 100 days with a good, foundational understanding of our current state.

The highlight of my travels was the time spent with students. Our students, regardless of the diverse settings in which they are living and attending school, shared very similar experiences, successes, and challenges. What I took away from the meetings was that our students understand the importance of a good education, want a good education, and for the most part, are motivated and inspired to do their best in school. Spending time with our students convinced me that with the right motivation and support, they can meet the higher academic expectations that we will soon ask of them.

I also met with a large number of educators, administrators, and parents. I saw firsthand the commitment of our educators and administrators – common to all was their passion for quality teaching and learning in our schools. Our school staffs clearly understand the unique challenges our students face as military dependents, and they are experts at developing the whole child academically, socio-emotionally, and physically. It was also clear that our parents want the best possible education for their children and have confidence in the ability and commitment of DoDEA's schools to provide quality educational opportunities.

Key Impressions

During my many meetings and conversations, several common themes surfaced that led me to frame three “big picture” impressions of our organization. The first is a positive impression that we will look to build upon. The second and third highlight areas that I plan to immediately address as part of our strategic way forward.

First Impression: We are a well-resourced school system.

The Department of Defense has made an extraordinary commitment to educating the school-aged children of our Nation's Service members and civilian employees serving around the world. We all look at the world through prisms formed by our own experiences. My experience as an educational administrator and leader in public schools for the past 15 years was that of constant educational program cuts, workforce reductions, and debates about cutting extracurricular programs. I think that we are very fortunate in DoDEA not to operate in a severely-constrained fiscal environment common to many of our public counterparts. Although we have experienced a recent reduction-in-force and do not have the resources to do everything we wish to do in our schools, I believe we are very fortunate to have the ability to resource our most important educational programs. However, we must do a better job of identifying and ensuring the long-term commitment of resourcing the educational programs most vital to improving student achievement.



FIRST 100 DAYS

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- ◆ Visited 79 of DoDEA's 190 schools in Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Georgia.
- ◆ Conducted 27 faculty and staff meetings, 9 parent meetings, 11 command visits, 12 student meetings, and 7 meetings with union officials.
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KEY IMPRESSIONS

FIRST IMPRESSION

We are a well-resourced school system.

SECOND IMPRESSION

We are an organization in “angst.”

THIRD IMPRESSION

We are experiencing unfocused “Educational Reform” fatigue.



Second Impression: We are an organization in “angst.”

DoDEA continues to be impacted by a number of internal and external factors that are creating a great deal of uncertainty and speculation. The factors having the most dramatic effect on our people include:

- ◆ The Department of Defense directed a study (the fourth in the last 20 years) to examine if and why it should own and operate K-12 schools in the United States. The study is currently in progress.
- ◆ The map of Europe continues to change. The down-sizing of our military force in Europe that started with the end of the Cold War 30 years ago continues. Under the leadership of the European Infrastructure Committee, the Military Services are once again conducting an in-depth examination of their force size and positioning in Europe. We should anticipate that the resulting military force resizing and re-stationing will impact the structure and location of DoDEA-Europe schools.
- ◆ Similarly, force re-stationing is also taking place throughout the Pacific, driving DoDEA-Pacific school closures and openings to support the changing landscape.
- ◆ Lastly, we are in the midst of examining our own organizational structure, looking deeper into several areas to determine how to better position available human and capital resources to more effectively support our schools and improve student achievement. I appreciate the fact that many of you have had an opportunity to provide input to the study.

In short, people throughout our organization are experiencing real stress from factors they personally (and DoDEA organizationally) have little to no influence over. Please know that I am sensitive to this and will always work on your behalf to do what’s best for our school system. I promise to openly communicate with you as these and other events unfold.

Third Impression: We are experiencing unfocused “Educational Reform” fatigue.

We have an abundance of initiatives, projects, and programs happening simultaneously under the well-intentioned umbrella of “educational reform.” Although well-meaning, they are not always well-aligned, all seemingly a top priority, and overwhelming individually and organizationally. In short, we lack strategic focus, cohesion, and clarity of purpose. I intend to address this issue immediately.

Our Strategic Focus

Based on what I saw, what I heard, what I learned, and the resulting impressions I formed, I am immediately narrowing our strategic focus to two priority areas that are essential to our ability to uniformly improve student achievement and put our school system on the path from “good to great.” I am confident the priorities address our system’s most urgent needs and will establish the requisite foundation from which further organizational growth can occur. However, due to the complexity of the two priority areas, I anticipate both will consume much of our focus and resources for the next four years.

Priority 1: *We must strengthen DoDEA’s standards-based educational system by transitioning to: 1) college- and career-ready standards that are infused with rigor and relevancy; and 2) a common standards-aligned curriculum, instructional framework, and assessment system.*

The bottom line is that DoDEA needs an educational system that is focused on ensuring our students are uniformly and progressively learning the knowledge and skills required for success at the next grade level and college and/or a career upon graduating from high school. Our new college- and career-ready standards – to include the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and literacy adopted by 44 of our nation’s 50 states (the 44 states are home to approximately 80% of military-connected children) – will establish the foundation from which we will develop and align a common curriculum, instructional framework, and assessment system. Equally important is that the implementation of each of the system components will be initiated by robust, targeted professional development for our educators. I believe the new system will have a dramatic, positive effect on every stakeholder at the school level.

For students, this priority provides:

- ◆ Improved educational opportunities that progressively build student college and career readiness as they advance from grade-to-grade.
- ◆ Academic consistency for our students, who change schools as frequently as six times or more during their K-12 education. The consistency in standards and academic expectations between DoDEA schools and the majority of U.S. public schools should serve to ease curriculum-related transition stressors.

For teachers, this priority provides:

- ◆ Clear expectations for the knowledge and skills to be taught in each grade and content area.
- ◆ An authentic assessment system that provides student learning results that reliably inform teachers about the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction.



“COLLEGE READY”

A graduate of an accredited secondary program that:

- ◆ Is prepared to enter a 2- to 4-year institution of their choice.
- ◆ Has the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to preclude the need for non-credit bearing remediation.
- ◆ Has successfully navigated the “readiness” pathway to achieve post-secondary educational goals.

“CAREER READY”

A graduate of an accredited secondary program or mastered competencies of a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program of study that is:

- ◆ Accepted into advanced training certificate program based on secondary achievements or the workforce.
- ◆ Prepared for cognitive engagement that leads to promotion, advancement opportunities and longevity.



OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

Priority 1:

We must strengthen DoDEA's standards-based educational system by transitioning to: 1) college- and career-ready standards that are infused with rigor and relevancy; and 2) a common standards-aligned curriculum, instructional framework, and assessment system.

Priority 2:

We will establish the organizational capacity to uniformly improve student achievement and school operations.



- ◆ Professional development and job-embedded instructional training to support the implementation of more rigorous academic standards, a common curriculum, a common instructional framework, and standardized assessments.
- ◆ Increased opportunities for collaboration across disciplines as teachers integrate literacy and math-based content knowledge with critical thinking skills in multiple content areas throughout their academic school day.
- ◆ Improved educator access to curricular resources and training materials shared by schools and school systems all over the United States.

For administrators (instructional leaders), this priority provides a common curriculum, instructional framework, and assessment system that cultivate the establishment of school professional learning communities and the ability to collaborate and share instructional best practices with other DoDEA schools.

For parents, this priority provides:

- ◆ Clearer expectations for student learning and encouragement for parents to work with teachers to motivate and help students meet the higher academic standards.
- ◆ Consistency for their child when transitioning between schools, minimizing the likelihood that a student will either repeat or miss opportunities to learn essential grade-level and/or content area skills and knowledge.

Priority 2: We will establish the organizational capacity to uniformly improve student achievement and school operations.

We will pursue our commitment to become a more effective and efficient school system by redistributing human and capital resources and clarifying organizational roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Let me emphasize that this priority is not about a new leader “reorganizing just to reorganize.” Rather, it is about following through on work that started more than 18 months ago to thoughtfully redirect human and capital resources to build the organizational capacity required to break through our long-standing student-achievement ceiling and close achievement gaps. This priority initiative will: 1) ensure the means to develop, implement and sustain a model standards-based educational system; 2) improve the ability of our above-school level organization to provide the resources needed to build school capacity; and 3) ensure all DoDEA schools are capable of consistently providing high-quality educational opportunities to all students.

This effort will focus our entire organization on doing what's best for students. Teachers and administrators (instructional leaders) will be able to focus on instruction while receiving improved resourcing and support from the above-school level. Our above-school organizations will better understand roles, responsibilities, and expectations and will be organized, resourced, and empowered for success. In short, DoDEA's entire organization will be aligned and focused on our most important organizational outcome - raising student achievement for *all* students.

Next Steps

Here are some of key actions you can expect to see over the next 12 months to improve our ability to operate globally as a high-performing, unified school system:

- ◆ The Headquarters Education Directorate will lead the effort to develop and implement a more rigorous and relevant standards-based educational system. The system will achieve alignment of a common curriculum, instructional framework, and assessments with DoDEA's college- and career-ready standards and will be supported by a robust, targeted professional development program.
- ◆ We will improve the ability of the DoDEA Headquarters to perform its core functions. This effort will focus initially on the Education Directorate and Human Resources Division.
- ◆ We will clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of DoDEA's HQ, areas, and districts and then establish the required capacity at each level to be successful.
- ◆ We will begin redirecting instructional support closer to the school level.
- ◆ We will engage military news organizations, local media outlets, national media outlets, and education trade reporters to establish a strong, honest, and collaborative framework for communication.
- ◆ We will schedule listening sessions worldwide to obtain community views and suggestions for moving forward.
- ◆ We will review our portfolio of educational programs to assess their impact on student achievement. Those that are determined to be of no value-added will be discontinued in a manner least disruptive to school operations.

While performing these key "capacity-building" actions, we must be careful not to disrupt school operations, most importantly teaching and learning. I want to maintain (and strengthen where possible) the things that make us a good school system while we work to build much needed capacity. This will require that we sustain performance levels by:



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- ◆ Doing everything possible to ensure our graduating seniors are college and career ready and all other students are ready for success at the next grade level.
- ◆ Using existing assessment data to improve instruction and student achievement and direct support to students and schools in need.
- ◆ Maximizing teacher time in the classroom.
- ◆ Continuing our school improvement process.
- ◆ Maintaining school accreditation standards.
- ◆ Maintaining an organizational-wide awareness of the status of priority initiatives and understanding associated roles and responsibilities.
- ◆ Continuing the communication between all organizational levels to vigorously address issues affecting school operations and student learning.

Let me close by sharing my excitement for our future. We are at a juncture where we have a tremendous opportunity to channel our talent, resources, and passions to improve our school system for our students and their families. Becoming a high-performing organization will not be an easy task, but given our current strengths, a good plan of action, and a fully committed and engaged team, it is certainly achievable. As we set high expectations for students, we must also set them for ourselves and trust that our capacity building efforts will establish the individual and collective efficacy to deliver on the higher expectations. No matter who you are or what you do in DoDEA, you have a role in preparing our students for their future. I ask all of you to hold yourselves accountable and start each day by thinking about how your work will positively impact the achievement of students and end each day reflecting on the contributions you made and what you can do to make a greater impact tomorrow. Our students deserve a great school system – I’m excited to work with you to provide them one!