

**2015** **SANFORD**  
**VISION**  
**Learning for Life**



LEARNING TOGETHER, LEARNING FOR LIFE

Today, I am here to talk with you about Sanford's educational system and our efforts to prepare our community and its young people for the best future possible. These efforts are part of an ambitious and coordinated plan that we call the Sanford Vision: Learning for Life. Many of you have no doubt heard about the Vision; I'm sure that some of you even helped shape it. Today, I'd like to unpack the Vision for you--to tell you more about why we're engaged in this effort, how we're going about it, and how we're going to evaluate our progress. I'd also like to make the case today that YOU--each and every one of you--are in a strong position to help us realize this vision.

# A COMMUNITY IMPERATIVE



In 2008–2009, Sanford had an opportunity to apply for a state grant, called the Innovative Building grant that would support the construction of a single campus that housing a high school, a technical center, an institution of higher learning, and perhaps even a center for adult education.

To help think about that prospect, we pulled together a group of approximately 50 business leaders in Sanford, who devoted several full-day meetings to discussing the needs of the business community in the future. These leaders were clear about the skills and knowledge necessary for 21st century success, and challenged the schools to come up with a master plan for moving the district forward.

We then invited a wide range of stakeholders in the community to help build a long-term vision for the Sanford Schools. Together, approximately 35 people representing all sectors of the town developed expertise about education in the 21st century and collected input from the community through a series of on-line surveys and face-to-face meetings. From the data, the group was able to determine what the community said it wanted and needed. More about that shortly.

Around this same time, Sanford received an invitation from the Nellie Mae Educational Foundation to apply for a grant to support a planning process for school districts wanting to engage in large-scale change efforts. Sanford sent its letter of interest to the Foundation in May of 2010, and received the planning grant in December 2010. With this funding, the long-term plan and logic model were fleshed out, and a full proposal went to Nellie Mae in September of 2011. In December of that year, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation approved a grant of \$3.75 million to the Sanford Schools in support of the vision.

This Vision, called the Sanford Vision: Learning for Life, is rooted in a commitment to ensure that all young people in Sanford are engaged in meaningful learning from the time they enter pre-school to the time they reach adulthood.

# WHY CHANGE THE SYSTEM?



Why the need for change? I probably don't need to tell you this, but--we live in an increasingly global, complex, and fast-changing society. A far cry from the world of the textile mills that gave life to Sanford many years ago. And yet, the educational systems in most places in this country--including in Sanford--still follow an Industrial Age assembly line approach to education, which presumes that all children are ready to learn the same thing, the same way, in the same amount of time.

# DIFFERENT WORLD, DIFFERENT SKILLS

Reading  
Writing  
Arithmetic

**21st Century Literacy Skills**

**21<sup>st</sup> century skills for the workforce**

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Social & Cross-cultural Skills
Communication & Collaboration	Creative Thinking & Innovation
Technology Literacy, Media Literacy	Productivity & Accountability
Flexibility & Adaptability	Teamwork
	Global Awareness

Previously, schools were thought to be the places where students mastered just the 3R's--reading, writing and arithmetic. Some students did that very well; many students did not, but still passed from one grade to the next. And in that earlier era, it didn't matter much that many students didn't reach high bars of excellence because there were good jobs to be had without it and because citizenship required only a basic level of literacy.

Today, there are many reasons that ALL of our young people need to master not just the 3R's, but also a host of other skills that employers say are critical for success in the 21st century: the ability to analyze and synthesize data, to communicate well, to solve problems creatively, to work well in teams and with diverse groups of people, to use technology. Educators refer to these as 21st century skills. In Sanford, we call them real-world skills because they will enable our young people to thrive in the real world--whether here in Sanford or on the other side of the world.

# DIFFERENT WORLD, DIFFERENT SKILLS



It's also a different world because, according to economists and others who make projections about the future, our young people will likely have multiple careers over the course of a lifetime. So a broad base of skills is absolutely necessary to being able to move from one industry to another, from one profession to another, from one locale to another. In other words, all of our young people need to be well-rounded and adaptable.

In addition, our society is aging, which means that our talent pool is shrinking. Therefore, we need ALL of our young people to become highly capable. Our community and our nation will thrive only if everyone has the kinds of rich educational experiences that will help them find their place in the community.

# REMODELING THE SYSTEM



So how do we move an entire school system? Well, the good news is that we don't need to blow anything up. In fact, our schools have a lot of good things going for them, and we can certainly capitalize on our many strengths. So you might say that we're engaging in a big remodeling effort. Like an old house that has "good bones" but was built in a different era, our school system needs to be updated. You would expect a home built in the late 19th or early 20th century to need new plumbing and electricity, for example, to bring the house "up to code" for the present time. The same can be said about school systems that were established a century and a half ago. The context was different, the goals were different, and there were far fewer tools than there are today. And there was far less knowledge about how human beings learn and how systems work.

# WHAT WE KNOW



For example, advances in neuroscience are teaching us a lot about how the brain works. As you probably know, neuroscientists--using powerful brain imaging tools--can for the first time study how the brain learns--while it's learning! Here's some of what we now know from their studies.

- The brain is continually changing, as learning experiences shape its architecture; students' abilities are always developing.
- The brain is learning virtually all the time, in both formal and informal contexts.
- The brain changes that underlie learning occur when experiences are active, not passive.
- Learning and emotion work together in the brain.
- Each student has a complex profile of strengths and limitations and learns best through experiences tailored to his or her needs and interests.

All of these points may seem obvious, but what's important is that we have physical validation, actual material proof that helps us shape the right kinds of learning experiences for Sanford's students.

# WHAT WE KNOW



Second, there are many pioneering school districts across the country, including right here in Maine, that are utilizing these new scientific understandings to inform practice in the classroom--with promising results. We know, for example, that best practices include such things as:

- adapting to the learning needs of the individual
- providing opportunities for students to apply what they are learning
- enabling students to learn from one another
- encouraging students to reflect on the content and on their own progress

# WHAT WE KNOW



Social scientists have also learned a lot in the last 20 years about how systems work. Often, those of us working in large systems have focused on the individual elements of a system. We apply a program or intervention and hope for the best. As many tools and practices as we might use to improve performance, we know now that it is the purpose and the interconnections that are the real power of a system.

Another way to say this is that Sanford's educational system is like an orchestra; it has many groups of players: students, taxpayers, families, business leaders, the School Committee, teachers, principals and administrators.

The orchestra sounds best when each musician is skilled, the instruments are well-tuned, and the sections work together in harmony toward the common goal of playing the best music they can. No orchestra becomes great overnight, and the beauty of the music depends on lots of small steps, dedicated practice by musicians who have all the resources they need, and an orchestra conductor who can create harmony among all the parts.

# REALIZING THE VISION

- Student-Centered



So how do we create a system that takes into account all of what we know to be true? In Sanford, we have a name for the kind of educational experience we aspire to provide for our young people. We call it a Student-Centered, Proficiency-Based system, or SCPBL for short.

The Student Centered part of the equation is making sure that we deliver on the findings from neuroscience and developmental theory that tell us that students learn and demonstrate what they have learned in very different ways, and that learning must be customized or personalized to the strengths and needs of each student. If the brain is learning virtually all the time, in both formal and informal settings, we must make sure that we create meaningful learning experiences that are more active and hands-on. And that our students are offered a range of non-traditional learning experiences such as service learning, job shadowing, and after-school enrichment.

# REALIZING THE VISION

- Proficiency Based



The Proficiency Based part of the equation means that graduation must be based not on how much time students have spent in school, but rather, what they can demonstrate that they have learned. Proficiency-based learning encourages students who have mastered a subject and are ready for new challenges to move forward; students who need extra time to reach proficiency will be given that time.

Another feature of proficiency-based learning is continually monitoring student progress. Students typically work with their teachers to design how to measure their progress—whether a test, an exhibition or portfolio, or some other regular form of feedback. Our goal is that all students in Sanford will maintain a Personalized Learning Plan or educational portfolio that will record their goals and the ways they have chosen to reach them. In short, no more “C’s” and “D’s” allowed. All students will achieve an A or B grade; we will not let them NOT learn well.

Now that you have the background story, I’d like to share with you some elements of the vision that our community created together a few years ago.

# SANFORD VISION

- Every Sanford student is engaged in meaningful learning in a PreK-adult community that takes pride in the development of lifelong learners.

What does this mean? That students will develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and core values through engaging coursework and through instructional practices that have been shown to be effective. Some of their learning will take place in a classroom, some of it in the larger community.

Students in a student-centered environment are frequently given choices about what and how they learn. This is based on what we know from the cognitive and social sciences: that when students are motivated, they can achieve much more than when they are not.

# SANFORD VISION

- Learning is the constant with the variables being time, place, and student groupings. Students are empowered to make decisions about their own education.

Students are expected to reach proficiency, i.e., mastery of a variety of learning targets, and are able to do so through a variety of assessment techniques so that they can put their best feet forward. Demonstrations of learning, both in and out of school, are guided by community mentors and certified teachers.

Each student will have a Personalized Learning Plan that records their goals and the ways they've chosen to meet them. Assessment is continuous and a student's progress at any given time is available to students and their parents/guardians.

Graduation is based on what students have learned, not on how much a student has spent in the classroom. A diploma really means something!

# SANFORD VISION

- The Sanford staff works together to nurture students, help them learn to use their minds well and exemplify the citizenship required in a democratic society.

Students learn how to learn, reflect on their learning, transfer it to new situations and solve problems that are relevant to themselves and their community.

Teachers guide and support students, identifying needed interventions and extensions and suggesting different kinds of learning experiences.

The system supports staff members by providing time for team planning, coordination, collaboration, professional development, and reflection.

# SANFORD VISION

- Students learn in a variety of settings and choose from an array of learning opportunities supported by technology.

Because every learner is different, we must meet them where they are, and provide more options than we've ever offered in the past.

# WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

- Structural Changes



Some of our remodeling efforts will be structural in nature, for example, we have created Enrichment Thursdays, one morning a week at the high school that enables teachers to collaborate, which research has shown improves teaching in dramatic ways. It's also a time when students have access to a variety of enrichment opportunities that they didn't have previously.

We will also be changing the way we report out student progress. Instead of a system based on a single letter grade, we will be creating a much more transparent system, so that parents can see how well and at what pace a student is showing proficiency. Everyone will be expected to reach proficiency, and will be provided with the supports and time to get there.

Some of the changes are related to instruction. Our teachers are being called upon to become learners, to change their classroom practices and challenge some of their previous ideas about what makes learning stick and how to reach all young people. To guide us in this shift, Sanford has chosen to work with several national experts.

# WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?



- Closer Ties Between School & Community

Some of the changes relate to how the community interacts with the schools. Many businesses and organizations in Sanford are now working closely with our schools to offer rigorous and credit-bearing learning experiences for our students. It's been exciting to see community-based learning take shape in Sanford, providing young people with real-life experiences that let them "try on" different professions and learn valuable skills that will last them a lifetime.

# WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?



- Stronger partnerships between schools and parents

We also know from research that when parents are engaged in their child's education, that child performs better. So an important part of this effort is to create new models of family engagement, and to empower families, particularly those who have felt disconnected from our schools in the past. Our Schools Our Future, a task group of Strategies for a Stronger Sanford, is working very hard to bring parents to the learning table, helping parents learn how to be effective advocates for their children.

# EVALUATING OUR PROGRESS

- Indicators of Success



We have developed a very detailed set of indicators that will be used to assess our progress over time. We have baseline data for each indicator and there is a plan to collect data on a regular basis to assess our progress.

# HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

- Start-up dollars
- Changing the way we do business



Here in Sanford, we are fortunate to have received funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to help us make the transition. Over time, we will have increased our capacity and internalized the new way of doing business, enabling us to move forward without the need for additional funding.

# HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?



By the time our Class of 2017 graduates, we will have a robust student-centered, proficiency-based system in place that grants standards-based diplomas.

# THE ROAD AHEAD



Fortunately, we are fully aligned with the Maine legislature, which recently passed legislation to move all schools to a proficiency-based model by 2017.

JOIN US!!!



We will be reporting back to the community on a regular basis, by showing you specific examples of our work in the classroom and in the community.

We also have an opportunity for you today to sign on to become an official endorser of the Sanford Vision and receive a sticker for your home or business. It's a small but important way to register your support for our ambitious agenda.

Thank you for your time today, and for helping us build a prosperous future for Sanford.