

Listening & Learning Tour: New Brunswick Public Schools' superintendent looks back on first year

Students, staff, and community significantly impact Johnson's view of district

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ (June 27, 2016) – New Brunswick Public School's superintendent, Aubrey Johnson, is taking some time to look back on his first year heading up this district of more than 10,000 students.

"I've always believed there's tremendous wisdom in that old expression 'Look before you leap,'" Johnson explains. "When I was hired this past summer, I determined that to be a truly effective leader, I needed to talk with pretty much everyone -- students, faculty, staff, and members of the community -- to gain understanding and perspective."

Beginning last July, Johnson initiated a crash course in what makes New Brunswick's school district and community unique. This information was essential to making educated decisions about long-term strategies and instructional direction, and the superintendent quickly came to think of his daily meetings and visits as his "Listening & Learning Tour."

Now, as the school year concludes, he's racked up some pretty remarkable numbers. Johnson visited each of the district's schools multiple times to the point that there have been more than 170 school visits, to go along with attendance at approximately 50 community events and sessions. In addition, he participated in more than 200 separate district meetings, either at the main office on Baldwin Street or in one of the schools. In total, Johnson estimates he spoke to "far more than a thousand" individual people this past year during all his various meetings.

One particular discussion stands out in Johnson's mind -- a meeting he had with a group of New Brunswick Middle School seventh and eighth graders. He asked the students what he, in particular, could do to enhance their educational experience.

"One girl said to me, 'When I tell people where I go to school, sometimes they're negative,'" Johnson recalls. "Then she commented, 'If people already have an opinion of your school district, they already have an opinion of you and that makes me feel like I can't do well.'"

"Then, the student added, 'I really like my school, but I don't know what to say when people say negative things. If we had more information about the good things our school district does, it would help.'"

These were eye-opening moments for Johnson, and he quickly realized that a strong dose of positivity was in order. Happily, this wasn't a tremendously tall order, since there's much to be positive about.

"I've never seen another community quite like this city," the superintendent says. "For one thing, we have a wonderful level of diversity and I believe this is New Brunswick's greatest single strength. In addition to English, a total of 41 other languages are spoken by the members of our student body. It's remarkable."

Johnson also notes that the district's faculty and administrators, more than half of whom hold advanced degrees, are passionate about what they do.

"From one school, after another, after another, I am impressed by the level of calm and organization," he says. "Many of my visits were unscheduled, so I knew I was seeing the real world. It wasn't just the orderliness that impressed me, it was how enthusiastic our teachers are. They're excited, creative, and looking to improve. It's terrific that they're so upbeat, and their demeanor is inevitably transferred to students. Our teachers are eager to teach, so I know our students are just as ready and eager to learn."

The superintendent also spent a lot of time out and about in the community, at lunch meetings, getting his haircut at a couple of corner barber shops, running into a shop for a cup of coffee, or dining out during the evening. It didn't take long to realize that the historic city of New Brunswick is a special place.

"Students learn from the entirety of their environment, not just at school," Johnson explains. "How lucky are our kids to be growing up with what New Brunswick offers? There's history dating back centuries, an outstanding university that serves as an absolute beacon for learning, hospitals to ensure health and wellness, and a chance to sample as wide a variety of ethnic cuisines as any place in our state. This town, this community – it provides a foundation for understanding and awareness that can serve our young people far into future."

Digital images of various meetings along the Listening and Learning Tour are available:

- [Image 1 \(LINK\)](#) - New Brunswick students, along with Superintendent of schools Aubrey Johnson and jazz band director Radostina Velikova at the American Graduate Day event
- [Image 2 \(LINK\)](#) - Parents, along with teachers and Superintendent Johnson, meeting at Roosevelt School library for the Forming Parent Partnerships meeting
- [Image 3 \(LINK\)](#) - Superintendent Johnson reading a Dr. Seuss book to students for Read Across America Day
- [Image 4 \(LINK\)](#) - Teachers and staff gather at the High School cafeteria for a discussion

About New Brunswick Public Schools

The New Brunswick, NJ public school district consists of two high schools (New Brunswick High School and Health Sciences Technology High School), a middle school (New Brunswick Middle School) and eight elementary schools (Lincoln, Livingston, Lord Stirling, McKinley, Redshaw, Roosevelt, Paul Robeson, and Woodrow Wilson schools). The New Brunswick Public School District offers a comprehensive educational program for students in grades pre-kindergarten through twelve and serves more than 10,000 students.

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