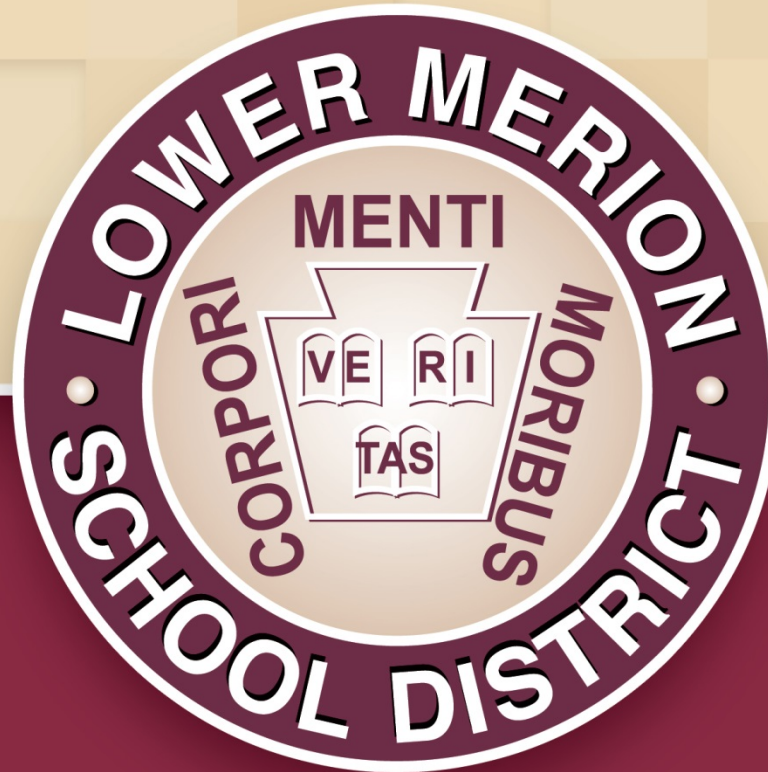


THE LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLANNING—LEARNING JOURNEYS



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ORIENTATION, PREPARATION AND MINDSET

LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT



What are Learning Journeys and Immersion Experiences?

Learning Journey

A Learning Journey is a way to get a fresh perspective by immersing ourselves in **promising places** with eyes wide open, assumptions suspended, curiosity and all senses engaged.

Learning Journeys can be in other schools or in completely different environments.

Immersion Experience

Immersion Experiences are opportunities to get insight into **our own system** or a population by immersing ourselves in “bright spots” and at the “edges” of the system.

What is the Purpose of a Learning Journey?



The Purpose is to:

- Ground ourselves
- Have first-hand experiences
- Explore core questions, especially our trickiest ones
- Challenge deeply-held assumptions
- See our “system” as a whole—especially the “edges” of the system (extreme users, the voiceless or people in special situations)

An Example of a Learning Journey



A branch of a university that felt beholden to its main campus:

- **They visited a minor league baseball team and discovered it didn't even talk about the major league, but talked a lot about local family entertainment as its competition**
- **They also visited the headquarters of an airplane engine manufacturer and heard "we wish more people would come to us asking for help"**

This campus ended up going to the main campus and got help changing its name, getting permission to have dorms and changing its legal status.



Making the Most of Learning Journeys

Go to the places of most potential.

- Meet your interviewees in their context. You can learn a lot by simply observing what is going on.
- Take whatever you observe as a starting point to improvise questions that allow you to learn more about the real-life context of your interviewee.

Observe, observe, observe.

- Turn off your “judging” instinct and suspend your cynicism.
- Connect with your sense of appreciation and wonder to notice things you may have never seen before.

Trust your intuition and ask authentic questions.

- Pay attention to and trust your intuition in asking questions raised by your experiences.
- Ask simple and authentic questions.

Making the Most of a Learning Journey



Remember intent. It will be seductive to get drawn into your host's story and forget our questions and purpose.

- Keep bringing yourself back to your reason for being there.
- Listen for the unasked, the unexpected and the synchronistic.

When speaking with people, use deep listening as a tool to hold the space of conversation.

- When your hosts have finished responding to one of your questions, don't jump automatically to the next question.
- Attend to what is emerging from the now.

Notice clues about the future for LMSD.

- Clues about the future often show up as points of passion, interesting side experiments, points of tension, gaps, polarities, and sometimes blind spots.
- Clues can be blinding flashes of the obvious or little sparks of possibility off in a corner.

Potential LMSD Learning Journeys



1. NextFab. (nextfab.com) – “A gym for innovators.” NextFab’s mission is to foster innovation and manufacturing as key elements of our nation’s identity and economy, through providing broad-based awareness of, competence with, and access to Next-generation digital design and Fabrication technologies and services.

2. Indy Hall (indyhall.org) – Is a community of people who choose to work together, more productively, to make our work, our lives, our cities and communities better. Indy Hall’s community is the intersection of designers, developers, writers, artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, educators, small business owners, telecommuters, marketers, videographers, game developers, and more.

3. Workshop School (workshopschool.org) – “Teaching students to change the world.” By the time you graduate you will have taken college classes and participated in internships, invented things, and maybe even launched your own business. Not only will you have done great academic work, you will have real world experience. Most importantly, you will know that you can overcome any challenge, and that you are capable of great things.

4. Comcast (comcast.corporate.com) -- Comcast brings together the best in media and technology. Comcast drives innovation to create the world's best entertainment and online experiences.

Potential LMSD Learning Journeys



5. Science Leadership Academy (scienceleadership.org) -- The Science Leadership Academy is a partnership high school between the School District of Philadelphia and The Franklin Institute. SLA is an inquiry-driven, project-based high school focused on 21st century learning that opened its doors on September 7, 2006.

SLA provides a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum with a focus on science, technology, mathematics and entrepreneurship. Students at SLA learn in a project-based environment where the core values of inquiry, research, collaboration, presentation and reflection are emphasized in all classes.

6. Delaware Valley Friends School (dvfs.org) -- DVFS is a national leader in the field of educating students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, executive function disorders, and other language-based learning differences. DVFS delivers a rigorous college preparatory curriculum using research-based instructional methods and innovative assistive technologies to help students build the skills they will need to become successful adults and life-long learners. Our teaching professionals developed the DVFS Adolescent Literacy Program to address the specific needs of students in the middle and high school years.

7. RJMetrics (rjmetrics.com) -- RJMetrics helps online businesses make smarter decisions with their data. RJMetrics provides the kinds of deep insights that were formerly only accessible by large companies willing to invest in full-time data scientists. With RJMetrics, any company can become truly data-driven.

8. The Netter Center for Community Partnerships – UPENN (nettercenter.upenn.edu) -- Founded in 1992, the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships is Penn's primary vehicle for bringing to bear the broad range of human knowledge needed to solve the complex, comprehensive, and interconnected problems of the American city so that West Philadelphia (Penn's local geographic community), Philadelphia, the University itself, and society benefit.

Your Learning Journey



As you think about this Learning Journey, make notes about key elements of the visit to help our team plan the most worthwhile experience possible.

Journey destination:

Journey leaders:

Questions to be explored:

Assumptions to be tested:

What to see?

Whom to meet?



Don't forget to take pictures!
Just be sure to ask the host first.



Sample Agenda

1. Team Prep Meeting—small office or on the bus (15 mins)

- Remember our purpose—why this Learning Journey?
- Name our most essential questions
- Review our agenda for the day
- Remember to hold a stance of openness—we are not evaluating or judging

2. Opening Comments—LMSD Learning Journey Leader (5mins)

- Begin by thanking the host for welcoming us
- Explain why we are here today.
- Ask the host to speak personally first—tell us about you, how you got to this work, what it means to you.

Sample Agenda



3. Host Welcome and Overview (15-30 mins)

- Personal story
- Organizational overview
- Q&A and discussion

4. Tour/Walking Around (30-60 mins)

- Time to take in the environment, notice the physical space, the energy, the way people interact
- Connect with individuals spontaneously and informally

5. Thanks and Closing Comments (5 mins)

- Share a few learnings and provide thank you gift

6. Debrief (15-30 mins)—bus

- Share notes from “reflections handout”

Reflections On Your Learning Journey



- **What learnings or “aha’s” did you experience?**
- **What struck me most? What stood out?**
- **What was most surprising or unexpected?**
- **What touched me? What connected with me personally?**
- **If the social field (or the living system) of the visited organization were a living being, what would it look and feel like?**
- **If that being could talk: what would it say (to us)?**
- **What is the generative source that allows this social field to develop and thrive?**
- **Moving in and out of this field, what did you notice about yourself?**
- **What ideas does this experience spark for possible prototyping initiatives that you may want to take on?**
- **What are the implications for LMSD?**
- **What message(s) must be communicated to the whole Steering Committee as a result of this experience?**

After the Learning Journey



1. Close the feedback loop with your hosts.

- Send an email (or other follow-up note) expressing a key insight you took away (one or two sentences), and your appreciation.
- Give them our gift

2. Prepare a short summary of your experience for the rest of the group, highlighting key messages from your experience. Focus on:

- Highlights—what touched your group?
- Key insights
- Potential implications for LMSD

3. Tweet!

Use **#LMSDstrategicplanning**