**What are Learning Journeys and Immersion Experiences?**

**Learning Journey**
A Learning Journeys 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.
The GA English Learner Coalition immersed themselves in a community outside Atlanta with over 50 immigrant groups.

- They met with children and teachers at an elementary school, walked through the gardens of Refugee Family Services, met with elders from a North African immigrant community, and interviewed parents at a parent leadership program.
- Their eyes were opened to see a very different picture than they had imagined.

As a result of their experiences, they are organizing a series of immersion experiences for legislators and business leaders in a conservative state that aspires to be a global economic player.
Making the Most of Your Immersion Experience

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 your 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.
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.
1. Welsh Valley Middle School
   May 12th 8:30am-11:30am
   Max # of Participants: 12

2. Harriton High School
   May 12th 9:00am-1:00pm
   Max # of Participants: 10

3. Lower Merion High School, Bala Cynwyd Middle School, Cynwyd Elementary School
   May 13th 8:30am-3:30pm
   Max # of Participants: 12

4. Cynwyd Elementary
   May 14th 8:30am-11:30am
   Max # of Participants: 7
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?
Sample Immersion Experience Questions

Below are a few questions for conducting a question and answer session directly with a population.

- What personal experience or journey brought you here?
- What issues or challenges are you confronted with?
- Why do these challenges exist?
- What challenges exist in the larger system?
- What are the blockages?
- What are your most important sources of success and change?
- What would a better system look like for you?
- What initiative, if implemented would have the greatest impact for you? And for the system as a whole?
- If you could change just a couple of elements what would you change?
- Who else do we need to talk to?
Sample Agenda

1. Team Prep Meeting—small office or on the bus (15 mins)
   - Remember our purpose—why this Immersion?
   - 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 Immersion Experience 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 Immersion Experience

- 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?
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 #LMSDplans