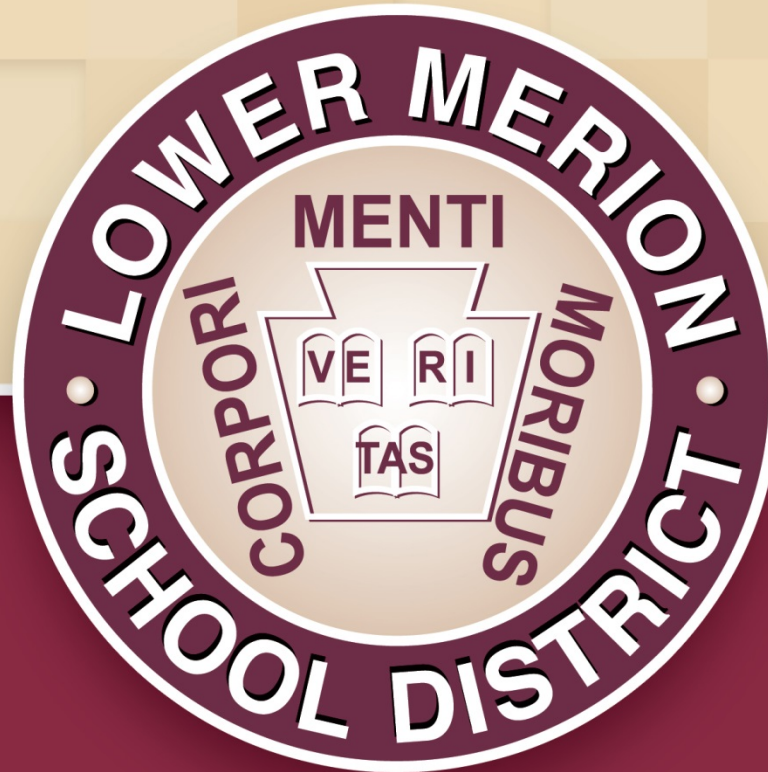


THE LOWER MERION SCHOOL DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLANNING- Immersion Experiences



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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.

An Example of an Immersion Experience



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 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 Immersion Experience



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.

LMSD Immersion Experiences



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

Your Immersion Experience



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?**

After the Immersion 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**