

Meet Union's New Superintendent: Dr. Scott Taylor

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UNION, NJ – Dr. Scott Taylor, Union's new schools superintendent (and triathlete), wants to hit the ground running when he begins his new role on July 1.

"I have a 90-day plan right off the bat and then want to work on a strategic plan for the district," said Taylor who has been making the rounds, on a 'listening tour' prior to his start date, meeting with school administrators, board members, teachers, township officials, residents and parents.

Taylor said goals for his 90-day plan include developing a mutual trust between him and Union's stakeholders; learning and assessing the organizational structure, financial plan, curriculum and instruction programs and projected future projects; and coordinating the strategic planning process.

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Taylor, who is currently superintendent of the Highland Park school district, said he would like to replicate some of the initiatives that district successfully created. For instance, Taylor said, in 2016 they established a policy to protect students who have transitioned gender. "It compelled leaders to protect kids who transitioned. Based on what I can see from the policy here,

it might be something the Board wants to look at with me."

Another initiative Taylor said he wants to pursue is a move away from a punitive discipline mindset to a restorative approach to discipline. "I know Union is starting to do some work in this area, so it seems I can build on that foundation and help people in the district steer clear of some of the failures we experienced in Highland Park."

However, Taylor said he does not intend to initiate change until a strategic plan is in place. "I want the plan to come from the inside out, from the stakeholders – teachers, board members, parents, students, and residents.

As for personal challenges, Taylor admitted he has a learning curve to overcome. "I never worked in a district this size before," he said. "But, the key to me getting over that challenge is for me to take things slowly and learn from people like Gerry Benaquista, who has experience running a school district this size and has institutional and historical knowledge." Taylor said he recently gathered all school principals and assistant principals for a meeting to introduce himself. "First thing I said when I looked at everybody in the high school auditorium was 'there are more of you here than the entire faculty in some of my [current] schools'. I'm going to have to figure out how to delegate. Right now, I'm really hands-on. I might have a difficult time letting go. Those are personal challenges."

"It's safe to say this is a very good school district, but I think it can be world-class," Taylor said. He said what he sees as the main challenge facing the district is the lack of focus on "what we all believe in and ought to be doing in the next three years. That's why the strategic plan is so important."

Taylor said he does not believe Union has a current strategic plan in place. He said the new plan will include goals, action steps and timelines that "reflect what the stakeholders, who take part in developing it, express are

the district's needs." He said in Highland Park, the strategic plan identified three basic needs: to foster greater equity in education, to do more in the area of helping the whole child grow, and to do more in the area of experiential learning.

Talking about what excites him about coming to Union, Taylor said, "a bigger district means more resources and already I'm enjoying being part of the big programs, like the UHSPAC, which is amazing, and the athletic program."

"Almost everyone I've met is extremely proud of this school district," said Taylor, "saying how it's so great here. I don't remember hearing things like that so prevalently in other districts. And that's getting me really excited. I've already been wearing Union t-shirts and masks and wearing it with pride."

"I want the community to know that I want to become an intimate partner with the entire community and that means people have to know they can reach out to me," added Taylor. "I want to be accessible. They shouldn't hesitate to stop me if they see me. I really mean that. I want to be seen as a member of this community."

Taylor lives with his wife, two daughters and three dogs in Highland Park. According to a bio on the Highland Park Schools website, Taylor, who lives in Highland Park, began his career teaching high school English at the High Technology High School in Lincroft. His first leadership position was as assistant principalship in the Manalapan-Englishtown Middle School, then moved on to become principal of the Lafayette Mills School (Grades 4-6). He left there to return to Lincroft in the position of principal of the Academy of Allied Health and Science. Taylor then moved to Little Silver Public Schools where he held the position of supervisor of curriculum, instruction, and technology. Taylor's next position was in Kenilworth as assistant superintendent and superintendent. He began his current job in Highland

Park in October 2015.

Taylor received his doctorate from Columbia University in 2008, according to the Highland Park Schools bio, and he began teaching at Rutgers University's Graduate School of Education soon after. He currently teaches at both Rutgers and Montclair Universities and is co-creator and facilitator for the Academy for Social-Emotional Learning in Schools. He currently serves on several executive boards, including those of the New Jersey Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the New Jersey School Development Council.