

Navigating Rough Times With His Compass

BY JULI VALENTINE

IAN SALTZMAN doesn't like to fly, but when it came time to interview in 2019 for a superintendency more than 3,000 miles from West Palm Beach, Fla., where he was serving as regional superintendent, he hopped on a plane — four times in 10 days.

It paid off, because in July of that year, Saltzman began his new job as superintendent in Everett, Wash., after a 30-year career spent entirely in Palm Beach County.

"Perfect place to land," Saltzman says of the suburb 25 miles north of Seattle that he now calls home and where he leads the 20,000-student Everett Public Schools.

He immediately embarked on a two-month listening campaign to connect with the community. The tour was the first in a series of communication strategies employed by Saltzman, who was named one of the 2020-21 Superintendents to Watch by the National School Public Relations Association. He is also active on social media and records videos that are linked on all of the district's platforms.

"We try to really honor the folks we work with," Saltzman says. "Sometimes, we're doing great things and sometimes we've got to do better things, and I think we especially learned that, during these COVID times, there are going to be bumps in the road."

There was no bigger bump than making the decision to shut down the district's schools in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 when Saltzman had been on the job for only eight months.

"Ian's approach to all of that was collaborate, communicate, close those feedback loops," says Peter Scott, deputy superintendent in Everett. "He has a very strong compass when it comes to 'what is this going to feel like for the students and families?' That was a common denominator in those first three days when the whole world

BIO STATS: IAN B. SALTZMAN

CURRENTLY: superintendent, Everett Public Schools, Everett, Wash.

PREVIOUSLY: regional superintendent, School District of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, Fla.

AGE: 55

GREATEST INFLUENCE ON CAREER: In 4th grade, I moved from New York to Florida and was very nervous and uncertain. Mr. Walker was my teacher for 4th and 5th grade, and he welcomed me and made the transition easier. He made me believe in myself and know I could achieve anything I set my mind on. He not only taught me academics, but confidence.

BEST PROFESSIONAL DAY: The first day of school every year is always the best.

BOOKS AT BEDSIDE: *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi, and *Culture Code* by Daniel Coyle

BIGGEST BLOOPER: I learned in my early years in administration that you must have balance. I haven't always had that. When my twins were born 10 years ago, I realized I had to take the weekends to recharge. When the leader is recharged, the team is as well.

WHY I'M AN AASA MEMBER: AASA has always been a great place for collaboration and leadership development. It is a great way to hear new ideas and share best practices.



seemed to be pivoting to a whole new set of modalities that we knew were going to be our immediate future."

Some of the tenets that Saltzman and his team relied on then have made their way into the district's new strategic plan that was created in 2020. It is centered around four pillars: systems, culture, climate and instruction.

"I'm really proud that we did the strategic plan during COVID, when everybody said, 'Why are we doing it?' but now it rolls out this year and we have everybody involved," Saltzman says. "Data is children so it's really just empowering people to do their job and building relationships. When kids are learning, you're succeeding."

As the pandemic wore on, Saltzman and his team found that parents in the district needed more information about various aspects of remote learning, so Parent University was born. The online and on-demand resource includes videos and how-to documents to increase parent engagement, but the

outreach didn't stop there.

"You've got to go extra these days because everybody was shut down, so we had to use that medium, but also we did go out in the community. We did knock on some doors to find some students," Saltzman says. "We had to get kids engaged."

The lack of face-to-face interaction was hard since he admittedly loves talking to people, but Saltzman, a sports fan whose ideal dinner party guests would include professional sports figures Sue Bird, Pete Carroll and Eli Manning, spent time studying how head coaches motivate their teams.

"We kept everybody motivated and we were determined to succeed," Saltzman says. "My team understood my tenacity that 'we're going to get through this.' You have to remember the glass is half-full every day."

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