

School Reform Commission

Criteria for next SDP Leader

MODERATOR REPORTS

Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce
February 6, 2012

Group 1

Moderators: Josh Warner, Abby Ellis

Moderator's description of the group:

Group 1 comprised eleven individuals, seven male and four female. Three were African American, two were Hispanic, and six were Caucasian. The group had several executives from a variety of businesses, but also included lawyers, an engineer, and heads of two chambers of commerce. Group 1 was well versed in the state of urban education, and because most were in positions of leadership, spent the majority of the small group work discussing various leadership qualities within the context of taking the district in a new, improved direction.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- That the new leader will outlive the average tenure of past superintendents
- The leader will increase college access and graduation rates
- The leader can develop a collaborative spirit within the district
- Will have a long distance view regarding diversity with an eye toward graduation
- Will be less about the politics – “it’s about the children.”
- That these above hopes will be achieved and this will instill pride and confidence in the city for residents and parents
- Sees that schools and students need to enter the 21st Century – bringing schools into present technology
- The leader will be long-tenured

Fears:

- Crisis management will overwhelm the leader and become the only work done
- That the status quo will continue

Hope/fear combinations:

- Leader will bring together the total support of the Philadelphia community as a unifying force (fear that this will not be done, as it is important)

- Leader will know how to navigate political waters in Philly

Parts of the Framework that Make sense to participants, and why:

#6 – A relationship builder who is able to build creative partnership with numerous external stakeholders to bring resources to individual schools and groups of schools

- The leader “must be out of the box” – must be intentionally open to rethinking things and looking at international best practices

#5 – Embraces the idea of a portfolio of schools and advocates for high-quality schools regardless of the provider (district or charter)

- Leader must be keen and use what’s working now
- Leverage the things working well in the district
- Portfolio does in fact mean different types of schools within the district – the internal portfolio is important to understand
- The portfolio idea is similar to the business idea of actively pursuing new markets and new ways to serve students – a.k.a., niche marketing
- Embracing autonomy & diversity go hand in hand – allowing more school autonomy will lead to more diversity and vice-versa

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training and leadership development among principals

- “One size doesn’t fit all” – must be willing to recognize individual school leaders and their successes
- The phrase “clear understanding” in the criterion should include or reference a clear understanding of what goes on in Philadelphia schools – good and bad. This involves talking to all stakeholders
- Teachers and students can and should collaborate with counterparts in other cities and countries

#7 – Ability to rethink the district's service model, moving closer to autonomy for individual schools and decreased centralization

- Must broaden this criterion! The entire system must be rethought, not just the service model itself.
- I.e., “anywhere, anytime learning”
- The more we can move towards autonomy, the more we inspire collaboration and innovation
- Leader should adopt a stance of “rigorous experimentation” – having high expectations for youth outcomes. Setting the bar high, striving, and keeping good records of successes and needed improvements

#9 – Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders

- High expectations of all children from all stakeholders. Doing that sets a tone, and engages everyone in that high expectation

- Not satisfied with just “good enough”

General (#3, 5, 7, & 8)

- Kids can’t compete – the quality of education is not the same (across schools, portfolio, etc.)
- Leader must communicate with all stakeholders

Parts of the Framework about which participants are concerned, and why:

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training and leadership development among principals

- To truly understand this, you have to have been an educator – a teacher and a principle. This is not clearly stated in any of the criteria

#2 – Knowledge and Capacity to run a large enterprise or organization

- If the leader is an outsider, how would the community react? If it has to be an insider, then the pool of applicants is limited

General concerns with the criteria

- There is no specific mention that the candidate needs to be an educator, nor be from Philadelphia
- No mention or allusion that a pipeline of leadership is important – mentoring and promoting from within
- Add a piece about financial acumen
- No one person could have all these attributes (perhaps two or three people may together possess the traits)
- Need to have a leader of vision – with a plan of what to do
- Criteria stop short of what’s needed. Not strong or clear enough, and too ambiguous. Because the district is in crisis, stronger plans/leaders are needed
- The relative importance of the nine criteria is not stated. Most candidates will have some of each, so which ones are most important when it comes to choosing?
- Improving technology is not mentioned, as well as learning via different methods and at levels students are ready for
- “Looking for the bright spots” is not mentioned. Which districts across the country have similar issues, and which ones have been most successful at dealing with them?
- Early childhood education is a missing piece – elementary school and pre-3rd grade. “Break the school to prison pipeline.”
- None of the criteria refer to the need for transformative change. Having a targeted effort and addressing problems are top level issues
- Previous superintendents had all these criteria – how will we avoid getting the same kind of leader, and hence, the same results this time?

- Vision and passion for progressive education are needed
- Question: “vision” seems to be seated with the SRC, such that the leader would implement their vision. Is this the case, or are we searching for a leader who brings their own vision?

What difference it would make if the successful candidate is/is not from Philadelphia, and why:

Pro Philadelphia:

- Familiar with the specific problems of the city and school district
- Understanding of “your market” (schools, students, challenges, etc.)
- Better chance to succeed in the political climate
- Familiarity is important for negotiations and partnerships

Pro Outsider:

- Fresh eyes can help with old problems

Major Themes:

- Transformative change
- Strong, long-tenured leader with vision, and a commitment to grow new leaders from within the ranks
- Collaboration and looking to technology and outside best practices to inform policy and execution
- Really understanding the inner workings of the district and portfolio of schools – leveraging what works and improving what doesn’t with rigorous experimentation and data collection, with high expectations throughout

Great Quote:

- Having a leader “that I would want to work for, or I would want to have working for me.”

Group 2

Moderators: Ellen Greenberg and Harmony Elsley

Moderator's description of the group:

The group was made up of 9 adults. There were six men (one African American man five White men). The three women were all White. The majority appeared to be over forty although there was one young woman and one man who appeared to be in their thirties. They were all thoughtful, engaged and respectful of the process and each other.

Note: the items below listed in bold were recurrent themes throughout the session

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- Understand and invest in alternative education
- **Believe that education is the foundation and will move the system in the right direction (be aware that because Philadelphia's educational system is huge that movement will take time)**
- Embraces new technology while focusing on content
- **Have a spirit of collaborative work and cooperation**
- **Be a teambuilder who's not afraid to do things differently but will build on existing strengths**
- **Explore partnerships and collective energy**
- **Navigate parochial nature of Philadelphia**
- Understand the diverse nature of the city (types of schools, types of students, etc.)
- Will be proactive vs reactive
- Will be innovative

Fears:

- That there isn't money/resources to do what the school districts needs to do to be successful
- That partnerships and collective energy will be squandered and that will lead to people becoming disenfranchised
- That the person will be unable to navigate the parochial nature of Philadelphia

Parts of the Framework that make sense to participants, and why:

Criteria 7: Ability to rethink the district's service model, moving closer to autonomy for individual schools and decreased centralization:

- This approach has worked in other places, i.e. NY
- Philadelphia School District is diverse
- Because of the size and diversity of the SD, things need to be broken down into manageable parts

Criteria 2: Knowledge and capacity to run a large enterprise or organization:

- Because of the size and amount of diversity of the SD of Philadelphia, the leader needs to have experience managing a larger enterprise or organization
- Much like a large enterprise or organization, the new leader should have a vision and brand for the school system
- The new leader should have a vision and set the strategy while allowing others to operationalize the strategy

Criteria 3: A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training, and leadership development among school principals

AND Criteria 4: A team-builder able to coordinate and motivate a diverse group of managers and educators of different types of schools in different types of settings

- It's important that the person be charismatic and have the ability to motivate others.
- **There should be a focus on leadership development (an awareness of the Principal's role and impact)**
- Should add "to hire and retain" to Criteria 4

Criteria 6: A relationship builder who is able to build creative partnerships with numerous external stakeholders to bring resources to individual schools and groups of schools:

- **Don't underestimate the importance of relationship building and how to leverage resources**

Criteria 8: Ability to influence the public, business community, higher education community, and legislative leaders on the value of public education and the commitments necessary to achieve notable progress:

- Rebuild credibility
- Engage the SRC beyond the search for the superintendent

Parts of the Framework about which participants are concerned, and why:

General Concerns:

- Expecting too much of one person
- Belief in the model to create the culture
- We're not going to have what it takes to attract the right candidate(s)
 - **This sparked a conversation about utilizing the resources in the room and beyond – specifically businesses and chamber members in sourcing/wooing potential candidates – the group seemed committed to being involved and offering their services/support in the process**
- Because of all of the issues, the person will turn into a troubleshooter
- Need to be willing to take risks, try new things and to sometimes fail
 - **Need to hold on to what works and be willing to try new things, make mistakes, take risks**
 - Utilize best practices from other school districts – see a track record of trial and error that leads to success
- SRC needs to stand behind the person who is selected

- Develop metrics for rewards
- Establish clear measurements of success
- Provide an environment that leads to success
- **Whatever changes are being considered – should always go back to “how does this improve the classroom.”**

Criteria 7: Ability to rethink the district’s service model, moving closer to autonomy for individual schools and decreased centralization:

- Autonomy is important AND there needs to be strong support and accountability coming from the central office/Superintendent
- Even though schools may have autonomy, it’s important to focus on equity across the schools

What difference it would make if the successful candidate is/is not from Philadelphia, and why:

- **It’s the skill set that’s most important, not where the person is from**
- Extra credit if the person is from Philadelphia
- Need to understand Philadelphia’s politics (there was discussion that it may be easier for someone from Philadelphia, but no consensus on this)
- **Regardless of where the person is from, he/she needs to include people from Philadelphia in the team he/she creates and be able to listen**

Not from Philadelphia

- Bring a fresh perspective

Main Themes/Key Points

- Team and relationship builder
- Focus on classrooms and principles
- Decentralization with focus on support and accountability
- Balance of a business and education background

Group 3

Moderators: Meaghan Brown, Marty Molloy, and Loretta Raider

Moderator's description of the group:

We had a diverse group of 9 people, 2 women and 7 men. The group included 5 African Americans, 1 Hispanic, and 3 white participants, the age ranged from 30's to 60's. The group included prominent business leaders representing African American, Asian, Hispanic and other business communities, as well as higher education, a business consultant, a representative from the Job Collaborative and an Officer of the Chamber of Commerce.

The members of the group were very thoughtful in their responses, listened well to one another, and searched for common ground. All were fully engaged in the discussion.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes

- Yield a person who is a change agent
- Find the talent in the city
- Multicultural world view
- Prepare students for work and bright futures
- Vision for innovation and showcase diversity
- Ability to increase performance
- Whole community to change
- Hire someone who is adept at turn around situations

Fears

- No one person will meet all 9 criteria, it's a tall order
- Outsider will be placed in the role
- That the person will not stay long enough to see success
- What about financial experience?
- That the person will not experiment with innovative ways to increase performance

Parts of the Framework that Make sense to participants, and why:

- Overall the criteria are a mix of management skills, strategy and vision, this is important because all are needed. The group agreed that being a visionary was the most important.
- There is a lack of technical requirements, which is a good thing. The technical skills can be on the team. You need a whole team of talented people for success
- To be a great leader you have to have vision, and the ability to articulate the vision and sell it to others

- #4 – Strong leadership is all about diversity and the ability to bring various people together, innovation in this area is a critical element
- # 8 – Very important, it is often why superintendents succeed or fail; there was agreement in the group that political leadership is key.
- # 6 – Building relationships is very important, the person must have a proven track record in this area; it's critical that the person can bring people together; hope the person can relate to current stakeholders, not trying to get rid of the resources that currently exist.
- # 7 – The System is broken and the organization needs to run like a business; what has to happen is to take autonomy to the school level and build metrics around performance; the individual has to have a proven track record for turning around a school system.

Parts of the Framework about which participants are concerned, and why:

- # 4 – *How do you synchronize with a portfolio of decentralized schools and create a new model?*
- # 6 – Is this asking the person to be a fundraiser? There was a division of opinion within the group, some felt that it is critical to be a fundraiser and others felt it was not a primary function.
- # 1 “Quality” missing, the group suggested adding “Strives for an educational system that delivers an outstanding quality education for all...”
- # 7 – There were a variety of views expressed, one group member asked, Stakeholders are entrenched how do you blow up the system? Another member expressed, we need someone who can manage what we have, fine tune it, not create a new model. Engage stakeholders around the current model not reinvent the wheel. There was agreement that the person needs to have a vision.

Missing competencies:

- In tune with policy and environmental changes of those served
- Proven track record of the highest level of morality and public integrity (there was broad agreement on this competency)
- Demonstrated ability and track record to lead change in a complex system

What difference it would make if the successful candidate is/is not from Philadelphia, and why:

- Not important, but needs to be sensitive to Philly needs
- Must have a proven track record and experience in a highly charged political environment
- High level of brand acceptance is a must if the person is from Philly
- There will be an extra burden on someone who is from Philly. Must be a high achiever and have a “wow” factor

- Must have experience in political circuits, no matter what city or industry must be a consensus builder

Other important ideas and Themes:

- This person will have to lead change with disagreement from stakeholders on how much and speed of that change
- Leader must be a visionary
- Too much for one person?
- Must run like a business, prioritization, accountability and getting people to buy into a plan
- Experience implementing change working within union environments
- Must be an academician, with a strong understanding of what works in educational systems
- Must come with a proven record of building political consensus
- A potential candidate must be able to navigate the uniqueness of Philadelphia
- A potential candidate should have done all their homework in respect to all elements of the job

Chamber of Commerce

Closing discussion: What people noticed across the groups -- themes

Criteria are incomplete – missing:

- Issues around transformation and change (came up in two of three groups)
- Fiscal acumen and its impact on schools and students
- Team user: leaders should surround self with people who have diverse skills (all groups)
- Vision: no criteria about a person who has a vision for the district.
- Missing an attribute about the ethics of leadership – need principled leader (2 of three groups)

A leader who can navigate the politics in Philadelphia (all groups)

Philadelphia or not?

- Have to have a reputation for doing good work.
 - Understand the environment (either know Philadelphia or come from a place like Philadelphia)
 - Different neighborhoods can be challenging in different ways
 - If from Philadelphia, have a track record of success here
 - A new person will bring a new perspective
 - Resume of a change agent:
 - Someone who is willing to carefully experiment and try new things.
 - An appetite for change
 - Value what we do well and build transformation on that
- Change built on success/best practices from here and from other place