

School Reform Commission

Criteria for next SDP Leader

MODERATOR REPORTS

Leeds Middle School
February 21, 2012

Group 1

Moderators: Terrill Thompson and Saxon Nelson

Moderator's description of the group:

There were nine adult participants in the group: three black men, one white man and five black women. Most of the participants had children or grandchild in Philadelphia public schools. Five people worked in the PSD. Everyone lived and/or worked in Mt. Airy. There were three young children who attended with their parents.

* Demographics are based on observation. Participants were not asked to self-identify.

The energy of the group started off low but thoughtful. Four adults and one child had to leave early. The remaining small group picked up energy and got very into the discussion.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- Primary focus in on teaching the youth
- They will have a holistic approach that includes quality teachers, facilities improvement, etc.
- Discipline and violence are addressed
- They are from Philly and can carry on the rich traditions
- A quick transition
- They will access resources
- Youth will be able to complete globally
- They will have a heart for children and fight for youth (especially those who have learning disabilities, ESL, etc.)

Fears:

- It will continue to be politics as usual with no changes
- Youth will continue to loose out
- Nothing can really be done
- Don't want anyone to lose educational opportunities

- SRC will hire someone with great credentials (political ties) who doesn't understand Philly
- Didn't learn from past mistakes

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

#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

- Not focused on their own limelight
- Help committed people continue to grow; empower others
- Diversity: some areas of Philly have more struggles. They need to balance every area's needs.

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

- Philly is a large city. The schools district is a business. The next leader will have to manage many different needs.

*# 1 - A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all children.
And*

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

- Parents have been alienated. They talk about seeing us as “partners,” but this is far from the truth. We are the leaders of our children. Parents need to be part of the process.
- Have not had good parent turnout in the past. Need “active” engagement of parents.

#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

- Need to think outside of the box
- Finances are a big issue. Traditional funding obviously isn't working.
- Businesses could help the school district financially.
- Need to build a city climate where people are willing to pay more taxes to support schools.

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

- Understand how basic services effect teaching (clean rooms, money and time being wasted, etc)
- Need to stop reinventing the wheel. Need to go back to the basics of reading and writing.
- Need to respect people as adults. Don't reprimand teachers in front of students. (Teachers shouldn't say things in front of students either.)
- Classes are too big. Teachers spend so much time on discipline that they can't teach. Teacher aides are needed.
- Culture of fear isn't helpful

- There is a problem of teaching testing instead of thinking
- Get principals together. Let them tell you (the new superintendent). They have experience.

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

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

- Autonomy could increase the gap between stronger and weaker schools
- Parents should be included in decisions about how money is spent
- Need to stand up to the media and politicians who make the schools look bad
- Should measure progress, not test scores.
- Decentralization is only helpful to an extent. Having area-superintendents is helpful, but autonomy on the individual school level is not.

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

- Portfolio should be opened up. Magnet schools are getting the money. This doesn't give students who go to neighborhood schools the same chances as those in magnet schools.
- Needs to lead a culture change that moves from fear to:
 - Respect for everyone (principals, teachers, students)
 - Leading by example so that it will trickle down: beliefs, morals, integrity, dedication, listen to other, be teachable
 - Everyone being involved
 - Thinking outside the box
 - People don't just say yes; they stand up for what is right
 - Feedback
 - Parent engagement; willing to earn parent respect
 - Willing to change the system
 - Mistakes are okay
- Additional desires:
 - Hands on in the schools, observing
 - Work is connected to what is happening in the schools
 - Focused on creating good thinkers, not test scores
 - Make people accountable and be accountable
 - Be there for the kids, not the money

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

- Pros of being from Philly:
 - Ability to relate to students, which will help get to the root of behavioral concerns.
 - Would already know local politics
- Negatives of being from Philly:
 - Will be aligned politically

- If they are not from Philly, then need to spend time learning the politics of each neighborhood. Schools are anchors to the neighborhoods.
- Summary: The group thought it would be best if the new superintendent is from Philly, but that skills are more important.

Other important ideas:

- The desire for the new superintendent to replace the current culture of fear with one of respect ran throughout most of the discussion.

Group 2

Moderators: Bryan McHale and Vonetta Robinson

Moderator's description of the group:

– six people – five woman and one man. Several were current or former teachers.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- The next leader can turn the School District around and every school is educated in a safe, public way.
- New superintendent is a local person who has a vested interest in our community and neighborhoods.
- A dynamic, creative thinker.
- Someone who is committed to the education of our children.
- Is committed to the school district and teachers. Has an ear to listen to them.
- Next leader is really committed and understands that test preparation is **Not** an education.
- Will respect and support teachers.
- Superintendent must have spirit of concern, commitment, and caring.
- Will directly involve parents in his/her thinking.

Fears:

- We will continue to turn over schools to charters and privatize education.

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

#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.

- Very important with current financial climate.
- More money is needed for public education. Mayor, legislators need to be convinced of how critical public education is.
- Would be in the District's best interest. Building relationships for when you need to call upon them.

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

- Knowledge about funding will be important.

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

- Right on the money.
- Staff needs to be properly trained. Don't just push kids through. Families, schools, and district need to come together.
- Need to engage with parents and community.

#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all.

- The aegis under which all other criteria fall.
- Must be at the top of the list.
- Needs to understand the importance of education.

#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.

- Needs to spend time listening to parents, teachers and students.
- Don't just come in and roll over everything. Ask questions.
- Recognize what team already exists. Don't try to redefine.
- Should have some vision and standards. Need to set define standards for all to follow.

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

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

- Too many missing teachers, principles, counselors, and school nurses due to budget cuts.
- Classrooms are most important in the school district.
 - This is where everything happens.
 - What's going to enable teachers and principles to work together for kids?
- Need a report card and a way to measure progress
- Someone who can follow through and fulfill promises.
- Should be transparent in the interview process so that the public can do their own due diligence.

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

- Budgets are already being slashed resulting in no nurses, no security, and no summer schools.
- CEO's don't understand the necessity of having NTA's in the schools to assist.
- Running as an enterprise rather than as a school shows no compassion for our kids.
- Position is a mission, not a job – New superintendent needs to demonstrate commitment.
 - No “golden parachute” in the contract.
- There should be a requirement that you have worked in a school setting.
 - Should know Philadelphia and the internal dynamics of the School District.
 - Should know about relationships between teachers and students.

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

- Don't know what this means – what does this person believe?
- New superintendent should really explain what this means to him/her.
- Preparing for tests is not an education.
 - Standardized testing is just pumping kids full of info.

- Are they retaining/learning anything?
- Love of teaching is now a lost art. Metal detectors and security make it seem as though kids are reporting to prison, and classrooms are just their cells.

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

- Teachers and employees leave the District because they have no sense of autonomy. They are not even treated as adults by the District.
- What does autonomy actually mean to the candidate?
- Nothing in here actually references allowing teachers to be creative.
- Need to come up with a better way to educate our kids.
- Under no circumstances should the creativity of the teacher be stymied.
 - Allow teachers to teach outside the box. Let them use whatever let's their class thrive.

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

- Should come from Philadelphia.
 - We have the talent in the District to make it happen.
 - Constance Clayton was a perfect example.
 - Knew about Philadelphia.
 - Treated people with respect.
 - Had “traditional” ideas, but also some “out of the box” ideas.
- Someone from Philadelphia would have a vested interest in our community.
 - Should have connections to the community – family, friends in the neighborhood.
 - Need to know who the key people are in the City and District.
 - Has to have connections – political, corporate, legislative – or they will be eaten alive.
 - Someone who is familiar with our failures, so we don't just keep repeating the same mistakes over and over.
- If they are not from Philadelphia they need to have a little humility and express interest in learning about what is going on here before making decisions.
- They must have characteristics that actually qualify them for the position.
- It has to be about the children. If you don't have love for the kids it's going to show.
- Should have the love of God. That's going to help them get through.
- Accountability – Is this person going to be accountable to anybody?

Other important ideas:

- What is the process that the search committee going to use to ID this person?
- Why aren't parents involved in the search process?
- Ask candidates what they think these nine criteria actually mean to them.
- This is really a waste of time, they are just going to do what they want to do.

- It's all about the ability of teachers to be creative.
- The vision of education as a whole has to be the consideration.
- The ability to listening is the most important skill.

Group 3

Moderators: Germaine Ingram and Matthew Mumber

Moderator's description of the group:

At its largest, we had 14 people in the group. Most (12) stayed throughout the break-out session. It was a diverse group: 2 high school students, a journalist, 3 parents/grandparents of current public school students (others were parents of graduates of the Philadelphia system), 2 "community activists", 4 current or past district employees (including a current teacher and a current assistant principal), several who identified themselves as area residents. From appearances, there were 5 "white" participants, and the rest were African American.

This was an engaged and spirited group. For the most part, they shared the floor, listened to each other's views, and discussed issues without being argumentative.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- That he/she can effectively manage a unique school system----that we can find a "superman/woman";
- SRC/Search Committee consults seasoned teachers about the qualities needed for the new leader;
- Dr. Nunnery is chosen to be superintendent (This person explained that this was less an endorsement of Dr. Nunnery than a plea for stability and continuity, and a demand for transparency regarding leadership changes at the District. This person---with general support from the group---said that there should be more information and transparency about the superintendent search process.);
- New leader will market successful Philadelphia schools more effectively and improve underperforming schools;
- New leader fosters a shared sense of accountability;
- New leader recognizes the diverse factors (home, school, community) that affect academic success;
- New leader can hear feedback and criticism---does not punish people for sharing their views;
- New leader has financial expertise;
- New leader can collaborate with key stakeholders, and is politically savvy;
- New leader will balance the budgetary challenges and student needs in a way that gives priority to the needs of students.

Fears:

- That he/she will fall for political tricks---won't play the local politics effectively;
- New leader will be a "bean counter".
- One participant said that she has no fears---she doesn't fear anything but God.

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

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

- There was general support for the idea that parents are key players in education, and that the new leader must work to engage parents at all levels of decision-making and be responsive to parents and families.
- He/she must be able to use diverse modes of communication in order to reach parents with different degrees of access to technology and media.
- Participants also noted that parents must do their share to support communication with the district and schools.

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

- The group concluded that this criterion should be reworded to say “Knowledge, capacity, and experience to run a large enterprise and organization.”
- There were nuanced opinions within the group regarding the balance of business and education chops needed by the new leader.
- All seemed to agree that the new leader must have some past education experience, and all seemed to agree that the new leader must have experience with leading a large enterprise.
- Even though business experience is necessary, there was consensus that running a school district is not the same as running a business, and that “it can’t be all about the money”.
- One suggestion was that the new leader should have experience with a large non-profit enterprise, as distinguished from a for-profit business. There was also a comment that the leader needs to be able to evaluate financial options----this comment was related to an assertion that banking interests have taken unjust advantage of the District in recent years.

There were varying opinions about whether a business background is more important than an education background, and what kind of education experience is needed. Some said that the criteria as a whole seem weighted toward a business mentality---this focus concerned some people. There was no dissent to the view expressed by an educator that the new leader should have experience as a classroom teacher. When I asked whether the new leader needs past experience as a superintendent, there seemed to be some hesitancy about adopting that view because it might limit the number of eligible Philadelphia educators. This concern yielded to the suggestion that prior experience as a Philadelphia regional superintendent should count as past superintendent’s experience.

#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all children.

And

#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

- There was concern that the criteria don’t speak adequately to the leader having a belief

in the importance of public education. (It's not clear how much of these comments had to do with a concern about the proliferation of charter schools.)

- One participant was quite vocal about what he considered to be the differential impact of school financing on traditional public schools as compared with charter schools.)
- A suggestion was that #1 be reworded to state "Commitment to public education and an overall passion and desire to ensure learning for all children."
- There was support for the idea that the new leader must be in for the long haul, and not be ready to walk away (with or without a healthy severance) when the inevitable sharks start circling.

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

- Participants said that the new leader must understand all levels of education.
- One person cited special education as one of the many highly technical areas that the leader needs to understand.
- On the other hand, the educators in the group urged realism about how much one person can know and do.
- They said that the leader must be "Educator in Chief"; he/she must build a team of smart and experienced people to provide expertise in the range of issues and areas--- including finance--- within the leader's scope of responsibility.

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

Whether talking about what made sense or what concerned them, the group's responses tended to be more a dissection and critique of the criteria than an endorsement of any of them. Nonetheless, when asked what criteria concerned them, they were forceful on two points that address the criteria generally: .

- The criteria as a whole do not portray the leader as someone who is visionary; and
- The criteria do not portray the leader as inspirational----as someone who can change the tone of leadership of the District.

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

The group was somewhat divided on this issue.

- Some said that it was important to them that the leader is from Philadelphia, and that they thought that there is adequate talent within the city to satisfy the needs of the job.
- Others said that they could support someone from outside the city so long as he/she has a "personal stake" in the city: examples of a "personal stake" were having attended Philadelphia schools, or willingness to raise his/her family here.
- Whether from inside or outside, the leader needs to be able to work the politics and the system for the benefit of students and families.
- There was agreement that the procedures for evaluating the superintendent must be

strengthened.

- There was a suggestion for an advisory council to ensure the leader's accountability for performance.

Other important ideas:

- The group identified the following three themes as central to the discussion:
- The leader must be able to "play the politics, but not be influenced by it."
- The leader must have a passion for the interests of students.
- There needs to be a good balance of business prowess and educational expertise.
- Although several in the group conveyed distrust of the search process thus far, overwhelmingly, they expressed hopefulness and confidence in the ability of the district to perform effectively under the right leadership. There were differences of opinion regarding the appropriate balance of business and educational expertise, but there was agreement that the next leader cannot be what they labeled a "bean counter." When the moderator asked whether they had a serious concern that the SRC would hire a "bean counter" for this important job, the resounding was "yes".