

School Reform Commission Criteria for next SDP Leader

MODERATOR REPORTS

Lincoln High School
February 4, 2012

Group 1

Moderators: Bryan McHale, Louise Giugliano, Ashley Brindisi and Abby Ellis

Moderator's description of the group:

About 16 people (people passed through), primarily district employees, six men, ten women. Very energetic.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- Philadelphia children can get truly equitable education.
- The next leader will utilize the great things about Philadelphia to start tapping resources.
- Sees what an amazing city we have and recognizes great things that are already going on not just the negatives.
- Challenge the status-quo.
- Emphasis on Education
- Superintendent focuses on children and their needs.
- Leader is a simple person who collaborates with parents, teachers, and students.
- Hire from within.
- Hope that the leader will work towards achieving 2014 NCLB goals which will clear up a lot of the issues we're facing.

Fears:

- The work of these forums will be seen and not considered.
- Leader is focused more on money than on children or schools.
- Leader gives credence to those who believe in charter schools.

Parts of the framework that makes sense (by criteria #):

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

- Have passion for kids not money.
- Needs to focus and care about education because decision affects children.

- What does “education” mean in action?
 - Engage with community, parents, school district staff, and students to fill in details.

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

- Emphasize finances and education together.
- An ability to make management decisions is needed in order to make tough decisions about money.
 - Political skills are needed to handle money problems.

#4 – A team-builder able to coordinate and motivate a diverse group of managers and educators of different types of schools in different settings.

- A team-builder is needed who listens and respects the community.
 - Needs to be grounded in education and able to delegate.
 - In relation to #8, should all of these responsibilities and criteria be related to one person?

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

- Absolutely should take input from community.
- There is instilled knowledge in the community about specific problems in schools and how they can be resolved.

Other points:

- Ability to show a track record is important.
- Commitment to transparency should be a tenth criteria.

Parts of the Framework which cause concerns (by criteria #):

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

- “A commitment to education” says nothing about education experience.
 - A person of integrity with a good track record is important.
 - There is concern that there is not an active teacher on the search committee.
 - Kids are not receptacles. They need someone who understands and can provide more nuanced curriculum.

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

- Do not understand how “autonomy” is or will ultimately be defined.
- System is already inequitable. Increased autonomy will only be going back to before Brown vs. Board and creating a failed system of separate but equal where individual schools will be directly impacted by neighborhood inequalities.
 - Need to be able to give the same basic resources to all schools.
 - All schools should be able to provide an equitable education.

- Centralization does a good job at some things. Bureaucracy is not a bad word.
 - Decentralization cuts support for programs which are by definition city-wide such as Special Ed, ELL, Poverty Programs.
 - Individual schools will have to figure out how to pay for city-wide mandates such as Special Ed with no support or resources from the district.
 - Specialized units not supportable in an autonomous school, but consolidation of them into one school may ruin the programs that work (certain magnet programs, art/music programs, etc.)
- Autonomy is a cover for spending on the wrong things.
- Autonomy is also a cover for the new Superintendent and the District to give away their responsibilities and drop the burden onto the schools.

#5 & 6 – Embraces the idea of a portfolio of schools and advocates for high-quality of schools regardless of the provider (district or charter).

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

- Emphasis on “partnerships” is code for charters – which lead to more charters.
 - Idea of “portfolio” is to give away public schools to charters and cause demise of public schools.
 - Focus on resources is fundamentally a financial focus, with that money going to charters rather than to public schools.
 - Charter-only neighborhoods help promote inequality.
- Continuation of Renaissance model pulls resources from public schools by consolidating troubled students into the public schools, but sending the money to help the charters.
 - If student is in a charter and moves back to a public school, the money allocated to them should follow them back to the public school.
 - Need team in place to ensure children who return to public school bring money back with them.
 - Don't want transfer of all programs that work to charters.
 - Requirements between charters and public schools are different but allocated money is the same.
 - Transparency of charters is poor. Need level playing field on transparency.
 - Need financial and political transparency.
 - What privileges do charters have that public schools aren't allowed?
- Charters are union busting.
 - New leader must welcome unions to enter portfolio of schools.
 - Must respect and allow collective bargaining and organizing,
- Overall need financial accountability to the City Controller to be more specific for the District and charters.

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

- Concern that education stakeholders such as teachers/parents are not included on the search committee.

- Need for leader to have direct contact with parents.
- Community involvement is a check/balance on business/university partnerships.

Other points:

- Long list for one person. Does this person exist?
 - Should not be a first time leader and should not be allowed to bring in his/her cronies.
 - Vague 9 criteria is dependent on leader's background.
 - Needs the vision to fix problems and maintain what works and the ability to recognize both.

What difference would it make to you if the successful candidate is or is not from Philadelphia?

- All other things being equal, being from Philadelphia is better.
- **Start search in Philadelphia. If leader can't be found here, then look outside. ****
- Philadelphia is not the decisive point.
- Need transparency about who applies.
- Either way, need strong political savvy and on-the-ground experience.
 - Philadelphia native will have people they owe favors to or who perceive they are owed favors.
 - All applications from Philadelphia should include full disclosures of all affiliations.
- Philadelphia is too political. It's more important the candidate meet other characteristics and competencies.
- Preference for someone who worked their way through our system and can demonstrate experience working with School District and communities.
 - Strong working knowledge of Philadelphia.
 - Need someone with urban inner-city living experience. Would prefer someone from Philadelphia who understands the nuances of each neighborhood.
 - Demonstrated competency in effectively engaging cultural and racial diversity.
- Someone who is/was an educator, not a CEO.
 - Education background important.
 - People in the education system know what they are doing with regards to mandates related to educating children.
- Experience moving a bad situation to a good one is more important than experience in a large organization.

Lincoln High School: Wailing Wall

- New superintendent must understand and respect special education, special education law and the function of an intermediate Unit – (and the impact of decentralization)
- School autonomy does not equal equity
- Teaching to the test vs. real instruction and real learning
- Keep PSD Schools as PSD and not turnaround/charters
 - FIX what we have – build on success
- Keep instrumental music as a centralized budget item.

The following OP Labor Work Group petition was attached to the Wailing Wall at the end of the forum:

We the undersigned want a superintendent...

- 1. who recognizes that schools are not businesses but public institutions with a unique mission of educating all children to be participants in a democratic society.*
- 2. who is an educator with a deep knowledge of teaching and learning.*
- 3. who can foster collaboration between principals, teachers, parents and students at all levels...who understands that people do the best job when they have a voice in shaping the decisions that effect them.*
- 4. who respects the process of collective bargaining and recognizes the rights of workers to organize.*
- 5. who recognizes that test scores only tell part of the story about teaching and learning and should not be used by themselves to judge the effectiveness of schools or teachers.*
- 6. who embraces the goal of quality schools for all children rather than providing lottery tickets for the fortunate few.*
- 7. who is committed to meeting the needs of special needs children and their families including improved services for English learners*
- 8. who understands a curriculum must connect with the life experience of students and motivate them to inquire, ask questions and construct knowledge.*
- 9. who recognizes that poor and working class children, particularly children of color are not treated equitably in our society and this must change.*
- 10. who knows that poverty matters and to talk about it is not "making excuses." Improving educational outcomes will take a major investment in overcoming the inequalities in our society.*

Finally we feel compelled to add that if the cuts, both those that have been made and those that appear to be on the horizon, are allowed to stand, it is unlikely we will be able to find someone of quality to preside over our schools and, even more unlikely that that person would be able to deliver on the promise of improving our schools.