

School Reform Commission

Criteria for next SDP Leader

MODERATOR REPORTS

Northeast High School

February 13, 2012

Group 1

Moderators: Bryan McHale, Gwynne Smith Scheffer, Louise Giugliano, Vonetta Robinson

Moderator's description of the group:

18 people, including seven students, several teachers, and a few city-wide community activists. Students had some of the most pointed critiques about what is going on in the schools.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

- New leader has respect for all income levels, ethnicities, and religions.
- Has respect for schools, including those in the Northeast.
- Appreciates teachers and school staffs.
 - Teachers are not always to have the finger pointed at them.
- Has some accountability to Philadelphia.
- Is a bridge-builder with and between parents, students, teachers, and administrators.
 - Last superintendent alienated parents, teachers, etc.
- Committed to the long-term greater than five years.
- Someone who manages the budget.
 - Bring the money back, make the schools better
 - Fund extra-curricular activities again.
 - Understand that programs like the IB program can't just be reduced to AP classes.
- Listen to the suggestions of teachers and students.
- Someone who focuses on kids and education not on politicians and unions.
 - Cares about the school district not about money.
- Someone who has empathy, compassion, integrity, lack of greed, and a commitment to Philadelphia.
- A leader with an education background.
- Can meet the needs of students in and out of school.
- Tired of the "super" names
 - Get politics out of education.

- Someone who can look at other school districts and implement successful programs here.

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

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

- Number one priority
- Education needs to be more rounded.
 - Being in school is not just about academics.
 - Need more extra-curricular activities.
 - Students need to be excited, engaged, active learners; not only lectured to.

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

- We need someone who understands that if they do something in West Philly it is going to have an effect on all schools in the District and vice-versa. The culture and climate of the schools exist together.
- Come down out of “the ivory tower” and allow ideas to flow from the bottom up.
- Parents want a true voice in decision making.
- There are multiple ways for children to learn. Central office should be responsible for defining goals and allow schools the flexibility to take multiple routes in getting there.

#5 & 7 – 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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Ability to rethink the district's service model, moving closer to autonomy for individual schools and decreased centralization.

- As originally intended, charter schools and traditional public schools should not have been enemies but rather partners.
 - Each school should have the autonomy to be creative in reaching district-wide goals
 - New superintendent should not have blinders on but see the big picture with all of its parts.

#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.

- The Village approach
 - Everyone has to have a stake and a vested interest
 - New superintendent has to build a bridge and make people see we **all** have a stake in public education.
 - Parents have to rally behind them.
- Smart enough to deal with the political landscape and willing to get in there.

#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.

- The points from #8 are only achievable by someone who can build those relationships.
- We need someone who is an advocate for public education, who has the ability to raise money, who is a schmoozer.
- Build relationships with other sectors of the creative economy to provide/donate resources to music and art programs and expand flexibility in schools.

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

- We need an administration that is sensitive to the composition and diversity of the student body.

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.

- If one school is allowed to do something, why shouldn't others?
- What is actually working? - That is the model to move towards.
- Superintendent needs to be able to figure out what is working in individual schools and how to pass those models on to others.
- What does decreased centralization mean?

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

- Budget cuts have impacted translation services in a city that speaks myriad languages. How is the District committed to engagement while lacking the tools to do it?
- Bullies have chased students out of the District due to a lack of action on the part of the schools.
- How difficult is this engagement going to be and how committed is the District?
- Communication = Big concern.

#8 & #6 – 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.

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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.

- People in Harrisburg are out of touch.
- New superintendent needs tremendous help dealing with vouchers (catholic & private schools), and for the government not to do away with the public school system.
- Not enough money on the table right now.
- Why isn't the SRC going out to businesses and the community for resources?
- Stop doing things that don't bring money into the schools (walk-throughs)
- Ryan Howard just donated – but sports are getting cut.
- Superintendent needs to be a cheerleader

- Kids are not disposable
- Need to hire someone who knows PR. 95% of students are good, but we only focus on the 5% who are bad.

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

- This is the problem. The last CEO ran the District like a big business. Need to run more as an educational organization and not a business.
- Education has taken second place to business aspect. Education needs to be the first priority.

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

- Politicians are going to be influencing what is in the portfolio.
- Concern about quality of the education regardless of if it is charter or public.
 - Everyone should be held to the same standards.
 - Summer school needs to be eliminated or parents should have to pay for it. Students are choosing to fail the regular school year because they can just make up the grade in a shortened three week summer school class.
- The superintendent should not allow charters to expand “willy-nilly” simply by sucking resources from other schools.
- Neighborhood schools are losing out to charters. Focus on neighborhood schools at the elementary level.

Other points:

- The Master Facilities Plan – No one knows where all of the students are going due to closed schools both in the public school and catholic school systems. Superintendent needs to start looking at all students as a whole and not just as disparate parts. Make good use of the resources we have (i.e. extra space)

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

- All things being equal, would favor a Philadelphian because other CEO types have found it easy to leave when things got tough because they aren't from here.
 - They need to at least understand the political dynamics in the City and State if they come from elsewhere.
 - Should have at least some team members from Philadelphia who understand the system.
- We have a lot of talent in the City and the School system which has been bypassed often causing them to leave for other districts.
 - Should have worked in the system so they know what is going on.
- Shouldn't be from the school district - leery of their connections.

Group 2

Moderators: C. Terrill Thompson and Jean di Sabatino

Moderator's description of the group:

There were 19 participants in the group. All but two of the participants were affiliated in some way with the school system. The majority (twelve) of participants were students. There was five teachers/school staff, one of which was laid-off. There were two community organizers. All but two students were either Asian or Hispanic. Of the school staff, two were African American and three Caucasian.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:

Hopes:

- Be persistent
- Work to increase schools' budgets (2 folks voiced this opinion)
- Dedicated
- Have both political and educational understanding so that s/he can successfully navigate both systems
- Committed to improving and maintaining after-school programs
- Be able to secure equitable funding for all schools across the district
- Guarantee that all stakeholders are "listened to and cared for"
- Knowledgeable of business and fiscal affairs
- Work to bring all stakeholders together to improve the system
- Be dedicated to seeking and keeping existing programs that are working well
- See excellence and high achievement as a priority
- Be a strong "center of the wheel" and set clear goals
- Be "well-rounded" regarding educational priorities with an understanding of the diverse needs of students
- Be progressive, forward thinking regarding organizational and instructional design (2 folks voiced this opinion)
- Call back laid-off staff
- Preserve and increase financial literacy and social entrepreneurial programs
- Find innovative ways to save money without cutting successful programs
- Bring back the public board
- Maintain the music programs
- Unite staff, community, families behind education
- Merge the public and private sports systems

Fears:

- Be unmotivated
- Make budget cuts that will affect programs (3 opinions)
- Be a dictator
- Emphasize and benefit privatization and charter schools (3 opinions)
- Fully fund charters at the expense of schools
- Lack commitment to the city and students

- Remove school sports and music programs putting students “on the streets” with nothing to occupy their time

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

- It is important to be able to relate to all types of people. We have all types of people in Philly.
- Role modeling starts from the top.
- Like the words “coordination” and “motivation” (rather than dictate)

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

- What works in one school doesn't work for all.
- Autonomy is good. The leader needs to be able to give up control.

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

- Needs to fix the budget problems

Words/ideas that describe the ideal leader:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Commitment
- Positive self-expression
- Empower stakeholders to do a better job
 - PSD has a history of losing spirit
 - Allow passionate people to do a better job and be more creative
- Humility and trust: Trust others to use their strengths where the leader has weaknesses. The leader sets the goals and needs to allow the individual school to implement them according to their own personalities.

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

- “Understanding”: Listen in order to understand the problems, then manage differently than in the past
- Needs to see the big picture and be fair to all schools.
- Needs to have compassion
- The style of the Superintendent is important. We don't want fear among staff.
- Want an established background in education, especially as a teacher. This will help them understand the impact of their decisions. They need to have the ability to think down the chain regarding how their decisions will impact others.
- Needs to have emotional intelligence
- Needs to understand his/her own strengths and weaknesses; be self-aware.
- Needs to have the ability to ask for help.

#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

- “Value”
- Should be an educator
- Needs to lobby legislators to support education
- Needs to not view public education as a deficit. He/she needs to be able to see and sell what is working well in order to build a community of support. Replicate what is working within the district.
- Needs to be influential in order bring money and activities to the district. Should have ties to government.

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

- Creates accountability
- Needs to be present in schools
- Should travel to schools alone for real conversations, not the dreaded walk through from the Superintendent and their crew.
- Don’t want people to be afraid to report incidents at their school.
- Top admin needs to know what is going on in schools.

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

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

- Increasing number of charter schools is inevitable.
- Charter school funding will squeeze out school funding.
- There will not be as much accountability for charter schools.
- There is fear that the leader won’t establish a higher standard for teaching within the charter schools.
- Refusal/reluctance to revoke charters that are not effective - no political will or ability to step-in when charters need to be revoked.

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

- All children has not meant all. In the past, too many resources have been focused on the bottom 20%.
- Fear that their will de-emphasis & reduced funding on the arts and current, high achieving programs (IB and AP)
- How will leader guarantee that good schools (e.g. NE High) are not over-shadowed by the “lighthouse” schools, e.g. Masterman.

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

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

- In the past, “education for all” has been given lip-service. “Committed to actively engage” has been disingenuous. Language in both criteria are empty slogans.

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

- How is autonomy defined?
- Is this criterion motivated for financial reasons as opposed to good education practice?
- What does decentralization mean?
- What does this mean to the role of central office? Critical work of central office is to coordinate efforts on a larger scale.
- How can accountability across the system be established with a reduced central office?
- Fear that there will be less attention/accountability to provide strong education for special populations such as ESOL and special needs students?
- Will decentralization results in inability to reach out to families, especially those with special needs children?

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

- Insider or outsider must have well-rounded perspective and experience.
- OK to have an outsider...
 - if this person can bring a different mind-set, new ideas
 - if s/he come from the same or similar urban setting
 - if substantial time is spent in schools
- Historically (last 3 leaders) did not last in the position.
- Outsiders don't understand the negative forces (political) that can side-track improvement.
- On the flip-side, insiders are already politically affiliated. This is also detrimental.
- Insiders might continue to engender favoritism.
- Outsider need to know the history of the city.
 - Need to do research about the city
 - Get the feel for the city
 - Get to know all the neighborhoods and diverse environments through walking tours
- Not sure how much guidance/mentoring the SRC will give outsiders
- Candidate must see health and safety as priorities