

# School Reform Commission

## Criteria for next SDP Leader

### MODERATOR REPORTS

South Philadelphia High School  
February 18, 2012

#### Group 1

**Moderators:** Guillermo Lopez and Ellen Greenberg

#### **Moderator's description of the group:**

The group was made up of six adults and one high school student. Two men; one white male and one Asian male who was born in Italy (he translated and participated), four white women (all indicated they currently live in the area and one was born in Italy), one young white girl from a magnet school and one Asian woman who lives in the area as well. They were all thoughtful, engaged, inclusive (made sure to involve/engage the one woman who had a translator with her) and respectful of each other. They did spend some time focused more on general concerns as opposed to specific concerns related to the individual criteria.

#### **Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:**

Hopes:

- Find someone who meets the criteria
- That we have a leader who is also fiscally responsible (able to spend within the allocated budget and find creative ways to use the money we've been given)
- The person comes from an educational background
- Able to talk to the mayor and the governor
- Accessible and known to the community as a positive face
- **Attuned to process – not mired in the pay to play culture – the person has integrity, honesty and resolve (strength of character and ethical)**
- Main goal concentrated on children's education
- Forums will percolate high enough – give strength to the possibility of the superintendent chosen
- Brave enough to tell the truth even when people don't want to hear it (i.e. budget, violence, and test scores)
- Dispel the culture of fear and denial – say this is what we feel
- Engage folks and have open discussions, not afraid to talk/speak up
- Attuned and experienced with process – can lead, guide and admit when wrong – model trust

- A history of willing to work with and cooperate (not cave over) with unions – ability to work with unions
- **Core leadership skills translates to the team (build trust, build community – one person can't do it all)**
- Reward high performing schools
- Sees that helping both high and low performing schools is important (autonomy)

**Fears:**

- Nothing's going to change
- Opposite of all the hopes
- Safe schools – not enough strictness to enforce the rules
- Don't want a polarizing force in the role of superintendent
- **Politics (Philadelphia and Pennsylvania) will interfere with the success of what needs to be done**
- Won't find someone to come here
- Will see things as zero sum gain (giving one, taking away from another)
- Will fall prey to the pressures to lie to us (ie. Violence, test scores, etc.)

**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:*

- Autonomy will allow my school to be successful
- Have to trust your principals
- **Autonomy with accountability**
- System needs to be busted up – the current system can't work well for **ALL** children
  - How can we support children who are ready to accelerate faster than the system allows?

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

- Have to trust your principals
- Autonomy shouldn't be universal (not all principals are strong performers)

*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:*

- **It takes a village – everyone needs to get involved and understand the importance of education**
- Needs to be able to engage the communities and the constituencies – that's what will move policies
- Need to be able to get economic support from the community

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

- Given the size and scope of the school system – the person has to have the experience and the capacity to run the district
- Knowledge of what they're stepping into

*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:*

- **The situation is so big – the person needs to be able to build relationships to create support**

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

- Know that setbacks are part of the plan/process
- Recognize that the culture this position is part of a compromise culture
- **What can we do to support the new person?**
- How do we evaluate the success of the criteria?
- Question about whether the list of criteria is in the order of priority
- We're looking for someone to meet all of the criteria and we might not be able to find that person
- Relationship and sustainability with money – two main categories to focus on
- Polarization
- Missing: the ability to distinguish between what you do and don't have control over/can and can't change as superintendent
- Nothing on here about violence/safe schools – new person needs to be aware of what he/she is stepping into
- Need to reframe the way we look at/approach the issue of violence
- Learn from each other about what works
- Missing from criteria #2 – fiscal responsibility isn't clear enough – Education is a business

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

- The pendulum keeps swinging (from someone from the area to someone from outside of the area). This should be about finding the best person
- Couldn't hurt, and it would be an added benefit if the person was from Philadelphia, but it's not necessary
- Focusing on it too much is a distraction
- If the person is from here – he/she would know the system (community, family, business, etc.)
- Think there should be a leadership **team** that includes people from Philadelphia
- Concern about bringing “the entourage” with them (regardless of whether or not the person is from Philadelphia)
- Concern that the person won't be able to address the concern of all of the ethnic groups

- Willing to learn from other places regardless of whether or not they're from Philadelphia

**Other important ideas:**

- Adapting capabilities (the new superintendent can't come in just knowing, needs to be open)
- All criteria are important
- Native Philadelphian is helpful and good but not necessary
- One person can't do it all, it's about collaboration (involve community, distinct communities, politics, etc.) – it's about listening
- Autonomy with accountability

## Group 2

**Moderators:** Louise Giugliano

### **Moderator's description of the group:**

6 people in the group: 3 African American women, 2 white women, 1 white male. There was good energy in the group. The male has been in another of these meetings that I moderated and is a retired teacher from the District. One woman is home schooling her child and another is active in the charter school where her child attends.

### **Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:**

Hopes:

- S/he will be able to stand up to the banks & corporations and make them give back.
- S/he can make schools community places where graduation rates are at 99%.
- S/he will work well with parents and will create a SD that parents can feel comfortable with.
- S/he can make changes and provide options.
- S/he will give students a chance and have empathy for students.
- S/he can unite students, parents and educators.

Fears:

- That parents won't be engaged.
- That there will be no change.
- That there will be a continued decline of educational standards.
- That new ideas will not get credit or a fair hearing.

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

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

- Autonomy is good because communities are different and principals can create curriculum that works for that community.
- Autonomy allows teachers to have some power over standards & instruction.
- There needs to be a balanced approach between centralization and decentralization.

*#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*

- S/he must be a team builder.

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

- S/he should be an educator to understand education.
- An educator is better able to see that the stakes are high for society and we need to graduate children who will be prepared for the world.

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

- S/he should have a business background and can work with corporations.
- The person needs to be able to run a large enterprise and delegate responsibilities.

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

- S/he needs to engage parents so they understand what their children need. Make a real effort to bring parents in and make them part of the decision-making from the beginning. We know how difficult this is and this is why we need you. All of these groups need to be treated with respect.

*#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*

- S/he needs to have political skills without being a political player.

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

- S/he should make resources available to all types of schools. Charters offer an alternative and an opportunity for smaller classes.
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**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*

- Decentralized schools get program cuts when they don't have enough resources.
- Principals may not have the passion for the students so they feel vulnerable to the local leader.
- Poor communities will not get what they need compared to those with money & connections.
- Need a centralized basis for standards but not one that is rote & drill.

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

- They recognize that it is hard to engage parents for many reasons. Parents need to feel respected rather than blamed or alienated. (One principal sent home a parent contract that was insulting.) Parents need to be partners and not brought in only on the school's terms.

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

- This criteria is too vague but all children means all children.

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

- Charter schools were experiments where things were to be tried out and then brought to public schools. This didn't happen. They have replaced public schools and are anti-union, not transparent, and have track records that are no better than

the PSs. They need to be more accountable and transparent. Parents need an alternative that is free.

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

**YES/NEED TO BE FROM PHILADELPHIA:**

A PHILADELPHIAN

- Understands the stresses produced by lay-offs and the impact of this on the community.
- Knows the schools, the key players and the politics of the city and how the city works.

A PERSON FROM OUTSIDE

- May be able to break loose of the politics and the usual way things are done.
- May bring new ideas and a fresh perspective.
- Will not be part of the pay to play aspects of the city.

**Other important ideas:**

- Many of the important educators from Philadelphia have been driven out.
- Searches have not paid enough attention to the candidates' track record from their previous positions, i.e. Ackerman.
- Engagement needs to be defined when we talk about engaging parents.

### **Group 3**

**Moderators:** Jeff Branch and Marty Molloy

#### **Moderator's description of the group:**

The participants included a highly engaged group of 7 diverse participants: 3 white male educators (2 retired from Philly public school system); 2 white females (1 educator; 1 Chamber of Commerce member); and 2 African-American women (both South Philadelphia residents). One of the participants was probably in their 30s; two were probably in their 40s; four were easily over 50 into 60s.

#### **Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:**

Hopes:

- Embrace democratic governance and leadership promoting the true voice about schools
- Transparency
- Education provides good transformational experience for students and teachers
  - Make education the focus...focus back on the children-
  - School communities would have more autonomy and power
  - A safe and enriching environment
  - Innovative and creative freedom for the teaching and learning process
  - Able to progress when there are movements/shifts in the overall results...testing and real-life experiences
- People become more engaged with the deliberative process...they believe in the process...they come out and are involved
  - Parental involvement/support is embraced
- Leadership works effectively with unions

Fears:

- SRC will just introduce a new superintendent instead of making a truly transparent process,,
  - There is an opportunity to make this a truly transparent process by presenting the candidates the community and having them scrutinized as part of the selection process
  - True public engagement is experienced
- Experience business and politics as usual instead of a focus on education
- They would pick someone who continues the corporate raider approach like the Washington DC system
  - Lack of understanding how schools operate...not able to really recognize the systemic problems
  - Doesn't benefit kids or community
  - Not interested in investing in the craft of learning

- School system continues the focus on discipline and safety versus an emphasis on educating
- We continue the steady decline...getting worse despite reform efforts
- Decentralization...is it code for continuing economic disparity in education...thereby producing unequal education?

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

- Overall needs to have language that indicates community involvement is the key
- Promote linkages between criteria. It feels disjointed. There are opportunities to combine to create greater coherency

*#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*

- Must have relationship builder, but add ‘internal’ to stakeholders...critical to not be left out
- Community involved with the school...it is a web network of involvement that can’t be underestimated or missed

*#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*

- ...must have the ability and support ‘internally’ as a leader to build support
- Makes sense...Philly focus is important to create a collaborative culture and build the ‘right’ coalitions

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

- Must have the relationships internally and externally to move the system
- #8 makes sense...needs to be in the community and have a connection

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

- The criteria is not strong enough...need someone who will be strong enough to stand up to various constituents...it is sanitized and not criteria that would get to the essence of the leader we need
  - Need to review Ron Whitehorn’s criteria for superintendent search elsewhere
  - It embodied the ‘spirit’ of the person
- Need to be specific about having someone who can build relationships with the state of PA
  - Start and promote a good relationship because of knowledge and appreciation of politics
- Missing in the criteria...person needs to have a stake with a ‘vested interest’
- Start with a leader that can build and sustain trust through their own ability to connect, competency and transparency
  - Collaborative, integrity, community building, trust building formation

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

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

- Need a leader that isn’t focused on promoting a culture of testing...just to meet test criteria

- Need a leader that approaches learning holistically...encouraging providing knowledge and experiences that prepare students for life
- Developing a balanced curriculum teaching students how to be effective in the world
  - Developing curriculum that teaches students how to be leaders by modeling leadership

*#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*

- needs included “a culture of building relationships **internally**, not just outside or external relationships...
- Include: “Able to create a collaborative and collegial culture”
- Include: “Builds a sense of community within schools”
- Focus on engagement of community and encouraging autonomy and decentralization where there is readiness

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

- A big system is not necessarily the same as a school district...MUST have education experience
- Can this be a team leadership process...no one person can do it alone
- Stress background, knowledge and experience
- Missing: The school as the center of the community
  - Needs strong language around creating the external and internal supports within the school
- Missing: Add language -- Knowledge and experience working with unions
  - To be a partner, not an antagonist, unless agitation is called for
  - Connection: Building partnerships to include teachers’ unions

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

**YES/NEED TO BE FROM PHILADELPHIA:**

- Leader creates a culture of mutual accountability, including charter schools
- System must be fundamentally changed
- If he/she lets portfolio system exist without a ‘whole system’ approach it just perpetuates the status quo
- Siphoning resources from traditional public schools
- Charters must play by the same set of criteria
- Decentralization just leads to expansion of charters in one way or another
- Charters as not-for-profits is a complete fiction
  - Can we scrutinize salaries for Charter CEOs...seem out of whack as a not-for-profit?

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

- Knowledge of Philly is key
  - Politics; neighborhoods is important

- Outsider with knowledge is fine
- Someone must know the way neighborhood systems work...it is okay to have someone on the leadership team with this knowledge
- Someone with a vested interest or stake in the system
- Don't hire some with 'Broad Institute' on their resume
- Public feedback with transparency is essential – It is Good Kiln

**Other important ideas:**

- Open communication of input (TRUST)
- Promote collaborative culture...Internally and Externally
- People want functioning neighborhoods schools that are the 'center' of the community

## Group 4

**Moderators:** Ted Enoch

### **Moderator's description of the group:**

The small group discussion this morning at South Philadelphia High was comprised of an optimistic and concerned group of about 15 people. The group was predominantly comprised of recent immigrants from Vietnam, all of whom having children attend South Philadelphia High. There was also another parent of a South Philly High student, also a recent immigrant; this mother however was from China. One other community member participated in this group, a white man who was invested in the future of our schools. The group relied heavily on a language interpreter provided by the school district who did a great job of translating and explaining issues to the group. An early event related to translation spoke very well for the spirit of the group. During the introduction portion of the session, the group was asked to name one "hope" or one "fear" each had for the next leader of our school system. After a bit of translation and questions to each other within the group spoken in Vietnamese, the group all raised their hands and said ***they had "hope" for the next leader*** and expected good things. This moderator was touched, humbled and inspired by the interpretation of the question by the group members. This positive belief in the possibility for our schools stayed consistent for the next 90 minutes for this group. These were parents committed to improving the schools for their children and community. This moderator was very impressed and inspired by the insights and commitment of the group.

### **Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:**

Hopes:

- (Hope) That s/he "really fits and is good for my children, for all children."
- (Hope) That we choose an excellent leader who will be effective.
- (Hope) "That there will be no discrimination, that all of our students will be treated equally, no matter if you are white, black, Asian, Latino... Everyone should have a good education."
- (Hope) That we can challenge teachers to have a more rigorous teaching process, with better checks on homework, with summer school work... Our students have to be challenged and held accountable.
- (Hope) That the next leader will have full and expert knowledge on education, ensuring that all children in every community can have excellence.
- (Hope) That we can bring success to all students.
- (Hope) That there will be no discrimination, all students can be taught, all students can be safe.
- (From a Vietnamese man): I don't care if it is a female or male, just a good leader.
- (Fear) More discrimination.
- (Hope) That the leader will come from the business community.

- (Fear) That this entire public engagement and dialogue process is a waste of time and won't have any real impact.

**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 children:*

- This group seemed to really focus on the "All" that ends this criterion. Many of the group talked about **discrimination** in their hopes and fears. In this regard, group members said:
- We want the new leader to prevent violence against our children that prevents them from learning. Several of the parents told stories of their children getting beat up to, from and during school.
- That all schools get attention and resources, not just high performing ones.

*#2 - Knowledge and capacity to run a large enterprise or organization:*

- The group all agreed that this was important and a clear need.
- One participant spoke of the need for the next leader to come from the business community, with real management experience, all the while not losing track that the schools "are all about the people."

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

- Again, this group saw the wisdom and importance of this trait. Several in the group saw the real need to "support and think about our teachers and principals, because they are the ones taking care of our children."

*#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:*

- The group agreed with this and said that it was not being done well in the district now.
- There are diverse communities in Philadelphia; this leader needs a team to help all of the groups.
- There are many problems with this area in our schools now and needs much improvement.

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

- The group again saw the value in this and were clear that the full range of schools needs to be considered and supported.

*#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 group agreed and saw this as important.

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

- This criterion also raised lots of energy, attention and concern for the group.
- There needs to be a balance and relationship between autonomy and centralization. We want to see our schools and administration working effectively together.
- Some decentralization is very important. Principals need to know clearly what they can and can't do, and this will let them make important local decisions. But things need to be clearly laid out.

*#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:*

- Again, all were in agreement and many in the group saw this critical to providing necessary resources and opportunities for all students.

*#9 - Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders. The group definitely agreed with this.*

- Parents and community affect students!
- "We are all connected together."
- How can we achieve safety in our communities to support learning? This is very important.

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

*#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:*

- One participant spoke about certain non-profits running schools and this was out-of-balance.
- Teachers and principals should teach and run schools.
- Non-profits should provide resources for schools, but not run them. The district is going too far with this.

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

- What if your principal is not so great? This could be bad.
- Some centralization is important to ensure quality.

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

- The group was running out of time and did not spend a long time with this question, but quickly came to a consensus that the person/leader does not need to come from Philadelphia. S/he just needs to be of high quality

**Other important ideas:**

- To fight/end discrimination and support learning for all students.
- To work very closely with parents and community because the connection is clear and vital for success.

## South Philadelphia High School

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

- Parent and community engagement:
  - Different communities present and want to bring whole community together
  - Improves chances of success
  - Power of collaboration
  - Function community schools
- Balance of centralization and local autonomy
  - Issues of quality of community involvement
  - All schools must have equal education, this requires centralization
  - Strong principals are needed for autonomy
  - Local community involved in decision
  - Collaborative
- Leader must connect to communities
  - Some communities have different priorities – some are working, all must be engaged
  - Schools much reach out
  - Need safe schools
  - School – community connection is where safety and health are achieved
- Transparency is crucial:
  - Can finalists talk in front of community?
  - Can there be a forum or debate?
  - How can process be democratized?