School Reform Commission
Criteria for next SDP Leader

MODERATOR REPORTS

Philadelphia Youth Network
February 23, 2012

Group 1
**Moderators:** Bryan McHale, Abby Ellis, Harmony Elsley

**Moderator’s description of the group:**
Eleven students – eight girls, three boys.

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

**Hopes:**
- Take everything into consideration instead of going crazy with power and simply dictating.
- Make the District be better at what they do.
- Actually care about and appreciate the students.
- Get more involved with student run programs.

**Fears:**
- Next leader will be like Ackerman.
- Budget cuts will continue.
  - Lead to cutting the good teachers.
  - Cuts to athletics.
- Nothing will improve in the schools.
- New leader will already have preconceived ideas and won’t listen to students and schools.
  - Will be out of touch with students.
  - Won’t care about students as people but rather as products.
  - Will make things worse, not better.

**Parts of the Framework that Make sense to participants, 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.**
- Education is a community process. The School District needs to provide more
opportunities for businesses to provide resources to the schools.
• Government and School District have to provide enough resources for the schools to work.

#9 – Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders.
• Leader should go to the students and see what they want.
  o Getting student ideas considered is important.
• Need programs for parents and students with problems of previous incarceration or unemployment.

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training, and leadership development among school principles.
• When considering closing schools, be aware of the differences between schools and the effects of moving students from one school to another.
  o Understand the different locations around the City and differences in students.
  o Can’t generalize across all of the schools.
  o Students seem to be considered interchangeable.

#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all.
• The next superintendent needs to be personally invested and open up opportunities for students with new libraries and books.
  o This criteria needs to be expanded to being a commitment to a “quality” education.
  o Make sure the basics are covered.
  o Push professionalism for students.
  o Strong effort to establish district-wide higher-goals and standards for students than what currently exist.
  o Focus on pathway to higher education.

#4 – A team-builder able to coordinate and motivate a diverse group of managers and educators of different types of schools in different settings.
• Establish a network of support and develop new ideas.
• Get college grads originally from the community involved in supporting their local schools rather than having them “escape” from the neighborhood.

Parts of the Framework which cause concerns (by criteria #):
#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all.
• This is underwritten.
  o No mention or emphasis on a “quality” education or reaching college in the criteria.
  o Set education standards such that all students are expected to succeed and receive quality educations.
• Students shouldn’t have reason to feel or be thought of as inferior because of the school they go to.

#9 - Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders.
• Students should be involved in helping to make decisions.
• SRC doesn’t understand the perspective, culture, and communication between students.
• Students and teachers don’t seem to respect each other.

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training, and leadership development among school principles.
And #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.
• Education is a community process.
• The School District needs to provide more opportunities for businesses to provide resources to the schools.
• Government and School District have to provide enough resources for the schools to work.

#9 – Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders.
• Leader should go to the students and see what they want.
• Getting student ideas considered is important.
• Need programs for parents and students with problems of previous incarceration or unemployment.

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training, and leadership development among school principles.
• When considering closing schools, be aware of the differences between schools and the effects of moving students from one school to another.
  o Understand the different locations around the City and differences in students.
  o Can’t generalize across all of the schools.
  o Students seem to be considered interchangeable.

#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all.
• The next superintendent needs to be personally invested and open up opportunities for students with new libraries and books.
  o This criteria needs to be expanded to being a commitment to a “quality” education.
  o Make sure the basics are covered.
  o Push professionalism for students.
  o Strong effort to establish district-wide higher-goals and standards for students than what currently exist.
  o Focus on pathway to higher education.
#4 – A team-builder able to coordinate and motivate a diverse group of managers and educators of different types of schools in different settings.
  • Establish a network of support and develop new ideas.
  • Get college grads originally from the community involved in supporting their local schools rather than having them “escape” from the neighborhood.

Parts of the Framework which cause concerns (by criteria #)
#1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all.
  • This is underwritten.
    o No mention or emphasis on a “quality” education or reaching college in the criteria.
    o Set education standards such that all students are expected to succeed and receive quality educations.
    o Students shouldn’t have reason to feel or be thought of as inferior because of the school they go to.

#9 -Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders.
  • Students should be involved in helping to make decisions.
    o SRC doesn’t understand the perspective, culture, and communication between students.
    o Students and teachers don’t seem to respect each other.

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training, and leadership development among school principles.
  • There is not enough emphasis on teachers. No consideration of the impact of firing teachers who the students respect and think are good.
    o Next leader needs to set better standards for teachers to encourage them to learn and understand what is realistically going on in the lives of their students.
    o Currently the focus is on discipline and other unimportant standards rather than education.
      ▪ Leads to bad results (suspensions, expulsions)
      ▪ Focus on metal detectors and dress codes detract from focus on education and make schools seem like prisons.
      ▪ Everyone is human and should be treated as such.
      ▪ **Students are not products.** They are people who learn differently and come from different backgrounds. Too much of the focus is on forcing everyone to be the same – like a product on an assembly line.

#7 – Ability to rethink the district’s service model, moving closer to autonomy for individual schools and decreased centralization.
  • Schools would be different if rules didn’t come from above.
• Fighting and cyber-bullying could be better recognized and handled differently at the school level.

What difference would it make to you if the successful candidate is or is not from Philadelphia?
Next Superintendent should be from Philadelphia.
• Feel like they are giving back to their own community.
• Know how things are in Philadelphia.
• They would be taken more seriously.
• Shouldn't just be from Philadelphia, they need to have grown-up here.
  o Understand what it's like to grow up in this culture.
  o More invested.
  o Committed to and care about their neighbors.
  o Personally understand complaints.
He/She could be from elsewhere.
• Regionally close if not from Philly, but not from beyond region.
• From somewhere similar in crime, demographics, unemployment, etc.
• Should be a minority.
• Have an inner-city mentality.
• Age matters – Older people no long
Group 2
Moderators: Ted Enoch and Steve Vassor

Moderator’s description of the group:
The small group discussion this afternoon at a gathering of youth leaders and ambassadors at the Philadelphia Youth Network was comprised of group of about 12 teenagers from throughout the entirety of Philadelphia. The group was nearly 100% African American and the majority of the group were young men. This group was engaged, committed, concerned and eager to participate in the process. They recognized that this was the only outreach effort that was specifically geared to students in the district and they took this task most seriously. The group listened intently to one another, explored and probed each other’s ideas and worked hard to get to deeper concerns for the next superintendent of schools. **Nearly each young person welcomed this opportunity and expressed direct interest in further involvement with this search effort.** It is this moderator’s opinion that these young leaders would contribute greatly to this process. They are bright, represent a wide selection of our schools and communities, and as one young man expressed, “Who IS the school district of Philadelphia?!? We are!”

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:
- **(Hope)** That the next leader can make education and the school culture more about the students, welcoming, helping more kids stay in school.
- **(Fear)** That s/he won’t know what s/he’s doing.
- **(Hope)** That we get a real leader with strong qualities. One who can look at a situation and know what to do to the satisfaction of both adults and youth.
- **(Fear)** That the next leader will let the power of the position get to their head.
- **(Hope)** That the next leader doesn’t take away the individuality and character strengths of each school. That s/he can respect the differences among schools and support them.
- **(Hope)** That the next leader will be strong and fair in decision-making.
- **(Hope)** That there will be recognition that education is more than reading and math, the basics, but that life demands call for learning about life skills like college prep, internships, budgeting and learning about different cultures.
- **(Fear)** That the changes we are seeing in places like Mastery Charter – where they are cutting arts and sports – will continue. This shouldn’t happen. These types of activities are an important part of our education.
- **(Hope)** That the leader can be their own person and not swayed by others. That they will have an important and clear vision and that they can stick to it.
- **(Hope)** That they will be familiar with or from Philadelphia and really know the city and our public schools.
• (Hope) That s/he will start more programs in schools like graphic design, auto mechanics and nursing...
• (Hope) That s/he will fight to keep our budget intact or growing to meet the needs of our schools and students.
• (Hope) That the leader is effective and can bring excellence to all of our schools so that all students can expect an excellent education.

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
• This came up specifically and immediately as participants named hopes/fears for the next superintendent:
  • That the next leader doesn't take away the individuality and character strengths of each school. That s/he can respect the differences among schools and support them.
  • That there will be recognition that education is more than reading and math, the basics, but that life demands call for learning about life skills like college prep, internships, budgeting and learning about different cultures.

#3 – A clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training and leadership development among principals
• This group identified this early in the process as a key issue. One of the participants said that the phrase should also include “impacts on students” as part of the language.
• One participant described how “the decision to keep Asian and American students separate from one another at S. Philly High, so that they couldn’t get to know one another, even being on different floors in the building... this led to the violence that happened.”
• Some in the group described how the learning climate at many schools “is against students” and that decisions should be made to support, welcome and include students to keep students engaged and progressing with their education.
• What decisions can be made to help teachers maintain better control of their classrooms to promote more learning for more students? Too many teachers have a poor handle of their classroom...
• Decisions need to be clear and easy to follow. That is one of the key duties of the superintendent.

#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 saw this as an important issue, and for some, it addressed the concern about knowledge and familiarity of Philadelphia.
• “The next leader can learn and address the issues of Philadelphia.”
• S/he “can listen to people from different parts of the city.”
• “Any leader needs a solid team behind them...” This job is so big and complex that a team approach is critical.
• “The leader might come from wherever, but they have to have a team from Philadelphia.”

#2 – Knowledge and Capacity to run a large enterprise or organization
• The group felt that this was very important, but was somewhat divided if the knowledge had to come from teaching and working in schools in general, and even more specifically, if that knowledge had to come from Philadelphia...
• “The leader needs to know what’s happening on the ground level in our schools.”
• “Yes, s/he must have teaching experience.”
• “Must be from Philadelphia, with school-based knowledge.”
• “Good management experience is more important that education experience. This person needs to know how to run a large organization.”

# 1 – A commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all children.
• This characteristic came up as one student tackled the issue of being from Philadelphia or not... He was concerned that an outsider would prejudge Philadelphia students and would not have the highest expectations... When pressed, this student wanted to know with certainty that this leader would “believe in us, challenge us and know that we can all be excellent.”

Parts of the Framework about which participants are concerned, and why:
#9 – Is committed to actively engaging with students, parents and community stakeholders
• Some participants felt this would divert energy and attention from important matters. Some pointed to the poor turnouts at back-to-school nights and parent/teacher conferences and talked about how parents will either be good at this or they will not. Others challenged this notion, however, and felt that encouraging student/family and community engagement was key. All felt like doing this effectively was a real challenge.
• Many students felt that **teachers were not included** in this document in any meaningful way and that this was a critical oversight.

What difference it would make if the successful candidate is/is not from Philadelphia, and why:
This question was very important to many in the group, and it came up in discussion after discussion on nearly every leadership characteristic that was investigated. At first, most students felt that direct knowledge/experience of Philadelphia schools was tantamount. Eventually, as the idea of a team-builder was investigated, many – but not all – felt like a team could ensure that leadership could properly address specific, local issues. Some of the ideas on this topic included:

• “It’s about the quality of the performance, not where they are from, that is most important. They can get help on local matters quickly if needed.”
• S/he “needs to know our history and our good ideas...”
• S/he “needs to really know what’s going on in our district.”
• That s/he “has seen things up close and personal.”
• S/he “knows how to address our communities.”
• “An outsider may have new solutions because they see things in a new light.”
• “They should have spent some time in our schools. They should have at least gone to a Philadelphia school at some point.”
• “Will an outsider prejudge us and have low expectations?”
• “This person needs to be committed to Philadelphia. They should have spent some time here BEFORE they take this position.”
• “They must truly believe that Philadelphia can succeed!”

Other important ideas:
• The lack of student input/involvement in this process:
• Immediately after the search committee member gave the overview of these leadership criteria to the plenary, one participant, a young woman, shot up her hand and asked if any students were involved in any part of this process, or “is it only adults talking about this?”
• Small group number 2 picked up on this question with real interest and concern:
• Some group members advocated having the top candidates sit with a group of youth for a panel question and answer session.
• Participants talked about the quality of young people’s perception, how “they can pick-up the truth, sense who is real, see who is just looking for a paycheck, and know who is real and understands the important issues…”
• “If you don’t know the issues, how can you solve the problems? We know the issues and problems, the candidate and next leader needs to be in dialogue with us…”
• “We are the district! Without us, there is no them. We should be heard and listened to…”
• One student was concerned about how practical it was to include students, and didn’t think that students should “dominate” the decision making process, but all felt that some greater input should be secured and included.
• All students in group 2 felt that the PYN participants were ideal for future engagement because they represented so many schools and communities from across Philadelphia.
• Other characteristics of leadership were addressed:
• The need to be proactive, to attack issues and solve problems early and immediately, always making improvements.
• The need to be a listener and learner, especially if they are not from Philadelphia.
Group 3
Moderators: Gwynne Smith Scheffer and Ian Charlton

Moderator’s description of the group:
• Our group consisted of twelve students – eight male (one Hispanic, one White, six African American) and four female (three African American, one African)
• School represented: Carver, Edison, Community College of Philadelphia, Hallahan, LaSalle, Overbrook, Bartram, Lincoln, Fitz Simon, Ben Franklin
• Neighborhood represented: Mt. Airy, West Philly, Southwest, Northeast
• Most of the students were initially a little reticent when sharing their hopes/fears but soon engaged in a little more dialogue. Two men, one white and the other African American were very forthcoming with thoughts once the first criteria was selected which helped to get the conversation started. Another male was a latecomer but added some spark to the conversation as he was very comfortable sharing his thoughts. I did call on students to add to the discussion to balance the input. When we got the last question, we went round robin to get feedback from each student.
• Criteria #1 and #4 were not discussed in detail but comments were made regarding them at the very end before moving onto the last question.

Hopes and Fears for next leader of the SDP:
Hopes
• Improve on extracurricular activities, e.g., sports
• Compromise on budget...know the necessities
• Make school safer
• Listen to the youth (mentioned three times)
• Take youth’s opinion
• Superintendent will work with resources but also advocate for more
• Know how to use money
• Bring positive energy
• Less budget costs
• Need more technology in school

Fears
• Students will be forgotten
• Things will get worse
• Weak-minded, unwilling to challenge political higher ups
• New budget cuts
• Broken promises
• Won’t do anything

Parts of the Framework that Make sense to participants, and why:
#3 – Clear understanding of the way management decisions affect teaching, training and leadership development among school principals

- Must know/clear understanding of necessities and cause/effect of decisions
  - New teachers sent to worst schools
    - Must be a blend, need experienced teachers in worst schools...a balance
- Need someone who understands teachers, who can work with principals to get them to do what school district wants them to do
- Age
  - Older superintendent may not understand needs of young students
- Understanding, compromise in decision making
- Need leader who knows how to hire the right teachers who can facilitate well “talking with” students not “talking at” students
- Need to help students who are more committed to their education
- More classroom checks, ear to the ground

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

- Makes sense because every school situation is different
- More autonomy = more connection to parents and students
  - But will superintendent have time to reach each school individually?
  - Decentralization = too much work for all of us
  - New leader needs a good team which would allow decentralization
  - Don’t make assumption that everyone wants to stay in their neighborhood
- Get community leaders involved with school community through partnerships
- Want community school to be high-quality, even if going to a school outside neighborhood

#5 – Embraces the idea of a portfolio of schools and advocates for high-quality schools regardless of provider

- All schools should be treated equally
- Need leader to advocate for high-quality education regardless of school type
- Charter schools are more strict, enforce rules more, e.g., two fights = expulsion, don’t tolerate cutting class
- Alternative schools perceived as better
- Texas (student moved to Philadelphia) had higher quality public schools
- Perceived hierarchy
  - Charters
  - Catholic
  - Public
  - Only way to get a quality education is through a special school
  - Need to improve quality and image of neighborhood high schools
    - Fights, lack of discipline and control
    - But this can be a misconception, sometimes neighborhood schools are just as good or better
- Should improve perception of neighborhood schools
• Sometimes magnate schools have even more local kids
• Community/neighborhood schools may not reflect actual makeup of neighborhoods anyway
• Quality of education, discipline and values are the three major issues when it comes to distinguishing regular public and “special” schools

#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
• Public perception of regular public schools is skewed, negativity often unwarranted
• Leader must manage public perception of all kinds of schools
• Need to show public education is a necessity to parents and other community members
• We need to be patient about slower, more meaningful progress
  o Need a one-step at a time process
• Leader needs to make school more attractive to students rather than imposing rigid attendance hours (related to #5 and #8)
  o Superintendent needs to push back against legislative leaders who don’t have ear to ground

#6 – Relationship builder who is able to build creative partnerships with numerous external stakeholders to bring resources to individual schools and groups of schools
• Leader needs to have good relationships, engage/partner with people in high places
• Give more resources to schools and have expectations to accompany those resources
  o Charter schools have more resources and higher expectations
  o Don’t wait until school is failing before providing resources, e.g., below 85, school is failing
• Leader must be personable and implement ideas from other leaders
• Leader must spread resources amongst schools and be sure we use the resources available
• Pair up with universities for pro-bono work, e.g., Drexel Law School students visit high school to inspire students)
• Bring in politicians, successful locals to the conversation and into schools
  o Successful locals as partners because they connect more with neighborhood people
• University partnerships help with careers, understanding the purpose of education
  o Senior projects and specific classes
  o Resources academies have to build inspiration amongst students
  o All schools should have access to those opportunities

#2 – Knowledge and capacity to run a large enterprise
• Leader needs degree, PhD in business, public administration, sociology
  o Needs to understand society and organizational structure
• Needs experience teaching, experience as a principal
• Needs experience running a large organization or a big company
  o That person is used to running everything, knowing what goes on
#4 – Team builder able to coordinate and motivate a diverse group of managers and educators of different types of schools in different types of setting
  • Need a team builder, someone who can manage a team underneath them
  • Need leader who can arrange a diverse team with skills in each area

#1 – Commitment to education and an overall passion to ensure learning for all children
  • Need passion for the children who are learning and programs offered in school district

Parts of the Framework about which participants are concerned, and why:
  • N/A

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

YES/NEED TO BE FROM PHILADELPHIA:
  • Know the area, geographically (grew up in Philly), personalities, culture
  • Out of towner = blind to our needs
  • Must have lived in Philly for a length of time, not necessarily from Philly
    o Understand changing educational scene – what kids need now
  • 10 to 15 years living in city
  • Outsider won’t understand Philly culture
    o Need understanding of culture and people because need to be able to touch/influence Philadelphians
  • Need Philly character, tradition, history

NO/IT DOESN’T MATTER:
  • Same people might make same mistakes as before
  • Must have knowledge of the Philadelphia educational scene
    ▪ Having a child/relative in school district means knowing wants and needs