



SCHOOL DISTRICT 89
(MAYWOOD, MELROSE PARK, BROADVIEW)

New Superintendent Profile

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School Exec Connect

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SCHOOL EXEC CONNECT

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Executive Summary

The School District 89 Board of Education requested that **School Exec Connect** consultants Tom Madden and John Sawyer gather data from the Board, staff, and community regarding the pending superintendent search. To gather this information, Board of Education members were interviewed individually. Focus group meetings were held with teachers, building leaders, support staff, community members and parents. A survey form was available to all constituents. The resulting ***New Superintendent Profile*** presents a summary of the attributes desired in the next Superintendent resulting from the listed strengths and challenges of the District.

This report summarizes the common threads among the various constituent groups. It suggests the skills and attributes collectively desired in the new superintendent. As will be mentioned again toward the end of this report, the challenges facing the district often serve as an attraction for the best Superintendent candidates.

This report may be used in several ways. First, after reviewing the report, the Board may modify, if necessary, the attributes that will serve as the criteria for the selection of the next superintendent. Second, the Board should review this report to become informed about the common thinking of the various constituent groups as a basis for long term planning. Third, the consultants recommend that this report be posted on the District website, shared with applicants and given to the newly appointed superintendent for a better understanding of the District and its issues.

KEY FINDINGS

STRENGTHS

The School District 89 constituents identified the following unique strengths of the District:

1. A new and like-minded Board – Personal agendas are a thing of the past
2. Board members are on the same page – Meetings are more efficient
3. Good Board committed to training
4. Board is working to develop a Mission and Goals
5. Professional Development Program – From Principals to Teachers

6. Diversity
7. Staff works well with diversity
8. Focus on increased parent involvement – Moving in the right direction
9. Efforts are underway to improve the culture
10. New Board-Fresh start-Unified effort-Trickle down effect
11. Does what needs to be done for State requirements
12. Community outreach – a start
13. Central Office uses data to make decisions
14. Student centered
15. Progressive
16. Good Materials/Resources
17. Staff wants to make things work

Present School Board: There is a general consensus expressed by almost all groups that the new School Board has the potential to be a force for good. Most believe the Board’s decision to employ School Exec Connect to conduct the initial search is a step in the right direction noting that it had not been done by previous Boards. Although there is a “wait and see” feeling by some, most believe this new Board will be a positive force for the District.

Learning Resources: The staff, faculty and administration include many experienced and dedicated individuals. Professional development is a normal aspect of the District’s desire to improve. Future, focused and comprehensive professional development will serve the District well. Learning resources have been available to staff. The availability of such resources with an implementation plan and follow up assessment of their effectiveness will also serve the District well into the future.

Student and Parent Resources: Many students want to learn and many parents desire what is best for their children. Parents are seen as potentially strong assets whose increased involvement would enhance the educational efforts of the school district. Students are viewed as happy and very interested in coming to school.

Diversity: The District’s diversity was cited as a strength that enhances the learning experiences of students and prepares them for life after District 89.

NOTE: There were divergent opinions on the value of the district’s technology. Some considered it a strength while others complained that the implementation and support was inadequate. Therefore, this issue is listed in both the Strengths and the Challenges categories.

CHALLENGES

In the area of issues and challenges, certain common threads were identified by the various groups. It should be noted that the list of issues and challenges often serves as an “attraction” for the most appropriate Superintendent candidates. These are individuals who believe their respective skill sets match these issues and challenges, therefore affording them the opportunity to make a positive difference. The School District 89 constituents identified the following unique challenges of the District:

1. Some teacher resistance to professional development efforts
2. Negative attitude by some members of the District 89 staff that not all children can learn
3. Low staff morale
4. Culture of complacency
5. Adversarial relationship between the Board and the Teachers’ Union – Even though there’s a new Board – An entrenched relationship
6. Low student achievement
7. Complacency – No sense of urgency – Belief that some students can’t learn
8. Bad/Poor image
9. Not community focused
10. Lack of stability
11. Central office gives in to parents
12. High Superintendent turnover
13. “This too will pass” mind set
14. Lack of planning leading to too much urgency – things have to be done now
15. Staff training not carried to fruition nor followed up with new hires
16. Administrative morale – no raises in recent years
17. Poor communication out to the buildings
18. Use of resources-inefficient, lack of training and comprehensive professional development
19. Lack of long term plan/vision
20. Poor implementation and planning
21. Poor relations between union, Board and administration
22. Serious lack of coordination-10 separate schools-no cohesiveness
23. Lack of pride in work products (errors, redundancy)
24. Perceived history of favoritism when making key appointments
25. Perceived micro-management by Board and Central Office
26. Administration/Union relationships are contentious
27. District has serious financial challenges
28. Parents would like to be more active but feel unwelcome by administrators

29. Parents report wanting workshops on how to assist their children with homework and other issues the students face in school.

NOTE: There were divergent opinions on the value of the district's technology. Some considered it a strength of the District while others complained that the implementation and support were inadequate. Therefore, this issue is listed in both the Strengths and the Challenges categories.

Financial Condition of the District: The financial condition of the District is reflective of the condition of the economy in general. Everyone appears to be aware that the District faces serious financial challenges. Cuts have been made and will continue to warrant attention. ***The current challenge, and it is a daunting one, is to reduce costs as necessary without further reducing program quality and further impacting the morale of staff and other stakeholders.***

Decision Making: It goes without saying that decision making is a huge part of any District's operation. The challenge is always to make wise decisions that are in the best interest of the students and the community. There is always a degree of pressure that accompanies decision making, and that pressure is exaggerated by a number of factors. There were concerns expressed that decisions are often seen as "top down," reactive instead of proactive, and made without the input of others to enhanced the quality of those decisions.

General Economic Situation: The impact of the present state of the economy is certainly being felt by individual families. Everyone, especially family members, feels the stress of the weak economy. The stress that so many are under presents additional challenges.

Leadership: The size of the District and the challenge of coordinating the efforts of ten school buildings and a central office present considerable leadership challenges. These challenges would include the creation of a Vision and a Mission (currently underway) and a strategy for making them a reality. Furthermore, leadership requires the positive motivation of others to achieve the goals of the District.

Management: Leadership is often associated with "doing the right thing." Management, on the other hand, is often associated with "doing the thing right." It focuses on the smooth and efficient day-to-day operation of the District. It requires structures and systems of communication that allows the District to be proactive and "out in front of issues."

Communication: Effective communication needs to be the foundation for developing important relationships and partnerships while ensuring the smooth operation of the District as a whole. It is both one-way and two-way. One-way communication involves

the information sent out by the Central Office and individual school buildings. It should be clear, timely and coordinated. Two-way communication involves what many refer to as “people skills.” People skills include being an excellent listener, an effective and non-hostile confronter, and a Win-Win problem solver. These are the skills that build relationships.

Culture: For a school district, “culture” can be described in many ways including how students are regarded and respected; how decisions are made and implemented; how staff are regarded, respected and utilized; how long-term planning is conducted; how structures and operational systems are established and utilized; how teachers and administrators embrace the concept that “all students can learn”; etc. The culture of District 89 needs improvement and direction and this will be a key challenge for the next Superintendent.

ATTRIBUTES DESIRED IN THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

There are many attributes that would serve a Superintendent well in any community; however, these common attributes take on nuances unique to the special needs of School District 89. The school district stake holders offered a variety of comments as noted below:

1. An experienced superintendent with a track record of success in previous position
2. Capable of helping the Board understand and fulfill its role
3. One who has a fiscal track record of managing resources and people
4. Capable of celebrating the diversity of SD 89
5. Be a great communicator to all segments of the school district
6. Demonstrate a child centered philosophy
7. Be highly visible throughout the school district, especially in the schools
8. An effective leader who mentors and delegates
9. Willing to advocate, support, and institute comprehensive professional development program
10. Trustworthy and willing to provide feedback, build cohesiveness among administrators
11. Possess an understanding of the role technology plays in the modern school environment
12. A strong leader to the Board and everyone else
13. Doesn't back down when he/she believes he/she is right
14. Strong advisor to the Board to accept good ideas and reject bad ones
15. Successful experience in a low achieving district
16. Will supervise properly and hold others accountable
17. Believes all children can learn
18. Will develop the right culture through effective motivation

19. Wise
20. Able to change the culture for the better
21. Change agent and strong leader
22. Able to work with an union
23. Able to handle push back
24. Fair, impartial, Wise
25. Well organized
26. Will change what is in our control
27. Empowers Cabinet to do its job, supports them and provide the right tools
28. Great communicator
29. Team player who will identify who the stake holders are
30. An educator with principal experience and a business mind set
31. Financial expertise and experience with deficit budgeting
32. No local baggage
33. Objective
34. Courage to face the tough challenges
35. Approachable/Accessible/Visible
36. Enthusiastic/Positive/Motivating
37. Will change the mind set
38. Comfortable with adversity
39. Strong, tough leader
40. Will bring in new ideas for professional development
41. Will hold others accountable
42. Professional – Knows how not to be subtle
43. Courageous, will take the lead
44. People skills/Open minded/Great communicator
45. Financial and curricular expertise
46. Can delegate but still supervise and stay informed
47. Will train and mentor principals and evaluate them
48. Outside the Box thinker
49. Finds additional funding
50. If head is right, the body will follow
51. Strong leader and team builder
52. Open minded
53. Communicator – Clear, precise, to the point, proactive
54. Able to delegate
55. Doesn't need micro-managing
56. Flexible

57. Be directive on the right things
58. Holds others accountable
59. Teachscape literate
60. Similar District Experience
61. Innovative thinker, vibrant, outgoing, personable, represents the Board well
62. Knows how to prep students for High School
63. Has backbone – Tough Communicator

Exceptional Leadership Abilities: The new Superintendent should be able to inspire and motivate others in a positive manner while always focusing on the intended goal or outcome. This person should not use a “top down” approach, but rather embrace the belief that the collective wisdom of several is often better than the individual wisdom of one. This person must realize that leadership means getting results, but getting them through the efforts of others. The new Superintendent is accountable to the Board and the community, and holds others accountable in the achievement of District goals. This person will “give credit where credit is due,” and will actively seek out “best practices” in others districts, including financial best practices. The new Superintendent will be politically savvy and play the key role in reshaping the culture of the District for years to come.

Excellent Communication Skills that both Build and Maintain Relationships: The new Superintendent should be a gifted communicator, someone who will be proactive and “get out in front of issues.” This person will appreciate that communication is both one-way, as with the dissemination of information, and two-way, as in the crucial interactions this person will have with all the stakeholders of the District. Disseminated information should be clear, timely and available in several ways. “Interactional” communication is what many describe as “people skills.” These are the crucial skills that build positive and productive relationships. These are the skills that make tense situations calmer. And these are the skills that often spell the difference between the success or failure of a leader. The new Superintendent will also need to establish effective and efficient structures of communication.

Strong and Effective Decision Making Skills, Especially in the Area of Finance: These skills are closely related to the leadership qualities and communication traits referred to in the previous two sections. The new Superintendent will face the challenge of making cost cuts. Most of the respondents know that this is necessary but challenge the new Superintendent to make necessary cuts while at the same time improving the quality of the District’s programs and restoring staff morale. This challenge will be a critical and daunting responsibility for the new Superintendent to face. The new Superintendent will be required to have an exceptional level of leadership and communication skills to properly meet this challenge.

Financial Expertise in Auditing, Planning, and Implementing both Short and Long Term

Plans: In the area of finance, the new Superintendent will not have the luxury of learning the business end of running a school district “while on the job.” This person will need to bring a high level of financial expertise to the position in order to properly address the financial issues facing the District as a result of the economy and direct the decision making referred to previously. In addition, this person will need the level of expertise required to lead the Board in the continued auditing of the District’s finances, the development of appropriate and ongoing plans for both the short and long terms, and the successful implementation of these plans.

Solid Personal Qualities: The new Superintendent should be honest, open and of exceptional moral character and integrity. This person will need to be visible, approachable and accessible. A good sense of humor will serve this person well. The new Superintendent must be trustworthy and inspire others to be likewise. This person should have a proven “track record,” bring no “baggage” to the job, be passionate about District 89 and its students, and have a very strong professional network. This person should have no problem setting his or her personal needs aside in favor of what is best for the District. Finally, an ability to speak and otherwise communicate in Spanish would be a valuable asset for the next Superintendent.

GOALS

Future District Goals should form the core of a new Operational Plan that will continue to guide the District in both daily and longer term decision making. These goals should focus on deliberately maintaining and enhancing the strengths already identified. The goals should also consider the issues and challenges facing the District and identify how best to address them.

Although the challenge of finding a candidate possessing all of the desired characteristics is daunting, the intent is to meet that challenge by finding an individual who possesses the best set of skills and character traits required to address the concerns and challenges facing the District. Further, the right individual will use his or her leadership abilities, relationship skills and political savvy and build upon the skills, experiences, enthusiasm and knowledge of the staff, Board, and citizens of the community to propel the District toward truly fulfilling its potential in a cost effective way.

We would like to thank the many people who took the time to respond to the survey or attend a focus group meeting. The results of this report will greatly aid the Board and the consultants in the next step in the search for a new superintendent.

Sincerely,

Thomas Madden and John Sawyer III, Consultants