

Summary of Focus Groups and Online Survey for the Wayland Superintendent Search

November 20, 2010

Overview

The Wayland School District has embarked on a search for a new leader. The current Superintendent has capably led the system for the past 16 years, his predecessor for over 25 years. The School Committee, citizens and staff have demonstrated great resolve in finding a special leader to tackle the broad range of issues facing the system today while creating a roadmap for the future. In a community where one citizen stated that “education is our prime business in Wayland,” they are determined to nurture their well earned reputation as one of the premier high performing systems in the Commonwealth.

The Wayland School Committee began the search process in September, 2010 with the support from Future Management Systems, Inc (“FMS”) of Beverly, MA. Engagement of stakeholders in the decision making process was considered paramount. As a result, focus groups with parents, community members, staff, faculty and administrators were completed in October, 2010. In depth interviews were also carried out with 8 community leaders and an online survey completed with 126 respondents. In total, over 175 individuals from a broad range of constituencies answered the call for input. Each person responding to that call was asked the following questions:

- What do you view as the strengths of the schools?
- What do you feel the schools in general or one or more specific levels (elementary, middle or high) need to address in order to improve?
- What do you view as the immediate challenges that will confront the next Superintendent of Schools?
- Are there emerging issues that may not require the Superintendent’s immediate attention, but nonetheless, should have his/her ears open to them?
- What are the personal and professional skills that the next Superintendent must possess in order to be successful?
- In terms of personal and professional skills, what do we need to be careful of, what won’t work in Wayland?

Each person’s comments were tallied and summarized. They were also asked to rate the importance of 14 potential characteristics of the new leader. The sum total of this impressive effort has been captured in the outline below; it represents a profile of the hopes, desires and

expectations for the new educational leaders. Potential candidates for this position should be measured against the Leadership Profile and this support document as a critical yardstick.

Current and Emerging Issues

A new leader will need to work with and strategically plan for the following top 5 issues culled from the engagement process:

1. **Developing a Vision** – Developing a commonly owned vision for the system is job one. Effectively communicating that vision is a priority.
2. **Finance** – Controlling costs in a town that has the second highest tax rate in Eastern Massachusetts is critical. Finding ways to fund excellence and innovation is a close second. The cost of special education services were of particular concern.
3. **Evaluating, Coaching and Mentoring Staff** - An excellent staff/faculty strives for improvement. Work in this area will only make an exceptional staff better.
4. **Need for Innovation and Strategic Leadership**– Wayland feels like a “traditional” system to many, well grounded but not on the “cutting edge.” Technology led the list of areas that needs a strategic focus.
5. **Instruction** – Developing a stronger instructional approach that incorporates 21st century skill development and pays attention to the “child in the middle.”

Other Areas Mentioned Less Often

1. **Perceived or Real Inequities Between the Elementary Schools** – The closing of Loker School has created concerns about the equitable distribution of students and resources between the remaining elementary schools. Whether the inequity is real or perceived, it’s an issue that requires attention.
2. **Too Many Initiatives, Too Little Follow-Through** – Several people were concerned about the number of new initiatives started with fully incorporating prior projects.

Core Competencies

Each candidate must demonstrate that they are competent in selected skills that are basic to this position. These are the “portal” or entry level criteria for each candidate to be considered.

1. Communicates effectively at all levels including administration, faculty and community.
2. Approaches tasks and situations in a collaborative manner.
3. Understands and can readily discuss a wide array of educational topics including 21st century skills.
4. Has the ability to readily discuss the needs of school age children.

5. Demonstrates knowledge of program evaluation and builds culture of continuous improvement.
6. Has a history of implementing innovative approaches.
7. Presents a career that demonstrates a love of learning and self-improvement.
8. Mentors and provides a model for all staff.
9. Can readily discuss school finance and oversee the creation of accurate, cost effective budgets, creative approaches to funding and financial projections.
10. Articulates a clear vision for high performing educational systems.

Values

The values of a leader can determine the culture and expectations for behavior in all aspects of the system. The 4 most important values for the new WPS leader are:

- Honesty/Integrity
- Positive Regard (for people/listens well)
- Teamwork
- Collaboration

Leadership Characteristics

The new Superintendent:

1. Can build consensus and create a commonly owned vision.
2. Supports innovation. Demonstrates high level skills in assessing innovative approaches to tasks and overseeing the implementation of those tasks.
3. Can engage individuals at all levels and build effective teams.
4. Effectively communicates ideas and information.
5. Is accessible and easily approachable.
6. Is courageous and not afraid to make decisions – self secure.
7. Focuses on individuals and families served.
8. Is an effective mentor, advocate and model.
9. Strong educational leader, who has solid theoretical base, understands the K-12 educational process and is capable of moving the system to a higher level of achievement and performance.
10. Is intellectual - sharp, bright and well read in theories and practices.
11. Is a good listener.

What to Avoid in a New Superintendent

1. “Egomaniacs” and “authoritarian figures”
2. A person who wants to maintain status quo
3. Lack of openness
4. An inexperienced person – would prefer a “marquee background” and experience as a superintendent
5. Someone who does not meet a high standard of professional sophistication

Rating the Characteristics

The new Superintendent will invariably have strengths in certain areas and require support and growth in others. The following skills are in rank order of importance for the new hire on a scale of 1-10 (1 is lowest, 10 is most important) according to all participants in the engagement process.

ITEM	Summary
Strong communicator	9.6
Ability to build and maintain high performing administrative, academic and support teams	9.4
Accessible	9
Big idea person/innovative	8.6
Strong at implementing new initiatives	8.5
Instructional knowledge	7.7
Committed to diversity	8
An effective mentor	8
Persuasive	7.6
Technology knowledge	7.2
Relies heavily on data generated by the system	6.9
Experience as a Superintendent	6.2
Compliance to rules and regulations is paramount	6.1

