

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

November 7th, 2007

This was a Special Board of Education meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to receive a preliminary oral update of the strengths, challenges and leadership needs related to the Superintendent Needs Profile from the superintendent search consultants, BWP & Associates. Ref: www.bwpassociates.com

Board members Tim Millar, James Ekeberg, Kelly Keenan, Sue Quinn and Wendy Rowden were in attendance. Board members Gerald Chapman and Nancy Lee Carlson were absent.

Oral Update of the Strengths, Challenges and Leadership Needs Related to the Superintendent Needs Profile

Background: BWP & Associate consultants **Darrell Dick, Deborah Hill** and **Don Gossett** conducted focus groups of various District 15 stakeholders during the day to receive their input as to the District's strengths and challenges and their view of the characteristics needed in a new superintendent.

Dick – Met with 38 people during the day from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m. His groups included: DACEE (business community), **Board member Wendy Rowden**, Educational Support Staff, Principals, PCEE (Parents Advisory Committee) and **Board President Tim Millar**.

Strengths mentioned by the groups were:

- Certified and Support staff made the District work and were working for the kids
- involved parent community
- facilities generally of quality
- curricula offerings
- diversity: not just ethnic diversity but also a broader perspective such as different kinds of family structures such as grandparents raising grandchildren, etc.

Hill – Met with 28 people. Her groups included: Assistant Superintendents, Junior High Principals, Directors/Coordinators/Instructional leaders, PTA Presidents (9), **Board member Kelly Keenan** and representatives from the CTC (teachers' union).

Hill noted that no one from the SEIU (custodians' union) came to the focus group. Keenan saw Craig Phillips, Manager – and he said that they did not get the information about the meeting. Hill will get the survey forms to Phillips and has offered to come back before next Tuesday/Wednesday to meet with that group.

Additional strengths she heard in her groups were:

- seems to be high expectations for everyone: teachers, parents and students themselves
- Student Academic Achievement has been successful
- Diversity: the largeness of the District was a strength in that there was a system but there was also individualism in the buildings. Some buildings stronger than others. Every building has strengths and weaknesses.
- Lots of parent support
- Good intergovernmental activities (with park districts, police departments, etc.)
- Both Board and staff are committed to professional development

- Experience of teachers

Gossert – Met with 8 people. His groups included: **Board member Sue Quinn, Board member Gerald Chapman, Board member James Ekeberg**, Transportation (1) and the Bi-lingual parent group (4 people).

Many of the **same strengths already mentioned** by the other groups were echoed by his groups. Added:

- Award winning district that is an indicator to the community that the District is moving forward
- Blue Ribbon schools
- Professional and caring teachers
- Community was proud of the school system

Dick - Said that the strengths, and the issues, are given in no general order, they haven't been ranked. He has 30 more survey forms to read/compile that came in through email/fax; the District and also expects more tonight at the community focus group.

Hill – Added that the CTC group asked what the deadline was for submitting surveys. Hill said that she could accept them up until next Tuesday; the report will be compiled next week. As mentioned earlier, the maintenance staff has the same opportunity to submit surveys.

Dick – Issues/challenges mentioned by his groups included:

- strong concern from parent group for more differentiated staffing and program delivery
- Communication: not enough, not adequate, not broad enough
- Finances: some people believed there was a severe financial problem and some were not sure.
- District and new Superintendent need to look at the spending patterns, look at the needs items and look at the accountability piece as it rolls into those
- One group said: "If we are convinced there is a need, it (referendum) will pass but we have to be convinced"
- Concern over number of retirements/resignations of teachers, administrators and support personnel and what the short term/long term plan was to address that personnel issue
- Morale was talked about by the in-house groups
- Boundaries should be looked at as it relates to building capacity and what seems to be declining enrollment.

Hill – Additional issues/challenges she heard:

- Lack of trust specifically related to the financial piece, how monies have been handled in the past and how that affects salaries – that whole component. Still some feeling of mistrust based on the contract negotiations. There is a disconnect amongst the groups.
- Public is mistrusting the administration, the Board and the District in and of itself based on previous stuff.
- Teacher/administration groups still has this level of distrust relative to how the contract negotiations unfolded and what to anticipate coming up.
- Every one of the groups she talked with talked about the trust issue, it took different forms depending on the group.
- Sense that this was an outstanding district however we are treading water and resting on our laurels and need to move forward.
- Everybody is pointing fingers at everybody else. That is part of what is undermining morale. Staff and administrators feel that their opinions and expertise not valued.

- Feeling of being micro-managed
- Diversity: as demographics are changing, some schools may not be prepared, or realize that they need to be prepared to address the demographic issues.
- Trust factor: From PTA, when the referendum didn't pass, they were willing to come in and help. Felt that there was not an open door policy and a lack of trust.
- Inconsistency: staff/administration turnover
- No sense of a plan/vision forward
- Technology and infrastructure: thought to be put on hold/backburner

Gossert – Added issues/challenges he heard:

- Attention needs to be paid to the work environment, so as not to lose young dynamic teachers/principals
- Attention needs to be paid to the Board/Superintendent/Staff relationships

Dick – Characteristics for the new superintendent offered by his groups include:

- Visionary: a vision that everybody understands, and then the leader puts the vision in place
- enthusiastic and dynamic
- personal energy to energize all the employees and put D15 back where it was
- someone who understands learning and continued student improvement
- a leader who is consistent
- financially astute and understands how the financial equation works in terms of the budget
- team-builder
- leadership that is proactive, not reactive
- good communicator
- a person who is centered, has a centered personal value system that he/she can articulate
- a presence of confidence as he/she leads the community forward
- a leader who needs to be a listener, if we give feedback – listen to it, want to be heard
- focus on the future and get off of the past

Hill – Would add to that:

- Appreciate the past but move on to the future.
- Looking for a person who can articulate that "equal is not the same"; some schools need certain kinds of things and other schools need certain kinds of things. Be able to articulate that so you don't have turf wars.
- A team builder to build relationships
- creative financing, know how to generate additional revenue in creative ways
- knowledge of learning, what it takes – focus on kids
- Open door policy (feels there is one now, don't want to lose that)
- has to be tough enough to make a decision and stick by it, not be waffling by saying one thing and changing it tomorrow
- advocate that diversity is a strength
- inspires people and staff to see what they are capable of, push the envelope
- someone that is straight-forward
- financial ability
- competent, qualified, communicator

Gossert – Would add the following characteristics heard from his groups:

- fair, firm, friendly, knowledgeable and consistent

- individual who could delegate and empower the staff to higher sights
- someone who could create a work environment with the Board
- guide the Board to common decisions that were in best interests of children

Darrell Dick – In closing, he wanted to mention that the consultants have more surveys to read and they will prepare a report for the Board by November 26th or sooner. They would like to meet with the Board again on November 28th to talk about the report and the process for the final part of the search. Wants the Board to see the profile in order to confirm it before going forward. All members don't have to agree with all of the profile, but wants to make sure it captures what the Board wants the consultants to do during the last weeks of the search process.

Dick gave an update regarding potential candidates. He spoke to four people that are current superintendents and plans to meet with one soon. Inquiries have come from both in and out of Illinois. Hill has also had some contacts. They have received four or five applications already from their Web site (www.bwpassociates.com) There are also some applications still in process on the site.

Base Salary Range for New Superintendent

The Board was given information on superintendent salaries.

The Board informed the consultants that the District will pay a competitive salary but did not want to give a specific range at this point. Salary/benefit negotiations with a specific final candidate would take place in an Executive session.

The Special Board of Education meeting concluded at approximately 5:30 p.m.

The next open meeting with the consultants is scheduled for Wednesday, November 28th as referred to above.

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