

August 9, 2010 - Superintendent Search Committee Meeting

BOE members in attendance: Debra Goldman (DG), Deborah Prickett (DP), Carolyn Morrison (CM), Kevin Hill (KH), Anne McLaurin (AM), Ron Margiotta (RM)

Presenters: Dr. George Conway and Mr. Dale Jones, Heidrick & Struggles (H&S)

H&S passed out a multi-page document based on feedback from their meetings w/ Wake County stakeholders, which took place over a period of 3 days in July.

H&S made the following comments regarding their meetings w/ stakeholders:

- They were surprised at the low turnout of the two public meetings, but noted that the meetings were scheduled on short notice and held in the month of July when many people are away.
- They met w/ roughly 150 people from various groups/ stakeholders (Wake business leaders, WEP, mayors, teachers, students, WCPSS staff, etc.)
- Dr. Conway said that the “level of candor” from the groups “was refreshing” and “there was great pride in the system and genuine concern for the future”.

The document H&S presented states the following themes/ feedback heard from stakeholders:

- Wake is a complex school system
- Community wants to get back to talking about students and student achievement
- New superintendent won't be able to come in and do everything at once
- Common call for a “unity builder” both for the board and in the community, especially to those who feel alienated from the process
- Lots of questions about whether or not H&S would consider educators; they said YES, that they were not given a mandate to find a non-educator
- Culture of accountability; professional development opportunities for all WCPSS staff
- Common call to “keep what's working and appreciate our strengths”
- Candidates should know the history of the school system
- WCPSS reputation has been tarnished in recent months
- WCPSS is not broken, but trust between the public and the BOE is broken
- Appeal for a strategic plan w/ clearly defined implementation

Page 4 of the document looks at two questions asked of the stakeholders:

1. What are the challenges facing the next superintendent from your perspective?
Dr. Conway noted “This is going to be a tough job on a good day.”
2. What qualifications would you like to see?
 - Intelligence- someone who can learn quickly to lead this complex system
 - Proven record of closing achievement gaps
 - From a large school district
 - Record of support for public education
 - Knowledge of financial oversight w/ a clear record of success managing complex budgets
 - Public does not want a behind the scenes CFO but someone who is out in the community as the face of the system
 - Someone w/ humility who is approachable
 - Open to the ideas of others
 - Understands the history of the county and the school system
 - Possess great integrity

H&S closing remarks:

- They have heard from educators across the country about how great Wake County is. People across the country know of this search and they are hearing many comments about what a good school system this is.
- Dr. Conway repeated several times that the new superintendent will need the support of the full BOE; that this is “non-negotiable”. Without such support, the candidate pool will be limited.
- H&S asked permission to submit this document along w/ an introduction to WCPSS (taken largely from WCPSS website) to candidates.

Discussion:

- Debra Goldman (DG) bristled at this suggestion; made comments about the original intent of asking them to meet w/ the stakeholders and collect this info was to have something to share w/ candidates once they were chosen, not at the front end. DG wants to make it clear the feedback presented is from community and not the board.
- Ron Margiotta (RM) wanted clarification that some of these items in the document don't exclude some candidates, like the closing of achievement gaps. RM noted they are interested in non-educators, as they are seeing non-educators hired as superintendents “in lots of other parts of the country”.
- H&S defended their document saying that they felt the community/ stakeholder input and the board's input they received were very much aligned.
- Kevin Hill (KH) asked DG why they wouldn't use this document if their intent is to be as transparent as possible. Hill said, “I think we can be proud of the job H&S has done here.”
- Carolyn Morrison (CM) asked, “Why wouldn't we want to use this?”
- DG replied, “I don't know. That's why I'm asking the question. I'm looking for feedback.”
- Dr. Conway replied, “I think this would appeal to a career educator. It gives a good idea of the complexity of the job.”
- Mr. Jones added, “Good candidates will go online to research the system. The media they will find there is not as positive as this document. This is a marketing piece to get the best candidates.”
- RM doesn't like pg. 5, 2nd bullet point b/c “it disqualifies some”. Page 5, 2nd to last bullet point he DOES like (this bullet concerns the candidate understanding the history of the school system).
- Dr. Conway said, “There's nothing here that would scare a seasoned educator.” He commented how he and Dr. Morrison had much in common in their education stories/ backgrounds.
- Mr. Jones mentioned the President of Wake Forest University who used to run Pepsi Co. as an example of a non-educator they may look at. (Not actually him, but someone like him w/ that type experience.)
- CM questioned state statute regarding superintendent qualifications. DG said there is no conflict, but H&S rep said they understood it was up to the boards (local BOE and state BOE to decide that). However, they would be sure to be in compliance w/ state law.
- Deborah Prickett (DP) had been asked for her opinion by DG at the start of their discussion (after the presentation of the document) but DP said she needed time to think. At this point she spoke up, saying if this document was meant to be used just as a tool in searching for the candidates, that she didn't see anything wrong w/ it “as a tool to cast a wide net”.
- H&S said they felt like this was a hopeful, positive document; that while they may have heard negative comments from stakeholders, they felt like they had taken that info and made it into a positive summary. It was here that they (H&S) mentioned a second time, that this search is being watched closely and by many across the country. H&S said this search can bring the best and the brightest if the board can unite around the candidate.
- Anne McLaurin spoke up saying she agreed the document was “hopeful”. (She may have been the first person to use that word.)

- In response, DG was defensive. She again said that’s why she was asking the question about using the document and that she saw her job as Chair of the committee, “the person sitting in this chair”, to facilitate discussion and ask questions. She did not see her job as declaring what they would or would not do.
- DP wants it to be clear to the candidate that WCPSS has a new direction and “we are headed in a slightly different direction”.
- H&S, for the THIRD time, said this search is getting a lot of attention, but that the challenge would be to maintain that attention ((this is when he mentioned the high profile national education player)). H&S said it would take some “selfless goodwill” from the board to get the very best candidates to apply to make this search a success.
- DP asked about the bullet points “improve engagement w/ county officials” and “public trust has been broken”; she said these sound negative and she finds them confusing; what do they mean? She went on about how the county commissioners have been so good to them lately by approving their budget, that they (BOC) have a “really good Chair” and that they (BOC) recently “helped us with a site for a new high school”.
- In response to DP, H&S said they didn’t mean to imply that the relationship w/ community officials was broken and needed to be fixed. Mr. Jones said, “The system is not broken; the trust between the system and the public is broken. We heard this from the public and from teachers. The teachers felt it reflected badly on the system.”
- H&S went on to say teachers are “fearful”.
- Mr. Jones said they heard often, “We don’t want to become like Charlotte. There is great concern with that image.” He also stated that the public has, in recent months, seen the school system in the press in a way they never have before; stakeholders want to improve the face of the school system.
- DP said she didn’t like the bullet about trust being broken b/c “trust involves getting to know someone”; questioned who was saying trust had been broken; was it really the public or the media saying that?
- DG doesn’t like the part under the strategic plan that references preparing students for the next level of education b/c this implies all students are going to college. What about students who want to go to vocational school or pursue other goals/ not going to college?
- H&S defended their language/ their point saying that regardless of whether or not a student intends to go to college, they should be prepared to continue any level of education, including many classes/ certifications required in many vocational jobs.
- CM asked H&S if they get candidates who don’t want to come to Wake County or who say negative things, would they let the BOE know. H&S said YES.
- DP doesn’t like bullet on page 4 which notes “maintains most effective programs in Wake Co.”; she doesn’t want specific programs listed (magnets) b/c they may look different than other parts of the country/ other programs in other districts.

There was consensus to approve the H&S request to use the document as part of the marketing of the recruitment for a Superintendent.

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The rest of the meeting, which was maybe 10 minutes, was spent talking about the timeline and next steps. They will present less than 10 candidates to the BOE (8 was given as an example) and from there, there are several “next steps”.

RM asked if they were obligated to look “in house” first?

CM made sure they were looking “in house”; H&S said yes.

H&S said they could enthusiastically present this school system to candidates.

DG said, “I think this is exciting. We don’t know who’s going to apply.”

After the meeting adjourned, Keung Hui requested a copy of the document, stating that it was now public record. Mrs. Goldman told him that he could look at hers and take a few notes, that it was not final yet. We do not know if he left with a copy in hand or not.