
City School District of Albany
Albany, New York



Leadership Profile Report
October 6, 2009

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LEADERSHIP PROFILE ASSESSMENT
City School District of Albany
Superintendent of Schools Search
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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the *Leadership Profile Assessment* conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates, Ltd. (HYA) for the Board of Education of the City School District of Albany. After the Board selected HYA as consultants in its search for the next superintendent, an assessment instrument was prepared to solicit input which would be used to help the Board clarify important considerations in the search. The School Board made the instrument available, through direct meetings, posting on the web site, and distribution in other venues, to a wide variety of stakeholders including administrators, faculty, support staff, parents, community leaders, and members of the wider Albany community.

In developing this *Leadership Profile Report*, the consultants sought comment in face-to-face meetings or in written response on three broad questions – the strengths of the City School District of Albany; issues and concerns confronting the schools and their leadership; and important characteristics to be sought in the preferred candidates for the superintendent’s position. At the interviews and meetings, we publicly noted that the School Board was seeking the views of a broad range of individuals and groups to assist in the search process, but that our consultants’ report would summarize the findings to the School Board without including the identity of any individual contributor. The resulting interviews and feedback forms appeared to show an appropriately responsive candor.

The items that were presented with some consistency from the individuals and groups included in the assessment are presented in this report – first in a narrative Executive Summary, and then in an alphabetical listing. The comments are listed alphabetically since the data are anecdotal, rather than a scientific sampling calibrated for priority. Nor should any item be viewed as necessarily representing the majority opinion of the stakeholders or the respective group in which they originated. Items are included if, in the consultants’ judgment, they were repeated by a sufficient number of respondents to warrant the Board’s attention.

The consultants are thankful to those with whom we met for their cordiality and candor, and to all who took the time to complete the forms. We would also like to thank Linda Jackson-Chalmers for the assistance she provided in arranging the interviews.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The data contained herein were obtained from reviewing 175 completed *Leadership Profile Assessment* forms and notes of our meetings with 92 staff or stakeholders. The constituents were identified by the Board for meetings in individual or group settings, which were conducted on August 26, September 14 and one group on September 30. Three Community Forums were offered during the day and evening of September 14 and an additional evening Community Forum was provided on September 30. The questionnaire, interviews and focus groups were structured to gather data to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics important in its next Superintendent, while also identifying what stakeholders perceived as existing strengths, and current and emerging issues which the City School District of Albany may be facing.

Strengths of the City School District of Albany

Any catalogue of the strengths of the City School District of Albany must begin with some reference to diversity. Almost universally, respondents spoke first and foremost of the school district's diversity and of how it reflects the diversity of the city it serves. In addition to an appreciation of that diversity, there was an underlying pride in the City of Albany and its position as the Capital City of The Empire State. The school district is one of the leaders in its own community of schools, colleges, and universities in the region. Its proximity to the state education department and the seat of state government was seen as a great asset. Albany is described as an exciting, cosmopolitan urban setting with enumerable resources available to enhance the educational opportunities for all.

A very close second to diversity when looking at strengths was the recognition of the many dedicated administrators, faculty, and staff. There is a highly cohesive administrative cabinet. The building administrators are supported by embedded and ongoing professional development. The faculty, too, are supported by a comprehensive program of professional development and are eager to investigate and implement new programs and teaching methods. All care very much about the strong relationships between teachers and students. There is a shared dedication to student success between administrators and teachers. Support staff benefits from a structured program of training and are the front-line link with the community. Communication between the schools and parents was specifically pointed out as a positive.

That overall theme of diversity clearly evinced itself in the descriptions of offerings to students. Most everyone chose to comment on the remarkable depth and breadth of programs and curricula at all levels but particularly at Albany High School. Albany High School is a prototypical comprehensive secondary school with an array of programs available to the entire spectrum of the student body. Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, National Urban Alliance Programs, all were pointed out as sources of pride. At other levels magnet programs of different kinds including a dual language program were described with great enthusiasm. There is a full roster of remedial, compensatory, and special education programs throughout the district. Students interviewed were quick to point out that a student's interest was the only admission

requirement for Advanced Placement courses. These regular curricular programs throughout the district were complemented by a wide variety of extra and co-curricular classes and activities.

The pinpoint focus on student success begins with the Board of Education and its teamwork with the Superintendent of Schools. The imminent completion of the district's ten-year facilities plan is indicative of the "bricks and mortar" benefit of that teamwork. Additionally, the Board of Education in partnership with the Superintendent of Schools has recently adopted a strategic plan.

Issues/Needs/Concerns of the City School District of Albany

Not surprisingly, the challenges facing the school district in many respects represent the other side of its strengths. The City School District of Albany faces all of the socio-economic challenges facing every school district in every city in America. As such, it is a highly political environment. As one respondent said, "The most popular spectator sport in Albany is politics and everybody is a fan." It can be a challenging environment. Graduation and retention rates are constant concerns.

There is widespread concern that problems often associated with an urban setting like violence become the problems of the schools. The school district is only one of many institutions competing for limited resources. Declining fiscal support and increasingly diverse needs make it more and more difficult to do all things for all students. The competition of charter schools has resulted in fewer students and less financial support. There is intense media scrutiny and many feel the attention is concentrated on bad news.

More programs at this time of less support put pressure on all those involved. There is an increasing need to do more with less. Staff members, teachers in particular, already feel they have been doing just that for some time. Class size in the high school and middle schools are a concern. The overall size of the high school is another concern. This translates into questions about the equitable distribution of resources across schools and the consequent impact on program and curriculum implementation.

Morale throughout the district can be affected. Teamwork suffers. A number of respondents get discouraged with their ability to improve academics for all while addressing the very real achievement gap for some. Concern arises over consistent enforcement of policies across schools. Open lines of communication between teachers and administrators need continual attention. Staff development must be seen as a necessary component of any program. Technology needs to be embraced.

The ultimate concern, of course, is student success. Many fear that expectations may be lowered at a time when they very much need to be raised. Finding effective ways to motivate students is a challenge.

Without doubt, one of the biggest issues seen as linked to all of the above is the successful implementation of the district's strategic plan. There is a need for clearly defined goals and objectives with equally clearly defined indicators of success. Accountability must become the school district watchword. This all needs to be effectively communicated with anyone with any investment in the success of students. The strategic plan can become the basis for improved morale, for more clearly defined and understood decision making, for the district's enhanced reputation, and for better working relationships with all aspects of the community particularly other municipal authorities.

Superintendent of Schools - Characteristics

It may be a bit too easy to say that the new leader of the school district needs to be all things to all people, a daunting if not impossible task. But respondents invariably spoke of characteristics with a sense of hope rather than outlining a set of rigid requirements for the position. Implicit in that hope was an often expressed wish and commitment to be of help and to work together with the new superintendent to move the school district and the community to a new level of responsiveness and success.

The new superintendent needs to be a master communicator. That is, he or she must have the ability to interact with all segments of the community. The person needs to first and foremost be a good listener, eager to understand and absorb the many different aspects of the diverse culture of Albany. In addition to being accessible and visible, the new superintendent must be approachable, must be seen as being eager and open to many different perspectives. But the new superintendent must also be able to effectively and enthusiastically represent the school district. He or she must be engaging and articulate in large group presentations or intimate conversations, in the media or in person. The new superintendent must have what were often referred to as “good people skills.”

The superintendent needs to be a good manager, able to organize and monitor the work of a complex social institution. The Board’s new Chief Executive Officer must be fluent with all of the latest research on effective educational practices and be able to establish sound priorities in an era of financial challenges.

The new leader of the City School District of Albany should have admirable personal qualities. He or she must be a person of integrity, be seen as one whose style is to be genuinely open and honest. There needs to be a quality that conveys in every way a passion for excellence and high aspiration that both invites and demands the same from others. Accountability for self and others is critical. More than one respondent said the new superintendent “needs to be tough, to be thick skinned.” Many indicated the need for a good sense of humor.

The demands on the superintendent in the City School District of Albany will be many. The hopes and expectations are very high – imagine a lightening-fast communication hub with integrity and charisma. Albany is a community eager to come together in support of its new superintendent.

Next Steps

This report will be presented to the Board of Education, and in turn shared with the members of the school community. After confirming with the Board the understandings that bear upon recruitment, the consultants will review applications received in response to national advertising, and – importantly in a search for this position in Albany – will undertake confidential outreach to potentially strong candidates who have not applied. The aim is to present the Board with a strong slate of potential semi-finalists by early winter, allowing time for the Board’s subsequent steps to unfold toward the choice of the next City School District of Albany’s Superintendant with an orderly transition of leadership not later than July 1, 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

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STRENGTHS OF THE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALBANY

CONSISTENT

Dedicated administrators, faculty and staff
Depth and breath of program/curricula
Diversity
Facilities
Proximity to state education department, state government, colleges and universities
Size of district
Strong core of involved parents and community members

BOARD

Board ready to break with traditional way of operating
Preschool program
Very strong dedicated and committed administrative cabinet
Workable size of district to meet the needs of its students

ADMINISTRATORS

Board's focus on instruction
Cohesive cabinet
Embedded and ongoing professional development
Extra curricula offerings

FACULTY

AP/IB, National Urban Alliance (NUA) programs
Community partnerships
Comprehensive professional development
Excellent leadership from administrators
Faculty that has learned to do more with less
Strong relationship between teachers and the students
Students
Wide variety of after school classes and activities
Willingness to investigate and use new teaching methods

SUPPORT STAFF

NUA training for staff
Rapport with the community
Remedial and support services
Work and career opportunities

STRENGTHS OF THE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALBANY (CONTINUED)

STUDENTS

Lots of good electives
Many different opportunities
No requirements to go into AP courses

PARENTS/COMMUNITY

Academic offerings at the high school
Dual language program
Good communication between the schools and the parents
Internships/career curricula
Level of special services
Magnet schools
Multicultural resources
Small classes at the elementary schools
Students have the opportunity to succeed
Well run Pre-K programs

ISSUES/NEEDS/CONCERNS OF THE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALBANY

CONSISTENT

Evaluating the alternative education programs – number of programs - effectiveness
Charter schools – need to attract students to the public schools, drain resources
Declining enrollment
Graduation rates
Highly political environment - inability of District and city to work together for the children
Improve academics for all while closing the achievement gap
Perception of community – image of schools, public relations

BOARD

Escalation of violence in city spilling into schools
Need more alternative education programs
Need more focus on the high school
Need more partnering with community, i.e. Harlem Children Zone
Update and implement the strategic plan
Vague goals – need more management evaluation of program

ADMINISTRATORS

Graduation rate
Increasing need to do more with money
Need to get strategic plan out to constituencies
Promote academic rigor at all levels
Size of Albany High School

FACULTY

Accepting mediocrity as excellence
Availability of resources to enhance education
Class sizes in the middle schools and high school
Consistent enforcement of policies across schools
Embracing technology in all the schools
Insufficient funds for proper training for programs
Lack of teamwork within the schools
Motivating students
Open lines of communication between teachers and administrators
Parental involvement
Providing equal facilities and materials regardless of socio-economic status
Safety/student behavior/discipline
Students having to deal with outside difficulties that affect their ability to focus
Truancy

ISSUES/NEEDS/CONCERNS OF THE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALBANY (CONTINUED)

SUPPORT STAFF

Building rapport between all staff
Maintaining and expanding our educational programs
Some parents do not trust school staff
Student behavior
Transient student population

STUDENTS

Class management
Grades are not weighted
Lack of accountability of teachers at the middle and high schools
Lack of parking
More money should go to athletics and the arts – look at how resources are allocated
Too little time between classes – hall sweeps – all day suspension

PARENTS/COMMUNITY

Better communication between parents and teachers – more consistent, more often
Class management
Consistent curriculum implementation
Drop out rate
Equity of resources between schools
Gangs/violence
Hold students and staff to higher expectations
Maintenance at high school
Need alternative education programs
Need more African-American teachers as role models for students
Need more music opportunities at elementary level
Not enough funds for students' needs
Not enough parental and community involvement
Overcrowding at high school
Size of the high school
Staff and faculty need to take ownership of mission
Transportation - flexibility
Test scores
Renewing confidence in public education
Reputation

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

CONSISTENT

Ability to listen to all stakeholders
Accessible and visible
Collaborative but decisive
Comfortable dealing with issues of race
Commitment to Albany
Creative – offers innovative ideas
Educational leader with urban experience
Effective communicator
Excellent communication skills
Good listener, open minded
People skills – can bring different groups together
Success in closing the achievement gap
Transparent

BOARD

Enjoys working with the community and city officials
Great manager
Independent thinker – do what's right for all our children
Passion for educating all students
Thick skinned

ADMINISTRATORS

Ability to empower and motivate others
Ability to frame, analyze and solve problems with assistance from the staff
Can determine which battles to fight
Classroom experience in an urban setting
Experience working with a board and defining roles
Genuine
Good fit
Good sense of humor
Holds people accountable
Humanitarian
Research based
Trust in administrators' abilities

FACULTY

Ability to connect with staff and other constituencies
Ability to make and enforce change
Accessible
Embrace technology in the schools
Fair, consistent
Honest, has integrity
Pushes for academic excellence

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (CONTINUED)

FACULTY (CONTINUED)

Strong presence – can stand up to media
Support for music and arts as well as core academics
Team builder
Visionary
Willingness to listen and work with faculty

SUPPORT STAFF

Establish positive relationship with city and BOE
Good with follow through
Kind
Love for kids/compassionate to staff
Inspirational
Open door policy
Visible

STUDENTS

Ability to connect with the community
Assertive
More attentive to students
Open communication with the school community

PARENTS/COMMUNITY

Believes in the importance of the arts
Charismatic
Committed to building a better community, better relations with the city
Demonstrated ability to identify and solve institutional problems
Energetic
Holds people accountable
Knowledgeable
Listens to parental concerns/needs
Passion for children and educational improvement
Politically adept
Sense of humor
Strong leader who garners respect
Thinks outside the box
Understands the needs and mission of each school in the district
Visionary
Willingness to explore a variety of solutions to improve the system
