

**BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS**

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

For Position of
Assistant Superintendent of
Special Education Services

Submitted November 6, 2009 by:

Dr. John P. Connolly
Dr. Albert F. Argenziano

HAZARD, YOUNG, ATTEA & ASSOCIATES, Ltd.
1151 Waukegan Road, Glenview, IL 60025
847-724-8465 FAX: 847-724-8467

Leadership Profile Report

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates on October 19 and 20, 2009. After the School Superintendent selected HYA to be the consultant in the search for a new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services, an assessment form was prepared to solicit input to assist the Superintendent in identifying the characteristics and experiences desired in the new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services. At the same time, the Superintendent identified a number of individuals and groups who were invited to meet with the consultants to discuss these issues in greater depth.

The Leadership Profile instrument was given to all individuals and groups who had been identified to meet with the consultants. In addition, the form was widely distributed to parents, staff and community members at meetings scheduled on October 19 and 20, 2009. In addition, on October 19, 2009, an evening meeting was held to further solicit participation and input from interested members of the public. More than 250 parents, teachers, administrators, support staff, students and community members of Boston filled in questionnaires and/or participated in the interviews, group sessions or the evening public forum. Information collected in these meetings and from completed questionnaires constituted the data on which this report is based.

In collecting data for the Leadership Profile, the consultants sought opinions on the strengths of the Boston Special Education Program, the challenges or issues facing the Boston Schools and the characteristics and skills which the new Assistant

Superintendent should possess. At the interviews and meetings, the consultants noted that the Superintendent was seeking the views of a broad range of individuals to assist in the search process. It was agreed that the consultants would report their findings to the Superintendent without revealing the identity of any individual contributor.

The assessment instrument which was used to solicit responses provides the framework for this report. The instrument as well as the interviews and group meetings focused on three questions. The first asks respondents to discuss the strengths of the Boston Special Education Department. The second asks about the challenges or issues facing the Boston Special Education Department. The third asks the respondents to share their views about the characteristics and skills which they would like to see in the new Assistant Superintendent.

The following sections of this Profile report on the data collected for each of the three questions posed. Under the title "Consistent" we have reported comments which were frequently heard from many individuals or groups. Comments heard less frequently are listed under each of the six categories of respondents (Faculty, Administrators, Support Staff, Students, Parents and Community Members). Under each of these groups, the comments heard or submitted with some regularity are listed. It should be noted that the data are not a scientific sampling, nor should they be viewed as representing the majority opinion of a group. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they were repeated by a sufficient number of respondents to warrant Superintendent's attention.

We commend the Boston Superintendent of Schools for her efforts to include a comprehensive range of stakeholders in the development of the Leadership Profile. We also commend Jocelyn Wright for her professional and capable manner in which the many stakeholders were contacted and the logistical arrangements which were made for the many focus groups.

Dr. John Connolly

Dr. Albert F. Argenziano

Executive Summary

The information obtained from the interviews, focus groups, public forum and completed survey forms reflect a range of thinking about the Boston Public Schools and the characteristics and skills needed by the new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services. There was broad and impressive agreement, however, on the major strengths of the Special Education Program. One was a large variety of Special Education offerings available to meet different student needs. A second area of agreement was the outstanding inclusion models in some schools, which need to be replicated and expanded throughout the district. A third area of strength was the dedicated staff in Special Education, who possessed deep knowledge and experience in Special Education laws, regulations, guidelines and least restrictive environment protocols.

When discussing the challenges or issues which will confront the new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services, there were also areas of broad agreement. The two most commonly cited were improved communication with parents and equity of services to all students. Another issue of concern was the need for regular, ELL and Special Education programs to be more aligned, and to reduce the number of transitions which students now experience.

Reviewing a community's list of the attributes and expertise desired in a new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services is always daunting for the consultants. The list usually defines a person of almost super qualities. While that is

certainly true for the input we received on this question in Boston, there is some consensus about the most important qualities the district would to see. All groups we met with felt strongly that the new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services must be a good listener and communicator. There is a strong desire for leadership that listens well and communicates well with all stakeholders. In concert with these characteristics, visibility in the community and the schools was rated highly, and commitment to the Boston Public Schools and to educating the whole child, a collaborative leadership style, a visionary with knowledge of Special Education laws and regulations. The person should also possess the highest level of honesty and integrity.

After compiling the data for this report, it is clear to the consultants that Boston is a school district with considerable community support and a great deal of pride in its philosophy and programs. It is a district with a strong teaching faculty and staff that are serving its students to the best of their ability. It is the consultants' job to find a group of candidates for consideration by the Superintendent of Schools who possess the attributes the community desires and the skills needed to build on the Superintendent of Schools' strategic plan and to move the district to the next level. We look forward to this task with confidence that the Boston Public Schools will have some excellent candidates from which to choose its new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services.

Strengths of the Boston Public Schools

Special Education Department

Consistent Across All Groups

- A large variety of Special Education offerings to meet different student needs.
- School placement flexibility
- Dedicated teaching staff
- Some excellent inclusion models which must be expanded to all schools
- Professional Development programs which cover the broad base of disabilities serviced in the Boston Public Schools
- Deep knowledge and experience of District staff in Special Education laws, regulations, guidelines and least restrictive environment protocols

Faculty

- Small class sizes
- Quality staff and therapists
- Diversity of programs tailored to students
- Availability of technology
- Transportation of students
- Bilingual specialists

Administrators

- Support of Superintendent of Schools to elevate the importance of the position and willingness to make change in the Special Education Department
- The inclusion programs at the Lyons and Henderson Schools
- Post high school readiness options for students with disabilities
- Strong alternative assessment programs
- Mainstream secondary education opportunities for Special Education students who are substantially separate from the regular student population

Parents/Community Members

- Small class sizes
- Quality staff and therapists
- Some strong inclusion models which need to be expanded to all schools
- Special Education parent advisory groups do outstanding work
- Excellent salaries allow the Boston Public Schools to recruit the best staff available

Students

- Strong, trusting, experienced staff
- Small class sizes
- Flexibility of programs
- Safe environment to learn

Challenges Facing the Boston Public Schools

Special Education Department

Question #2 – What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges or issues facing this District?

Consistent Across All Groups

- Transitions for Special Education students are far too many in number
- Need more programs at the neighborhood schools
- Isolation of Special Education students
- Timeliness of Individual Education Programs needs to be improved
- Improved graduation rates of Special Education students
- Improved communication with parents
- Equity of services to all students
- Integration of curriculum; regular education, ELL and Special Education need to be more aligned
- More inclusion programs throughout the school district

Faculty

- Overpopulation of black and Latino males in Special Education
- District wide accountability of services
- Special Education Department does not properly define services; there is a lack of transparency
- Department needs a collective inclusive spirit

- High level of autistic students on increase
- Early identification of students

Administrators

- The movement of students in .4 school programs into less restrictive settings
- More preventive behavioral support in the schools
- District wide vision and support of Central Office for improvement of the Special Education Department
- Better and innovative ways of communicating information to parents
- Need for a systematic student intake and transfer process

Students

- More availability of after school programs
- More vocational offerings
- More electives, i.e., Art, Music and Drama

Parents/Community Members

- Lack of early intervention
- Culture is more adversarial than collaborative in nature
- More accurate information communicated to parents
- Need to lower dropout rate
- Insufficient inclusion programs throughout the district
- ELL students are over identified

- Accountability needs to be strengthened
- Need to better handle parent complaints

Leadership Attributes and Expertise of the
Boston Public Schools Special Education Department

Question #3: Please share two or three characteristics which you would like to see in the new Assistant Superintendent of Special Education Services

Consistent Across All Groups

- Good listener – seeks input from parents, administration and staff, open to feedback, approachable and accessible, listens to students (Note: Listening skills were cited by all groups as paramount. One respondent said it this way, “the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education Services needs to help people feel like their voices matter in decision making.”)
- Communication Skills
- Understanding of and commitment to the Boston Public Schools and its staff, parents, students and the community
- Visibility in the schools and in the community
- Fiscal management expertise
- Innovation
- Collaborative leadership style
- Honesty and integrity
- Visionary

- Knowledge of Special Education laws and regulations

Faculty

- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment in the areas of regular, ELL and Special Education
- Believes in the bottom up model of change rather than a top down model
- Strong belief in educating the whole child
- Ability to see the big picture
- Decisive, visionary, and collaborative
- Previous experience in an urban setting with diverse needs and population

Administrators

- Supportive of teachers and administrators
- Understands the educational needs of the 21st century
- Effective management skills
- Flexibility
- Ability to make tough decisions
- Good interpersonal skills
- Knowledge and experience in labor relations
- Urban school experience

Students

- A caring leader
- Understands Special Education

- Willing to have assemblies to speak with students
- Confident

Parents/Community Members

- Concern for all learners
- Strong organizational skills
- Independent thinker
- Has a vision for the future
- Risk taker
- Strong work ethic
- Ability to hire and retain quality teachers
- Hold district and staff accountable
- Parents want to be respected with civility and candor
- International in character
- Experience, passion, empathy
- Advocate for inclusion
- Proven track record in a similar urban setting
- Open dialogue with Special Education Parent Advisory Councils

