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Dare County Schools Nags Head, North Carolina District Stakeholder Input

Executive Summary

On March 8, 9 and 10, 2017 McPherson & Jacobson consultants had the privilege of conducting school/community stakeholder sessions to gather input regarding the selection of a new superintendent for Dare County Schools. A total of 136 invitations were sent—127 through email and 9 through USPS mail. The team of consultants met with 13 small Stakeholder Groups and 3 large Stakeholder Groups for a total of 16 meetings. The small and large Stakeholder sessions were held at Manteo High School Auditorium, Cape Hatteras Secondary School Media Center, and First Flight High School Media Center. In addition, input was received from telephone interviews, emails from stakeholders who were not available during the time the consultants were in Dare County Schools, and from the online survey available in English and Spanish. Each group was asked to respond to the four questions noted in bold below. Consultants provided a review of the timeline and selection process and stakeholders were given the opportunity to ask questions of the search consultants.

Consistent themes and ideas across stakeholder groups are captured in the Executive Summary below. Following the Executive Summary is a complete record of responses recorded for all stakeholder sessions as well as those submitted by telephone and electronically. In order to ensure honest input, no participants are named in order to maintain our promise of confidentiality.

1. What makes your community a good place to live?

Dare County Schools range from Duck to Cape Hatteras in North Carolina and provide high-quality academic instruction, rigor and support each school day. The diverse area supports a resort environment with close-knit communities where families live in neighborhoods and enjoy the feel of a safe small town. The socio-economic diversity of students represents a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The resort area is very welcoming to people and supports a variety of seasonal employment opportunities. The area offers a beach community with both a relaxed lifestyle as well as an active lifestyle with array of sports activities, a rich Arts program, accessibility to trails, both walking and biking trails while being surrounded by historical monuments and many parks, including a Cape Hatteras National Park. The area provides access to higher education for high school students through a strong partnership with Albemarle Community College enabling dual enrollment. There is strong civic pride in

the community where people are vitally interested in the best interest of kids. The business community is incredibly supportive of the schools and donates hundreds of thousands of dollars of money for scholarships. The Dare Education Foundation plays a vital role in assisting families and students to help students remain competitive in the global marketplace. The community and business leaders maintain a strong commitment to the schools with both volunteerism as well as with philanthropic endeavors.

2. What makes Dare County Schools a good school district – for students and staff?

Dare County Schools are staffed by caring, passionate faculty, administrators, and support personnel, focused on the students' welfare. The schools throughout the county each have an individual identity and unique programs. There is excellent support for the budget by the Dare County Commissioners and mutually respectful collaboration between the commissioners and the Dare County Board of Education.

The county funds gifted education in each school building. Twenty-five percent of the teachers are paid through local county funds; otherwise those teachers would not be funded based upon the North Carolina state formula. The facilities are good and well maintained. The staff is highly dedicated to create a successful environment for children. Both parents and teachers have high expectations of students. Teachers and staff genuinely care about the students and have a *must do* attitude—always willing to help students and families in need. Teachers truly impact students through their focus on teaching and learning.

There is great accessibility to nature thus allowing for many creative programs and courses. There is affordable teacher housing available. The Parent Teacher Associations are strong, providing time, talent and financial resources to schools.

3. What are the issues the new superintendent should be aware of as she or he comes into the district?

A prevailing issue across all stakeholder groups is communication. A perceived lack of follow-through on decisions and lack of transparency around decisions erodes confidence in the efficacy of those decisions.

The community is not as wealthy as it appears. Many students and families have great needs. Small class sizes are important.

There is a multi-generational drug epidemic among both students and parents. The school needs to work in partnership with community agencies and parents to tackle this issue. Parents of all economic levels need to feel welcome and invited to address the drug issue as well as other issues.

There are about 150 homeless students living in the district along with a number of undocumented people living in the district.

The community is very involved and engaged. People expect results when they raise issues. There is a need to understand that there are three diverse areas of the school district. Due to the fact that the needs of the three school campuses differ, there is a desire to have them treated differently in accordance with their unique needs rather than being treated with a one-size fits all approach.

The student population is very transient in and out of the county. This transience of student population impacts state assessment results.

Due to the large geographic size of the district more classes need to be offered virtually. However, the technology infrastructure in the schools needs to be updated in order to offer more virtual classes. With approximately 50% of the students in the county

qualifying for free or reduced lunch, assistance needs to be provided for families to connect with the school using technology.

There are limited vocational classes and a nonexistent work-study program. The school needs to cooperate with local businesses to provide internship and work study opportunities for students.

There is a perception that when students disrupt classes there are no consequences. Thus, teachers must be provided support for dealing with classroom discipline issues. The student discipline code must be enforced consistently.

There is a need to understand the changing political climate at the federal level and the impact of vouchers and charter schools from the United States Department of Education.

There is an untapped resource of retired people living within the community who would like to be involved in helping the school district. It will be important to involve them in assisting students in the learning process.

A positive relationship with private pre-schools exists throughout the county. These pre-schools work cooperatively with the schools in helping students to be ready for kindergarten. This positive working relationship needs to continue and to expand.

There is a reluctance to re-district; yet some schools have no available space while other schools have empty classrooms.

Due to the varied nature of the weather and geography, there is a need to individualize the school calendar since weather often forces the closing of schools in one area while other schools in the school district are unaffected.

4. What skills, qualities and characteristics will the new superintendent need in order to be successful in Dare County Schools?

Dare County stakeholders want an excellent communicator who builds trust with the staff and within the while promoting opportunities for communication between and among schools, parents and all groups.

The stakeholders want a person who possesses classroom teaching experience as well as prior superintendent experience and is technologically competent. The individual needs to be a leader in curriculum and staff development and someone who is versed in cutting edge technology and makes it available for students to implement.

The stakeholders want the new superintendent to be an active and engaged problem solver. There needs to be a vital, respectful, and ongoing working relationship with the teachers so that problems are addressed in a straightforward manner.

The new superintendent needs to be student centered, to understand and use data, and be clear and transparent in presenting that data.

The stakeholders believe that a superintendent should be an *outsider* with a fresh perspective in order to advance the district from the status quo. The individual needs to find creative and viable solutions despite limited funding.

The new superintendent needs to be an advocate in Raleigh for the region and students and needs to stay connected with North Carolina superintendents.

The stakeholders want a team builder who will leverage all community resources to benefit students and families. The new superintendent needs to ensure that the culture of the school values, appreciates, and supports teachers and students.

The new superintendent needs to inspire teachers and students.

It is expected that the new superintendent will be able to clearly communicate why decisions are made and how those decisions support educational excellence and educational equity throughout the district.

The new superintendent needs to be a visionary leader who makes difficult decisions based on data to advance academic excellence and equity within the district and one who leads by example.

Stakeholders want the new superintendent to be visible both in the schools and in the community. It is important that the new superintendent be committed to remain within the community to embrace the changes while serving as an advocate for meeting the needs of each child. The new superintendent needs to create a culture where learning is valued and interruptions are minimized.

The Stakeholders want a leader with intestinal fortitude who is not afraid to do what is right for all children. The new superintendent must be capable of building a winning team.

It follows that the new superintendent needs to be a “people person” who is approachable, friendly and encourages honest dialogue. Stakeholders desire an energetic leader who wants to build a career in the district. Possessing the ability to collaborate with community leaders and maintaining a positive working relationship with all staff is also a requirement for the new superintendent.