



Alexandria City Public Schools LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in September 2017 for the new superintendent of the Alexandria City Public Schools. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	9	NA
Administrators	58	36
Teachers and/or other licensed staff	7	106
Support Staff	18	39
Students	22	17
Parents of students attending ACPS	29	989
Community Members	40	56
Total	183	1243

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report.

It should be emphasized that the data are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Board's attention.

Strengths of the District

History and Location

Alexandria City, incorporated three years after independence in 1779, has been central to the development of American democracy. Since its beginning, Alexandria has played a pivotal role in social justice, being home to both the largest slave-trading firm in the country yet also having a large free-black community. In 1862, Virginia's first high school for African Americans, Beulah Normal and Theological School, opened in Alexandria. There is justifiable pride in Alexandria's unique history around race and equity

The participants in many focus groups, both citizens of Alexandria and ACPS staff, continue to celebrate the diversity of this community and consider it the city's greatest strength. Alexandria residents include many highly educated people who contribute their expertise to the good of the community. Community members and city staff promote equity and opportunity for all who live in Alexandria. The community supports education and the arts, and ACPS has forged committed partnerships with exceptional non-profit organizations that provide many resources to its schools (i.e., pre-school, after-school programs, curriculum enhancements). Alexandria citizens have high expectations for quality services, and value the city's small-town atmosphere within an urban environment.

Commitment and Resources

The recently developed strategic plan has the support of stakeholders. Many participants want to keep what has been put in place and build on it, rather than starting over. This work is seen as a positive step toward establishing clear objectives with accountability that has been lacking in the past. Students, staff and others talked about the commitment of teachers and administrators to ensuring the success of ACPS. The work ethic in the district is strong, and staff is committed to making sure every child succeeds. The framework that the strategic plan provides is a way for the district to focus its efforts on common goals.

Even though the school budget has been declining in per pupil amounts, the resources available were frequently mentioned as a strength. Technology integration was hailed by students (who all had Chromebooks), and their only concern was that some parts of the facilities have slow Wi-Fi. Social Workers and counselors enjoy favorable student loads, and class sizes are also

controlled through hard caps. There was general acknowledgement that Alexandria has been comparatively “resource rich.”

Alexandria City and ACPS are committed to working together for all children. The size of the city and the school district makes it easier for leaders to have an impact in Alexandria than in the larger jurisdictions in the region. Each and every focus group expressed a commitment to making ACPS succeed and a willingness to support positive change. It is rare to see such a diverse and urban community speak with such pride and hope for their public-school system.

Programs and Offerings

Neighborhood elementary schools with specialized programs, STEM offerings, an International Academy for ELL students, a well-regarded JROTC program at T.C., and other programs make for a rich environment meeting the diverse set of needs of ACPS students. ACPS has been at the forefront of educational reform with technology, a ninth-grade campus and parent resources such as interpretation in multiple languages as well as child care for parents attending school functions. Opportunities for innovation and enrichment are valued by the community and staff.

ACPS Staff

Students were effusive about the commitment of their teachers and counselors. The international academy staff in particular was singled out for praise. Students also talked about counselors and other school personnel who had made a difference for them. High school students recognized that the TC Williams staff provides a wide choice of courses and activities that develop their strengths and support their interests. Principals and teachers were praised by parents as quality educators who are dedicated to their schools and to their students. TC students appreciate the work that the new principal is doing to improve the school.

Dr. Alvin Crawley also received praise from many different types of focus group participants for taking over ACPS at a difficult time and righting it back to a steady and improving state. He modeled integrity, fairness and respect for others, qualities that earned him genuine appreciation.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

Central Office Operations and Communications

Central, school and city staff all reported issues with the functioning of the ACPS central office. The turnover of superintendents has impacted work at this level. The central office lacks focus, unity and alignment with the schools, as well as ongoing communications problems among different levels (leadership, middle management, support) and among departments. A lack of systemic protocols and procedures was also reported. The “chain of command” was frequently cited as keeping principals out of the communication loop with the superintendent. Dr. Lois Berlin has recognized this issue and is making superintendent contact more accessible.

The knowledge and work-ethic of the staff at the central level were generally acknowledged. In fact, people at this level work very long hours and feel significant pressure. However, the culture in the central office has created divisions and “silos” that impede progress, create confusion and may actually increase the workload. School leaders often act independently of central office, which in some cases is appropriate, but also leads to inconsistencies that are not always seen as positive, especially when differences are viewed as disparities that could impact student achievement.

Curriculum, instruction and testing

ACPS is making positive progress in terms of school accreditation and overall test results. However, stakeholders noted inconsistencies in the delivery of Special Education services, with serious compliance issues at some schools. The over-emphasis on testing is a real concern of staff, community and students. More hands-on, engaging, career oriented, creative and meaningful learning opportunities are desired. High school students recognize that all the testing they have experienced will not prepare them for a future that requires skills in communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking in order to be successful.

Diversity, equity, disparity

The divide between families in poverty, who comprise the majority of families accessing public schools in Alexandria, and the affluent residents of Alexandria results in a “haves vs have-nots” tension in the school district. Stakeholders acknowledge that Alexandria City leaders and citizens have a genuine desire to provide quality schools and equity of opportunity for all students, but this is not always the reality. Schools with higher percentages of poverty, ELL and Special Ed students have greater needs and experience less success than schools where students are more advantaged. TAG and Honors programs that further divide students exacerbate the inequity. The lower per pupil funding provided by the City in recent years is making it more difficult to meet the resource needs of all students.

Facilities—capacities, maintenance, repair, cleaning, project management

Many buildings have repair needs ranging from roof leaks to HVAC issues. School-staff noted that ongoing issues with facilities are not taken care of by facilities personnel and often fall on school-based administrators to correct. Levels of cleanliness in buildings vary from school to school, but overall cleaning needs to improve.

ACPS is facing critical capacity issues, especially the looming problem of over-crowding at the high school level. This capacity issue must be addressed, and the solution needs to be crafted in a process that provides opportunities for community input and buy-in. Scarce and expensive land and the questionable educational soundness of 5,000+ students in one high school setting are among the especially difficult aspects of this challenge. The intensely loyal T.C. Williams staff, students, and alumni, as well as Alexandria citizens who are proud of the legacy of T.C., all have strong opinions about how the high school capacity issue should be solved—but it MUST be solved.

The City of Alexandria is now making substantial investment in school facilities. City leaders recognize the high school capacity problem and are willing to explore solutions. At the same time, city officials lack confidence in the ability of ACPS to manage this investment competently. Re-building confidence and trust between ACPS and the city staff is essential as they must work together to successfully solve the facilities challenges confronting Alexandria.

Community perceptions

Alexandria Public Schools has enjoyed the support of the community as reflected in adequate funding over many years. However, many citizens, often those without children in the schools, openly share negative perceptions of ACPS. While support and loyalty are expressed by some in the community for the neighborhood elementary schools, and for the legacy and history that T.C. represents, the community does not always express pride in its schools and in the students who attend them. Many citizens are critical of the schools, especially middle schools. Staff notes that community members sometimes have an overly idealized view of the past, without recognizing that many current students are actually achieving at much higher levels in a more demanding and competitive environment than students experienced in the past.

Characteristics of a new superintendent

Communicator and collaborator

ACPS desires a strong communicator and collaborator who can create an open work environment in the central office and throughout the district. He or she must be able to break down silos and department divisions, facilitate sharing of best practices, and build relationships and trust.

Experienced, innovative instructional leader

The new superintendent should be an experienced educator and skilled instructional leader, grounded in a whole child philosophy and committed to closing achievement gaps and providing for the needs of a diverse student population. He or she should focus on teaching and learning with clear and consistent instructional priorities and goals. The superintendent must identify what all schools must do the same and when they can be different. He or she will also need to incorporate 21st century skills into the curriculum, and develop career paths for both the college bound and non-college bound students.

Operations and management ability

The superintendent will need to possess either deep experience and skill in operations and management, or the ability to create a leadership team/cabinet with skills in the areas of finance, facilities, operations and project management. Improvement in these areas will allow the new superintendent to earn the confidence of City colleagues and community leaders.

Strong, respected and committed to Alexandria

ACPS desires a strong, courageous, student-centered leader who will stand up for what is right. He or she must be well respected and have the ability to build consensus in a highly politically

charged urban environment. Because of the current capacity challenges that require bold thinking and action, the superintendent will have to secure the unwavering support of the School Board and forge constructive relationships with Alexandria City leaders.

The new superintendent must value and respect the positive history of Alexandria and ACPS. ACPS expects its new leader to make a long-term commitment to this position.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the district. The search team will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Alexandria Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and communities.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and the Alexandria City Public Schools staff members who assisted with our meetings, Dr. Lois Berlin, Interim Superintendent, and especially School Board Clerk Jennifer Abbruzzese and Deputy Clerk Susan Neilson who organized the search team's time in the district.

Respectfully,

Brad Draeger

Ann Monday

Summary of Consistently-Reported Themes

Bullets are listed in alphabetical order and not by priority

Strengths

- Community - location; unique history around race and equity; values education, supports the arts; active, committed partnerships that provide many resources
- Diversity!
- Manageable size
- Neighborhood elementary schools: strong connections to families and communities
- Overall academic foundation sound
- Resources: comparatively well-funded; technology
- School staff works hard to support students, address achievement and relate to a diverse community
- Small town atmosphere in urban environment
- Staff: well-respected, talented educators; knowledgeable, dedicated
- Strategic Plan provides a positive, consistent framework

Challenges

- Central office: functions and communication need to improve
- City officials lack confidence in the ability of ACPS to manage facilities investment
- Diversity, equity, disparity: Alexandria City leaders and citizens have a genuine desire to provide quality schools and equity of opportunity for all students, but this is not always the reality
- Facilities, capacity: buildings need cleaning, maintenance and repair
- Facility capacity issues, especially the looming, critical problem of over-crowding at TC
- Lack of systemic district-wide protocols and procedures
- Lower per-pupil funding provided by the city in recent years is making it more difficult to meet the needs of all students.
- Over-emphasis on testing is a real concern of staff, community and students.
- Perceptions/image of ACPS: many citizens are openly critical of the schools
- Programs and career paths are needed for the both college and non-college bound students
- School leaders often act independently of central office
- Stakeholders noted inconsistencies in delivery of Special Education services
- Turnover and style changes of superintendents has impacted ACPS
- Unity and alignment of programs among the schools

Characteristics

- Breaks down silos and department divisions: facilitates sharing of best practices
- Builds relationships and trust
- Commits to ACPS for a long tenure to make enduring change
- Communicator, collaborative: creates an open work environment
- Competent in fiscal management
- Consistent: clearly identifies what all schools must do the same and when they can be different
- Earns the confidence of city colleagues and community leaders
- Educator/skilled instructional leader; with a commitment to closing achievement gaps and providing for the needs of a diverse student population; focuses on teaching and learning
- Facilitates experience or the ability to attract, develop and retain talent in those areas
- Innovative, future-oriented: makes sure that students are prepared for their futures with the skills they need
- Operations and management ability: can bring order and coherence to operations
- Optimistic
- Respected by all, especially the Alexandria City officials, the ACPS staff and the community
- Strong, courageous, student-centered leader
- Values and respects all that is positive about Alexandria and ACPS

Summary of Comments from Focus Group Meetings

Focus groups and interviews were held on September 11, 21 and 27, 2017

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do stakeholders value regarding the schools? What strengths do they desire to retain and build upon?
- What are the issues this District currently faces, and, will face in the next three to five years?
- What personal and professional characteristics are expected in a new Superintendent?

Bullets are listed in alphabetical order and not by priority

Slash marks (/) indicate intensity, how often items were mentioned

ACPS Board Members

9 Participants

Strengths:

- ACPS has a lot going well
- Alexandria City—very attractive to the next generation if we can offer a strong school system
- Alexandria is an open and accepting community
- Amazing teachers—mostly
- Appreciative of paying for quality service—ACPS will stay competitive because we recognize the value of high salaries
- Attractive system to work for
- Best of the best work in ACPS
- Capacity and facilities—need to modernize facilities as well as new schools—demographers say 7-10 years of increasing enrollment
- College readiness—part of minority—parents going to college—in poverty—as defined by SAT—a student with all three is in the lowest percentile for readiness
- Communication is strong—fewer silos—superintendent will be welcomed into any discussion
- Community engagement and interest
- Community engagement and support: high expectations from highly educated citizens and non-profits; support for families, i.e., parks and rec (child care), metro public transportation,
- Community is committed to ACPS

- Community is still working through what equality means—what do students need to have equity
- Community members threatened by the recent political events (DACA)—still feel highly regarded by Alexandria and ACPS
- Community that any person who is interest can play a significant role in the development of the city
- Continue to close gaps in achievement
- Coordinate better with city services
- Dialogue about college with students at risk—how to communicate and create expectations
- Diversity—ethnically, racially, socio economically, linguistic, cultural, global values of accepting diversity—the more open we are—ACPS will have more success //
- ELL is very strong—but it requires casework
- Foundation been built to target and serve at-risk students: some schools succeeding with at risk students, hitting state benchmarks in high poverty schools; district recognizes the need to support families in poverty and ELL /
- Funding good comparatively
- Great place to live
- History of Alexandria is a strength—contributions to the genesis of the country, the civil war and the civil rights struggle
- Home visit—need to expand
- Interesting moment of time—families are moving back to cities
- International Academy
- Is a 2nd high school in the future? —Conversation must engage the community
- Keep educating community on the differences between equity and equality
- Living in Alexandria—very respected, you’ll have influence and voice
- Location: access to DC, to people, programs and ideas
- Opportunity: good size for piloting and rolling out programs, managing growth; new superintendent can affect change and see growth soon
- People have a choice where to live—People choose ACPS because of the diversity
- Proximity to Washington DC—visibility—high demand area for families with children
- Resources are available with many opportunities /
- SB is not a bunch of crazies—SB is grounded in the wealth of ACPS
- Share resources with the community—not everyone understands what is all available
- Small size and easy layout—transportation is excellent
- Staff: young, up and coming leaders at schools and central levels; good central office staff, hard-working; talented people, growing in skills, developing; energy - lots of devoted people who care for students //
- Strategic Plan
- Strong potential—but we’re not knocking it out of the park—continuum of leadership will help develop this potential
- Talented community members contribute through proximity and partnerships
- Taxpayers support ACPS

- White subgroup is frequently greater than 90% achievement—maintain that but raise the achievement of the underserved non-achieving students

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Achievement gap is rarely discussed at SB meetings. 60% free and reduced lunch impact
- ACPS does not keep up to date on working with students at risks
- ACPS needs to develop their own leaders—treat people well and support them and great leaders will evolve
- ACPS sometimes wants to act rural—it doesn't fit our reality—we hire with the rural mentality and that doesn't fit the actual classroom experience—white middle class rural students are not the majority for which many of our hires are best suited
- Active community members—representing different factions—socio economic, special needs, GT, ethnic, etc.—all feel that there is a zero-sum game involved—focusing on one group diminishes all other groups
- Adjusting to redistricting—most is set to go—but decisions about programs and bussing still to be decided
- Board does not stay in their lanes—or have a positive reputation in the community
- Board gets too involved when they don't see communication about progress
- Board is seeking a course correction—Board was kept at arm's length—help the Board stay in their lane and make them more effective that way
- Budget challenges: high cost to do needed facility improvements, address over-crowding
- Climate—parents feel their kids don't count
- Comfortable with diversity of community and can communicate with the diverse community
- Community doesn't always recognize the great things about ACPS
- Community engagement and interest create challenges
- Community: does not understand and support what is needed to address needs of all at-risk students; weak support from some aspects of community for enduring change - want immediate change, but not to do what it takes to make the changes
- Competition—funding—more resources—which group gets the funding //
- Conversations about ACPS sometimes omits the positive
- Cultural competency is beyond white/black
- Difficult to show standardized progress with so many different subgroups
- Diversity is a challenge as an educator - some people are scared of diversity ///
- Enrollment growth until 2026
- Equity for all at risk populations - poverty (60% FRM), high % ESOL, Spec Ed (not necessarily high numbers, but needs not being met); inequity in schools by neighborhood - i.e., west end vs east end middle schools - course offerings, student activities, student academic performance
- Expand relationships with City Council and City Manager
- Experienced superintendent or large school system assistant/deputy superintendents

- Facilities - capacity: student enrollment growing in the areas of the city where there are more POV and ELL; issues have been looking for a decade, but only getting attention now
///
- Facilities - management - need to analyze what is happening operationally /
- Facilities are a mess—maintenance has been neglected—and 1,000 students over capacity
- Facilities—need to feel comfortable with leading the way—provide a vision
- Facility and capacities—Need to figure out with community—Minnie Howard—building needs to be replaced
- Facility issues taking focus from academics in community; facility/capacity issues taking disproportionate attention and resources and support from community, distracting from the core mission of academic achievement /
- Hiring great principals must be a top priority
- HR department is not strong—best teachers are missed in the hiring practices because of slowness—HR is not confidential
- Immigrant population has swirl of fear from recent political decisions
- Implementation of Strategic Plan: lack of fidelity; need evidence that the plan moves from SB and Supt/Central Office and into the schools
- Inclusion for special education wasn't well planned many years ago and parents still have confusion
- Incredible range of students with wide range of needs
- Keep doing more with less—per pupil spending is flat
- Lack of unity on SB - lack of vision
- Less than 15% of Alexandria citizens have children
- Many feel ACPS has plenty of funding—no additional funds are needed—too many comparisons to Arlington
- Many new principals—very sharp but still they are new—they need support
- Mentoring is a weakness
- Need to develop an eye for talent; attract, recruit, develop and retain
- No magic programs—stick to the basic tenants for successful school systems—i.e., high quality PD, staff and accountability
- Operating budget—working with City Council—tell ACPS story why funding is needed—get the message across that ACPS is running lean
- Past superintendent couldn't make decisions about personnel
- Per pupil allocation has dropped by 30% since 2008
- Principal salary scales have topped out
- Prioritize operations to a clear and realistic vision—stand fast against meddling board members and community members
- Promotes and celebrates ACPS through excellent communication
- Proven track record in areas of critical need for ACPS—communication, closing the achievement group
- Respects the research—and is respected by their peers
- Savvy political skills

- Special Ed - not where we need to be, not always compliant with law /
- Special education—scores tear us down—but that’s not the right message
- State funding is very small—burden is on local economy
- Superintendent must be able to know and coach principals—supporting principals!
- TC Williams doesn’t have an attendance policy
- TC Williams—graduating class of 1,000—does this work for everybody
- Teachers need to feel support
- Test scores—SOL’s should be at 100%
- Too many layers are in place between superintendent and principals
- Turnover: teachers in some schools; superintendent /
- Working conditions in schools are different in many schools

Desired Characteristics:

- Balanced approach: balances forcefulness; Dr. C worked with people to make changes; need to be able to confront productively, be decisive
- Board relations: can “push back”, even with SB; use Board as a tool for communication, for fighting for what is needed /
- Builds trust
- Charismatic, but not phony
- Chomping at the bit to be No. 1—someone to take ACPS into the 21st century
- Clear instructional leader—dedicated to the classroom
- Collaborative
- Committed educator who can develop the senior leadership skills
- Communicate with wide variety of audiences—Board, Senior Staff, Principals, Teachers, students, and support staff, community //
- Communication/human relations: understands the art of communicating -uses social media, knows how to campaign regarding issues and decisions, Interfaces with the community - the hyper vigilant parent as well as the parent who needs out-reach
- Curriculum expert—Board’s focus on personnel—let the superintendent focus the Board on governance—not personnel
- Data expertise
- Educator: experience as a teacher and principal, superintendent /
- Empathetic to a point—but hold people accountable to the point of changing positions
- Empathy
- Experience with diverse populations /
- Experience with facilities management: some experience with facilities, but more important to be able to deal with politics of it and managing a strong facilities team; hires and manages a strong team in facilities and operations //
- Experience with restorative justice
- Facility experience /
- Financial experience

- Focused on achievement, data-oriented: use data for planning, knows how to “move the needle” for select populations
- Help the Board develop effective methods of communication, roles and responsibilities
- High Emotional Intelligence
- HR skills: understands recruitment and retention of quality personnel; needs to establish and implement evaluation protocols; knows how to hire well and to remedy hiring mistakes; uses the existing strengths on staff, i.e. CFO, Tech, Academics, Accountability; can strengthen quality of leadership in facilities, and some areas of student services ///
- Instructional leadership ability: has a date-proven success record, “moves the needle”;
- Large urban as a No. 2—kick ass approach to make every child succeed and address the facility issues
- Listens: open door policy; will meet with stakeholders where they are
- Lover of children; talks about children, not self; was the teacher the children would want to gather around
- Manage a team and hire a team
- Management skills and experience: proven record as a manager; needs to understand operations - finance, HR, facilities //
- Moved a district from unaccredited to accredited
- Operational experience—not just vision
- Political savvy to navigate political issues. strong with community: can politic - understands political warfare //
- Positive: promotes good news
- Real leader—tough conversations
- Respect, support and accountability
- Responsible, productive: able to give attention to day-to-day work in implementing the Strategic Plan with fidelity and depth; sets clear expectations, follow through /
- Seasoned would help with Board nuances
- Sensitive to diverse needs: experience with language learners and diversity
- Special Ed background and knowledge: will hold Special Education teachers accountable; can figure out Special Education issues and act on problems; supports training for new principals in special education
- Strong with Board communications—equal access and not catering to individual Board members
- Strong, but not arrogant; does not travel with an entourage when visiting schools
- Student achievement—must have track record of moving subgroups and communicating the progress to ACPS
- Urban experience is a necessity
- Visionary

Community Organizations

22 Participants

Strengths:

- ACPS is a great challenge
- Community schools: some do a stellar job connecting to families and larger community
- Community: Alex is a wonderful place to live; active, involved parent community; small southern town that gets things done with relationships; pride, culture ///
- Cultural
- Diversity - socio-economic, cultural, ACPS capitalizes on diversity ///
- Elementary community schools provide strong identity and support
- Extremely committed faculty
- Funding: Comparatively well-funded and resourced division //
- Location
- Partnerships in the community that provide resources (after school programs, pre-school, curriculum support)
- Passionate involved parents and community members
- Program strength: outstanding programs available at all schools, even TC
- Robust amount of course offerings—HS offers
- Schools are better than the optics
- Size: a superintendent can make a big impact
- Standards for success are good
- Strategic Plan: working to imbed the 7 core objectives, benchmarks and indicators; Strategic Plan needs to be implemented, not started over (Crawley worked on this)
- Unique system - many ES, two MS, one HS

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Accountability across the system: who is making sure that students are coming to school? seniors who should be ready to graduate have serious attendance problems that were not dealt with; students believe that no one cares if they come to school since no staff follows up on chronic absences
- Achievement gap and achievement for different groups
- Best practices are not shared - ES with good practices that are not exported to other schools
- Budgetary constraints
- Bullying—because of student cultural challenges
- Capacity issues: impact learning (i.e., class size); TC overcrowding: Do we have two high schools? (Not a good plan — consider three smaller high schools) //
- Changing population: more diversity and growth
- Choice: need more paths/choices for students
- Communication from central office to schools needs to be improved
- Communication: with the broader community as well as parents
- Community expectations
- Curriculum and Instruction: too much narrow emphasis on testing, not enough on what students really need — social emotional support, arts, sports; need to engage students in non-traditional ways during the school day; many students need more engaging hands-on

learning rather than traditional classroom instruction; more opportunities for students to learn by doing; evaluate students in different ways; need for more innovative approaches; need to focus on and invest in “whole child” //

- Demographic changes; ELL population has great needs
- Disparity, from school to school and even within in schools
- Diversity is a challenge for all families—many different countries and different cultural and how to integrate
- Duality/diversity of the system: extreme socio-economic divides; must meet critical, basic needs of many students/families, while attracting affluent students/families; need to build on cultural diversity - not keep people in pockets ///
- Economic climate—preparing the students
- excel and move forward; parent involvement lacking in some populations; some parents do not understand what children need to succeed in school, esp. in these competitive schools;
- Facilities: no guiding principles have been established; too many band aids put on issues; overcrowding; City Council - ACPS issues in regard to planning/funding for facilities needs ///
- Gifted and Talented identification - some schools up to 30% GT
- History of Alex around how people can pick and choose schools
- How to keep students and parents informed about the course offerings
- Image/perception of ACPS: viewed as underperforming; community does not always see the benefits of schools; small pop of family’s access ACPS
- Implement PMIS- restorative justice
- Inconsistency and lack of clarity — constant leadership change feels like constantly starting over; lack of clear expectations for teachers! Are teachers just there to “deliver” instruction?
- Incorporating curriculum to bridge the cultural differences
- Inequity - parents of means are supplementing what is happening in schools, so their children
- Integration without assimilation
- Legacy of competition in elementary schools, -trying to break this down, but it is hard;
- loss of pride and sense of community at TC; TC school spirit is lacking - lack of support for athletics and activities; making TC the elite school it once was /
- need for more sharing among school administrators; why don’t schools share best practices? /
- Program inconsistencies: community schools allowed to differ so that some schools do not welcome certain populations, exclude students; need for core principals around treatment of students with special needs; some ES can integrate special needs students’ others not //
- Racial injustice issues — suspensions rates
- Relationships with community partners are not institutionalized so they have to be reformed with each new leader; lack of protocols for relationships with community partners; lack of consistent relationships with community partners
- Safety in the schools

- self-segregation: parents who get children where the advantages are and parents who can't or don't know how to negotiate the system; stratification begins as early as K-2 - kids don't play together, eat together; the AP and Honors classes look different from other classes; stratification of students/families becomes more apparent in MS; perception that certain groups (minorities) get less attention than others //
- Staffing: K-8 model needs to be staff correctly
- Students leave the school
- Students need to be engaged after school to avoid negative behavior
- Supports in schools—but it needs to teach the dominant group to accept student
- TC: TC becomes the “fall guy” for issues and problems that started long before students got there; Yale or Jail feels like a reality; TC students just trying to survive - need to be motivated

Desired Characteristics:

- “Whole child” as a governing philosophy; know that students emotional and social needs must be addressed in order to learn
- Advocate of pre-school: has clear goals about the need for this model
- Approachable, personable, fun, laughter (like Dr. C.) /
- Be able to transform the community
- Being able to recognize and retain talent
- Bilingual, hopefully Latino
- Builds relationships with social services providers
- Career prep experience—social class difference—value all post school options
- Clear, consistent: has a clear vision regarding the organizational culture of system; develops uniform approaches to instruction, student services and handling of critical issues
- Collaborative
- Commitment and investment in Alexandria
- Committed to equity, comfortable with diversity: can work with a diverse, varied community; will work aggressively to de-stratify the schools; experience in discussions of reconciliation ////
- Communicate the value to the citizens with no students in the schools
- Community focused
- Engages other leaders to find pathways for children to have community service and work
- Experience and be a leader in the culture of the school system
- Experience in an urban setting
- Experience: preferably as a superintendent, as a project manager
- Experienced with Pre-K12, especially Pre-K
- Focused, clear, productive: has the long view; not a new intervention, product every year; not following the next “shiny ball” in education; messaging needs to be consistent - not different each year; does not get distracted by national issues - focuses on APS; work horse not a show horse; does a couple things really, really well, rather than a few things at a mediocre level; not so many initiatives that spread resources and energy; focuses on what's important //

- Impartial ambassador
- Leadership
- Long-term growth –we want somebody on his or her way up—not on their way down in their career
- Makes sure that school principals are instructional leaders who build strong, consistent, supportive success programs
- Maximize private public partnerships
- Operational experience: knows how to handle a budget process
- Political savvy to forge relationships to get things done; can stand up for schools with CC but in a collaborative way, not confrontational ///
- Positive: cheerleader for the schools; sees problems as opportunities
- Someone dealing with levels of hierarchy willing to push it aside to get things done
- Someone who can recognize their own blind spots—fill in the holes in their skills
- Someone who engages and listens
- Strategic, problem-solver: will work to understand the dynamics of the City and schools; studies systemic problems to find what is working; builds on successes; collaborates with neighboring school divisions to employ best practices /
- Strong convictions and character, clear values, core beliefs about initiatives in education that are compatible with the community //
- Super superintendent—who can engage the students to get them involved in the community
- Superintendent needs to have deep expertise in non-college programs and career paths
- Understands the needs of a diverse population
- Visible, accessible: Dr. C attended TC band activity; visible - supports all activities - arts, drama, involved in the community /

Community Forums

29 Participants

Strengths:

- Alexandria - good place for education, values music and arts /
- All kids are accepted
- Community of Alexandria is strength—like a small town
- Connection with community lodgings and other agencies
- Diversity of culture, languages in City and schools /
- Dual Language Program
- Image and perception for parents is strong
- Jefferson Houston is an impressive school
- Leveraging resources within the community—Community college partnerships
- Opera at John Adam’s—and other school programs are strong
- People who invest in ACPS put their entire heart and passion into it
- Positive kindergarten experience at Cora Kelly ELL program

- Really awesome facilities—some are new and beautiful
- Restorative justice—needs to be promoted
- TC - good instructional programs
- TC principal making good changes
- Teachers: relate to diverse community
- Very unique identify forged in Washington DC area

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Buildings need renovation and modernization
- Bullying initiative
- Capacity issues, overcrowding; ELL Kindergartener has to ride one hour on a bus because neighborhood school does not have room
- Challenging population—higher percentage of ELL and children in poverty
- Changing demographics
- City and school system divides: haves vs have-nots; west end vs east end; west end has been stepchild of ACPS; population on west side has not been demanding; advocate groups are on the east side; resources and facilities are not fairly distributed
- Communication is a challenge—correct times for events is a challenge
- Communication/community relations: parents are not told what is happening at their schools; parents do not feel respected
- Cut the middle men at Central Office—principals need relationships with Superintendent
- Discrepancy in school suspensions
- Email lists for each school don't become available until deep into the fall
- Facility needs—experience needed
- Facility's needs: TC will have 4000 on its campus
- Image and perception to non-student citizens is lacking—beyond the City of Alexandria—the reputation is poor
- Infrastructure will not support current and future capacity
- Large number of teachers leaving some schools
- Neighborhoods are segregated
- Non-discrimination policy but no regulations
- Revenue needs: lack of support from the City /
- Rigorous instruction for all students regardless of cultural and language
- School resource needs not understood by Supt's office
- Schools are more homogenous in other districts—not true in Alexandria
- Schools make bad choices based on budget—so principals need to decide if they need a science teacher—flex positions leave some curriculum
- SOL math pass rate at TC is 42%
- SOL's overemphasized—leads to teaching to the test
- Student discipline: need to deal with issues at TC; discipline problems affect students who want to learn; need for strict principals
- Teacher retention

- Unaccredited School—Jefferson Houston—needs to be changed

Desired Characteristics:

- Ability to attract and develop talent
- Blend of the two styles of Alvin and Mort
- Build a team
- Candidate of color
- Collaborative /
- Communicate good news about ACPS and individual schools; proven record of success in community relations
- Community oriented, outwardly focused; good community mobilizer; engaged; can assess the community and figure out how best to serve it; Supt has to reach out to community - parents ///
- Compassionate, empathetic
- Courageous: will take on the capacity issues at TC
- Creativity—We can't have everything—we need prioritization
- Credibility, truthful
- Demonstrated leadership: has experience running high performance schools; can select the kind of leaders that develop high performance environments; challenges the teaching community to reach for higher goals; would make changes (consider moving principals from school to school) //
- Educator: teaching background; understand building communities in schools
- Experience as a teacher (at least 5 years); has been “in the trenches” /
- Experience in a district like Alexandria: urban, multi-cultural, diverse
- Experience in policy
- Give principals a lot more autonomy
- Hires and retains good teachers; knows how to train teachers; will pull in the best teachers
- Innovator: has new ideas to address urban, crowding, density problems; bold; creative; independent: thinks for him/herself /
- Must be able to capitalize on diversity as strength
- Open, listens: Dr. C was good at this
- Open-minded: talks to people regardless of race, color, creed; listens to parents, not just staff
- Politically skilled: builds relationships with elected officials; is proactive, not reactive with City Council; gets attention needed for schools from CC //
- Progressive ideas, democratic leadership style; gets employee feedback
- Realistic, balanced: sets achievable goals, juggles needs effectively
- Role model; leader in the community /
- Strong, courageous leader: not afraid of parent groups; does not give in to political pressure and money; listens, but knows what is right and delivers; deals with systemic inequities //
- Student focused: their needs come first

- Understands and appreciates the challenges of diversity; experience in an urban, diverse community /
- Values CTE at the high school level
- Visible and accessible in schools and community

Support Staff

1 Participant

Strengths:

- Community loves the schools and gives support
- Diversity
- Good administrators are supporting staff—it's getting better

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Creative funding is needed
- Facilities need to be enlarged for enrollment
- Grow our own leaders
- Growth—fast paced growth
- Large group of retirees could impact the school system—need to plan for their replacements for continuity
- Support staff can get degrees—but need new pay scale

Desired Characteristics:

- Good listener
- Good organizational skills
- Meet and listen to support groups—before schools starts—used to be paid days before school started
- Staffing in central office is not keeping up with enrollment growth
- Willing to listen and take advice—support staff have strong connections to the community

Students

22 Participants

Strengths:

- ACPS has many opportunities—curriculum better than FCPS—very diverse—many extracurricular activities

- Free lunch for poor students is great
- Good technology—chrome books make things easier—Google classroom
- Gym class –many exercises and strength
- Hammond is a highly rated school
- Incentive programs—field trip opportunities—advisory clubs—community circles
- International academy—very strong and helpful
- Lots of opportunity
- New principal TC: overall TC is better this year
- STEM has been positive at TC
- Students appreciate each other
- Students enjoy their time—many different types of electives
- Web leaders—Where everyone belongs—great program
- Wi-Fi is free

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Academic pressure: students do not feel that they can take the time to do choir and other arts courses — no joy in school experience:
- Beach volleyball needed, cricket, baseball, swimming lessons
- Bullying—needs to be addressed ///
- Communication: Lack of communication with students about overcrowding; most students do not know who the superintendent is
- Curriculum: need for more career oriented classes and experiences; STEM opportunities should begin in ES; need for opportunities for learning based on interests; Economics and Personal Finance is not worthwhile, but students really need practical skills //
- Genetically modified food—might be in the cafeteria
- Get rid of assigned seats in auditorium and cafeteria
- HVAC is too hot and too cold //
- Intramurals—lacrosse should be offered—6th and 7th grade don't get to play
- Locker rooms are too small
- More food options in the cafeteria—always pizza, hamburgers and chicken burgers—occasional burritos
- Need more time in PE to change clothes
- Need more emphasis on restorative justice
- Improve the courtyard
- Overcrowding at TC
- Passing time—four minutes—not enough time
- School dress code needs to be more enforced
- School funding for plays and drama—costumes and background supplies—drama teacher had to buy many of the supplies
- Shelving needed in the bathrooms
- STEM issues: transition from STEM Academy to integration in entire school; lack of communication regarding changes (STEM) with students; breakdown of STEM academy /

- Student behavior: too many TC students in the hallway or skipping school
- Students want socialization time
- Students want to sit with their friends
- TC has Titan time to chill—middle schools need chill time
- Teacher’s complaints are not heard
- Teachers need to listen more to students—teachers sometimes dismiss late
- Testing is too dominating; too much teaching toward tests; too much testing, not enough support and actual teaching //
- Transportation is not meeting its schedule—buses run late
- Water fountains needed outside
- Wifi is slow

Desired Characteristics:

- Ability to connect with students and teacher
- Ability to see student’s perspective
- Believes that every student needs to succeed; wants to see every student succeed
- Committed: will be here for the long run, will stay with us
- Communicator: listens and acts on what he/she hears; keeps students updated
- Gives students a say in what is happening, how decisions are made //
- Instructional leader: provides courses that provide what kids will really need for their futures;
- Like children
- Open mind
- Patience
- Promotes more specialized STEM courses; provides education that is not solely based on tests; puts the emphasis on knowledge and real skills ///
- Should be able to be compassionate
- Teaching experience needed
- Understands ACPS: has been in ACPS as a student or teacher; not someone who does not understand how ACPS works
- Visible, open, engaging: gets into schools to see what is going on; gets to know students;
- Works well with principals

Central Office Administrators

27 Participants

Strengths:

- Alexandria City - a great place to live!
- Committed Board and staff /

- Community: engagement, lots of input from stakeholders; willingness to serve, i.e. on task force; highly educated, involved citizens; have a passion for Alex and for TC; exceptional input - community wants to be involved ///
- Curriculum infrastructure: strong; many good systems and processes in place
- Diversity //
- Leadership team is very cohesive and highly functioning team
- Location
- Optimism: ACPS making process, moving forward, developing systems that did not exist
- Proximity to DC and resources
- Pupil teacher ratio is low with hard caps on class size
- Relationships with schools are improved—less back channel approvals
- Resource rich; investment in school counselors
- Small community—small school district; size is manageable
- SP in process and in place with good metrics //
- Staff strength: work ethic, put in long hours; dedicated to student success; grooming people from within to be principals; experienced staff who understand the complexity of the system; willingness to try new things; staff leaders are highly committed to outcomes for kids /////
- Student demographics—allow leveraging resources
- System on the move
- Technology: use of tools for efficiency
- Working groups with city staff perform well

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- ACPS has had a “Mom and Pop” organization and practices that need to adapt to the reality of growth and change
- Alexandria has not been looking at the real problems - tried to keep up an appearance of how we are doing, of the changes in population; disconnect between how the City sees itself and the reality of the schools; need a better definition of what is the role of school in the community; too much glossing over of problems //
- Alexandria looks like an idyllic wealthy community - in stark contrast to the school population ///
- Alexandria City: small town mentality can make it hard or easy for a superintendent;
- Budget/fiscal issues: need for significant capital funding; lower per pupil spending; decrease of 16% in 10 years, while demands and expectations increase; limited funding ///
- Capacity/growth: unanticipated growth in last decade; 1000 seats short ///
- Compensation: not staying competitive so ACPS loses good people; many principals are not getting raises
- Culture in central office: demanding; excessive time demands; expectations of high performance, time and energy; constant complaints; demands of every Board member for Supt's/staff time; burnout pace that wears out senior management - and superintendents ; people leave and take institutional history with them /////

- Diversity/poverty - 60% FRM; impact of poverty on students; chaotic home lives; profound issues at young ages; east vs west divide in Alexandria //
- Facilities management: need for a plan, not just “band aids”, land, maintenance, planning and implementation; dysfunctional systems; problems do not get solved
- Highly political environment
- Lack of focus, lack of planning - a lot going on, priorities not clear; not enough forward thinking //
- Lack of system-wide clarity: too much following the next shiny thing; need to identify what is mandatory and what is optional; need to systematize what is most important and stick with it //
- Loss of confidence in ASCP by city officials: ACPS says one thing in the public, but then does not follow up; plans keep changing; cost over-runs on projects; losing face in the city
- Majority minority school system
- Make changes when they need to be made
- Mort to Alvin—ACPS is much more strategic and using resources wisely
- “Need to get the right people in the right seats”
- Old regime teachers—especially at TC, some have direct access to the Board
- Org chart change putting layer in between Sup and principals
- Over emphasis on SOL’s: need for performance assessments, etc.
- Political will of elected politicians to fund ACPS
- Public perception is low and needs focus
- Racial disparities: Black and Hispanic students report not believing they are capable of advanced academics; TAG program, Honors classes not inclusive /
- Resource management: i.e. use of school counselors for non-counseling tasks
- Redistricting - big problem
- Relationships with Board, Board Chair and City Council
- Reputation/image of Alex schools: historical challenge of low achievement; generalizations about poverty; belief that things were so much better in the past /
- School Board: some very inexperienced members, new chair; Board members frequently approach staff members, do not demonstrate respect for staff time; Board has not established norms; inappropriately “in the weeds”; size; continuity missing because entire slate elected, causing turnover ////
- Senior leadership team was not always informed about decisions—communication must include central office
- Central office structural /management issues: instructional leadership and those supervising schools are not aligned; division between schools and central office; lack of respect for the work of central office staff; refusal to do what is needed or required, even if required by law; central office out of touch with what is going on in the schools; people in central office work hard but not smart /////
- Systemic/alignment issues: need for performance alignment - how to align the central office with student achievement so that LT can better support schools; getting all to understand and support the Strategic Plan - how they fit in to the process //
- Task force not embraced early on by SB and school staff

- Turnover, leadership changes: constant, “forming, storming, norming”; attitude of “We will just wait you out - this too shall pass” /
- Transportation needs review (\$3mil/year spent on taxis); safety
- Urban issues that need to be addressed

Desired Characteristics:

- Acumen within ACPS and with City for political savvy
- Accessible, visible: knows what is going on in the schools; “boots on the ground”
- Board management and development skills: can work with the SB and guide them toward positive, production functioning; has skill in Board development; does not get overrun by SB, strong in dealing with the Board; tells members when they are too far “in the weeds”; will practice “reality rubbing” with the SB - understanding and acknowledging our history
////
- Builds relationships with City; can rebuild confidence in ASCP in regard to facilities; can lead the CIP process; re-establishes faith in ASCP in the city ///
- Builds bridges between central office and schools (Leadership Academy does not accomplish this goal.)
- Builds trust: trusts staff, assumes competence
- Committed: will stay longer than 3-5 years
- Communicator: understands modern communication; knows how to form a web of communication; communicates with key people, not isolated //
- Experienced: has a background in school improvement, facilities and strong instructional background
- Fresh eyes: not from within ACPS
- High standards: will improve accountability measures for principals and teachers; holds people accountable at all levels; does not let things slide /
- Hires people who are self-starters, flexible; who have a passion for urban schools; good HR/recruitment ability; finds people with the determination to solve problems /
- Leadership strength: strong leader, advocates for schools; strong, but not bullheaded; true, tested leader /
- Listens: not just to Cabinet, not just to the loudest voice in the community
- Management ability: can create efficiencies around outcomes
- Motivated, learner: needs to be hungry, wants to prove him/herself; not afraid to grow
- Operational/management skills: organizational management — how do things run; on top of operational functions /
- Pays attention to operations - so that the system is resilient; need to have a long-term plan for facilities and fiscal issue to support learning //
- Parent relationships: can handle the demands of highly engaged parents and reach out to those who are not as engaged; works on behalf of all families
- Political acumen: skilled in negotiating and influence; political savvy related to facilities;
- Politically adept; can work in Alexandria’s political environment; can mediate between SB and City regarding budget; strong in the political arena //

- Positive, optimistic: champion for APS who can “tell the story”, beyond SOLS; will celebrate excellence; will validate the good things; strong advocate for schools //
- Restores a reasonable work-life balance for the staff of ACPS
- Stands tall to community
- Strategic, visionary, understands the change process: has the long view; sees ahead, can anticipate change; recognizes the changes caused by technology; adapts ////
- Team-builder, trust builder: draws staff together
- Understands Alexandria’s “city with a small-town attitude”; understands the context of Alexandria schools
- Urban experience

City Officials

5 Participants

Strengths:

- Community: education is important in Alex; high expectations; community is willing to give support to schools, in spite of small percentage with students in schools; people care what happens in this district //
- Competitive salary
- Diversity of students and parents
- Efforts by ACPS to engage parents and community
- Facilities/operations: loss of confidence that ACPS can handle these issues: lack of trust about facilities issues (ACPS plays games, not credible); CIP presentations from year to year have different priorities, so not credible; numbers do not make sense; issues around co-locating agencies with school buildings; ACPS now forced to work on facilities issues with City staff /
- Financial resources—anything you really want can happen
- Focus on achievement gaps: bringing in initiatives to address inequities
- Great staff relationship between schools and city—complicated enough to be interesting—but everyone knows and cooperates
- Highly educated parents and community
- Interim Sup. doing a good job of communicating
- Leading city in the country—25% of adults have more than four years of college
- NO County to deal with—only City government
- Partnerships with ACPS and community on key initiatives — some really good
- Partnerships with City are one-sided; ACPS does not acknowledge the work of the City; ACPS is defensive which strains partnership

- Politics of Alexandria: budget process has gotten ugly; Schools vs City
- Recruitment and retention
- Staff in ACPS: some great principals and teachers; very good staff below cabinet level that is focused on students; some staff very aware of current research and programs, good knowledge //
- Strong faith-based schools in Alex provide sharp contrast with ACPS
- Technology is in place
- Very few conflicts—students have a great celebration of the diversity

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- 10% of Alexandria City students in private schools
- 10-15% of households in Alexandria have children that attend ACPS
- 1100 units of subsidized housing—high concentration of crime—what can schools do to help the community
- Academic issues are non-English speakers—parents not literate
- Accreditation issues
- Budget process — communication not credible, i.e., data related to projections, enrollments, capacities (at every meeting the numbers changed); population projections not trusted
- Central office is weak: lots of turnover; people selected for connections rather than competence; in central office; high level school staff coming in from outside the district and not taking time to learn; lack of respect for knowledge and experience between old and principals and teachers waiting for strong leadership; trust and competence need to be established at the central office level //
- Funding for CIP—should be sufficient
- HS size issue is a challenge
- Lack of broad community engagement — beyond the parent community; need for better communication with total community about what is important — and what is happening in schools /
- Lack of coherent and consistent message — totally different directions from different people; no coherent message from leadership; some strategies have been brought in by Supt - without input or communication with stakeholders //
- Money—operating budget—very little state aid—85% of operating budget comes from
- Pre-K approach has been scattered and not transparent
- Respected: knows what really works — does not come in and promote the flavor of the month
- Strong: can stand up to direction of SB when it is not best for schools
- Town budget has been shrinking—5% over the past few years
- Willing to learn, not stuck with dogma/philosophy; flexible, sees more than one point of view

Desired Characteristics:

- Collaboration
- Community oriented: listens to and understands the community; does the hard-messy work of building partnerships with City
- Delivers strategies based on expertise but also with awareness of the dynamics in Alex
- Focused on achievement gap: will find the root causes for gap, provide expertise and resources that work
- “Friend raising” is important for new superintendent
- Introvert versus extrovert—balance needed
- Long term
- Open-minded
- See the details—and provide visioning
- Thinking for solutions outside of the school system

City Council, Vice Mayor and Mayor

6 Participants

Strengths:

- 150,000 residents with a small-town feel
- Academic direction of the schools strong; positive student achievement by many measures
- After school programs and preschool programs are strong
- Alexandria is beloved—many tourist and visitors
- City support — making substantial capital investments in school facilities; overall strength of classroom instruction; process started for expanding and replacing schools /
- Community is devoted to academic excellence /
- Community: city filled with experts; dedicated citizens; diverse; highly educated, creative, has high expectations around all services, including schools; quirky little town; Alexandria is special, wonderful city; Alex is small enough that leaders can really make a difference /////
- Diversity is a strength
- Good quality staff—very competitive with other districts
- Great community
- High appreciation for the school system
- Incredibly great restaurants
- Investing heavily in facilities and renewing the buildings
- Much community support for school system
- Much to offer—beautiful, historic and diversity is a core value
- Non-profits make extraordinary contributions to schools

- Per pupil expenditures—is at an amazing level
- School Staff: some really good principals; respected educators in system
- Small urban system
- Support for school system comes from the white community
- Teacher quality from K to grade 12
- Tradition in the school system

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Academic achievement gaps: test results in some schools
- Alexandria is committed to anti bullying—all Alexandria employees must model anti bullying
- Appointed school board may be in the cards
- Arlington should be the ACPS model
- Board member with policy experience is rare
- Bring back preventative maintenance
- Capital, capacity and maintenance of current buildings: huge capacity needs, especially at T.C. /
- Central office: too many weak leaders; ACPS is top-heavy
- Diversity—challenge, but also a strength
- Elected school board—wide array of strengths and weaknesses
- Facilities: aging, and managing challenges of growth, capacity needs; some bad facility decisions made by the School Board and school staff in the past; Patrick Henry project not well managed, many overruns, poor info given by contractors, considered a fiasco ///
- Facility planning – needs long term planning and financing
- High degree of special education, at-risk, ELL student
- I want to ensure students do well—focus is needed on academic excellence—youth are in a global competition
- Kids only have one shot—we can't mess it up
- Manage the relationship with city council and school board—city manager too
- Not a fan of SOL—too much focus on low scores
- Operational/business of the school system: communications, finances; management of the City's capital investments — need to build trust in the community regarding competence in this area; inability of the school system in the past to get projections right — this has improved — but caused City Council not to trust data /
- Per pupil spending—why can't we do better—comparable students and comparable spending has been getting better results
- Perceptions/image: ACPS reality does not match community perception and “talk” /
- Private and religious groups are getting Head Start funds—ACPS wants to take this over
- School Board is too big
- Schools must be maintained—really bothersome when they are not maintained
- Shifting money in budgets is undermining city council trust
- Social media—challenges—distraction and ripe for bullying
- Strong leadership is definitely needed

- Students from all over the world where English is a second language—challenging for entering students
- Superintendent would have to reeducate Board members—about their role and responsibilities
- TC is too big and needs a different solution
- Two schools' systems—TC school within the school
- Very engaged community—double-edged sword.
- What does ACPS stand for? —Too many initiatives under Mort—ACPS needs focus

Desired Characteristics:

- Active, involved, visible: does not sit behind a desk; does not become isolated from the system/city; people person; strong, positive personality
- Board management experience and ability, can transition and manage School Board, integrate new members; not intimidated by the School Board, stands up to them when needed /
- Builds trust with City leaders by being clear, transparent and accurate — competent
- Cares about diverse students; will address gaps, including the digital divide
- Commitment to the challenge—significant number of years' service to ACPS
- Committed to transparency
- Communication and human relations skills; able to reach both families in poverty and parents with advanced degrees; builds relationships with staff and students
- Community feedback loop is important
- Community schools are an important concept
- Courageous: stands up for what matters
- Empathetic to different populations; sensitive and understanding of differing needs and perspectives
- Experience selecting and supporting quality staff; can identify talent and put good people in the right place
- Facilities management and school construction experience; maybe hire a construction czar?
- Focus on critical thinking skills
- Focused: does not pick up every fad in a superintendent magazine
- Good CEO and manager
- Innovative and creative in developing solutions to capacity issues: might consider co-locating, other non-traditional ideas
- Instructional leadership skills AND operations and management skills; can focus both on academics and on the mechanics of the system; does not need to know the details about facilities, but needs to ask and learn and find out the facts /
- Integrity
- Kindness
- Know the community
- Listens
- Lois Berlin qualities

- Long time teacher
- Not at the end of the career
- People who live around the schools—engage the community
- Rising star—make a meaningful difference—someone could make a mark
- Selling new ideas and structure depends upon transparency
- Someone who will speak up when they need to push a vision
- Understands the history of Alex and its schools; knows the town and appreciates it
- Visionary
- Work closely with mayor, city council and the town manager

Facilities Task Force

7 Participants

Strengths:

- Advantage of smallness and international fame from TC
- Alexandria is a one high school town—but it's also the largest challenge
- City of 130,000
- Community is willing to invest for their children
- Diversity
- Engaged citizenry—highly educated citizens
- Fabulous City—many choose to be her
- Good relationships across town
- History
- John Porter—we need that type of longevity
- Many families with young children are choosing Alexandria—but will they choose to stay through high school
- Many people choose to go to public
- Microcosm of benefit for all citizens—open arms for children in need—tremendous support for struggling children
- Scholarships are available for many students
- Small town—mix use
- Task force member's wife was the school Nazi

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Board training with City Council together
- Traditional professional deferral—educators must do more than ask for deferral—engagement and transparency to the community
- Ex-officio superintendent position on business chamber—superintendents never attend
- Get out and work culture is in conflict with academic mission
- Schools are underperforming—people with means send their children to private schools—ACPS needs those students to raise all performance
- Funding sources are dependent upon real estate

- Urban challenges—churning of superintendents—need long-term stability
- Elitism at TC—taking students and parents pass social gap will help TC
- Economic development depends upon newer buildings but even more importantly a great education system
- Ability to mentor up—there have been many weak SB's
- 30% of city budget goes to school—they are narrowly accountable to the community
- In danger of becoming a bedroom community
- Battles between schools and city must be quelled—a great superintendent can do this
- When Alexandria is evaluated by outside agencies—ACPS gets a negative rating
- Keep the peace—has been the mantra—it needs to stop because it isn't working
- Progress as measured by public metrics is a must—not arcane statistics
- Alignment to vision is the leader's role and it is badly needed in ACPS
- Continuity—lack of—has been an ACPS issue for several years—Berg and Porter provided the longevity
- Explosion of immigrant families--\$20,000 education cost per child, a tremendous challenger
- Children attend TC but they do not live in Alexandria

Desired Characteristics:

- Able to change the culture on both sides of the fence
- Demeanor, smarts and diplomacy
- Leadership not management
- Longevity
- Must be able to stick their head out of the foxhole
- Must be accountable to all citizens of Alexandria
- Must engage with business community
- Need to serve all children of ACPS

Central Office Support Staff

17 Participants

Strengths:

- Diversity
- Resources: personnel, fiscal, programs
- Size of division: small enough so that people know who to go to; easier to communicate /
- Special Ed: opportunities for parent education available through resource center; opportunities for teachers to learn about Spec Ed in various ways
- Staff

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Accountability: staff needs some tough love

- Communication: need to have more openness, keep people informed Special Ed: staff, parents not taking opportunities to learn about special education
- Customer service deficits: school front office are not friendly, responsive even to ACPS staff; principals see but do not deal with the way people are treated; customer service needs to be part of strategic plan //
- Diversity
- Divisions in the community: haves and have-nots; City elites and ACPS; affluent areas vs areas of high poverty /
- Lack of forward thinking, stuck in old ways; lack of vision /
- Operational and organizational issues: lack of organization and clear procedures - that are clearly communicated; weak middle management; departments do not work together and support each other; resources not managed to maximize impact; need for staff and resources for early childhood education ///
- Organizational culture: Elitist attitude in APS; unwelcoming hierarchy in City and school division; low morale; ego issues; lack of collaboration; no formal induction - no clear expectations; chaos; need to honor exemplary service; lack of value for support employees in APS that impact functioning; need to address issues of “corporate culture”; employees do not feel that the Supt and LT has their backs; need to acknowledge the hard work that people do ////
- Overcrowding
- Turnover, leadership changes: staff turnover throughout the system; so many new employees that it is hard to maintain training need and impact of constant change; things get started, but not followed up on; APS does not make a plan and stick to it. ///

Desired Characteristics:

- Accessible, personable and can connect: has the personality to connect with people and be the face of ACPS
- Collaborative, unifier, trust-builder: will change culture of ACPS; will hold meetings with admins in every department; reach out; skeptical of someone with a set plan - willing to assess the needs and will listen; flexible ///
- Communicator: storyteller for ACPS
- Experienced: well-grounded in the work of schools; has experience with facilities team
- Like Dr. Berlin: has been a teacher and principal; can hit the ground running; decisive; empowers middle management; holds people responsible; visible at events /
- Political, community relations skills: can build a strong relationship with community and with the City Council
- Reflective: listens, thinks: someone OK with taking the time to process information;
- Strong, responsible, gets things done: holds LT and principals accountable; deals with difficult issues; has a plan and follows through; does the hard work of evaluating staff; acts on staff issues
- Will step back and think - no knee jerk reactions /

Teachers

7 Participants

Strengths:

- Central office support for arts and physical education: improved professional development opportunities and access to community resources
- Central office: generally, supports the needs of school staff
- Diversity
- Dr. B's statement about immigrant families demonstrated strong leadership
- Dr. C's leadership: visible, supportive and positive when in schools; listened to teachers and acted on what he heard; strong values — stood up for teachers.
- Staff: talented people who really do believe that every child can succeed
- Support: ACPS invests in staff - can further education, have opportunities

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Balancing the needs of students, parents and staff
- Capacity needs: will ACPS need another high school?
- Curriculum inconsistencies: schools differ in the delivery of instruction; teachers do not understand why there are not uniform practices
- Diversity: so many differences — culture, language, economic; diverse populations make schools very different with different issues; no one size fits all; need for staff diversity to reflect students //
- ELL programs are not working: need to have more training for regular education teachers in ELL methods
- Equity: "haves" get what they need and want; but other parents/students have barriers; making sure that all students get what they need to be successful
- Facilities, capacity
- Social media/technology: preparing students to live in a very different world; what part do schools play?
- Special education staffing and resource protocols not supporting student needs; using minutes rather than student needs as the determiner of Special Ed staff
- TAG divides students not by critical, legitimate needs of highly gifted students; disadvantages students of color and low socio-economic status
- Testing is over-emphasized and takes too much instructional time; question the validity and usefulness of so much testing for many students //
- Work environment in middle schools is negative, morale low; perceptions of middle schools are especially bad in Alexandria; parents pull children out of ACPS because of middle schools

Desired Characteristics:

- Active and decisive

- Advocate: for the arts, for arts integration, for universal pre-K; for the classroom space and other needs of teachers
- Appreciates diversity, embraces the diverse cultural of Alexandria
- Collaborative: works with the Teachers Association on common goals
- Combines Dr. C and Dr. B: strong, fair, listens, responds
- Courageous: stands up for what is right (i.e., immigration)
- Creative thinker
- Direct and assertive but not mean
- Experience in an urban system similar to Alexandria; experience with diversity; understands the many facets of diversity //
- Fair, just, sensitive to diverse needs: makes sure that the “have nots” get what they need
- Human resources ability: recruits and retains strong, diverse teachers; supports teachers’ leadership pathways
- Instructional background, not just management: knows what good instruction looks like
- Invested and committed to Alexandria, will stay
- Open to new ideas: will use what works in neighboring districts, will employ best practices from other places
- Political and relationship skills: can bridge the SB and CC; can have a productive relationship with city leaders
- Political skills: can deal in the politically charged atmosphere of Alexandria; strong when dealing with other city leaders
- Problem-solver: acknowledges and solves the problems at middle schools; changes the narrative about middle schools in the community
- Program knowledge and experience: Special Education; ELL; TAG
- Realistic: has reasonable expectations
- Temperament needed for positive leadership; treats people with respect,
- Visible, positive, approachable; makes people comfortable when visiting schools /

School Based Administrators

31 Participants

Strengths:

- Diversity /
- Dr. C: cared about learning environment; modeled treating people with respect
- Office of Talent Development
- Parental support, may be divided but there
- Resource rich, comparatively: i.e., computers, social workers, counselors
- School staffs: dedicated and talented
- Size of ACPS: more intimate -more potential to be known and know others
- Small town advantages: we are a community
- Staff: many working in ACPS really want to do what is right for students; resourceful

- Unique history, especially around race and equity

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Central office does not relate to the real issues in schools; departments work in isolation; central office is not accessible; flow charts that keep school based staff from leadership; poor use of instructional specialists — skilled people but not used strategically; lack of accountability for how funds are spent (instructional technology) /////
- Communication: parents go right to School Board; school leaders are not told what is going on in the district; school staff not used in a constructive way to communicate district issues (i.e. facilities issues) to parents //
- Communication: need better communication from superintendent: leadership needs to listen to school staff, not just parents/community; listen to more than one side of a story /
- Culture competency program is preaching to the choir
- Disparity/inequity/diversity: strong Parent-Teacher Associations where 20% of parents give input; however, some parents' perspectives are not heard; 20% of parents speak for all; TAG programs create inequities; affluent children get into TAG; students not in TAG left behind; instructional delivery model =TAG mostly white affluent, Gen Ed mostly nonwhite, co-taught; chasm between those that have — rich, white vs those who do not have advantages; need for support with needy populations — help schools meet social and emotional needs; City Council, School Board and schools need to work to be sure that all students come to schools' ready to learn; need to empower all parents — including parents of ELLs /////
- Facilities - CIP: not dealing with issues such as mold, roofs; principals being required to deal with facilities issues that they are not expert in; no building engineers; how is CIP money being spent? needs not addressed ///
- Inconsistency: too much of “whatever the school decides”; too much autonomy in some areas; lack of planning across the district; ACPS does not stick to one thing //
- Leadership development and retention: professional development needed for new leaders, invest in development to build leadership from within; get people to grow and build for success; principal retention — there is no data — but needs to be studied to find out what is happening in ACPS //
- Leadership meetings have not been good
- Priorities not clear: How does ACPS want educators spending their time? school staff spending lots of time doing things that are not mission-driven
- Summer school is a hot mess with no accountability, no oversight
- Systemic dysfunction: no structures in place regarding facilities, and other operational processes; communication lacking on even basic functions; history of problems not getting solved; gaps in services; educators have to take care of too many operational issues that take away from mission; lack of protocols and systems ///

Desired Characteristics:

- Aligns central office to needs at schools; understands organizational management; solves issues of systemic inefficiencies ///

- Articulates plans to address equity and excellence
- Builds relationships: with State leadership, with community partners;
- Builds trust
- Can forge real partnerships and relationships between ES-MS-HS, alignment //
- Charismatic
- Communicator, collaborative: has a direct line to building leaders-no “chain of command”;
- Data-based decision maker: uses data to find out what schools need
- Decisive
- Educator, committed to ACPS: can tell us why he or she wants to be in ACPS; What was he/she like as a teacher? What is his/her history? Not just moving up the ladder /
- Experience with and sensitivity to diversity
- Experienced: knows how to support Special Education; has dealt with problems of growth and capacity
- Fair: will not disenfranchise people
- Follows the communication protocols — solves problems at building level; forges partnerships and alliances beyond community to support ACPS /
- Hires and develops competent people; provides quality professional development opportunities for principals /
- Instructional leadership: understands challenges of taking schools from low to high performance; demonstrated experience with closing the achievement gap; supports the arts; values the whole child, not just SOL results ///
- Manages Board relationships
- Manages central office: believes that central office has to listen to and support principals; open to all parents — makes sure that all parents and children have a voice; not just providing “access” to opportunity but all requiring equity; not just words but action regarding equity ////
- Operational experience: can deal with capacity and facilities issues effectively
- Passionate, not always risk averse
- Sensitive to diversity/equity: support parents, including ELL and those in poverty;
- Sets clear priorities and provides direction: balances and communicates when schools need to have autonomy and when schools need to be consistent /
- Strong: tough enough to look at real issues, solve problems that have gone on year after year; can withstand the fire; fights for what is most important //
- Student-centered: Will get support for the needs of students; staffing, manpower; makes student needs and fairness the priority
- Understands Alex and ACPS: knows Alexandria politics; understands the challenges of having one HS and two MS, etc.; can bridge the divide between schools and City Council ///
- Values and vision: willing to die for a child; passionate, devoted; has strong core educational values /
- Values what needs to be continued: takes time to assess what is in place before making changes; will abandon things that are not working; learns about programs before making decisions /

- Visible: comes to school buildings; accessible to stakeholders, as well as principals; likes being around students
- Wants to work in Alexandria; wants to be here