

To: Glenn Brand

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From: Kristina Rychlik

Re: FY '16 Superintendent Evaluation Process/Additional Feedback

Date: May 25, 2016

Last week, I was fortunate to be able to meet with nearly all of Dr. Glenn Brand's direct reports in order to request feedback on his performance as Superintendent of our district. It proved a worthwhile effort to meet with those that work most closely with him, and should allow for the school committee to provide both positive feedback and suggestions for improvement based on the experience of those who have the most experience working with him. Feedback received was very consistent and able to be organized into broad themes. I have summarized this feedback for your review to be considered as a part of this year's evaluation process.

Glenn's greatest strengths as described by his colleagues consistently fell into three categories; those relating to his personal traits and characteristics, those relating to his work ethic, and those relating to his skills as a manager and leader.

Personal

Glenn was consistently described as both personable and approachable. His colleagues believe him to be a good person with good intentions, and no ulterior motives. He's likeable with a good sense of humor, very ambitious and consistently wants to do the right thing. He is considered very trustworthy, and is believed to have integrity as a leader.

Extraordinarily compassionate, people view Glenn to be a caring person who cares immensely about others: those he works with, our faculty and staff, and most importantly, our students. He is considered to be a very good listener with parents and staff alike; he's all ears, doesn't rush, and is compassionate and thoughtful. Glenn is noted to always be polite, doesn't have an ego, and never acts in an inappropriate manner.

Work Ethic

Many acknowledged that taking on the leadership of this district at the time that Glenn did was a difficult task, yet he is credited to be working extremely hard to address the challenge. Extraordinarily earnest, he puts in the time, and is willing to roll up his sleeves and work extremely hard. He wants to do well personally, and wants all others to succeed as well.

As a Superintendent, staff admire his positive values, and how highly committed he is to A-B. He cares deeply about the district, is incredibly reflective, yet remains open and receptive to feedback on his performance. People view him as invested in both his career and the students and staff of A-B, and acknowledge that he is self-reflective and works towards personal and professional growth.

Managerial

Nearly everyone expressed feeling overwhelming support from Glenn in their role in the district, and many shared examples of being supported through numerous difficult issues in their schools. In that role as manager, he is viewed as very responsive and supportive when issues need to be addressed, and is noted as being quick with feedback, reassurance and offers of help. "He's the exact person I'd want as my superintendent...I feel I can grow professionally and I feel supported."

Viewed as a very thoughtful, calm leader, he is credited with taking time to understand all positions before giving a directive, and has shown that he can make tough decisions. At the same time, examples were shared of how he is not afraid to accept help when he needs to; utilizing a facilitator to manage difficult discussions with the principals was one appreciated example.

Many credit Glenn with being very proficient in the budget process. Some feel him to be most comfortable with logistical/mechanical issues like planning the capital study process or the budget process.

Many feel his managerial skills have played out well in his role in leading the Senior Leadership Team (SLT); he respects the process and peoples' opinions, and relies on his cabinet and SLT to challenge him: "He's brought a sense of trust and unity to the SLT, allows us to trust each other and address difficult areas." "The Senior Leadership Team is functioning well, and Glenn should take credit for that. We are less divided than in the past, and people are now willing to "take one for the team."

Many view him as willing to take on difficult issues. Many are impressed that he's trying to make progress in some difficult areas where his predecessors didn't. "He will go after the difficult conversations and turn over the rocks." "It's positive to be brave enough to tackle difficult issues like bus passing."

Numerous people believe that Glenn communicates well with staff at large, more frequently and better than others in his role. A number of people also acknowledged that he's doing "a terrific job with the facilities/capital planning issues, much better than in the past."

Areas for Improvement

The areas for improvement identified by this process fairly consistently fell into four categories; those relating to meeting management, trying to do too much, decision-making and communication.

Meeting Management

Numerous aspects of meeting management were mentioned as areas that appear challenging. It was acknowledged that some progress has been made here, but there is still room to improve. Regarding meeting planning, some questioned whether all the meetings held are really necessary, and believe that receiving meeting agendas further in advance would be helpful.

Many have suggestions for increasing the efficiency of meetings run by Glenn. Some feel that he often tries to do too much in one meeting. There is often a long background discussion/preface to each agenda item which many view as unnecessary and a waste of precious time. Too much discussion on a topic before the group addresses an issue blurs the message and allows the group to get sidetracked. Time management during meetings is also viewed as an area for improvement, and one that could be delegated. When meeting time isn't managed well, some issues are rushed and others are delayed.

Managing the group dynamics of a meeting is also viewed as challenging, especially when discussing sensitive topics. His colleagues feel that Glenn needs to better ensure that standard meeting protocols are followed to ensure that all voices are heard, and better utilize information from small group conversations and subcommittees in larger meetings. He needs to make certain that every staff member stays within the bounds of their role/responsibility. Lastly, better "wrap-up" after meetings is needed to be clear exactly what the decision is that's been made and exactly what the next steps are (who, when etc.).

The budget process specifically was often described as requiring too many meetings: "While there is a need for [these meetings], the budget process is very long and involved and takes us from our buildings a lot. It's necessary for our current process but is our current process necessary? Some has to do with the history of SC demands...if you're going to make an ask, you really need to justify it so there's a lot of pressure. Glenn is very good at conceptualizing the process, asking the right questions and pushing us, but the budget process can and should be more efficient."

Trying to Do Too Much?

Many I met with admire Glenn's ambitions for his role and our district, yet feel a sense of overwhelm: "What we're doing is good, but we need to think about where we want to be and work backwards...we need to slow down, narrow our focus and prioritize what's most important." "We've picked up a lot of rocks, and are carrying them all around...we need to put some down. We are doing so much at once, and still some important things remain undone." "It's good to be ambitious but we should slow down...everything seems critical...but it's not." "While he has good intentions, has the School Committee given him too many projects? Do we need a special projects body?" "There are so many things that pull me out of my building and away from my school community. I'm not feeling connected and am being

forced to rush decisions and hurry through tasks more than in the past. It's nice to feel included in district-wide issues but it's hard to be out of my building so much."

This seems to have translated to a very busy schedule, with some perceived downsides: A number of people reported that while Glenn is very good about scheduling time in schools, he sometimes needs to reschedule, or shows up late or leaves early... and they worry about the message this sends. Some feel that he is hard to access outside of established weekly meeting times, and others wonder if there is adequate "give" in his schedule for the inevitable crises.

Lastly, some feel the pace of change is too fast: "Too much is happening too quickly and too last-minute." "We've not been given time to digest all the changes and more keep coming."

Decision-making

While acknowledging the demands of the superintendent role and all it entails, many are concerned that it sometimes takes too long to get an answer or bring a problem to resolution. Some feel this is complicated by difficulty setting priorities and establishing a sense of urgency around certain issues. When an issue gets dragged out, or decisions are changed, it becomes more complicated.

Many acknowledge that making decisions takes too long but communicating those decisions to large groups of people is often done too quickly. The details sometimes get missed, what are the consequences of these decisions. Once a decision is made, the communication about that decision is often an afterthought, and that can cause problem; the Central Office move process was one recent example given. When people are personally affected by a decision, there are times when an in-person communications is believed to be preferable to an email or memo.

It seems that there is a struggle between balancing building-based and centralized decisions and that more clarity is desired; when a decision needs to be made, it should be clear whether it is truly a group decision or that if the group can't decide he will decide: "We struggle with balancing autonomy versus vertical decision making. Glenn wants to honor principal autonomy but it does create inefficiencies in decision-making. Sometimes it makes sense for the superintendent to have the final say, and figuring out/gaining clarity regarding when that is most appropriate would be helpful."

Communication

While many praise numerous aspects of Glenn's communication style, a great deal of feedback was received with the feeling that his oral and written communication is too wordy; there are concerns that he has trouble coming to the point and summarizing what's important on a topic. Sometimes answers are too long-winded. "Glenn very often has great things to say but the message gets lost, there are either too many words or too much explanation." There is the concern that people then "tune out."

Conversely, when attending meetings he is not running, people observe him as often very quiet and wish he'd speak up more: "People want to know what he thinks."

Communication surrounding personnel issues was mentioned more specifically. While acknowledged to be very good at dealing with concrete issues like the budget or capital planning, the "people issues" seem more challenging. When addressing interpersonal or personnel issues, the gravity of a situation is not always immediately apparent, which can be frustrating. Some shared that personnel issues often take too much time to handle, and even the most urgent issues can seem to drag on, which makes them more stressful.

When people are personally affected by an issue or decision, some feel that a more personal touch is required. Elaborate emails and memos are sometimes used at times when an in person meeting may be a better choice. People directly impacted by a decision should be told of the decision in person if at all possible, in keeping with tradition and expectations of the district.

Lastly, improved communication in the area of team creation is a growth opportunity identified: "The links between Cabinet-SLT-DLT are not really clear yet; we are missing common goals and themes among those groups which would serve to bind us together." "If the DLT Long Range Strategic Planning process can happen as planned that will be great... it has been a struggle to agree on a model moving ahead." "We are still in need of someone to articulate clearly what he/we are trying to accomplish, what are our greatest strengths, our greatest challenges, and what is our current work as a leadership team.

In summary, I am hopeful that this exercise has provided the committee with additional insights into Glenn's performance as our Superintendent. We have now identified a great many positive skills to be appreciative of, as well as some areas for continued professional growth.

I thank those district leaders who took the time to meet with me to share your insights, and I thank Glenn for his willingness to participate in this additional feedback exercise. Just being willing to allow this process to occur demonstrates his dedication to improving his performance as our Superintendent and should be commended and appreciated.

