

## Atlanta Public Schools

### LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

February 3, 2019

#### Executive Summary

##### *Introduction*

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in January of 2020, for the superintendent position in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS). The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when meeting with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings on January 6-13, 2020, and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders between December 3, 2019 and January 8, 2020. APS also provided constituents with open ended survey questions through their website “Let’s Talk”. The consultants also utilized the results of the APS facilitated community meetings about the superintendent vacancy from the fall of 2019. 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. Forty-nine stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings were used to collect information regarding the strengths of the district, the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years, and desired characteristics in the new superintendent. The online survey was used to collect data relevant to ranking desired characteristics in the new superintendent as well as suggestions for prospective superintendent candidates. Data collected through the online survey were very consistent with the input of the stakeholder interviews and focus groups.

##### *Participation*

The number of participants in interview and/or focus groups sessions, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below:

Group	Personal Interviews or Focus Groups	Online Survey
Board	9	N/A
Administrators	35	148
Teachers	12	434
Support Staff	15	292
Parents	14	580
Community	25	171
Students	10	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>1660</b>

The Board of Education members were individually interviewed. Many other central office administrators and elected officials also received individual interviews. Various different community members and groups were invited and participated, including the Mayor, County Commissioners, Public Safety Officials, and numerous others. Open invitation community forums for parents, staff and community were offered at various times and locations.

The responses provided by the individuals and focus groups during the interviews are listed in two places: 1) "Summary of Consistent Themes. . ." which are listed on pages 7 and 8 of the report, and; 2) "Summary of All Reported Comments and Observations..." which begin on page 9. They are listed alphabetically with no attempt to prioritize them. Finally, a draft of desired characteristics for the new Superintendent, to be discussed with the entire Board on February 3, 2020, can be found on page 35. Separate documents will provide the Board with the statistical results of the online survey and the Let's Talk comments.

The 1660 respondents on the on-line survey represent an outstanding cross sampling of the different groups engaged with the Atlanta Public Schools District. Parents and community members were especially well represented with 39 individuals attending meetings in person and 751 individual responses to the on-line survey. Atlanta Public School staff members were also well represented with 62 meeting the consultants in person and 844 individuals responding to the on-line survey. The on-line survey comparative statistical analysis, ranking desired characteristics sought in the new superintendent, and the comments from Let's Talk and the facilitated community meetings amplify the findings and themes from the focus groups.

It should be emphasized that the data from the focus groups 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***

When asked about the strengths of Atlanta Public Schools District, almost every person and group interviewed cited the quality of life, the vibrant culture of Atlanta and the diversity of the community. People spoke with pride about the resources and opportunities of Atlanta. The city is growing and flourishing in many areas of business and commerce. The City of Atlanta is unique in that it is geographically located in Fulton County and is the state capital of Georgia. This confluence means a multitude of government agencies operate in the City of Atlanta, which was seen as both a strength and a concern. The business community, the clergy and parishes of Atlanta and these governmental agencies all believe the key to the success of the City of Atlanta is the public schools. Participants and groups all cited the incredible commitment of the community to support the schools and support the students and families in need.

The most common source of pride for many citizens of Atlanta is the history. Seen as the epicenter of the civil rights movement, Atlanta citizens continue to believe as a community they have advanced civil rights and serve as a lighthouse community for the nation with a deep history. The Atlanta Public Schools have played an incredible role in the civil rights movement and many prestigious African American graduates of APS have left their legacy on that movement. Alumni and graduates speak with great pride of the role of APS in this history.

The compact size and location of Atlanta Public Schools District was seen as a strength for finding a way and a means for every child to succeed. There is great pride from all respondents in the commitment to the individual child and how the staff is committed to providing for the basic needs of children in need. Principals and teachers were praised by many respondents for going the extra mile with challenging and sometimes dire family situations to advance the needs of the child.

Many focus group and survey respondents recognized the quality of Dr. Carstarphen's leadership and tenure. At the start of Dr. Carstarphen's tenure in 2009 APS was recovering from a testing scandal. Her forthright no nonsense approach and her longevity allowed APS to rebuild trust in the employees who did not participate in the testing scandal. She also had to administer and lead a district with over 100 employees under indictment. Many participants praised Dr. Carstarphen for being the right superintendent at the right time for APS to survive the corruption of the test results

Progress has been made in high school graduation rates, test scores and other indicators. Various and numerous curriculum initiatives were also instituted under Dr. Carstarphen.

Many groups such as religious groups, health care, higher education and a plethora of non-profits all provide resources and can't do enough for the students and families of Atlanta. The impacts of poverty in Atlanta would be far greater if it were not for the committed citizens of Atlanta.

The passion of the commitment to students from the teachers and the entire staff was consistently referenced. Many of the employee participants were either products of Atlanta Public Schools District or were residents with children attending the Atlanta Public Schools. Frequent mention was made of the dedication of the professional staff and their relationships with their students. Students, parents, and community members made reference to teachers and building administrators that went "above and beyond" in assuring the academic needs of all students were met regardless of budget or program constraints with which they may have been faced. Students were also pleased to acknowledge the presence of district administrators, teachers, and building administrators in other aspects of their lives (the arts, sports, mentoring, etc.). Even more impressive were the words used by many participants to describe the teacher workforce, i.e., passionate, gracious, dedicated, and devoted.

Principals and the Central Office also received praise for their competence and their commitment to the mission of the schools. It is rare for the consultants to hear such universal praise of staff. Staff retention and quality principal appointments were singled out for praise as a vast improvement from past years. Central office cabinet personnel were very knowledgeable and competent in their respective areas of responsibility. APS runs very well, and the superintendent, the Board and the staff deserve praise for running a great organization in an urban setting. This does not happen in many cities!!

The facilities are in very good condition and improvements continue on a rolling basis. The Atlanta Public Schools District has committed funds for growth, renovation and school safety through ESPLOST that make the facilities function at a very high level. The school district has even

included doctor staffed medical clinics at six schools to serve the students and the community. There is a recognition that more needs to be done in the impoverished communities but that everyone is committed to solving the problem.

Atlanta is a community that has great pride in the history of its schools and they are committed to continually improve the schools to ensure that all children have equal access to the highest levels of student achievement.

### ***Challenges/Concerns/Issues Facing the District***

Atlanta has a very high poverty rate as indicated by per capita income in the state of Georgia. The distribution of poverty in APS is extremely bifurcated. The most frequent quote from all participants was “A tale of two cities”. A large array of train tracks and an Interstate highway dissect Atlanta into a north and south orientation. Higher per capita incomes and much of Atlanta’s resurgent growth has occurred on the north side. The south side has not experienced redevelopment and community poverty is extreme on the south side.

As a result of this demographic/economic divide, APS schools on the north side are perceived as well appointed, high achieving and at capacity. Schools on the south side have excess capacity, and students come from families in crisis. Providing a stable and safe environment is the highest priority on the south side. The extreme need for all types of social services competes with raising the academic achievement on the south side. As one staff member said, “all staff in the poorest schools want and believe all children can achieve, there are just so many obstacles of social issues to overcome”.

Demographics are changing in APS as well. African Americans are for the first time in the history of the school district projected to not be the majority student base. Increasing whites, latinx and Asians are all changing the demographics.

Generational poverty remains the challenge for APS and City of Atlanta. But the commitment of Atlanta citizens is strong and with great leadership in the schools and in cooperation with the City, it is our hope that Atlanta be the community that can address a systemic approach to poverty.

Superintendent and Board relations were cited by many respondents as needing improvement. And there is a broader realm of relationships and cooperation with City government and other governmental agencies that needs enhancement. Atlanta has tremendous resources and many felt that the existing state of these relationships hinders the educational mission.

There was recognition that the teachers were dedicated and passionate, but there was also a teacher quality issue that many felt needed improvement. Numerous teachers were APS graduates and just as generational poverty impacts communities, many respondents felt that APS teacher graduates could and should model higher teacher expectations and improve their content knowledge and teaching skills.

The new superintendent should establish an open and responsive communication system to ensure teacher input and concerns are included as a standard operating procedure.

The Atlanta Board of Education members must also redefine their roles with the new superintendent. The majority of Board members feel a new working relationship needs to be established quickly upon the appointment of the new superintendent. Communication between the superintendent and the Board must be transparent and must be inclusive to ensure all members are receiving all of the communication. The new superintendent and the Board should consider an early workshop to focus on roles, responsibilities, communication and expectations.

Despite these concerns, the citizens and especially the Board, staff, and parents should and continue to be very proud of the many strengths and accomplishments of the Atlanta Public Schools District.

### ***Desired Characteristics***

The most often-mentioned response to this question was passionate educators able to maintain the current achievements yet provide a vision for continuous improvement for APS. Many expressed a desire to not hire a change agent

The new superintendent must be a community builder! Relationships in Atlanta for the superintendent extend far beyond the Board and the school staff. A harmonious and productive relationship must exist with and among a multitude of governmental agencies, businesses, higher education, clergy, health care and community groups of Atlanta. The relationships with the City of Atlanta call for the most improvement and the new superintendent must make an extended effort and have a cooperative working relationship with the City.

The successful candidate should also be a great communicator who can reach out to engage the entire community, all parents, and all citizens across the wide spectrum of diversity in Atlanta. Communicating, supporting and seeking the input of the teachers will also be vital to the success of Atlanta Public Schools District. Community involvement and visibility in schools and the community are highly desired.

The candidate should also be able to analyze and create a strategy to ensure standard operating procedures, curriculum and instruction occur with greater consistency in all schools for all students. Fewer initiatives, analysis of current initiatives and seeking staff input on initiatives would all be welcome qualities in the new superintendent.

In summary, the high level of survey responses, along with participation in the focus groups and community meetings, are strong indicators of a school district that is very proud of past accomplishments, but seek a talented leader who can build on the excellence and move the district forward in transparent communication, community engagement and continued and improved high student achievement.

HYA cannot promise to find a candidate who possesses all of the characteristics desired by respondents. However, HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to address the concerns expressed by the constituent groups. We will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards for all students, while meeting the unique needs of each of its students.

The consultants would like to thank all the members of the Atlanta Public School Board of Education who provided valuable information through individual meetings, as well as Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Maria Carstarphen, for sharing time with us. We would like to thank all the individuals who participated in the focus meetings for their candid “on the ground input” and specificity in dealing with the positive aspects of the district, varying challenges facing the district in the future, and comments regarding characteristics they would like to see in the new superintendent. Equally important was the input provided through the online survey in ranking the top characteristics for the new superintendent and candid comments regarding the superintendent search. We would also like to thank the Atlanta Public Schools District staff members who were most accommodating and always made us feel comfortable as we borrowed office space and navigated our way through the Atlanta Central Office complex. Finally, a very special thank you is extended to Pierre Gaither and Keith Glass, who assisted us greatly in identifying constituent groups and coordinating meeting times within the Atlanta Public Schools District community.

Respectfully submitted,

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## **SUMMARY OF CONSISTENT THEMES FROM INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS**

### ***Strengths***

- An engaged and supportive City that wants APS to succeed
- APS has a long history of distinguished graduates and alumni
- Atlanta is a vibrant city with growth and unlimited potential
- Atlanta's access to higher education, the arts, businesses, and recreational resources
- Board members are committed to their governance role
- Funding and resources are available for the needs of APS
- Graduation rates and other academic indicators have risen in recent history
- Legacy of civil rights movement is part of Atlanta and APS history
- Principal and central office staff are highly competent
- School facilities and maintenance are in good shape with funding sources from ESPLOST
- Schools and staff embrace and care for the neediest families in poverty
- Staff is passionate and committed to all students
- Talented teachers that are dedicated, committed, and responsive to parents as well as students

### ***Challenges/Concerns/Issues***

- "Tale of Two Cities" a city with wealth and poverty in the extremes
- Board and superintendent roles, relationships, governance and engagement are vital to the success and longevity
- Capacity issues with crowding in the north with underutilization in the south
- Diversity—racial, ethnic, socio-economic, etc.
- Equity—many different viewpoints and definitions
- Many schools in need academic improvement for accreditation
- Provide equal access for all students (north and south) to a rigorous curriculum
- Relationship improvement with the City and other governmental agencies is a priority

### ***Desired Characteristics***

- Communicates and connects with parents and all citizens in a caring and gracious manner
- Collaborative with the community, the schools, and especially the governance structure of APS and Atlanta
- Develops ideas and is able to stand her/his ground in the face of political pressures
- Engages, supports and seeks the input of teachers
- Instructional leader with urban experience
- Demonstrated results in an urban setting to close the achievement gap
- Systemic thinker who is proactive - not reactive
- Teaching background is desired
- Honesty/integrity/transparency are critical attributes
- Understands diversity in all forms, comfortable in all settings

- Willing to listen and observe while learning the district – doesn't start changing things immediately

# Comments from Interviews and Focus Group Meetings

Listed in alphabetical order

“/” indicates multiple similar responses from different interviews

## Board Members

### Strengths

1996 Olympics put us on the map  
52000 great students who need APS  
6000 employees who commit to these students every day  
Affordability  
African American—leadership and opportunity  
Airport serves the world  
All benefits of big city with a small-town feel  
Ambitious strategic plan focused on closing achievement gaps between subgroups  
APS desegregation was a historical leader  
APS has a legacy of graduates—Martin Luther King, and many others  
APS has rich history—noted and appreciated—distinguished graduates //  
APS identifies principals through strong screening process  
Atlanta has great opportunity—philanthropic, corporate and city and County resources  
Atlanta is an up and coming city to live in  
Attracts business and international—to southern hospitality  
Board  
Budget  
Buildsmart—Master Plan led to ESPLOST for construction—facilities are good shape  
Challenging position  
City growth and growth mode  
Collaboration potential  
Community engagement office—ensures parents the skill to navigate APS  
Community support of schools  
Community wants APS to succeed  
Community will rally and support the new superintendent—Buckhead to Bankhead  
Contributions of people are valued, especially those of color  
Corporate partnerships  
Current Atlanta Mayor is a Douglass graduate  
District on the rise  
Diversity is very strong and welcomed ////  
Dual enrollment—700 students and growing  
Emerging city—still a long way to go  
Every landform within a few hours  
Facility growth potential  
Funding is very good—money is available for all critical needs  
Good foundation is in place—great things that need to continue  
Graduation rate of Latinx students increased

Great City-offers great opportunities— “A city too busy to hate”  
Groundwork is in place for a new superintendent to take it to the next level  
Growing exponentially  
Historical  
Momentum is in place  
Operations have improved to allow future superintendent to focus on academics  
Striving for excellence  
Strong Board of Education  
Strong educated AA’s in every aspect of the school chain  
Strong focus on students  
Strong funding--community ready and willing to help  
Strong instructional focus—APS has moved beyond compliance  
Strong system for some—but you sometimes you have to fight to get it  
Students  
Teaching excellence and leadership excellence  
The worst is over—but there is still a lot left to do  
Unique city  
Weather

## **Challenges**

1% gains in schools is not enough  
6 of the 9 school clusters need improvement—87 schools  
APS children are not getting the same education  
Barriers—city, state and county need to be held accountable for improving students lives  
Barriers—income disparity is very wide  
Board elected by popularity, not skills  
Budget allocation  
Build relationships with trust in the community  
Capacity issues split by north and south—can’t be solved by busing  
CEO model needed--not a monarchy  
Challenging Board sometimes get too involved in small issues  
Charter Schools—no need to extend or expand—focus on the traditional schools rather than turn more schools over to Charters  
Children need a vision and hope—we owe that to them  
Children not reading on grade level  
Communication (internal/external)  
Community Buy-in  
Consider reorganization  
Continue successful initiatives  
Culture of mistrust  
Cycle of poverty in the City is persistent—creates funding needs for wrap around services  
Develop a strong relationship with the Board as a whole and each individual member of the Board to leverage synergy in APS  
Develop a thorough knowledge of organizational structure of APS to ensure all central office activities are in support of the students  
Develop strategic thinkers not just test takers

Develop, establish and maintain professional boundaries with the entire Board and individual Board members  
 Disparity of private resources in individual schools is exasperating the achievement gap  
 Diversity  
 Ensure Stability and continuity  
 Equity and disparity ///  
 Focusing on turning around low performing schools—highest priority  
 Funding is plentiful—how does this impact the lives of the children –unravel the current expenditures to ensure student achievement  
 Gaining trust of community members is vital—only an ecumenical approach will work  
 Give the north what they need—then let them figure it out  
 Graduation rate increases will be more difficult to achieve than the recent graduation growth APS has experienced  
 High poverty—needs effort of the entire city to make a change  
 Housing is an issue—livable wages would help too  
 Improved communication  
 Inequities of the parents and homes is tremendous  
 Innovation  
 Lack of food, breakfast and lunch – why not food pantries  
 Large constituency still wants current superintendent to stay  
 Letting adult problems getting in the way of educating the children  
 Linkages and connections are important—don't take credit for all good ideas—let others shine  
 Literacy  
 Low enrollment  
 Low performing schools concentrated geographically  
 Majority of students not performing at the proper levels  
 Maria's legacy  
 Navigating APS is still too difficult for parent and staff, website improvement is still needed  
 Need immediate improvement in low performing schools  
 Not all principals are clear in their vision and addressing discipline, teacher empowerment, and the overall culture of the school  
 Opportunities:  
 Parent engagement  
 Peacetime general versus wartime general—it's time for the peacetime  
 Perceived accountability – nothing seems to happen in the schools that are continually failing  
 Political stamina  
 Politics—always navigating City with State with County  
 Poverty //  
 Predominantly white and high socio-economic schools need to become more diverse  
 Race—tail of two cities, haves and have not's //  
 Racism  
 Relationships need improvement with the City of Atlanta and other governmental agencies ///  
 Restorative practices  
 Schools are not diverse  
 Schools—facility equity issue remains  
 Services-housing, food, mental health  
 Shift to autonomy school principals need different skill sets

Social and emotional learning  
Socioeconomic divide  
Students having access and equity to curriculum and resources such as technology are a concern  
Superintendent's legacy  
Tale of two cities—North and South—demographics, income, education  
Teacher support  
Teamwork with Board and Superintendent  
Threats  
Time is a constraint on the 70% of students not reading on grade level at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade  
Tough district—from community input to political involvement  
Traffic  
Transportation—bussing will not solve the issue, but the limits of traffic impact solutions  
Trust is not where it needs to be between the parents and the school system  
Water polo practice sites versus do children have meals and food—what are our priorities  
We need someone to work cooperatively with us now  
Workforce quality—concerns about employee accountability to the needs of the child

### **Characteristics**

'TEAM KIDS'  
"Genuinely" increase achievement  
Ability to recognize mistakes and come back with a good solution  
Advocate for APS students  
Assertive  
Bridge builder not bridge burner  
Can adapt to change and be able to coach employees rather than scare them  
Challenging environment experience  
Change agent not needed  
Child advocate  
Collaborative /////  
Come in and work with those who need it the most  
Commitment  
Communication effectively with all constituents and communities ///  
Deep and broad experience in education  
Deep urban, poverty, achievement, experience needed  
Delegates  
Diversity of thought  
Diversity—all forms  
Drama free  
Emotional intelligence /  
Engaging  
Equity and inequity experience //  
Experience in the schools /  
Experience with low performing schools  
Fearless  
Flexibility and autonomy would be valued in school leaders  
Gender/Race/LGBTQ, age does not matter

Heart for students  
 High expectations for student achievement  
 Honesty ///  
 Humility  
 Hyper focused on school district—keep the main thing the main thing and focused on APS  
 Independent  
 Innovative ///  
 Integrate and network community groups while protecting the district's interest  
 Integrity ///  
 Knowledge of instruction  
 Manage the employees—hold them accountable  
 Model for 'out of the box' thinking  
 Need someone like Dr. C  
 No spotlights—link arms instead  
 Non-education candidates do not fit APS needs  
 Organized  
 Passion for students—drive for success  
 People person  
 Political maneuverability is very important  
 Priority:  
 Qualities  
 Recognizes differences but prioritizes unity  
 Relationships with city official  
 Respect what's working  
 Scare tactics and fear do not work  
 Self-awareness  
 Servant leader  
 Someone who can navigate external and internal politics of schools and governmental agencies  
 Someone who cares deeply about eradicating poverty—using education as the vehicle to do it  
 Someone with a history of closing achievement gaps  
 Someone with turnaround success in schools and school districts  
 Strategic Thinker  
 Strong leader, manager  
 Students first  
 Study and understand the beat of APS—don't assume  
 Supports internal compliance  
 System approach  
 Systems thinker  
 Team Player  
 Teamwork and collaboration  
 Thought partnerships with solutions  
 Transparency ///  
 Trustworthy  
 Understand the civil rights history of APS and the role it played in US history  
 Understands an urban district  
 Understands the importance of addressing the needs of the whole child  
 Use data to make informed decisions

Value divergent points of view—engage and consider input from staff and parents

Values

Values data

Vision for instruction—continue the recent initiatives

Worked up through the ranks

Works well with the board

## **Administrative Team**

### **Strengths**

500,000 to 1.2 million in City population growth is expected  
Accountability in tech division  
APS attached to city of Atlanta  
APS Police Dept  
APS used to be 100,000 students—we may grow back to that  
Atlanta is a great thriving city  
Atlanta is unique for school choice options—charters are not a brain drain  
Atlanta was seen as progressive before the cheating scandal  
Central Office leaders  
Charter system and school-based autonomy engages communities in a new way  
Cohesive board  
Collaborative atmosphere  
Communication from district  
Communities loves their schools  
Credibility in attracting and retaining partnerships  
Culture and economic strength  
Culture of the organization is improving everyday—no trust issues  
Custodial 50% outsourced and food service is entirely outsourced  
Dedicated staff  
Defined academic program—many curriculum improvements  
Director/principal had high turnover—that has changed  
Discipline—proactive with discipline supports  
Diversity //  
Employees are committed to the students  
Engagement of alumni, community, parents, students  
Enormous workforce talent within the schools  
Family atmosphere—very welcoming and embracing  
Family oriented  
Financial stability  
Go teams are very successful  
Great accomplishments—foundational stuff—documenting SOP's, beyond regulations and policies  
Great City  
Great communication  
Great schools  
Growth should double in the next 20 years  
Hub of the south  
Leadership development program  
Legacy of APS  
Operationally sound organization  
Opportunities to interact with businesses which have had an impact on the district  
Opportunity to put your stamp on Atlanta  
Organization is resource rich, especially for an urban environment

Partnerships are very strong  
Passion for the work from the employees  
Passionate staff  
People care about the City, the families and the students  
Positive momentum in academic outcomes  
Poverty of students is decreasing  
Principals  
Principals are empowered—ability to innovate is fostered  
Principals are strong  
Principals owning their buildings—operational leaders  
Rich history of the city and school district  
Robust professional development  
Room to move district to the next level  
School based health clinics in several schools staffed with M.D.'s  
Schools  
Smart capable staff  
SPLOST gives \$100 million a year for facilities  
Stability at the principal level  
Stable leadership  
Strong cabinet  
Systems in place  
Talent pool is strong and highly educated  
Talent pool of the senior staff is excellent  
Unique and passionate neighborhoods  
Very rigorous selection process for principals  
Wrap around supports for mental, social and emotional health

## **Challenges**

76% free and reduced is moving lower  
Accountability for student success from all stakeholders  
Advocacy groups  
Affordable housing is an issue  
African American population will not be the majority group in the future  
Asian and Caucasians demographics are increasing  
Behavior and discipline – professional development still needed  
Better relationships with the City of Atlanta  
Board service sometimes used as political springboard  
Board informed decision making (content specialists cuts)  
Bureaucracy can be streamlined—the flow charts are not strong and not always followed  
Commitment to Community  
Competition for talent in Metro Area  
Content knowledge  
Cultural work still needs improvement  
District's past  
Diversity

Division of communities  
Engagement of “all” community  
Generational poverty  
Global HR/Lawson  
Haves and have not’s—tale of two cities  
How to bring a Board together—how to build trust in a Board that hasn’t been able to do it themselves  
Inequity  
Lack of education of Board members leads to the Board not understanding consequences of the decision  
Major demographic shift  
Money/funds become politically attractive—but students need to remain the focus  
More pressure—everything from celebrations to crisis has tremendous coverage from the press  
Navigation of tradition  
Need to repair the relationship with the City of Atlanta and other governmental entities  
Parent engagement is a challenge  
Political landscape needs careful and thoughtful attention  
Politics  
Pre-K reading  
Pressures on taxes—tax allocations  
Racial segregation -- community development seems to be geared to the high socio-economic clientele  
Relationship between district and the city  
Relationship between district/city  
SOP’s need improvement and need to be documented  
Stable leadership needs to be maintained  
Stagnant literacy performance  
Strategic Planning is not evident in the top of the administrative level  
Student achievement has been flat  
Talent deficit in the teacher and transportation workforce  
Teacher training  
Tech budget insufficient  
Technology is a challenge  
Transition from a school system to “a system of schools”  
Trust  
Turnover is still too high  
Very wealthy or very poor—bifurcated district  
Wages

## **Characteristics**

“Moral politics” (what’s best for kids)  
Ability to navigate highly complex political relationships with City, State, Business Community, State Education, officials, etc.  
Able to bring a divided Board together

Academic leader  
Accessible atmosphere is well established and can't be diminished  
Board relationships  
Collaborator  
Come in with open mind and heart; don't believe they have all the answers  
Committed to community  
Communicate "good information" to parents/community //  
Community is very engaged—candidate must be open to the community  
Culture building skills  
Deliberative  
Don't stop the positive momentum—assess what's working  
Effective school board experience  
Eliminate silos  
Empowers leadership  
Enroll their children in APS  
Errol Davis type—CEO—nontraditional – pink unicorn  
Ethical //  
Evidence of raising student achievement  
Excellent transparent communication skills especially with Board Members  
Focus needed—many different priorities and much noise distract  
Goal focused  
Good listener  
Grit is needed  
Instructional leader  
Instructional leader with a strong background  
Integrity  
Internal team talent builder  
Involved  
Knows instruction  
Personable and willing to hear the concerns  
Politically savvy /  
Preserve dignity of all  
Priority is APS business  
Public school experience  
Relates to all constituents and families in the district  
Relationship builder /  
School Leader experience  
Silo eliminator  
Slow steady progress is needed  
Spotless personal background  
Stabilizing leader—not transformational  
Staff developer  
Strong managerial skills  
Superintendent experience  
Supporter of strategic plan process  
Thick skin ///  
Trust

Union experience—right to work state—but organizations/associations still need superintendent relationship skills  
Urban experience in large districts /  
Value staff  
Visible in and out of district  
Willing to listen

## **Principals**

### **Strengths**

Acquisition of resources  
Birthplace of civil rights movement  
Collaboration  
Equity  
Family oriented, passion for children  
Hearing stakeholders  
High School principal unity  
Impressive education for Urban students  
Increasing employee morale  
Intentional focus on excellence  
Location, Atlanta a thriving city  
Longevity of employees, skill set  
Opportunities for success  
Opportunity for diverse groups  
Opportunity to help underserved  
Positive changes over last 5 years; re-branding  
Resiliency of District  
Students are great  
Trajectory of student achievement growth

### **Challenges**

Academic underachievement  
Atlanta politics  
Changing management  
Deal with diverse politics  
Employees morale  
Enforcement of policies equally  
Equity //  
Establish rules of engagement that are consistent  
Financial needs  
Gentrification impacts  
Improve discipline protocols  
Increase number of college bound students  
Literacy improvement  
Provide in-house opportunities for staff

Re- branding/images  
Retention of highly regarded employees  
Socio-economic and educational divide  
Special Education  
Streamlining of initiatives  
Support building principals  
Support employees of closing schools  
Whole child approach to teaching and learning  
Work-life balance distribution

### **Characteristics**

Principal in an Urban School  
Turnaround experience  
Passionate, approachable  
Able to build/develop relationship with staff/community  
Navigate the political landscape  
Allow communication protocols to work  
Defined position on charter schools  
Able to connect to community  
Able to enhance partnerships and fund raising  
Focus on children  
Willing to review current programs before changes  
Thoughtful, reflective  
Able to understand and utilization data  
Able to focus on literacy  
Able to distribute resources based on **need**

## **Directors and Instructional Staff**

### **Strengths**

Administrators are supportive of the Arts  
Area attractions, social and historical  
Charter system is great  
Community history/legacy  
Community passion and attachment to schools  
Cultural capital of the US  
Diversity, economically, racially and culturally  
Economic growth potential  
Facilities are good  
Focus of social-emotional learning  
Focus on vision/mission  
Forward-looking school district  
Growth and development  
Increasing number of partnerships  
Infrastructure  
Job opportunities  
Melting pot  
Metropolitan city  
Opportunities for student growth  
Opportunities in district/community  
Opportunities to address challenges  
Opportunities to increase partnerships  
Partnerships are abundant /  
Professional staff  
Quality of life  
Resources  
Schools could almost run without a superintendent  
Staff engagement  
Staff longevity  
Strategic plan  
Support system for the schools is very strong—facilities, mental health, student services, etc.  
Teachers have heart for the kids  
Untapped potential for growth and prosperity  
Very talented and skilled educators  
Vibrant city for the Arts  
Workforce is very dedicated—they go over and above for their students

## **Challenges**

Academic performance  
Autonomy of schools  
Charters  
Collaboration with city/state //  
Community dynamics vary  
Continue student reach  
Continued re-branding  
Culture shift needed  
Decision making does not include all information  
Developing a caring culture  
Disconnect between district and schools  
Employee social/emotional support  
Equity ///  
Equity between the different areas north versus south – levels of service  
Equity in Arts  
Family database is not current  
Financial commitment to prior pension plans  
Focus on social emotional learning  
Focus on vision and mission  
Full engagement of business and community groups  
Impoverish communities  
Managing changing demographics and diversity  
Move from focus on numbers to people  
New leadership anxiety  
Overcoming the “cheating scandal”  
Politics will be a challenge—special favors/needs—many requests  
Population of students in poverty—poverty issue transition into the schools  
Recruit more Black males  
Redistricting  
Relationships with 10 clusters  
Silos do not engage community  
Some employees here for the wrong reason  
Student achievement  
Student and Teacher safety  
Student behavior  
Teacher and student advocacy  
Top down focus

Transparency  
Trust

### **Characteristics**

Ability to work with government and community groups  
Able to access staff, forward thinking, motivator  
Able to work with BOE, and communicator  
Academic achievement experience  
Academics are a priority  
Active listener  
Approachable—by all employees and all citizens  
Authentic  
Available to press  
Awareness and Sensitivity to Special needs students  
Children first mentality  
Clear vision and implementation plan  
Commitment to district and students first  
Communicator  
Consistent messages  
Develops relationships with staff and others without getting caught up in politics  
Effective communicator, visionary  
Ego does not impede work  
Experience as a principal, traditional public school  
Experience in an Urban center  
Focus on order, operations, structure  
Focused on students  
Fund raiser for resources  
Gets out of the central office  
Listen without being offended  
Local administrator  
Loves Atlanta  
Manager of district operations  
Media savvy  
Non-Educator  
Not a “yes” person  
Polished in delivery of difficult messages  
Politically savvy  
Proven track record of building capacity  
Respect work of the District  
Someone with Atlanta experience and historical history

Transparency //  
Treat staff as professionals  
Trustworthy, approachable, visible, caring /  
Utilizes an inclusive decision-making model  
Values school discipline  
Visible  
Visionary  
Voice expectations  
Willing to engage and learn from community  
Willing to understand before initiating change

## **Teachers**

### **Strengths**

Big city with increasing population  
Caring and nurturing staff  
Great City leaders  
Great diversity  
Great teachers  
In the process of turnaround  
Job opportunities  
Partnerships  
Serious investment in Student Learning  
Students  
Teachers are able to help others  
Willing to spend money to build infrastructure

### **Challenges**

Continue the transparency  
Equity  
Power and autonomy of principals  
Resistance to change in leadership

### **Characteristics**

Able to build relationships with partners  
Be a true advocate of district, teachers and teachers  
Great communicator  
Honest, reliable and keep promises  
Knowledgeable, visionary  
Non-Bully  
Well aware of education protocols and practices  
Willing to focus on improving behavior of students  
Willing to hold everyone accountable  
Willing to include teachers in decision making process  
Willing to observe current work before making changes  
Willing to work with teachers to improve work place benefits

## **Students**

### **Strengths**

Abundant resources  
Family atmosphere  
Freshmen mentoring program  
Grads return to see teachers  
Multiple activities centered around student interests  
Parent, teacher, staff support system  
Project based learning  
Public figures serve as mentors  
Single gender schools  
Staff stability  
Superintendent attends events  
Teachers prepare students for career pathways

### **Challenges**

Bright Students from underserved families are not encouraged to seek opportunities available to others  
College readiness is not introduced until senior year  
Financial college resources reserved for top 10%  
High teacher turnover in one of the schools  
Limited inclusion of sped students  
Limited SEL training for Staff/students  
Low student-counselor ratio for college prep  
Money management classes needed  
More ACT/SAT prep needed  
Negative teacher energy impact students negatively- (“I have my degree, you have to get yours”)  
Ongoing redistricting conversations  
Provide Special Ed students need same opportunities as others  
Recognize, respond, provide resources to LGBTQI students  
Teachers experiencing emotional stress  
Teachers released midyear from “Purpose Built” (partnership company) schools  
Tension which may result from future demographic shifts  
Threats to send kids to Forest Hills (alternative school)  
Under-resourced communities handled differently than resourced communities

### **Characteristics**

Compassionate  
Driven  
Education experience  
Experience in a diverse district  
Genuine  
Involved

Meets with students to clarify the impact of decisions

Open-minded

Outgoing

Resilient

Selflessness

Understanding

## **Support Staff**

### **Strengths**

Approachable  
Communication  
Great working relationship with the current superintendent  
Welcoming

### **Challenges**

Current hierarchy—will they work with the team in place—be mindful of the different organizations  
Large shoes to fill with personality  
Stop outsourcing—bring nutrition back in house

### **Characteristics**

Always have children as a first priority  
Can't be all about the teachers—they've got to be flexible  
High-spirited  
Leadership skills—tough skin  
Open-minded  
Put the students first—core value  
Solution oriented  
Someone who is grounded but has an ear for everybody—welcome everybody to the table  
Support services are important

## **Local Government Officials**

### **Strengths**

Administrators are effective  
Atlanta is one of the most desirable places to live in the US. i.e. cost of living—weather—  
employment opportunities  
Balance of compassion and commerce  
Community Resources  
Community resources  
Community willing to help shape future direction of APS  
Cost of living  
Disposal income—leads to enrollment in private schools  
Diverse student population  
Diversity /  
Dr. C's leadership put APS in an upward trajectory  
Facilities  
Growing  
Growing area  
It's ATLANTA!  
Partners support the legacy of the community  
Partnerships with school districts  
Progressive //  
Proposed transit system  
Recognition of historical figures  
Residents want to see schools succeed  
Rich history  
Small town nurturing  
Strong private schools  
Students are great  
Superintendent was passionate about the students  
Synergy between philanthropic, business companies  
Tech savvy district

### **Challenges**

2 police systems – city/APS  
Able to work with school board  
Alternative school student management  
Diversity  
Don't know if the top school district exists now.  
Dysfunctional relationship between city/Superintendent  
Expectations will be high  
Failure to have equity on north/south sides  
Familiarity with nuances of Atlanta  
Gentrification  
Growing population

Ignored/disenfranchised employees  
Majority of schools need improvement  
Morale is bad  
No real powerhouses on the Board  
Parents put Superintendent under a lot of scrutiny  
Police equipment/vehicles needed  
Politics  
Resources to support student needs  
School failure impacts outcomes for community  
Separate and unequal school system  
Share APS mission/vision with community  
Socioeconomic gaps  
Strong willed  
Superintendent should put students first and not bow into the City of Atlanta's priorities  
Support salary review needed  
Traffic  
Try to get along with everybody

## **Characteristics**

Active in community  
Belief that turnaround can occur within a reasonable time  
Builds relationships with officials to achieve goals  
Collaborative with internal/external stakeholders  
Committed to living in Atlanta  
Communicate with all district/community constituents  
Demonstrated success with school boards  
Desire to serve  
Ego cannot take a front seat  
Engages with employees  
Familiar with Atlanta, nuances of Atlanta  
Fearless  
Flexible  
Focus on safety and security  
Get out in community to share APS mission and vision  
Heart for children and communities  
History of moving districts in a positive direction  
Involved in community  
Kids first, not business officials  
Listener  
Move students toward college and career  
Optimism  
Outgoing  
Passion for students of color  
Personable /  
Politically savvy

Progressive thinking  
resources for all students/families  
Seek input prior to decision making  
Social consciousness  
Successful work with community partners  
Supportive of APS Police  
Understands uniqueness of Atlanta  
Vision which is clear to all  
work with students in and out of classrooms  
Work Effectively with city/state officials

## **Clergy**

### **Strengths**

APS is resource rich  
Many opportunities here, culture is very rich  
Many resources for children beyond the school system  
Principal qualities are great and still improving  
Principals are ensuring the safety net for all children  
Vibrant City

### **Challenges**

Accountability systems need to accommodate different teaching and learning styles?  
APS is losing ground with competitive pay  
APS needs to recruit and retain a better teacher workforce  
Are all HS graduates ready for employment or college without taking remediation courses?  
Do teachers just teach to the test? Students need skills beyond test taking?  
Great teachers don't seem to stay in the positions that need them the most  
Make decisions that may be diverse from the Board to protect students  
Superintendent needs to understand the challenges of APS youth  
Superintendent should meet with clergy interfaith on a regular basis  
Teachers are the lynchpin to future APS success  
Wealth disparity—impacts youth—so many challenges based on poverty

### **Characteristics**

Conviction over convenience  
Empowerment is more important than power  
Heart of service for children  
Not a career path—comes to APS as a calling  
Passion for the entire job—students, staff and community  
Principle over pleasure  
Principled—not easily persuaded  
Relationships are the best skills for leadership  
What does leadership look like—it's not about power—it should be about service

## **Alumni**

### **Strengths**

A sense of community, family and Legacy  
Changing demographics  
Partners  
The program of “no C’s”  
Untapped potential of Atlanta

### **Challenges**

Need for students to rise from the “Ashes” (untapped potential)  
Need to be more family than business  
Empower principals  
Equity  
Fix the infrastructure/fundamentals

### **Characteristics**

A focus on community awareness and engagement  
A focus on improving reading for all students  
Ability to merge various identities into one  
Ability to work with government agencies  
Able to communicate a vision  
Cultural awareness  
Honesty and Integrity  
Instructional orientation/student achievement  
Proven track record in achieving district wide equity  
Work with Atlanta politics

**Atlanta Public Schools District  
Superintendent of Schools  
Desired Characteristics  
(in alphabetical order—not prioritized)**

After seeking input from its Board members, parents, staff, students, and community via focus groups, interviews, and an online survey, the Board of Education of the Atlanta Public Schools District (APS) seeks a strong and dynamic educational leader who possesses the following characteristics:

- Ability to champion and execute a shared vision on equity.
- Accessibility that is transparent and welcoming for community groups and organizations.
- Adaptability in developing a professional presence that is demonstrated through visibility.
- Humility and resilience in the face of dealing with difficult decisions and varying needs of the community.
- Inclusive style of leadership that engages and collaborates with Board Members, staff and community in a transparent style of leadership.
- Urban teaching and administrative experience that serves as a foundation for understanding differentiation of instruction, meeting individual student needs, and provide a curriculum and strategies to close the achievement gap.

With regard to leadership experiences and accomplishments, the successful candidate will:

- Demonstrate community and family engagement built upon transparency, trust, honesty and integrity.
- Demonstrate proven skills in building a governance model that is inclusive of excellent working relationships with the Board, the governmental agencies of the region and especially the community.
- Demonstrate skilled leadership in curriculum and program development that is research based, evidence based, and is supported by well-planned and sequenced implementation and professional development.
- Demonstrates an ability encompass vision, mission and strategic plans but also demonstrates and ability to work with current initiatives and provide a continuous feedback loop for improvement.
- Demonstrate district wide achievement results that have raised the bar of accomplishment while reducing achievement gaps between and among all student groups.
- Demonstrate creativity in the development of an educational working environment that is effective, well managed, fairly evaluated, inclusive and holds all employees accountable.
- Demonstrate human resource(s) skills that attract outstanding candidates for all positions and decrease turnover vulnerabilities.

