

Search for New Charter School Leader Focus Group Questions and Answers Raw Data

1. What education, skill set, and experience should the new school leader bring to the position?

Staff Focus Group	Parent & Community Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader than just undergraduate and graduate degrees in one content area • Secondary and elementary knowledge & experience • Special Ed, ELL, and Behavioral background • Administrative certification and experience • Budget experience • Experience with Charter Schools and their multiple stakeholders (i.e., Board, DOE, other schools in the geography, Charter School networks and professional organizations) • Experience and skill at implementing organizational change • Admin experience in elementary; specifically Grades 5-6 focus; demonstrated “developmentally-appropriate” decision making for these grades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelors, Masters, PhD and Charter School education and experience • Age level experience (for our Grades) • Experience with comparable school size • Experience with similar demographics • Charter experience • True understanding of site-based management • Experience with budget problems • Proven success with Charter renewals and Management accountability plans • Business background – examples: budgets, staffing, criteria for school uniqueness. PR, etc. • Bringing kids together from diverse elementary schools • Well-versed in SpEd issues • Bi-lingual would be nice (Portuguese, Spanish) • Any special certifications needed for Charter Schools

2. What leadership traits and characteristics are critical to a leader in this position?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to generate enthusiasm and creativity • Sense of humor • Approachable, accessible • Organized • Good at problem-solving and conflict resolution • Uses consensus and staff empowerment in decision making BUT still has ability to appropriately make decisions “Benevolent Dictator” • Has strong professional ethics – good at confidentiality • Can market the school; is good a PR and public image; grooms the relationships with colleagues, parents and the public community • Confident but not arrogant • Motivates staff and parents • Pulls new staff into the Charter commitment • Is committed to implementing the Mission state – see it as core to the school and is loyal to this; someone who can take the philosophy and move it into action • Surrounds self with strong staff (as a leader complements his/her weaknesses with others strengths) • Trusts staff therefore NOT a micro manager • Knows Charters school laws and SpEd laws • Ability to build school culture; knows what this takes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible, visible, approachable (e.g., seen in the halls, able to speak with him/her, s/he speaks with the kids). • Open-minded • Good communicator (with Board, parents, staff, students, community, etc.) • Strong advocate (w/public, other school districts/towns) • Likes kids • Uses common sense; helps keep small issues from becoming large issues • Strong motivator (with kids, and staff)- helps them achieve the best possible • Sense of humor • Able to see long term impact of decisions (and can balance this against the short term) • Fiscally responsible • Fair (open listener with students; can mediate staff and student differences) • Someone who thinks there is more to education than MCAS (e.g., arts, languages, music, etc.) • Strongly encourages parent involvement • Able to multi-task • Knows how to delegate; not a micro manager • Organized • Respected and credible; “respect breeds respect” • NOT larger than life to the kids; connects with kids • Willing to try (risk-taker); if it fails, just move on • Adaptable • Thinks “outside the box” • Follows through and follows up Deals effectively with discipline issues (i.e., follows the handbook consistently; points kids in the right direction)

3. What short term (ST) and long term (LT) issues will the successful candidate need to focus on at the beginning of his/her tenure as a Charter School leader?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the Charter Assessment goals on an evolving plan (continuously reviewed and assessed) • Will be facing the 3rd school renewal therefore will need to focus all on keeping energy high for this renewal • Achieve goals of the Accountability Plan • Prioritize those things where “most improvement” is needed • Deal with the SpEd compliance review (April?, 2006) • Financial: stability and equity (i.e., expend per student formula) for the school • Find strong Board Members – be a leader that would attract strong Board Members • Can implement dissemination of best practices commitments • Create a plan for dealing with changing demographics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget and the projected shortfall for the next few years • Maintaining the Charter (i.e., corrective actions, renewal, accountability plan) • Staffing; knowing how to recruit top staff as we face turnover from retirements in the next 5 years • Jump in and get up to speed without slowing things down • Focus on the Grade 6 curriculum to bring it in balance with the Grade 5 • Getting a handle on the demographics and overall enrollment shifts and effectively dealing with this. • Recognition of, and sensitivity to, the legacy and culture that has been established. Capitalize on this in his/her plans for the school • Identify the priority adjustments that need to be made to satisfy the MCAS needs.

4. What should the Board, staff, and parents do to assist the leader in making a successful transition into the position, the school, and the community overall?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback in early months (both positives and negatives (open communications)) • Offer to help and share information • Create early opportunities to meet/get to know each other; even use established formats (meetings, etc.) that lend themselves to this • Provide history of the school • Help him/her understand the Community issues • Assure that the Board creates clear expectations (not left arbitrary or undefined) • Make documents available that would be helpful in creating background and context of school (Annual Reports, etc.) • Expect the candidate to initiate research about the School, towns, etc. and do visitations to get to know these (PAC could help with these visitations) • Encourage staff to have an attitude of openness to change (because some will be inevitable with a new Principal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming in and doing without understanding (not change for change stake) • Not fixing what is broken or fixing what is not broken (result of uninformed judgment) • Incompatibility; not mixing well; not getting staff, students and parents on the same page. • Accountability Plan not followed • Positive energy no longer there when you enter school • Collaboration is lost • Inability to manage (may be a good educator but...) • Inability to keep a vision; not willing to continuously improve (prefers status quo) – doesn't follow the idea of "do as much as you ask staff and students to do" • Can't maintain a balanced budget • Doesn't keep students as Priority #1 • Not a team player (school and community) • Is not seen as in harmony with the Board; lacks "one voice"; isn't on the same page.

5. What would most contribute to a new school leader's failure?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was afraid of, or not able to handle, conflict (head in the sand) • Too concerned in newness about approval; fails to take a stand • Dictatorial • Stifles staff creativity and risk taking • Micro manages • Fails to make decisions based first on what's "best for the kids" (defaults to best for staff or best for parents, etc.) • Neglects to pursue in earnest the Accountability Plan ("not my plan" or not serious about it as a priority) • More worried about appearances than about the "meat" (non-participatory, not listening) • Fails to be proactive; lacks ability to think ahead/anticipate. • Not a risk-taker (or backs off) – when it is required of change. • Fails to see political influences and misses opportunities - on local, state and national levels • Not seeing bigger opportunities beyond "our building"; misses contemporary ideas in education reform, national charter movement, etc. • Fails to advocate for staff (in particular, against constant chipping away at them by colleagues and Admin around their collaborative efforts and Charter school initiatives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming in and doing without understanding (not change for change stake) • Not fixing what is broken or fixing what is not broken (result of uninformed judgment) • Incompatibility; not mixing well; not getting staff, students and parents on the same page. • Accountability Plan not followed • Positive energy no longer there when you enter school • Collaboration is lost • Inability to manage (may be a good educator but.....) • Inability to keep a vision; not willing to continuously improve (prefers status quo) – doesn't follow the idea of "do as much as you ask staff and students to do" • Can't maintain a balanced budget • Doesn't keep students as Priority #1 • Not a team player (school and community) • Is not seen as in harmony with the Board; lacks "one voice"; isn't on the same page..

6. Five (5) years from now, what substantive difference should be evident in this Charter School as a result of his/her leadership?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A renewed Charter (3rd time) • Staff has stayed and others ask to join the school – and all staff remains engaged and is focused on their own continuous learning • Evident uniqueness (a “model school”); research-based, reputation for best practices – sought by other schools for best practices • Students are active/pro-active, engaged learners; they are responsible, self-motivated and “like learning”; and scores show this through improvement in the measurables. • Increased parent participation in surveys and staff surveys (and improved positive results) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids/Parents, and staff are banging on the doors to come here. • There is no “criticizing” of us at the School Committee Meetings; the community believes in us. • More schools want to become like us • We are noted as a top ranked school (local, state-wide, beyond) • Graduating students are evidently successful in their following years (Middle school, High School, Colleges, work endeavors, etc.) • More programs support diverse learners • Our best practices are being used throughout the state (and more schools are making field trips to see us) • We’ve added another grade to the Charter (Grade 4?)