



Inquiries for Smooth Transitioning

NEW SUPERINTENDENTS GUIDANCE DOCUMENT NYSCOSS

Transitioning: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders

SOURCE: NYSCOSS *New Superintendents Institute, 2005-06.*

Questions to ask during transition:

- What has made you successful so far in your career?
- What strengths will apply to your new role?
- What new skills will you need to develop?
- What do you need to do to make the mental leap into the new position?

Areas of exploration for the first 90 days:

- How has the district performed in the past; what data and benchmarks are used?
- What is the goal-setting process; what are past goals?
- What are the strengths of the district in: its programs, finances, personnel structures, its culture, and the political environment?
- Does the district have a vision and strategy? Do they seem aligned?
- Who are the leaders in the district; what are their perspectives on the district?
- Which are the key structures, policies, agreements (contracts), groups in the district; how well do they perform?
- What are the major challenges and opportunities that you can identify for the district? Are there new capabilities needed?
- What are the barriers to needed changes, e.g., what changes have been tried in the past and succeeded or failed? Why?
- What elements of the culture (norms, symbols, beliefs) that strengthen the district? That might need changing?

Questions to identify and secure some early wins:

- What are the most promising focal points for your early efforts?
- What items have an achievable urgency?
- Who are the people you need involved to achieve some small early successes?
- How will you communicate and reward the successes?

The first six months: Considering Student Achievement

- Has your district established goals (based on objective results) for this year, longer range? If so, are they realistic?
- Do you perceive a district culture that supports high academic achievement? What are the attributes you are looking for?
- Do you and your staff feel comfortable in identifying good curriculum, good teaching and good student work?

The first six months: Considering the Budget

- Is your present budget adequate? Is your budget based on the priorities you feel are important for the school district?
- When will your budget development begin? Do you have a process- existing or proposed- to use for budget development?
- What goals and guidelines do you have in mind for budget development?

Questions Regarding School Norms and Community Values:

- What are some famous/often repeated stories about our schools, the school district?
- If you had to describe the covenant between the schools and the community, what would it be?
- Are your schools doing as well as expected? What are the things that tell you this? What grade would you give them (A-F)?

- What do you think this community prizes most in its schools- sports, academics, good discipline, low cost, safety, etc.?
- Are there things the schools here do that they should not do, should change?
- If you were considering moving to this community, how would the schools influence your decision?
- What's the last new article you remember reading about your schools
- Are your schools a good mirror of the community's values?
- Are you proud of your schools? How do you describe them to others who are unfamiliar with them?

What parents look for in schools (School Match):

- Competitive test scores; solid academics but not too rigorous as to intimidate
- Accredited and/or recognized by a foundation, U.S. Department of Education
- Competitive teacher salaries
- Above national average in instructional expenditures
- Small class size

For further discussion:

- Are there questions you would add to these?
- What stakeholders should be part of this process? Would focus groups or different techniques work?
- How do you balance community norms and expectations with parent norms and expectations and staff norms and expectations?