

# AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD

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A Pathway to Finding and Hiring an Exceptional  
Leader for Our Public Schools



February 2, 2016

Metropolitan Nashville Board of Education  
2601 Bransford Avenue  
Nashville, TN 37204

Members of the Board of Education:

Nashville stands at an interesting and critical intersection as a city and a school system. On the one hand, important and hard-fought progress has been made in recent years, thanks in part to the tireless work of thousands of excellent educators, district leaders and the School Board alongside engaged and active private-sector, and nonprofit leaders – all deeply committed to the cause of strong and improved public schools. Many others, the most important being our students, have made important and meaningful gains. A number of interesting and highly promising initiatives have been incubated and grown. Many barriers to improvement have been confronted and addressed. Significant policy and resource changes have been made with an eye to strengthening teacher talent, developing principal leadership, tackling underperforming schools, creating more choice for parents and students, prioritizing the growing needs of our EL students, and more.

At the same time, there is a restlessness within the community about what comes next, about how to balance the need for greater urgency with the challenge of creating confidence and sustainability in a consistent direction for the school system. There is also a feeling of divisiveness and rancor that has come to characterize the debate about our schools, which many fear impedes our ability to move forward in the way Nashville historically has broached deep, complex challenges.

This backdrop against which you must find and hire a new director of schools both makes the imperative of finding the right leader all the more tantamount and the recruitment effort complex and difficult.

As we worked together over the last several weeks, we found that, while we represent very different community perspectives, we are remarkably united around a path forward. We believe this search could not only yield a strong, innovative leader who can take our schools forward on an accelerated path, but also turn the page to a new chapter in Nashville's pursuit of a world-class public school system. Done properly, the search could bring about greater urgency for improvement, stabilize the environment, better mobilize and organize the community behind the school improvement efforts, and bring about a more cohesive and less divisive relationship between all of the stakeholders in our community, including the School Board. It is with that desire in mind that we offer the recommendations on the coming pages.

We are honored to have been asked to lend ideas and support to this process, and each of us remains committed to supporting the Board as you enter the more formal search and recruitment phase. Not only do we represent our respective organizations, but we have other deep, personal connections to our public schools. Many of us are graduates of public school. Several of us have children in the public schools or children who graduated from the public schools. Some of us have been public school teachers or have family members who have dedicated their lives to serving as public school educators.

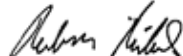
Others of us represent companies whose long-term success relies heavily on current and future graduates of our public schools. We volunteer in the schools, serve on nonprofits dedicated to supporting our schools or in other ways are driven in our daily lives to improving the opportunities of children. These experiences deepen our resolve to be part of an exciting new chapter for the city and our public school system.

We hope the recommendations on the pages that follow provide a constructive roadmap for finding someone who can truly LEAD our public schools forward. Our students and families deserve it. Our teachers and administrators are hungry for it. Our neighborhoods will benefit greatly from it. Our community urgently needs it.

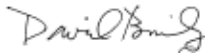
Sincerely,



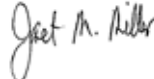
**Shannon Hunt**  
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**Rich Riebeling**  
SAC Co-chair; Chief Operating Officer,  
Mayor Barry's Office



**David Briley**  
Vice Mayor



**Janet Miller**  
CEO, Colliers International



**Sheila Calloway**  
Juvenile Court Judge



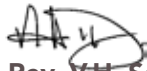
**Mark Rowan**  
Owner, Roundabout Consulting



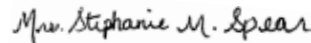
**Bill Carpenter**  
Chairman and CEO, LifePoint Health



**Renata Soto**  
Executive Director, Conexión Américas



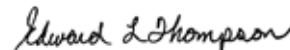
**Rev. V.H. Sonnye Dixon**  
Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship



**Stephanie Spear**  
Chair, MNPS Parent Advisory Council



**Marc Hill**  
Chief Policy Officer, Nashville Area  
Chamber of Commerce



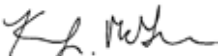
**Rev. Ed Thompson**  
Nashville Organized for Action and Hope



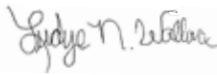
**Erick Huth**  
President, Metropolitan Nashville  
Education Association



**Robbin Wall**  
Principal, McGavock High School



**Dr. Kristin McGraner**  
Founder and Executive Director, STEM  
Prep Academy



**Ludye N. Wallace**  
President, NAACP Nashville



**David Williams**  
Vice Chancellor, Vanderbilt University

In September 2015, the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board of Education began discussing the best way to “reboot” the search process for a new director of schools. Realizing the importance of bringing others into the search process more intentionally, they proactively reached out to newly elected Mayor Megan Barry and the Nashville Public Education Foundation (NPEF) to form a community advisory committee to help kick-start the search process. This group of 17 community leaders was announced in November, and we began our work in earnest in December.

**We were asked to answer three sets of questions in the context of our recommendations:**

**What does Nashville need?** What are Nashville’s biggest challenges? How do we stack up against other cities/districts? What does this point to in terms of the profile of an effective director of schools?

**Who might fit that profile?** Are there districts or systems around the country achieving significant gains or implementing innovations in these areas? Are there others outside these districts that bear further discussion?

**Are we competitive enough to attract high-caliber candidates?** How does our compensation package compare to like-minded or -sized districts? Are there other things we can do to make the position more attractive?

To answer these questions, we immersed ourselves in data and information about our district and about other districts around the country. This included information compiled by NPEF from public data sources as well as reports and information from the district, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Tennessee Department of Education, and nationally recognized research organizations. We compared Nashville to other like-sized districts, as well as to other aspirational districts. We also looked at the competitive landscape in which this search will take place to understand who else is searching for leaders at the same time and how the market more broadly could impact the landscape for recruitment efforts.

We reviewed the material compiled as part of the prior search process last year, working to build and hone that work. We took additional steps to further engage the community, in particular teachers and parents, two of the most critical front-line stakeholders. This included a survey targeting these audiences and asking for additional feedback.

**The response we received from the community to this call for deeper insights was substantial and profound.** Nearly 5,000 people responded, including one-third of the teacher workforce. We’re hopeful that it gives the School Board and others greater resolve to focus the search in a more calibrated way. Certainly, the community feedback was instrumental in informing our recommendations. The recommendations you find on the coming pages are as much a sense of the community as a whole as they are the individual facets of the community we each individually represent. Our hope is that the unity and consensus emerging from these outreach efforts sets the stage for a unified and cohesive decision on the city’s next director of schools and will be a positive signal for potential candidates that this is a city more unified than people may think on first blush.

On the pages that follow, you will find a brief summary of our key findings as well as recommendations for you to consider. In the appendices of this report, you will find a number of additional materials, which were part of the due diligence of this committee:

**District Comparison Data:** Information about how Nashville stacks up against other districts, including a summary matrix with aggregated demographic data of comparison districts including student enrollment, number of schools, per pupil expenditures, total annual budget, percent of economically disadvantaged students, percent minority students and percent EL students.

**Identification of Bright Spots:** Information used as the foundation for identifying a starter list of districts initial search efforts should consider.

**Profiles and District Approaches:** Includes articles about various districts, leaders and/or individual initiatives. Some of these were shared with the committee by others or found through the committee's independent research. While good people can arrive at different conclusions by hearing about what others have done, it is useful to get a sense of how other cities and leaders have approached some of the same challenges Nashville faces.

**Community Insights:** A detailed summary of feedback received from the community survey.

**Compensation Analysis:** Summary of compensation analysis conducted by Arthur J. Gallagher & Company.

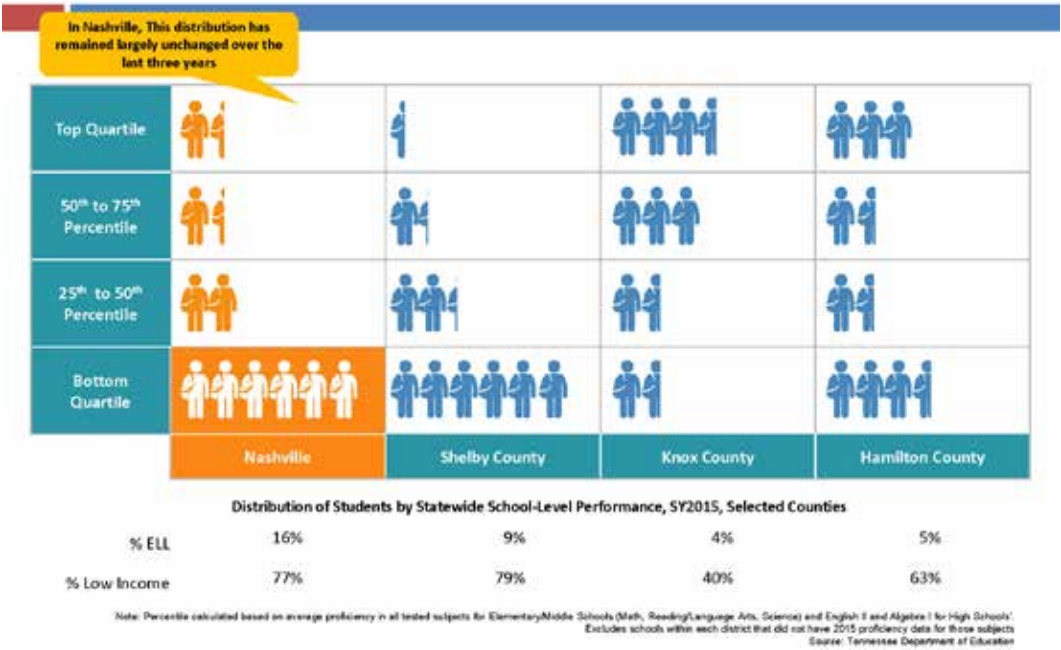
# KEY FINDINGS AND CONTEXT

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is the 42nd-largest school district in America, serving 86,000 students enrolled in 166 schools. More than three-fourths of students in the district – 75.3% to be exact – are economically disadvantaged, 16.2% are English language learners, and 69.3% are minorities. The district’s workforce is composed of 10,300 employees (including 5,302 certified teachers), and the district represents 42% of the Metro budget. While some urban school systems have seen a decline in enrollment, MNPS has seen consistent gains. In addition to overall growth, Nashville has seen the number of English language learners more than double over a 10-year period from 2004 to 2014. While the percent of EL students we serve is on par with several other urban school systems, the rate of growth in our public schools of that population has been meteoric.

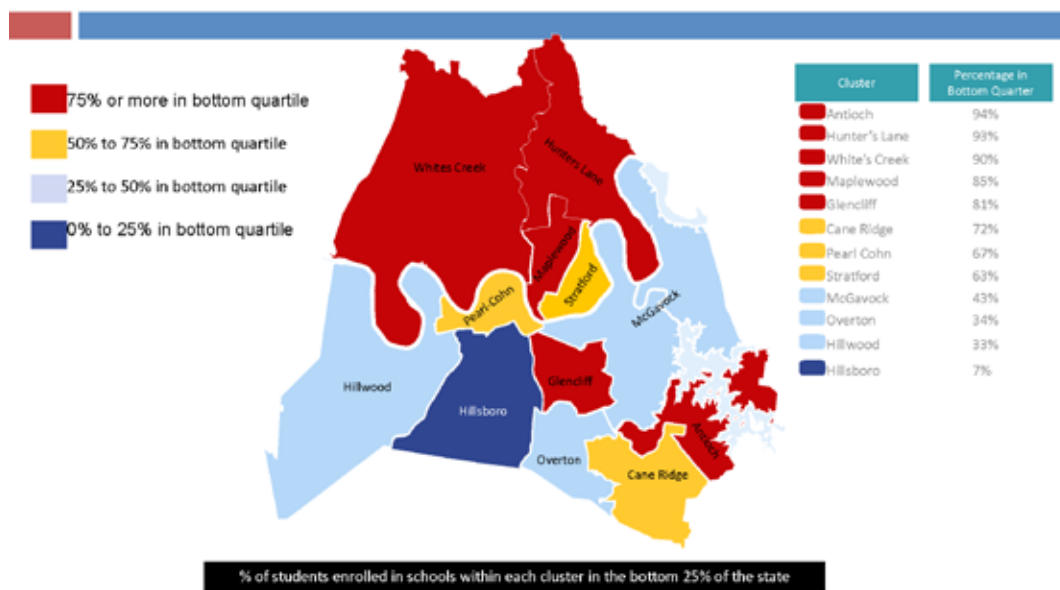
Over the last five years, Nashville’s students have experienced academic gains, often outpacing those of the state overall. At the high school level, the gains have been more significant. While there has been progress, students in Nashville public schools still struggle to meet state standards, let alone a higher bar in terms of college or postsecondary readiness or success.

While progress has been seen in the district, efforts to tackle underperforming schools have lagged. The number of schools deemed “priority schools” by the state and therefore subject to state takeover has increased. In fact, today approximately 60% of MNPS students are enrolled in a school that falls in the bottom quarter of all public schools in Tennessee. Among other urban school systems in Tennessee, we are tied with Memphis in having the largest percentage of children attending underperforming schools and have the second-smallest percentage of children attending a top quartile school. There are many neighborhoods where an overwhelming majority of students attend a bottom quartile school.

## MNPS Today – The 60% Challenge



# MNPS Today – The 60% Challenge



Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Parthenon-ET Analysis. Note: Percentile calculated based on average proficiency in all tested subjects for Elementary/Middle School's Math, Reading/Language Arts, Science) and English II and Algebra I for High Schools. Excludes schools within each district that did not have 2015 proficiency data for those subjects

In addition, despite important and hard-fought gains:

- Less than half of Nashville students in grades 3-8 meet the state standards in reading or math.
- Just over half of high school students are meeting standards in English II and Algebra I end-of-course assessments.
- Only 30% of all students in the district score a 21 or higher on the ACT (primary indicator for college readiness).

These academic results have long-term impacts on our students and our community. The vast majority of jobs over the next five years will require education beyond high school, and a full 60% require a bachelor's or master's degree. As a result, there is an open question whether our public schools are able to prepare students for success after high school, let alone fill the jobs being created. That, in turn, poses significant challenges for the city in terms of maintaining the current economic trajectory.

While all urban school systems face these same challenges and, indeed, no district in America has "fixed" this problem completely, others do appear to be making more rapid gains compared to Nashville. Districts like Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Memphis/Shelby County, Denver, and Lawrence, Mass., come to mind. It is worth noting some important similarities across these districts:

- **A clear, well-communicated vision:** At the core, there was a strong vision or plan understood and supported by the community that guided efforts. In Shelby County, that plan was co-developed with the district, the state and private philanthropy all at the table. In Lawrence, Mass., state receivership triggered the construction of a comprehensive strategy, though the elements were very intentionally developed with a local stakeholders group in the driver's seat. The



Denver Plan, first created in 2005, served as the guiding vision for increased public and private investments in the schools. In Charlotte, the push toward decentralization and the creation of smaller “learning communities” was the centerpiece of the then-new superintendent’s citywide improvement plan.

- **Continuity of leadership:** There has been longer staying power in these districts around improvement efforts. For example, in places like Charlotte, they have been committed to a consistent set of priorities and improvements for a decade. Some of that happened because the initial superintendent who helped drive the strategy stayed longer than average (five years vs. the traditional two to three years). But much of it also appears to be driven by two other key factors – (1) the superintendent built a very strong senior team around him or her that stayed the course even when superintendents changed, and (2) the community was brought into and understood the vision and plan. Indeed, community engagement and partnership seem to be a central element in all of these cities.
- **Recruitment from nontraditional sources:** In all of these instances, efforts were kick-started by leaders most have described as “nontraditional” and/or more focused on bringing innovative ideas or alternative approaches to the table. Dr. Gorman had not run a school system anywhere close to the size of Charlotte-Mecklenburg at the time he was selected. Michael Bennet was the chief of staff to the then-mayor of Denver. Most people had never heard of Jeff Riley before; he was a former principal and later Boston’s chief innovation officer. In other places like Tulsa, Boston and Chicago, School Boards have selected superintendents whose path to that role was less conventional and most of whom had not previously served as a superintendent.

There is often a tendency to try to force people to pick sides in education debates – pro-public schools or anti-public schools, pro-reform or anti-reform, pro-magnet school or anti-magnet school, pro-charter or anti-charter. It is neither the desire nor mandate of this group to pick any side. Instead, our point in relaying these facts is simply to acknowledge that, despite critically important progress that has been made, considerable work remains. That strengthens the imperative of finding a strong leader who can help our schools and our community make improvements at a greater speed.

What we are hearing from the public through the community survey also echoes that sentiment:

- The public is split on the overall trajectory of the system. When asked whether they thought we were on the right track, only 25% agreed. Of those respondents, only 3% felt strongly we were on the right track. Conversely, 42% felt we were on the wrong track, and 33% were somewhere in the middle.
- When asked whether we should be looking for someone who would “make fewer changes/stay the course” or someone who would “bring new ideas and be a change agent,” 81% of those surveyed said they preferred someone who would “bring new ideas/be a change agent.”
- When asked whether they preferred a leader who would “use conventional approaches to education” or “be innovative, think outside the box,” 65% of all respondents said they wanted an outside-the-box leader.



It is worth noting that these findings do not change among subgroups. For example, one might think teachers would be less embracing of a “change agent” or someone who would pursue less “conventional” approaches to education. That was not the case. The conviction of teachers on these points largely mirrored that of the public at-large. Our interpretation of this is that, while educators are frustrated with a seemingly constant state of change, that should not be mistaken for a lack of willingness and commitment to deep improvements and systemic changes.

While we acknowledge considerable room for improvement, it is equally important to acknowledge successes across the district. In addition to many very good schools and terrific teachers, the public also consistently identifies many other assets and successes a new director of schools starts with. Successes consistently highlighted in the survey include the Academies of Nashville, Music Makes Us, Limitless Libraries, increased parental choice (i.e., magnets, enhanced option schools, charters) and the move toward student-based budgeting.

When asked what issues the public felt the next director of schools should tackle, the top issues identified were:

- Keeping and attracting great teachers
- Addressing concerns related to overreliance on testing
- Improving academic performance
- Making our schools more competitive
- Improving underperforming schools
- Improving teacher pay

It is with this background and context in mind that we offer the recommendations below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 The net for this search should be cast wide and focus more intently on recruitment.** This should be an aggressive, national search seeking to find a topnotch leader to take our schools to the next level. That will require the Board to cast the net wide and focus on proactively recruiting someone outstanding rather than managing an application process.
- 2 This search must be grounded in a sense of clarity about what we are seeking with the full commitment of the Board to be open to different types of candidates who could fill the agreed-upon profile.** In particular, we urge the Board to agree on a leadership profile that distinguishes “must have” and “would be good to have” characteristics or qualities. A recommended profile is attached for your consideration. We purposefully worked from the profile HYA developed for the Board as a starting point.

### 3 Recruiting efforts should concentrate on finding candidates with demonstrable expertise in four primary areas:

(a) community-building and vision-casting capacity, (b) expertise inspiring leaders throughout the district to own and implement that vision across the organization (i.e., system and organizational culture change), (c) knowledge/expertise of student populations like ours, and (d) innovative approaches to talent and turnaround.

While it is unlikely to find a candidate with deep expertise in every one of these areas, candidates should be considered only if they can articulate with relative specificity ideas and capacity in these four areas and a demonstrable track record in at least two. Tantamount is the ability to articulate a vision for the district tied to short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and build community behind it. Absent the ability to articulate a clear and specific direction and build community buy-in for it, individual efforts cannot reach their full potential and the current political challenges will linger.



### 4 An overarching interest of the search should be to find someone who will bring a fresh approach to our challenges – one with more innovative, outside-the-box ideas.

It is telling that, when asked whether we should be looking for someone who would “make fewer changes/stay the course” or someone who would “bring new ideas and be a change agent,” the overwhelming sentiment was to find someone who would “bring new ideas/be a change agent” – with 81% of respondents feeling this way. This preference was shared among all subgroups who took the survey, including teachers.

This sentiment was reinforced in other ways. When asked whether they preferred a leader who would “use conventional approaches to education” or “be innovative, think outside the box,” – 65% of all respondents wanted an innovative, outside-the-box leader.

Whoever the Board hires needs to be someone who both in their ideas as well as their style represents a “third-way” approach to things – innovative and not wedded to doing things the way they’ve always been done.

One important point – we recognize that words can sometimes convey unintended meanings, particularly when talking about public education issues. “Change” is no doubt one of those words. We want to be clear that, in saying we should seek someone more innovative, someone seen more as a “change agent,” or someone who understands and can manage system or organizational change, we are NOT picking sides in the reform debate. This is NOT code for a pro-reform or an anti-reform agenda. Rather, we are saying that, given how we stack up against other school systems and the realities our students face in a post-high school environment, we MUST change how we are looking at the challenges we face and be not only open but embracing of new, different and varied approaches.

From what we've seen in the research we've conducted, there is no silver bullet – no one thing that, if a school system does it, all ills are cured. Rather, the districts that seem to be making more rapid progress have pursued a blended approach – deploying multiple tactics to meet the varied needs of students, families and neighborhoods. Good examples of this include Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Memphis, and Denver. The leaders who set those districts on a more intentional path of improvement have in no way felt bound to doing things the way they've always been done but rather deep in their core tried to consider outside-the-box ideas, alternative approaches to decades-old problems.

Nashville would benefit greatly from someone who sees the world through that sort of lens – focused intently on outcomes but open to many ways of getting to those outcomes.

**5 Recruiters should be directed to think beyond the traditional set of candidates (i.e., sitting superintendents from like-sized districts), but to also contemplate other, less-traditional candidates.** By saying the search should be open to less traditional candidates, we are not necessarily saying it should be someone completely outside the K-12 world, nor are we saying it should not be a sitting superintendent. Clearly, the public places high value on classroom experience and/or proven educational leaders. That said, we strongly urge the Board to be open to candidates who do not meet the prototypical mold and/or have a less traditional path to the position. This could include strong No. 2s or No. 3s leading the more cutting-edge, innovative work in districts, superintendents from smaller districts with a track record of closing the achievement gap, or leaders from other facets of the education arena beyond K-12 district leadership.

**6 Recruiting efforts should not focus solely on like-sized districts, but also on innovator districts and aspirational districts.** In our research, we identified several cities or districts where we urge initial efforts be concentrated:

Atlanta, Ga.	Fresno, Calif.	Miami-Dade, Fla.
Austin ISD, Texas	Guilford County, N.C.	Nashville, Tenn.
Baltimore City, Md.	Gwinnett County, Ga.	New York, N.Y.
Boston, Mass.	Hillsborough County, Fla.	Orange County, Fla.
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C.	Jefferson County, Ky.	San Diego, Calif.
Chicago, Ill.	Jennings, Mo.	Seattle, Wash.
Clark County, Nev.	Lawrence, Mass.	Tucson, Ariz.
Dallas ISD, Texas	Lindsay, Calif.	Washington, D.C.
Denver, Colo.	Los Angeles Unified, Calif.	
Fort Worth, Texas	Memphis, Tenn.	

We are not suggesting that Nashville's next director of schools is necessarily the superintendent or a senior leader from one of these districts. That may or may not end up being the case. We believe, however, that these districts provide the right starting point for recruitment efforts.

We arrived at this list by looking at districts from multiple perspectives. Namely, we looked at four key factors:

- Districts with academic achievement in the top one-third of the country (focusing on those that serve student populations similar to Nashville's)
- Districts showing above average growth in achievement – in other words, they are making significant gains in achievement. We looked at districts with like-sized student populations showing overall above average growth, but also looked at who was posting the most significant gains and closing the achievement gap of at-risk students (i.e., economically disadvantaged, minority, EL populations)
- Districts recognized nationally as “innovator districts” or as districts doing interesting or more innovative things in areas prioritized locally (i.e., early learning, district-led turnaround, teacher talent, decentralization/greater school-based decision-making, etc.)
- We also included Nashville on this list because any effective search should actively consider any strong local leaders who could fill the profile, as well

## **7 Interviews of finalists should build on successful hallmarks of the last search.**

While the outcome of the last search was far from desirable, we commend the Board for structuring the interviews of finalists in the way it did. While the nature of these searches demands the final phase operate on a tight timetable, the Board's insistence on strong community engagement in the interview process was critical. Giving the public an opportunity to interview candidates directly builds buy-in but also allows you to assess how they will handle critical elements of the job – namely communicating and building confidence of teachers, parents and the public.

We would suggest, however, that both the public and Board interview process ask candidates to outline with greater specificity where they think the district is today and what their priorities would be should they get the job. The search firm should provide a comprehensive background package to all candidates and communicate the expectation that finalists come prepared to talk specifically about their approach and priorities – including a sense of priorities for the first six, 12 and 24 months.

In addition, we urge the Board to ask finalists these kinds of questions, as well:

- How have you worked to build consensus among diverse stakeholders?
- How would you handle racial disparities in school discipline, school suspensions and expulsions, graduation and dropout rates, etc.?
- How would you tackle the challenges posed by a rapidly increasing EL population?
- How do you see pre-K and early childhood fitting into your vision? Is continued expansion of pre-K programs important? A recent Peabody study highlighted challenges in ensuring high-quality pre-K and connectivity of pre-K to the rest of the K-3 experience. How would you tackle those things?
- What experience do you have and what will you do to address racial disparities in suspensions, expulsions, and court referrals to juvenile court, including districtwide policies and training curriculum?

- How are you qualified to work in a school district with a high level of ethnic, religious and economic diversity, and how would that inform decisions you will make if you were director?
- What is the ideal relationship between your administration and various community groups, and how do you plan to develop these relationships and integrate private and nonprofit efforts into your larger vision for the school system?
- A significant challenge is adequate funding for public education. How would you go about building the case for greater public and private funding? State funding of urban districts has been a consistent problem. How would you approach that?
- At the core of improving our schools is attracting, retaining and growing an incredibly strong teacher workforce. How do you build teacher support for a vision? How can a district best support great teachers?
- How do you strike a balance between testing and accountability and development of the whole child? How does social/emotional development fit into your larger vision for student achievement?

A final point regarding the interview process for finalists – we should remember that these interviews are not just about candidates selling us on them (though that is the most important piece), but also our selling candidates on Nashville. We should approach the structure of these visits to more closely resemble recruitment trips for senior executives, university leaders, etc. Thus, our hope is it can be a more robust schedule that will give them a sense of all our community has to offer. We hope the School Board will lean on expertise from this group to help organize the visits to accomplish this dual mission. Several in our group have already begun thinking about what those visits might look like and have volunteered to help organize activities accordingly.

**8** **If we are serious about finding a topnotch leader, we must be competitive with the marketplace to attract that talent.** This search takes place at a time when a number of other high-profile searches are underway, including Charlotte, N.C.; Houston, Texas; Minneapolis, Minn.; Montgomery County, Md.; Providence, R.I.; Salt Lake City, Utah – just to name a few. In addition, in Tennessee, the superintendents in both Knoxville and Chattanooga recently stepped down, which puts them in the hunt as well. This search will also occur a matter of months ahead of local School Board elections, adding to the complexity of the situation. For the most part, we cannot control these circumstances, and indeed, there is never a “good time” to launch a search of this type. That said, we must take steps to address our own vulnerabilities and ensure we are highly competitive for top national talent.

As part of our work, we commissioned Arthur J. Gallagher & Company, a global risk management and benefits solution company, to conduct an independent compensation analysis. They benchmarked our most recent contract against that of 23 peer districts. In addition, they reviewed the Council of Great City Schools salary data and spoke with their executive director, Mike Casserly. Their full analysis is in the appendices of this report. We urge the Board to spend time with this and internalize the implications on the search process. Moreover, should you wish to speak with Arthur J. Gallagher in more detail, we’re sure that could be arranged.

### Some key takeaway points from their analysis include:

- When you look at the class of school systems as a whole, our base pay is in the middle of the pack. Peer district base salary ranges from \$198,000 to \$375,000. That said, when you look at superintendents hired in the last two years – likely a better barometer when assessing the competitive landscape – our base pay is below average.
- Separate from base pay, 40% of the districts we reviewed offer incentive or bonus pay. The majority of these payments are tied to targeted goals and/or performance criteria.
- Several districts also include other incentive pay in the form of retention bonuses to reward longevity. That could be interesting as the average tenure of an urban school superintendent is only two to three years, and stability and staying power behind a more unified vision for the district is desired by all.
- We are less competitive compared to other districts as it relates to supplemental benefits. For example, the majority of peer districts pay 100% of insurance premiums for health, dental and vision plans; MNPS pays 75%. Many offer other programs such as supplemental life and disability plans, but that did not appear to be part of our package. As does MNPS, the majority of peer districts contribute to the state retirement program on behalf of the superintendent, though many provide additional retirement contributions above and beyond that.
- The average severance among peer districts includes pay and benefits for the lesser of 12 months or the remainder of the contract term. Examples of more generous severance provisions include only a 'just cause' termination allowed during the first two years of the contract to give a new leader time to get established and post gains, pay and benefits for 18 versus 12 months.

### Given this analysis and the imperative to be highly competitive for topnotch talent, there are four things the Board should consider:

- A. Salary should not be an impediment.** Rather than aiming to be average for school systems our size, this search should communicate to the marketplace our intent to be in the top one-third of urban school districts. That includes a willingness to compensate leaders in that same pay band and certainly not allowing ourselves to be beneath the average for recent hires. That said, the precise base pay level should be determined in accordance with the qualifications and salary history of the candidate. Moreover, we urge the Board to think about compensation as a complete package, not just base pay. There are three legs of the compensation stool – base pay, performance/incentive pay, and supplemental benefits. If you are limited in offering something in one area (for example, if supplemental benefits are more difficult to enhance), you must compensate for that in the other two areas. In addition, we are drawn to a combination of strong base pay coupled with performance bonuses that would be tied to the long-term vision the director of schools establishes. This would afford greater accountability for results against that vision. Regardless of the details you would work out in the context of contract negotiations, we strongly encourage you to communicate proactively to the marketplace that Nashville is looking for extraordinary talent and, as a result, will not allow salary to be an impediment.



- B. Address the risk associated with the proximity to elections with strong contractual terms.** The perceived divisiveness of the Board presents considerable recruiting challenges. These challenges are further exacerbated by the proximity of the School Board elections this summer. Given these challenges, the Board should use contractual terms to reassure candidates of their commitment to working with a new leader. The severance clause, in particular, must incentivize everyone to work together and ensure that a director of schools will not be dismissed without cause without significant penalty. Two options that are based on the analysis and would position us more strongly include allowing only a 'just cause' termination during the first two years of the contract and/or an 18-month pay and benefits payout if a contract is severed without cause.
- C. Actively consider other more creative compensation package elements.** Nashville has a track record of being creative in its pursuit of economic development opportunities and topnotch talent. We should take a page from these successes and actively consider other creative benefits the school system could offer. For example, Vanderbilt provides a significant enticement by offering tuition discount for the children of full-time employees with five or more years of service. The Board should work to identify other creative benefits that could be offered to enhance Nashville's competitiveness for candidates and convey a strong commitment for someone extraordinary. To that end, there are several members of this committee willing to serve in a small working group to help the Board to identify and explore some alternative ideas.
- D. The search must remain a unified, citywide effort.** Beyond compensation and benefits, there is one final piece of ensuring Nashville is highly competitive and addresses any vulnerabilities we have. In addition to seeing a deeply divided Board, candidates could also misinterpret current public dynamics to believe the city as a whole is not unified or committed to the work that lies ahead. What we are seeing and hearing from the community, both in outreach we conducted as well as other efforts such as Project RESET, tells a different story – showing the city remarkably unified around priorities, concerns and interests. The more we can demonstrate this is a unified effort – an endeavor bigger than one person, entity or agenda, but indeed the cause of the city, the more successful recruitment efforts will be. And, the more others are part of the search process, the more buy-in people will have to the person ultimately selected. To that end, we hope the Board continues the powerful partnership forged early on between the Board, the mayor and the Foundation. These are assets that bring the community more definitely into the fold of the search.

## 9

**A strong leader is only part of the equation. For the city to move forward in a meaningful way, there must be a strong, public and unequivocal commitment to a transition process for a new leader:**

- A. Support for development of a comprehensive, citywide strategic plan.** At the core of any new director of schools' proving successful is consensus around the strategy and approach that will govern efforts over the coming years. When you think back on Dr. Register's initial tenure, everyone was unilaterally focused on preventing state takeover of the school system. That united everyone – district administrators and the Board, the central office and school leaders, key partners and stakeholder groups, etc. We must bring that same level of clarity, specificity and direction to strengthening and improving our schools today.



While the district has a strategic plan, Education 2018, it is essential that a new leader have the resources and capacity to assess and modify and make that strategy his or her own. With a clear, actionable, outcome-driven vision for success, the Board can hold a leader accountable for results, community stakeholders understand the priorities and know where they are needed most, and teachers, parents and the public understand where we are going and why. There must be full support and appropriate resources committed to that process.

In addition, it is essential a new leader have the full latitude and flexibility to hire and restructure the necessary staff support to take that vision forward. Without a strong and nimble team, the strategic plan is not worth the paper it is written on.

**B. Strengthened working relationship between Board and administration.** Working hand in hand with agreement around a citywide strategy for improvement, we must redouble efforts to improve the quality of the working relationship between the Board and the director of schools. We understand the Board is already taking steps in this regard in partnership with the Council of Great City Schools. We applaud that effort. We hope the arrival of a new school system leader will be seen as an opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities between the Board and the director of schools and determine what is necessary to ensure the Board operates with the professionalism, efficiency and support their new director of schools will require to be successful.

**10 Do not compromise on candidate quality.** Time is of the essence with this search for many reasons, the least of which is that extended periods with a vacuum of permanent leadership take a heavy toll on students, parents, teachers and others. We share the Board's sense of urgency around the search and are hopeful about its prospects. That said, we should never compromise on the quality of the candidates. As long as we have strong candidates from whom to pick, we should move with speed and efficiency.

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

We hope these recommendations help frame the recruitment effort and put Nashville on a path toward hiring a world-class leader to run its public school system. There are few things more important to Nashville's long-term success than strengthening and improving our public school system; 86,000 students depend on it, not to speak of future generations of Nashvillians and their families. We simply must get this right. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to support the School Board in this vital task, and we each individually and collectively remain committed to helping the city see the search through to a successful end.