



Montgomery County Public Schools

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

September 1, 2015

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in August of 2015, for the new superintendent in the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). 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, and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. 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. Additionally the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years. The online survey data is very consistent with the input of the focus groups.

Participation

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

Group	Personal Interviews or Focus Groups	Online Survey
Board	7	N/A
Administrator	46	21
Business/ Community Member	20	46
Teacher	22	73
Support Staff	23	24
Parents	29	259
Students	6	6
Total	153	429

The Board of Education members were individually interviewed. The Central Office staff had a group meeting and several individual interviews, including one with Ms. Blackburn and one with the Assistant Superintendents. There was significant input from Montgomery County with the County Manager, service and chamber representatives as well as representatives from the higher education entities of Montgomery County.

Open-invitation community forums for staff and community were held in three MCPS High Schools at night in the following locations:

August 17 Christiansburg High School
 Blacksburg High School

August 19 Auburn High School

The responses provided by the individuals and focus groups during the interviews are listed in two places; 1) “Consistent Themes,” which are listed beginning on page 6 of the report 2) the online survey results begin on page 7 and 3) all responses from individual and focus group meetings begin on page 11. They are listed alphabetically with no attempt to prioritize them. Finally, the final version of superintendent characteristics, discussed with the entire Board on September 1, 2015, can be found on page 32.

The 429 respondents on the on-line survey represent a good cross sampling of the different groups engaged with MCPS. Parents were especially well represented with 29 attending meetings in person and another 259 completing the on-line survey. MCPS staff also participated in great numbers with 91 meeting the consultant in person and another 118 responding to the on-line survey. The on-line survey statistical sections and the open-ended comments amplify the findings and themes from the focus groups.

It should be emphasized that the data from the focus groups is 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 MCPS, almost every person and group interviewed cited the beauty and rural life of the area coupled with the embedded institutions of higher learning that make Montgomery County a desirable place to raise a family. There was great pride of all citizens in the quality of life and the excellence of the school division. Many participants said that the cultural and artistic resources are bountiful and that each college and university contributes an individual enhancement to the County. Many publications have cited Blacksburg or Montgomery County as a “great place to live and raise a family,” and more recently, to retire.

Montgomery County and Montgomery County Public Schools work collaboratively, better than many counties in Virginia. The model of cooperation, especially at the County Manager level, is to be admired and cherished. Both MCPS and Montgomery County practice fiscal accountability and receive high praise for ethics and integrity in the discharge of their governance.

Montgomery County is geographically diverse and contains unique and distinct communities. MCPS has identified the four areas by the names of their communities; Auburn, Blacksburg, Christiansburg and Elliston/Shawsville. The school division calls these four high school areas “strands” and many of the positive comments and some of the comments of concern address these strands.

The school facilities are largely in good shape. An extensive construction program has resulted in modern facilities in most areas. There are a few older facilities in need of an extensive renovation and some critical capacity issues in the Christiansburg strand. MCPS has a surplus of seats overall, but any boundary adjustment to utilize those seats would be very difficult because of the community identity with the strand.

Many respondents went out of their way to praise the quality of Ms. Blackburn's leadership. Especially noted was her ability to deal with roof collapse of the old Blacksburg High School that occurred after she accepted the position, but before she arrived in Montgomery County. Her ability to deal with that crisis and the massive logistics of moving children, boundaries, buses, etc., while winning approval to build three new schools were an incredible challenge successfully met during her first two years. She was also instrumental in the advancement in academics, including CTE, STEM, and the infusion of technology into the schools. Improvements in SOL scores and the accreditation of schools reflect successful district-wide initiatives. In a County sensitized to public safety by the April 16, 2007, VT incident, Ms. Blackburn and the schools received praise for the safety parents and students feel in the school division. Many people feel Ms. Blackburn's work must be sustained and built upon by the new superintendent.

The quality of the teachers and the entire school-system staff was also a frequent response. Different groups frequently cited the staff work ethic and overall quality of their work. Many employees expressed respect for their colleagues, whether working in or out of the schools, whether support staff or instructional staff. Employees were also thankful that during the worst of the recession MCPS was able to provide some, if not small, compensation increases or bonuses during the difficult budget years. Many of the employee participants were either products of MCPS or were residents with children attending MCPS. There is deep loyalty and pride within the school district.

There is strong support for the school system from not only the parents and citizens, but also from County Government, Service Agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Tech, Radford University and New River Community College. Montgomery County fared the 2008 recession better than many areas of the country. Job growth and economic vitality are a testament to the quality of Montgomery County Public Schools, a key element in this vibrant and growing region.

The citizens, and especially the Board, staff and parents, should continue to be very proud of the many strengths and accomplishments of the Montgomery County Public Schools.

Challenges/Concerns/Issues Facing the District

The development of Montgomery County from 1777 was centered on the old thoroughfare of Route 11 such as the unincorporated areas of Elliston and Shawsville. Christiansburg was also a major town on the original Route 11 corridor. Blacksburg, although relatively young, has grown in direct relationship to the growth of Virginia Tech, one of the major public universities in the United States. The new plan to add a significant number of students each year at Virginia Tech will impact the school district now and in the future.

The unique identities of the four geographic regions of Montgomery County are amplified and exacerbated by having one MCPS high school in each of the four communities. The feeder systems of elementary and middle schools exclusively feed one high school. Christiansburg and Blacksburg High

Schools are medium to large; Auburn and Eastern Montgomery High Schools are extremely small and rural. Providing equal resources and equal access to curriculum and extracurricular activities is always a challenge for any school division. This challenge is even greater in Montgomery County because of the big differences in school size.

MCPS respondents almost all mentioned the perception and/or reality of unequal treatment and resources amongst the four strands. The current concern about facilities in the Christiansburg strand was sometimes cited as an example of inequity. The perception that more and/or better support and preferential treatment are given to the Blacksburg strand is pervasive. At the same time, some in the Blacksburg strand resist system-wide instructional initiatives and control thinking it unnecessary for them.

As the strands are rooted in history, and as the county government and school board were formed, the election of representatives to local government were aligned to the geographic and school division strands that exist today. Many respondents pointed to the fact that the MCPS Board has many decisions and votes that align with the geographic divisions. These same respondents said that the Board needed to rise above the strands and represent all children. The divisiveness of the split votes was cited as a definite challenge to the division and to the superintendent.

Employees, while thankful for compensation increases and bonuses during the recession, cite low compensation and compression of the salary scales as a long-term challenge. There have been cutbacks in support staff and increases in class sizes. The feeling is that fewer employees are working harder than ever with very limited compensation increases.

Increasing the diversity of staff was cited as a need by a small number of respondents, including two Board members. The overall student population of MCPS is below 10% minority but the teaching and administrative staff is below 5% minority. The Asian population is the fastest growing minority group, with more growth expected in the coming years. One of the challenges is hiring a diverse teaching pool when the majority of applicants come from Radford and Virginia Tech, two schools of education that produce a pool of qualified graduates almost completely devoid of minority students.

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 MCPS.

The new Superintendent must be a community builder! Relationships in Montgomery for the Superintendent extend far beyond the Board and the district staff. The new Superintendent of MCPS must be able to represent and advocate for all children regardless of strand or socio economic status. They must distribute resources and commitment to unite the four strands into one high achieving division for all MCPS students.

The successful candidate should also be a great communicator who can reach out to engage the entire community. Community involvement and visibility in schools and the community is highly desired. But even more important is being present and engaged in each of the four strands, and creating the reality that there is no favoritism or over representation of any one strand. The candidate should also be able to

analyze the current condition and create a strategy to ensure that standard operating procedures, curriculum and instruction occur with greater consistency in all schools for all students.

The candidate should also be able to focus on attracting, selecting, developing and retaining staff, including adding diversity to staff whenever possible. This focus on staff also includes setting high expectations for staff and ensuring accountability. Staff members also want a strong leader who will inspire and guide change, but will also be open to divergent opinions in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

Honesty, ethics and integrity were also frequently mentioned. Many expressed a desire for the candidate to commit to Montgomery County for a long time, but the underlying theme among respondents is high visibility in all aspects of the schools and in community life.

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 the past accomplishments, but seeks a talented leader who can build on the excellence and move the division forward in communication, facilities, and continued and improved 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 Montgomery Board of Education to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance in spite of major enrollment growth and facility challenges, while meeting the unique needs of each of its students.

The consultants would like to thank all the participants who attended focus group meetings or completed the online survey. Also, we would like to thank all of the Montgomery County Public Schools staff members who assisted with our meetings and single out for incredible praise, Ms. Brenda Drake and Ms. Brenda Blackburn for their efforts in facilitating our time in the District.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Draeger
Ann Monday

Summary of Consistently Reported Themes

Strengths

- County Administrator and BOS are supportive of MCPS
- County services and agencies and businesses support the schools
- Higher education in the County plays an important role and partner with MCPS
- Improvements/advancements in academic achievement, including CTE and STEM; use of technology; facilities; school safety
- Overall quality and work ethic of MCPS staff
- Public support for community schools
- Quality of life - Great place to live, raise a family; cultural, artistic, educational resources; economic stability, growth; community activism and spirit
- Strong and mostly positive relationship between the schools and County/Towns

Challenges/Concerns/Issues

- Auburn HS and Eastern Montgomery HS course offerings are limited compared to BHS and CHS
- Community and schools divided by strands that lead to perception/reality of inequity and competition, impeding district-wide consistency and unity
- Facilities are in good condition, but communities perceive inequities in CIP
- Increasing diversity on the MCPS staff
- Ongoing funding/budget and compensation issues
- Overall capacity is sufficient, but MCPS would require significant, and possibly contentious boundary change, in several schools to utilize the full MCPS capacity
- Planning and providing for the future - changes anticipated in technology, workplace needs and demands, demographics and enrollment growth
- School Board "split" that mirrors community divisions
- Tension between teacher/school/strand autonomy and flexibility versus district-wide policies and instructional practices

Desired Characteristics

- Ability to provide each community with visibility, equity, resources and commitment to unite the four strands into one high achieving MCPS for all students
- Committed to Montgomery County
- Communication skills to reach broad and varied audiences
- Consensus builder, collaborative –a unifier
- Dynamic, creative problem –solver
- Honest, ethical, builds trust with the staff and community
- Transparent, open, listens to and respects different perspectives
- Visible in the community and in the schools

Montgomery County Public Schools Online Superintendent Profile Survey Results

The Superintendent Profile survey was completed by 429 stakeholders. Over half of respondents were parents (60 percent). Seventeen percent were teachers, and another 11 percent were business/community members. The rest were support staff, administrators, and students. Survey questions centered around five general leadership characteristics – Vision & Values (VV), Instructional Leadership (IL), Community Engagement (CE), Communication & Collaboration (CC), and Management (M).

Stakeholder Groups

	Frequency	Percent
Administrator	21	4.9
Business/Community Member	46	10.7
Parent	259	60.4
Student	6	1.4
Support Staff	24	5.6
Teacher	73	17.0
Total	429	100.0

The top-rated characteristics respondents selected for a superintendent were:

- Listen to and effectively represent the interests and concerns of students, staff, parents, and community members. (CE)
- Foster a positive professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators. (CC)
- Recruit, employ, evaluate, and retain effective personnel throughout the District and its schools. (M)
- Hold a deep understanding of the teaching/learning process and of the importance of educational technology. (IL)
- Lead in an encouraging, participatory, and team-focused manner. (CC)

Percentages of respondents overall who selected each item, as well as percentages by stakeholder group, are given in the tables on the following pages. Benchmark results from over seventy comparable districts,

incorporating the ranking of over thirty-five thousand stakeholders, are also provided in the table to allow for a comparison of results to national norms.

In addition, differences were examined for statistical and practical significance to determine whether the mean scores by stakeholder group differed. Results indicate that, for many items, the various stakeholders were in agreement. On the other hand, there were several items that certain stakeholders valued more than others.

- Parents were significantly more likely than business and community members to select the Community Engagement item “Listen to and effectively represent the interests and concerns of students, staff, parents, and community members.”
- Teachers were significantly more likely than parents to select the Communication and Collaboration item “Foster a positive professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators.”
- Support staff members were significantly more likely than administrators to select the Community Engagement item “Be visible throughout the District and actively engaged in community life.”
- Support staff members were significantly more likely than parents to select the Management item “Be an effective manager of the District’s day-to-day operations.”
- Business and community members were significantly more likely than parents to select the Community Engagement item “Develop strong relationships with constituents, local government, area businesses, media, and community partners.”
- Administrators were significantly more likely than parents and teachers to select the Vision and Values item “Act in accordance with the District’s mission, vision, and core beliefs.”

Percentage of Respondents Who Selected Each Item (By Subgroups)

Number indicates rank order by overall results		National HYA Benchmark	ALL (429)	Admin (21)	Business & Comm. (46)	Parent (259)	Student (6)	S.S. (24)	Teacher (73)
1	Listen to and effectively represent the interests and concerns of students, staff, parents, and community members.	37%	65%	52%	41%	71%	83%	71%	59%
2	Foster a positive professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators.	32%	52%	57%	54%	44%	17%	67%	74%
3	Recruit, employ, evaluate, and retain effective personnel throughout the District and its schools.	27%	41%	19%	28%	46%	17%	38%	38%
4	Hold a deep understanding of the teaching/learning process and of the importance of educational technology.	36%	39%	38%	28%	42%	50%	21%	44%
5	Lead in an encouraging, participatory, and team-focused manner.	28%	39%	43%	41%	38%	33%	21%	49%
6	Effectively plan and manage the long-term financial health of the District.	27%	36%	33%	52%	34%	50%	29%	34%
7	Have a clear vision of what is required to provide exemplary educational services and implement effective change.	39%	34%	29%	17%	39%	67%	29%	32%
8	Identify, confront, and resolve issues and concerns in a timely manner.	28%	33%	33%	24%	34%	17%	46%	36%
9	Hold a deep appreciation for diversity and the importance of providing safe and caring school environments.	29%	32%	33%	41%	32%	17%	13%	36%
10	Involve appropriate stakeholders in the decision-making process.	22%	32%	19%	37%	32%	0%	42%	34%
11	Align budgets, long-range plans, and operational procedures with the District's vision, mission, and goals.	21%	31%	48%	35%	27%	33%	33%	41%
12	Communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and in a variety of ways.	27%	31%	43%	28%	30%	33%	25%	36%
13	Be visible throughout the District and actively engaged in community life.	33%	30%	10%	30%	31%	17%	54%	27%

Key	VV-Vision & Values	IL-Instructional Leadership	CE- Community Engagement	CC- Communication & Collaboration	M-Management
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Percentage of Respondents Who Selected Each Item (By Subgroups)

Number indicates rank order by overall results		National HYA Benchmark	ALL (429)	Admin (21)	Business & Comm. (46)	Parent (259)	Student (6)	S.S. (24)	Teacher (73)
14	Promote high expectations for all students and personnel.	34%	30%	19%	33%	32%	17%	50%	21%
15	Guide the operation and maintenance of school facilities to ensure secure, safe, and clean school environments that support learning.	21%	29%	24%	26%	32%	50%	25%	25%
16	Encourage a sense of shared responsibility among all stakeholders regarding success in student learning.	38%	28%	29%	22%	28%	17%	33%	32%
17	Strive for continuous improvement in all areas of the District.	35%	27%	24%	30%	27%	17%	33%	25%
18	Maintain positive and collaborative working relationships with the school board and its members.	27%	24%	29%	24%	24%	33%	17%	23%
19	Provide meaningful guidance for systematic and comprehensive district-wide curriculum, instructional services, assessment programs, and professional development.	27%	21%	29%	17%	19%	50%	21%	30%
20	Be an effective manager of the District's day-to-day operations.	23%	21%	24%	22%	19%	33%	46%	21%
21	Increase academic performance and accountability at all levels and for all its students, including special needs populations.	35%	21%	24%	30%	21%	33%	8%	14%
22	Develop strong relationships with constituents, local government, area businesses, media, and community partners.	25%	21%	29%	37%	17%	17%	17%	22%
23	Seek a high level of engagement with principals and other school-site leaders.	20%	20%	19%	13%	24%	17%	0%	16%
24	Act in accordance with the District's mission, vision, and core beliefs.	35%	13%	38%	13%	12%	17%	17%	10%
25	Utilize student achievement data to drive the District's instructional decision-making.	22%	9%	19%	11%	6%	33%	8%	14%

Key	VV-Vision & Values	IL-Instructional Leadership	CE- Community Engagement	CC- Communication & Collaboration	M-Management
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Comments from Interviews and Focus Group Meetings

Listed in alphabetical order

“/” indicates multiple similar responses from different interviews

Board

Strengths

- A real community – Friday night football games still a tradition
- Academic achievement gains
- Art education is strong and should never be cut
- Compensation—has survived the recession very well
- CTE - valued by District, especially strong on CHS
- Cultural arts available at Virginia Tech
- Dedicated staff—high retention
- Engaged community
- Four strands—are a strength
- Giving, kind, socially aware people in the community
- Good buildings and facilities /
- Good teachers and administrators
- Improved safety of schools; SROs ///
- Improved transparency with budget process
- Inclusion is a strength but it needs even more attention
- Instructional specialists in schools who look at data analysis and provide information and tools for teachers
- Monthly meetings with superintendent—one Board member at a time
- Only one school not accredited 18 out of 19 are fully accredited
- Parents who are engaged reap rewards—i.e., Auburn parents
- Relatively few expulsions each year
- Schools have good leaders—no major changes
- SOLs have been used to look at needs of all students – especially those "in the middle “
- STEM academy implementation
- Strong superintendent—excellent in public speaking and dealing with issues as they come along
- Successful bus drivers
- Supt has brought us into 21st century in use of technology /
- Virginia Tech, Radford and community college are excellent resources

Challenges

- \$100K of carryover going to Christiansburg schools—PTO’s doesn’t have the funds to support as much as in Blacksburg
- Accountability for performance, i.e., inconsistent performance of instructional specialists
- Auburn—needs better instructional space
- Balancing technology with the need for good teachers - tech does not replace good teachers
- Budget is getting better but still a challenge //
- College Mentors Organization—needs superintendent support as the program expands

- Confederate flag issue, transgender issues looming
- Consistency needed amongst the strands and schools, i.e. dress codes
- Cuts in staffing that negatively impact class size and the ability to offer courses
- Demanding parents who do too much for their children
- Discrepancy in graduation rates with diversity
- Employee population needs to be more diverse –lack of staff diversity cheats students from role models—previous African American superintendent—attracted greater numbers of diverse staff
- Four distinct communities—superintendent must make everyone feel they are part of one district
- Growth, facilities, especially in Christiansburg strand /
- Hire teachers from the best colleges and then trust them to teach—don't dictate their curriculum
- Lack of transparency
- Leaders must be developed and retained
- Maintaining equity in the smaller schools
- Maintaining quality personnel, including increasing diversity in employee groups
- Maintaining STEM offerings
- Montgomery County Education Foundation is in the beginning stages—needs support
- Need better cohesion between SB and BOS in planning and budget process—with a look to the future
- Need to bridge the gap in the community
- Need to maintain gains in academic achievement
- Need to prepare students better overall, not just for college entry
- Outsourcing considered but soundly rejected—needs to be reconsidered—for money savings
- Perception that Blacksburg demands and gets everything
- Political divide in region
- Pre-K is needed for all children of poverty
- Principal autonomy
- Reading level—must have equality by 3rd grade
- Recruiting great teachers and school administrators
- Safety concerns - need to keep vigilant
- School start time change still controversial //
- Should the Board have term limits?
- Strand division—4 to 3 votes - Blacksburg versus rest of County //
- Teachers think central office is too heavy
- Technology—burden on teachers—with every ninth grader getting a computer
- World language offerings are weak and needed in younger grades

Characteristics

- A unifier who will break down the Christiansburg-Blacksburg barrier
- Approachable
- Aware that students may be smart but not necessarily ready to live in the real world; will help high school students gain practical life skills
- Can think on their feet—take the temperature of a room and make adjustments
- Communicate using the strategic plan to guide the district staff
- Data driven for instructional decisions
- Deliberate but decisive
- Diplomatic
- Diverse candidate pool

- Experience with a community with similar political, cultural profile as Montgomery County
- Great public communication skills
- Has experience in a district that values CTE as well as SOLs
- Has high standards for student behavior/discipline
- Increase parent involvement
- In-tune with teachers; will encourage and their participation in decision-making and respects the professionalism, knowledge and experience of teachers
- Invested in southwest Virginia—will not use position as a steppingstone /
- Let the leaders lead and decide
- Listen to the community
- Need experience with working the Board—Board likes to debate and unanimous votes are rare
- New superintendent must address school start time issue
- Open to listen—but also understanding to do what is the best for children
- Out in the district—engaged
- Proactive, future-oriented
- Seven very different Board members—personal friendship is not necessary
- Someone who will "wow"—someone with strength and confidence
- Student-centered, will focus on student needs and opinions
- Superintendent must welcome and embrace community involvement from VT, Radford U., etc.
- Transparency
- Tremendous energy
- Understand they work for the Board and not the chair
- Vast array of experiences in education, including school-based and central office experience
- Visible, especially in community events such as FB games, and frequently throughout community /
- Visionary
- Will continue positive work that has begun under previous superintendent—the 6 Year Plan
- Will develop leaders - mentor people and build leadership capacity
- Will not "play" one community against the other
- Will not make SOLs the focal point of instruction

Administrators

Strengths

- Academics on the right track: SOL scores, SAT scores, AP results, graduation rate trending up
- Best place to live—quality of life, good, caring people
- Community emphasis on education
- Community support for schools /
- Current instructional initiatives that are producing good results ///
- Current professional development plan is sound
- Dual enrollment opportunities
- Good relationship between schools and media
- High standards for staff performance
- Many resources available to help students be successful
- Natural setting coupled with universities
- New River Valley Community Services
- SB and BOS work well together
- School counselors and RN's
- Six year plan, mission, vision are working /
- Special education now more consistent—processes, roles, policies in-line with legal requirements
- Staff development on lesson planning, student engagement
- Staff retention not an issue—people want to work here
- Strong and dedicated employees //
- Strong, effective leadership team
- Strong, positive relationships with BOS and with other County services & agencies //
- VT and Radford provide resources

Challenges

- 4-3 split board does not provide strong support for Board decisions
- A culture that supports community schools rather than a total district
- Belief that the Christiansburg strand does not have facilities comparable to other strands
- Chain of command is sometimes ignored when problem arise
- Desire for flexibility and autonomy at the school level versus best-practices system-wide
- Differences in strands—different needs
- Differences in strands can be divisive and create perceptions about haves and have-nots
- Examine use of funds for technology—amplification system is not worth cost
- Hard for different communities to see the "big picture"—County as a whole
- Higher standards and accountability has put pressure on staff at all levels
- History is site-based management, can impede consistency
- Lack of training in technology
- MCPS has the elementary classrooms but not where they are needed
- Multiple ES feeders in Christiansburg strand have trailers
- Pay for ES APs is not competitive for experienced teachers
- Pay scale needs to keep up to keep quality staff—compression
- SB and BOS changes after this election
- Singular focus on strands rather than systemic needs
- Tension between doing what is best for children rather than on adult needs and preferences
- What to do with Christiansburg HS facility—dire need of rebuild or new building

Characteristics

- Ability to work with a challenging, split SB
- Broad base of educational experience
- Can get entire county to see the "big picture", not just what is good for one strand, can "heal the divide" /
- Can speak to multiple audiences—across the diversity of education and backgrounds among parents and community members
- Collaborator, uses a team approach, build consensus /
- Good communicator—both internally and externally
- Has the courage to mandate successful instructional practices
- Likes children
- Operational vision and experience
- Someone who has worked across multiple levels
- Strong leadership—can make decisions and hold his/her own under Board and community pressure
- Strong public speaker
- Understands the budget process—VA budgeting, relationship between BOS and SB /
- Will be comfortable with and use social media
- Will become a part of the community as a leader
- Will bring MCPS up to other districts in regard to technology
- Will examine and then address issues of inequity in terms of facilities, course offerings, staffing
- Will trust subordinates to make decisions—not micro-manage
- Works to improve what is already going in the right direction, but not "start over" or change for the sake of change /

Business /Community Members

Strengths

- Able to attract and retain teachers
- Becoming a great place to retire—which will bring wealth/resources to area
- Chamber Support—Teacher of the Year, Scholarships, DECA
- Community economics more stable than other areas
- Diverse community of faith
- Dual enrollment opportunities
- Excellent employment opportunities in Montgomery County - low unemployment
- Expertise of population
- Good facilities—new schools
- Good relationship between schools and County Government /
- Great place to raise a family
- Growth
- Liaison position with Chamber
- Location—situated between universities with a strong community college
- Medical facility and healthcare availability
- Opportunity for superintendent's spouse/partner to find work here
- Overall quality of faculty and staff working in school district
- Public support for education
- Quality of life
- Regular sharing meetings - Schools with towns, County, Universities and Colleges
- Relationship with Radford U - placement of students teachers, hiring of new teachers
- Some partnerships with STEM academies
- Talented students

Challenges

- Growth and changing demographics
- Appalachian culture—vs. more "urban" areas of Blacksburg and Christiansburg
- Budget
- Decreasing state funding
- Diversity of needs in different parts of the County
- Divide in community
- Growing number of people without children in schools
- Increased push on early childhood development
- Keeping elected officials "ahead" of what is happening and where we need to go - i.e., growth
- Lack of diversity of school employees
- Making sure that there is a succession plan for leadership, building capacity of employees
- Need to provide more services for children in poverty—i.e. early childhood education
- Perception that Blacksburg gets more resources
- Political landscape shifts—large changes possible after the election in November
- Shortage of people in the trades
- SOLS being so stringent, decreases flexibility to address local needs

Characteristics

- Ability to educate a Board

- Accountability - sets high standards for self and others
- Drive
- Ethical
- Goal setting and follow through ability
- High expectations
- Inclusive person who can bridge gaps
- Initiative
- Love for work/people and a passion about this job—smiling, happy face of public education
- Strong leadership
- Technical background—this community has high expectations and expertise
- Visible in community and schools
- Visionary
- Will think outside the box, especially in regard to budget

Support Staff and Central Administration

Strengths

- Access to leadership—open doors at all levels
- Accomplishments in technology
- Community partnerships
- Emphasis on ongoing professional development
- Employees who love their jobs
- Good relationships with County Government—Board of Supervisors are positive towards MCPS
- Highly collaborative central office staff
- Inclusive Special Ed model //
- Innovative programs
- Instructional expertise—in schools and in central office
- Instruction—only one school without accreditation
- Love and respect among support staff for each other
- Police partnerships are strong
- Resource rich when it comes to services for families and students
- Six year plan
- Solid team of central administration
- STEM/CTE program
- Student achievement gains
- Supervisors are very strong
- Team provided leadership during Brenda Blackburn’s absence
- Two universities—instructional knowledge around us—clinical faculty

Challenges

- Board and BOS turnover—could impact the future
- Board management and relationships—helping the SB function
- Board needs to stay out of micromanaging
- Brenda Blackburn—hard act to follow
- Data management and analysis needs improvement
- Demands on support staff, i.e., only one more tech position in district since 1993
- Employee compensation and benefits; support staff pay not competitive //
- Establishing budget priorities /
- Functions of the school district and the County are separate
- Funding technology support adequately
- Instruction—keeping accreditation
- Keeping the professional development initiative going forward, and making sure to keep support staff trained and updated /
- Minority employees—need more
- Providing updated equipment when needed—i.e., custodial, technology
- Relationships with SB and BOS //
- Restoring staffing and program cuts over the past years— rather than funding new initiatives //
- School start times—elementary start times at 7:00
- Technology—challenge with universities

Characteristics

- A change agent, but also a knowledge gatherer who does homework and knows what is going on
- Able to work with different groups
- Healer—Brenda built relationships that had been broken
- Can work well with a lay Board
- Close enough school experience to remember what it is like
- Experience with pre-K - 12
- Experienced
- Fiscal management background /
- Good communicator—with different levels and audiences
- Good personality—gets a long with people
- Has a broad base of experience
- Has an open mind
- Has tech experience and will continue work started in this area
- Has the interest and will in making MCPS a unified school division
- Honest and trustworthy
- Is not reactive to the loudest voice
- Known by staff, parents, students and community /
- Likes kids
- Nice, friendly, kind
- Polished and professional
- Problem solving skills
- Putting students, teachers first, setting clear priorities based on six year plan
- Respects the work of staff, including support staff /
- Sees things from a district perspective
- Sense of humor
- Sitting superintendent preferred
- Smart
- Student-centered—makes decisions on what is best for students overall, not what adults want
- Team builder
- Team builder, collaborator
- Thick skinned
- Transparency in terms of budgeting
- Understands and respects the diversity of the community from farmers to professors
- Understands the differences among the strands and adjusts resources based on need
- Understands the role of the superintendent—their global role
- Visible in schools and support facilities
- Will build on existing success for example in instruction, not "reinvent the wheel"
- Will investigate issues, uses data and facts in decision making
- Will listen to concerns of the support staff—continue the Advisory meetings
- Will look at history regarding compensation and benefits for support staff and make fair adjustments
- Will respect the progress we've made
- Will support staff —back people and trust people to do their jobs
- Wise

Teachers

Strengths

- Administration
- Deep resources for teachers
- Diverse student body
- Ethnicity and socio economic
- Faculty
- Fine art is strong
- Good instructional initiatives
- Quality of our students
- Supportive environment for a new teacher
- Use of advanced and innovative instructional practices

Challenges

- 33% of Eastern Montgomery students have not passed SOL test
- Blacksburg has an underserved population
- Blacksburg strain dominates at the expense of a unified MCPS
- Diversity of ethnic groups, socio-economic, political viewpoints
- Don't be enamored with fads in education
- Extreme needs from one end of the county to the other
- Keeping the focus on students - on what really matters
- Limiting the "hoops" that teachers must go through that may not help students
- Middle school fine arts need work
- Need for re-zoning to use space efficiently and be equitable
- Over emphasis on assessment
- Overcrowding of schools in Christiansburg
- Racial comments are absorbed in the small schools
- Some ruling by intimidation
- Start time controversy
- Use of funds for technology—especially considering limitations on infrastructure
- Use of space—small schools versus large schools
- World Language (French) has been cut
- World Language offerings are not robust, especially at EMHS and AHS

Characteristics

- A clone of Fred Morton
- Balance the diverse needs of the four schools
- Good at communicating the why behind their decision
- Has the courage to stand up to a SB in the best interest of the students
- Have faith and trust in school principals—let them make decisions
- Humanistic
- Longevity
- No common core bandwagon
- Open door policy
- Passion for the work
- Personable

- Someone who can be unifier among extreme viewpoints
- Someone who knows and is part of the community
- Someone who will fight for what is important - and consider the impact of decisions on students and teachers
- Student-centered
- Treat their administrators fairly so that teachers are treated fairly
- Vested in community and willing to live and commit
- Will fight the State on the assessment requirements versus more time to teach
- Will not use MCPS as a steppingstone

Principals

Strengths

- 19 of 20 schools accredited
- Affluence—depending upon on location
- Central office is supportive of school staff
- Curriculum is advanced with high expectations
- Diversity—also a challenge
- Dr. Graham has done a wonderful job
- Dual enrollment, governor’s school
- Great facilities
- Great place to live, work and raise children
- Great students
- Hard working and caring staff
- Immersed in higher education
- Majority of tax payers support the school system
- Partnership community service board
- Partnership with local university
- Partnerships with VCOM
- Technology

Challenges

- Board is influenced by very small and vocal numbers of constituents
- Budget cuts despite \$1.8m and \$1.5m carryover
- Current strain on school board and superintendent relations
- Decisions are made by committee or consultants
- Funding
- Lack of diversity within the staff
- Long term planning needed for capacity
- Middle school schedule changed from eight period to seven period days
- Overcrowding in Christiansburg schools
- Poor relations with Board of Supervisors
- Redistricting
- Roles of SB and Superintendent have not been defined—verified by SACS accreditation
- School start time
- SPED/VRTSS/PBIS/ more support and resources are needed
- Staff time is limited—asked to do more and more with less resources—all employees all levels
- Strand based decisions causes problems—majority of SB are Blacksburg representatives
- Too many school board members

Characteristics

- Back and support the principals
- Bring ideas and experience from outside of Montgomery
- Building level experience
- Don’t change things the first year
- Don’t micro manage
- Experience

- Fortitude with decision-making
- Hire great staff and trust the staff
- Innovative and with it – can function is this technology word and create that atmosphere for staff and students
- Not a steppingstone for career
- Personally invested and willing to commit to Montgomery
- Principal's part of decision-making
- Sit and talk with principals
- Someone who doesn't rule by fear
- Strong
- Visible

Montgomery County Educational Association

Strengths

- County has been a leader in State education in the past
- Great kids
- Great people that work in our schools
- Health insurance for support staff
- Highly qualified students ready for college and world of work
- MCEA input—Superintendent has met with us monthly and accepts our point of view
- MCEA works well with SB and superintendent—No "us and them" mentality
- MCPS is a "star"
- Nestled between two universities
- Superintendent truly cares

Challenges

- "Blacksburg and everybody else"—Perception that Blacksburg gets more than others.
- "Morale is low—economic strain, frozen salaries, high stress
- Classroom supplies and resources limited—schools have actually run out of paper
- Community is more interested in strands than in the district as a whole
- Diverse strands—within the same County, totally different demographics
- Inclusion setting attracts families for special services, but space, staff is lacking
- Low wages for support staff coupled with high demands
- Need for more leave for support staff
- Need to follow through with salary adjustment commitments, especially for support staff
- Overcrowding in some schools - with projected growth
- Staff is having to provide for needs of students in some schools
- Student population growing, fewer teachers and aides, higher class size
- Teachers are hit from all avenues—some teachers/aides are struggling financially

Characteristics

- Appreciates the geography, the people here
- Approachable, open and willing to "walk in the shoes" of staff members
- Commit to longevity—not here as a steppingstone to next job
- Knows and respects our culture—Appalachian area, traditions
- Knows that equal and equitable are not the same - will diversify resource for diverse needs
- MCEA will be used to help the organization in different ways
- Transparent and down to earth—will not "sugar coat" the truth
- Visibility in schools—interaction with teachers, support staff
- Will commit to the long haul
- Will continue positive work going forward and will remain committed to salary adjustments
- Will continue to have a good relationship with MCEA—honor monthly meetings
- Will look at the budget and consider the impact on the support staff as well as leadership team level
- Will take advantage of available resources

Community Forums

Strengths

- A place where you can make a difference
- Board is doing a good job
- Central office works hard, 24-7 when needed—lots of responsibilities
- College town
- Communication—schools to parents, teachers to parents
- Diversity—geographic, socio economic
- Engagement of community—people do things, passion around being involved, being helpful
- Great program—good teachers
- Inclusion program that has been recognized—inclusive practices need to stay
- MCPS has small schools which some families prefer
- No lack of brains and drive in this community
- Overall a good school system /
- People are passionate about their schools
- Professional development—i.e. mentoring for new teachers
- Quality of life, small town atmosphere, good place to raise children /
- Quality teachers
- School employees work hard
- Superintendent has been very open to meeting with Dialogue on Race
- Support staff
- Team work with school staff
- Uniqueness in the range of backgrounds and experiences that are in this community
- Virginia Tech—economic engine for region , draws people to the County, spurs growth ,

Challenges

- Blacksburg HS no longer ranked as highly in US News/World Report—what can be done to restore to previous achievement levels at all high schools?
- Budget cuts—staffing cuts which impact programs and class size have not been restored
- Budget—not enough funding to meet needs
- Bus routes—longer walking distances
- Community demand for wide-open transparent government - people are involved, want to relevant information, want communication, want information to be easily accessible
- Cultural competence, sensitivity and outreach toward Asian and international and minority families in the schools and in the larger community
- Different high school schedules
- Discipline—teachers need to be supported by school based administrators, effectiveness of in school suspension and other disciplinary practices need to be assessed
- Employees with direct in-school contact with students—teachers, bus drivers, custodians, have low morale, do not feel valued outside their schools
- Facilities in some strands need attention
- Fear that speaking out to Supt or SB can jeopardize jobs
- Frustration and controversy over the school start times—as plans roll out and issues become more real for families, a “hot button” issue /
- Gifted Advisory Committee not supported

- Growth and capacity issues in Blacksburg and Christiansburg
- Growth of Virginia Tech—plan to add students may impact already overcrowded strands
- Growth within the County
- Inclusion has had a problematic result when student hit, bite employees (Spec Ed aides especially)
- Issues around testing and accreditation
- Lack of budgeting and adequate funding in State of VA
- Lack of communication from SB office to parents, guardians, grandparents
- Lack of community trust over start times—belief that survey results, opinions ignored
- Legislature—public education
- Lost superintendents because of hiring outsiders
- Need for additional resources for special education
- Need to know all of the facets of the community and be sensitive to unique needs
- Perception that Blacksburg strand gets what it wants at expense of district wide concerns
- Perception that strands compete and may not be true—extends beyond the school system
- Professional development required for all employees—regardless of their skills, experience and needs,
- Public misunderstanding: for example, in spite of budget cuts, money spent on door security technology
- Respect and teamwork needed from central office to teachers schools
- School start times—single parents
- SOL emphasis puts pressure on students
- Some special education students' behavior is a problem for other students—is inclusion always the best option?
- Strands that are widespread and diverse divide community; Christiansburg and Blacksburg dominate
- Unity needed amongst the strands
- Use of funds for consultants (re-districting) that was not productive
- Workforce preparedness versus college prep

Characteristics

- A salesperson for school system
- Approachable
- Attends monthly breakfasts - Schools, Virginia Tech, County, Towns
- Can build faith and trust with community and with school staffs
- Can instill in staff the willingness to think creatively and use available resources (VA Tech and others)
- Committed to Montgomery County, not using the position as a steppingstone
- Considers different ways to support employee needs— i.e. job-sharing, not compensation benefits
- Develops a good relationship with County Administrator
- Does not send massive amounts of information to parents that buries important information
- Engaged in the community
- Engages in community activities to understand role as PR person for schools /
- Focus on student achievement—how did your students do
- Has a track record of growth, learning, service
- Has the skills to negotiate the real politics that underlies school funding - and build support for schools
- In-tune with the community, but can also educate the community about issues /

- Invested in the people who work in MCPS, listens to them, responsive to them
- Knowledgeable about budgeting
- Learns and listens—to understand the diversity of the community
- Look for candidates in Montgomery first—look in Virginia first
- Maintains the working relationship between SB and BOS
- Not a top down approach
- Not just "listens" but follows-up, very responsive
- Open—will listen to ideas about new revenue streams
- Open to concerns of teachers and other staff - will listen and welcome appropriate dissent /
- Part of the community—not a short run
- Put down some roots
- Sense of humility
- Servant leadership—Montgomery County not a place to come to "make your mark" but to meet needs of broad range of constituents
- Sincere, open communication skills
- Sitting superintendent experience should be required
- Somebody who listens to the constituents from all economic backgrounds
- Someone who will not blame all problems on budget cuts
- Transparent about vision and ideas
- Understands the changing workplace of the future and what students will need
- Understands the four strands and respect the fact that unique schools are critical to each community
- Understands the perspective of the parent and will be an advocate for students
- Understands Virginia State budget and how localities are effected
- Uses a creative approach to problem solving and budgeting
- Values and acknowledges the work of part-time employees
- Visible, "hands on", seen in the schools—not just for PR events but to really know the schools, staff and students //
- Will develop and guide a clear vision
- Will respect differences and not use a one size fits all approach
- Will work hard
- Willing to look at the safety and disruption issues around inclusion

Students

Strengths

- Art from students is proudly displayed
- Athletes and other who achieve are personally congratulated by SB
- Close community
- Community bands together
- County is really proud of its students
- Diverse, open community—free to be who you are
- Good place to grow up
- High expectations—people here want students to succeed
- Involved students support the entire community
- OK for people to do what they want - i.e. boys in choir, girls in sports
- Positive reputation of Montgomery County as a place to live and work
- Rivalries are mostly positive—bring schools together
- Safe place
- SB recognizes students from all schools
- Schools support each other
- Students given funds to apply to college
- Superintendent has been open to the public
- Superintendent has been willing to talk with parents, teachers, students
- Talent show that includes all schools

Challenges

- "Engagement" is not the only way to teach/learn—some lectures are effective.
- Budget—use of funds
- Every school is different and has different needs
- High standards need to be maintained.
- Inconsistent availability of technology— i.e. Blacksburg has 3 3D printers; Auburn has 0
- Increasingly depending on parents to pay for supplies and resources—i.e., art fees in MS and need for contributions to fund science labs, especially in AP classes where many labs are being done on-line to save money.
- Not all teachers are able to use technology effectively.
- Quality of instruction—need to listen to students opinions about teachers - some teachers are not effective and students know it.
- Questionable use of funds—Why smart boards in every classroom? Tablets for every freshman does not seem productive, so much is blocked on the tablet, some students cannot get connectivity at home.
- Relatively small community that is tight-knit and has strong opinions
- School start time change will impact activities negatively
- Some effective teachers do not need to do all of the requirements that the SB has placed on them— not one size fits all, and it tires out great teachers who now must do annoying work.
- Some teachers are faking "engagement" when being observed.
- Teachers are given training that they may not need—need to customize training by skills and needs.
- Teachers who speak up to SB can lose their jobs.
- Too much is political with SB

Characteristics

- Has the judgment to differentiate the teachers who need help from those that are doing fine
- Listens to good teachers—they make or break a school
- Listens to students—would consider starting a student advisory group
- Sensitive to differences among schools
- Understands that different schools need different things
- Visible—gets into each school and talks, not just to principals but to teachers

Community Agencies and Service Providers

Strengths

- Fine arts programs have been nationally recognized—choral, band, art
- Highly qualified teachers
- New school facilities in some areas

Challenges

- Addressing the achievement gap—White achievement versus African American achievement
- Community extremes—Parts of the community are open to cultural, social changes in society, parts are not
- Data driven emphasis causing stress
- Different curriculum/instructional people telling teachers what to do without consideration of the impact on the teachers
- Emphasis on testing at District and State level
- Finding root causes of achievement gap
- Four strands that are not alike
- Minority integration and inclusion
- Minority recruitment and hiring—staff needs more diversity for parity with students
- Need for African American role models in school and community
- Need for male role models at elementary level
- Public misunderstanding of budget cuts; people see money spend on new programs but not on schools' basic needs
- Socio-economic disparity
- Special needs children can fall through the cracks
- Teachers are overwhelmed—joy of teaching seems to be gone
- Teachers expected to be on the same page, same day regardless of needs of learners
- Testing and remediation pressures—does not meet all students' needs
- Too much top down direction not enough bottom up initiatives
- Turnover on both the SB and BOS could be a big change
- Use of carryover funds—it is good to have funds leftover, but not at the expense of basic needs

Characteristics

- Acts on needs—follows up with people and on problems
- Effective communicator not just with parents, but the larger community
- Good at team building and delegating, but will also check back to be sure things get done
- Good listener
- Has a background in diversity—training and experience, insight and sensitivity
- Innovative
- Relates to teachers, gets to know them
- Responsive
- Transparent
- Trust builder
- Understand Virginia school funding
- Understands the relationship between the SB and BOS
- Will continue diversity work done in the past and invest time, money and energy to support it
- Will give people faith that things can change

- Will tap into fine arts resources at Virginia Tech, Radford and New River CC
- Willing to recommit funds to the fine arts and CTE - programs that give students a chance to discover "who they are"



Montgomery County Public Schools Superintendent of Schools Desired Characteristics

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 Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) seeks a strong educational leader who possesses the following characteristics:

- Creates a highly visible and approachable presence throughout the schools and community
- Fosters trust and transparency
- Is a strong communicator who can listen and be empathetic
- Is both collaborative and decisive, demonstrating both creativity and risk-taking skills, but also who will celebrate and build on the existing strengths of MCPS
- Is willing to make a long-term commitment to MCPS
- Possesses a strong vision for education and provides the leadership, courage and management to achieve that vision
- Possesses curriculum, financial, facility/construction experience
- Possesses the ability to build relationships and trust with all constituencies in Montgomery County
- Recruits, develops, evaluates and retains outstanding and diverse staff members at all levels

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

- Demonstrates a solid track record of increasing responsibilities and success
- Has experience as a teacher, school based administrator and central office administrator
- Is or able to be certified as a Virginia superintendent
- Possesses deep knowledge and experience with providing a comprehensive curriculum for all students preferably with innovative curriculums such as STEM, CTE and AP.
- Possesses doctorate (preferred)