

SCHOOLS

KIDS

ACTION

GetSmart!

October / November 2005

What Cleveland needs in a new school leader

Activists, students and others say the "right stuff" includes the ability to build strong partnerships

The School Board and a community panel are beginning to search for a new school leader to replace CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who announced plans in August to step down as soon as a replacement is found. *Get Smart!* asked students, community activists and others what the next CEO of the Cleveland Municipal School District must do to take schools to the next level of improvement. *Get Smart!* also asked what skills the new chief should have to effectively educate Cleveland's 65,000 school children. In interviews, they pointed to three key areas:



CONSTANT, OPEN COMMUNICATION

At the top of many residents' list is the need for a stronger, more steady flow of information between the district and city neighborhoods. For example, some interviewed said that it seemed as though residents only heard from the CEO when it was time for a vote on a tax increase to pay school expenses.

"An important piece of the puzzle is

constant, open communication," says Gloria McCullough, a retired college administrator and activist in the Lee-Harvard neighborhood. "I think that was part of Barbara Byrd-Bennett's problem — the communication did not come through.

When I say communication, I mean it has to be two ways — up, down, sideways and around. It has to be in all directions, not just from the CEO to the community or from the CEO to the School Board and then it filters to the community."

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What you can do!

Attend upcoming School Board community forums for public input on the CEO search

Stayed tuned to CMSD's web site www.cmsdnet.net for a survey

For more on what you can do, see page 2.

Greg Brown, executive director of the Center for Community Solutions, which works with the district on various projects, says the leader should "develop a network for feedback because it's one thing to talk to people but it's another thing to get information" and use it effectively. He adds that "a good sense of the politics unique to an urban district and a community where there is racial strife" is also needed.

"This person has to have a realistic vision for public education," says Ian Heisey, mediation coordinator at the Bellaire Puritas Development Corporation, who helps to organize residents' involvement with schools. The CEO has "to be a responsible leader to all the stakeholders — you can't just select one group that you are going to perform for. And then, you've got to have constant, open and consistent communication."

Khalid Samad, an activist and member of Peace in the Hood, agrees with McCullough and Heisey. "These are the stakeholders. These are the people who have ownership and they are nine out of 10 times the last to be consulted about issues that affect the destinies of themselves and their children. They should be the first."

Samad goes on to say that the next CEO also needs to be able to build bridges between groups that tend to disagree. "In this kind of environment where there is so much distrust, ambivalence and fear, whoever it is has to be a convener of mutual consensus," he points out.



THE ABILITY TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Second on the list is the new leader's skill at creating successful relationships with community groups, colleges, businesses and other organizations so they can help efforts to improve schools.

Says Samad, the next schools chief has to be "someone who can create synergy, who is not afraid to sit down with indigenous leadership, speak truth to power and mobilize collaboration and partnership." Because of stepped-up gang activity, it is important that the CEO be able to recognize the need for, forge and maintain partnerships between neighborhoods and safety forces within schools, he says.

McCullough from Lee-Harvard says "the big picture is we have to have a CEO who knows how to connect the dots of community, organizations and partnerships. The district is not just for educators to run. We have to have the involvement of this person, that person, this corporation and organization and we definitely need partnerships with universities." She adds that parents should be a major player in those partnerships.

For example, McCullough suggests that the CEO build relationships with companies and sports teams that lead to "partnerships that will do things that the district looks to the taxpayers to do." Heisey from Bellaire-Puritas says the CEO has to reach out to residents who want to help schools but don't know what to do. "Whether it's CDCs [community development corporations] along with block clubs, people at the neighborhood level want to see things improve and are looking for ways that they can meaningfully be involved.

Heisey notes that the CEO should appeal to residents who are not necessarily parents. "We need to create a way for people who don't have any children in the district to feel some investment in the schools, to connect."



ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The know-how to boost student performance and raise graduation rates higher than the current 50 percent is

What you can do!



Contact members of the community advisory panel appointed by the School Board to assist in the search. Here's how to contact them:

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also a top job requirement for the next CEO, as residents see it. There were different views on how the schools chief should accomplish that.

Students say the CEO should be more in touch with routine conditions of the schools to understand the difficulties they face. "I'd like to see as CEO someone who is more involved in coming out to schools on a regular basis and talking with us students to see what we do day-to-day," says Keyana S. Williams, senior class president of the School of Applied Sciences and Technology at East High.

Madelyn Hruska, a junior at James Ford Rhodes High, agrees with Williams that a hands-on approach to schools will help. "It has to be someone who really knows the feel of schools — how we have no books and how the supplies are lacking," she says. "I don't think they should've necessarily been a teacher. ... But I think they should've been in the schools like a parent and know what is going on and not just saying this is what we think is going on. They need to know what students have to face everyday because of certain things that we don't have." For example, Hruska says, "I take chemistry and our chemistry teacher has to buy supplies to do labs for us. He has to personally take his own money to buy chemicals for us."

The new chief has to have high expectations for students, adds Samad. The leader must "understand that regardless of the economic and social environment these young people come out of, they have greatness and genius in their very being, and it has to be activated," he says. "Education comes from the Egyptian word which means to bring out that which is already in you. So we're talking about someone who nurtures and cultivates their potential." ■

City Summit

What does the next CEO need to do to continue improving Cleveland Schools? Get Smart! asked students and community activists their views. Here's what some said:



"I'd like to see as CEO someone who is more involved in coming out to schools on a regular basis and talking with us students to see what we do day-to-day.

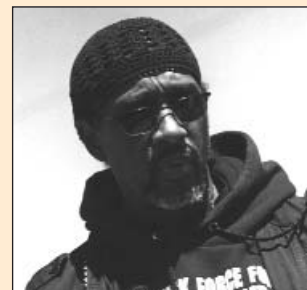
*Keyana S. Williams,
senior class president, School of Applied Sciences
and Technology at East High*

S "Someone who tries to really be a listener and hear from many segments in the community that care about public education, including parents — just because they turned down a levy doesn't mean they don't care about education; someone who has a good relationship with the teachers union as well as the mayor.



*Ian Heisey, mediation coordinator, Bellaire Puritas
Development Corporation*

T The CEO should "support multicultural education. It's imperative that content and images in books recognize and affirm the contribution of those whom the children are ethnically tied to. If they see themselves in the history books and understand the mathematical genius of [figures like] the Egyptian Imhotep, they won't feel insecure about their ability to master mathematics."



*Khalid Samad, activist, member of Peace in the Hood
and the Taskforce on Community Mobilization*

Tips for parents

How to choose quality preschool

Pre-school or day care should get your kids ready for kindergarten. But in many cases, after being dropped off at day care, kids receive little learning.

It's up to parents to make sure their children learn colors, sounds, letters, words, shapes and counting.

When choosing day care, Starting Point (216-575-0061), a local non-profit, urges parents to ask themselves:

- Will my child fit in and be safe here?
- Do I like this center's approach to learning, play and discipline?
- Can I talk easily with the staff about my child?
- Do the costs, hours and policies meet my needs?

Based on their personal experiences, parents interviewed by Get Smart! offered this advice for choosing better-quality daycare:



THE RIGHT FACILITY

- Ask other parents to recommend good places.
- Visit each setting with your child to make she enjoys being there and gets along with other kids.



THE RIGHT PEOPLE

- Look for a place where teachers are friendly to you and your child.
- Make sure teachers and staff are open to parent visits any time.



THE RIGHT TEACHING

- Check teacher qualifications. Certifications and associate's degrees can mean better teaching.
- Check the teacher-child ratios. Smaller is often better.
- Make sure learning is going on.

If you are a home-care provider, you can take part in workshops on WVIZ-PBS, Channel 25. Also Tri-C Metro Campus offers training in early childhood learning standards. For information, call 987.2380.

Dates to Remember

Nov. 1 | 4pm
Cleveland School Board Meeting
Memorial School
410 East 152nd Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44110

Nov. 8 | 6:30 am - 7:30pm
General Mayoral Elections
Get out and **VOTE!**

Nov. 8 | 6 pm
College Financial Aid Demystified
South Branch Library
3096 Scranton Road
Cleveland, OH 44113

Nov. 11 | 7:30 pm
Hip Hop as a Cultural Phenomenon:
Interpreting a Social Consciousness
Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch Library
1962 Stokes Boulevard
Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Nov. 14 - 15 | 8am
State Board of Education Meeting
Ohio School for the Deaf
500 Morse Rd.
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dec. 13 | 4pm
Cleveland School Board Meeting
Charles Dickens School
3552 East 131st Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44120

To send an event for consideration in Get Smart!, call Rick Doll at 216.623.6317.

Why GetSmart!?

Misinformation about schools is everywhere. And on TV, spectacle often wins over substance when it comes to education.

To provide accurate information to businesses, churches, organizations, parents, activists and others, *Catalyst* magazine will publish the *Get Smart!* newsletter every other month.

You can use *Get Smart!* to:

- Decide the best way to support your school — tutoring, mentoring, donating supplies, etc.
- Understand education issues that affect kids' lives and futures.

- Link youth organizations and programs to the classroom.

So read on and *Get Smart!* about what you can do to improve education for all Cleveland children.

Find *Get Smart!* in neighborhood recreation and community centers, restaurants, cafes, churches and hair salons near you. To find out where to pick up a copy of *Get Smart!* or to have an issue delivered to your home or business, call 216/623-6322.

Also, look for *Get Smart!* TV airing monthly on Village Television (Adelphia Cable, Channel 20).

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FUNDED BY
Cleveland Fdn.
George Gund Fdn.
The Joyce Fdn
United Black Fund