

District Scan

Best Practice Example

There are many things that make this a great district scan.

- 1. Note the “Observation” (conclusions) at the end of each section. This is more than the collection of data; there was work to analyze what it all means.**
- 2. The associate visited the district (schools and community) twice, once with her partner.**
- 3. The associate connected with people in the community, educators and residents, to come to an understanding of the district.**
- 4. The associate used many sources to explore the district.**
- 5. The associate reached some sound conclusions as to the match for herself and her family.**

Note: The associate applied to this district and did not get the superintendency. The associate was successful in a later district scan and is currently in superintendency.

How do you think the quality of your district scan will affect your job interviews - confidence, response to questions, willingness to commitment to the district, etc.?

NOTE: [] Edited to protect the associate's identity, confidentiality, and sources. James M. Merrins, Ed.D.

[] CENTRAL SCHOOLS

Current Superintendent Vacancy

DISTRICT SCAN

Name []

Date []

THE DISTRICT/COMMUNITY

- Rural district – [] County – 121 sq. miles – 11 towns – three counties.
- Located between the [] and the [] River – known for tourism, recreation, and beautiful views
- Elevations range from 400' to 2200' above sea level – steep and curving roads
- The Area Chamber of Commerce boasts nearly 100 members. They sponsor a large balloon rally every July that engages the community
- Businesses include retail and services with some light industry and farms
- There is an active Rotary Club; no other service organizations
- Two major churches in the community – one with an active youth program
- The Town Park – [] acres for hiking, XC skiing, biking, and observing wildlife – historic barns being developed for use
- Many travel to the [] or [] for employment – with an increase in people commuting from New York City since the 9/11/01 attacks
- Long time Town Supervisor was recently unseated leading to some internal conflict on the town board
- Chartered a “free academy” for secondary education in 18[] – one of 15 in NY
- The district and community share pride in traditions steeped in rural culture

- Housed in two buildings – on one campus. The Elementary School (Grades K-5) and the Jr.-Sr. High School Building housing the Middle School (Grades 6-8) and High School (Grades 9-12)
- Student demographics include the following:
 - Enrollment: Over the past three years enrollment has trended downward from 1465 → 1447 → 1419 in the 2002-2003 school year.
 - Ethnicity: The ethnic makeup of the district shows a three year percentage trend of 97.9% → 97.7% → 97.5% Caucasian.
 - Poverty: The district is described as of average student needs in relation to district resource capacity. There has been a three-year upward trend from 18.9% → 30.9% → 34.4% eligible for free or reduced school meals.
 - LEP: The LEP population is virtually non-existent.
- The community was described by people as welcoming, but has little to offer young people in the way of recreation outside of the school program.

Observation

- ☞ The community is facing economic change. There are differing community perspectives, with some who would embrace change and others who resist. There is evidence that a careful and coordinated strategic plan to address the changing times would allow the community shape the future rather than have it created by accident.
- ☞ The region may have ability to attract technical and research related business. The potential is here for the school district to play a role through dynamic leadership, programming, and high school course offerings.
- ☞ The village center is clean and well kept, both businesses and houses. Some pockets of poverty housing (poor streets) in the village. Outside the village housing ranges from new construction to rural poverty.
- ☞ Businesses are mostly retail. Two very small manufacturing businesses on the edge of the village.
- ☞ There is a downward trend in district student enrollment, losing 18 and 28 students respectively in the last two years. If this continues the superintendent will need to consider reductions in district staffing in the next couple years.
- ☞ The upward trend in poverty indicators may mean increased support services in the district (counselors, school social workers, etc.)

THE POSITION

- The district is utilizing the services of outside search consultants for the Superintendency search.
- Three-year initial contract – starting salary between \$110,000. – \$130,000.
- Residency in the district is preferred.
- Qualities sought include the following:
 - Puts students first
 - Makes well-reasoned and informed decisions and stands behind them
 - Emphasizes the importance of education and demonstrates a commitment to academic excellence
 - Values and recognizes that the school is the center of the community
 - Has the ability to be a highly visible ambassador for the school district
 - Positively engages the community and parents and unifies all constituencies
 - Appreciates and champions diversity
 - Is willing to make a long-term commitment to the community
 - Has the ability to take a good district and make it better
 - Practices open, honest, above-board communication with all constituents
 - Hires outstanding people and holds them accountable
 - Maintains a safe, caring, respectful learning environment
 - Possesses or is eligible for New York State School District Administrator certification
- In the past 10 years there has been a pattern of administrative turnover in the Superintendency but not in building administrators.
- Community adults are clear that they seek a long-term superintendent commitment and a high degree of involvement in the community.

Observations

- ☞ Position attributes listed focus on the superintendent's capacity to build relationships. Minimal reference to the educational mission of the district.
- ☞ The district would benefit from stable superintendent leadership – someone who can build a cohesive leadership team in the district and with the community.
- ☞ Talking to adult community members the expectation for superintendent residency in the community is much higher than articulated by the board (“preferred”).
- ☞ Proposed superintendent salary is low for the area (surrounding school districts).

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION / PERSONNEL

- The seven-member BOE has a balance of long term and new members
- There are currently no major conflicts between board members
- Mentioned potential conflicts:
 - desire to expand the Agriculture Program.
 - need for a transportation facility
- The BOE has begun meeting in different locations throughout the district in an effort to be more accessible and visible
- The superintendent has begun working with advisory committees
- Each BOE meeting begins with celebrations/accolades
- Informal notes from BOE meetings are posted on the website. They do not include members in attendance, or who made motions.
- During the 2003-04 school year there were 123 teachers – 95% held valid certificates. The brochure reported 138 teachers
- Highly qualified teachers taught in 94% of the classes
- There are 115 Support Staff
- Administrative staff includes the superintendent and an Assistant Superintendent for Business. Each building has a Building Principal with an Elementary Assistant, and a MS/HS Assistant Principal. Directors include Special Student Services and Technology with a Grant Writer/ Communications Professional. Supervisors include Buildings and Grounds, Transportation, Food Service
- Shared Decision Making Teams operate in each building
- There is an interest in long-term planning, and they have a CDEP (Comprehensive District Education Plan) in place called the Quality Education Plan. The plan is not accessible on the district website
- The brochure describes the existence of district wide goals – not listed in the brochure or evidenced on the district website

Observations

- ☞ Although the existence of district goals developed based on data analysis is mentioned in the brochure, there is no evidence of this focused effort on the website.
- ☞ The use of advisory committees has been carefully developed and appreciated by the public. The new superintendent must be willing to operate consistently with the board's committee philosophy.
- ☞ The strength of the building administrators in the community may pose political problems for the superintendent trying to bring change.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE

EDITOR'S NOTE – here were two pages of data in table format

Grade 4 New York State Assessments

Grade 8 New York State Assessments

High School Results After Four Years

Regents Exam Results

Comprehensive English

Math A

Math B: No percentages listed

Math Course II

Math Course III

Global History and Geography

US History and Government

Living Environment

Earth Science

Chemistry

NOTE: Numbers of students tested in Chemistry drops dramatically.

Comprehensive Spanish

Comprehensive Latin

- Despite having a large percentage pass necessary exams, the percentages of students earning Regents Diplomas has been 41% → 50% → 42%
- Post-Graduation: The most recent school report card reports that 34% went to 4 year colleges, 38% went to 2 year colleges, 4% entered the military, 9% sought employment, and 15% were unclassified
- Career development data showed 0% participating in career development activities grades K-5, mid-30s% grades 6-8, and 0% grades 9-12.
- Attendance over three years stands at 94.2% → 93.8% → 94.4%
- Suspension Rates over three years stands at 5.5% → 4.6% → 5.9%

- Drop-out: The dropout percentage is virtually non-existent – perhaps because of an alternative program in the secondary school
- Average class sizes hover around 20 with some spikes into the high 20s

Observations

- ☞ The district takes pride in going out of their way to help students who struggle including providing transportation after school four nights a week, an extensive summer program, and an in-house alternative education program (31 students).
- ☞ There are curricular areas of strength and weakness with regard to mastery level performance.
- ☞ There are areas of strength and weakness with regard to student participation in higher-level course work.
- ☞ Elementary scores trending upward including increases at level 4.
- ☞ Middle School Scores: ELA stagnant with math climbing – Decline in ELA at level 4 and math level 4 is in single digits.
- ☞ Steady increase in English and math Regents passage over 4 years to mid-80% range.
- ☞ The achievement gap between General Education and Special Education Students is in need of further study.
- ☞ There is an intermittent gap between the achievement of all students and the achievement of economically disadvantaged students.
- ☞ There is room for growth in the percentage of Regents Diplomas awarded. This is recognized as a goal for the district in the brochure.

PROGRAM

Elementary

- Class size for 2004-05 range from 15 to 22
- The school hosts a homework support website
- Community adults describe elementary school as well managed – principal doing a great job
- School wide art show every spring
- Intermural sports available grades 4 and 5
- Annual elementary musical
- The local natural preserve partnership supports inquiry based science instruction
- Multi-year programs in 1-2 and 3-4
- Supported by PTA
- An elementary counselor helps students address barriers to learning
- The elementary school has developed student exit goals
- There are clearly articulated and progressively increasing expectations for homework

Middle School

- A relatively new principal (taught in the district) – optimism that she will stay – consistency will help the program increase focus on middle level programming
- Community adults describe the middle school as “a work in progress”
- Extensive activities including but not limited to Odyssey of the Mind, Newspaper, Nursing Home Service, Math League, Geography Bee, Current Events League, Band, Chorus, Athletics, Challenge Program (enrichment) etc.
- Supported by middle school PTO
- The Junior “g” Award recognizes students for quality participation and contribution
- There is access to homework information on the district website

High School

- Community adults report turnover in high school leadership has hurt program. Several expressed questions about the current principal’s performance
- A challenge program (enrichment) is described as being open to all students
- Supplementary literature program requires students to read six or more books outside of class each year
- Extensive clubs and student activities including but not limited to Interact (Rotary affiliate), Sound System, Peer Mediation, International Club, FFA, Musical, SADD, Library Club, Drama Club, Band, Chorus, etc.

- Three foreign languages – Latin (3yrs), Spanish (5 yrs), and Japanese (3 yrs)
- An alternative education program has an enrollment of 31 students
- Limited information on ratemyteachers.com
- Agriculture, technology and business courses enjoy high interest – approximately 14% of 11th and 12th graders attend [] BOCES Occupational Education
- FFA is tied to the Ag. Program – high visibility and community support
- College credits available through the AP program and SUNY
- There is one listing for a computer class
- No active parent group affiliation
- Percentage of students taking Regents Chemistry is low and may be impacted by a “Practical” Chemistry Course with lower academic standards
- The Code of Conduct is concise, general, and comprehensive
- The entire Curriculum Guide is on the website
- Students clustered in grade level teams to promote interdisciplinary/theme based learning
- Guidance services help students develop and revisit/revise a four-year plan based on career goals.
- The district has a Special Education Classification Rate of 13.6% compared to the Statewide average of 11.8%
- There were 103 Special Education students in the district in December of 2002. 62.1% are served in the least restrictive program model (Statewide – 52.1%)

Observations

- ☞ The community theme of appreciating administrators who make a long-term commitment is evident across all administrative positions in the district. The superintendent must project a philosophy consistent with this.
- ☞ The elementary program appears to be the most progressive of the three schools.
- ☞ High School Curriculum Guide is traditional in format and uninviting in language.
- ☞ There is no evidence of a local scholarship foundation.
- ☞ In general, there is strong adult community support for the teachers (“They’re doing a good job!”)
- ☞ Having theme-based instruction with grade level teams at the high school is impressive.
- ☞ The school report card showed no career development activity occurring at the high school, when in fact there is. This makes me wonder: What other report data is not accurate, and is data reporting and review taken seriously?
- ☞ Adequate Yearly Progress requirements have been met.

- ☞ High school student exit goals are needed to help focus program development for the future.
- ☞ The superintendent will have to deal with the performance of the high school principal – improve or terminate.

FINANCIAL/FACILITIES PICTURE

- A wing added to Jr.-Sr. High in 1995 – allow development of a middle school
- The buildings (outside) and grounds are well cared for
- Budgets have passed for the past five years
- The 2004-05 budget is \$19,054,960
- \$12,180,000 bonded indebtedness for capital improvements and bus purchases
- The equalization rates from the eleven towns are diverse. This has been an issue of contention in the past that appears to have settled down
- There is a Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) that meets regularly and assists in providing input as well as helping to explain the budget to the community
- The BAC produce a document entitled *Know Your School Budget* answering frequently asked questions about the school budget
- The district is careful to operate within its perceived needs with the help of a strong business official (Asst. Superintendent for Business)
- The district's Title I allocation for 2004-05 dropped 1.7% while the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch increased
- The costs of educating students are kept low as evidenced in the comparison chart that follows:

	Per Pupil Cost	Per Pupil Cost
District	General Ed. \$6,006.	Special Ed. \$12,578
Similar Districts	General Ed. \$6,649.	Special Ed. \$15,575
State Wide	General Ed. \$6,958.	Special Ed. \$12,265

Overall per pupil expenditure are figured at \$10,858 compared to the average across the state, which is \$12,265.

Observations

- ☞ The Budget Advisory Committee appears to have a clear vision of their role.
- ☞ The community appears to be willing to support programs for children. Despite tight economic times there has been growth in program.
- ☞ Special Education costs appear to be well contained.
- ☞ The district maintains a modest fund balance (10 – 12% on average).
- ☞ The district has made minimal use of Reserves (nothing special).
- ☞ Taxes increases have been higher than in the past, but consistent with surrounding districts.
- ☞ School budgets have passed each year for the past five years.
- ☞ The declining enrollment may have a state aid impact, through a reduction in revenues.
- ☞ Addressing student attendance may be important for strengthening student performance while increasing district revenue.

SCAN SOURCES

District / Community Visits (two visits, one with spouse)

School Building Visits

Announcement Brochure

In-Person Interviews:

- Retired Superintendent living in the area (telephone)
- President, Rotary – sign shop owner
- Parent – works at [] College
- H.G., Real estate salesman – owner
- J.K. Real estate saleswoman – by appointment
- B.T., Food Preparation – Cumberland Farms
- Newspaper reader – late 20s – Cumberland Farms
- Retired man – walking dog
- W.R., Former Superintendent (7 years)
- DS at the BOCES
- Director of Career, Technical and Alternative Ed – BOCES
- Director of Professional Development – BOCES

Review of Prior Year's Independent Audit and ST-3

- Reviewed with the business manager in my current district

Building Program Descriptions

Newspapers Reviews (one year, local library)

- The [] (daily)
- The [] (weekly)

Regional Real Estate Guides

Internet

- School Report Card (NYS)
- Area Chamber of Commerce Website
- Ratemyteachers.com
- Title I Website
- District Website
 - Budget Advisory Committee Report
 - Know your School Budget
 - Course Descriptions
 - Honor Roll
 - Student Code of Conduct

FURTHER STUDY

Recognizing that this entire scan is a work in progress, I plan to update the information with each stage I reach in the search. Hopefully there will be several updates.

Questions I already know I want to ask at some point appear below. With each new piece of information, new questions will come to mind.

- ☞ What are the ages, occupations, and backgrounds of BOE members?
- ☞ What is the anticipated retirement pattern for teachers over the next five to ten years?
- ☞ Who is involved in the development of the Quality Educational Plan?
- ☞ How many bargaining units?
- ☞ What is the status of the different contracts?
- ☞ What is the history of labor relations in the district?
- ☞ How do students access alternative education and Challenge Program?
- ☞ What are the structure, philosophy, and intended outcome of the programs?
- ☞ Do alternative students earn a regular diploma?
- ☞ What supports will help the principals and reduce turnover?
- ☞ What is the district's attendance policy? What steps can be taken to increase attendance?
- ☞
- ☞
- ☞ More to come.....

IS IT A MATCH?

After reviewing the desired attributes in relation to the district's performance and program I believe that this district is a strong match to my skills, attitudes, and interests. First and foremost, they are looking for stable leadership. My reason for wanting to be a superintendent involves a desire for true impact. This can only occur if I remain in a district. My plan is to work at one more job, for 8 – 10 years.

The community seeks a superintendent who will become involved in the community as well as the school. I've observed that the district has similar needs to those of the community – clearly defined goals based on a vision of the future, rather than protection for the past. My leadership history includes establishing not-for-profit agencies, working with community coalitions, and participating as a member on a community visioning team. I look forward to the potential for seeing hard work in the community benefit the district and vice versa.

Expectations for students may be at the center of a culture clash in the community. Long time residents with roots in agriculture may feel satisfied with the level of expectation. However, the people moving in from urban and suburban areas have a different definition of excellence. The percentage of students receiving Regents Diplomas, taking upper level math and science course, and scoring at the mastery level on some state assessments suggests to those newer citizens that expectations are somewhat relaxed. Consideration of this question will require reflection on program offerings, and the status of pedagogy in the district. I have a clear vision of what a district looks like when high expectations are effectively blended with aggressive support so that all students can reach the expectations. I also have a common sense way of “selling” those higher expectations to the resistant parent and/or student. In addition, I am patient and respectful of diverse positions and mind-sets. This leadership task will require sensitivity to the teachers, students and community.

It is clear that the district seeks an individual who has deep commitment to students, learning, and enthusiasm for working with people. That's me. When I left the [] Campus the staff gave me a bronzed running shoe inscribed “Thank-you for Always Going that Extra Mile for Kids”. I treasure it. I believe my energy and honesty will be appreciated in this setting.

Hiring the best people and letting them do their jobs is the quickest way to success for a superintendent. I have been a successful recruiter of teachers, largely because of my reputation and enthusiasm. Experience running a teacher-mentor program will be an asset. In addition, I was able to inspire experienced teachers to take new risks. The professional development background will enhance that skill for the learning community in the district.

Finally, my husband and I value rural life. [] is the type of community in which we want to live. The recreational activities available are a perfect match for our interests.