

The School District Scan

The Skill of the District Scan

"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER"

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District scanning is the progressive collection and ongoing analysis of information on a school district - seeking to understand the district's culture and issues. Scanning is a learned skill set that helps the aspiring superintendent through the transition process to successful Superintendent of Schools. It is a continuous process of coming to understand a school district prior to making any of a series of important decisions.

When seeking a school district to make application it helps the aspiring superintendent to determine the "fit" and whether he/she wants to work (and live) in that district.

When interviewing the district scan helps the aspiring superintendent answer interview questions and demonstrate knowledge of the district and its issues.

When appointed it helps the new Superintendent develop a strategic entry plan.

When starting it helps the new Superintendent in preliminary decisions.

Four General Areas of Simultaneous District Scanning

KEY – Scanning is in layers. The easiest is data scanning – every applicant will do this. The next layer is visitation – driving the district and seeing the district / community. The highest level is talking to people - residents / officials / your network, etc..

I. DISTRICT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- VACANCY INFORMATION
- BOARD OF EDUCATION
- COMMUNITY

!!. DISTRICT PERCEPTION SCAN

- !!.A WHAT TO ASK
- !!.B WHO TO ASK

III. DISTRICT DATA AND PERCEPTIONS

- DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS
- STUDENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
- TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY
- PERSONNEL
- BUSINESS/FINANCE
- DISTRICT / COMMUNITY

IV. PERSONAL AND FAMILY INTERESTS

I. DISTRICT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

KEY – This is the initial analyze (before applying) of the match between your interests, strengths, weaknesses and aspirations, and what you can learn about what the board/district is seeking.

Vacancy Information

- Size of district (# of students), location, budget, type (rural, suburban, urban, special, etc.)
- Board desired characteristics/attributes (usually from brochure and talking to network)
- Salary, length of contract

Board of Education

- Present members of the board and their reputations (usually from talking to network)
- Member longevity and recent major shifts
- Systems / manner of conducting business

Schools

- Reputation in district / region / BOCES
- Administrators and competency
- Conditions and construction projects

Community

- Local and regional economic growth
- Community trends
- Major employers – economic health

II. DISTRICT PERCEPTION SCAN

II.A WHAT TO ASK

KEY – What are the questions that will tell you what you want to know?

Kinds of open-ended questions to ask --

- What is(are) the major issue(s) in the community?
 - School related
 - Non-school related
- In your opinion, what does the District presently do well?
- In your opinion, what programs or services is the District presently providing that could be improved? Why and how?
- In your opinion, what programs or services doesn't the District offer that it should offer?
- Do all students who could benefit from the District programs and services have access to them? If not, who and why?
- Can you think of any examples of where the District could improve its cost efficiency?
- What do you like most about what has happened in this District (region) in the last year (5 to 10 years)?
- What has happened in this District (region) in the last year (5 to 10 years) that gives you the most concern? ...hope?

II.B WHO TO ASK

KEY – What are the 2 or 3 questions you want to ask this person that will tell you what you want to know?

- BOCES leadership
 - o District Superintendent
 - o Assistant Superintendents (Finance, Curriculum)
- Former superintendent, interim superintendent, and superintendents in neighboring districts
- Other BOCES personnel
 - o Director of Technology
 - o Director of Instructional Staff Development
 - o Director of Special Education
 - o Director of Vocational Education
- Friends and relatives familiar with the district (live or work there)
- District staff
- Business owners / leaders in the community
- County agency staff leaders
- Regional / state leaders
- Local not-for-profit leaders
- Special interest group leaders

III. DISTRICT DATA AND PERCEPTIONS

DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHICS

- Enrollment
- Racial/Ethnic, etc. breakdown
- Poverty rate
- Percent free/reduced lunch
- Percent ESL

STUDENT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- NYS test results
- Percent types diplomas
- Annual attendance rate
- Annual dropout rate
- Suspension rate
- Dropout rate
- College bound rate

TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY

- Quality and quantity of current systems
- Instructional staff
- Administrators

PERSONNEL

- Number of employees by class
- Organizational Chart
- Experience and competence of administrators and directors
- Teacher / staff / administrator moral
- Number/Size of bargaining units
- Present status of employee contracts
- History of negotiations
- Open grievances

BUSINESS / FINANCE

- Size of current budget
- Competence of the Business Administrator/Manager and business office staff
- Breakdown of budgets (i.e.; instructional, administration, debt, fund balance, etc.)
- Budget history
- Budget vote history
- Fund balances (three years)
- Independent Auditor's Reports (three years)
- Appearance, care, condition of facilities
- Student transportation system
- Pending litigation

DISTRICT / COMMUNITY

- Parent involvement and community support
- Unemployment rate
- Relations with other units of government
- Power people / organizations

IV. PERSONAL AND FAMILY INTERESTS

KEY – You and your family must have the potential to find happiness in your new environment. Be sure to include your family in visits and discussions.

- Can you accept / thrive as a Superintendent in this district / community?
- Will your family accept / thrive in this district / community?
- Is there a board / community requirement / expectation that you live in the district?
- Are the life style activities you and your family need available (housing, shopping, recreation, arts, etc.)?