

SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT

Succession Management is the systematic process of developing individuals to fill the key roles in an organization. The succession management process identifies and monitors various staff pools in order to identify and leverage the leadership talent that already exists internally in order to maintain institutional knowledge, capitalize on associated experience, and meet the future needs of the organization.

Succession Planning

A review of the literature on succession planning indicates that effective succession management requires:

- identification of areas where there are potential shortages of talent
- links to the strategic direction and the distinctive needs of the organization
- alignment to the organization's unique culture and history
- support of the top management
- focus on leadership development rather than specific job requirements
- selection of objective criteria for advancement
- provision of individualized developmental activities to leadership candidates; and
- continuous monitoring and assessment of the program

Organizations should start with an organizational chart that identifies key staff and their expected retirement dates to determine the organization's succession needs. Specific information, including identification of positions that need to be filled and assessment of internal talent, should be gathered. Once succession planners have a clear understanding of the organization's readiness and planning priorities, they can develop objectives that will reinforce the organization's goals and objectives. (Province of Nova Scotia, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2003).

In addition to basic managerial qualities (interpersonal skills, ability to manage others, understanding organizational dynamics), organizations should consider other important factors, such as the candidate's ability to multitask in ambiguous situations, maintain a consistent temperament and energy level, manage a team to meet specific objectives, and sustain team morale (George, 2005; Fulmer, 2002).

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Miami-Dade County Public Schools faces the challenge of building and maintaining a pool of highly qualified and effective leaders for over 360 schools and multiple levels of district and region administration. Development of a succession management plan is an identified priority for the District. However, most organizations that undertake the development of a succession management plan do so with a far broader range of fiscal and personnel resources than are available to the District in the current economic climate.

In developing the current succession management plan, District staff had to balance the need for effective research-based strategies and the best possible preparation opportunities for participants with the need to remain cost-neutral throughout the process. In this endeavor, the District will rely heavily on the enormous internal resource represented by the collective and individual experience, expertise, institutional knowledge, and wisdom that resides in Senior Staff.

The two key initiatives that have been developed to meet this critical need and to make the most effective use possible of this internal resource and, where available, grant funding, are *The Executive Administrative Residency Program* and *Project Lead Strong*. The common thread linking these initiatives is the philosophy that “experience may be the best teacher, but experience gained next to a high-performing practitioner is even better.” All the initiatives are based on a clinical model of authentic residency experience paralleling the model which has historically been proven effective in transmitting complex and subtle “soft skills” and fostering “situated cognition” in medical, psychological, and legal training, among other professions.

The Executive Administrative Residency Program

The Executive Administrative Residency Program consists of two tracks, *The Administrative Residency Track* and *The Executive Track*. Each track targets a different high-impact position level in the District.

The Administrative Residency Track was initiated in the 2009-2010 school year to provide selected high-potential school-site and non-school-site administrators with a residency experience to build their leadership capacity and skill sets, and mentoring by the appropriate members of senior staff. In addition, a core component of this model is building a two-way communication channel. Not only do participants benefit from attendance and participation in high-level District meetings at the Cabinet and School Board level, but it allows a more “ground-level” voice in top-down tactical decision-making and planning. Thus, the Administrative Residents gain not only an ear at the highest level of discussions to develop a comprehensive background on District initiatives, but, also, a voice in those discussions. This will prepare these high-potential middle-level managers and principals to transition from a school-site or departmental perspective to a broader focus on regional and District-level issues.

Through Administrative Residency, senior staff is provided with an opportunity to groom and coach potential successors, and become acquainted and work with potential candidates for other senior positions. For the candidates, it provides valuable experiences and the opportunity to build the contacts and knowledge base that will be critical for their future success, as well as the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and their “fit” with realities of the senior level positions to which they aspire.

Candidates for the Administrative Residency are directly appointed by the Superintendent.

The Executive Track is an initiative that will be introduced in the 2010-2011 school year to prepare seasoned district and region administrators for Senior Staff and Cabinet level positions (i.e., Assistant, Associate and Deputy Superintendent). The executive track is designed to build the bench for sustaining the organization at the most senior levels through a customized program featuring on-the-job training, job-shadowing, job-embedded professional development, 360-degree assessments, and mentoring.

After analyzing the retirement data for the next two to three years, it is apparent that the District will sustain vacancies in the highest level positions which include: Labor Relations, School/District Operations, Region Center Leadership, and Budget/Finance. In order to prepare potential candidates for these positions with the knowledge and expertise needed, current Cabinet and Senior Staff will identify and nominate high-potential candidates either from within their own departments or different offices. A rigorous written application and interview process will precede selection as an Executive Track candidate. The application will be reviewed by members of the Cabinet prior to their approval of the participant's selection into the program. Candidates selected for the Executive Track will receive a personalized profile assessing

competence levels with respect to critical CEO leadership skills and attributes. They will use this information to identify potential areas for further experience and development.

The major component of this track is job-embedded professional development which includes intensive shadowing and mentoring by Cabinet and select members of Senior Staff. Participants will shadow appropriate Cabinet members on a sustained basis immersing themselves in mission critical aspects of the position. Active participation at Cabinet and other strategic job-specific meetings, in addition to regular attendance at School Board Committee meetings and the monthly School Board meeting is required in order to develop a global District perspective.

As a culminating activity, candidates, with input from their mentor, will identify three critical issues facing the District and make a presentation to the Superintendent and Cabinet. The presentation must include an analysis of pertinent contributing and co-factors, potential options for action, implications and cost-benefit analysis of each option, and a final recommendation based on the above factors and fit with the District's Strategic Plan.

Project Lead Strong

A critical need identified in the current literature on the principalship is the high turnover rate for new and early career principals, particularly those taking the reins of high-need, high-poverty, chronically low-performing senior high schools. There is a growing body of evidence that, in order to effect a significant positive change in a school, principals need to remain in place for several years. Given this, it is particularly troubling that, in reviewing the ten (10) senior high schools in the District that are identified as being persistently lowest-performing, this "revolving door in the principal's office" pattern held true. Every one of the schools had experienced repeated leadership turnover, with multiple changes in the principal's office in the past five years.

In response to this need, in the spring of 2010, staff in Professional Development wrote and submitted a successful grant application under the School Leadership Program (SLP) of the United States Department of Education. Funding for this innovative five-year program, Project Lead Strong, was awarded in August 2010, and grant implementation is in process.

The purpose of Project Lead Strong is to leverage a combination of grant-funded and district resources to build leadership capacity at multiple levels throughout the district. The core, "mission-critical" target of Project Lead Strong is to build a bench of highly effective secondary principals who are prepared to turn around the most challenging, chronically low-performing senior high schools and to attract, empower, and lead high-performing teachers in order to improve student outcomes.

In order to build this leadership capacity, Project Lead Strong will provide a scaffolded system of support, including mentoring, coaching, and professional development. Most critically, participants will have the opportunity to experience the "next job up the chain" for extended authentic residency experiences that are either semester-long or year-long job placements at a higher level of responsibility. Qualified, high-performing teachers will gain experience as Interim Assistant Principals; high-performing Assistant Principals will serve as Interim Principals; and experienced, successful principals will prepare themselves to lead and turn around challenging, high-need senior high schools through extensive residency experience in those same school settings.

Upon completion of their residencies, the Lead Strong participants will initially return to their schools of origin equipped with an even more extensive repertoire of effective strategies. As openings develop in the identified pool of high-need senior high schools, Project Lead Strong trained principals will be both eligible and prepared to assume those positions; priority will be given to placing Project Lead Strong participants into these schools.

Summary

In summary, the focus of the three core models in the M-DCPS succession plan is the need to provide high-potential candidates with opportunities to experience and perform in the highly challenging work settings for which they are preparing themselves.

The succession management plan, of necessity, focuses most strategically on fostering candidates for key top-level positions. However, there is a parallel focus on reaching down throughout the entire organization to create opportunities for growth and to aggressively scout for internal talent at all levels.

The ultimate goal of effective succession planning should be that Cabinet members should be able to step into the position of Superintendent when a vacancy exits.