

Right schools leader can make difference

Published 07:30 p.m., Thursday, June 16, 2011

Aside from the mayor, the schools superintendent arguably is the most important leader in any community. The job goes straight to the community's bottom line. How public schools are viewed and how well students achieve directly affect property values and the economic health of a city and region. For that reason, selecting a superintendent is the most important function of a board of education.

So what might the school board and any search committee in a community such as Stamford, which is about to seek a permanent replacement for departing Superintendent Joshua Starr, look for in Stamford's next educational leader?

My views about successful superintendents have been shaped on the front lines of education, through working one-on-one in partnership with superintendents from Seattle to Chicago, San Francisco to New York City.

I can tell you that a good superintendent can be of any gender, cultural background -- even profession. School boards ought to set no limits or restrictions on candidates. Lawyers and business people have done superb jobs. A general -- John Stanford -- motivated Seattle's schools and left an enduring legacy. What these superintendents have in common is that, somewhere along the way, each decided that the most important job he or she could have was to support young people through education.

But what there can't be -- and what Stamford can ill afford, especially at this time -- is complacency.

A ringing school bell once was the sound associated with public education, but in recent years, that steady tone has been replaced by a loud, raucous, attention-getting alarm, representing the needs of students who, because of family challenges, look to school for learning -- and so much more.

The right superintendent will recognize that, whether it is fair or not, the reality is that many schoolchildren in Stamford depend on schools not only for academic success, but also for emotional development and support. Too often, their parents are forced to hold two to three jobs just to survive, leaving them little time to spend with their families. That deficit is even more striking in a community such as Stamford, where many other children benefit from a parent at home, academic tutoring, rigorous college preparation, and numerous enrichment activities that stand them well in competitive circumstances.

Critics may argue that family support is essential to success, and that schools should stick to academic preparation, with the belief that individual effort ultimately trumps institutional commitment. This is shortsighted and ignores the connection between school success and social and

Unclear of the state of the
real estate market?

Call for monthly updates
with sales statistics and
current mortgage rate
information.



Capital Properties & EstatesSM

Greenwich, CT • 203-661-5400

emotional wellness. A dynamic superintendent who cares, is trustworthy, tactful, a good listener, a pathfinder and a good communicator will help unite the community behind a system of support for all children.

For we know all too well what happens to children who have no support. They stumble. I met an example the other day on Main Street while I was downtown with my son. The young man, a school dropout without a mother or father, asked for a couple of dollars for food with a smile -- still hopeful, pleasant, humble and engaging. He promises that he will return to school or pursue his GED. He is not alone. Yet unfortunately, many young people fail to graduate or are unable to attend college, leaving them ill prepared for the demands of the 21st century.

Superintendent Starr, with strong support from the GE Foundation and his staff, has made strides in the proper direction. But these gains will lose traction without an active, dynamic, engaged superintendent who can guide, cajole and convince the Board of Education and the community to hold a progressive line of education reform.

Our policy must begin with values that shape the vision of how our schools should be. One popular view today is that district education policy should be "data driven." Data gives substance and structure to our plans; but values are what define them. Data informs the development of policy that puts plans into action to reflect those values.

For example, a popular policy is that America "doesn't give up on its children." It isn't data driven. It's a statement of values. Stamford must believe that no child is so compromised by his or her family or community circumstances as to preclude success in school.

I believe policy should be driven by the values and vision that helped our country become a worldwide beacon of hope, and directed by data that help to drive action.

Our next education leader needs to establish relationships and partnerships with the community that enable individuals to feel respected and valued. Yet he or she also will need to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. This will demand a sense of team to be built with the Stamford Board of Education, administrative staff, teachers, parents, students, community organizations, foundations and union leaders. The next superintendent must be charismatic as well as self-reflective, and be able to hold herself/himself accountable, along with others. This superintendent must understand how to facilitate financial planning that is strategic and has a laser-like focus on teacher quality -- the most important factor related to student achievement. All actions related to budgets, programmatic interventions and staffing needs must reflect consideration of the effects any and all actions have on schoolchildren and young people.

Stamford faces an important decision. The right leader can truly take a school district such as Stamford from good to great. The right leader can lift and invigorate a city and region that we love -- or at the very least, call home. As many in the school system continue to say thanks to Josh Starr for the leadership he has so ably provided, we need to ensure that education remains the engine that provides sustainable stimulus for the health of "The City That Works."

Stamford resident Eric J. Cooper is president of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA). The work of the NUA with Bridgeport's Beardsley School was recently highlighted on CNN's Anderson Cooper 360 for engaging students with their teachers in professional development.

Triathlon Clothing Store

Free Shipping on triathlon clothing and wetsuits at TriathleteSports

Tri Bikes Up to 60% Off

Big Name Brand New Triathlon bikes Free Ship. BikesDirect.com

Ads by Yahoo!

GREENWICH	Cars	HOW TO	BEST	BEAUTY	FOOD & HEALTH
TIME	Homes	Get More Hair	Hair Color	Get Celebrity	Pasta Salad
Home	Rentals	Volume	Soup Recipes	Hairstyles	Recipes
News	Business	Virtual	Best Eye Cream	Best Beauty	Amazing Soup
Sports	Directory	Makeover	iPod Docking	Trends	Diet
Business		Try Virtual	Stations	Medium Length	Low Calorie
Entertainment	SERVICES &	Hairstyles	Twilight Trivia	Hair	Recipes
Living	INFO	Find Haircut	Twilight Quizzes	Cover Under Eye	Best Diet Plan
Opinion	Customer	Ideas	Best Haircuts	Circles	Mixed Drinks
Blogs	Care	Get Wavy Hair	Ever	Treat Damaged	Recipes
Obituaries	Contact Us	Get Rid of	New Beauty	Hair	Best Sandwiches
Classifieds	Advertise	Blackheads	Products	Best Anti-Aging	Rachael Ray
Find	With Us	Teen Hairstyles	Fragrances for	Cream	Recipes
Greenwich	Privacy Policy	Beauty Tips	Women	Half-Up Hairstyle	Coupons for
jobs	Terms of	Going Green	Best Toning	Best Beauty	Groceries
	Service	Tips	Exercises	Products	Chicken Breast
	Hearst	How to Stop	Paint Colors	Fast & Easy	Recipes
	Corporation	Hair Loss		Hairstyles	Cake Recipes
		Get Longer		Best Health	Grilled Chicken
		Lashes		Secrets	Recipes
				Eye Makeup Tips	

