



October 16, 2017

Washington State Board of Education
c/o MJ Bolt, Board Member
Olympia, Washington

Ms. Bolt and members of the board

I appreciate this opportunity to respond to your request for information regarding the use of an executive search firm in the employment of the next Executive Director of the Washington State Board of Education. While the role of the consultant can vary widely depending upon the firm selected and the services requested, I will outline the typical scenario when our firm is asked to assist the process.

Let me start by outlining what key steps we would expect to take if selected to facilitate this search:

1. Clarify the needs of the agency and the board as they are related to the qualities sought in the new Executive Director and the key challenges he/she will need to address while in the position. This will be done by meeting with and listening to board members (including student representatives), agency staff, and other key stakeholders as identified by the board. We will also utilize an on-line survey seeking input on these issues.
2. Create a vacancy announcement to use in advertising the position. This will be based upon the input gathered from the Board and other stakeholders. We will draft the position description, but it will be the responsibility of the board (or subcommittee thereof) to refine and approve it. This is a key step in the process as it enables the board to become clear on their expectations before undertaking the selection of an individual to assist in fulfilling them.
3. Recruit well qualified candidates for the position. You will get candidates, even good candidates, without recruitment; but outstanding individuals are often not seeking a new position and must be encouraged to consider the opening and make application. We will do this via distribution of the announcement through our 3000+ mailing list; posting the opening on appropriate websites; and, most important, active one-to-one recruitment of well-qualified individuals.
4. Identify and select the best candidate. We will help the board design and implement an interview and selection process that meets the needs of the board, that is fair and transparent, and results in the selection of the best candidate for the position. We will never try to tell the board who they should hire or stack the process in favor of one candidate over the others.

5. Close the deal. At the request of the board we will assist in negotiating a fair and equitable contract with the selected individual. In so doing, we will always try to represent the best interests of the board and operate within the parameters they establish.

The advantages of using a consultant are many, but let me list three that might not be readily apparent to those not familiar with the process.

- The process, if done right, is labor and time intensive. It is doubtful if you have staff members that are not working hard to keep up with their present duties, let alone undertaking a project as critical as this.
- The process needs a single, consistent voice. If various potential candidates speak to different individuals and get different responses to such key questions as “what is the board seeking”, the board loses credibility and strong candidates will be reluctant to apply.
- Potential candidates need a source of objective and trusted information. The best candidates will have some questions that will need to be addressed before they seek the position. These might include such issues as “Is the board in agreement regarding the role of the Executive Director?” “What are the relative strengths/weaknesses of key staff” and “Are there any hidden agendas I need to be aware of?” Obviously they can ask staff or board member about these issues, but they are generally more willing to share these concerns with a consultant.

It is always tempting to want to move quickly to fill an opening, but we believe it is more important to try to insure you have the best possible field of candidates. The next Executive Director will have long lasting implications for the board and the state. My initial recommendation would be to identify a strong interim Executive Director, and then address the search on an “open until filled” bases. This approach will allow you to consider candidates who might be currently under contract and not immediately available, but still move quickly if the “right” candidate emerges.

Cost is always an important factor in deciding whether or not to use a search consultant. It is, of course, impossible to give an exact quote until your needs and our potential role is more clearly articulated. However, I believe our fee could range from fifteen to twenty-five thousand dollars for a search as outlined herein. One thing that I would like to clarify is that our quoted fee is what you would end up paying. We do not believe in low-balling the quote to get the job, and then making our profit with hidden costs and up-charges. The only additional charge you would face would be for consultant travel and/or outside advertising as requested by the board.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this information. I would be most happy to meet with you and/or provide additional information upon request.

Sincerely,

Dennis Ray

Northwest Leadership Associates