Executive Summary

It is important to note the historical context within which the Lawrence Alliance for Education will select Lawrence Public Schools next Superintendent of Schools. As a result of the District Review Report about the Lawrence Public Schools, the district was identified as one of the bottom five Massachusetts districts in academic achievement in 2010-2011. The district was viewed as a "troubled school district with chronic underperformance." The leadership and governance of the district was cited as "flagging." Likewise, achievement data indicated that three quarters of the Lawrence Schools experienced continuing declines in math and English Language Arts proficiency from 2009 through 2011. Additionally, the graduation rate had dropped to 50% (four-year high school graduates). These results had occurred even though efforts had been made by Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to partner with the Lawrence Public Schools

In November of 2011, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted to place the Lawrence Public Schools in receivership. The appointed Receiver, Jeff Riley was given full authority over the district for all decisions, basically assuming the role of School Committee as well as district Superintendent. Within the first six months of Jeff Riley's tenure, he worked with community stakeholders, school district staff members and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop a long-term strategic turnaround plan. The plan was developed and introduced to the community in detail in May 2012. The Major focus of the plan included but was not limited to: combining the many assets of Lawrence with the best assets of the Commonwealth; providing great schools for Lawrence Public School students; empowering teachers, principals, parents, and the community to drive and lead improvement; using resources wisely for the greatest return on investment; implementing solutions with a sense of urgency; and focusing on results. The major strategic themes supporting the plan leaned heavily on developing and permanently improving the district's internal capacity to continuously move forward. Since functioning under receivership, the Lawrence Public Schools have demonstrated improvement. The graduation rate has risen by 19 points, MCAS proficiency in math on the 10th grade MCAS has risen18 points and proficiency in ELA has risen 24 points.

With the appointment of Jeff Riley as the next Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the decision to extend the receivership of Lawrence Public Schools, the receivership model will change. The Lawrence Alliance for Education, a non-profit entity, will serve as district receiver. The Lawrence Alliance for Education will support the work of the Superintendent and her/his team. Likewise, the board will provide strategic guidance and support for all schools. The Superintendent's role will focus on: implementing the "Open Architecture strategy;" addressing day-to-day systemic issues; proposing strategies and procedures when appropriate; making

recommendations to the board; providing support for the autonomous schools; and keeping the Lawrence Alliance Board well-informed. Under the leadership of the Superintendent and the Lawrence Alliance for Education, and with the continued implementation of the strategic turnaround plan, the Lawrence community is optimistic about continuous improvement and removal of the label "underperforming district."

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in March 2018 for the new superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools. The data contained herein were obtained from input that HYA Associates, Donald Macrino, Dr. John Ramos, Michael Cicchetti and Dr. Brenda Finn, received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings between March 15, 2018 and March 30, 2018, and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders between February 27, 2018 and March 20, 2018. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years. Finally, HYA Associates reviewed four documents that served as "key supplemental material" for developing the Leadership Profile. The first document was the *Level 5 Turnaround Plan* developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as presented to community of Lawrence on May 20, 2012. The second and third documents were "policy briefs" published by the Harvard Kennedy School, Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston. The first was Published in March 2016, *Turning the Tide: Evidence on State Takeover and District Turnaround from Lawrence Massachusetts*. The second was published in January 2018, *School District Turnaround: Learning from Leadership in Lawrence, Massachusetts*. The final document was, *The Opportunity to Lead the Lawrence Public Schools*. The three latter documents were provided by John Connolly, Executive Director of The 1647, Inc. and Chairman of the Lawrence Alliance for Education.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below: *Not all focus groups were a group that was disaggregated for the on-line survey.*

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
School Committee/ Former School Committee	7	NA
Administrators; Department Heads; District Leadership	24	23
Teachers	13	45
Community	73	34
Central office Support Staff	13	NA
Staff	NA	11
Community Organizations; Business Leaders; Elected Officials; Higher Ed	11	NA
Parents	65	73
Union Leadership	8	NA
Students	66	33
Total	**271**	**219**

The community survey report, "open-ended" comments gathered through the survey, and candidate suggestions from the survey are provided separately and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report.

It should be emphasized that the data are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the attention of the Lawrence Alliance for Education and the Lawrence School Committee.

The focus group input, individualized conversations, and on-line survey data contributed several perceptions, opinions, and ideas to the development of the Leadership Profile. The narrative summaries which follow contain common themes gathered through the aforementioned means. The meeting notes following the *Executive Summary* contain more detailed information gathered through focus group discussion and/or individual interview(s) in each of the areas considered for discussion and/or comment.

Strengths of the District

Lawrence Public Schools have remained dedicated to continuous improvement under receivership as the district continues implementing a local and state partnership governance model. Focus groups expressed pride in Lawrence Public Schools' progress, while positing that there is much more work to be done. Administrative leadership, dedication of staff and students, and the outstanding leadership of superintendent, Jeff Riley, were often cited as the "key" reasons for Lawrence Public Schools' forward movement. The elements of success cited by focus group participants are related to the "open architecture structure" of Lawrence Public Schools. Those elements included but were not limited to: following a vision for students including "Four Pillars of High Quality Teaching and Learning"; partnering with community organizations; operating schools in an autonomous manner; increasing enrichment and afterschool activities; and talented teachers providing for the needs of a diverse student population.

Several focus group participants cited the Family Resource Center as a strength of the Lawrence School District. The resource center provides key services for community members ranging from school registration to language translation services. Outside agency contacts including medical, housing and employment may also be secured through the center.

Among the most frequent strengths discussed among focus group participants was the appreciation for teachers who have remained dedicated to the students of Lawrence Public Schools. Teachers were generally viewed as being well prepared and committed to their students and teaching assignments. Some students described them as "the best," and as being the type of individuals with whom you could "bond." Other references were made regarding the teachers' positive role (with others) in changing the culture of the schools. Throughout significant changes in Lawrence Public Schools over the past few years, it appeared clear that veteran teachers who have stayed and worked positively with the process of receivership are sound examples of building capacity for improvement from within a school district.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

The transition to a new structure of receivership is a challenge facing Lawrence Public Schools, the Lawrence Alliance for Education, and the new Superintendent. Lawrence Public Schools will continue work under an Open Architecture Model that changes the role of central office "top-down" oversight of schools to one of support for empowered schools in the areas of curriculum, staffing, schedule, budget and culture. The Lawrence Alliance for Education will primarily represent the state and community interests, functioning as both the district receiver and a non-profit board. The Board will provide strategic guidance and support for the work of the empowered schools and Superintendent. The Superintendent will support the core work of a system of empowered and autonomous schools by implementing the Open Architecture Model, addressing day-to-day systemic issues, providing effective support to

schools and implementing equitable systems (regarding special education and enrollment, for example) while ensuring that school autonomies are protected. Finally, the Superintendent will keep the Board well-informed.

Focus group participants referenced the need for Lawrence Public Schools to be student centered. Meeting the challenges of that need elicited many opinions centered on concerns about the relatively high exodus of veteran professional staff members who may have been responsible for leadership in the successful increase in student achievement and innovation in the district. It was stated on several occasions that frustrations with non-competitive salaries, inequitable resources, and unbalanced enrollment by class and school may be one of the contributing factors to negative staff mobility. Those factors coupled with the elimination of some programs that may have been favorites to some, may also have a perceived negative effect on staff morale. The challenge will be for Lawrence Public Schools work toward ending those perceptions through a review of resource distribution, and perhaps opening additional means of communications between schools and Central Office to clarify the specifics of these concerns.

On the financial front, focus group participants were concerned about district finances. There were frequent references to the need to address deteriorating facilities, the lack of resources for classrooms, the reduction of programs and/or teaching staff members and continuing inadequate funding by the Commonwealth. While these budgetary issues may not be unique to any one particular school district, it was generally perceived to be an issue that may stall growth in academic achievement**.**

Desired Characteristics in the New Superintendent

It is expected that the new Superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools has demonstrated successful leadership in a diverse urban school district. In so doing, she/he must have demonstrated cultural competence and a deep understanding of linking a clear vision for student centered programs to increased opportunities for improved student achievement.

The new Superintendent should have demonstrated experience in developing and maintaining a sound working relationship between the Board/School Committee and the administration. Those experiences should clearly reflect the manner in which the new Superintendent's will approach a working relationship with the Lawrence Alliance for Education.

The new Superintendent for Lawrence Public Schools will have to be politically savvy. The continuation of the *Level 5 Turnaround Plan*, and implementation of the Open Architecture Model will require a high degree of interface with local and State officials to maintain the integrity of forward progress. Likewise, the new Superintendent's past experiences should point to the fact that "going to bat" for his/her previous district, be it in relation to grant opportunities, legislative matters

effecting his/her school district, or being an advocate for students in his/her school district were commonplace.

Additionally, Lawrence Public Schools' new Superintendent must have demonstrated expertise in maintaining partnerships, successfully garnering grant funding and communicating effectively with potential partners that support educational opportunities for students. It is expected by most focus groups that that the communication continuum in candidates' previous district(s) exemplify a strong sense of physical presence in all areas of the community.

HYA and the Lawrence Alliance for Education intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the challenges of Lawrence Public Schools. In so doing, they will seek an outstanding, experienced educator who can work with the Lawrence Alliance for Education and the Lawrence School Committee in providing the leadership necessary to continue to maintain the path of continuous improvement in student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and the community.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus group meetings, met individually with HYA Associates, or completed the online survey. Likewise, HYA would like to recognize the "behind-the-scenes" efforts of Lawrence Public Schools staff members who assisted with scheduling our focus group meetings, assisted in facilitating larger group sessions, and located appropriate venues for meetings. In particular, we are appreciative of the work of Denise Snyder, Deputy Assistant Superintendent, who provided key contacts and flexibility in dealing with adverse weather.

Respectfully submitted,

Dwight R. Pfennig, Ed. D.
ECRA/HYA Senior Associate

Donald Macrino
ECRA/HYA Associate

Lawrence Public Schools
Superintendent of Schools
Desired Characteristics

After seeking input from its community constituents via focus groups, interviews, and an online survey, the Lawrence Alliance for Education and the Lawrence School Committee seek an experienced educational leader who possesses the following ***characteristics***:

- Administrative and teaching experience in a building-based budget environment within an urban environment.
- Political savvy (State; Federal; Local) in dealing with difficult decisions and varying opinionated personalities.
- Excellent understanding of long and short-term budget planning and implementation supported by s strong sense of financial acumen.
- Welcoming and transparent in developing a professional presence that signals accessibility and humility.
- Understanding of the ongoing necessity to build and maintain a productive working relationship with the Lawrence Alliance for Education that is focused on a strategic vision with common goals.

With regard to leadership ***experiences and accomplishments***, the successful candidate will:

- Demonstrated experience in creating or working within a clear vision on how to continue to improve student achievement while on students first.
- Demonstrate excellence in building, supporting, and maintaining a strong working relationship with community partners like those who support Lawrence Public Schools.
- Demonstrate cultural competence within a diverse setting that clearly indicates an understanding of matters of race/racial disparity.
- Demonstrate community engagement and transparency built upon trust, honesty and integrity, regardless of issues at hand and/or problems to be solved.
- Demonstrate proven skills in developing building-based budgets that reflect an understanding of short-term and long-term planning to meet specific outcomes for students.
- Demonstrate an ability to work collaboratively with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Demonstrate district-wide achievement results that have met projected goals while raising the bar of accomplishment and reducing student achievement gaps within multiple school settings.
- Demonstrate an “out-of-the box” mentality in solving system level issues.