Principal Succession: Petworth Community Charter School

Before Chanel Spencer took over The Petworth Community Public Charter School, the community was very dissatisfied with the school. Parents protested in the field in front of the building and a survey showed only 50 percent satisfaction with the school.

When Spencer got the keys to the building and started as principal in fall of 2009, she knew she had a lot of work to do to turn the school around and gain the confidence of the community. First, she created an entry plan and interviewed as many staff, parents, community members and students as she could – and then she worked with her staff to develop a clear mission statement and action plan. She walked the community and introduced herself to parents. And she also immediately improved the building, taking three U-Haul trucks of junk out and making the facility bright and clean.

After some of these first steps were in place, she worked to assemble a strong team who she knew would work hard to increase student achievement. She conducted frequent classroom visits and provided honest, direct feedback using data. Furthermore, Spencer increased parent and community engagement by making sure she and the staff knew the families well. Finally, she developed a strong Academic Leadership Team that engaged in continuous learning cycles using data and implements a coordinated system of assessments and interventions across the school.

At the end of her first year at the school, 2009-2010, there was a 14 percent increase in reading. At the close of her second year, 2010-2011, there was a 16 percent increase in math. Good news about the school spread quickly, and Petworth now has a waiting list of more than 100 students. In a survey from 2011, 98 percent of parents would recommend that a friend send his/her child to this school, and 97 percent of the parents think the school is on the right track for student achievement. While Spencer and her staff are pleased with their progress, they feel their work has just begun; they are focused now on driving achievement levels even higher and providing all children in the school with the highest quality elementary education.

Chanel Spencer remained the leader of Petworth PCS for six years, enjoying continued student gains and other successes, ultimately earning her CMO's Principal of the Year Award in 2014. In 2015, Ms. Spencer's personal life took an unexpected turn when suddenly her spouse received an amazing job offer- overseas. Chanel had three months to prepare personally and professionally before moving her family to Europe. Top of the list was identifying a successor.

If you were Chanel, how would you create a succession plan that ensures that the students, staff, and community stakeholders are unaffected of the change in leadership and the success of Petworth Community PCS continues?