

Ian A. Roberts



February 2023

Greetings Search Committee and Members of the Board,

I am writing to formally apply for the position of Superintendent of the Des Moines Public Schools.

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit my application to serve your school district and the Des Moines community. I am a career educator with over 20 years of experience as a classroom teacher, school, and executive leader, serving primarily in several urban and suburban school districts, and some experience in charter management organizations. During my years of service, I have made a commitment to have a relentless focus on collaborating with like-minded adults on the board, in the community, and district to create equitable opportunities for students to thrive, and the adults who serve them to grow. These opportunities inevitably result in unprecedented gains, improvement, and acceleration for thousands of students regardless of their identity, academic standing, or background, while preparing them for college, career, and life.

During my tenure as a Middle and High School Principal, Principal Supervisor, Network/Area Superintendent, Chief of Schools, and recently as Superintendent, I successfully coached, supervised, and supported principals and district office leaders which resulted in strong outcomes and measures of success. I have inherited both chronically underperforming and even “persistently dangerous” schools, as well as “good to great” or sustaining success schools in diverse urban school districts and charter schools. In each of these experiences, I have led teams that successfully turned around or significantly improved all those schools and districts in which I served. These successes are measured by strong retention rates of effective principals and teachers, strong academic gains for students on state and national measures, preparation for post-secondary success for students, as well as enriching cultural and diverse experiences for all stakeholders.

I am inspired by and commend the Des Moines Public Schools superintendent, team, and board for your continued efforts to create high-quality schools in your community and beyond. It is inspiring to witness both the quality and continued growth of the academic data for the 31,000 students in your 64 schools. Despite your accomplishments and achievements for students as the largest district in the state, with some of your schools consistently outperform state standards and peer districts, the members of the board acknowledge that the organization remains committed to continuous improvement. This is a sign of a healthy and reflective organization, and one which I am excited to serve.

I believe that I possess the passion, expertise, experience, and love for working in urban, suburban, and diverse communities and school districts as an instructional and equity-focused leader, and hereby commit to bring the following skills to the Des Moines Public Schools leadership team:

- A recognition of the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and leadership for Des Moines students and adults in K-12, and knowledge of whole-child educational approaches

- A passionate advocate for special education students and other marginalized populations
- A passion and love for creating, inspiring, and managing high performing teams through effective delegation of authority and shared accountability
- The ability to lead multiple projects simultaneously, applying both technical and adaptive skills to ensure their success
- Expertise in creating and/or guiding a team with the implementation of research-based curriculum and aligned instructional practices and assessments that lead to student success
- A high level of comfort with ambiguity, and a genuine appreciation for diverse populations
- An excellent communicator with the ability to inspire and lead teammates to accomplish an organization's mission and vision through a strategic and collaborative approach
- Engage all stakeholders, especially the local, faith-based, and business community to collaborate towards the success of the school district
- The ability to utilize sound budgetary practices to align resources appropriately to ensure positive outcomes and mission accomplishment

I have spent most of my career working in such systems whose missions are like yours; a belief that a quality education should ensure that all children possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in the next stages of their lives. In St. Louis Public Schools, I oversaw some of the school district's most challenging work to transform low performing schools, with a specific focus on scaling the pockets of success across all middle and high schools. During my tenure, 5 of our high schools were ranked in the top 50 in the state of Missouri, including the #1, #9, and #25 ranked schools for academic performance, and I was a part of the leadership team when the district regained full accreditation. At this district and others, I led teams that galvanized the broader community (politicians, law enforcement, social services, parents, faith-based, universities) to partner in serving all our schools and students.

At Aspire Public Schools, I led the initiative to create structures that supported a robust coaching and instructional leadership development framework that had principal supervisors utilize research-based and proven practices to coach, develop, and increase the instructional leadership competencies of principals and their teams; thereby increasing retention of principals. Additionally, I inspired my team's focused on creating brave spaces, and erecting the conditions for students to experience psychological safety, academic, and behavioral success in every school through rigorous pedagogical and SEL practices. We also experienced increases in graduation rates, dual enrollment rates, and saw multiple schools named as U.S. News and World Report Best Schools.

I believe deeply in the promise of public education being the most important opportunity gap closer for youth, particularly with a focus on diverse populations; I have personally benefited from it, and it is a belief that is rooted in the work of your school system. I am excited about the opportunity to bring my experiences as an educational leader who cares deeply about instructional excellence, diversity, equity, inclusion, and innovation to the Des Moines Public Schools. Working with the district's team and the Board of Education, we can ensure that the education every child receives is of the highest quality, and the district is one of Iowa's and America's most desired places to work, and for students to learn and achieve.

Having reviewed the school district's profile and data, I am eager to meet with the board to discuss career opportunities.

Educationally yours,

Ian A. Roberts

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An exceptional equity-focused educational leader serving underserved communities; driving change via strong practices that includes a robust instructional leadership focus for principals and principal supervisors, inspiring academic and organizational excellence for students, adults, and their communities.

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice | Coppin State College
Baltimore, MD, August 1998

Master of Science in Education | St. John's University
Jamaica, NY, June 2000

Doctor of Education – Urban Educational Leadership | Morgan State University
Baltimore, MD, May 2007

Dissertation topic: (January 2007)

"Is Inclusion A Panacea or Problem? A Study of The Efficacy of Inclusion on the Academic, Behavioral, and Social Achievement of Special Education Students in An Urban School District."

Master of Science, Executive Leadership | Georgetown University, McDonough School of Business
Washington, DC, December 2013

Doctor of Education –Educational Leadership | Trident American University
Cypress, CA, June 2021

Dissertation Topic: (July 2021)

"Teachers And School Leaders' Perspectives On The Efficacy of Culturally Responsive Inclusion And Self-Contained Settings."

CERTIFICATIONS

National Institute for Urban School Leaders | Harvard University
Cambridge, MA, 2003 & 2007

Improving Schools: The Art of Leadership | Harvard University
Cambridge, MA, 2009

HONORS

Teacher of the Year – Baltimore City Public School System (2001-02; 2002-03)

Principal of the Year – GW University, DC Public Schools (2012-13)

Olympic Track & Field athlete competed in the 2000 Olympic Games (Australia)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

SUPERINTENDENT

Millcreek Township School District

August 2020 – Present

Operating 10 public schools in NW Pennsylvania – approximately 7,000 students.

The district's demographics includes 83% White, 19% SWD, 4.5%AA, 4% Latinx, 4.5% ELL

Responsible for the district-wide implementation of the K-12 instructional program, ensuring cohesion and rigor across all subject areas. Cultivating a culture of high expectations across the instructional staff, while supervising and coaching school and district leaders to align their daily actions to the mission and vision of the Millcreek Township School District.

Notable achievements:

- Ranked in the top 25% academic achievement of schools in the United States (U.S. News and World Report).
- Led the district during the global pandemic prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of 100% of students and the adults who served them. Retaining 100% of school and district leaders during a period of mass exodus of school and district leaders in K-12 education
- Strong academic proficiency and growth scores by subgroups; particularly for historically marginalized students.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COACH

Lively Paradox, LLC

June 2014 – Present

Clients include New York City Department of Education, Blue Valley Public School District, University Academies Charter Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools, The Lemelson Foundation, Rapphannock Electric Corp, R.B. Wiley Charter Schools, Bellwood School District 88.

Topics: Culturally Responsive Leadership; Strategic Planning for Effective Teams; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Organizations.

CHIEF SCHOOLS OFFICER

Aspire Public Schools

June 2018 – November 2019

Operating 40 public schools in 2 states (Memphis, California) – 17,000 students.

The district's demographics includes 89% FARM, 15% SWD, 95% AA and Latinx, 25% ELL.

Responsible for the network-wide implementation of the K-12 instructional program, ensuring cohesion and rigor across all subject areas. Cultivated a culture of high expectations across the instructional staff, while supervising and coaching 4 superintendents, 4 associate superintendents, and 40 principals to ensure that every Aspire student has equitable access to high quality and culturally relevant instruction.

Notable achievements:

- Led the project through collaboration with the CAO that created a framework, strategic plan, and accompanying scope and sequence for monthly professional development that resulted in targeted support for school leaders to create coherence in instructional practices / routines and optimizing student learning outcomes within all our schools.
- Responsible for the supervision and development of the Regional Superintendents, Associate Superintendents, and the schools' principals, ensuring that hires are mission aligned, qualified instructional and operational staff.

- Development of Regional Superintendents, Associate Superintendents, and Principals in their instructional leadership roles.
- Collaborated to erect the infrastructure, policies, and procedure to support the consistent implementation of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and targeted whole-child supports for 17,000 students.
- Collaborated to reimagine and develop a bold and innovative data system (Step backs) to drive results across the network. Led the initiative to cultivate a culture of data driven decision making which resulted in a robust scope and sequence for classroom, school, and central office data step-back meetings to progress monitor and make frequent adjustment to our instructional, operational, and leadership practices.
- Collaborated and led the creation of a program that resulted in the targeted and differentiated coaching, development, and support of superintendents, associate superintendents, and school principals via a robust scope and sequence and research-based practices.
- Collaborated on and established partnerships with organizations, including Relay Academy and New Leaders to support the development of regional and school leaders.
- Collaborated with the CAO to develop systems, structures, and aligned rubrics that supported the consistent implementation of Instructional Rounds and Program Inquiry Practices across all schools.

NETWORK SUPERINTENDENT of SECONDARY SCHOOLS

St. Louis Public Schools

June 2015 - June 2018

This is an urban school district and the largest school system in the state of Missouri - 26,000 students. The district's demographics includes 90% FARM, 20% SWD, 90% AA and Latinx.

Served as the leader of the academic mission and vision for high schools for the largest school district in the state of Missouri with 26,000 students PreK-12, 70 schools, 4,000 teachers/staff.

Notable achievements:

- Graduation rates increased for second year in a row (2015-2016)
- Placement rates for CTE students increased 27.9% (from 48.9% to 76.8%)
- Average ACT score above the national average, increased from 10.9% to 14.6% in 2015- 2016
- Increased college acceptance rates (4-year universities) from 30.2% to 32.0% in 2015-2016
- Improved high schools across the district with six of the district's thirteen high schools being ranked in the top 50 in the state, exceeding 87% graduation rate: (#1-96%, #9- 90%, # 25-93%, #37-87%, #38-89%, #41-92%)
- Reduced out-of-school suspension rates by > 20%
- Led the initiative that partnered with several colleges and universities resulting in more than 300 at-risk students enrolling in college.
- Led the project to create and implement a training module on Culturally Responsive Leadership orientation for all school leaders and district leaders.
- Served as the lead for the district's initiative "Finish Line Committee," targeting students who were withdrawn or dropped out to get them to the "finish line/graduation."
- Established and designed the district's initiative at creating mission and vision focused schools by leading and facilitating the professional development and strategic approach for all principals, assistant principals, and academic instructional coaches.
- Served on the district's executive leadership team that developed a district-wide data dashboard, and school performance-management accountability system that expanded data usage amongst employees.

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

Lighthouse Academies, Inc.

June 2014 – June 2015

*A Charter Management Organization operating 18 public schools in 4 states – 6,971 students.**The district's demographics includes 90% FARM, 16%SWD, 92%AA and Latinx.*

Served as the leader of the academic vision for the region that is focused on stronger academic outcomes for all scholars, and focus on the Common Core State Standards instructional shifts.

Notable achievements:

- Successfully managed, coached, and contributed to the development of principals in schools across the National Network in seven states (18 schools), resulting in significant student achievement.
- Ensured teacher and principal quality was aligned to a focus on Common Core shifts that significantly targeted instructional leadership practices.
- Effectively managed two Boards of Trustees that governed two separate charters in partnership with the NYS DOE.
- Enhanced student performance, especially in identifying and closing/narrowing the gaps in student achievement amongst students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.
- Created the infrastructure that built consensus and commitment among individuals and groups, that ultimately increased parent and community involvement by more than 60%.
- Coached the high school principals around creating a college focused culture that resulted in Ivy League, Tier 1 college acceptances, and a 95% college acceptance of the senior class.

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

District of Columbia Public Schools

June 2010 – June 2014

A public school system in the nation's capital with 120 schools (Pre-K-12) - 47,000 students

Served as the leader of the school's academic vision which focused on stronger academic outcomes for all scholars and focus on the Common Core. State Standards instructional shifts.

Notable achievements:

- Successfully managed multiple projects which included communicating high expectations for 900 students and more than 120 faculty and staff through strong support, accountability measures, and leadership by example; established and maintained a safe and disciplined learning environment for students, families, and staff.
- Created a program that brought 7 Advanced Placement courses to the school within three years.
- Led the District's initiative by creating the first 9th grade Academy Model (now a DC Public Schools districtwide program)
- Led the District's initiative by creating a Twilight Academy that increased our graduation rate of over-aged and under-credited students by 28% over two years, with a >20% increase of over-aged and under-credited students. (Our program was featured in the Harvard Education Journal.)
- Served as the leadership trainer for district principals and assistant principals on topics such as: Turnaround School Leadership, Mission, Vision and Strategies, and Instructional Leadership for Special Education
- Orchestrated the increase in the state assessment each year during the past two years in: ELA - 6% increase, Math - 5% increase, Biology - 10% increase.
- Increased graduation rates of seniors from below 50% to 79% over a three-year period.
- Created partnerships with several organizations, including the College Success Foundation, Gates Foundation, The White House, Mayor and City Council, Georgetown University, George Washington University etc., that resulted in significant resources and more than \$10 million in

scholarships annually.

- Successfully managed the \$63 million building modernization and renovation school project.
- Retained more than 95% of faculty and staff over three years.

MENTOR PRINCIPAL

July 2010- July 2014

Principal Trainer of New Leaders (NLNS); mentored and guided one resident principal and assistant principal each of the 4 years in preparation for school leadership in urban schools.

FOUNDING PRINCIPAL

Friendship Academy of Science & Technology, Middle/High Schools
Baltimore City Public Schools

June 2008 – June 2010

This is a large urban school system in Maryland, with more than 200 schools and more than 100,000 students.

- Communicated high expectations for 400 students and more than 50 faculty and staff through strong support, accountability measures, and leadership by example; established and maintained a safe and disciplined learning environment for students, families, and staff.
- Analyzed student performance data with faculty and administrative team to inform school improvement efforts and benchmark progress that resulted in more than 20%-point increases on Maryland State Assessments (MSA) in ELA and Math over a two-year period.
- Developed, implemented, and monitored the School Improvement Plan (SIP) resulting in 50% reduction in OSS.
- Conducted regular classroom observations to analyze instruction, provide feedback, and monitor learning and teaching for trends and evidence of high levels of instruction.
- Created partnerships with the Gates Foundation resulting in more than \$1 million in additional funding.
- Created a robust recruitment, professional development, and support plan that resulted in 100% teacher retention over two years.

HIGH SCHOOL RESIDENT PRINCIPAL (New Leaders for New Schools)

Baltimore City Public Schools

June 2007 – June 2008

PUBLICATIONS

Multiple educational and leadership articles.

BOOKS

Prisoners or Presidents – The Impact of Inclusion on the Achievement of Students with Disabilities.

2010

Prisoners of Presidents – The Simple Things That Changes Everything When Principals Lead Like Lives Depends on It.

2013, Xlibris Publishers

The Power of Seven Second Chances – Obtaining Success Without Firing the Rest.

2016, Lively Paradox

Radical Empathy in Leadership: Equity-focused Trials, Tools, and Testimonials for School Leaders.

2021

Dangerous Indifference: The Case for Culturally Responsive Leadership.

2021