

Nathan McCann

Evanston - Skokie School District 65

1. Please share why you are interested in this position and your unique qualifications for it.

It is with great enthusiasm that I submit this letter of interest for the Evanston-Skokie School District 65 Superintendent of Schools position. I anticipate that many very talented school leaders will be drawn to the Evanston-Skokie School District 65 superintendency. District 65 is a family-friendly community, supportive of their schools and proud of their diversity. It is the ideal place for a superintendent to work and raise a family.

I am interested in District 65 for the above reasons as well. But I am most drawn to the position because of the immense potential inherent within District 65. In reading the Leadership Profile Report, I was encouraged to see the honest and thoughtful responses as survey participants identified the district's challenges. Many organizations and their leadership teams are reluctant to examine their shortcomings. A hallmark of curiosity, which is chief among the attributes I believe we should be nurturing in our students, is the desire to continuously improve. It is clear to me that the board, staff, families, and stakeholders in Evanston-Skokie School District 65 share that belief.

The success of any leadership search ultimately is determined by fit. The superintendent must be right for the district and the district must be right for the superintendent. After researching District 65 I believe I offer the right fit for the district as it seeks to move forward.

So the question might then be, why should the Evanston-Skokie School District 65 Board find me to be the ideal candidate for their superintendent of schools. I am proud of the many significant accomplishments we have achieved in my current district. Admittedly, to many though, it may be difficult to draw the parallels that demonstrate my fit for District 65. I serve a small economically-disadvantaged community in Tucson, Arizona with little political voice and few advocates for its children. At first glance Altar Valley looks quite different from District 65. However, the challenges identified in the Leadership Profile Report are nearly identical to the challenges I found when I became superintendent in Altar Valley. Specifically, I entered a district where trust in leadership was fractured. Concerns about transparency, decision-making processes, and community-connectedness had damaged the district's integrity and public perception. Resentment, both internally and externally, impeded attempts at real progress. It was clear to me that we could not become who we aspired to be until leadership practices changed.

My sense is that the Board and community believe that some change is needed in district leadership practices, but are rightfully concerned about how that change process is implemented.

This is why I feel I am such a strong fit for District 65 going forward. First, I presuppose nothing. Advancing a district requires full community participation and I have extensive experience engaging divergent voices and building meaningful community connections. Second, I appreciate that change can be difficult for some people. This is almost always related to their sense of losing control or having no voice in the process. When those feelings are acknowledged

and addressed, people stop viewing the process as change and instead as a natural and positive evolution toward an improved state.

I welcome the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications and interest in the Evanston-Skokie School District 65 superintendency. Thank you for your consideration.

2. Please list the five accomplishments in your professional career of which you take the greatest satisfaction and why you do so.

I appreciate the opportunity to share a few significant accomplishments in my career. Focusing on my time in the superintendency, I wish to highlight the following:

1. *Superintendent-School Board Relationships:* The superintendent-school board relationship plays a critical role in implementing meaningful and sustainable reforms that advance schools. High functioning superintendent-school board teams generate greater community confidence in the school system. This aids the district in developing partnerships that more effectively leverage scarce resources to better serve our children. My board and I implemented a superintendent-school board relationship model that I developed in my doctoral research, and I am particularly proud of the results we have achieved as a team. Our relationship may best be described by sharing what my governing board president and vice-president wrote in nominating me for the 2013 All-Arizona Superintendent award. “The effort [Nathan] has put in to building relationships with the entire board collectively, and each of us as individuals, has certainly paid off. In fact, we have now twice-extended Nathan's contract and he continues to enjoy stellar reviews and the unanimous support of the Board...[Nathan] made several critical promises. First, he promised to communicate equally with all board members. Second, he promised to tell us both the good and the bad news. He has always followed through on this promise and that is why we all trust and have faith in Nathan.”

2. *Long-Range Planning:* During the interview process for my current superintendency, it became apparent that Altar Valley was in need of an articulated direction. I adapted my entry plan to that discovery. Immediately, I met with as many groups as possible and focused conversations on learning about the hopes, dreams, and beliefs that stakeholders held for Altar Valley. I presented these findings to the board at a work/study session and recommended that we move forward with the development of a long-range plan. Over a seven-month period I facilitated a community-wide collaborative effort to develop Altar Valley 2020, our long-range planning guide. The process was nearly as important as the outcome, as it allowed the district to build relationships with individuals and groups who had not been previously engaged. Altar Valley 2020 includes five overarching priorities and, since formal adoption by the Board in February 2011, every board agenda action item includes the overarching priority to which the issue is connected. I felt it was vital to keep our plan visible in order to honor the community's efforts, show we were committed to change going-forward, and ensure follow-through. Additionally, every classroom and office has a copy of Altar Valley 2020 posted. It has become central to our planning and critical to the many successes we have achieved. We secured a partnership with a Tucson-based print company and each year we now provide an annual Altar

Valley 2020 update for our stakeholders. Additionally, my annual goals and performance pay are tied to Altar Valley 2020. The community and staff have responded positively to what they view as real and measurable accountability for the superintendent and governing board.

3. *Financial Management:* In addition to serving as the superintendent, I am also our district's chief financial officer. I am directly responsible for the development and implementation of the annual budget and the supervision of the daily activities of our business office. School finance is particularly challenging in Arizona where per pupil spending ranks 47th in the nation. Arizona has also experienced the third most precipitous drop in K-12 funding since 2008, enduring a 17.2% decline in spending. Despite these significant financial challenges, I believe there is always money for what is important. Driven by Altar Valley 2020, our budgeting priorities included raising teacher salaries, upgrading technology and facilities, and aggressively pursuing external funding to assist with program development. Base teacher pay when I came on board four years ago was the third lowest in Pima County. Today, just three budget years later, starting teacher pay has increased 11.5% and we now rank in the top-third for starting pay in the county. After multiple years of frozen pay, all employee groups have received wage increases each year during my superintendency. At the same time we have increased bandwidth seven-fold and integrated hundreds of additional student machines, including iPad and Chromebook initiatives, while also significantly upgrading our facilities. Our board would indicate they are most grateful for the considerable increase in external funding I have brought to our district, including significant funding for our early childhood and STEM programs. I am extremely proud of the financial stability we have established. The consolidated fund balance has increased three-fold, while health and liability insurance premiums have been pre-paid a year in advance each of the last three years.

4. *STEM Initiative:* I believe successful superintendents serve as their district's instructional leader. I also believe that means far more than just possessing a strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction. It means possessing the vision to direct the instructional program to meet the needs of all students. It means changing perceptions and raising expectations where necessary. It means celebrating the amazing work teachers do on a daily basis and providing them the resources and supports necessary to do their job. In short, it means being bold and maintaining a laser focus on student achievement. Our STEM initiative is one such example. Just a few years ago, most in our community would have thought it impossible that Altar Valley would be chosen for a grant with an even more rigorous review process than National Science Foundation grants. But that is exactly what happened. A little more than a year ago I wrote a grant application for the Helios/Science Foundation Arizona STEM School Pilot. Altar Valley was the only school district in southern Arizona to be selected to participate in the pilot program. The Helios grant provides teachers with relevant professional development opportunities, exposure to STEM experts, and partnership opportunities with public, private, and higher education organizations. To date, 15 additional local and national corporations have partnered with the AVSD to provide field trips, financial support, and expertise in the classroom to enhance the learning experience for our students.

5. *Building a Culture of Increased Expectations:* I chose to close with this accomplishment, because I think it captures my most important work. For years, Altar Valley had been held in very low regard throughout the education community. It was seen as a district of low

expectations, primarily interested in pursuing the path of least resistance. Decisions were based largely on what was best for adults and a sense of hopelessness permeated throughout the district. I would see this in the faces of the Altar Valley students I received as a high school administrator in a neighboring district. When I became superintendent, I was determined to change this. I believe all children can accomplish great things and I do not wish to work in an organization accepting of mediocrity. I am very proud to say that we have created a culture of high expectations and Altar Valley enjoys a strong and rapidly growing reputation throughout the Arizona education community. Abundant evidence of this exists throughout our organization. Our student achievement scores continue to rise and the district has earned B letter grades from the state for the past two years. (To provide some perspective, just five years ago the district was still under the federal and state consequences of school improvement.) We have introduced 21st Century after school programs at our schools. We now serve 300% more pre-kindergarten students than we did just three years ago. Our work has been recognized statewide. For example, in 2011 the Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) recognized our board as the top-performing board in Arizona. Just this winter our school board president was one of just three board members statewide named to the illustrious ASBA All-Arizona School Board. I am proud to have written both of the nomination applications. And I am even more proud to say that Altar Valley is a district of high-expectations that always makes decisions in the best interest of our students.