



Fairfield Public Schools Superintendent Search

Stakeholder Feedback Report and Leader Profile July 2022

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Introduction

In May 2022, Dr. Charles Dumais and Mr. David Erwin, Search Consultants for Cooperative Educational Services, of Trumbull, CT, met with the Search Committee of the Fairfield Board of Education to establish parameters for the collection of stakeholder feedback for the purpose of identifying current district educational strengths/challenges and desired skills, qualities, and attributes for the next superintendent.

Stakeholder feedback, in the form of electronic surveys, focus groups, key individual interviews, structured Board Member input, and research on high leverage executive leadership qualities, were synthesized to develop a comprehensive and representative set of leadership roles and leadership competencies to be assessed in the selection of the ideal candidate.

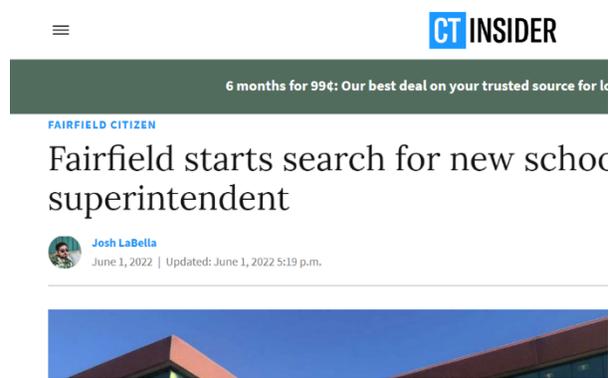
This report will provide summary information of the data collection process, perceived educational strengths and challenges of the district, qualities desired in the next district leader, and key skills and abilities essential for the ideal candidate. The roles and competencies developed with this information will serve as the foundation for the standards-based selection of candidates to be considered, and, ultimately, of the candidate to be recommended for election. It will also serve as a resource to the superintendent and Board of Education as they transition into their new relationship.

The Fairfield Board of Education Search Committee is grateful to the broad, diverse group of stakeholders from the Fairfield Community and the Fairfield Schools who provided their feedback and insight in this important process.

The Fairfield Board of Education Search Committee has reviewed and approved the content of this report.

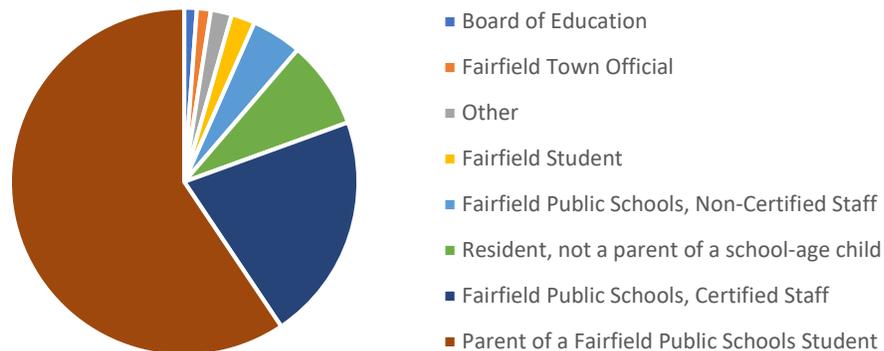
Stakeholder Feedback Collection

Over the course of much of the month of June 2022, stakeholder feedback was collected through electronic surveys, focus groups, key individual interviews, and structured Board Member input. Information regarding the data collection process was shared on the district web page, through direct emails to district contacts, and in an area press release. Feedback from all of the sources was translated into English, processed using qualitative coding techniques, reviewed for accuracy, synthesized, correlated with a comprehensive research-based library of leadership skills and attributes, and reviewed by a second individual for accuracy and completeness.



Participant Demographics

Nearly eight hundred stakeholders participated in the data collection portion of this process over the span of more than two weeks. More than seven hundred individuals submitted survey responses; more than sixty individuals participated in focus groups and individual interviews; and, all Board of Education members completed a comprehensive evaluation of district strengths, district challenges, key stakeholder identification, key community resource identification, and preferred professional qualifications and experiences.



Survey

An electronic survey was made available in four languages (Arabic, English, Portuguese, and Spanish), and distributed to stakeholders through direct email and a conspicuous link on the district web page. More than 5000 individual comments and responses were received and reviewed. All participants had the opportunity to rate predefined leadership qualities and essential experiences, as well as to respond to open-ended prompts regarding district strengths, district challenges, and any additional comments.

Focus Groups/Key Individual Interviews

Sixty stakeholders took advantage of ten combined opportunities to meet in person or virtually with a search consultant and share their perspectives regarding the superintendent search. Individual interviews with key town officials were also conducted.

Board of Education Search Committee

The entire Board of Education provided in-depth feedback on district challenges; district opportunities and imperatives; detailed measures of success for the next superintendent over the first six, twelve, and eighteen months; critical values and beliefs of the next superintendent; essential elements of financial acumen; specific, critical stakeholder groups and keys for highly effective relationships with them; experiences; credentials; and, other desired qualifications of the ideal candidate.

Strengths

While many strengths were identified through the data collection process, a number of items appeared far more often than others. It is clear that respondents are very pleased with the quality of the teaching and support staff, the overall reputation and achievement history of the Fairfield Public Schools, and the large degree of support of the schools provided by the Fairfield community. Respondents identified clear communication during a crisis, resources and academic opportunities for students, and the general curriculum as additional strong assets in the Fairfield Public Schools.

Challenges

Respondents overwhelmingly identified the need for a balanced approach to providing high quality education and supports in a fiscally responsible manner as the priority challenge for the incoming superintendent. Other identified challenges included maintaining an objective and student-centered focus and approach in light of national, state, and local political pressures on educational issues; diversifying staff and instructional approaches to better recognize and support changes in student diversity; providing leadership to build coherence across the entire district; addressing student mental health; addressing issues of equity for *all* students; and, finding a solution to the issue of racial imbalance in the district.

Experiences/Qualities

In addition to broad and deep experience and understanding of the instructional practices that take place in classrooms across all levels, the ideal candidate will be able to provide evidence of improving student engagement and student achievement; demonstrate expertise in managing operations (particularly facilities and capital plan items); be progressive and proactive in creating learning opportunities for students; have experience leading well in a community with similar demographics and challenges; have a strong background in the development, communication, and generation of broad support for the school budget; and, demonstrate engagement with and commitment to the community.

Superintendent Performance Criteria

Roles

Roles are the sets of major tasks that are essential for superintendent success. They can be viewed as the most important ‘hats’ that the superintendent must wear as circumstances dictate. Priority roles were established based on a review of leadership skills, attributes, and qualities, in the context of the synthesis of stakeholder feedback.

The ideal candidate will:

- Be a skilled communicator with the ability to communicate effectively, transparently, and promptly with all stakeholder groups. S/He will build on district communication strengths to enhance coherence across the district, support from parents and community members, and awareness for Board members.

- Provide and support clear and coordinated systems leading to district-wide goal attainment and effective operations overall.
- Be an accomplished instructional leader who is able to set, support, and enforce, across all levels and disciplines, the instructional standards required for the success of *all* students.
- Has the ability and experience to support (and evolve) the District Improvement Plan by identifying, developing, and evaluating measurable outcomes that are aligned, across all schools and programs, with the Plan.
- Relentlessly identify inequities in policies and practices; find and implement appropriate solutions to the issues; and, advocate for those solutions.
- Create and implement influence strategies that motivate and inspire staff and others to achieve or exceed goals.

Competencies

Competencies are the set of knowledge, skills, talents, and attributes that support a high level of role execution. Priority competencies were established based on a review of leadership skills, attributes, and qualities, in the context of the synthesis of stakeholder feedback.

The ideal candidate will:

- Demonstrate evidence of being adept in collaborative and distributive leadership, maintaining a practice focused on the leadership skills across functional and organizational boundaries.
- Communicate effectively in both the written and spoken word (including formal presentations) for the purpose of informing, educating, and positively influencing others.
- Demonstrate evidence of professional courage, persevering in the face of threats and strong resistance to change.
- Have depth of experience in maintaining and applying a broad understanding of financial management principles to ensure that decisions are fiscally sound and support the District Improvement Plan.
- Be an adept instructional leader, with experience and expertise in promoting and building a culture of continuous improvement through innovation, collaboration, and reflection.
- Possess the demonstrated ability to manage difficult situations and relationships through diplomacy and tact, while minimizing conflict.

- Have a long history of clearly basing all goals, plans, and actions on what is best for students, and consistently influences all others to do the same.
- Highly value people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, color, religion, or social status; fully recognizes and embraces the value that diversity brings to the workplace with regard to energy, new ideas, and problem solving, and encourages all others to do the same; and, proactively creates a diverse work environment to enhance its richness, vibrancy, and productivity.
- Demonstrates an overwhelming passion for the work; is energetic and inspires others in a positive way with the importance of the work they are engaged in.
- Possess a deep, intense, and personal sense of the need for every child to have equal access to learning opportunities, accompanied by the support necessary for students to embrace the opportunities; take the initiative to ensure that equity driven opportunities and supports become a reality.
- Be an engaged and active listener, establishing connections and understanding through questioning, as well as genuinely sharing his or her own personal feelings and thoughts.
- Demonstrate experience and expertise in linking long-range visions and concepts to daily work, incorporating the implementation of simple strategies on a daily basis and an in-depth awareness of the impact of large-scale societal issues on choices and strategies.
- Possess the ability to assess the level of functioning of individuals, teams, and/or processes/systems for the purpose of improving performance.