

**HAMILTON SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Superintendent Search  
Survey and Focus Group Report**

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The Hamilton School Board has requested as part of its search for a new superintendent that input be collected from community members and employees. The information is to be used to assist the board as it develops a profile of the preferred candidate, prepares for interviews and evaluates applications.

An online survey was made available via the school district website. Information about the opportunity to complete the survey was distributed widely via email and other public announcements. In addition, a series of focus groups were conducted with parents, members of the business community, local government officials, school district instructional leaders and administrative staff.

This report summarizes the information collected through these processes. It presents the highest rated skills, characteristics and experiences from the survey and common themes and observations from the focus groups. Obviously, much more information was collected than can be captured in this summary report. This report presents the observations and advice that appear most frequently, spans multiple groups and is important to a variety of constituents.

### **Survey Results**

A total of 279 surveys were completed. This total represents the input of 149 community members and 130 staff members. The survey invited respondents to indicate what they believe to be the greatest challenges and opportunities facing the Hamilton School District in the next five years, rate and suggest the most important attributes of the new superintendent and suggest names of people they believe would be a good superintendent for the Hamilton School District.

Community members and employees were invited to rate 15 potential areas of challenge and opportunity facing the school district. Of these items, six were noted as important by at least 30% of both community and employee respondents:

- Maintaining and increasing student achievement
- Harnessing limited financial resources
- Considering potential referendum for operational costs
- Responding to increasing community growth
- Attracting and retaining high quality staff
- Engaging staff, parents and community in school decision-making

Two additional challenges and opportunities were rated highly by more than 30% of community members:

- Engaging in strategic visioning and tactical planning
- Understanding community expectations and aligning initiatives to match

Several additional challenges and opportunities were noted in the open comment section of the survey. However, none of the additional suggestions was repeated by a large number of respondents.

Survey respondents were also invited to rate the attributes they believed most important for the success of a new superintendent in light of the challenges and opportunities the school district will face in the next five years. Again, there was a high level of agreement between community members and employees regarding the most important attributes of the next superintendent. Using selection by at least 30% of respondents as the cut-off, seven characteristics were identified as priorities by both groups:

- Student focused
- Visible, accessible and approachable, promoting partnerships
- Creative problem solver
- Professional and personal integrity
- Motivates others/team builder
- One who is committed to the district that does not appear to be looking at the district as a “stepping stone”
- Demonstrated track record of success as a leader

More than 30% of community members also identified the additional attribute of “developer of people and organizational capacity” and more than 30% of employees rated “believes in and practices shared decision-making” as important additional attributes.

Still other attributes were noted in the open response section of the survey. Many respondents noted the importance of good communication skills, being student centered and politically savvy. Some respondents used the open comment and suggestion section to expand on attributes from the list provided. While none of the suggestions was repeated often enough to rise to the level of inclusion in the formal profile, they are worthy of note and review as the board considers the selection of the next superintendent.

Nineteen names were suggested for consideration as the next superintendent. The names represented a combination of administrators from within and outside of the Hamilton School District.

### **Focus Groups**

The purpose of focus groups was to collect input that is less structured, more nuanced and spontaneous than formal survey responses. As noted earlier, five focus groups were held, each including constituents with a variety of perspectives. The same questions presented in the survey were used to guide focus group discussion.

A number of consistent themes surfaced across each of the constituent groups:

- Financial challenges facing the school district are likely to continue and grow. It is important to have a leader capable of dealing effectively with these challenges.

- Good communication is the “life blood” of the organization. Proactive, effective, empathetic communication is an important attribute to consider in the selection process.
- Collaboration is seen as a key aspect of the culture and functioning of the school district. This value and practice needs to be nurtured and protected going forward.
- Progress of the school district in a variety of areas, including student achievement, is a source of pride. However, the organization cannot rest on past and current successes. The next leader needs to continue to build on what has been accomplished.
- Compassion, integrity and selflessness are highly valued in this organization’s leaders. The next leader must model these attributes.
- The Hamilton School District is a complex organization. The next leader needs to bring significant, relevant experience. However, there did not appear to be consensus that the experience must be in the superintendency.
- The financial and policy challenges present in education today are greater than in the past and likely will grow in the future. Political savvy will be important to the next superintendent’s success.
- Visibility and accessibility are seen as keys to leadership success and should be high priorities in the selection process.
- Student centeredness and experience in the classroom, preferably at multiple levels is important, especially in the face of an increasingly diverse student population.
- Attracting and retaining talented teachers and staff are seen as crucial to organizational success and likely to be growing challenges in the future. Attending to educator workload and the stresses of the role will be an important dimension of this effort. The next superintendent will need to make this aspect of his or her leadership a priority.
- The purchase, presence and utilization of technology to support instruction is an area in which progress has been made, but much more work remains to fully utilize the resource and realize a good return on the investment. Continued attention to the availability of technology and teacher expertise to employ it appropriately is important.
- A renewed and continued focus on the culture and vision of the organization will be an important challenge and responsibility of the new leader.

Obviously, the themes surfacing through the focus groups are fairly consistent with the responses collected through the survey. In fact, there appears to be a high level of consensus around a core set of attributes the School Board might consider as it selects the next superintendent.

## **Profile of Preferred Candidate**

As noted earlier, the purpose of collecting input is to assist the School Board to establish a preferred candidate profile. The profile will assist the work of the School Board as it prepares for interviews and evaluates candidates.

It appears that a good place to start consideration of elements to be included in the profile is the attributes from the survey that enjoy the greatest support across respondent groups:

- Student focused
- Harnessing financial resources/business acumen
- Visible, accessible and approachable, promoting partnerships
- Creative problem solver
- Professional and personal integrity
- Motivates others/team builder
- One who is committed to the district that does not appear to be looking at the district as a “stepping stone”
- Demonstrated track record of success as a leader

Additional attributes identified by community members and employees or through focus groups that the School Board might consider include:

- Developer of people and organizational capacity
- Believes in and practices shared decision-making
- Politically savvy
- Proactive, effective communicator

The Board might choose to add to or delete from this list to form the profile it believes will best serve the leadership needs of the Hamilton School District. Typically, a list of 8-10 attributes is easiest to utilize in the selection process. However, a slightly shorter or longer list can still be employed effectively.