

**Superintendent Search**  
**Stakeholder Feedback Summary Report**

***Washoe County***  
***School District***  
***Reno, Nevada***

**March 2024**

MCPHERSON  JACOBSON, LLC



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EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT & DEVELOPMENT

This report summarizes stakeholder feedback in the Washoe County School District Superintendent Search.

The report includes a summary of responses from online survey submissions gathered from WCSD Stakeholders between February 8 and February 26, 2024, and a summary of one-on-one conversations with members of the WCSD Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

In total, 545 online survey responses were received and nine (9) ELT members participated in scheduled individual conversations.

McPherson & Jacobson, LLC research and data collection partner *K12 Insight* managed the survey platform, data collection, and provided initial item analysis.

WCSD Stakeholders were presented with the opportunity to respond online to four prompts/questions with open-ended, narrative responses. These questions were:

1. Please tell us what you believe are excellent reasons for potential candidates to consider becoming the next superintendent of the Washoe County School District.
2. What traits, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent must possess?
3. What do you see as significant opportunities for the next leader of the Washoe County School District?
4. What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront?

Members of the ELT were asked, during virtual conversations, to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the best things about working/leading in the Washoe County School District?
2. What would you tell potential candidates are reasons they should consider the position of WCSD Superintendent?
3. What do you see are the biggest challenges ahead for the next superintendent?
4. What is most important to you regarding what the next superintendent brings to the role?

The most common themes emerging from each group's responses to the questions above are reported on the following pages.

## Online Survey Responses

### **#1. Please tell us what you believe are excellent reasons for potential candidates to consider becoming the next superintendent of the Washoe County School District.**

It was evident that a majority of respondents did not fully understand the construct and/or purpose of this prompt as over 50% of respondents submitted statements that spoke directly to the qualifications or traits they desired in the next superintendent. As a result, these responses were parsed and merged with responses for Question #2, leaving approximately 200 responses applicable to this prompt.

Comments about the reasons someone should consider becoming the next Washoe County School District Superintendent highlight several common themes, which can be summarized into key points of interest for potential candidates:

- **Opportunity for Impact and Growth:** Many comments emphasize the district's potential for improvement and growth, offering a chance to make a significant positive impact on educational outcomes and experiences. This includes opportunities to revamp the district, address challenges, and steer it toward success with the current strategic plan and community support.
- **Community and Environment:** The supportive and dynamic community, coupled with the beautiful environment of northern Nevada, is frequently mentioned. The area offers a high quality of life, abundant outdoor activities, and a growing economy, making it an attractive location for families and individuals. The presence of a single school district, community college, and university in the city presents unique collaboration opportunities.
- **Dedicated and Diverse Staff:** The district is recognized for its many dedicated educators, supportive staff, and a culture of professionalism. Potential superintendents are encouraged to empower and work closely with these individuals, leveraging their intelligence, vision, and dedication to drive the district forward.
- **Leadership and Innovation:** The role is seen as a leadership challenge given the district's history but offering the chance to lead a large educational institution through complex issues. There's an emphasis on innovative thinking, strategic leadership, and the ability to work collaboratively with a supportive board, educators, and the community to bring about change.
- **Resources and Compensation:** Recent increases in resources, highlighted by legislative support for teacher and staff increases and local ballot issue WC-1, along with a competitive salary and benefits package for the superintendent are significant draws. These resources are seen as foundational for enabling the success of new initiatives and improvements within the district.
- **Diverse and Growing Student Population:** The district's large size and diversity offer a broad canvas to effect educational improvements and address equity gaps. The superintendent has the opportunity to shape the educational foundation for future generations, ensuring all students have access to high-quality education.
- **Community Support and Engagement:** A strong sense of community support and engagement is highlighted, with an engaged parent base and a community willing to

support the district, the superintendent, and its students. This environment fosters a collaborative approach to education and district improvement.

These themes collectively paint a picture of a district that, despite its challenges, is ripe with opportunities for a visionary leader to make a substantial and lasting impact. The role is not just about managing a school district; it's about being an integral part of a community, leading change, and shaping the future of education in Washoe County.

## #2. What traits, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent must possess?

Analyzing the extensive feedback on desired qualities for the next superintendent of the Washoe County School District reveals several common themes. The most prominent themes include:

- **Longevity and Local Commitment:** There's a strong desire for a superintendent who plans to have a long tenure and is committed to the community, ideally someone local or willing to become an integral part of the community.
- **Education and Experience:** Commenters emphasize the importance of a background in education, including experience as a teacher and school administrator. There's a preference for candidates who understand the challenges teachers face and are capable of addressing the diverse needs of a large and growing district.
- **Honesty and Integrity:** Many responses highlight the need for a superintendent with high ethical standards, honesty, and integrity. Trustworthiness and transparency in decision-making are deemed crucial.
- **Listening and Communication Skills:** The ability to listen to and effectively communicate with teachers, staff, students, and parents is frequently mentioned. Stakeholders want a leader who values input from all members of the school community.
- **Student-Centered Approach:** A genuine care for student success and well-being is a recurring theme. Respondents seek a superintendent who prioritizes students' educational and emotional needs.
- **Support for Teachers and Staff:** There's a significant call for a leader who supports and values teachers and staff, recognizes their hard work, and is committed to professional development and fair compensation.
- **Decision-Making and Leadership:** The ability to make informed, rational decisions with input from stakeholders, coupled with strong leadership skills, is highlighted. A leader who is both a visionary and a practical problem solver is desired.
- **Commitment to Equity and Inclusion:** Many comments express a desire for a superintendent who is committed to equity, inclusivity, and diversity, ensuring that all students have access to quality education.
- **Community Engagement:** Engaging with the broader community and building partnerships is seen as important for the next superintendent. This includes understanding local issues and working collaboratively with various community stakeholders.

These themes reflect a desire for a superintendent who is deeply invested in the Washoe County School District, has a solid background in education, is ethical and communicative, supports teachers and students, and is ready to tackle the challenges of leading a large, diverse, and dynamic district.

### #3. What do you see as significant opportunities for the next leader of Washoe County School District?

The comments about the significant opportunities for the next Washoe County School District Superintendent highlight several common themes, reflecting the community's diverse concerns and aspirations for systems improvement. These themes can be grouped into several key areas:

- **Staff Morale and Professional Development:** Enhancing staff morale and providing robust support for professional development are highlighted as crucial opportunities for creating a positive and productive educational environment. Commenters advocate for a leadership style that values and respects the expertise of educators, avoids overwhelming them with constant changes, and focuses on building a culture of trust and appreciation.
- **Student Support and Classroom Management:** A recurring theme is attention to students exhibiting extreme behaviors in the classroom. Commenters express an opportunity to implement strategies to help these students effectively, suggesting the need for specialized training, resources, and support systems for teachers to manage classroom dynamics better and foster an inclusive, productive learning environment.
- **Educational Improvement and Innovation:** Many comments underscore both the importance of and opportunity to lift the overall educational standards within the district. This involves not only addressing the current shortcomings but also implementing innovative approaches to teaching and learning that can significantly enhance educational outcomes countywide.
- **Leadership and Community Engagement:** An opportunity to establish a leadership culture that is both responsive and responsible, with an emphasis on listening to and valuing the input of teachers, staff, parents, and the broader community is noted. Effective communication and genuine engagement with all stakeholders are seen as critical to fostering a collaborative atmosphere and ensuring that initiatives are well-supported, appropriately resourced, and effective.
- **Curriculum and Resource Allocation:** Appropriate curriculum and the effective use of resources feature prominently. There's a desire for the next superintendent to take this opportunity to ensure curricula that are research-based and reflect best practices in education, as well as for a more strategic and equitable allocation of resources to support teaching and learning across the district.
- **Infrastructure and Safety:** Comments address the need for improvements in school infrastructure and safety measures while also recognizing the impact and importance of WC-1 and the Facility Modernization Plan (FMP) toward this end. Highlighted specific needs were modernizing school facilities, addressing overcrowding, and ensuring that schools are equipped to provide a safe and conducive learning environment.

- **Addressing Systemic Issues:** There's an acknowledgment of systemic issues within the district that require bold, transformative leadership, which stakeholders see as an opportunity in this leadership transition. This involves tackling challenges head-on, from improving public confidence and staff morale to overhauling ineffective practices and policies that have hindered progress.

These themes collectively underscore a desire for a superintendent who can take advantage of this leadership transition and offer visionary leadership committed to fostering an educational environment that is inclusive, innovative, and focused on the well-being and success of all students and staff. The community seeks a leader who is not only capable of addressing the immediate challenges but is also committed to laying the groundwork for long-term educational excellence in Washoe County.

#### **#4. What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront?**

The comments regarding the next Washoe County School District Superintendent highlight several common themes and challenges:

- **Leadership Stability and Trust:** There's a clear concern about the rapid turnover of superintendents and the resulting instability. Building trust within the community, staff, and educators, and demonstrating a commitment to long-term leadership are paramount.
- **Student Safety and Mental Health:** Addressing student safety, including physical and mental health needs, is critical. This includes dealing with behavioral issues, bullying, and providing adequate support services for mental health.
- **Morale and Employee Retention:** Low morale among staff, teachers, and administrators is an issue. There's a need for effective strategies to retain high-quality teachers and staff, improve working conditions, and foster a positive and supportive work environment.
- **Educational Quality and Equity:** There's a call for improving the quality of education, addressing learning losses, and ensuring equity across the district. This involves curriculum development, integrating technology, and tailoring education to meet diverse student needs.
- **Community Engagement and Communication:** Strengthening ties with parents and the broader community, improving communication, and building partnerships are seen as essential for fostering a supportive educational ecosystem.
- **Organizational Structure and Efficiency:** Suggestions include restructuring the district to manage its size more effectively, reducing central administration, and ensuring that decisions benefit students directly.
- **Cultural and Political Pressures:** Navigating the diverse cultural and political landscape, resisting external pressures that detract from educational objectives, and maintaining focus on student-centered education are important.
- **Budget and Financial Management:** Financial constraints and budgeting issues are pressing concerns. The challenge includes ensuring competitive salaries for teachers, managing resources efficiently, and improving student outcomes with limited resources.
- **Innovation and Adaptation:** Embracing innovative approaches to education, including modernizing curricula to include technology and preparing students for future challenges, is seen as crucial. Enhancing opportunities for professional growth for teachers and staff to ensure they are equipped to meet the evolving educational demands is also noted.

These themes reflect a community deeply invested in the success of its educational system but also one that is grappling with complex, multifaceted challenges requiring a superintendent capable of addressing these issues with vision, resilience, and a strong commitment to the community.



## Executive Leadership Team (ELT) Interview Responses

### **#1. What are the best things about working/leading in the Washoe County School District?**

The responses to the question about the best things about working in the Washoe County School District highlight several common themes that reflect the district's strengths and the positive aspects of its working environment. These themes can be summarized as follows:

- **Opportunities for Impact and Personal Growth:** There are opportunities for real impact and influence, along with the ability to work closely with children, suggesting a rewarding professional environment where one can make a difference. The mention of infinite possibilities needing momentum and encouragement points to a dynamic environment ripe for innovation and personal growth.
- **Community Support and Involvement:** There's a strong sense of community support and involvement, with the district being described as a unique and kind community that is deeply invested both financially and emotionally. This includes support from the broader community, indicating a collective commitment to education.
- **Cultural and Recreational Opportunities:** The county offers a rich cultural environment and ample recreational opportunities. Being close to the outdoors and recreation, it provides a balanced lifestyle for employees, blending work with leisure and cultural enrichment.
- **Professional Excellence and Commitment:** The presence of highly skilled individuals, excellent teachers, and a management team that cares and takes their job seriously reflects a high level of professional excellence and commitment. Employees are noted for their dedication to public education and the public sector.
- **Benefits and Working Conditions:** The district offers great benefits, including the Nevada state retirement plan, and has a positive culture among its leadership team. This indicates a supportive work environment that values the well-being of its employees.
- **Strong Educational Mission and Influence:** The district is portrayed as having a solid mission and purpose, with significant influence at the state level. It is seen as a guiding light in Nevada, suggesting that it plays a pivotal role in shaping educational policy and practice within the state.
- **Scale and Integration into the Community:** The district's size is seen as an advantage—large enough to matter and have influence, yet small enough to maintain a close-knit community feel. Schools are integrated into their neighborhood structures, enhancing the sense of community and belonging.
- **Leadership and Direction:** The potential for the new superintendent to influence change at the state level indicates a district that is open to leadership and innovation. This openness to improvement and making a difference in children's conditions is a crucial aspect of the district's appeal.

These themes collectively paint a picture of a supportive, dynamic, and professionally rewarding working environment in the Washoe County School District, characterized by strong community ties, professional excellence, and a commitment to making a positive impact in the field of education.

## #2 What would you tell potential candidates are reasons they should consider the position of WCSD Superintendent?

The most common themes among the answers to this question highlight several key attractions and opportunities within the Washoe County School District. These themes can be distilled into the following points:

- **Diversity of Students:** The district boasts a diverse student population, which presents a rich educational landscape. This diversity can offer a superintendent the chance to work on inclusive education strategies and policies that cater to a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and educational needs.
- **Variety of Educational Options:** With a large selection of schools and educational programs, candidates will have the opportunity to oversee a district that provides multiple pathways for student success. This variety includes different types of schools (e.g., traditional, charter) and specialized programs that cater to different interests and talents, offering a broad educational canvas to work with.
- **Legislative Influence:** The district's active and influential role at the legislative level is a significant draw. It suggests that the superintendent would have a voice in shaping educational policies and laws, providing a chance to advocate for the district's needs and priorities at a higher level. This involvement can lead to meaningful changes that benefit the district and its stakeholders.
- **Growth and Success Potential:** The repeated mention of the district being ripe for growth and success indicates that it is at a pivotal point where strategic leadership can catalyze significant improvements and achievements. This suggests an opportunity for a superintendent to lead transformative initiatives and leave a lasting impact on the district's trajectory.
- **Community and Taxpayer Support:** The passage of WC-1 indicates strong community and taxpayer support for the district, suggesting a positive environment for implementing new initiatives and funding improvements.
- **Collaborative and Supportive Environment:** The emphasis on being surrounded by good people who care, a knowledgeable leadership team, and talented individuals at all levels suggests a strong foundation of support and expertise. This environment fosters teamwork and shared goals, making it easier to implement change and improvements.
- **Hands-On Leadership Opportunity:** The expectation for the superintendent to be deeply involved in the work, rather than directing from afar, highlights the need for a leader who is willing to engage directly with the challenges and opportunities the district faces. This hands-on approach is vital for understanding the nuances of the district and effecting real change.
- **Funding and Resource Challenges:** While there is an acknowledgment of low state funding, there is also optimism about improving resources. The superintendent will need to navigate these financial challenges creatively and effectively to maximize the impact of available funds.

- **Potential for Significant Impact:** The repeated mention of the opportunity to influence change, the readiness for improvement, and the existence of a strong facility modernization plan (FMP) with backing resources highlight the potential for the superintendent to make a significant positive impact on the district.
- **Strong Infrastructure and Partnerships:** The repeated recognition of great school-level leaders, strong relationships with professional associations, and partnerships with cities and the county underscores the presence of a solid infrastructure for support and collaboration. These relationships are crucial for implementing district-wide strategies and policies.
- **Positive Outlook and Momentum:** The acknowledgment of Reno being highly underrated, along with the district's desire to gain and keep momentum, reflects an optimistic outlook for the district's future. The superintendent will play a critical role in harnessing this momentum and steering the district in a consistent direction toward improvement.

These themes collectively paint a picture of a district that is poised for positive change, supported by a committed community, and ripe with opportunities for a dynamic leader to make a lasting impact. The challenges, particularly around funding, are acknowledged but are seen in the context of a broader landscape filled with potential for growth, improvement, and innovation. The role promises the chance to influence educational policy, lead a district with a variety of educational options, embrace and enhance diversity, and steer the district towards growth and success.

### #3 What do you see are the biggest challenges ahead for the next superintendent?

The challenges ahead for the next superintendent, as identified, span a wide range of areas including leadership, resource management, interpersonal relationships, community engagement, policy navigation, trust building, and organizational understanding. These themes can be grouped into several key categories for easier analysis:

- **Leadership Continuity and Change Management:** Overcoming the impact of prior administrations, managing transitions smoothly, and being able to make and stick to informed decisions are crucial. This includes the ability to lead in a way that builds up and doesn't tear down relationships within the school district.
- **Resource Allocation and Prioritization:** The need to resource priorities effectively, especially in the face of fiscal challenges such as the end of one-time federal funds, signifies the importance of financial acumen and strategic planning.
- **Community and Relationship Building:** Developing and maintaining strong relationships with a diverse and politically "purple" community, rebuilding trust, especially if the superintendent is from outside of Washoe County, and engaging with politicians are highlighted. This involves listening and learning before making changes and being genuine in words and actions.
- **Organizational Understanding and Management:** Understanding the size and complexity of the organization, including legal requirements specific to Nevada, academic performance issues, and the need for improved student achievement are all present. This also encompasses handling the negative impacts of previous leadership transitions and the lack of systems cohesion due to the district's size and geography.
- **Personal Qualities and Professional Skills:** The ability to trust and rely on the expertise of chiefs and executives, develop interpersonal relationships, seek to understand before acting, and manage the pressures of the role without becoming overwhelmed are noted. These qualities are essential for navigating the intricacies of a large and diverse school district.
- **Educational Leadership and Academic Improvement:** Aggressively addressing the challenges of improving academic performance and learning outcomes, while understanding that progress in a large district might be slow is seen as an important balance.

These themes collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of the superintendent's role, requiring a blend of strategic vision, operational excellence, emotional intelligence, and community engagement to lead effectively in a complex and dynamic environment.

#### #4 What is most important to you regarding what the next superintendent brings to the role?

Responses to this question cover a wide range of leadership qualities and values. These elements can be categorized into several common themes, reflecting the diverse aspects of effective leadership and management in an educational setting. A breakdown of these themes includes:

- **Participatory Leadership and Engagement:** This includes being a willing and active listener, having a consistent physical presence in the district, and genuinely listening to executive team advisors. It emphasizes the importance of the superintendent being deeply involved and engaged with all stakeholders, including students, staff, and the community.
- **Respectful Communication:** This theme involves maintaining respectful and gracious dialogue in the face of disagreements, being honest, and communicating thoroughly. It underscores the need for the superintendent to foster a culture of open and respectful communication, even when opinions differ.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** The use of data to inform decisions instead of relying solely on emotion reflects the importance of objective analysis and evidence-based management in educational leadership.
- **Courage and Resilience:** This includes courage in the face of controversy, not taking criticism or feedback personally, and having the ability to execute on what they say they will do. It highlights the need for the superintendent to be resilient and steadfast, capable of navigating challenges and controversies with strength.
- **Sustainability and Vision for Change:** Longevity in order to sustain real change on behalf of students and the ability to clearly define roles and responsibilities are part of this theme. It points to the importance of having a long-term vision for the district that focuses on sustainable improvement and clear direction.
- **Relationship Building:** Maintaining positive relations with professional associations and demonstrating real candor and empathy are crucial for building and sustaining effective relationships within the district and the wider community.
- **Political Acumen:** Having a strong political sense and political savvy are essential for navigating the complex landscape of educational policy, funding, stakeholder interests, and the political diversity of Washoe County.
- **Leadership Qualities:** Leading with passion, confidence, kindness, and the ability to inspire and motivate others are key leadership qualities that are valued in a superintendent. These qualities are critical for fostering a positive and productive educational environment.

These themes collectively highlight the desire for a superintendent who is not only an effective administrator but also a compassionate leader, an engaged listener, and a visionary capable of driving meaningful change. The emphasis on both the emotional intelligence aspects (such as empathy, communication, and resilience) and the intellectual or strategic aspects (such as data-driven decision-making and political savvy) reflects a comprehensive view of what effective educational leadership entails.