Stakeholder Input Report for

Hastings Public Schools Hastings, NE



HASTINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Executive Summary of School/Community Input Groups for Superintendent Search

On Tuesday, January 14, 2025 consultant Derrick Joel met with students, teachers, administrators, community, and parent stakeholder groups to gather input regarding the selection of a new Superintendent of Schools for Hastings Public Schools. That report will be added to this upon the conclusion of those in person meetings.

In addition, stakeholders who could not attend any of the sessions could submit their thoughts electronically via an electronic survey on the school district's website that is live January 14, 2025 - January 23, 2025.

Each group was asked to respond to the same four questions noted in bold below. Each group was provided a review of the selection process and were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the search process.

In the executive summary, consistent themes and ideas are recorded. They represent input that was consistent to all or most of the groups.

- Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.
- Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.
- What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you're looking for in the next superintendent?
- What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?

Overall Themes

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- **Community Support and Engagement**: The community is deeply involved in supporting the school district, local programs, and nonprofits. There's a strong sense of pride, active family engagement, and a culture of giving back. People are willing to invest in both the education system and community services, demonstrated through voter support for funding initiatives, like the bond issue for schools..
- Inclusive and Welcoming Environment: Hastings is characterized by a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere, where new families are embraced, and the community offers support to those in need. There's an emphasis on cultural competency, accessibility, and opportunities for everyone, including those with disabilities.
- Safe, Active, and Vibrant Community: The community prioritizes safety and offers a wide range of activities for people of all ages, including walking trails, parks, the YMCA, and a waterpark. There's a focus on health, wellness, and active engagement through community events, youth programs, and facilities like the inclusive playground and softball complex.
- Small Town Feel with Big Town Amenities: Hastings has a strong sense of community with a small-town vibe, while offering the conveniences and amenities of a larger city. Residents enjoy close-knit relationships, local pride, and the ability to access resources like education, healthcare, and employment opportunities easily within a short distance.

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- **Quality of Education and Collaboration**: Hastings values quality education, with strong partnerships between local schools and higher education institutions. The community has a diverse and supportive educational environment, fostering collaboration between the school system, two colleges, and the wider community.
- **Dedicated and Caring Staff**: The educators and staff at Hastings Public Schools are deeply committed to their students. They go above and beyond, using creative and flexible approaches to support individual student needs, ensure high-quality education, and foster a positive, caring environment. Staff communicate effectively with parents and maintain a student-centered approach, providing both academic and social-emotional support.
- Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment: The district is highly inclusive, offering a variety of programs and activities that support all students, including

those with special needs. There is a strong emphasis on helping every student find their niche, with ample opportunities for involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities. This includes partnerships with higher education and community organizations to expand opportunities.

- **Quality Facilities and Resources**: Hastings Public Schools is well-resourced with excellent facilities that support a wide range of student activities. The community's support for bond issues has allowed for improvements in buildings and playground initiatives, contributing to a safe and welcoming atmosphere. These resources enhance the learning experience and provide students with diverse opportunities to excel.
- Strong Leadership and Community Engagement: The district benefits from strong, approachable leadership at all levels, including the administration and Board of Education. There is a collaborative culture between staff, students, and the community, with mutual respect and a shared commitment to the success of all students. The district also encourages parental involvement and maintains positive relationships with local organizations, creating a supportive environment for both students and families.

- **Strong Leadership Skills**: This encompasses being visionary, goal-oriented, and strategic in thinking, with a focus on student outcomes. A good leader is also flexible, collaborative, and able to make tough decisions while keeping the best interests of the students and the district in mind.
- **Good Communicator**: Being an effective communicator is key to building trust, maintaining transparency, and engaging with staff, students, parents, and the community. This includes listening, being approachable, and ensuring consistent messaging both inside and outside the school.
- **Compassionate and Supportive**: Showing care and concern for both staff and students, with an emphasis on supporting wellness and fostering a culture of support. This quality also includes being emotionally intelligent, kind, and genuinely invested in the well-being of the school community.
- Visible and Accessible: A leader who is present in the schools and the community, engaging with students and staff, attending activities, and being visible in day-to-day operations. This helps build relationships and fosters a strong connection with the school district.
- **Student-Centered Philosophy**: Keeping the focus on students by making decisions that are in their best interest and ensuring that all actions align with improving student outcomes. This also includes understanding the needs of diverse learners, including special education.

• **Integrity and Accountability**: Acting with honesty, transparency, and fairness, while taking responsibility for decisions and actions. A leader with integrity fosters trust within the community and staff and ensures ethical decision-making.

- **Financial Challenges and Strategy**: The district faces significant financial constraints, including low per-pupil valuation, a challenging tax base, and the impact of ESSER funding. There are ongoing discussions about creative funding strategies, including potential levy overrides, as well as a focus on managing finances conservatively and prioritizing essential positions like classroom teachers.
- **Staffing and Teacher Retention**: There is a critical teacher and staff shortage, exacerbated by a higher-than-average special education population and the need for specialized roles like school psychologists and paras. Creative recruitment and retention strategies, including addressing wage disparities and offering retention bonuses, are a priority to combat burnout and ensure staff support.
- **Student and Staff Well-being**: Both student and staff mental health are major concerns, with increased challenges around student behavior, staff burnout, and the evolving roles schools play in supporting students beyond academics. The district is focused on providing mental health support, training for staff, and addressing the increasing behavioral needs of students.
- **Collaboration and Community Relationships**: The district benefits from strong partnerships with local organizations, law enforcement, and higher education institutions. These collaborations aim to connect families with resources, improve community engagement, and support a network of services that enhance the overall well-being of students and their families.
- Facility and Infrastructure Needs: The district faces facility challenges, including the need for a new high school, as well as ongoing maintenance needs like HVAC and roofing. Additionally, the district is working on addressing logistical issues such as bus driver shortages and maintaining a safe, wellequipped learning environment.

Middle School Student Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Safe community
- Small diverse community
- People within the community are helpful
- Wide variety of places to eat and shop
- There are a lot of things to do
- There is a YMCA that serves a variety of services
- Everything is relatively close together
- Great location

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Nice facilities
- When things need to be fixed, they get fixed
- Staff works hard to keep everyone safe
- Staff works hard to support students
- Staff uphold the bullying policy
- Wide variety of extra-curricular activities
- School resource dedicated to the Middle School
- Respectful teachers
- Class schedule is positive, a lot of course options
- Good job of preparing students for the next level
- Good food options

- Someone who is positive and build upon success
- Outgoing
- Someone who is relatable and easy to talk to
- Someone who wants to make the school better
- Some who makes positive outcomes
- Hard working
- Dedicated to Hastings Public Schools
- Someone who will listen to students and take feedback from them

- Someone who works hard for the staff
- Fair and consistent
- Visible within the schools
- Good public speaker

- Student respect for staff, depending upon situation
- Student use of devices during non-approved times
- Students who have bad situations at home comes to school with them
- Students not taking ownership, blaming others
- Students make excuses for not completing homework on time or at all
- Dress code is unfair between girls and boys
- There is a vaping problem for youth
- Sometimes there are physical altercations between students
- Attendance can be an issue, consistent practice needed for students
- There is not enough time to eat at lunch, if you are on the last table there is no food left

High School Student Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Open community, great public events
- Great museum with a friendly staff
- Safe and clean
- A lot of local businesses, the community supports local businesses
- Great size town, everything is easy to get to
- Not too small, a lot of amenities
- Everyone know just about everyone
- Welcoming, willing to help when people are in need
- Location is great Grand Island, Kearney and Lincoln
- A ton of different institutes for worship
- Wide-variety things for everyone, there is something for everyone

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- A lot of choices for activities inside and outside the school
- Good activities, excellent fine arts department
- Every single teacher gives everything to the students to be successful
- Caring staff
- Diverse background of students
- Students can explore their interests
- Competitive Show Choir, Debate and Speech Teams (high performing)
- History Days is a great club
- Teachers are uplifting
- Teachers are involved with students, truly care about students
- \circ $\,$ Teachers do their best, be there for students when they are in need
- Excellent course offerings, including Dual Credit, AP and Honors
- Positive interactions between staff and students
- Healthy rivalry between Adam Central
- Supportive community for extracurricular activities

- Humble
- Different experiences, from outside the district

- Different mindset
- Open mindset
- Goal oriented
- Someone who has diverse experiences in their leadership journey
- Someone who is willing to get involved with parents and the community
- Dedicated to Hastings Public Schools
- Open to change
- Money smart
- Allocates resources for needs and not wants
- Evenly distribute resources (money)
- Get input from students
- Get input from the community, communicate
- Include special education
- Fundraising is excessive, work on connections with organizations rather than asking for money

- Discipline issues at the High School
- New building within the next 10-15 years, facilities need upgraded
- Student use of devices, lack of a consistent process and protocol
- Focus on getting vapes out of students hands education and consequences
- More school pride is needed, lack of school spirit

Support Staff Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Supports the school district, bond issue a few years ago
- Involved with what the school district is doing
- Supportive of both general and special education programs
- Small town feel
- Cultural competent, the community welcomes new families or when in need
- New YMCA
- Walking trails
- Hastings is trying to grow
- Safe community

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Staff know staff
- Communication has been timely and informative
- School district is good supporting groups within the community, Teammates as an example
- Not every child has a home to go to or happy home to come home to, staff work hard to support all students
- Kindness is spread throughout buildings
- Good parent involvement, especially at the Elementary level
- Hire excellent teachers and paras
- Strong educational system and offerings
- The schools offer a wide range of services for students and families
- A variety of supports for students

- Kind
- Compassionate
- Good communicator
- Approachable
- Knowledge of the job
- \circ Accessible

- Respect for all levels
- Family oriented
- Transparent
- Consistent
- Strong leadership skills
- Visible
- Vision oriented for the district
- Easy to talk to at 3 AM
- Available
- Not intimidating
- Open minded
- Communicate at all levels

- Need for the new high school, not waiting for 2040
- Maintenance roofs, HVAC, etc.
- Value of returning employees, look at wages for current and new employees - retention bonuses
- Trainings, need for training for classified staff primarily special education paras - fit into the schedule, not on a school day
- Need buses and bus drivers
- Sub availability

District Office Staff Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Family engagement
- Support and pride within the school system and community
- Very involved in the school community example Fun Run
- Large willingness to give back to lots of great nonprofits
- Great facilities and services new YMCA
- Waterpark
- Softball complex
- Inclusive playground has been built in the last couple years
- Community takes care of people who are in need
- Community opportunities for everyone to be included
- The people of Hastings are nice and welcoming
- Two colleges in town
- School and universities work well together

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Unified bowling, unified show choir inclusive
- Culture within the schools
- Welcoming atmosphere
- Staff is very welcoming and helpful
- Strong leadership, approachable and down to earth
- Mutual respect for everyone strengths
- Everyone works together for the betterment of the district
- Facilities are a positive, playground initiative going on

- Personable
- Integrity
- Approachable
- Culture of support
- Open minded
- We before Me
- Represent within the community as the face of the district

- Not shy of big challenges
- Good communicator
- Flexible, roll with the punches
- Not afraid to get their hands dirty
- Collaborative
- Does what is best for kids
- Visible in the schools and community
- Strategic planner and thinker

- Challenging tax base and economic environment
- Interlocal agreement with Adams Central poses unique financial challenges
- Staffing paras, school psychologist and SLPs
- Discussions regarding the High School and facility needs
- Legislative and political challenges, not allow schools to get too caught up
- Keeping students and staff safe

Building Administration Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Diverse community
- Supportive community
- Welcoming and open to new families
- Two colleges in town, great learning opportunities for adults and students
- Education entities work well together
- Religious foundations, lot of options to choose from

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Committed educators
- Social emotional support training
- Kid centered, Student centered
- Variety of opportunities for students as they age through the system
- Always looking to overcome barriers students face
- Strong supportive culture between staff, students, admin and district office
- Birth to 21 there are excellent opportunities for students inside the school and community
- Kids and adults feel safe in school (perceptual data)

- Professional Learning Communities, embrace it and move it forward
- $\circ~$ Kids first, keep kids at the center of making decisions
- Understands systems and what is in place operating for a purpose
- Systematic approach
- Present in buildings and activities
- Understands poverty
- Does not rush to judgement when an angry parent is called
- Follows chain of command
- Kind
- Truly cares about staff and students
- Compassionate
- Supportive and concerned for staff wellness
- Involved in the community

• Continue community partnerships

- District is in a solid financial position
- A conservative approach will be needed with finance
- Student behavior
- Parent behavior
- Teacher shortage all staff
- Strong commitment to increasing academic scores a lot of work has happened in reading, working on math now
- Hastings Public has a great relationship with police and fire department truly partners
- Relationship with media
- Great relationships and work with organizations within the community connect families to different resources, collaborative relationships with Hastings College, CCC, Mary Lanning, etc...
- Facilities are in decent shape
- Awareness of district's poverty growing, economics are different than surrounding areas
- School Board is outstanding

Teacher Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Supportive
- Close knit
- Small but convenient
- Strong partnership with local high ed institutions
- Quality teachers, quality administrators, and students at all school sites
- Education and community is comprehension
- Diversity and culture rich
- Safe and secure
- Community programming is diverse, example community sympathy
- Always something going on for youth and families
- Active churches
- Healthy community vibe
- Museum
- Small town with bigger town amenities
- People know people

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Wide variety of offering from high school opportunities
- Partnerships with higher education
- Student find their niche and are able to explore their curiosity
- Every kid finds a group to belong to
- Never settle for good enough, always finding resources to take to the next level
- Care and commitment of the educators
- Opportunities for all students, it is a very inclusive environment
- Educational rigor, students are prepared for life outside of high school
- Board and administration's ability to support ALL students to participate in anything they want to participate in

- Personable
- Communicator

- Flexible
- Transparent
- Engaged
- Student first philosophy
- Listener
- Emotionally intelligent
- Leader
- Outside the box thinker
- Integrity
- Educational expertise strong understanding of best practice
- Non-micro manager
- Learner
- Interact within the community
- Consistent messaging inside and outside the school
- Visible
- Not afraid to get their hands dirty
- Budgeting expertise
- Fiscally responsible
- Taught at all levels
- Understands special education
- Diverse educational background

- Teacher retention
- Staff retention
- Teacher and sub shortage
- Budget
- Prioritizing classroom teacher positions over other positions
- Maximized ESSER money to maintain teaching staff, creative funding ways to keep staff
- Landlocked district
- Superintendent has a strong relationship with the staff. Culture of staff "voice" is alive and well.
- Superintendent needs to be approachable and visible in the buildings
- Be a community member first, buy into Hastings
- Payscale will be more challenging for all positions

Community Leaders' Responses

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- Quality schools
- High community engagement (both positive and negative)
- Post secondary education opportunities
- Safe
- Arts and humanitiesCommunity Sympathy and Community Theatre
- Anywhere in town in 10 minutes
- Small town feel
- Great downtown
- Size of the town is a great advantage
- Unique, local brand
- Everyone knows the Superintendent, last two have been extremely successful
- Tremendous voter support (75% to tax ourselves)
- Wide variety of employment opportunities
- New YMCA
- Collaboration between the school and community

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- \circ Teachers
- Administration
- Wide variety of activities
- Tons of opportunities for students
- There is a place for every kids to fit, a group for everybody
- Supportive staff
- Opportunity for dual credit for students
- Collaboration with community organizations and businesses
- Facilities are a strongpoint
- Well resourced district
- Give and take with teachers and administrators
- Flexibility for students at the high school

- Visible and accessible
- Good brand ambassador for the school district and community
- Advocate for the good things of Hastings
- Get in front and be a leader
- Own the decisions made
- Visionary
- Collaborative
- Creative
- Ability to think outside the box
- Experience, know the finances
- Stability
- Community investment
- Communicator

- New high school will be a priority
- Ramifications of the new attendance policy
- Student and staff mental health
- Work on summer credit recovery
- School finances and property taxes
- 3 school systems on top of eachother, work closely together
- City administration changes going on
- Disbursement of student needs between the three school districts
- Teacher pay scale
- Creative recruitment practices for talent

Community Forum

Tell us the good things about the community of Hastings.

- School system
- Size of the community, not too small and not too big
- Jobs, community resources for whatever needs there are
- No matter what age you are there are opportunities
- Youth activities and aquatics center
- There are a lot of resources for individuals with disabilities
- Post secondary opportunities with the community college and four year college
- Vocational opportunities for job shadowing
- Housing boom happening now

Tell us the good things about Hastings Public Schools.

- Programming available for students are above any other district in the area
- Dedication of staff
- Staff do it because they care
- Hastings Public Schools does not take a backseat to anyone
- The schools and staff do the best they can with what they got
- Creative using their resources
- Individualized, staff knows the kids where they are in their classes or not
- Staff communicate well with parents and families
- Improved buildings
- People of Hastings support bond issues and district improvement
- You have to go a long ways to find as good of a system to serve students with special needs, very inclusive
- Quality administrative team
- Interactive and transparent Board of Education

- Financially strong
- Understand Nebraska School Finance
- Understand the "hole of the donut"

- Good communicator
- Visible in the schools and community
- Brand ambassador for Hastings Public Schools
- Involved with students, attend all activities
- Belong to a service organization
- Advocate statewide, attend statewide meetings
- Involved locally
- Strong partnership between all schools in the area, continue to collaborate
- Be able to support building level people
- Family oriented
- Firm but fair
- Make tough decisions, you are not going to make everyone happy

- Understand the financial situation
- Understand the interlocal agreement with Adams Central
- Hastings is one of the poorest valuation per pupil in the state
- Understand the political climate as it relates to school finance
- Hastings has considerably been in the lower salary than other array schools
- What are creative, non monetary strategies to recruit and retain staff?
- Recovering from ESSER money to hire staff, plan to keep them.
- There is a chance for a potential levy override in the net year or two
- Teacher shortage is a real thing Hastings has a higher SPED average than the State of Nebraska
- Superintendent needs to be from outside the district, new perspectives and ideas
- Safety of the schools and within the buildings
- Teachers need support with the additional challenges that have risen regarding student behaviors
- Combat the burnout of staff members who are overwhelmed
- School has taken on roles that use to fall on the home and families



Hastings Public Schools Superintendent Search Survey

Results and Analysis

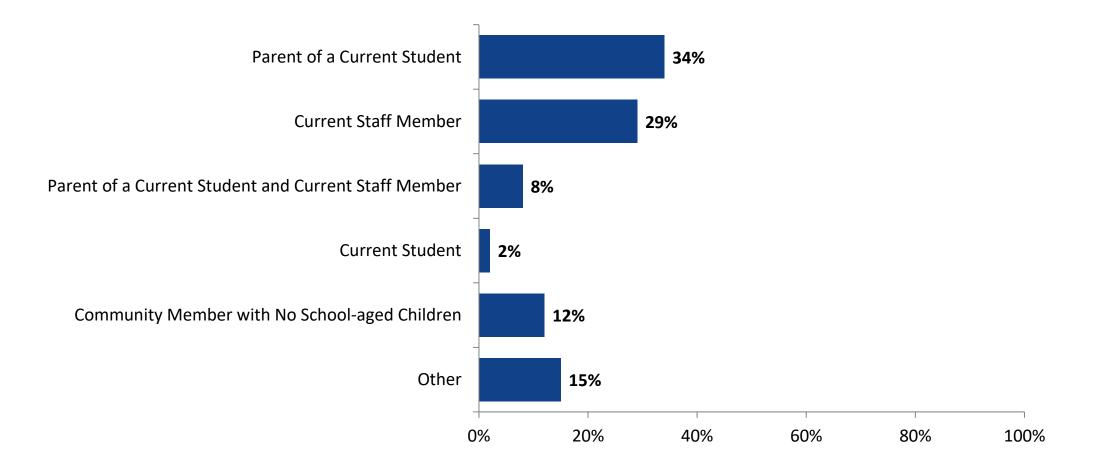
McPherson & Jacobson January 2025





Relationship to District

Which of the following best describes your relationship to Hastings Public Schools? (N=65)



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Good Points About the Community

Please tell us great things about your community and the Hastings Public Schools that potential candidates for superintendent should know. (N=57)

- **Collaboration and Partnerships**: The community's collaboration with local institutions like Hastings College and Central Community College was frequently mentioned. Positive relationships with local businesses and healthcare systems added to the district's appeal.
- **Community and Small-Town Feel**: Respondents highlighted Hastings as a safe, family-friendly, and close-knit community. The small-town atmosphere was noted to foster strong relationships and support networks.
- **Communication:** The community values the district's transparency and proactive communication, which enhances trust.
- **District Staff:** Stakeholders appreciate the strong leadership, dedicated educators, and the cohesive support system within HPS.
- Strong Educational Environment: Hastings Public Schools (HPS) was praised for its supportive staff, inclusive environment, and variety of educational programs. Participants perceived HPS as a progressive and inclusive district offering diverse opportunities for students. The district's focus on academic excellence, extracurricular opportunities, and career pathways stood out.

Characteristics, Attributes, Skills

What qualities, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent needs to have in order to be successful? (N= 61)

- **Communication and Approachability**: Respondents emphasized the need for a superintendent who is an excellent communicator, approachable, and able to listen and respond effectively.
- Community Engagement: The ability to build relationships within the community and be visible at school and public events was a recurring suggestion.
- **Experience in Education**: Experience in education and familiarity with diverse populations are critical attributes
- **Support for Staff and Students**: The ideal superintendent should understand teacher workload, advocate for mental health, and be willing to engage directly with staff, students, and families.
- **Strong Leadership Skills**: Stakeholders want a leader who values collaboration and respects staff input while maintaining a firm vision for the district. A superintendent with a balance of compassion, strategic thinking, and leadership skills is highly desired.
- Visionary and Innovative Leadership: Stakeholders expect the superintendent to be forward-thinking, financially astute, and capable of balancing traditional values with modern educational demands.

Significant Opportunities

What are the critical areas of improvement that the next superintendent should address? (N=58)

- Behavioral and Mental Health Support: The need for expanded mental health resources and improved behavior management strategies was emphasized. Behavioral and mental health challenges are critical concerns for both staff and student
- Communication and Transparency: A more unified and consistent communication strategy was requested to keep staff and the community informed about key issues and changes. Clear and transparent communication channels will help unify the district and address misconceptions in the community.
- **Curriculum and Academic Rigor**: Stakeholders highlighted discrepancies in curriculum alignment across schools and the need for higher academic expectations, particularly in reading and math.
- Physical Infrastructure and Facilities: Issues with outdated facilities and overcrowded classrooms were mentioned, along with inconsistencies in heating and cooling systems. Long-term infrastructure planning was seen as necessary to address space constraints.
- Staff Recruitment and Retention: Challenges in recruiting and retaining quality teachers and staff were repeatedly mentioned, with specific emphasis on support staff and paraprofessionals.

Significant Challenges

What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront? (N=56)

- Budget and Financial Constraints: Managing the district's finances amid limited funding and increasing demands was the most significant challenge cited. Participants believe managing budgetary challenges, including the impact of declining funding and increasing costs, will require innovative solutions.
- Behavioral and Socioeconomic Challenges: Addressing student behavior, increasing poverty levels, and ensuring the safety of schools were recurrent concerns. Behavioral and socioeconomic issues, such as poverty and student engagement, require targeted interventions.
- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**: Balancing diverse community expectations and navigating the polarized political climate were seen as significant challenges. Stakeholders want a leader who can effectively address perceptions of favoritism within the district.
- **Cultural and Demographic Shifts**: Hastings' increasing diversity requires a superintendent who can engage with different cultural groups and advocate for equity. Support for English Language Learners (ELL) and programs for students with special needs were identified as areas requiring improvement.
- **Teacher Retention and Recruitment**: The retention of quality educators and recruitment of new staff remains a pressing issue. Stakeholders expect the new superintendent to prioritize teacher retention and improve the district's reputation as a supportive work environment.



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