



SUPERINTENDENT SURVEY & FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Prepared for Southeast Delco School District

Prepared by Delaware County Intermediate Unit



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Overview

The Delaware County Intermediate Unit, as the search consultant, conducted a survey and focus groups from October to December 2023 with school administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and guardians, students, and the community at large. The goal of the process was to garner feedback from the stakeholders on the qualities needed for the next Superintendent of the Southeast Delco School District (SED). In addition, the input gathered from consultants of SED will help to shape the development of a Leadership Profile for the next Superintendent of Schools.

Summary of Results

The comprehensive data gathered through surveys and focus groups demonstrates the rich perspectives of the Southeast Delco School District community regarding their priorities for the next superintendent. Community members, parents, staff, and students highlighted the importance of community engagement, effective leadership, transparent communication, and cultural competence as essential qualities for the new superintendent. Key strengths of the district, including excellent teachers and staff, the district's size, and its location, were identified, along with concerns such as school climate, effective leadership, available resources, and financial management. The desire for a committed, ethical, and collaborative leader was echoed consistently. The data emphasizes a desire for the new superintendent to take the initiative in understanding the district, building relationships, addressing academic concerns, and fostering positive climate. Moreover, the feedback underscores the importance of gaining historical awareness, proactive leadership, and effective communication strategies to navigate the challenges faced by the district. These insights will help to shape the Leadership Profile for the next Superintendent of Schools in Southeast Delco School District.

Survey Findings

The purpose of the survey was to solicit feedback on the essential leadership competencies and professional experiences for the next Superintendent of SED. Community and staff were able to access the survey online. In total, 127 individuals participated in the survey. Some participants identify their relationship to the SED in more than one category.

Total Number of Responses: 127

#	Role
52	Parent/guardian of a child or children in the district
51	Teacher or other professional staff (e.g., psychologist, counselor, nurse, etc.)
9	Student
4	Administrator
3	Parent/guardian of a child or children who live in the district and attend a non-district school
4	Operations and facilities staff
6	Support staff
3	Volunteer in the school district

3	Other
3	Resident without children in the district
1	Community or civic leader
1	Local business owner
1	Faith leader
1	Board member
0	Elected official

*Some individuals hold multiple roles within the district

The survey consisted of seven questions whereby a participant identified qualities from a potential list of options, and one open-ended question. The survey questions are:

1. Select the four most significant strengths of the district.
2. What do you consider to be the four most important issues or concerns facing the district in the next five years?
3. Select the four most important personal characteristics you would like a superintendent to exhibit.
4. Identify four areas of leadership (expertise) you prefer in your next superintendent.
5. For each of the superintendent experiences below, indicate whether you believe the item is not important, important, or extremely important for the next superintendent.
6. For each leadership skill below, indicate whether you believe the item is not important, important, or extremely important for the next superintendent.
7. Other information or comments you would like to share.

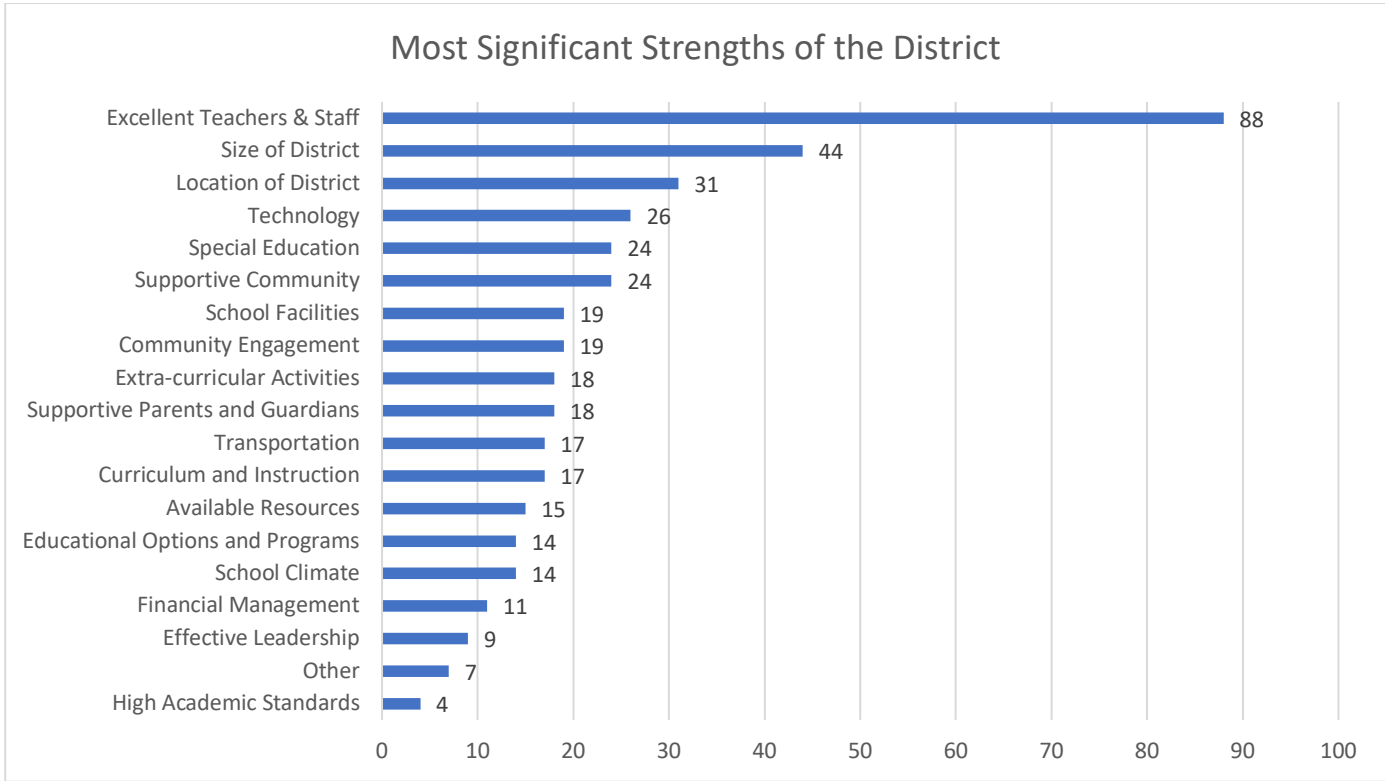
The survey results are presented on the following pages. Results are displayed with summary totals for responses and disaggregated into the following groups:

- Community
- Parents
- Staff
- Students

Strengths of the District

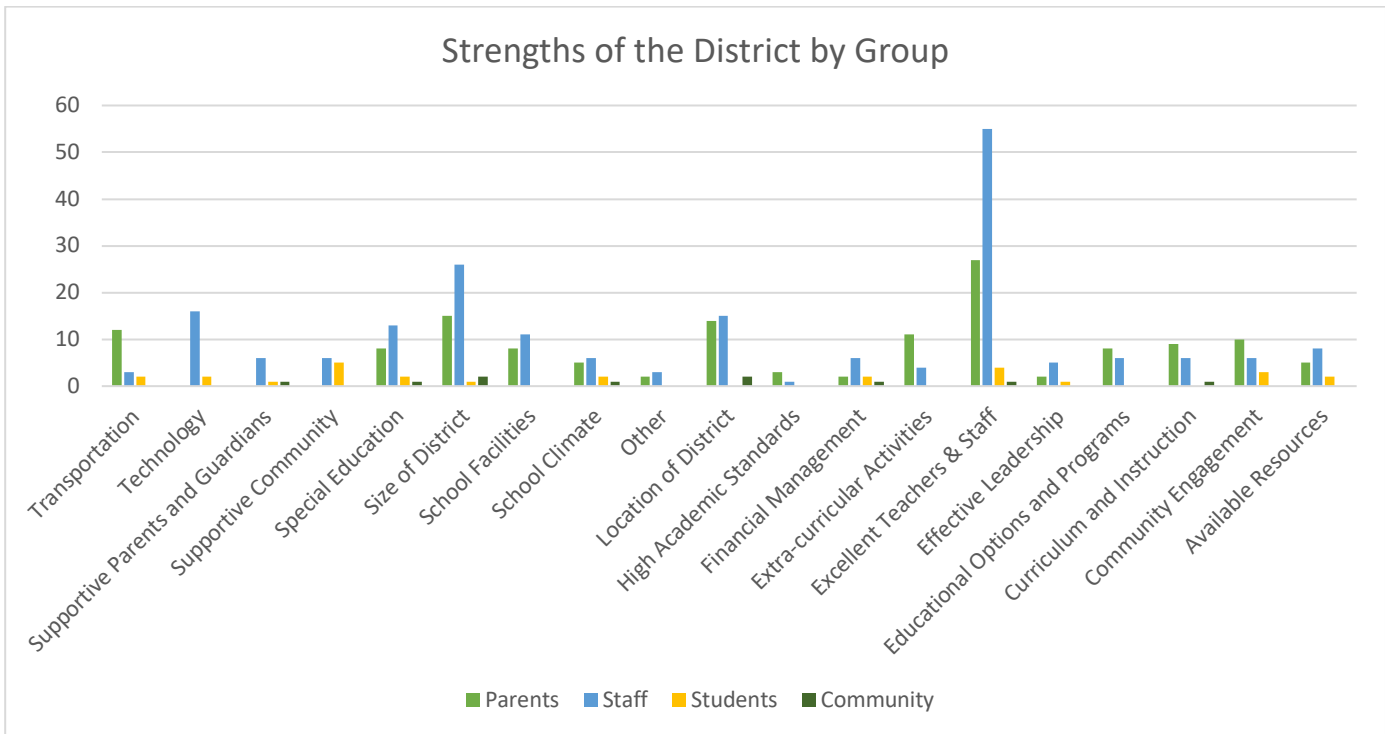
Survey respondents were asked to select the four most significant strengths of the district. The four areas of strengths chosen most frequently were:

1. **Excellent teachers and staff:** 88 responses (69%)
2. **Size of district:** 44 responses (35%)
3. **Location of district:** 31 responses (24%)
4. **Technology:** 26 responses (20%)



The top choice by role within the school community was: (multiple listed when tied)

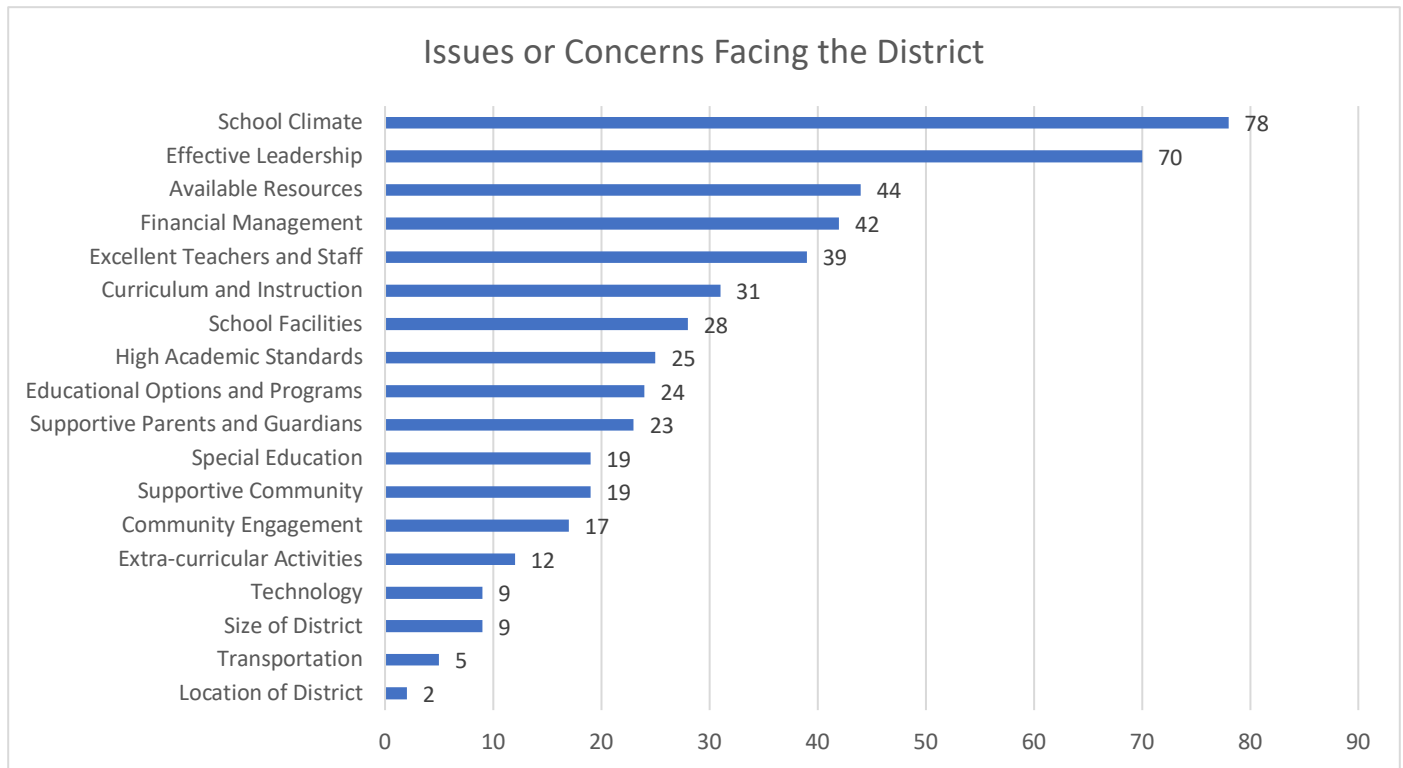
- **Community:** Location of district, size of district
- **Parents:** Excellent teachers and staff
- **Staff:** Excellent teachers and staff
- **Students:** Supportive community



Issues or Concerns Facing the District

Survey respondents were asked to select the four most important issues or concerns facing the district in the next five years. The four issues or concerns most frequently chosen are:

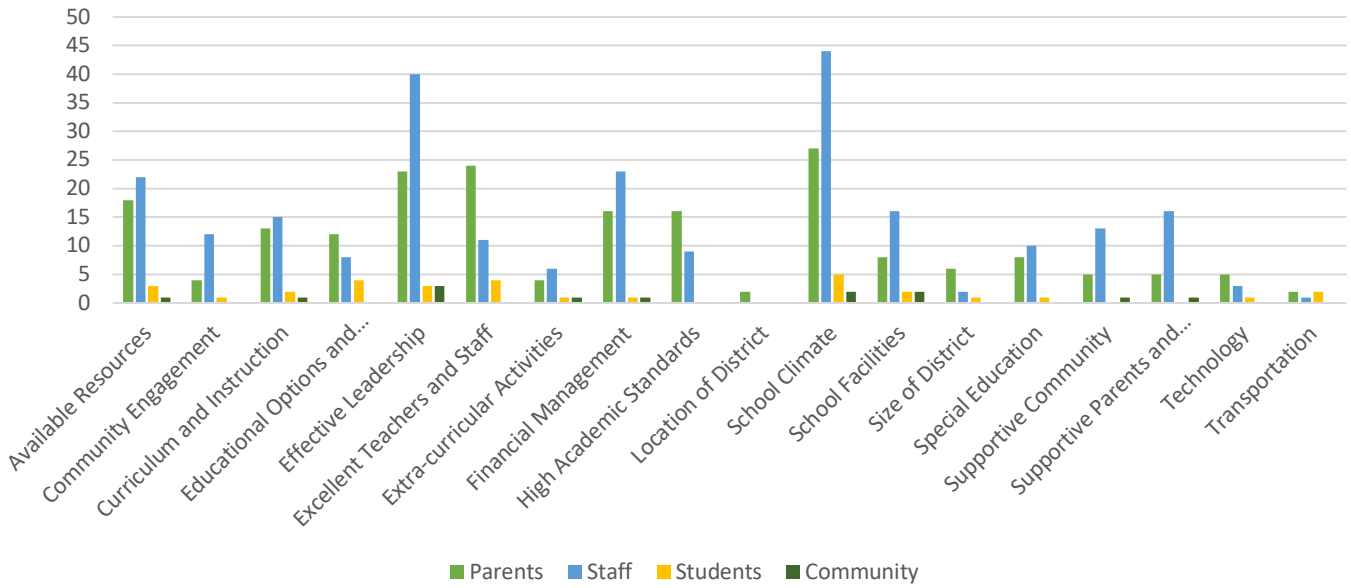
1. **School climate:** 78 responses (61%)
2. **Effective leadership:** 70 responses (55%)
3. **Available resources:** 44 responses (35%)
4. **Financial management:** 42 responses (33%)



The top choices by roles within the school community are:

- **Community:** Effective leadership
- **Parents:** School climate
- **Staff:** School climate
- **Students:** School climate

Issues or Concerns Facing the District by Group

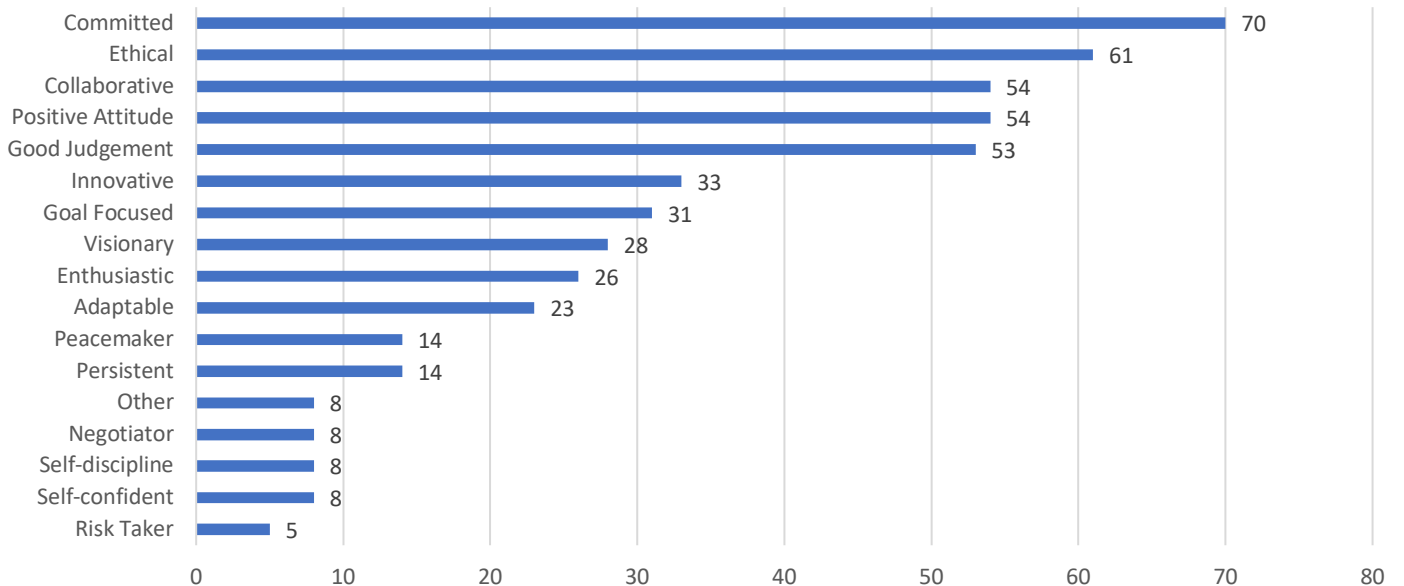


Personal Characteristics of the Next Superintendent

Survey respondents were asked to select the four most important personal characteristics they would like the next superintendent to exhibit. The four characteristics most frequently chosen were:

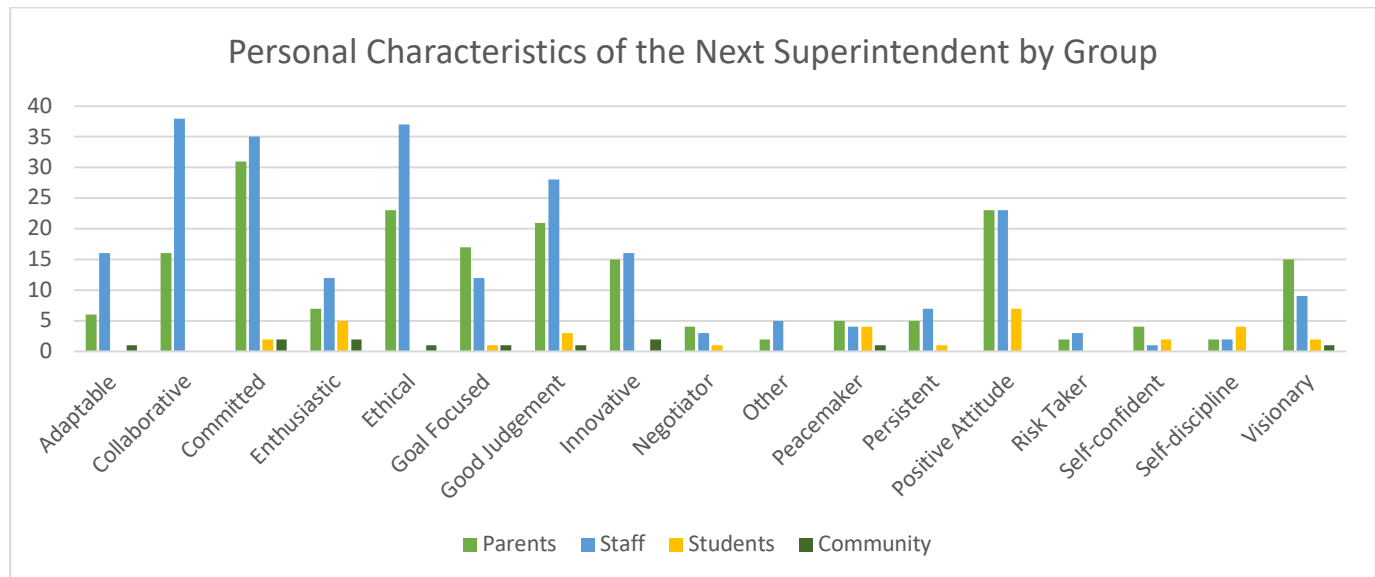
1. **Committed:** 70 responses (55%)
2. **Ethical:** 61 responses (48%)
3. **Positive attitude:** 54 responses (43%)
4. **Collaborative:** 54 responses (43%)

Personal Characteristics of the Next Superintendent



The top choices by roles within the school community are: (multiple listed when tied)

- **Community:** Committed, enthusiastic, innovative
- **Parent:** Committed
- **Staff:** Collaborative
- **Student:** Positive attitude



Preferred Areas of Leadership (Expertise)

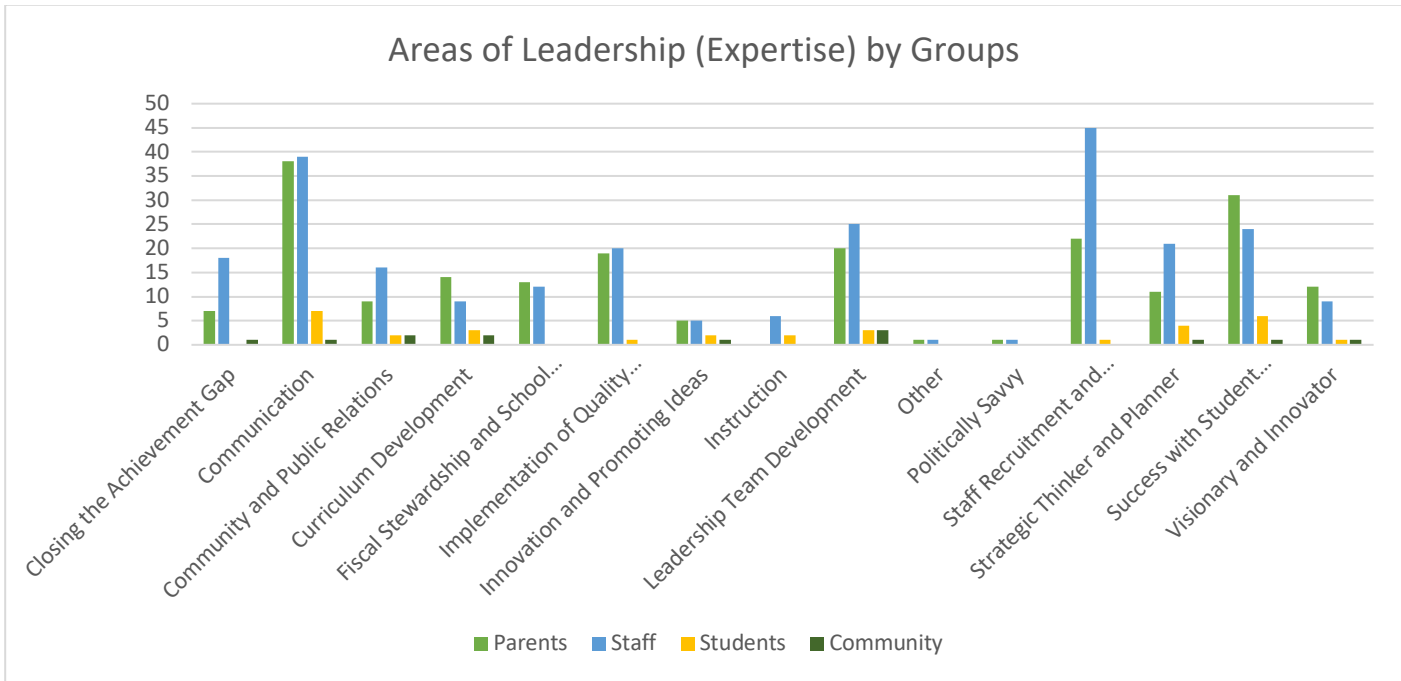
Participants were asked to identify four areas of leadership (expertise) they prefer in their next superintendent. The four characteristics chosen most frequently were:

1. **Communication:** 85 responses (67%)
2. **Staff recruitment and retention:** 67 responses (53%)
3. **Success with student achievement:** 63 responses (50%)
4. **Leadership team development:** 50 responses (39%)



The top choices by roles within the school community are: (multiple listed when tied)

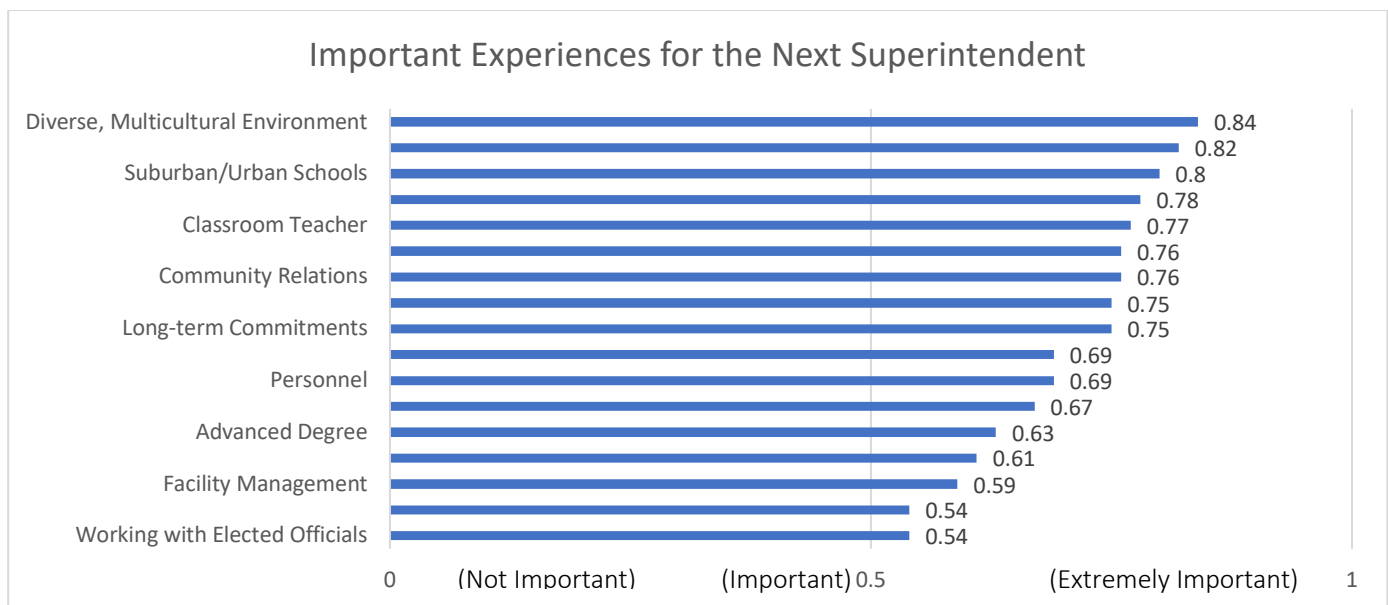
- **Community:** Community and public relations, curriculum development, leadership team development
- **Parents:** Communication
- **Staff:** Staff recruitment and retention
- **Students:** Communication



Important Experience for the Next Superintendent

Participants were given a list of experiences and asked to rate them Not Important, Important, or Extremely Important for their next superintendent. The experiences rated, on average, from most to least important are listed below. The highest ranked experiences were “experience in a diverse, multicultural environment”, “experience in strategic planning”, and “experience in suburban/urban schools”. The lowest ranked experiences were “experience in facility management”, “experience with technology”, and “experience working with elected officials”.

There were no significant differences in average responses between various roles of respondents.

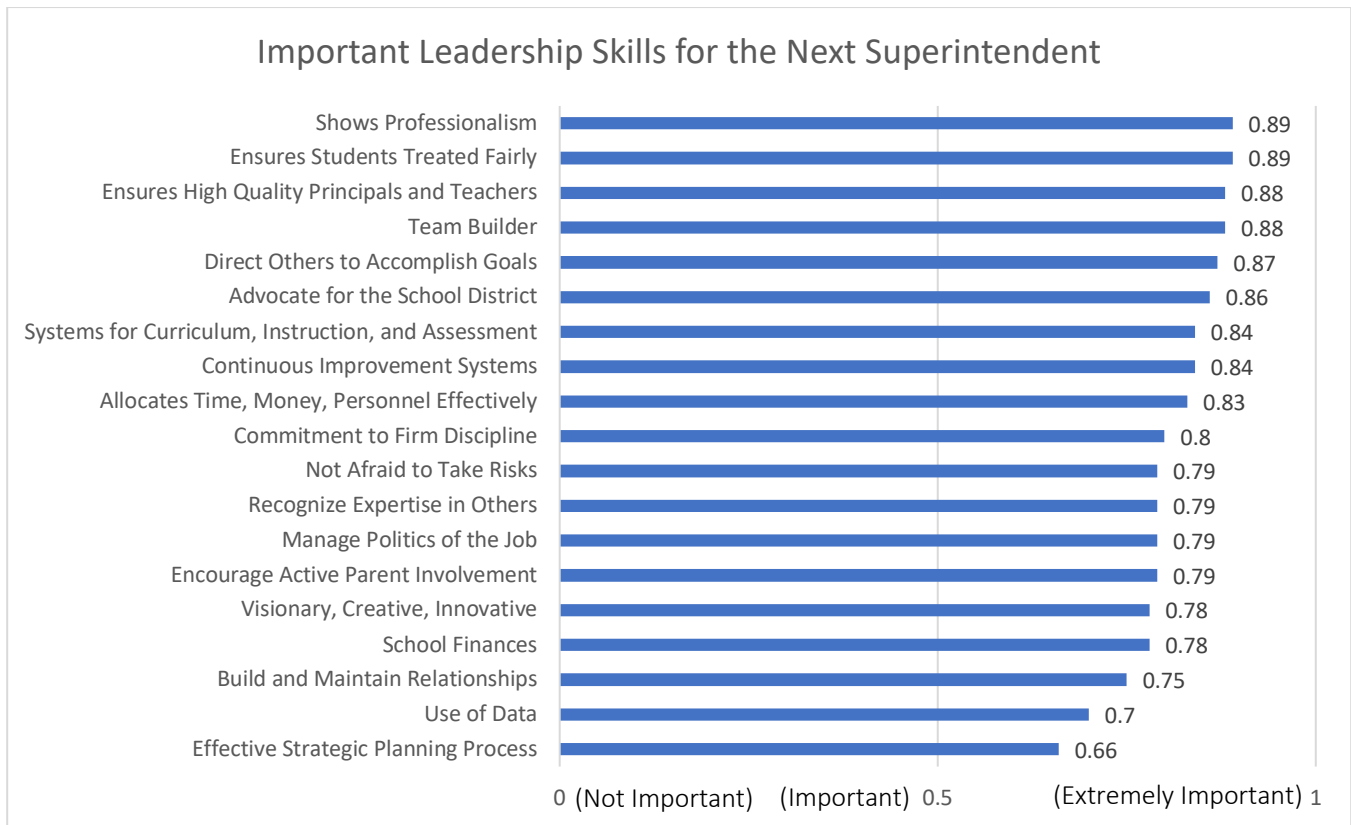


Leadership Skills for the Next Superintendent

Participants were given a list of leadership skills and asked to rate them Not Important, Important, or Extremely Important for this next superintendent. The leadership skills rated, on average, most important to least important are displayed in the chart below.

There were some statistically significant differences in average responses between various roles of respondents. Community member respondents had ratings significantly lower (ranked as Not Important) for the following skills:

- Visionary, creative, and innovative leader (0.25 compared to 0.78 overall)
- Implement and oversee an effective strategic planning process to ensure a focus on what matters most to stakeholders (0.25 compared to 0.66 overall)
- Use data to track student progress, inform decisions, and communicate district and school progress (0.17 compared to 0.70 overall)



Other Comments

Participants were given an opportunity to share any additional comments that they would like to share. Comments fell into the following categories:

- Support for Staff** (11 comments): Support for staff was a strong theme in the feedback, including fair treatment for staff, equitable pay, teacher retention, and providing staff the resources to support students' needs, particularly related to special education and academic achievement.
- School Environment and Safety** (9 comments): These comments focus on creating a safe and positive school environment. The district community is concerned about improving morale within the district, ensuring that school buildings are safe, addressing disciplinary policies, and addressing issues related to violence.
- Communication and Community Engagement** (8 comments): The theme of communication and engagement is prominent. Community members hope the next superintendent will be an effective communicator who engages with all community members, values open communication, listens to concerns, and is visible in schools.
- Leadership and Management** (6 comments): Comments in this category emphasize the need for effective leadership and management at both the administrative and board levels. The community would like the next superintendent to work with the Board of Directors effectively, ensure unity within the district, and not be undermined.
- Fiscal Responsibility and Resource Allocation** (4 comments): Fiscal responsibility and resource allocation are mentioned, focusing on avoiding frivolous spending, prioritizing finances for students and teachers, and addressing issues related to staff pay and retention.

Focus Group Findings

Focus groups were conducted in November and December 2023. Focus groups were conducted from November 13-17, 2023 with school administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, and the community at large. A total of 6 focus groups were held. Student focus groups were conducted with approximately 45 students at Academy Park High School on December 6, 2023.

The purpose of the focus group discussions were to:

- Explore the strengths and challenges of the Southeast Delco School District;
- Review key issues to be addressed over the next year and beyond; and
- Determine the critical skills required for the next superintendent.

Listening to the input of various groups within the district community provided a wealth of information and insight. At each focus group, participants were asked to respond to five prompts:

1. What is important for a new Superintendent to know and understand about the Southeast Delco School District and community?
2. What do you see as the top three challenges we face as a school district?
3. What are the three essential skills or characteristics that a superintendent must have to be successful in the Southeast Delco School District?
4. What do you see as the first step that a new superintendent needs to take in order to lead our school district?
5. What additional information would you like to communicate to the next superintendent to best prepare them in this critical role?

The same prompts were asked of each focus group. The data from the focus groups and survey are being used for the development of a Leadership Profile, comprised of the qualities and skills identified as being necessary for the next Superintendent.

The data from the sessions are reported as common themes across all staff/community focus groups and student focus groups.

Important for a New Superintendent to Know about the Southeast Delco School District and Community

Question #1: *What is important from your perspective for a new superintendent to know and understand about the Southeast Delco School District and community?*

The responses for this question a desire for a superintendent in the Southeast Delco School District who comprehensively understands the challenges faced by the community beyond academics. Community connection and understanding were highlighted across both adult and student focus groups, emphasizing the importance of a visible and engaged superintendent in both schools and neighborhoods. The desire for a hands-on superintendent invested in collaboration, communication, and understanding the diverse dynamics within the school district were important across focus groups. Staff and community focus groups

also discussed empathy, visionary leadership, cultural competence, data-driven decision-making, and addressing staff and student needs. Challenges such as high poverty, transient population, teacher retention issues, and the absence of clear direction in certain administrative aspects were also noted. Student perspectives specifically emphasized the importance of understanding and embracing diversity and fostering a supportive and inclusive environment in the district.

Themes from Staff and Community Focus Groups

- **Community Engagement and Understanding** (10 comments): Participants emphasized the importance of a superintendent who understands and is visible in the community, spending time in various neighborhoods and schools, attending community events, and actively engaging and building relationships with both parents and faculty.
- **Staff and Student Well-being** (6 comments): Concerns were raised about the well-being of both staff and students, with an emphasis on addressing trauma, creating a positive working climate to retain teachers, and involving staff in decision-making processes.
- **Leadership Qualities and Vision** (5 comments): The desire for a superintendent with visionary leadership qualities is evident, with a focus on innovative ideas, political acumen, advocacy for the district, and the establishment of a foundation for social events, alongside an emphasis on the need for long-term stability in leadership.
- **Cultural Competence and Diversity** (4 comments): Cultural competence was emphasized, along with the importance of understanding and respecting the diverse cultural background of the district, making decisions that inspire the community globally, and considering the unique challenges faced by a “rainbow community”.
- **Administrative Challenges** (3 comments): Addressing administrative challenges was expressed as a need, such as the absence of a Director of Pupil Services, providing clear administrative direction, and fostering collaboration between special education and general education.
- **Data-Informed Decision-Making** (2 comments): Respondents stress the significance of a superintendent who is adept at making decisions based on data and possesses a vision aligned with the district’s historical context, current state, and future goals.

Themes from Student Focus Groups

- **Understanding and Embracing Diversity** (7 comments): Comments in this theme highlight the importance of the new superintendent understanding the diverse nature of the Southeast Delco School District. This includes awareness of demographic variations, urban challenges, and cultural differences among the student population. Specific points raised include knowing how to connect with students who grow up in poverty, seeking perspective and celebrating the Muslim student population, and acknowledging the unique experiences of students from smaller communities within the district.
- **Building Relationships and Engagement** (6 comments): Respondents identified the need for the superintendent to actively engage with both students and staff. This theme encompasses attending

various school events, participating in programs, and connecting with the community. There is a desire for a superintendent who is visible, fosters relationships, and shows genuine interest in the school culture beyond official duties. This also includes being open to student opinions and incorporating them into the decision-making process. It was noted that “showing up” was seen as valuable for clubs and activities beyond sporting events.

- **Fostering a Supportive and Inclusive Environment** (5 comments): This theme revolves around the desire for a superintendent who promotes inclusivity and support within the school district. Comments underscored the importance of listening to students and teachers, considering diverse perspectives, and being open-minded. The new superintendent should actively work towards creating an environment where all students feel heard, valued, and included.

Greatest Challenges Faced by Southeast Delco School District

Question #2: *What do you see as the top 3 challenges that we face as a school district?*

Both student and adult perspectives on the challenges facing the Southeast Delco School District converge on several themes. Administrative challenges and communication gaps emerged in both discussions, highlighting concerns about defined roles, transparency, and collaboration. Additionally, both groups identify safety as a concern, with students specifically expressing worries about weapons in school and a desire for a more positive school image. Focus groups also discussed academic needs of the district, with adults focusing on low test scores and consistency between buildings and students noting a desire for more educational opportunities within the district and a more aligned and engaging curriculum. Students expressed a need for additional staff connection and support, while adults discussed concerns about staff retention at all levels.

Themes from Staff and Community Focus Groups

- **Administrative Challenges** (13 comments): Challenges in administrative processes, such as lack of communication, defined roles, collaboration within upper administration, and planning for professional development were all discussed. Communication gaps in the hiring process, separation of content areas, and lack of planning were named as areas that negatively affect effective administrative leadership.
- **Staff Turnover and Retention** (8 comments): Participants expressed concerns about retaining staff at all levels, the superintendent’s tenure, and the loss of veteran employees. Retention strategies, including competitive pay, are highlighted as critical.
- **Communication and Transparency** (7 comments): Participants desire transparent communication, both within the district and between the district and the community.
- **Security and Safety** (5 comments): Safety concerns are raised regarding both physical security measures and an overall sense of fear among students. Bridging the gap between the school district and the police was also important.
- **Academic Concerns** (5 comments): Academic challenges, including low scores, the transient nature of students, and concerns about consistency between buildings, were raised. The need for a positive leadership focus on academic achievement was emphasized.

Themes from Student Focus Groups

- **Educational Resources and Opportunities** (7 comments): Students expressed concerns about the lack of certain classes and electives crucial for college admissions or specific career paths. Issues with scheduling, block scheduling inefficiencies, and wasted time in classes were also noted. This theme reflects a desire for more diverse educational offerings and improved utilization of class time.
- **School Safety and Image** (6 comments): Safety concerns, especially regarding the presence of weapons, emerged as a top priority for students. The impact of the school's negative image on individual opportunities and the need for a more balanced representation in the media were important to students. This theme emphasizes the importance of addressing safety issues and fostering a positive perception of the school.
- **Administrative Challenges and Communication** (5 comments): Students raised issues related to administrative challenges, including disorganization, last-minute decisions, and a lack of communication. The need for clearer information, better planning, and more effective communication channels between administration and students was desired.
- **Staff Engagement and Support** (4 comments): Concerns about a perceived lack of effort, motivation, and engagement from staff, administration, and teachers were expressed. Students called for more support, connection, and motivation from teachers, highlighting the impact on the overall school climate and the need for improved relationships between students and educators.
- **Funding and Financial Concerns** (4 comments): Funding challenges and financial limitations were discussed, including the perceived misuse of funds, teacher compensation, and the impact of students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities or trips. This theme underscores the importance of fair and effective allocation of resources.
- **Curriculum Cohesion and Preparation** (3 comments): Issues related to curriculum cohesion, lack of preparation for transitions, and outdated or insufficient resources were raised. Students expressed a desire for a more cohesive and engaging curriculum, better preparation for transitions, and improved access to necessary resources for learning.

Essential Skills and Characteristics of a Successful Superintendent

Question #3: *What are the three essential skills or characteristics that a superintendent must have to be successful in the Southeast Delco School District?*

Community engagement and relationship building are universally prioritized across both adult and student focus groups, with participants underscoring the importance of the superintendent actively participating in community events and fostering partnerships. Effective communication and transparency emerge as essential qualities in both groups, emphasizing the need for a superintendent who listens, engages, and maintains open lines of communication. Staff and community focus groups also highlight leadership skills, advocacy, cultural competence, and resilience. Students name positive and collaborative decision-making as crucial for success.

Themes from Staff and Community Focus Groups

- **Community Engagement and Relationship Building** (8 comments): Participants discussed the importance of the next superintendent actively engaging with the community, prioritizing relationships with parents, the school board, and external partners. It includes being visible at community events, showing interest in various community activities, and fostering partnerships.
- **Leadership Skills and Advocacy** (7 comments): Highlighting the need for strong leadership, participants focused on qualities like dedication, being a team player, and a willingness to stand up for what is right. It also includes the ability to lead, navigate challenges, and advocate for the best interests of the students and community.
- **Effective Communication and Transparency** (6 responses): This theme underscores the importance of communication skills, including being a good listener, responsiveness, maintaining transparency, and ensuring that information is effectively and timely communicated to staff and families. Follow-through and availability are also important.
- **Cultural Competence** (5 comments): Recognizing the diversity within the Southeast Delco School District, participants discussed the superintendent's need to recognize, understand, and address the unique needs of different cultural contexts, including suburban and city cultures. This includes collaborating with external sources to provide diverse educational options.
- **Resilience** (4 comments): Comments discussed a need for the superintendent to be resilient, able to handle criticism, and navigate situations where not everyone will be pleased with decisions. This includes the ability to make tough choices, especially connected to the safety of students and retaining staff.

Themes from Student Focus Groups

- **Caring and Engaging Community Involvement** (8 comments): Students emphasized the importance of a superintendent being a caring individual who actively engages with the community. This includes going around the community, asking about people's wellbeing, and getting involved with various community members. The theme reflects a desire for a superintendent who demonstrates a genuine interest in the community.
- **Effective Communication and Listening Skills** (7 comments): Good listening skills, an outgoing personality, and approachability for both staff and students were highlighted as essential characteristics. Students expressed the need for a superintendent who actively listens to the concerns of the community, engages with students, and fosters an open and approachable environment. Effective communication is seen as crucial for success.
- **Positive Decision-Making and Collaboration** (5 comments): Proactivity, decisiveness, and the ability to make informed decisions were identified as crucial skills. Students discussed the importance of a superintendent who not only makes decisions, but also sticks to them when they align with the community and student best interests. Collaboration and creating a bond with the community were also highlighted as important components of the decision-making process.

First Steps Superintendent Needs to Take to Lead District

Question #4: *What do you see as the first step that a new superintendent needs to take in order to lead our school district?*

The responses to this question provide insights into the initial actions a new superintendent should take. Both staff/community focus groups and student focus groups share a common emphasis on relationship-building as an essential initial step for a new superintendent in the Southeast Delco School District. Staff and community members underscore understanding the district's complexities, fostering effective communication, and providing visionary leadership. Students highlight the superintendent's role in optimizing financial resources, improving the district's image, and actively engaging with the community to build trust. These themes collectively reveal a shared desire for a superintendent who prioritizes community engagement, addresses financial considerations, and fosters positive relationships within the district.

Themes from Staff and Community Focus Groups

- **Understanding the District** (10 comments): Responses related to this theme centered on the importance of the superintendent gaining a comprehensive understanding of the district by assessing staffing, school climates, and academic performance. It involves collecting data, visiting schools, and driving around the district community to familiarize themselves with the community and environment.
- **Building Relationships and Communication** (9 comments): Participants identified the need for effective communication and relationship-building, responses suggest that the superintendent interact with various community groups, including students, staff, and parents/community members. Participants underscored the significance of listening to diverse perspectives.
- **Leadership and Vision** (6 comments): Focusing on leadership qualities, participants discussed that the superintendent inspire and motivate staff, set a vision for the future, and address behavioral issues impacting students. It also includes the idea of being a proactive problem-solver rather than relying on the school board for solutions.
- **Navigating District Dynamics** (5 responses): This theme focuses on building understanding of the complex dynamics within the district, including the need to address a perceived lack of direction and shared understanding of problems.
- **Accountability** (4 responses): Participants discussed the importance of promoting accountability at all levels and addressing problems specific to each building. They also underscored that the next superintendent not focus on maintaining the status quo.

Themes from Student Focus Groups

- **Building Relationships and Community Engagement** (8 comments): Students highlighted the importance of the new superintendent building relationships with the community, students, and staff as the crucial first step. Emphasizing the need for receptiveness, respect, and understanding, students stressed the value of a superintendent who fosters positive relationships within the district.
- **Financial Resource Allocation and Budget Review** (5 comments): Resource allocation and financial considerations were mentioned as a critical first step. Students expressed a desire for the

superintendent to review the budget, move resources to teachers, and actively seek additional funding to address limitations, especially in academic pathways. This theme reflects a concern for optimizing financial resources for educational purposes.

- **Image Improvement and District Attractiveness** (5 comments): Students desire the superintendent to focus on improving the image of the school district and making it a more attractive option for students. This includes addressing the negative perceptions, building trust through clear communication of goals and values, and actively working to retain students within the district.

Communications to Prepare Next Superintendent for this Critical Role

Question #5: *What additional information would you like to communicate to the next superintendent to best prepare them in this critical role?*

Responses to this question provide additional insights meant to help prepare the next superintendent. Staff and community members underscore the importance of community connection and communication, underlining the need for the next superintendent to engage with the community through various channels and be well-versed in the district's history for informed leadership. Additionally, there is a focus on addressing specific educational challenges and ensuring effective budget management. Students highlight leadership qualities, adaptability, and responsiveness as crucial, along with concerns about teacher evaluation, accountability, and optimizing schedules for meaningful learning. Both groups stress the significance of the superintendent's background, experience, and strategic resource allocation in addressing the unique needs of the Southeast Delco School District.

Themes from Staff and Community Focus Groups

- **Community Connection and Communication** (7 responses): Participants discussed a need for the superintendent to establish a strong connection with the community, using various communication channels such as an open-door policy, technology, and involving students in the communication process.
- **Knowledge of District History to Inform Leadership Approaches** (6 responses): Participants acknowledge the importance in understanding the district's history as a crucial component to effective leadership approaches and proposed solutions. This theme suggests that it will be important for the next superintendent to proactively offer solutions, build trust, work closely with the school board, and be visible within the district.
- **Addressing Educational Challenges** (5 responses): This theme focuses on specific educational challenges in the district, including homeschooling, special education, and the need for community support. Participants discussed the need to find ways to increase funding and advocate for the needs of special education students and parents.
- **Budget and Funding** (3 responses): Stressed in some responses, participants note the significance of the superintendent understanding and effectively managing the budget, as it directly impacts the community.

Themes from Student Focus Groups

- **Leadership Qualities and Adaptability** (6 comments): Students emphasized the importance of a superintendent displaying leadership qualities such as patience, adaptability, and an open mind. The ability to understand diverse perspectives and be more responsive to the evolving needs of the district was also named as important.
- **Teacher Evaluation and Quality** (3 comments): Students expressed concerns about the teacher evaluation system, advocating for a thorough review to ensure the hiring of high-quality teachers. Specific examples were provided, emphasizing the importance of teacher effectiveness in the learning environment.
- **Accountability and Communication** (3 comments): Students desire a superintendent who demonstrates accountability, independence from external pressures, and effective communication skills. The ability to respond to critical situations, such as student protests, while maintaining transparent communication was important.
- **Schedule Optimization and Educational Focus** (2 comments): Students raised concerns about the length of certain block classes and suggest the superintendent address scheduling issues to allow for more effective focus on learning. The importance of focusing on meaningful educational activities, regardless of the schedule, was emphasized.
- **Superintendent's Background and Educational Experience** (2 comments): Students stressed the importance of the superintendent having relevant experience, particularly in a district with a community similar to Southeast Delco. Having a proven track record of success in a comparable setting was identified as a key criterion.
- **Resource Allocation and Fund Management** (2 comments): Students called for the superintendent to review the budget, allocate funds differently, and actively seek additional funding. Optimizing financial resources for educational purposes, especially in academic pathways, was identified as critical.