

OAK PARK UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Executive Summary
Board and Stakeholder Input and Online Survey (January 12-February 1, 2021)

February 5, 2021

This report presents the findings from Board and stakeholder input sessions and community forums facilitated by Leadership Associates consultants Peggy Lynch and Fred Van Leuven. Themes were captured from: 1) the online surveys, which was posted on the District website and 2) over 38 separate Zoom meetings with the Oak Park school community members.

Data collected is foundational to the development of the Oak Park Unified School District Superintendent Position Profile, for development of the interview questions and in discussion with applicants.

Outreach:

The Oak Park Unified School District Board of Trustees provided opportunities for extensive outreach to stakeholders of the District. Outreach included email distribution lists including staff, families, community partners, municipalities and general public; postings on district website; information from school sites, and word of mouth. The Board's direction was to ensure access to input sessions was as convenient as possible.

There were 38 separate Zoom sessions with district/community stakeholders held between January 27-February 1, 2021. The Board initial input session was conducted on January 12, 2021.

Stakeholders provided important information that will be useful in recruitment efforts throughout the superintendent search process. Ragini Aggarwal was a tremendous help with the organization of the days, preparation of schedules, site logistics and ensuring the flow of the meetings.

This summary is based on online survey from 862 respondents and 105 individuals in Zoom Conference interviews.

Key themes from the online survey are reflected in this summary report.

Input Sessions Focus Questions:

The forums, input sessions and online surveys asked for responses to the following key areas:

1. *What leadership qualities, characteristics and experiential background are you seeking for in the next superintendent?*
2. *What do you believe are the strengths of Oak Park Unified School District? Why would someone want to be your next leader?*
3. *What challenges do you see in the next few years for the Oak Park Unified School District?*

Online Survey Participation

Oak Park Unified's online survey was accessible to the school community from January 13 to February 2, 2021.

There were 862 survey respondents who classified themselves as follows:

Respondent Group	Responses %	Total
Parents/Guardians	60	519
Students	21	177
Community Members	17	145
Teachers	15	126
School Volunteers	10	87
Classified Staff	9	79
Other Certificated	4	31
Business Owners/Partners	3	23
Non-Profit Staff	2	19
Administrators	2	14
Public Officials	.4	3
Total Respondents: 862		

Survey respondents could choose more than one category; therefore, the total number listed in the various categories exceeds the 862 survey participants.

The top desired qualities and characteristics from the survey were as follows:

Desired Characteristics

Stakeholders had common themes regarding the following three areas: professional experiences, professional leadership characteristic and personal characteristics. The most commonly emphasized desired characteristic across all stakeholder groups was to find an experienced, proven leader who has led or held a high-level position in a complex, diverse organization. The leader must value the District's diversity, its culture, its students and its students varied needs, and care about good relations within its community. The leader must view the District through an "equity lens."

The top survey responses are listed below in priority order:

Professional Experiences/Leadership

1. A proven track record of growing academic achievement for all students, including special needs children, second language learners, and children of poverty
2. Experience at an executive cabinet level position (assistant superintendent or superintendent)
3. Experience in California public education, either teaching and/or site administration
4. Experience as a superintendent in a comparable district
5. Experience in oversight of school district finances, budgets, and business management

Professional Leadership Characteristics

1. Is a strong instructional leader who will maintain and improve the student achievement gains made in the District
2. Will place the highest priority on safe environments for students and staff
3. Will bring the entire community together toward a strong vision of student achievement

Personal Characteristics

1. Accountable
2. Collaborative and inclusive, an active listener
3. Empathetic
4. Visionary

Common Themes:

The following summarizes several of the main emerging themes regarding the qualities desired in a new superintendent. Stakeholders told us they want someone who:

1. Puts Oak Park students and student issues as the top priority—the focus of all actions and decisions
2. Has a collaborative, inclusive leadership style and assesses what is working in the District with a fresh set of eyes
3. Is skilled in working with a Board, fosters cohesiveness within the Governance Team and builds a strong, shared District vision that is clearly articulated with stakeholders
4. Embraces the rich diversity that is found in Oak Park and views the District through an “equity lens”
5. Is visible, approachable and authentically involved in the schools and in the community; knows the history of Oak Park and has done research on the District
6. Has a vision, can articulate the vision to stakeholder groups; can bring clarity and continuity to district goals, procedures and practices
7. Knows organizational management and fosters a positive, servant leadership culture in the District Office and throughout an accountable organization
8. Can/Will make the tough decisions and engage in courageous conversations and actions
9. Is progressive, strategic and innovative in actions, visioning and planning
10. Has experience in a District with like demographics and size
11. Provides for equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, has deep understanding of what equity means
12. Is accountable and holds accountability as a value throughout the organization
13. Has effective communication skills, understands the importance of communication at all levels of the organization, with parents, students, community partners, and with the general public
14. Is an active listener with all stakeholders

Communication and Collaboration

Stakeholders want an individual who values two-way communication and has a collaborative leadership style, which includes Board, staff, students, parents from throughout the District, community-based organizations and other stakeholders. The new leader must be proactive in seeking to build upon relationships and partnerships throughout the District.

Embracing the opportunities available with community resources is important. Greater attention to formalized articulation between the elementary schools and middle school and middle school to high school was frequently mentioned. Being culturally competent and valuing the diversity of the community was an important quality as well.

Clarity of vision, District goals and accomplishments is desired to be a shared process.

District Strengths:

Dedicated Teachers, Administrators, Support Staff and Students as District Strength

Stakeholders held high regard for the dedication and compassion of the District staff in efforts to meet the needs of the students. Teachers were frequently mentioned as hard-working, passionate and dedicated. Employee retention rate is high and was noted. For the most part, staff was viewed as being "like a family" and engaged in teamwork at school sites and within the central office. Compliments were made about the students in the district. Attention to the whole child and quality of students were viewed as District assets. District support of high quality, award winning schools and programs were a source of pride and deemed to be integral and essential component of the District.

Diversity

Stakeholders overwhelmingly indicated that the diversity of the District is an important strength of the District. The new superintendent must embrace diversity and continue to work to engage the voices of the various diverse populations within the District. In particular, there is a desire to be inclusive of all. There was discussion about options for both college bound students and those aspiring to follow a career pathway.

Budget and District Finances

The district was commended for its fiscal position and stability. With concern an economic downturn could be in the near future, many stakeholders were comforted by the fiscal management of District resources. District of Choice has assisted the district through the years of declining enrollment and lean fiscal times

District Challenges

The impact and return after COVID

The return to school from COVID was a major concern for stakeholders and will be a major challenge for all. Lost opportunities for learning and interaction, has created the need to reinvest in existing and develop new social emotional support mechanisms for students and staff.

A Divided Community

There is an acknowledged divide in the community over many issues. A few of the issues that were noted: recent changes to curriculum, perceptions from both teachers and community member that they have lost their voice and part in decision making, the response to COVID, District of Choice and meatless Mondays. Stakeholders look forward in a positive sense to working out some of these contentious issues. Stakeholders were polite and cordial during our community input sessions describing differing points of view in a positive manner.

District of Choice

District of Choice has specifically created a deep divide among some stakeholder. Some community members expressed the need to get a better understanding of its true impact on district students and the financial picture of the district. The majority of focus groups were aware of declining enrollment facing the district and its potential impact.

Declining Enrollment- Future Financial Status

Many are concerned about the financial future status Oak Park Unified. The District of Choice may or may not be continued/allowed by the State, declining enrollment within school district boundaries coupled with the district low revenue amount leads to a potentially unsettled future.

Trust, Respect and Clarity of Direction

Many respondents reported a desire to ensure trusting relations. Some feel they do not have a voice, or perhaps a strong enough one. The District has implemented a variety of initiatives over the past few years and some have felt left out of the decision.

Accountability

The need for increased accountability was expressed in both the survey and community meetings. Consistency in some district operations and communication of actions would be welcomed.

The Transition of the New Superintendent-Building and Sustaining a Cohesive Governance Team

The new superintendent will need to be skilled in working with a Board and school community, in developing a common vision and aligning Governance Team actions with the organizational goals and objectives of the District.

Diverse Student Populations

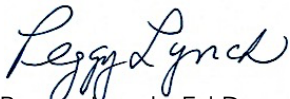
Expectations for high quality programs and offerings for high performing students need be considered as equally important as the needs of students requiring supplemental and support services. It was noted that diversity exists in so many key areas in the district.

Submission of Summary Report

There is a wealth of information from the community input forums, input sessions, and online survey. In terms of what a candidate should know about Oak Park Unified School District, comments in this regard echoed much of what has been captured in other components of stakeholder input commentary. Clearly a consummate professional who is honest, personable, empathetic and who possesses effective communication skills is desired. The diversity and complexities of the District must be acknowledged and embraced by its next superintendent and in partnership with the Board as a Governance Team unit.

Leadership Associates Consultants appreciate the opportunity to have gathered this important information to develop the Oak Park Unified School District Superintendent Position Description, which is now available for your review and comment. We look forward to the next critical phases of the superintendent search process.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Lead Consultants, Leadership Associates