



# **Orange Public Schools 2015 Superintendent Search Leadership Profile Report**

Prepared for the  
**Orange Board of Education  
Superintendent Search Committee**  
By  
**Cooperative Educational Services**

**Thomas Jokubaitis and  
Dr. James Ritchie  
Consultants  
March 27, 2015**

## **LEADERSHIP PROFILE**

The Orange Board of Education established a Superintendent Search Committee and engaged the services of Executive Search Services of Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S). Search consultants worked with the Search Committee to create a focus group framework and an online survey to determine desired attributes in a new superintendent of schools. Seven focus groups were held on March 19, 2015 for targeted groups of teachers and staff, parents, administrators, public officials, and the first selectman. An online survey was accessible from March 16 through March 23. Fifty-two people participated in the focus groups and 159 people responded to the survey. More detailed information about the results of these activities is presented in the following report.

Focus group participants were asked to describe the strengths of Orange Public Schools and what school and community characteristics would attract a person to apply for the superintendent position. It was clear that all participants are proud of their schools and the community. Frequently mentioned items are as follows:

### **School and community strengths:**

- A great family oriented community that is supportive of its schools
- An excellent, high performing student body, ready and eager to learn
- Dedicated, high performing teachers and school leaders who always put all students first
- Schools are supported by involved parents, engaged in their children's education
- There is a great commitment to voluntarism and ensuring all schools and programs have what they need for success
- Trying new things that have potential for improved learning; a cutting-edge culture

Both focus group and online survey respondents had opportunities to express their opinions about the challenges facing a new superintendent of schools. The following items are among those specifically stated and some were frequently brought up under different questions.

### **Challenges facing a new superintendent of schools:**

- Improving morale and building a spirit of collegiality
- Parent involvement
- Common Core curriculum and testing
- Changing demographics
- Developing a shared vision for the future of the schools
- Public relations and communications
- Facilities and school safety

Closely aligned with challenges facing the new superintendent are concerns about the instructional focus that should be a priority. The following items were raised as concerns.

### **Most important instructional focus:**

- Classroom instruction and the Common Core

- Collaboration in program/curriculum development
- Helping parents support student learning
- Strategic and systemic approaches to implementing programs with an view toward middle school

Both online survey respondents and focus group participants described the personal and leadership characteristics desired in a new superintendent. These are as follows:

**Leadership and personal characteristics:**

- An inclusive leadership style
- A personable, approachable style of interacting with others
- A strong desire to be actively engaged in schools and community; visible
- An effective communicator with diverse audiences
- An advanced degree; personal qualities more important than degree status
- Experience as a teacher and principal at the elementary school level
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Knowledge of curriculum and instruction
- Collaborative and able to build teams

**LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES**

Based upon an analysis of focus group and online survey data, Executive Search consultants recommend that the Board of Education and Superintendent Search Committee consider the following attributes in their recruitment and selection processes for a new superintendent of schools:

1. *It is preferred that a new superintendent have experience at the elementary school level as a teacher and principal or demonstrates extensive knowledge of elementary education.*
2. *The new superintendent should have a collaborative style; including others in developing a clear vision for the Orange School District and enabling the voice of others in major curriculum decisions and policy decisions.*
3. *The new superintendent must be personable, approachable, and an effective communicator; must possess the ability to build positive relationships within the school district, community, and with town officials.*
4. *The new superintendent must be ethical, trustworthy, and have strength of conviction and will be expected to be an advocate for Orange students and the schools.*
5. *The new superintendent will be expected to be active and engaged in the schools and the community; the superintendent needs to be visible and known to children parents, and other community members.*

6. *The new superintendent should possess knowledge of curriculum and instruction; concerns about Common Core and its implementation will need to be addressed.*
7. *The new superintendent must have the ability to engage parents positively and constructively in their volunteerism and support for the Orange schools; parents expect to be involved and informed.*
8. *The new superintendent should have the ability to gain the trust and confidence of school personnel, community leaders, parents, and citizens; this will be the result of open and honest communication and a willingness to listen and an act in a forthright, consistent manner.*
9. *The new superintendent will be expected to build upon the successful history of the Orange public schools and not enter the job with preconceived notions or plans to change; change initiatives will need to be collaboratively designed, strategically planned for implementation, and evaluated for results.*
10. *The new superintendent will need to be a proactive problem solver; aligning learning expectations for Orange students with performance expectations of the Region # 5 schools; effectively addressing issues related to enrollment decline; creating systematic and systemic curriculum and instruction processes in the district.*
11. *The new superintendent should be willing to make a long-term commitment to the school district; the school district and community are looking for leadership stability and continuity in implementing the vision for Orange schools.*

## **PHASE I: RESEARCH REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Orange Board of Education is conducting a search for a new superintendent to fill the vacancy resulting from the resignation of the previous full-time superintendent. An interim superintendent, Dr. Michael Nast was hired to fill the vacancy through June 30, 2015.

The selection of a school superintendent is a state-legislated responsibility of Boards of Education in Connecticut. To fulfill that responsibility the Orange Board of Education has established a search committee pursuant to guidelines set forth in Board policy, # 2141 – Recruitment and Selection of Superintendent (adopted April 15, 2013). To assist the Search Committee, the Board of Education has entered into a contract with Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) Executive Search Services for assistance in the recruitment of highly qualified candidates to be considered for the position of superintendent of schools in Orange. The Orange Superintendent Search Committee authorized C.E.S. Executive Search Consultants, Tom Jokubaitis and Jim Ritchie to conduct data collection activities with Orange stakeholders focusing on the leadership expectations of school personnel and members of the Orange community and on identification of the challenges the Orange district is expected to face in the near future. Data collected has been organized into a *Leadership Profile* that the Search Committee will use as a guide in the recruitment and selection of the next superintendent of schools.

The end product of the data collection phase is this *Leadership Profile* report, which provides the Superintendent Search Committee with a general profile of the leadership attributes and personal characteristics Orange stakeholders desire to see in the new superintendent. The leadership profile presented in this report is based on the data collected through the *focus groups* and the *online survey* that were conducted in the school community from March 16-23, 2015.

### **PARTICIPATION IN THE DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES**

The C.E.S. consultants used two research or data collection protocols: (1) an online survey and (2) face-to-face focus group meetings. Seeking stakeholder input on a number of essential elements of superintendent leadership, the consultants asked the online survey respondents and the focus group participants to identify the skills, qualifications, and personal attributes and characteristics they deem most desirable for the new superintendent. Additionally, participants were asked to identify and comment from their own perspective, on the district's future challenges and their vision for the Orange Public Schools.

The data presented in the report represents input from a total of 211 people who participated in focus group meetings and/or the online survey that was accessible on the school district website. Consultants met with 52 people in the focus group meetings and 159 people took the online survey.

Persons who took the online survey were asked to identify their demographic or stakeholder category but were not asked to provide their names. The breakdown of the stakeholder categories is provided in the data charts included in **Appendix A**, a separate electronic file. The number of participants in each of the focus group meetings is provided in the data charts included in **Appendix B**, a separate electronic file.

In its entirety, this report contains (1) an **Executive Summary** of the research phase of the search process and the findings contributing to the Superintendent Leadership Profile, (2) an **Appendix A** - compilation of raw data collected through the online survey, and (3) an **Appendix B** - compilation of raw data collected in the focus group meetings. Frequently mentioned or consistent ideas and themes expressed by the stakeholders throughout the data collection activities are included in the **Leadership Profile Report Executive Summary** and are organized by discussion of district strengths, district challenges, and leadership attributes and personal characteristics desired in the new superintendent.

It should be noted that respondents to the online survey may have participated in both a focus group meeting and the online survey, thus expressing their opinion/thoughts more than once in the process. Additionally, the conclusions set forth in this summary may not reflect the opinion of a majority of any singular category of stakeholders represented, particularly if the participation rate for that category was low. However, the number and cross-section of participants who took part in the data collection effort assures that many voices were heard.

Finally, the summary and conclusions are based comprehensively on the data collected throughout the research phase of the search and summarized in the data charts included in the addenda to this report. The online survey results, *with the exception of the open-ended questions*, are rank-ordered with the responses presented in order of frequency. The focus group comments are not rank-ordered and are presented randomly within a focus group category.

The following chart displays the demographics of online survey participants. The percentage column displays the extent to which the voice of each group is represented on the survey results. A total of 159 people responded to the survey. It should be noted that some participants may have checked more than one category (i.e., a parent who is also an Orange teacher; a town official who is also a parent, etc.) resulting in a total of 176 people representing the various demographic groups completing the survey.

**ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS**

<b>Demographic Group</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of All Groups</b>
Resident, non-parent	22	12.5%
Parent	86	48.9%
Student	2	1.1%
Certified staff	48	27.3%
Non-certified staff	12	6.8%
Town official	5	2.8%
Other	1	0.58%
Total:	176	

The consultants caution the Superintendent Search Committee and others not to look upon the identification and discussion of the challenges discussed in this report as criticism of the Orange Public Schools as an organization. School districts are very complex organizations every school district faces challenges. Instead, the discussion of the challenges should be regarded as an attempt to "take the temperature" of the school community and assess what stakeholders perceive to be the most pressing challenges in the present and immediate future of the school district. The Superintendent Search Committee will do a better job in the search process by knowing which challenges are of greatest significance to the stakeholders. The Superintendent Search Committee will use this information, along with the other data that was collected, to identify an individual in the applicant pool who has the skills-set and background to respond to the challenges.

The Orange Board of Education, Superintendent Search Committee, and C.E.S. Executive Search Consultants wish to express gratitude to those people who took the time to respond to the online survey and/or to attend one of the focus group meetings, and by doing so, participated in the search process.

## **STRENGTHS OF ORANGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Stakeholders who participated in the data collection activities expressed their personal pride in their community's historical heritage as well as its present-day amenities. They readily discussed their ongoing interest in and commitment to helping shape the future direction of the Orange Public Schools, a central focus of the town in which they enjoy living and working.

In the context of the focus group meetings, participants generated a list of school district's strengths. Many positive statements about the public schools and community were shared in each of the meetings. Those comments have been organized around several broad areas that appear to be representative of the most frequently cited strengths across all focus group meetings.

The list of strengths presented is not intended to suggest that some items outweigh others and, thus, they are presented in random order. Although a wide range of comments around a variety of strengths was generated in the discussions, the consultants identified those most frequently expressed by most of the participants. Those strengths are listed below:

*Orange Public Schools boasts as strengths . . .*

- *A great family oriented community that is supportive of its schools;*
- *An excellent, high performing student body, ready and eager to learn;*
- *Dedicated, high performing teachers and school leaders who always put all students first*
- *Schools are supported by involved parents, engaged in their children's education*
- *There is a great commitment to voluntarism and ensuring all schools and programs have what they need for success*
- *Trying new things that have potential for improved learning; a cutting-edge culture*

### **Discussion of the Orange Public School's Strengths**

#### **Small town school community**

Focus group participants were quick to identify Orange as a "small town" that, as a byproduct of its "smallness," easily fosters relationships among students, staff, parents, and members of the community. People live in Orange because of the schools. People who have attended Orange schools come back to the community to live and possibly work. There is a very strong appreciation for the history of the community and its family-oriented culture. There is always something to do in the community. These characteristics are considered by many participants to be a valuable "drawing card" for a new superintendent. Many focus groups used the phrase "sense of community" to express this strength. Additionally, several people identified themselves as both employees of the school district and also residents of the town. Orange's small size, in the words of the participants, should be attractive to applicants seeking to work in a small town in which building relationships and getting to know people both in the schools and the town would be very manageable. Orange was also described as a community that

cares about its children and its schools. Parents and staff all expressed sentiment about appreciating the long-standing reputation the district has about their high-performing, cutting-edge schools. Parent engagement and support, both financially and through volunteer services, is very strong. Parents have high expectations for their schools and are committed to ensure they function at high levels.

### **Excellent student body**

The Orange School District is comprised of four elementary schools. Focus group participants spoke often of the excellent student body throughout the school district; students who come to school prepared and ready to learn. Students participate in both school and community activities, take learning seriously, and behave respectfully and responsibly toward their teachers, peers, and the community. Parents and teachers speak with great pride when they discuss the high achievement of the student body, even as demographic changes increase the variety of cultural backgrounds and home languages. Some examples of outstanding school programs include elementary world language classes and an elementary school band with more than 100 members.

### **Strong and dedicated teachers, administrators, and support staff**

The Orange Public Schools employs administrators, teachers, and support staff who are dedicated to their professional practice, are involved with and supportive of their students, care about one another, and share a sense of community. They take pride in their commitment to new initiatives in the organization and the challenges that sometimes surround such efforts, but remain committed to the success and growth of the school district. They are resourceful professionals working to ensure all students have the learning tools they need to succeed. Additionally, the teachers expressed a desire to continue to grow and develop as educators so they can continue to best serve their students. The school leaders and teachers are considered to be an asset to the district and are committed to working with the parents and community in a partnership focused on the students and their achievement. Human resources overall are the greatest strength of the school district, according to the many voices participating in the data collection effort in the superintendent search process.

### **Engaged, supportive parents**

Participants in the focus groups stated that parents are very involved in their children's education, supportive of the schools and the educators. They are also focused on helping the Board of Education, the administration, and the staff improve the schools for the benefit of the students. Parents were also described as being "eager to be participants in the functioning of the school district" and "engaged" in both school district and community efforts to provide opportunity for all children. In the discussion groups, parents were passionate and spoke openly and frankly about the school district's many assets while also recognizing that, as an organization, the district should remain focused on further growth and development to ensure that their children and future students benefit from access to state-of-the-art educational

learning opportunities. Parents are very visible in the school community and stand ready to assist and promote the schools.

### **Programs and Opportunities**

Educators and parents take great pride in the innovative culture that permeates the schools and the school district. People are willing to try new things. This elementary school district has a marching band with more than 100 students from all of its four schools participating. A world language program is available to all children starting in the first grade. The curriculum is up-to-date. There is a strong commitment to technology in the school district. This is a district that prides itself in being inclusive for children of varying cultural backgrounds and those with special learning needs. It is all about the children in the Orange schools and that sentiment pervades the community. Parent-sponsored fundraisers are supported on a community-wide basis.

## CHALLENGES FACING ORANGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

---

Focus group participants expressed a variety of concerns about the challenges facing the public schools as well as potential barriers to success for the new superintendent. The issues expressed most often are summarized below. These challenges are important to the new superintendent's success and, consequently, they represent criteria from which to assess a candidate's readiness to lead efforts to address those challenges. These items are listed randomly and their order is not intended to represent an order of importance.

### *Challenges of the Orange Public Schools:*

- *Improving morale and building a spirit of collegiality*
- *Parent involvement*
- *Common Core curriculum and testing*
- *Changing demographics*

### **Improving morale and collegiality**

There is a need to build a spirit of collegiality and improve morale throughout the district by giving a greater voice in curriculum decisions to school leaders and teachers; more systemic approaches are needed, as well as ongoing professional development for new initiatives. There is a feeling that many recent program decisions have been top-down without adequate consultation of teachers and school leaders. Consequently, there are some strong opinions that some of these initiatives may not be the best approach for students. Program implementation can be different at each school and those differences become more evident as children transition to the middle school. Further, professional development to support changes needs to be more strategic, ongoing, and tailored to the individual needs of teachers.

### **Parent involvement**

While parent involvement and support is very strong in the district and is viewed as a strength, it also presents challenges because parents expect to be involved, especially in decisions and actions that affect program quality. There is a parent communication network in the community that must be acknowledged and dealt with for maintaining positive parent relationships and support. Many resident parents and school employees have gone through the Orange Public Schools and have returned because of their experiences in this family-oriented community. Many people know one another on a personal and professional level. There is an expectation that a new superintendent will maintain a culture of excellence in the schools and will appreciate the highly valued sense of history within the community.

### **Common Core curriculum and testing**

There is some consternation among parents about the Common Core in terms of curriculum implementation, especially in the area of mathematics and how to help their children. There is support for the Common Core among school leaders and teachers. Parents stated that they are not sure it is the standards that are the problem or if it is the curriculum selected to implement them. Nonetheless, they expressed much frustration over their inability to provide help and support for their children's school work. There is a need to develop a better understanding of "standards" and precisely what that means for the Orange schools as well as to provide opportunities for parents to learn how to help their children in their learning. This issue has also created a sense that there is too much testing and less time for the social aspects of schooling. Parents do not want the social aspects of going to school to be compromised because of the Common Core or too much testing.

### **Changing demographics and support for schools**

While Orange is a fairly stable community, there is a changing demographic in the community as well as in the schools. This can be observed in such areas as short-term residents seeking medical assistance from nearby health centers such as the Smilow Cancer Center at Yale. The diversity of home language backgrounds in children attending the public schools has increased and while that provides expanded cultural opportunities for students, it also presents a challenge to provide appropriate services that enable all children to reach high performance levels. People stay in Orange and as the population ages there is growing concern that support for sustaining school excellence may diminish. School facilities need upgrading, and as technology advances, efforts will be needed to ensure adequate resources to maintain an efficient and effective infrastructure to support learning and teaching.

Online survey participants expressed the following sentiments about challenges facing the Orange Public Schools.

### **CHALLENGES**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>Percent of All Responses</b>
Curriculum and instruction	62	19.4%
Public relations & communications	38	11.9%
Budget and finance	28	8.8%
Facilities and school safety	38	11.9%
Personnel & contract negotiations	13	4.1%
Relationships & team building	78	24.4%
Developing a shared vision	63	19.7%
Total:	320	

Focus group issues are reinforced by the top three online survey results. Relationship and team building concerns represent the highest percentage response. This is followed by concerns about the need to develop a shared vision for the future of the Orange Public Schools; this relates to the morale and collegiality issues where people in the education community desire to have their voices heard when it comes to program development and implementation. Again, curriculum and instruction concerns support focus group sentiments about Common Core and its implementation. Respondents were asked to check their top three items resulting in a total of 320 responses to this question.

### **MOST IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS**

Focus group participants were asked to identify what they considered to be the most important instructional area for the new superintendent to focus attention upon. While some of these issues and concerns may have been expressed under previous questions, they are repeated here with a different perspective. This is a small school district and the superintendent is expected to know and understand the issues related to teaching and learning that affect students, teachers, and parents. Further, a new superintendent will need to create the structures and processes that facilitate implementation of programs and services that continue to produce high quality learning. Collaboration and respecting the teacher voice in these matters is a sentiment expressed clearly by teachers, administrators, parents, and others who participated in the focus group sessions.

## **The most important issues are:**

- *Classroom instruction and the Common Core*
- *Collaboration in program/curriculum development*
- *Helping parents support student learning*
- *Strategic and systemic approaches to implementing programs with an view toward middle school*

### **Classroom Instruction and the Common Core**

Opinions vary and emotions run deep on the issue of Common Core State standards. One provocative question posed, “Is what we are doing really good for kids? The discussion needs to begin with the teachers.” There is some sentiment that teachers need to have more flexibility in scheduling the instructional day for their classes. There is a need to structure lessons but the decisions for what and how they teach must reflect the needs of students in individual classrooms. The district needs positive leadership to help teachers and parents navigate through the issues associated with Common Core.

### **Collaboration in program/curriculum development**

It has been made abundantly clear that the teacher voice has been absent from the selection of new programs and the design of curricula, especially as it relates to the Common Core. This has created morale problems among staff as well as a concern that their opinion matters little in what they need to teach their students. Such approaches certainly dampen spirits but, perhaps more importantly, they do not elicit “buy-in” or commitment to the programs. The enthusiasm with which teachers approach their work under these circumstances can be affected by this. It is heartening to note that the teachers are still eager to try new things and to engage in work to improve despite their recent experiences. They yearn for a culture of collegiality and collaboration and would wholeheartedly embrace a leader who could deliver on such a promise.

### **Parent support for student learning**

As stated previously, a strength of this school district is its high level of parent involvement and support for the schools and students. This is also a challenge in that parents want to be productively engaged and will exert their will if they feel they are not being listened to seriously. This seems most apparent in issues associated with Common Core but can easily shift to other program or procedural matters. Parents feel out of the loop in terms of their full understanding of what the Common Core is all about. They are not certain if it is the standards themselves that are at issue with what is best for children or if it the way those standards have been interpreted and have found their way into curricula/programs selected for their implementation. This uncertainty or lack of understanding will continue to breed discontent until it is adequately addresses.

## **Strategic and systemic approaches to program development**

There is a strong sentiment that, in addition to involving principals and teachers in program decisions, there is a need to be both strategic in approaching change/improvement efforts and there is a need to be more systemic in implementing those programs throughout the school district. In being strategic, change is based upon identified needs to improve and those needs can be supported with data. The change selected to meet identified needs must be thoroughly investigated and determined with reasonable assurance that it will accomplish the improvement goals. In being systemic, the planning and selection processes require broad participation from all schools in the district to ensure “buy-in” and a commitment from all to implement the programs decided upon. Some focus group participants expressed the opinion that as students enter middle school, there are discernable differences in their preparedness based upon the experiences provided at individual elementary schools. These differences can exacerbate transition problems for some children and can also complicate instructional delivery at the middle school. While the middle school is part of another school district (Amity Region # 5), there is longstanding collaboration and cooperation among all superintendents representing the regional district and its feeder school districts.

### **LEADERSHIP AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Focus group participants had more to say in this area than any other question. It is clear they would like a different leadership style than that which characterized their most recent experience. They were most professional and respectful in their comments and directed statements to preferred styles of interacting with others that would build rapport, confidence, and trust between the superintendent and the Board of Education, town officials, citizens, and the school community. They recognize the importance of the superintendent as the “lead” educator in advocating for Orange students and schools, and the significance of a respectful, effective communicator to accomplishing long-term school goals. The following characteristics dominated focus group conversations:

- *An inclusive leadership style*
- *A personable, approachable style of interacting with others*
- *A strong desire to be actively engaged in schools and community*
- *An effective communicator*

#### **Inclusive leadership style**

The new superintendent of schools will be expected to effectively utilize team approaches to deal with significant issues related to program and policy. School district employees are experienced and take great pride in their work. Most feel a need to be trusted and supported to do their work without the interference of micromanagement from any level, and expect the superintendent to act as a “buffer” as appropriate. The Orange Public Schools have extraordinarily dedicated, committed, and competent professionals who feel their voice has not been heard and that all in the schools and community would benefit by dialogue and deliberation before embarking on new initiatives. All want to feel assured that decisions made will result in

the “best” options for Orange students, families, and the community. The new superintendent should be a strategic, forward looking thinker with no preconceived agenda about what is best for the Orange Public Schools. Future directions need to be the result of collaborative efforts to determine the best approaches to attain the preferred future of the school district. A superintendent who leads and distributes leadership to others, as appropriate, will bring out the best in everyone and foster a culture of continued personal growth and increased human capital capacity for the school district. Finally, the new superintendent must have a working knowledge of elementary school education and demonstrate a willingness to learn alongside principals and teachers for new initiatives – teachers are willing to expend time and effort well beyond expectations if they know their leaders are as committed as they are. There is a strong desire for a superintendent who is future oriented and can work with school and community people to shape a vision for the Orange public schools. Furthermore, the superintendent will need to be able to translate that vision, with the help and support of others, into a strategic plan that move the district toward its vision.

### **Personable and approachable interaction style**

Focus group participants want a school superintendent who is a “people person.” This individual is one who genuinely cares about all the people in the school community and demonstrates this in words and actions. Parents want their children to know that the superintendent is more than a figurehead and know him/her as a person who actively engages students while visiting the schools and classrooms. Teachers want to know that the superintendent is a “straight shooter” who can be trusted. Attributes such as approachable, sincere, friendly, honest, and respectful were mentioned often. Sincerity, good judgment, good sense of humor, and a person of good character were also cited as desirable qualities in a new superintendent. The new superintendent will need to be resilient and able to handle pressure and criticism; that is one of the challenges of a high performing school district with strong parent involvement.

### **Engagement in schools and community**

School employees at all levels want a superintendent who knows them. There is an expectation that the new superintendent will be actively engaged in school and community activities, and will be invested in those activities when present. Observing classrooms in action and engaging teachers and students is important for rapport building and gaining first-hand knowledge of instructional and learning issues. Parents are reassured that policy decisions are being made by a knowledgeable leader when their children come home and inform that the superintendent visited their classroom – it develops confidence that decisions are not being made in a vacuum. Orange is a small, family-oriented community and much is to be gained by attending events and getting to know people in more relaxed, social situations. It benefits schools greatly, especially in Orange where so many teachers live in the community, when they see that the superintendent is concerned about the community as well as the schools. The Orange public schools have experienced more turnover in the superintendent position than desired. All focus group participants want a new superintendent who is committed to elementary school education and the Orange school district for a long-term; they want leadership stability and the opportunity to experience the growth and development that results during such relationships.

## Effective communication

Focus group participants want a superintendent who is articulate and respectful in speech and manner. Transparency is a “buzz” word that is now in vogue, but it expresses a critical requirement for establishing positive and constructive relationships in this community and the school district. The new superintendent must be seen as a person of their word with a willingness to be open and honest in dealing with people. The superintendent is required to work well with the Board of Education, town officials, and the various community agencies that frequently interact with school personnel on a variety of issues. Also, people must feel they are being heard. Recent experience with district leaders may have precipitated protocol breaches by some as they felt their needs were not addressed or important issues went unheeded. It will take some time to mend fences and restore appropriate communication networks and problem solving mechanism so all can feel valued and respected in their respective positions and with their responsibilities. There is a need to be able to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and different town agencies.

Online survey participants expressed the following preferences related to the experience, education background and expertise of the new superintendent.

### EDUCATION BACKGROUND

Education Level	Number	Percentage
Doctoral degree	29	16.1%
Advanced degree	58	32.0%
Personal qualities are more important than the degree	90	50.0%
Other (MBA)	3	1.6%
Total:	180	

More than half of the survey respondents indicate that the personal qualities of the new superintendent are more important than the earned degree. It is noted that an advanced degree is required for superintendent certification in the State of Connecticut. Several people checked more than one area resulting in a total of 180 responses.

## **BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE**

<b>Experience Type</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Superintendent of Schools	59	12.7%
School principal	114	24.5%
Classroom teacher	102	21.98%
Central office administrator	52	11.2%
Central office supervisor	24	5.1%
Specific elementary education experiences	104	22.6%
Private sector management	9	1.9%
Total:	464	

Online survey respondents are very clear in their preference for a new superintendent who was a principal and teacher with extensive elementary school experience. Superintendent or central office experience would be a benefit provided that the candidate demonstrates a thorough understanding of elementary school education. Respondents were asked to check their top three preferences in this question resulting in a total of 464 responses.

## **PERSONAL EXPERTISE**

<b>Area of Expertise</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Student safety & crisis management	37	7.7%
Relationships & team building	99	20.7%
Developing & managing budgets	34	7.1%
Personnel & contract negotiations	20	4.2%
Faculty relations & development	81	16.9%
Leading strategic plan implementation	39	8.1%
Policy & governance	3	0.6%
Public relations	24	5.0%
Curriculum & instruction	82	17.1%
Managing school construction projects	12	2.5%
Special education	20	4.2%
Communications	25	5.2%
Other	3	0.6%
Total:	479	

The personal expertise desired in a new superintendent of schools expressed by online survey respondents reinforces the sentiments expressed in focus groups. The three most important areas are (1) relationships and team building, (2) curriculum and instruction, and (3) faculty relations and development. Other important areas requiring attention are (4) strategic plan implementation, (5) student safety and crisis management, and (6) developing and managing budgets. Respondents were asked to check up to four items resulting in 479 responses.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Focus group participants were given an opportunity to express opinion or concerns about issues that may not have emerged through prior questions. The issues vary and many are redundant from prior questions. The following list provides a random listing of these thoughts and further explanation is provided where needed.

- There is a need for better collaboration with “sister” elementary schools in Bethany and Woodbridge in order to ensure all students have similar experiences upon entering the Amity Middle School.
- Continued support for fine and performing arts programs and LEAP is needed – emphasis on academics should not detract from the creative opportunities these programs provide. There is some concern that emphasis on Common Core will diminish time and support for these programs; all-day kindergarten needs to be developed and flow seamlessly through the grades.
- Need to proactively plan as enrollments decline. This needs to be viewed as an opportunity to improve school district organization.
- Do not take disagreements personally – the new superintendent needs to set a tone such that people feel free to engage in dialogue and have the freedom to express opinions; build positive and constructive working relationships with Town government bodies.

