

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DeKalb County School District

Prepared by: Georgia School Boards Association

This report presents the findings of the Community Engagement Sessions conducted by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) in December 2022 for the superintendent search for DeKalb County School District (DCSD). The data contained within the report were obtained from input GSBA Associates received during community engagement sessions held on December 8, 13, and 15, 2022. The community engagement sessions were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new DCSD superintendent and to assist the Board in moving forward with candidate selections and interview preparations. Additionally, the stakeholder sessions collected information on three key points: the district's strengths to be considered in building the superintendent profile, the major challenges before the district, and the leadership skills needed in the next DCSD superintendent.

The GSBA Superintendent Search Process Framework is heavily grounded in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL):

- Based on research and practical application that impact students' academic success and well-being
- Student-centered and pinpoint leadership best practices designed to ensure that educational leaders improve student learning and secure more equitable outcomes
- Focused on the readiness of educational leaders to "meet challenges of the job today and in the future as education, schools, and society continue to transform"

The PSEL Standards were the foundation for the discussion prompts.

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

Participation

Engagement Sessions: December 8, 13, and 15, 2022

Participants: 225

The community engagement sessions contributed several perceptions, opinions, and ideas to develop the leadership profile for the new DCSD superintendent. The narrative summaries contain common themes gathered through discussion prompts. In addition, the graphic charts provide rankings based on the activity poll priorities entered by each participant.

Discussion Prompt #1:

As you reflect on the importance of PSEL Standards in the superintendent search process, what major strengths come to mind for DCSD that the superintendent must be prepared to protect and elevate to the next level? (PSEL Standards)

DeKalb County School District is the third largest public school district in Georgia, with a rich history of cultural diversity, whose student body represents over 166 languages and 155 nations. DCSD's cultural responsiveness through strong parent and family engagement is a model that must be protected and nurtured to allow families to feel comfortable and to engage parents to leverage student achievement.

Rigorous programs, i.e., International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, STE(A)M, Career, Technical, & Agricultural Education (CTAE), provide robust course offerings. In addition, School Choice options are available for early college academy, the Arts, charter, Montessori, theme, and magnet.

DCSD curriculum is research-based and focuses on the academic growth of the whole child while recognizing the importance of non-academic factors. Students represent the strength of the district. Teachers possess higher education degrees and regularly participate in professional development and training. Technology integration and access to technology resources are prevalent in the learning environments across PK-12.

Additionally, there must be a continued focus on mediation/conflict resolutions, wrap-around services, mental health, and social-emotional learning for students and staff. These services should be protected and elevated.

The new DCSD superintendent must ensure equitable services to all students across all schools, including equity in education in learning environments that create fair and equal access to resources for all students.

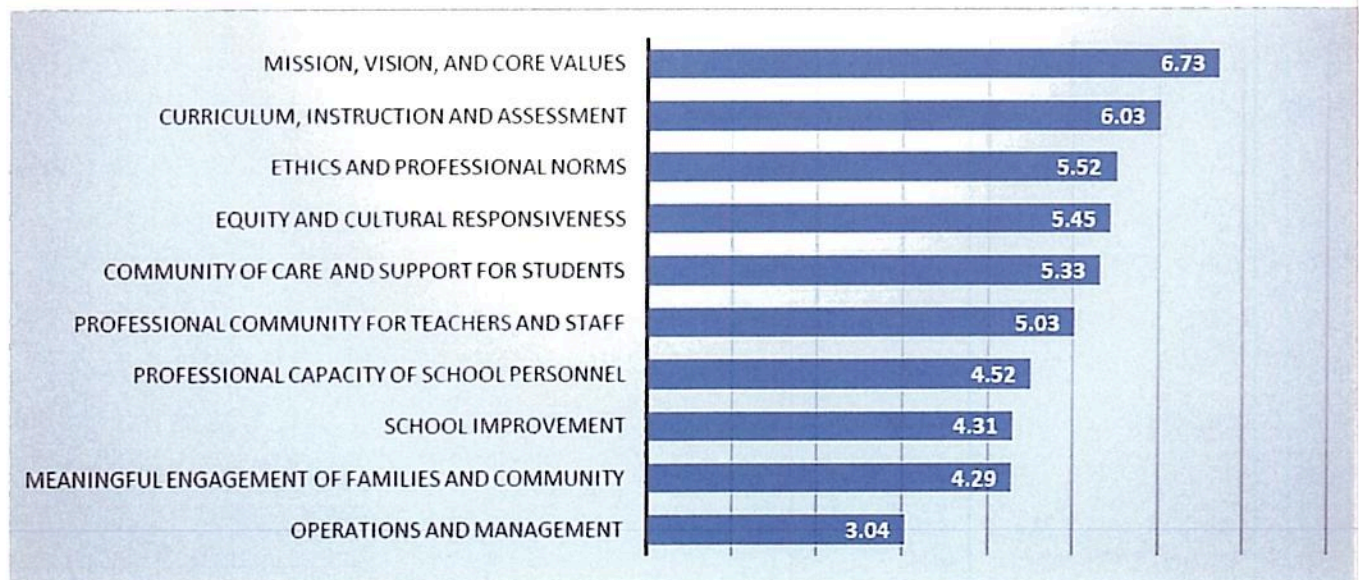
Other strengths include continued work with the community and non-profit partners. Protect funding resources, keep communication open with the public, work with elected officials, and support financial literacy and book buddy programs for students.

Poll Results of Discussion Prompt #1

What district strengths should be considered in building the superintendent profile? (PSEL Standards)

Rank the following PSEL standards based on the strengths of DCSD from 1 to 10, with 1 being the highest and 10 the lowest.

- Mission, Vision, and Core Values
- Ethics and Professional Norms
- Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Community of Care and Support for Students
- Professional Capacity of School Personnel
- Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
- Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
- Operations and Management
- School Improvement



Discussion Prompt #2:

What major challenges are before the district? (Organizational Effectiveness)

Considering organizational effectiveness, what DeKalb School District weaknesses come to mind that the superintendent must be experienced in and poised to immediately address?

Community engagement participants referenced the need for DCSD to select a superintendent who is experienced and committed to accountability and transparency in day-to-day operations, including the allocation and flow of two billion in funds for best use directly to students. In addition, experience leading a large urban organization is essential.

The new DCSD superintendent must be a bold, ethical leader who understands the issues associated with board governance and the skill set needed to address the superintendent's role and responsibilities separate from the school board. Additionally, the superintendent's ability to build an effective cabinet team for long-term success is critical.

Post-pandemic, the students are behind academically, particularly in reading and math. The pandemic caused learning loss among students. The new DCSD superintendent must have an instructional model to improve educational standards for struggling students, including addressing a core group who have not mastered standards even though promoted to the next grade level.

Facilities and operations of school buildings are a priority equity concern. The perception of quality and application of services of the north/south/central divide is still very prevalent amongst stakeholders. It must be a priority to address facilities and resources for academics and athletics, including using and allocating ESPLOST resources. An experienced leader must listen across all regions of the district while understanding the variety of needs.

Attention is required to improve teacher recruitment, retention, training, and support. Teacher morale is an issue, and the new DCSD superintendent must address culture and climate. The district needs to continue the mental health work to address teacher burnout. It is necessary to review the student-to-counselor and student-to-teacher ratios and their impact on instruction.

Other areas for review include:

- Differentiated instruction at all levels
- Support personnel for teachers
- Teacher inclusion during curriculum creation
- Improved communication between the central office and schools.

School violence and safety are on the minds of parents, students, and staff. Therefore, a sustainable approach to integrating discipline and social learning in schools is necessary. Parent and family engagement is a strength, but work must continue to build involvement in some areas of the district, including building trust and leveraging parents to participate in the

conversation. In addition, stakeholders, including parent councils, and PTA/PTO organization involvement, should inform decisions and influence outcomes.

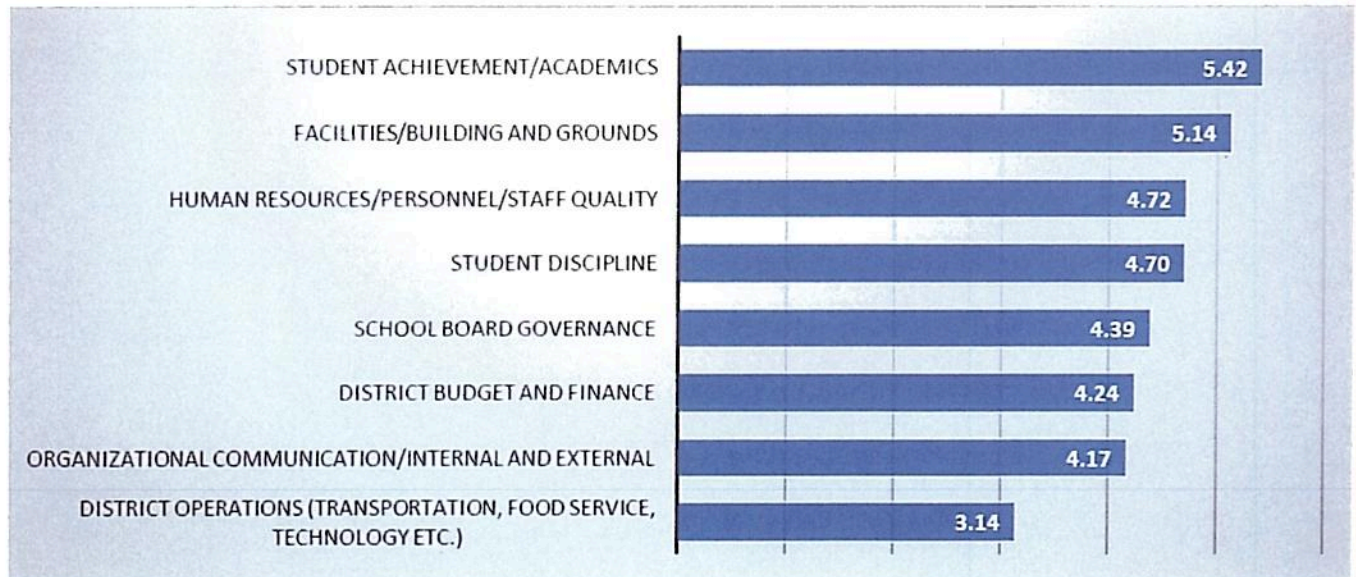
Other challenges noted are the need for more bus drivers, improving operations after recent financial audit findings, school calendar concerns, a deeper analysis of organizational effectiveness, and the need to embed character programs in the curriculum.

Poll Results of Discussion Prompt #2

What major challenges are before the district? (Organizational Effectiveness)

Rank the following challenges based on the areas of need for DCSD from 1 to 8, with 1 representing DCSD's greatest weakness.

- Student Achievement/Academics
- Facilities/Building and Grounds
- Human Resources/Personnel/Staff Quality
- Organizational Communication/Internal and External
- Student Discipline
- District Budget and Finance
- School Board Governance
- District Operations (Transportation, Food Service, Technology etc.)
- Other



Discussion Prompt #3:

What leadership skills are needed in the DCSD superintendent? (Superintendent Job Standards)

What words describe your ideal DeKalb School Superintendent/CEO and why?

The new DCSD Superintendent must be a bold and resilient leader for a large urban school district rich in culture and diversity. The innovative leader is a business-savvy visionary with a high level of ethics and compassion for collaboration and engagement with internal and external stakeholders.

The new DCSD Superintendent must be a problem-solver and an authentic leader that will model a high level of accountability and transparency to build trust with the parents, teachers, students, staff, and the Board.

The new DCSD Superintendent will have to collaborate with the community and prioritize listening to parents with an open mind across all regions of the district. There must be visibility in all communities and lead in a way that reflects the community's values.

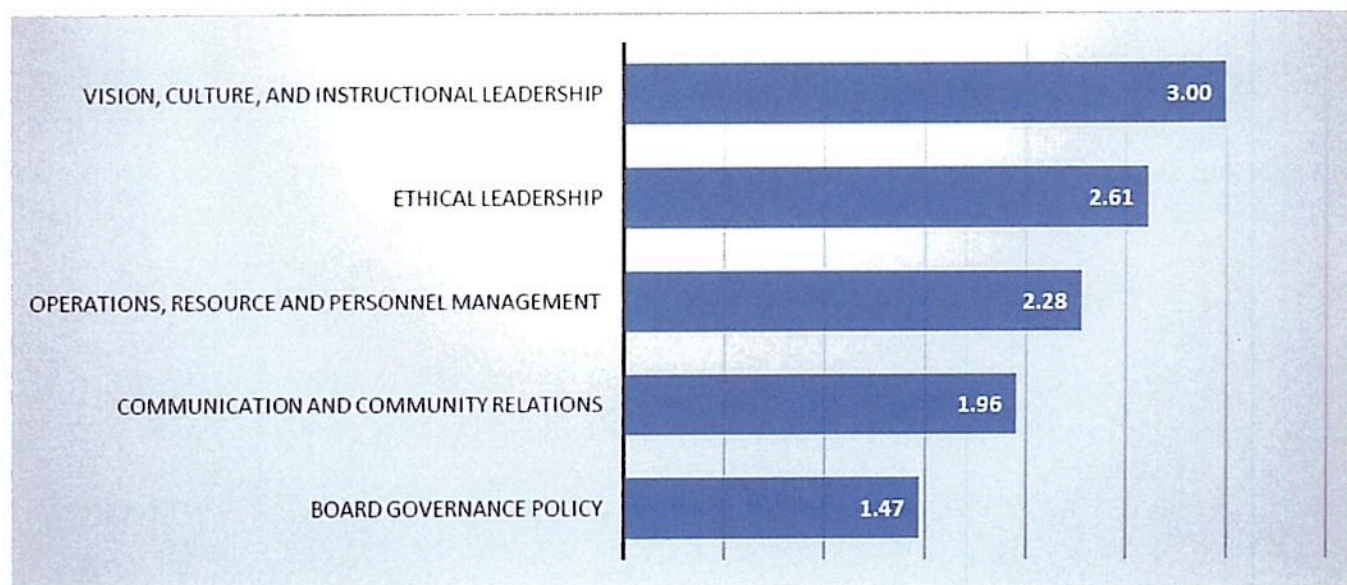
The new DCSD Superintendent must have demonstrable experience in board governance, instruction, facilities & operations, budget, and human resources management. The new leader must understand the connection between teachers and the classroom experience and be willing to work on the front line to improve academic performance. There must be a commitment to equity for all students in access to education and facility resources.

Poll Results of Discussion Prompt #3

What leadership skills are needed in the DCSD superintendent? (Superintendent Job Standards)

List the top 3 leadership skills needed in the DCSD superintendent from 1 to 3, with 1 representing the most important skill needed in the DCSD superintendent.

- Vision, Culture, and Instructional Leadership
- Operations, Resource and Personnel Management
- Board Governance and Policy
- Communication and Community Relations
- Ethical Leadership



In closing, the community engagement sessions were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new DCSD superintendent and to assist the Board in moving forward with candidate selections and interview preparations. The GSBA team would like to thank all the participants who attended the community group meetings. Additionally, GSBA would like to recognize the DCSD staff members who assisted with scheduling the meetings, locating the appropriate meeting venues, and providing on-site support.