

**Draft Consultants' Report to the Sullivan West Central School District  
Board of Education  
Regarding the Search for a New Superintendent  
For Release to the Public**

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Introduction

This report serves as a synthesis of the data collected from the online survey posted to the District's website and meetings between eight (including the Board of Education) focus groups and the consultants. It covers three broad areas: 1) the traits, characteristics, and behaviors the new Superintendent should possess: 2) opportunities for the new Superintendent: and 3) challenges for the new Superintendent.

The purpose in sharing this information is to inform the Board regarding what the school community and community at-large see as important. The report can also be shared with the new Superintendent to assist them in developing an entry plan and setting priorities. The consultants have, for the most part, chosen not to interpret what the data "says"; the consultants do discuss how the results from the online survey and focus group discussions relate to and support each other.

Survey

The survey, which was posted for approximately 10 days on the District's website, was completed by 59 respondents. The consultants analyzed the survey for salient information and present a summary, below.

Preferred Experiences and Skills

From a list of 26 experiences and skills, respondents were asked to indicate the **five** that they desired or felt were most critical for the next Superintendent of Schools to possess.

The following is a ranking from across all respondents of the **top 10** attributes in order of preference along with the number of votes received. Each of these attributes received at least 14 votes; no other attribute garnered more than 10 votes.

It is worth noting that at least 58% of the respondents indicated that the next Superintendent should have experience with the #1 characteristic - **creating a positive school culture** and the #2 characteristic - **identifying problems and developing effective solutions**.

1. Ability to create a positive school culture: **37**
2. Ability to clearly identify problems and develop effective solutions: **34**
3. Has successfully engaged parents as partners in the education of their children: **22**

4. Experience as a teacher or related position, e.g., school counselor, school social worker, etc.: **19**
5. Proven commitment to addressing the social/emotional needs of students: **18**
6. Committed to involving others in decision-making: **17**
7. Visibility in and engagement with the schools and community: **16**
8. Proven commitment to improving student achievement: **14**
9. Leadership experience in a rural setting: **14**
10. Promotes positive labor-management relations: **14**

### Comments from the Surveys

Below is a list of comments received from the respondents. The comments are listed in the order they were received. Because this version of the Report will be made public, a limited number of comments were edited or excluded because some members of the Sullivan West school community may find the comments hurtful or offensive. Otherwise, the comments are presented as written by the respondents. All comments were shared in a confidential report prepared for the Board.

- Critical thinking and effective communication
- Selecting the next superintendent is a challenging but extremely important task. If we could find an individual with all of the traits listed above it would be a home run, but obviously that is unlikely. So to pick just a few, improving student achievement, fostering a fun, supportive, inclusive, challenging school environment, while supporting the staff and teachers who do the actual educating I feel is most important. -Improving student achievement however goes beyond improving test scores. That is certainly a part of it, but it is also about real world preparation and giving each student the support and best chance for success that is possible. When these kids graduate the real world is coming for them whether they are ready or not. So let's prepare them to be successful. -As far as school culture goes, this is important because it can shape the attitude and mindset of a student from very early on. Creating an environment where they can thrive, be themselves, and have a chance to forget their outside problems can have a huge impact on their education. School should be fun, it should be challenging, it should be teaching responsibility and preparing them to follow their dreams. -Let's talk labor. In order for any multi layered organization to be successful there has to be effective communication and understanding from the top to the bottom. What that means for a school, is management supporting the teachers. That's not just in pay and benefits but on a classroom and everyday level as well. That's listening to teacher and staff concerns, finding out what's working and what isn't, and a constant open dialogue of successes and challenges and ways to fix them. Let's reward our best performing teachers and work with the underperforming (ineffective) ones to help them improve. Maybe a review of the tenure process is in order...At the end of the day the students are what's most important. They are the ones that deserve our

absolute best. The teachers are the facilitators and the ones in the trenches doing the hard work. If we take care of the teachers and staff we take care of our students by default. In closing, let's sum it up: Let's keep the main thing the main thing, which is preparing our students for the future, for the real world. Let's keep them safe so they can focus on learning. Finally, let's support the staff who actually does the work. If we can do these three important things, their success will be our greatest reward. Good luck!

- Already works within the system... Hire from within
- Ability to identify those who are doing their job because of the love of educating others.
- Someone who can bring SW back together
- Understands our community or one similar
- Rural setting experience
- Local, community minded, involves parents, good communicator
- The Superintendent needs to have follow through, check up on decisions made, and adjust when needed.
- I would like a superintendent who is well rounded and highly intelligent. It is important that he or she recognizes the social contract between a rural community and the school which it supports including looking to the future of our community and the type of citizens our children will become. In looking toward our future citizens, I would like a superintendent who prioritizes health and safety including a zero tolerance policy regarding drugs which, especially when in schools, can destroy a rural community for multiple generations. We also need a superintendent who recognizes that declining populations are a threat to our schools and works to make enrollment and living in our school district appealing. This is even more important as the Roscoe/Livingston Manor schools combine and are able to offer more resources to students. I would also be in favor of a superintendent with a track record of hiring women in administrative positions. As a mother of a daughter, it is important to me that women are seen to be making decisions and that there is zero tolerance for male administrators treating female staff differently than male staff. I did not mention education and social emotional development, but I feel that it is understood that any candidate our school will consider will have an excellent record in both of those areas, being able to present new research, information, and methods to our community in a way that aligns with the challenges of being a rural but very diverse community.

- Willing to stand up to Dept. of Ed and any other state officials
- Needs to stand up to his board when their monitory decisions are detrimental to the students.
- Outreach to community organizations to collaborate and fill the needs of our rural community is important. Removing the stigma associated with vo-tech programs and community college as a steppingstone. Lastly listening to the needs of students. Encourage suggestions
- Transparent with communication to parents. Honest. Straight forward.
- Trust and listen to your professional staff. They work here, live here, see and know intimately, what the issues are and have great ideas for improving the district. DO NOT Micromanage. Reside in the district.
- Able to push back against angry unreasonable parents
- Unbiased decisions
- Strong non liberal personality with a can do attitude for our children's best interest.
- Technology, recruiting, leadership, experienced, committed, positive, team player
- Knowledgeable in school related programs, work with the teachers, parents, and the students to help them achieve what's best for the students. Be relatable, also help the school district grow strong in academic programs.
- The ability to set examples, not to be a follower, but lead with the intention of what is best for the students.
- Our Superintendent should be transparent and let stakeholders know if there is a problem immediately and allow them to be part of the solution. They must also be an effective communicator.
- Working with kids with disabilities and diversity
- We need a superintendent who will be visible to the public. They will attend functions and be involved with the school community. We also need a superintendent who believes in shared decision making and working with the staff

and community. No someone who will make decisions and share them, but really listening and involving others.

- Someone who understands or is familiar with our community would be preferred
- Someone who is student oriented
- The new superintendent should focus on improving instruction and the use of technology in the district.
- Experience with positive behavior supports

### Focus Group Comments

The facilitated sessions with the focus groups provided some robust data for consideration. Drs. Lawrence and Ramming used the research based Creative Problem Solving tools “Brainstorming” to help groups generate ideas and “Highlighting” to help groups converge upon themes from among the many ideas they generated. The data are presented around these three questions:

- 1) What might be all the traits, characteristics, skills, and behaviors the next Superintendent should possess?
- 2) What might be all the challenges facing the next Superintendent?
- 3) What might be all the opportunities available to the next Superintendent?

The themes are summarized by focus group, below. Responses to question #2, challenges, that some may find offensive or hurtful, have been omitted from this public version of the report.

### **STUDENTS**

#### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Authenticity
- Open minded
- Experience in a similar environment
- Hands-on
- Passionate
- Financially smart

#### *Challenges*

- Location - response to weather
- Covid related issues
- Staff turnover due to retirement
- Treatment of minority groups
- Infrastructure issues

- Debate over start time
- Drugs

#### *Opportunities*

- Active student participation
- Location
- Good faculty and staff
- New facilities and technology

### **PARENTS**

#### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Knowledgeable about the dynamics of SPED programming
- Listens and makes well informed decisions
- Values teacher aids and support staff
- Values sports
- Knows understands and will be involved in the District and the towns within the District
- Visible and engaged with students

#### *Challenges*

- Difficulties of the pandemic
- Budget constraints
- Transportation
- Tough board
- Frustrated parents
- Staffing
- Dynamics of a large and geographically challenged rural district

#### *Opportunities*

- Embrace a small-town life
- Continue to grow “Dog Pride”
- Bring school and community together
- Opportunities for change and growth

### **COMMUNITY**

#### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Effective and reflective communicator
- Validating of all students
- Promotes *all* career and school opportunities
- Ability to motivate people
- Knowledge of rural communities
- Broad experience in Pre-K 12 public education
- Not afraid to make tough decisions

#### *Challenges*

- Being visible and becoming involved
- Getting support from staff
- Recruiting good staff
- Limited background knowledge/context of District contract negotiations

#### *Opportunities*

- Involved parents
- Nature outside your door
- Forming relationships with school and community
- Slower pace lifestyle... Rural and country living
- High energy and school spirit

### **TEACHERS**

#### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Skilled communicator
- Transparent
- Authentic
- Review and recommit to policies and procedures
- Proactively value early education not just test scoring and regents scores
- Academic focus top priority
- Ensures accountability
- Experience and commitment to SDM

#### *Challenges*

- Split board
- Stressed and frustrated employees

#### *Opportunities*

- To engage stakeholders and build a strong community
- Strong human capital
- Strong teaching faculty

### **UNIONIZED SUPPORT STAFF (SRPs)**

#### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Honesty
- Fair negotiator
- Open minded
- Thanks for themselves

#### *Challenges*

- Low staff morale
- Establishing accountability for students

#### *Opportunities*

- Best school District in Sullivan County
- Room to grow
- Open to change... Just include us in with the change process

## **PRINCIPALS**

### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Integrity
- Understands rural education
- Effective communicator
- Open to suggestions

### *Challenges*

- Teacher shortage
- Resistance to moving the District forward

### *Opportunities*

- Creative thinking team
- Strong community support
- Resourceful

## **MANAGEMENT/CONFIDENTIAL EMPLOYEES**

### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- Forward thinking
- Excellent communicator
- Student focused
- Visionary
- Inspirational

### *Challenges*

- Recruiting and retaining staff
- Fiscal
- New board

### *Opportunities*

- Supportive community outside of school
- Skilled and supportive school community inside and outside the school

## **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

### *Traits/Characteristics/Behaviors/Skills*

- A proven leader
- Effective communicator with all stakeholders
- Continues to build a positive culture
- Trustworthy
- Demonstrable experience in education

- Interested in the growth of the whole child/student

### *Challenges*

- Ongoing financial awareness
- Success of secondary reorganization
- Infrastructure
- Transportation (geography)
- External challenges
- Evolving technologies (acquisition and use)
- A transitional board
- Staffing shortages

### *Opportunities*

- Location
- Great place to live
- Opportunity for personal and career growth
- Great place for a person and their family

### Conclusion

The pandemic has had widespread impact on students, staff, Board, and community. Perhaps the biggest challenge any superintendent faces is to restore a sense of normalcy and, with clear, consistent, and otherwise effective communication strategies and skills, once again focus on what matters most – the students. This is particularly true for the new Superintendent who must first establish relationships and build trust with stakeholders. Sullivan West stakeholders, across the board, have shared that they want a Superintendent who can capitalize on the perceived strengths of the District and, as a visible and effective communicator, build a culture that continues to focus on doing what is best for students.

The consultants will share this information in discussions with prospective candidates.

We suggest that the Board utilize this report to understand what the school community and community at-large see as important. The Board can also share the report with the new Superintendent as a means of helping them develop an entry plan and establish priorities.