

Lakewood City School District
Lakewood's Vision for a Superintendent - Research Report
2018



BURGES & BURGES
S T R A T E G I S T S



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Lakewood's Vision for a Superintendent

The next superintendent of Lakewood City School District (LCSD), more than in almost any other community we've seen, needs to envision the schools and community as a single system. Lakewood it's fair to say is a community that cares a great deal about learning and expects the superintendent to be an active learner, as well as a strong leader. Even the skills that continuously jumped to the forefront – collaboration, empathy, strategy, financial management, appreciation of all people, and, as important as any, making sure the District teaches the whole child – are grounded not only in the school buildings, but in the Lakewood community. Satisfying these values which exist in both the City and the District is no easy order. But for a superintendent to succeed in Lakewood, he/she must embrace them in the same way the school community does.

Our research had limits. But combined with our prior work, experience in Lakewood, and informal input from so many others, it's clear that working with educators and citizens to produce well-rounded, well-educated, and well prepared graduates, who are as diverse as America, is Lakewood's vision. That vision sets a high standard for the next superintendent.

Executive Summary

The goal of the multi-faceted project for LCSD was to gather extensive input about the future needs of the district from parents, teachers, staff, and citizens in preparation for the Board of Education's review of candidates. Hundreds of people participated, and their valuable input will help the Board members align the next superintendent's vision, skills and character with the main stakeholders' view of the future of the schools. Ultimately, this feedback will also benefit the next leader as he/she will have a window into how the District's main stakeholders view the future of the schools.

Each step of the project informed the next stage, so our instruments and questionnaires become more specific, until they reached a more quantifiable stage. We began by conducting in-depth telephone interviews with ten individuals closest to the District, including each of the Board members, the Superintendent, Treasurer, and three building principals. Using these leaders' thoughts and feedback, we then developed a listening session guide to gather more about how teachers, staff, parents, and residents perceived the District, its priorities, and its future leader. We facilitated four listening sessions, two with teachers and staff, and two with parents and residents, to provide an opportunity for them to share their input and feedback. Then finally, we fielded an online survey with 803 completed responses, which was composed of items based on the input we heard from the previous two phases.

We shared the results of each phase with the Board of Education, providing a glimpse into the District's stakeholders view of the future, and the qualities and experiences they value most in the next leader. This information will help inform members of the Board of Education, and hopefully guide them to a candidate, who may not check every single box, but whose vision and values align best with those of the stakeholders.

As you can see from the results below, and the sheer number of online survey responses – stakeholders care a lot about the District, its future, and the next superintendent. They perceive selecting a new superintendent as an opportunity to continue improving what Superintendent Patterson has built over his tenure, and to bring new energy, ideas, and solutions to items that stakeholders are hopeful will be addressed.



In-depth interviews

To start, Burges & Burges Strategists conducted 10 confidential, telephone interviews with leaders to gather their views on the District, its core values, and where they perceive LCSD is heading. Interviews occurred from December 20 through 27 using a discussion guide developed in cooperation with LCSD administrators. The following summary intends to assist LCSD Board of Education members as they look to bring on a superintendent whose vision and skills align with the values and beliefs of those stakeholders closest to the District.

Overall takeaways

Throughout these interviews, leaders communicated the District is stable and on a good course to continue to meet the needs of students where they are. LCSD works hard to educate every child to his or her potential, but, like many districts, has internal and external issues the administration must be thoughtful about. It is evident leaders welcome the challenge of educating students from around the world who have come to call Lakewood home, and identify this, in and of itself, as an aspect that sets the District apart. Leaders recognize this opportunity to bring on a new superintendent with the right vision, and leadership style to guide its next chapter.

Describing the District

We started the interview by asking leaders to describe LCSD as they would describe it to a friend, or another leader not familiar with the area. The leaders we spoke with often began by describing the unique, dynamic community of Lakewood, and its cultural impact on the District. Leaders highlighted the community's diversity - economically, racially, and culturally – and shared that Lakewood residents are defined frequently in terms of their activism and engagement.

A few leaders included the District's excellent school facilities, and hardworking and talented teaching staff, while others focused on the high academic standards, challenging course work, and abundant extracurricular activities available for students at every level. Leaders appreciated the long-standing traditions in the community, including generations of families who have lived here all their lives, and, most notably, the tradition of strong support for the schools.

As leaders think about the next superintendent, they want someone who fits into the fabric of the community, which is diverse in so many ways. This person must be passionate about education, and must be excited to become a part of Lakewood and its traditions.

What LCSD does best

In addition to what makes the community and District unique, we asked leaders to share what they believe the schools do well. Leaders praised the District's ability to meet the needs of the whole student and provide a well-rounded experience to help each student achieve more than one year's worth of academic growth each year. Leaders discussed the District's ability to balance the needs of its students – from the brightest of the bright to those who must overcome life's toughest obstacles.

Though a steep challenge, leaders applauded the District's capacity to stimulate both the left- and right-side of the brain through strong academics and a wide array of elective, extracurricular, and career preparation offerings to choose from, such as visual and performing arts, athletics, clubs, West Shore Career-Technical programs, College Credit Plus, and AP Courses. "There is something for everybody," one leader stated, which was a common theme throughout the interviews.

Leaders also praised LCSD's committed, high quality staff, and their student-focused approach--for without people like them the District would not be where it is today. Additionally, some leaders mentioned the positive relationship between the administration and the District's three unions, and the



importance of continuing to cultivate this valuable relationship. Fostering positive relationships, as well as maintaining trust and communication, whether with internal or external stakeholders, were both key points leaders commonly articulated.

Looking to the future

Stability on key success factors

When thinking about the future of the District, its stability on key success factors encouraged leaders the most. Leaders are encouraged by the District's financial stability, responsibility, and transparency, highlighting the way LCSD maximizes resources and pares down its operations to keep them streamlined. Likewise, the ongoing support of the community, and history of passing levies was another reassuring financial factor. Leaders viewed the stability and strength of the housing market in Lakewood, and the demand for houses keeping property taxes steady or rising as another positive attribute.

A few leaders also expressed optimism about the stability in the District's workforce, and the high number of applicants for open positions. In addition, with the completion of the long-range Facilities Master Plan, the top-quality facilities were another lasting feature which reassured leaders, knowing their updated, efficient facilities will provide the essential space for 21st-century learning for decades to come.

State priorities

While the District's recent reading and writing scores show significant growth and the value added scores encouraged some leaders, others expressed greater concern about the future of testing and mandates. The "changing climate of accountability" at the state and federal level, unfunded mandates, and the emphasis on test scores rather than the District's ability to keep students moving forward worried these leaders. Leaders also shared their fear about mandates that could tie the Board's and administration's hands, preventing them from implementing initiatives they deem valuable. Likewise, leaders commented on the ways these mandates already bring on stress for teachers. Additional requirements and evaluations are already a worry as more and more work is packed into a teacher's very full day.

In addition to mandates, leaders expressed apprehension about what future funding cuts might look like at the federal, state, and even local levels. At least one leader wondered how long the community will continue to support tax levies as the State continues to shift more and more financial burden to local governments. Leaders shared it is imperative for LCSD to continue to be proactive in finding ways to save money and maximize resources, as the District has in the past, to maintain existing community support.

Economic sustainability

Other items that worried leaders as they looked toward the future of LCSD included declining enrollment and declining incomes, as Lakewood's economy is dependent on the economic well-being of the City of Cleveland. These declines would result in less funding, and therefore fewer resources to allocate towards programs and opportunities the community has come to expect. A few leaders were concerned about preserving course offerings and electives as the District opts not to replace employees as they retire to continue showing fiscal prudence. As one leader acknowledged, "When things go away, they don't come back."

It is clear leaders are cognizant of the expectation and importance of ensuring the District delivers a variety of course offerings and opportunities to meet the needs and interests of its diverse student population. But it is also clear leaders are aware of the threats to preserve these experiences, which are critical components to their mission and student-centric approach of providing well-rounded experiences for every child.



Community relationships

Although leaders viewed the relationship between the City of Lakewood and LCSD as positive, a few shared some warnings as well. Leaders discussed the collaboration and cooperation that has defined the relationship for a number of years, but were concerned undertones of negativity from parts of the community could potentially disrupt this accordance. Leaders acknowledged how the District must continue to meet and work together with the City, find ways to partner, and take full advantage of shared resources, but also remain independent and not beholden to it.

Prioritizing the values of its main stakeholders

Leaders emphasized the critical need for the next superintendent to take their time to understand, recognize, and prioritize the values of its main stakeholders - teachers, staff, unions, parents, students, alumni, and the community. As one leader stated, LCSD's stakeholders are "strong, independent and willful people who need to feel heard, validated, and respected."

Leaders articulated that stakeholders value a culture which supports students' progress and learning in a safe and productive environment. The District's main stakeholders value opportunities for every child, and allocating resources for these opportunities even-handedly. In addition, they value Lakewood's diverse community, and the way the student population mirrors this reality. Leaders we spoke with shared that many stakeholders can look beyond raw test scores because the full narrative of the District illustrates how imperative it is for teachers and staff to meet students where they are, recognizing this work is not always measured by the state. Stakeholders also value the quality teachers and staff who prepare the youngest citizens to grow into responsible members of the community.

Throughout the discussions, leaders often returned to the value of engaging with and listening to their main stakeholders. There seemed to be an understood—and adhered to—expectation that LCSD will solicit stakeholders' input and feedback on possible changes before decisions are made. Leaders shared how imperative this active dialogue and responsiveness is to maintaining the District's strong, trusted, and transparent relationship with stakeholders. More than once, leaders discussed the value of bringing stakeholders along in the decision making process, helping people understand why a change is being considered, and ensuring all voices are heard before a final decision is made.

The next superintendent

Personal and professional qualities and expectations

Leaders were very thoughtful when they shared what personal and professional qualities the next LCSD superintendent should have to be effective in this community. They characterized someone who is:

- Dignified, sophisticated, well-traveled, pleasant, approachable, and engaging
- Loyal to students, values diversity, and committed to opportunities for every child
- Willing to be visible and connected to the community, expending their own time to attend formal and informal functions instead of sending a subordinate on their behalf
- Emotionally intelligent, hearing and listening to what people are saying, while knowing they are not expected to have all the answers
- Thoughtful, collaborative, and proactive in taking the necessary time to bring people along in the decision-making process and follow-through once a decision is made
- Strategic in their ability to maximize resources – not just spend money - by talking to the right people, identifying a plan, and following through
- Willing to work with the District's three unions, and maintain and cultivate those ongoing relationships, as previously mentioned



Leadership style

Leaders agreed the District is on a positive trajectory, and the next superintendent will be inheriting a stable, successful District, but one not without challenges. To facilitate getting the District from where it is now, to where leaders would like it to go there were a number of items mentioned to keep in mind.

First, leaders want to remind the next superintendent to be an effective communicator and listener. They want this person to have a strong vision and creativity, coupled with a set of principles and philosophies that guide them. Leaders also want the next superintendent to be humble, service-oriented, and collaborative. As one leader said, "Nothing that is built to last is done in isolation." They urge this person to learn about the community and stakeholders, and get to know them before making any changes. They want the new superintendent to utilize the grassroots input and energy that is unique to Lakewood, but also to know how to manage this communication process to ensure feedback is used appropriately. Leaders want the next superintendent to use the talents and strengths of the cabinet and administrators and trust their institutional knowledge and experience, while also serving as a mentor for them.

Furthermore, leaders want this new superintendent to trust their frontline employees. Teachers and staff who interact with students and parents must feel comfortable sharing what they know and the information they receive to ensure the District continues to meet the needs of students and families.

The next superintendent must also accept the shared-responsibility structure of the Board and treat members as equals, communicating with all of them not just those in leadership positions. In addition, the next superintendent must be able to balance the use of quantitative data to inform an opinion, but also look at the whole picture and other contributing factors.

Finally, leaders want this person to bring energy and a drive to make things happen, someone who, once a path is decided on, communicates their goal, then sticks to it, and brings it to fruition.

Vision for the District

As leaders look toward the future of LCSD, many of their statements portrayed a broad vision of providing a well-rounded, positive experience for students. From expanding pre-school for every child through partnerships with the City to individualized learning and engaging with students on the verge of dropping out, leaders were intentional in thinking about the whole child and supporting the needs of each one to help them reach their highest potential. As one leader shared, "every child has to be better off for walking in our door." Another leader highlighted the significance of teaching students how to participate in and contribute to their safe environment by standing up and making a difference. Others stated the importance of continued active community engagement and addressing issues proactively to help position the District so it is prepared for what comes its way. Additionally, leaders recommended the District identify more ways to engage with the community to help build a mutual understanding of its direction and goals.

Conclusion

LCSD is a quality school district built on trust, communication, and its people – the most important asset. Its main stakeholders are fully dedicated to the success of the District, so it is no surprise that finding the next superintendent is an exciting opportunity to introduce a new person to this special place filled with both challenges and joys. Each year the District welcomes students from around the world into its doors, and this year leaders will be ready to welcome a new superintendent - one who pays homage to the strong, stable foundation built by past leaders, but one who is ready to bring new energy and new ideas to carry on the District's mission and success.



Listening Sessions

In collaboration with LCSD, Burges & Burges Strategists scheduled four listening sessions – two with employees, and two with parents and community members. LCSD invited participants via e-mail invitations, the District’s web page, and the digital newsletter. For each session, facilitators used a guide of questions developed in partnership with the district.

These listening sessions captured participants’ thoughts and opinions about the direction of the City of Lakewood and the District, what worries and encourages them most, and what qualities are essential for the next superintendent of LCSD to possess.

Since the participants do not make up a representative or random sample, we cannot generalize their sentiments to the entire population. However, there were some common themes and feedback expressed throughout the sessions, which are important to share as the Board of Education looks to make decisions about the interview process and future of the District.

Perceptions of the City of Lakewood

Overwhelmingly, participants perceived the City of Lakewood is headed in a positive direction, using words such as “renewal” and “resurgence” to describe what is happening. They highlighted rising property values, updated school facilities, independent dining and entertainment options, and new, young families as encouraging features that demonstrate this positive energy and trajectory.

“I feel like my city is putting its money into making my life better.”

In contrast, however, a few participants raised concerns about high taxes, even though they know their importance in supporting city services, and the impact increased property values will have on the makeup of the community. A couple of participants mentioned Lakewood Hospital’s closure, and one specifically noted a concern about job losses and its economic impact. A few other participants commented on a perceived lack of transparency by City leaders and needing more open communication. But, by and large, participants appreciated what the City is doing to make Lakewood a desirable place to live, and to attract new families.

Perceptions of LCSD

The overall sentiment from the sessions was mixed, parent and resident sessions were more balanced in their tone, but in all sessions there was a feeling of unease. Not unlike many districts across the state, teachers and staff are exhausted by new initiatives, assessments, and evaluations that take away from the joy of actually teaching. Teachers and staff communicated a sense of increased disconnect from the administration and middle management. On the other hand, parents and residents are sifting through confusing metrics and ratings that make them question the District and voicing concerns that seem to go unheard. And, not surprisingly, bringing on a new superintendent also made some participants worry. Nevertheless, participants’ overall pride for the District and support for student achievement is unyielding, but their concerns and unease cannot be ignored.

Parents and residents

Parents and residents were more apt to start off by sharing positive perceptions about the District’s variety of course offerings and electives, and sponsored activities for students to participate. They coupled

“I’m seeing a lot of kids coming back to raise their families here because they had a positive experience to start with.”

these comments with comparisons to nearby school districts and private schools, which do not have a range of opportunities like LCSD provides. Others highlighted committed and dedicated teachers and staff, ongoing support from the community for levies, success of the



building project, an outstanding orchestra program, the administration's willingness to gather input from its stakeholders, and the diverse community-feel in the school buildings. Participants often noted how neighborhood schools bring about a sense of community, which is unmatched in other districts. This feature, especially, has kept people in Lakewood, and brought people back to the community to raise their children after having moved away.

Despite their general praise for the District, even parents' and residents' comments took on an apprehensive tone, as they brought up issues that concerned them. One prevalent concern surrounded academic improvement and state ratings. Parents newer to Lakewood questioned why test scores are low compared to neighboring districts. And parents with older children in the schools questioned why the District does not spend more effort communicating how the diverse makeup of the community impacts these metrics, or sharing all the other valued components of a Lakewood education that should be considered when making a comparison.

"I'm looking at the charts and the school ratings and I'm thinking, 'we're right next door to Rocky River which has a much higher rating than us. So what makes Lakewood better?'"

In addition, a few participants discussed the Communications Coordinator's position, and one mentioned their dissatisfaction that there are "8 people on the baseball coaching staff" and not even a full position for District communication. This is one area to look at further because, throughout the sessions, participants agreed enhancing internal and external communication and PR should be a priority.

"There are a lot of things about Lakewood schools that are unique to this region and I don't think that story is being told well enough."

Elementary school parents raised a concern about inequity and differences between school buildings. While they do not expect the schools to be identical, parents agreed that programs and services should be similar across buildings. In addition, elementary school parents discussed programming, including adding more art to the school year, as well as more play-based learning. One participant urged the District to consider implementing diverse educational delivery methods, such as Montessori or STEAM based instruction, to better meet the needs of individual students, and, potentially, attract families seeking a non-typical learning environment for their child.

"There's different experiences in each building and it needs to be more consistent."

Parents of high school students also discussed concerns about programs, specifically their perception of a dichotomy between advanced programs and what is available to an average student. They indicated there needs to be more levels of engagement for average learners. Additionally, parents conveyed concerns about needing more counselling capacity; more parent accountability and involvement; losing sight of educating the 'whole child' through well-rounded courses and support services; the District favoring some athletic programs over others, which discourages students from participating; and how to handle drug use in the District.

In addition, some parents' and residents' negative comments centered on the final phase of the construction project. For example, some thought even newer buildings were showing wear and tear. Teachers and staff echoed similar comments about conditions at Lakewood High School. Participants from one of the employee sessions indicated Phase 3 was trying and discouraging. They said their input and worries were disregarded when they spoke up, that a lot of things had to be cut at the end of the project,

"Things were continually brought to the table as concerns... but we were pointing these things out as they were happening and being disregarded."



and, most notably, poor construction quality has continued to effect the building causing stairs to disintegrate, walls to constantly need paint and repair work, and acoustic issues throughout a wing of the facility. They viewed these types of issues as just one example of how District leaders discount their concerns, which results in even more frustrations.

Parent and resident participants also shared comments about low teacher morale. There is a perception that teachers are unappreciated, and frustrated that their input and professional expertise is not taken into consideration when decisions are made regarding their work. One parent said the teaching staff is “completely underutilized in terms of their opinions and input,” and others agreed.

“Teachers are going through all these hoops, these dog and pony shows, to show that they’re doing their jobs. It would be nice if we had some leadership that would give some autonomy to the teachers, as much as the State will allow.”

Employees

Many of these LCSD employees are frustrated with the workplace culture and commented on teachers’ low morale, and how dissatisfied they are with their relationship with administration. Teachers are concerned about what they see as a top-down approach, rigid chain of command, and how decisions are made about curriculum and programs without taking their input into consideration. As frontline employees who know their students and will be implementing the curriculum, they emphasized the importance for them to be brought along and included in the decision making process.

“Elementary teachers, especially the veterans, used to have a lot of input in what happened. Now, decisions are made for us without trusting our professional input. We’d like to get back to that.”

A couple of participants highlighted this frustration by citing an example of meetings between the music department and administration. While the administration took time to ask for input, participants believed the administration did not listen. Participants agreed there is a perception that some input sessions may be more of an illusion, than an authentic opportunity for two-way dialogue and feedback. Furthermore, when their input is not solicited or heeded, teachers view this as a sign of disrespect or disregard for their expertise. Stories were shared and fears were expressed and - whether these fears are plausible or not - it will be imperative to explore what causes them. Additionally, identifying or creating ways to involve teachers and staff in the decision making process, especially regarding outcomes that directly impact their work, will be critical.

“It feels like they ask us so we can give them answers just so they can tell the community they’ve taken our input, but they haven’t, and it’s been happening for a long time.”

“It goes back to the lack of creativity and lack of spontaneity. We’ve lost the teachable moments because they’re not in the script.”

Teachers, as well as some parents, also discussed increasing amounts of requirements, and decreasing amounts of flexibility and creativity in the classrooms. They communicated that so much of the lesson plans are dictated by complying with rules and teaching to standards, which prohibits modifying the curriculum to fit their students’ needs, and being responsive to timely topics. Teachers perceived this as another example

of the administration’s and the State of Ohio’s disregard for their professionalism and in difference toward their experience in the classroom.

Participants also shared their worry about losing institutional memory of the “Lakewood way.” As employees turn over, fewer people have experienced this “Lakewood way,” which seems to be a kind of culture of connectedness and collaboration that previously existed. Teachers talked about eating together, collaborating, and sharing common office areas, while alumni reminisced about a room where



students gathered to hang out that was viewed as “a symbol of trust.” Many participants think that a top-down approach, and lack of collaboration and input from all levels will continue to erode what so many individuals, especially, valued about the culture in the District.

Another theme that arose in these discussion focused on a combination of factors that have made teaching gradually more trying and less gratifying. Teachers acknowledged they are doing their best with the students they have and the resources they are provided, but there is a lack of recognition and appreciation from District leaders. For the most part, they know increasing requirements and demands

“It’s a combination of a lot of things that I don’t know are just Lakewood, but it has made teaching very difficult.”

do not all originate from middle management, or the administration – but more communication and feedback opportunities will alleviate some of this confusion and distrust. Furthermore, District leaders must also reconsider the culture in each of the school buildings, and make a concerted effort to find ways to establish a more respectful and collaborative environment.

What encourages and worries you most

As we pivoted to talk about the future, we started by asking participants to write down the top three things that encourages and worries them most about the future of LCSD. Below are some of the main themes we heard:

What encourages you most:

Parents and residents

- Committed, caring, quality teachers and staff
- Supportive and involved community
- Strong art and music programs
- Opportunities for extracurricular, after school, athletic, and academic activities
- Dedication to supporting diversity
- State-of-the-art facilities/neighborhood schools
- Special needs programming
- Fiscal responsibility/management
- Willingness to look outside of the box for the interest of students’ growth and well being
- Striving to stay in the top 20 public schools in OH

Teachers and staff

- Student diversity, acceptance, and tolerance of each other
- Eager students and their willingness to learn
- Numerous curricular options and the diversity of programs offered to varying educational levels
- Passion and commitment of teachers and staff
- Strong, engaged community
- Community sees the value of the schools despite the current test scores
- Updated facilities and technology
- Assistant superintendent’s listening sessions and attempts to foster collaboration in small groups
- Safety and security for students and staff
- The rebound of the economy and increased property values

What worries you most:

Parents and residents

- Cuts to fringe programs, and diminishing the Gifted & Talented program



- Academic disparity and how to continue challenging average learners
- Differences between elementary schools and lack of textbooks
- Testing and other state mandates
- Too much prioritization of technology in the classroom
- Teachers' morale and the District not listening or hearing their concerns
- Lack of collaboration between administrators, teachers, and parents
- Competition with private schools and declining enrollment
- More levies are inevitable/taxes are already high
- Losing sight of why we're all here – for the kids

Teachers and staff

- Growing negativity and loss of trust from teachers to administration – us vs. them attitude
- Lack of input from teachers on curricular materials and disregard for professional experience
- Lack of transparency regarding decisions made at central office
- Cuts in the number of custodians, secretarial staff, and teachers
- Understaffing and work load
- On-going issues with facilities
- Needs of students not being met, especially on the middle quartiles
- Decreased creativity in classrooms due to demands of teaching to standard tests
- Shrinking opportunities due to budget cuts and losing talented faculty
- Declining enrollment

As you can see, there are a number of similarities between what parents, residents, and employees shared about what encourages them most in regards to the future of LCSD. They all want District leaders to focus on these items, and to make sure that stakeholders know they are doing it.

Unsurprisingly, employees' worries were more focused on their job and decisions that impact their work, while parents and residents focused their comments on curriculum and instruction of students. District leaders may want to consider and communicate actively about these concerns.

Qualities and characteristics of the next superintendent

Participants were eager to share their thoughts about desired qualities, characteristics, experience, and even the appearance of the next superintendent. They listed quality after quality and acknowledged few, if any, candidates could fulfill their wish list. On the other hand, they do want a star and believe Lakewood deserves one.

What was most evident from these comments was the importance of a new superintendent taking time to get to know the District and the City before making any changes. To succeed, a new superintendent must listen, understand the District and its culture, and adapt as necessary. Many participants are hopeful a new superintendent will make positive changes, and bring a sense of renewed energy to the District.

Living in Lakewood during their contract was not seen as a requirement for candidates by one group, who would rather broaden the pool of applicants to individuals who may already be settled in a nearby community with their family. The other three groups, in contrast, strongly favored a person willing to move to Lakewood and embed themselves in the community and culture. Others viewed knowing Lakewood already as a positive, instead of having to learn about what makes it unique. And there was consensus that their preferred candidate would come from outside of the District.



Additionally, three groups were steadfast in their assertion the next superintendent should have prior experience as a superintendent, while one session disagreed. Participants in this session argued that a person with past superintendent experience will come in with preconceived ideas about how the job should be performed, and they would rather have a person who can breathe new life into the role and bring energy to their new position.

Nevertheless, there was agreement, particularly among teachers, that the next superintendent must have extensive teaching experience. For educators especially, educational leadership is a crucial characteristic. Teachers indicated they would like a superintendent who did not immediately start out on the administrative track, but rather spent time as a teacher and can understand and empathize with their experience.

Participants highly value diversity in the District and the City, and know it is integral to have a superintendent who is open minded, and appreciates what makes Lakewood - Lakewood. Likewise, participants highlighted the active, engaged, and vocal community of parents and residents, and the significance of choosing someone who is welcoming, approachable, and willing to listen. They want a person who is visible at school events and community functions. More notably, they want someone who regularly visits school buildings to check in with teachers and staff, and shows interest in the well-being of their employees and students. Teachers want this person to value them as professionals and trust their expertise.

"Lakewood is an engaged community that expects to have itself heard and not just in the schools, but the larger community. I think there's an art to listening to people and making part of what you hear a piece of the decision, or resolution, and then explaining why some things couldn't be incorporated, or weren't possible."

In addition, participants indicated they want the next superintendent to have a collaborative decision making process, which acknowledges stakeholder input, effectively communicates a final decision, and then shares why the decision was made, specifically if it contradicts the input provided. "A leader, not a boss" was a phrase participants used in a couple of the sessions to convey their interest in selecting a superintendent who not only facilitates making tough decisions, but also raises up their employees and helps them reach their own highest potential.

"A leader that helps get rid of this 'us vs. them' feeling that's going on. Somebody who really doesn't see it as union and management, or this group vs that, or the teachers vs. the administration..."

Participants also would like the next superintendent to see the potential in all of the District's students – from the highest achieving to those who have recently arrived to the U.S. to embark on their new life. Participants spoke about Lakewood being a "whole-child community" that looks beyond test scores to the full narrative of the student and their needs. They prefer someone who has worked in "non-homogenous communities," who has experience working with immigrants, as well as the LGBTQ community. They expect this person to preserve the "buffet" of course offerings and opportunities, and ensure that resources are in place to support every child.

There is a concern amongst participants that the well-rounded, whole-child mentality is diminishing as cuts are made, electives are lost, and programs like Gifted & Talented are "watered-down." The "Lakewood mystique," as one participant said, "ebbs away with each new administration hire." This concept of providing education and services for the whole-child is one that resonates with parents and the community. LCSD should ensure it addresses these concerns, and communicates what it is doing to achieve this District goal.



Likewise, while participants emphasized the importance of fiscal management and responsibility, many of their remarks advocated for a new superintendent who should be willing to spend money and recapture some of what has been lost or reduced over the years.

"The custodial staff has been cut to a minimum. How do we protect our investment?"

Whether it is a position, like a secretary, a custodian, or a person who supported the needs and well-being of culinary students; a program or elective that went away when a teacher retired; a piece of equipment that is more economical and efficient than what is installed now; or a maintenance update to alleviate a persistent problem - these kinds of items can have a negative impact on the culture. They reinforce employees' frustration with not being heard by middle management and the administration. Additionally, these items result in questions about how money is spent, and what is being prioritized. Facilitating conversations with the new superintendent about what has been cut, or diminished that needs to be reinstated or expanded will be an important step forward.

Despite frustrations, participants in every session are proud of LCSD and student achievements and want to ensure the next superintendent is the District's biggest cheerleader. To showcase student achievements and District accolades, improving public relations and communication was a common sentiment.

"We need to know what we're good at and promote that, and make those things stronger and build upon things, so that the choice is to come to Lakewood – not to get away from Lakewood."

Participants see this not only as a way to share LCSD's story, but also to attract families to the District. Declining enrollment and competition for students with private and parochial schools was perceived as a concern, therefore participants recommend a more robust marketing, PR, and recruiting strategy.

Finally, one participant stated, "past performance predicts future performance," and conveyed the significance of looking at what a candidate has actually done, and seeing how it relates to Lakewood. Participants responded positively to this sentiment, and viewed this decision as an opportunity - one that the Board of Education must get right from the process of interviewing the candidates to their final decision.

"If we get the right person, then we will rise again. If we don't, we won't recover."

Process

Participants were grateful for ongoing opportunities to share their input via listening sessions and surveys, but they were also vocal about diverse voices being heard throughout the entire superintendent selection process. We've heard this before from listening sessions in 2016. Teachers, staff, and parents want to have input into how this decision is made, and that is understandable. There is no position more important than that of the superintendent.

This interview process for the next superintendent is a chance for the Board of Education to demonstrate the significance of and commitment to including the direct voices of two of its main stakeholder groups – employees and parents. This action could be the start of what so many participants need to see and hear from leadership. By including employees and parents in this process, it will also set a precedent for the next leader to continue seeking stakeholder input throughout his/her tenure.

Conclusion

The feedback from these listening sessions offers the administration and Board of Education a distinctive view of how participants perceive the City, District, and qualities and characteristics of the next superintendent, as well as their expectation of the selection process.



Lakewood is clearly an extraordinary school district and community. However, the challenges and frustrations Lakewood faces are not unlike other districts. Teachers across the state, and country, are unhappy with unfunded mandates, evaluations, and assessments that take time away from what they love to do most – teach. Administrators and principals are under immense pressure to churn out high test scores, while demanding more and more of their employees with less and less resources. It is not a sustainable predicament and results in a culture like the one many listening session participants have described.

Without a doubt, participants view this hiring decision as a turning point for the District. The listening sessions had a good turnout of well-meaning, passionate stakeholders who firmly believe in the District. They know the next superintendent will not be able to meet all of their preferred characteristics and qualifications, but they do think Lakewood deserves the best. For as much as they expressed frustration, they still had a great deal of pride and hope. They are optimistic that a new superintendent, surrounded by the right people, can really make a positive impact.

Online Survey

Burges & Burges Strategists developed and implemented an online survey to help quantify the prevailing thoughts and feedback stakeholders shared during the 10 in-depth interviews and 4 listening sessions. Burges & Burges worked in collaboration with LCSD leaders to develop the online survey instrument and outreach strategy. The District emailed the survey link and a reminder to teachers and staff, as well as parents and families. The District also posted the link on its website and social media platforms. In addition, the Recreation Department provided the survey link to its members via multiple communication platforms, and other community organizations (including LakewoodAlive and the Lakewood Chamber of Commerce) helped publicize the survey link as well.

The survey garnered 803 completed responses while it was available for completion between January 24 and February 2, 2018.

We utilized a multi-use, public link so respondents who share a computer at home, use a public computer lab, or took the online survey using a District device would be able to participate. However, to avoid duplicative responses, we did monitor the IP addresses to identify any issues and ensure there was no coordinated effort to skew the survey results. With no direct evidence of this occurring, we chose not to exclude any responses.

Throughout this memo, it is important to keep in mind all respondents opted in to complete this survey. As this is a self-selected sample, respondents are likely to have more knowledge and motivation to weigh in on the district's future and the next superintendent. With such a large number of respondents, results are apt to be more akin to District stakeholders' viewpoints than the feedback received from listening session respondents.

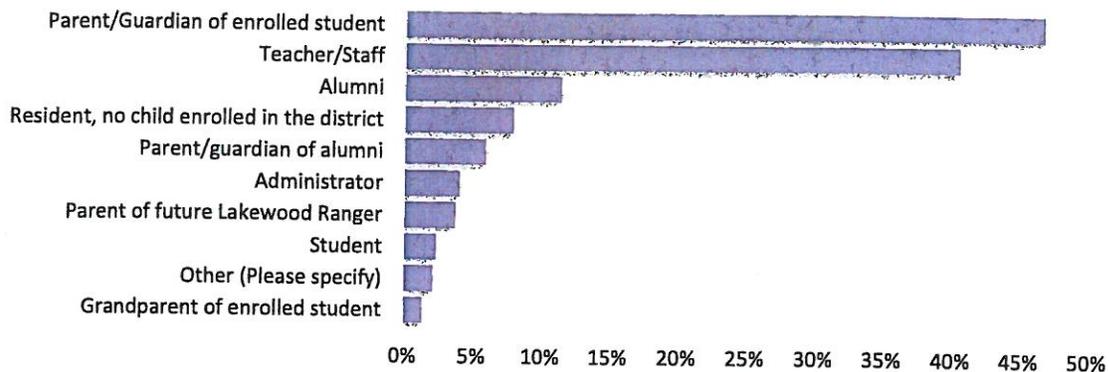
Respondent Overview

Survey participation included a good demographic mix, with the bulk of responses coming from parents (46.8%) and teachers/staff (40.5%), which are the two most important stakeholder groups. The percentage of teacher and staff responses is markedly higher compared to a previous online survey from 2016 (27.5% teachers/staff in 2016), but this can be somewhat explained due to the importance of sharing their perceptions about the future of the District and the next superintendent.



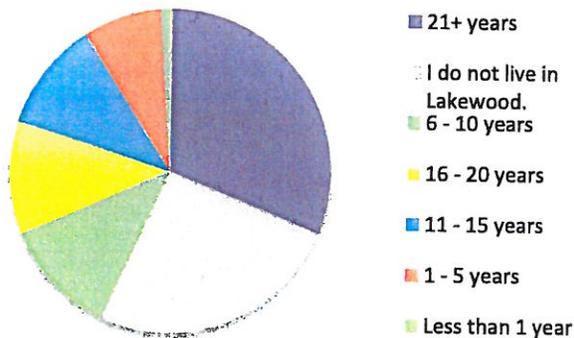
Other notable groups of respondents included alumni (11.4%), followed by residents with no children enrolled in the District (7.9%). Please keep in mind that respondents were able to select more than one applicable description, which many did, showing the interconnectedness of stakeholders and the tradition of staying in Lakewood after graduation, having children attend the schools, and for some, even working for the District.

Relationship with the District

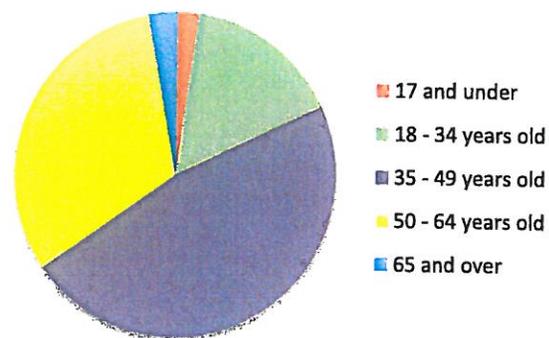


In addition, over 31.1% have lived in Lakewood for 21 or more years. Another 11.3% have lived in the City for 16-20 years. These long-time residents understand the significance of strong community support and maintaining a strong school district. However, the significant number of respondents who *do not live* in Lakewood should also be noted (25.8%). Nearly all of this non-Lakewood residency group is made up of district teachers and staff which correlates to the noticeably higher number of employee respondents.

Residency in Lakewood



Age Range of Respondents



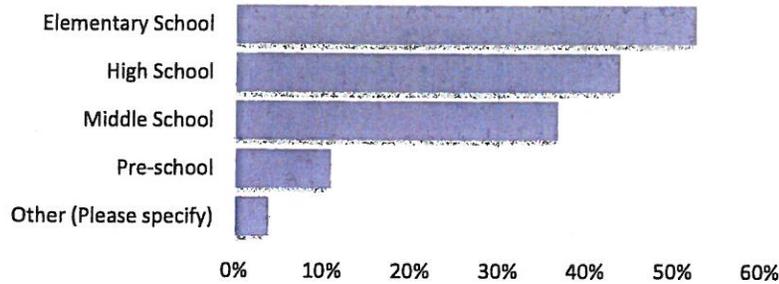
The age range also coincides with what would be expected for parent and teacher/staff respondents with a plurality of 47.2% indicating they are between 35 and 49 years old, followed by 34.8% who are 50 or older, and 15.9% who are between 18 and 34 years old. A small number of district students under age 17 also participated in the survey (2.1%).

Over sixty-percent of respondents have school-aged children living at home (61.9%). A majority of those have children in elementary school (52.6%), while 43.9% have students in high school and 36.8% have



students in middle school. Roughly 11.0% of the sample have children who are still in preschool. Having so many parents of preschool- and elementary-aged children participating in this survey is valuable, as they will hopefully continue to be involved and play a large part in the District for many years to come.

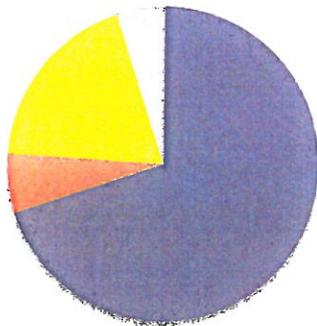
Grade Levels of Respondents' Children



Direction of the City of Lakewood and LCSD

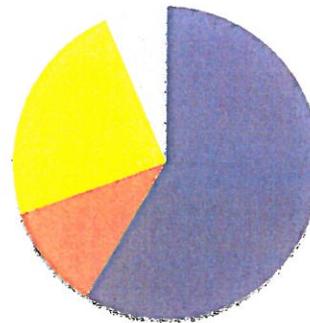
Similar to sentiments we heard in the in-depth interviews and listening sessions, a majority of respondents viewed both the City of Lakewood and the Lakewood Schools as heading in a positive direction. For the City, 69.9% chose "right direction," 6.2% "wrong direction," and 19.0% "staying about the same." By contrast, when thinking about the District, 58.5% of respondents said "right direction," 11.1% "wrong direction," and 23.9% "staying about the same."

Direction of the City of Lakewood



■ Right direction ■ Wrong direction
■ Staying about the same ■ Other (Please specify)

Direction of LCSD



■ Right direction ■ Wrong direction
■ Staying about the same ■ Other (Please specify)

In examining the responses to these two questions from the perspective of parents, and then from teachers and staff, it is interesting that their perceptions, while positive, are inverted from expectations. Essentially, teachers are more likely to see the City moving in the right direction, while more parents see the District moving in the right direction.

For example, nearly three-quarters of teachers and staff indicated the City is headed in the "right direction" (76.0%), compared to two-thirds of parents (64.9%). Conversely, parents were more apt to state the District is headed in the "right direction" (61.3%), compared to teachers/staff (57.4%).



Nevertheless, the “wrong direction” evaluation for the District is noticeably low (11.1%). Less than 10% of parents (9.6%) selected “wrong direction,” and only 11.0% of teachers.

Additionally, over a fifth of both groups (parents only – 20.6%; teachers/staff only – 24.7%) indicated the District is “staying about the same.” This finding, along with the “right direction” responses, suggests an opportunity for the next superintendent to bring new ideas and solutions to help guide the schools.

City of Lakewood's direction

In the opened ended questions prompting them to share more about their selection, respondents identified a number of tangible improvements within the City that led them to the perception it is headed in the right direction. Overwhelmingly, respondents remarked on its growth and economic development, mentioning its thriving downtown, ability to attract businesses, new dining options, and new construction. They highlighted infrastructure investments, increased housing prices, and quality amenities including, libraries, parks, and city services.

“I love to see all the investment that has been made in our schools, parks, even businesses. It’s a refreshing new face for Lakewood. Maintain our charm with a modern face.”

“Good schools and after school programs are key to attracting people to live in Lakewood. It shows we are a community who believe in investing in families.”

Many respondents also described young professionals and young families planting roots in the City and recent investments in areas that these individuals value. Similarly, respondents mentioned LCSD’s completion of its building project as another visible example of progress, and an illustration of something that attracts young families to move here.

Those that indicated the City is “staying about the same” reflected on the signs of progress, but identified other problem areas and talked about the “ebb and flow” of issues. For example, respondents wrote about vacant storefronts, transient populations, internal City politics, affordability of homes, keeping up with derelict homes, closing Lakewood Hospital, parking, traffic, crime, drugs, and high taxes.

“There are signs of progress as well as signs of things needing attention.”

Respondents who selected “wrong direction” also described similar issues as above, and were more likely to include specific comments about the closure of Lakewood Hospital and concerns about City leadership. These respondents, in particular, do not feel as though City leaders represent their interests, or have the best interest of the community in mind when making decisions.

“It started with the Hospital and has gone downhill since. The trust is gone.”

LCSD's direction

Respondents expressed their perception of the District as heading in the “right direction” throughout the open-ended responses, highlighting a multitude of positive features. One respondent stated “(the) District and current Superintendent seem to always look forward to the next challenge, rather than wait for problems to come up.” This forward-looking, anticipatory approach to position the District is an attribute woven throughout many comments.

“We have strong curriculum, forward thinking leadership, and dedicated staff. We offer our students a well-rounded education with endless opportunities to excel!”



Similar to comments about the City's improvements and development, a majority of respondents wrote about the completion of the building project as an example of the District's positive direction. They described this investment as one which demonstrates improvement, progress, and a good use of tax dollars. It shows the community places a high value on education, some respondents stated. Others commented on the "competitive edge" new facilities give the District, and one respondent described it as an undertaking that not even "outer-ring suburbs [could] pull off."

"The rebuilding of the schools was a huge step to making the schools a great place to learn."

In addition, respondents focused their positive comments on course offerings and opportunities for students to get involved at each grade level, along with dedicated teachers and staff. One person highlighted LCSD's strong alumni group and the Lakewood Rangers Education Foundation as positive examples, as well.

Among those who stated the District is "staying about the same," many comments acknowledged some progress, but often shifted from specific concerns to recommendations for improvement. For example, they argued that elementary students need art, music, and physical education all year, as well as more access to technology. Others commented on the perception that there is too much focus on reading and writing at the elementary level, and not enough focus on social studies, math, and science. Respondents raised concerns about an ongoing emphasis on standardized test scores throughout the District, and are hopeful this focus will shift toward, as one person wrote, "alternative learning experiences, with more hands on projects to help solidify subject matter."

"I see many positive developments on the macro scale, such as the renovation project and the many extracurricular opportunities. However, I question whether the district is best meeting the needs of individual children."

Respondents who indicated the District is headed in the "wrong direction" also had an assortment of concerns similar to those mentioned above, as well as some direct recommendations. Some discussed what they saw as an over-reliance on technology, and lack of emphasis on interpersonal skills. Elementary school parents urged the District to provide textbooks so they can assist their children at home. Other parents expressed concerns about large class sizes and a lack of differentiation. Some parents also conveyed concerns about a perceived issue with communication from Lakewood High School, and guidance counselors who they believe to be spread too thin.

"If parents are to help their child at home it is of utmost importance that textbooks are available to them to do so. Parents are unable to help because this district has handcuffed them by not providing the tools to assist them in this process."

Also a number of parents stated their concerns about the perceived "degradation of the Gifted and Talented program, and the music and arts programs." A number of parents are worried these programs, which they highly value and view as features that help Lakewood stand out, are being cut and diminished.

"I'm worried that the district is losing sight of what makes this district unique and desirable. Yes, absolutely, the diversity. But the music and G&T programs are equally important in attracting and retaining families."

Employees, who specified that the District is headed in the "wrong direction," focused their comments on what they feel to be a disconnect between the teaching staff and the administration. Specifically, they cited: divides between Teaching & Learning and classroom teachers; principals with no teaching experience; a perceived lack of respect from Central office; students not being held accountable; reductions in personnel, especially custodial staff; diminished electives and decisions not to replace

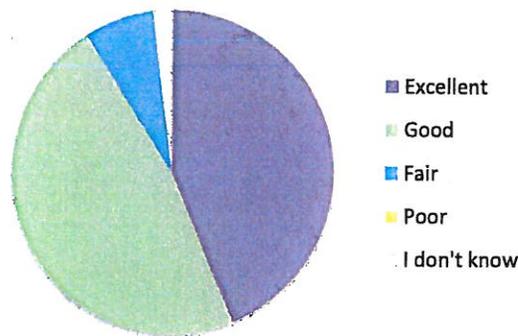


teachers; and the adoption of curriculum and programs which they deem ineffective. Additionally, one employee highlighted the missed opportunities to strengthen and market LCSD's strongest programs and attract more students. This missed opportunity is one that respondents have repeated across this research.

Quality of Education

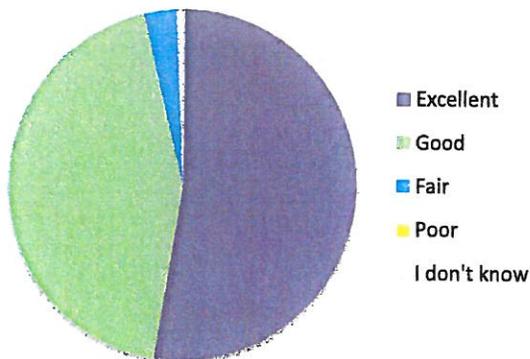
Over ninety percent of respondents rated the District as "excellent" (43.7%) or "good" (47.2%). Only a slim minority of respondents rated the district fair (7.1%) or poor (0.1%), and a small number of respondents said they "don't know" (1.9%). The quality of education rating has been consistently high throughout surveys over the past few years, which recognizes the District's efforts in providing quality curriculum, course offerings, and opportunities for its diverse student population.

Quality of Education

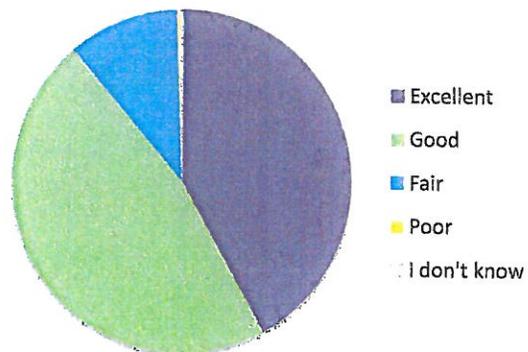


In looking closer at the stakeholder groups, teachers/staff were more likely to highly rate the quality of education as excellent/good (96.2%), compared to parents (88.8%). Additionally, parents were 7% more likely to rate the quality of education as "fair." Granted, this variance could potentially be connected to parents' understanding and perceptions of the state report card grades, more than the actual quality of education provided by the District.

Teachers - Quality of Education



Parents - Quality of Education

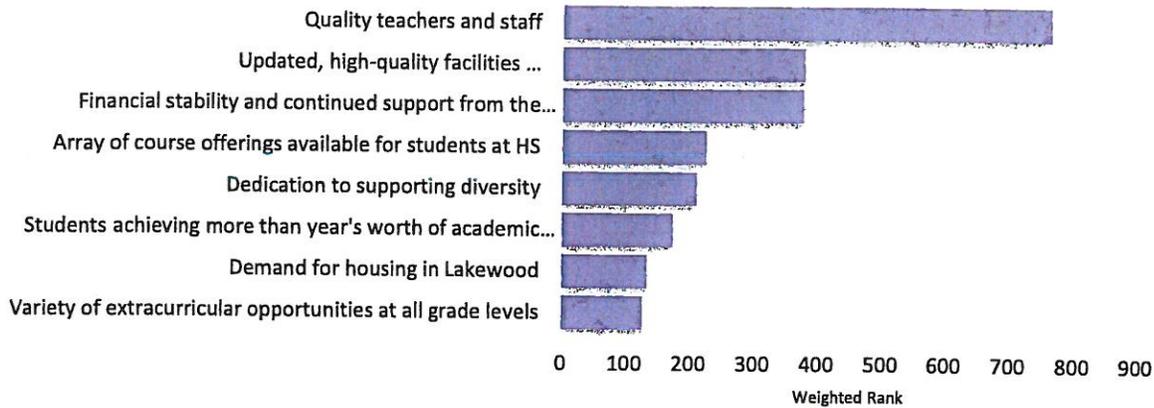




Future of the District

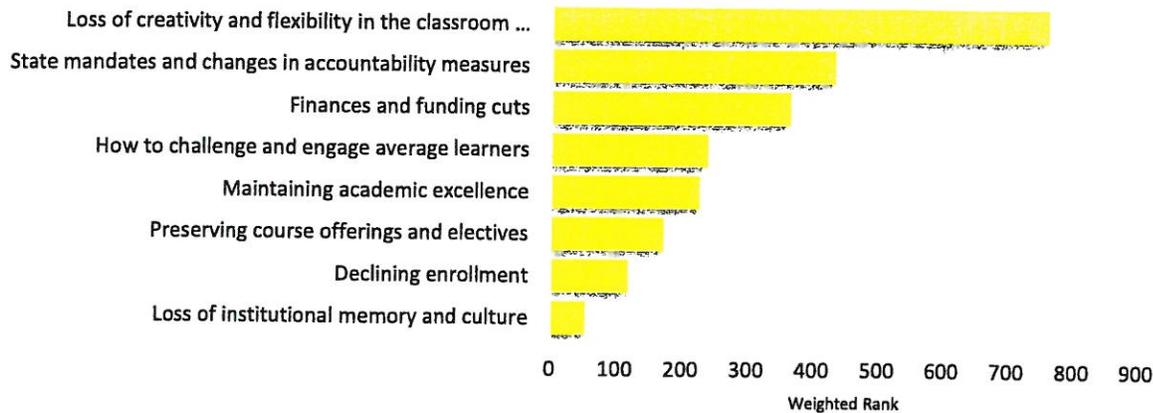
Looking toward the future of the District, three features stood out as what respondents are most encouraged by. By far, “quality teachers and staff,” are undoubtedly the most encouraging thing about the District, a sentiment that has been consistent throughout each phase of this process. “Updated, high-quality facilities that will serve our District for decades to come,” and “financial stability and continued support from the community” were also major factors that followed distantly in second and third rankings, respectively.

Encourages you most about future of the District



In addition, we asked respondents what aspects of the District most worried them. Similar to what we heard in the listening sessions, respondents overwhelmingly ranked “loss of creativity and flexibility in the classroom due to the demand of teaching to the test” as their number one cause for worry. Respondents then ranked “state mandates and changes in accountability measures,” along with “finances and funding cuts,” as the second and third most worrisome issues, respectively. Parents also highly ranked “how to challenge and engage average learners” as a top concern, which was a widely-held concern that participants shared in the listening session discussions.

Worries you most about future of the District





What respondents value most

Over eighty percent of respondents took the time to volunteer what they value most about the District – and often times it was a list of features that sets Lakewood apart for them.

Most often, respondents wrote about how they value LCSD’s teachers and staff, which aligns with how they responded to the previous question about what encourages them most about the future of LCSD.

“I appreciate that the teachers know my children-- and all the students -- as people and as learners.”

Interestingly, about 30% of both parents’ and teachers’ open-ended responses included comments about teachers and staff. They used words with very positive connotations such as, “amazing,” “outstanding,” “dedicated,” and “caring.” Respondents described teachers’ passion and devotion to students’ education and overall happiness. Parents often included comments about teachers contributing to their children’s growth by challenging them and helping them reach their full potential.

Teachers and staff also used this as an opportunity to highlight their work and their peers. They wrote about and described a culture of perseverance, going above and beyond, not giving up on students “no matter the difficulties they are facing,” and striving “to create the best learning environment ... despite ever changing stakes, accountabilities, and student/family engagement.”

Respondents also were inclined to share the features of LCSD they value most. These lists commonly included stand-alone categories like dedicated teachers and staff (as mentioned previously) a

“Lakewood City Schools encompass inclusivity, diversity, a commitment to arts and culture of the community, character education, and quality from preschool through graduation.”

commitment to diversity of both people and course offerings, and the senses of pride and community that the District provides. They also mentioned features such as: helping students grow in all areas; the Gifted & Talented program; support services; arts; music; special education; West Shore Career-Tech; up-to-date facilities; sound fiscal management; strong families; and an energetic community.

“Commitment to diversity of both people and course offerings,” as one person wrote, is a noteworthy observation as it highlights the District’s goal to strive to meet the needs of its students through a welcoming culture, and variety of course offerings and programs. Respondents highly valued inclusivity, acceptance, and diversity of culture, ethnicities, backgrounds, and ideas. They viewed these features as assets and learning opportunities, and heavily linked them to the Lakewood community itself. They also cited the variety of courses and programs offered as another way the District appeals to and responds to the needs of its diverse student population. As one respondent wrote, they value “the breadth and depth of courses to meet the many diverse needs of our student body.”

“The diversity that is embraced and celebrated, and making the effort to provide learning opportunities to students at all levels.”

“The ability for students of all backgrounds to find an area that they can excel and be challenged in through a wide array of offerings.”

Another main sentiment respondents shared centered around their sense of pride in the District, and the sense of community the schools create. Strong traditions understandably arise when generation after generation join the Lakewood Schools’ family, where they create fond memories and

“I love the sense of community and pride I feel in this district, and the support that I receive as a teacher.”



forge positive experiences. Respondents value what they described as a “family-like atmosphere” within the schools, and enthusiastic support from the community. As one respondent wrote, there is “a sense of community and the feeling that my children are truly cared for through teachers, activities, and communications.” While another respondent added, “being a part of the diverse Hayes community has always felt like being a part of something great that you, as a parent are encouraged to be actively involved in to help your child succeed together as a team.” These overlapping senses of pride and community are something special that must be nurtured, embraced, and grown.

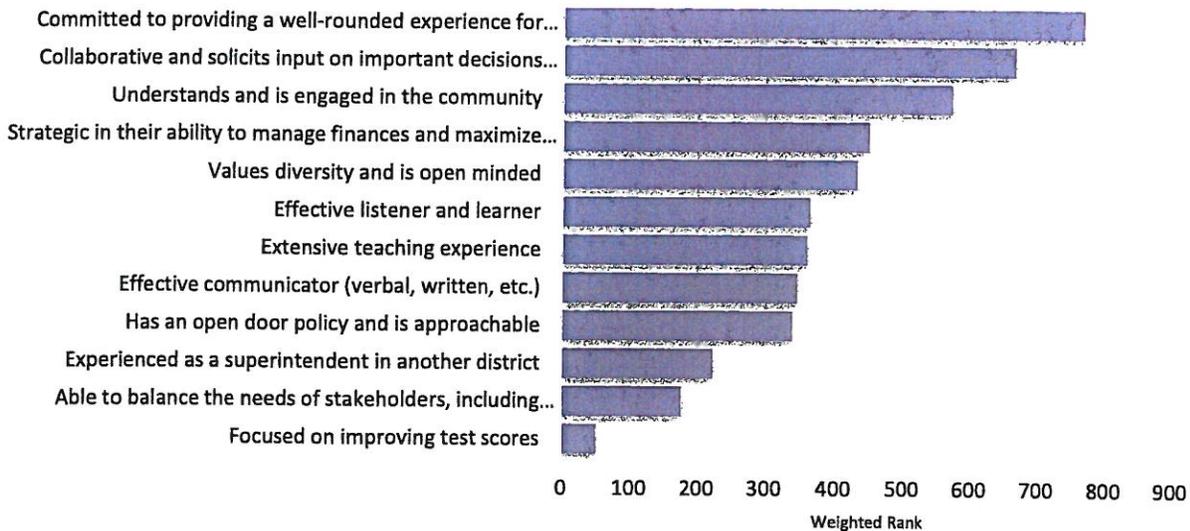
LCSD’s next superintendent

Throughout our interviews with District leaders and listening sessions with teachers, staff, parents, and residents, we heard a number of qualities, characteristics, experiences, and qualifications individuals wanted their ‘ideal’ superintendent candidate to possess. While participants know that no one candidate can fulfill all of their preferences, it was important to ask the broader audience which qualities they deem most important for the District’s next leader.

Collaborative and solicits input, committed to well-rounded experiences, understands and engages in the community, and strategic in managing resources and finances were four characteristics that rose to the top for the overall sample, as well as for parents and teachers and staff.

The characteristics and experiences that stood out include:

Most important characteristics and experiences of superintendent



Overall, participants ranked “committed to providing a well-rounded experience for every child” as the single most important quality, followed by “collaborative and solicits input on important decisions before they are made” and then “understands and is engaged in the community.” These attitudes correspond to what we heard throughout the previous phases, and are reiterated in the open-ended responses.

In addition, respondents placed more emphasis on the next superintendent having “extensive teaching experience,” than “experienced as a superintendent in another district.” As one might expect, teachers



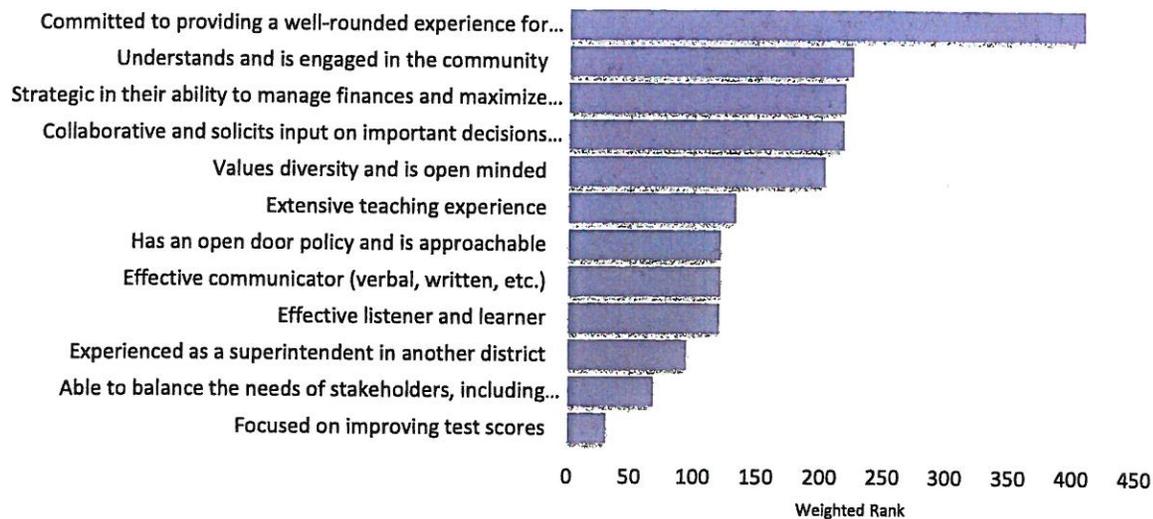
were more likely to rank “teaching experience” higher than parents, but it is evident this preference extends to both constituency groups.

A very small minority of the overall respondents selected “focused on improving test scores” as a desired quality in a new leader. As the lowest priority overall, this finding supports the sentiments heard throughout the process about the importance of looking beyond test scores at the full narrative of students and the District. As one respondents said, they want a leader who will “stop playing the test score game, in addition to being able to effectively communicate why a single test score is not an effective measure of a school or student success.”

Looking at what some specific constituent groups ranked the highest is also noteworthy. For example, parents overwhelmingly ranked “committed to providing a well-rounded experience for every child” as their most important quality. But their next four highest ranked qualities diverged from the overall sample. “Understands and is engaged in the community” was their second most important quality, followed by “strategic in their ability to manage finances and maximize resources.”

As both parents and taxpayers, it makes sense for them to highly rank these specific qualities over others, as they are directly applicable to their decision making in both choosing the best educational option, and voting to put their tax dollars into the district. Parents also identified “collaborative and solicits input ...” and “values diversity and is open minded” as important characteristics for the next superintendent.

Parents - Most important characteristics and experiences of superintendent



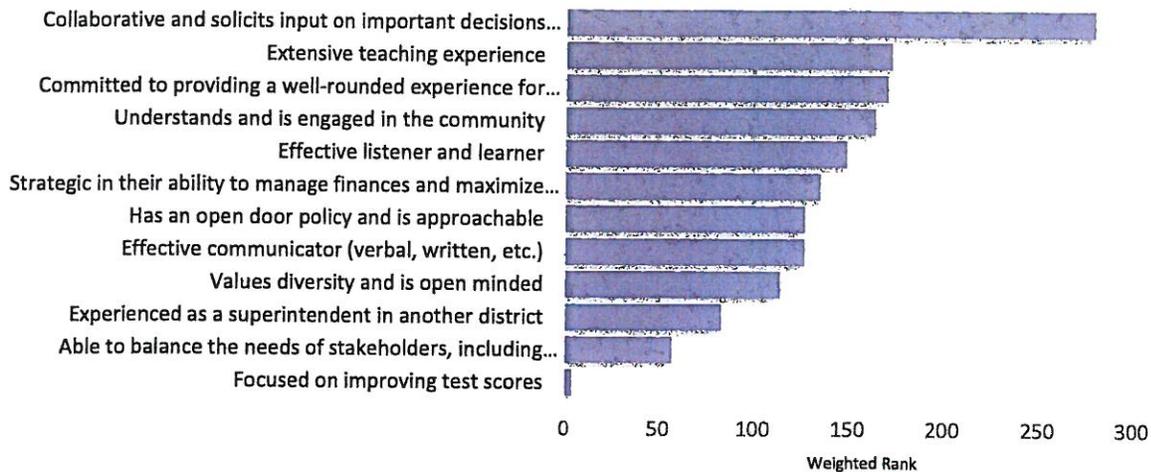
Understandably, teacher and staff member respondents (who do not have a child enrolled or graduates of the District) ranked “collaborative and solicits input...” as the most important characteristic. This result underscores their attitude that the next superintendent, and leaders throughout the District, should involve teachers and staff throughout the decision-making process and include their input in final decisions, particularly for items that impact their work and students’ learning.

Their second highest ranked characteristic was “extensive teaching experience,” which is congruent with the opinions expressed in the listening sessions. Teachers and staff prefer a candidate who can bring classroom experience to this position and empathize with the day to day challenges and concerns that the



teaching staff faces. As one person shared in the additional comments, “look into someone who has taught recently and considers the demands and needs of today’s working educators.”

Teachers - Most important characteristics and experiences of superintendent



Similarly, those respondents who identified themselves as residents, with no child enrolled in the District, also ranked “collaborative and solicits input ...” as the most important quality, followed by “understands and is engaged in the community” as the second highest. Like parents, these residents and community members recognized that the new superintendent will wear the mantle of educational leadership, and needs to be highly engaged in the community and receptive to community input.

In contrast, those who identified themselves as administrators, ranked “effective communicator” as the most important quality for the next superintendent to possess. In their position, having an effective communicator as their leader is critical as administrators are often charged with relaying the superintendent’s message.

Understand that each constituency group comes from a different place when prioritizing leadership qualities – but all of these qualities matter. Regardless of what ‘group’ they belong to, it is essential for the Board of Education keep in mind what each candidate would bring to the superintendent position, and how their qualities align with the priorities of the District’s main stakeholders.

Additional attributes and preferences

In addition to ranking some specific qualities and characteristics, we also asked respondents to share what other attributes they want to see in the next superintendent, and to share what else the Board of Education should consider as they review candidates for this position. After listing a number of ideal attributes, one respondent ended with “basically, a unicorn.” While respondents recognized their catalogue of preferences was growing rapidly, they still strongly believed Lakewood deserves the best.



Respondents specified they want a superintendent with charisma and energy, who is inspiring, innovative, approachable, transparent, and both a good listener and communicator. They expressed that the next superintendent should appreciate and foster more parent involvement and community partnerships.

"This person should be experienced in working with diverse communities; driven, competent and confident, yet humble. Leaders are learners."

They seek a person who respects Lakewood's traditions, especially its tradition of educating the whole child, and every child. They are looking for a superintendent who is willing to learn and embrace the "Lakewood Way."

Some respondents emphasized their desire for a superintendent who recognizes and promotes

"Someone who believes that students are our customers and is invested to support them and their families. [Someone who] believes students deserve a world class education and that it can happen at LCS. [Someone who] MUST inspire others to be a part of something great!"

supporting students beyond academics. As one person wrote, "The students of Lakewood are not only coming with educational needs. To teach our children, we need more support with emotional, social, and home life needs."

Respondents sought a superintendent who understands that children "don't fit one mold" and prioritizes making services available to help meet the social, physical, sensory, and emotional growth of all students.

Along with maintaining and improving course offerings, opportunities, and support services, a number of respondents were also vocal about the need to revamp the District's athletic program. These respondents want the next superintendent to recognize and promote athletics as a vital part of the District's culture. Some expressed concern about the athletic program's current leadership and the perceived inability to strengthen the program, while others commented on gaps in communication, vision, and cohesiveness.

"The growth and streamlining of an athletic culture and program is ready to go, but it will need a push and some strong leadership to allow it."

Beyond being a strong advocate for every student, respondents also want the next superintendent to be a strong advocate for teachers, too. As one respondent said, "I would hope the new superintendent would see teachers as allies and work with us to create the best possible learning environment for every student in the district." While another shared, "I would like the superintendent to be someone that feels they are a part of a great team and not above the members of our district."

"Choose someone who brings out the best in his/her staff... someone we would be proud of."

The teaching staff made it clear that they want the next superintendent to understand the challenges they face, and appreciate their dedication and hard work.

Despite a lot of agreement on the key characteristics of the next superintendent, respondents offered notable differences on whether the next superintendent should build on the current direction of the District, or take it in a new direction. For example, some respondents preferred seeking a new superintendent who can take the current momentum of the district and "discern the best next steps" to amplify that momentum. A number of respondents shared their respect and admiration for Superintendent Patterson, and urged the Board to

"Find the best leader to maximize our strengths ... the one who loves students and will think creatively to create opportunities for them...the one who will recognize the great work that has been done so far."



select a superintendent that “stays on track” and continues to move the District in the direction he set forth.

In contrast, other respondents urged the Board of Education members to step outside the box and find someone who is willing to “shake things up” and “move LCSD from good to great.” Some would like the new superintendent to impart a new, strong vision for the District. For example, respondents mentioned having a superintendent willing to look at less traditional teaching and learning approaches, which is a sentiment echoed in the listening sessions.

“The next superintendent should not be someone who's intent is maintaining the status quo. The morale of the staff is low and the can do spirit is drifting away.”

Likewise, a few respondents hoped the next superintendent would have the ability to look beyond data and test scores. Lakewood is unique, and they seek a candidate that will take the time to see what fits best for Lakewood. As one person said, the “District is more than just data.” Similarly, another respondent communicated they want an “evidence-based-decision maker,” who uses what is known to work in the District as the driver of decisions, not just data. These individuals preferred a candidate who is “not a number cruncher,” but rather someone who has some perspective and uses data in the appropriate circumstances.

Respondents also seek a superintendent with a “record of success in leading, teaching, and change management.” Some commented on demographic traits of the next superintendent, and encouraged the Board of Education to strongly consider female, minority, and/or LGBTQ candidates. Others sought a “candidate with a lot of practical experience - someone who has been a superintendent before and who has been a teacher,” though many indicated they do not want a retire/rehire situation.

Nevertheless, respondents urged the members of the Board of Education to check beyond resumes and references, and to not just rely on an interview. Others remained adamant about seeking and including more input from stakeholders in the final selection process, a sentiment prevalent among listening session participants, as well.

While the perfect candidate might be someone grounded in all of these skillsets and experiences, they are also human beings with unique strengths and weaknesses which can be aligned with community hopes and expectations. Many acknowledged the difficulty in making this decision, knowing it will set the tone for of the District for years to come, and were grateful for the opportunities to share their input and thoughts.

Conclusion

Superintendent Patterson’s retirement comes at a time when LCSD is in a good, stable position - the building project is complete, finances are sound, union contracts have been extended, and community support is strong. There is a lot to be proud of in Lakewood.

As the Board of Education meets with candidates, it is important to note that teachers, in particular, are looking for empathy. They want a superintendent who is collaborative and has teaching experience. They want to be sure the next superintendent is always listening, and directly soliciting their input.



On the other hand, parents have broader concerns. They seek a superintendent who is committed to the whole child, collaborative, values diversity, and strategic in their management of District finances, which they rank considerably higher than teachers. A balance between these preferences needs to be struck to continue the District's tradition of excellent superintendents.

The prevailing sentiment from stakeholders throughout this process has been optimistic and hopeful. Stakeholders were more than willing to volunteer their thoughts and opinions about their vision for the future of the District and the kind of person they want to serve as its next leader.

From a list of adjectives to describe their preferred candidate to an inventory of proven achievements, it will be difficult, as we have said many times before, to find someone who checks every box. But no matter who is chosen, it will be essential for the Board of Education to communicate why they selected the candidate they did, and connect it back to what stakeholders shared is most important to them.

It will also be vital for the District to empower the next superintendent with resources and knowledge to address the concerns stakeholders expressed and focus on the priorities they value most. Whoever is selected will have big shoes to fill, but will be surrounded by an exceptional team of employees, parents, and community members committed to the District and excited to cheer him/her on.



Appendix A: In-depth interview guide

1. Let's start by thinking about how you describe Lakewood City Schools to someone outside the District – maybe a fellow School Board member/Superintendent/Treasurer/Principal from a district downstate, or a friend you haven't seen in a few years – Could you give me a few words, or a sentence that you would use to describe the District *right now*?
2. What are the kinds of things you think the District does well? (*Probe: academics, extra-curricular programs, preparing students, etc.*)
3. What three things encourage you most about the future of Lakewood City Schools?
4. What three things worry you most about the future of Lakewood City Schools?
5. Now let's think about the City of Lakewood and the School District. When you look toward the future - what do you expect the relationship between the City and Schools to be? How do you maintain or create that relationship?
6. Many factors contribute to the culture of the City of Lakewood: its diversity, activism, density, willingness to pay higher taxes, etc. Are these factors trending positively or negatively right now? What other factors have a major impact on the city's culture?
7. What's important to keep in mind regarding Lakewood's culture when selecting a new superintendent?
8. What values are most important to Lakewood City Schools' main stakeholders? What's important to keep in mind regarding these values when selecting a new superintendent?
9. Lakewood City Schools has a mission statement, but not a vision statement. Often a vision statement defines a common, agreed-on direction for a district. What would be some elements of your vision statement as you look toward the future of the District?
10. When selecting a new superintendent, what's important to keep in mind in regards to moving the District from where it is now, to where you would like it to go?
11. Anything you'd like to add or share about your vision for the District's future?



Appendix B: Listening Session Guide

1. I'd like to start by hearing your thoughts about the City of Lakewood. What are your overall perceptions of Lakewood? Is the City heading in the right direction or wrong direction?
2. And thinking now about the District, what are your overall perceptions of Lakewood City School District?
3. Now I'd like to have you to take a minute to write down 3 things that *encourage* you most about the future of Lakewood City Schools on the [color] post-it. We'll collect them once we are done.
4. Now I'd like to have you take another minute to write down on the [color] post-it 3 things that *worry* you most about the future of Lakewood City Schools. We'll collect them once we are done.
5. With Superintendent Patterson's retirement at the end of the year, what does the Board need to keep in mind about the next leader when thinking about the items you just shared?
6. What do you, as a parent/staff, value most important about the District? (*Probe – if needed: diversity, academic achievements, programmatic offering/opportunities, preparing students, etc.*)
7. What's important to keep in mind regarding those values when selecting a new leader?
8. I'd like to now explore a few specific features about the District and its future.
 - a. First, **Achieving Academic Success**. What do you think the Board needs to consider when hiring a new leader when it comes to Achieving Academic Success?
 - b. Next, **Culture and Communication**. What do you think the Board needs to consider when hiring a new leader when it comes to Culture and Communication?
 - c. **Declining enrollment**. What do you think the Board needs to consider when hiring a new leader when it comes to the District's declining enrollment?
 - d. And finally, **Finances**. What do you think the Board needs to consider when hiring a new leader when it comes to the District's finances?
9. Anything else you'd like the Board to know?



Appendix C: Online Survey Results

Survey Title: 2018 - Lakewood Superintendent Survey
Report Type: Bar Graph
Start Date :23-Jan-18
End Date :3-Feb-18
Completed :803

Q1. How would you describe your relationship with Lakewood City Schools?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Parent/Guardian of enrolled student	374	46.75%	
Grandparent of enrolled student	11	1.38%	
Teacher/Staff	324	40.50%	
Administrator	32	4.00%	
Alumni	91	11.38%	
Parent/guardian of alumni	47	5.88%	
Student	19	2.38%	
Parent of future Lakewood Ranger	30	3.75%	
Resident, no child enrolled in the district	63	7.88%	
Other (Please specify)	17	2.13%	
Total Responses	1,008		

Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.

Q2. How long have you lived in Lakewood?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Less than 1 year	9	1.13%	
1 - 5 years	64	8.02%	
6 - 10 years	94	11.78%	
11 - 15 years	87	10.90%	
16 - 20 years	90	11.28%	
21+ years	248	31.08%	
I do not live in Lakewood.	206	25.81%	
Total Responses	798		

Q3. Thinking for a moment about the City of Lakewood - Do you think the City is headed in the right direction, wrong direction, or staying about the same?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Right direction	557	69.89%	
Wrong direction	49	6.15%	
Staying about the same	151	18.95%	
Other (Please specify)	40	5.02%	
Total Responses	797		



Q5. Now thinking about the Lakewood City School District - Do you think the District is headed in the right direction, wrong direction, or staying about the same?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Right direction	466	58.54%	
Wrong direction	88	11.06%	
Staying about the same	190	23.87%	
Other (Please specify)	52	6.53%	
Total Responses	796		

Q7. How would you rate the quality of education in the Lakewood City School District?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Excellent	349	43.68%	
Good	377	47.18%	
Fair	57	7.13%	
Poor	1	0.13%	
I don't know	15	1.88%	
Total Responses	799		

Q8. From the statements below, please rank the top two you are most encouraged by when thinking about the future of Lakewood City Schools. Please rank these in order, where Rank 1 is most encouraged by. Please note you can only rank two statements, and can only use each rank once.

Answer	Rank 1	Rank 2	Weighted Rank (Score)
Quality teachers and staff	313	139	1 (765)
Updated, high-quality facilities that will serve our District for decades to come	116	148	2 (380)
Financial stability and continued support from the community	113	152	3 (378)
Array of course offerings available for students at the high school	69	88	4 (226)
Dedication to supporting diversity	55	101	5 (211)
Students achieving more than a year's worth of academic growth each year	58	58	6 (174)
Demand for housing in Lakewood	48	38	7 (134)
Variety of extracurricular opportunities for students at all grade levels	26	74	8 (126)
Total Responses			798



Q9. From the statements below, please rank the top two you are most worried about when thinking about the future of Lakewood City Schools. Please rank these in order, where Rank 1 is most worried about. Please note you can only rank two statements, and can only use each rank once.

Answer	Rank 1	Rank 2	Weighted Rank (Score)
Loss of creativity and flexibility in the classroom due to the demand of teaching to the test	296	170	1 (762)
State mandates and changes in accountability measures	127	181	2 (435)
Finances and funding cuts	128	111	3 (367)
How to challenge and engage average learners	68	103	4 (239)
Maintaining academic excellence	73	81	5 (227)
Preserving course offerings and electives	51	70	6 (172)
Declining enrollment	35	49	7 (119)
Loss of institutional memory and culture	14	27	8 (55)
Total Responses			792

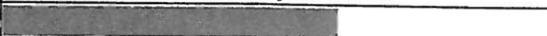
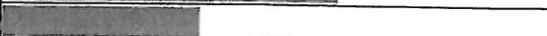
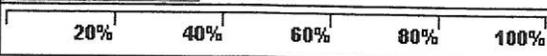
Q11. While the characteristics and experiences below are all important qualities of a leader, please take a moment to rank the top three you believe are most important for the next Lakewood City Schools superintendent to possess. Please rank these characteristics and experiences in order of importance, where Rank 1 is the most important. Please note you can only rank three statements, and can only use each rank once.

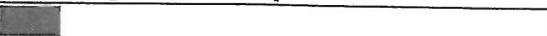
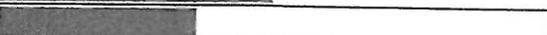
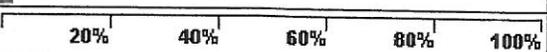
Answer	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Weighted Rank (Score)
Committed to providing a well-rounded experience for every child	165	94	85	1 (768)
Collaborative and solicits input on important decisions before they are made	113	115	97	2 (666)
Understands and is engaged in the community	81	111	108	3 (573)
Strategic in their ability to manage finances and maximize resources	69	86	70	4 (449)
Values diversity and is open minded	70	69	84	5 (432)
Effective listener and learner	50	81	52	6 (364)
Extensive teaching experience	72	44	56	7 (360)
Effective communicator (verbal, written, etc.)	44	72	70	8 (346)
Has an open door policy and is approachable	56	48	75	9 (339)
Experienced as a superintendent in another district	42	31	34	10 (222)
Able to balance the needs of stakeholders, including taxpayers	20	32	52	11 (176)
Focused on improving test scores	9	8	8	12 (51)
Total Responses				791

Q13. What is your age?

Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
17 and under	17	2.14%	
18 to 34 years old	126	15.87%	
35 to 49 years old	375	47.23%	
50 to 64 years old	253	31.86%	
65 and over	23	2.90%	
Total Responses	794		



Q14. Do you have any school-aged children living at home with you?			
Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Yes	493	61.93%	
No	303	38.07%	
Total Responses	796		

Q15. What grade(s) are your children in?			
Responses	Responses	%	Percentage of total respondents
Pre-school	54	10.98%	
Elementary School	259	52.64%	
Middle School	181	36.79%	
High School	216	43.90%	
Other (Please specify)	19	3.86%	
Total Responses	729		

Multiple answers per participant possible. Percentages added may exceed 100 since a participant may select more than one answer for this question.