Profile of the Ideal Executive Director Candidate Survey

Maggie L. Walker Governor's School
April 3, 2025

Survey Purpose

This survey collected feedback from community members, the regional school board, the superintendent steering committee, the education foundation and advisory members, staff, and students regarding the important characteristics needed for the next Executive Director at Maggie L. Walker Governor's School to be considered in the candidate search.

Report Sections

- TOP THEMES
- CHARTS AND TABLES
- APPENDIX: TABLES BY GROUP

Survey Design

- **Type of Survey:** Feedback survey with mostly closed-ended multiple choice questions, and one open-ended question.
- **Length:** 13 questions

Respondent Demographics

A total of 254 respondents participated in the survey (n = 254)

Role Representation

- Community Member: 14 (5.5%)
- School Board Member: 3 (1.2%)
- Steering Committee Member: 14 (5.5%)
- Foundation and Advisory Member: 6 (2.4%)
- Parent/Families: 39 (15.4%)
- Staff: 64 (25.2%)
- Students: 114 (44.9%)

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Top Themes

The following survey results highlight the core characteristics, attributes, and experiences that respondents value in the next Executive Director. While many priorities were shared across groups, each also offered unique perspectives based on their connection to the school. These insights should guide Maggie L. Walker in identifying candidates who reflect these expectations and are well-aligned with the school's mission and community priorities.

Theme 1: Expertise in Gifted Education and Public School Leadership

Across all stakeholder groups, there is strong agreement that the next Executive Director must be a seasoned public educator with deep experience in gifted education. Stakeholders want a leader with **proven credibility, instructional expertise, and firsthand knowledge of high-achieving school environments**—someone who has led in similar settings and understands the unique demands of gifted learners.

- **Experience in gifted education:** This was the most frequently selected qualification across all stakeholder groups and was viewed as essential. Respondents stressed that the Executive Director must understand the academic rigor, emotional complexity, and intellectual curiosity of gifted learners. Stakeholders are looking for someone who appreciates both the challenge and nuance of gifted education and can cultivate programs that promote deep thinking, creativity, and social-emotional growth.
- **High school and instructional leadership:** Prioritized by teachers, staff, Steering Committee members, and school board representatives, this experience was seen as foundational. Stakeholders favored candidates who have served as high school principals, instructional leaders, or classroom teachers, citing the importance of firsthand knowledge of adolescents, curriculum design, and school operations. This background was closely tied to credibility and effective day-to-day leadership.
- **Regional or district-level leadership:** Especially valued by school board and regional committee members, this experience aligns with the school's multi-district structure. Stakeholders want a leader capable of navigating political complexity, forging cross-division partnerships, and aligning school operations with broader district goals. Systems-level experience was viewed as critical to building trust and sustaining collaboration.

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- **De-emphasis of experience in other sectors:** While nonprofit, advocacy, higher education, and private sector experience were occasionally noted as potentially valuable, stakeholders expressed a strong preference for candidates with a public K–12 background. This reflects a belief that deep familiarity with public education systems, particularly at the high school level, is most aligned with the school's mission and operational context. Experience from other sectors may be viewed as a complement to—but not a substitute for—direct public school leadership.

Supporting Data

- **75.2%** selected experience in gifted education as an essential criterion for the new candidate. (See Figure 2.)
- **55.6%** selected high school teaching experience as an essential criterion for the new candidate. (See Figure 2.)
- Quote: *"Two ideas are essential to this position. First, experience working with gifted students in public schools. Second, instructional leadership—this person should be someone who's worked closely with curriculum and understands classrooms." (Teacher/Staff)*
- Quote: *"I truly believe that experience as a classroom teacher is vital to this role. While there are many other experiences, qualities, and proficiencies that will help a candidate be successful, I do not think they can fully fulfill the mission of our school without a deep understanding of the on-the-ground experience of teachers." (Alumni)*
- Quote: *"I hope the search committee will look well beyond the "stable" of current principals and truly search for someone with vision and experience in leading a talented faculty and staff. I long for a return to a more collaborative model instead of the top-down approach increasingly favored over the last 10 years or so." (Teacher/Staff)*

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Theme 2: Values-Driven Leadership - Fairness, Integrity, and Inclusion

Stakeholders are seeking a leader who reflects the school's core values and leads with both professionalism and purpose. **A central theme across the data is the desire for leadership rooted in fairness, integrity, and inclusion.**

The next Executive Director should demonstrate a commitment to building welcoming, supportive systems that honor the diversity of students, staff, and families. Stakeholders also **value emotional intelligence, humility, and transparency**, and are looking for a leader who **fosters a culture of respect, trust, and belonging** throughout the school community.

- **Fairness and cultural competence:** Across all groups, stakeholders emphasized the importance of a leader with a strong, ongoing commitment to fairness, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness. This includes fostering diversity and ensuring that policies, staffing, curriculum, and student support reflect the needs and strengths of all learners—especially in a high-performing environment where equitable access and opportunity remain central priorities.
- **Emotional intelligence and relational leadership:** Stakeholders—particularly staff and students—highlighted the value of a leader who builds trusting relationships, listens with empathy, and creates space for diverse perspectives. Qualities such as kindness, humility, and authenticity were frequently cited as essential to fostering a positive school climate.
- **Ethical leadership and transparency:** School Board and Steering Committee members especially emphasized the need for a leader who is principled, transparent, and fair. In a multi-district context, where decisions carry broad impact, ethical leadership is seen as key to maintaining trust and alignment across communities.
- **Whole-child, student-centered philosophy:** Stakeholders broadly support a leadership approach that balances academic excellence with attention to students' social-emotional development, identity, and well-being. They want a leader who sees students as full individuals and supports their growth beyond traditional academic measures.

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Supporting Data

- **43.3%** noted that the next executive director should have an appreciation for and promotion of individual differences among students and **42.1%** emphasized the need for emotional intelligence and cultural competence as well as **28.7%** for flexibility and adaptability. (See Figure 4.)

- Quote: *"Good candidates are dedicated to equity in education, inclusion in schools, and culturally responsive teaching. Good candidates trust teachers to be experts in their fields." (Teacher/Staff)*

- Quote: *"... flexible when appropriate and recognizes the importance of meeting the needs of the "whole child" including mental health." (Teacher/Staff)*

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Theme 3: Relational Leadership with Strategic Vision and Accountability

Stakeholders are looking for a leader who is both **present and strategic**—someone who communicates openly, builds trust, and is prepared to make thoughtful, sometimes difficult decisions in support of the school's mission. This combination of relational leadership and strategic execution was one of the most consistent themes in the data.

Stakeholders value a leader who can **navigate complexity with clarity, uphold high expectations for students and staff, and inspire shared confidence**. Importantly, accountability and empathy are seen as complementary, not conflicting. Strategic planning also emerged as a key priority, with many—especially families, board members, and community members—seeking a leader who can align daily operations with a clear, forward-looking vision.

- **Visibility and approachability:** Students and staff emphasized the need for a leader who is consistently present, engages informally, and builds strong relationships through everyday interactions. There was clear concern about detached leadership. Stakeholders want someone who is genuinely involved in school life.
- **Collaborative problem-solving and inclusive decision-making:** Across all groups, stakeholders valued leaders who listen actively, welcome diverse input, and involve others meaningfully before making decisions. Inclusive leadership was seen as a strategic asset that fosters trust and alignment.
- **Decisiveness, high expectations, and courageous leadership:** Respondents want a leader who is principled and firm, upholding high standards for both students and staff while making difficult decisions when needed. The ability to balance empathy with resolve was widely seen as a key leadership trait.
- **Strategic planning and execution:** Families, board members, and advisory groups prioritized a leader who can move beyond vision and implement measurable, long-term plans. Stakeholders are looking for disciplined follow-through and alignment between strategy and daily operations.
- **Advocacy and external relationships:** Staff and Steering Committee members stressed the need for a leader who can effectively represent the school externally, especially with state legislators and funding partners. Advocacy is seen as critical to the school's visibility, sustainability, and regional influence.

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Supporting Data

- Quote: *"Teachers at this school have often voiced concerns about consistency of expectations. While compassion and flexibility are a valuable asset to a leader and a necessary part of leading a unique institution such as MLWGS, we also need a leader who has clarity and consistency in expectations, rules, policies, procedures, and enforcement for teachers, students, and parents." (Teacher/Staff)*

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- Quote: *"Someone who is relatable and approachable." (Parent/Family Member)*

- *Quote: "They should be compassionate and approachable, so the students feel comfortable going to them with concerns" (Student)*

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Charts and Tables

Table 1. Please select the role from which you are responding:

Response	Count	Percent
Parent/Family Member	39	15.4
Student	114	44.9
Teacher/Staff	53	20.9
Other	48	18.9

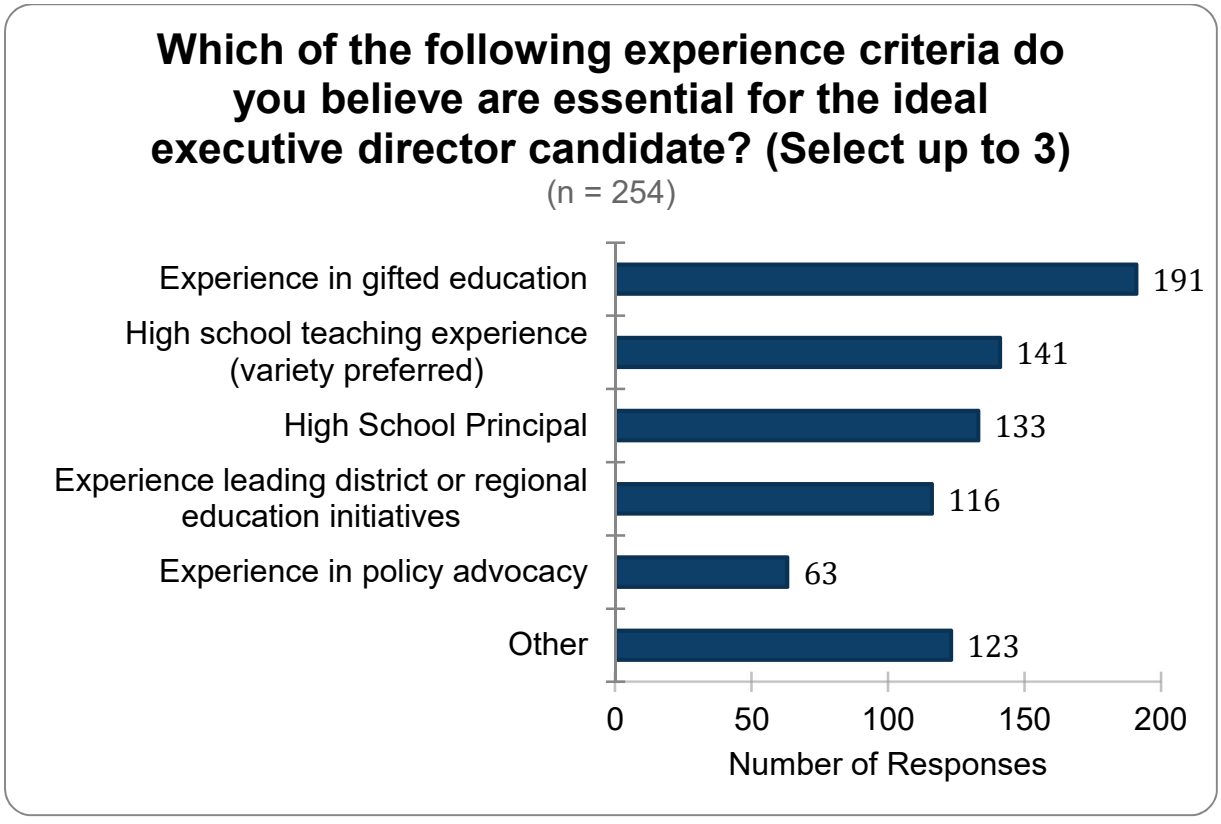

Figure 2

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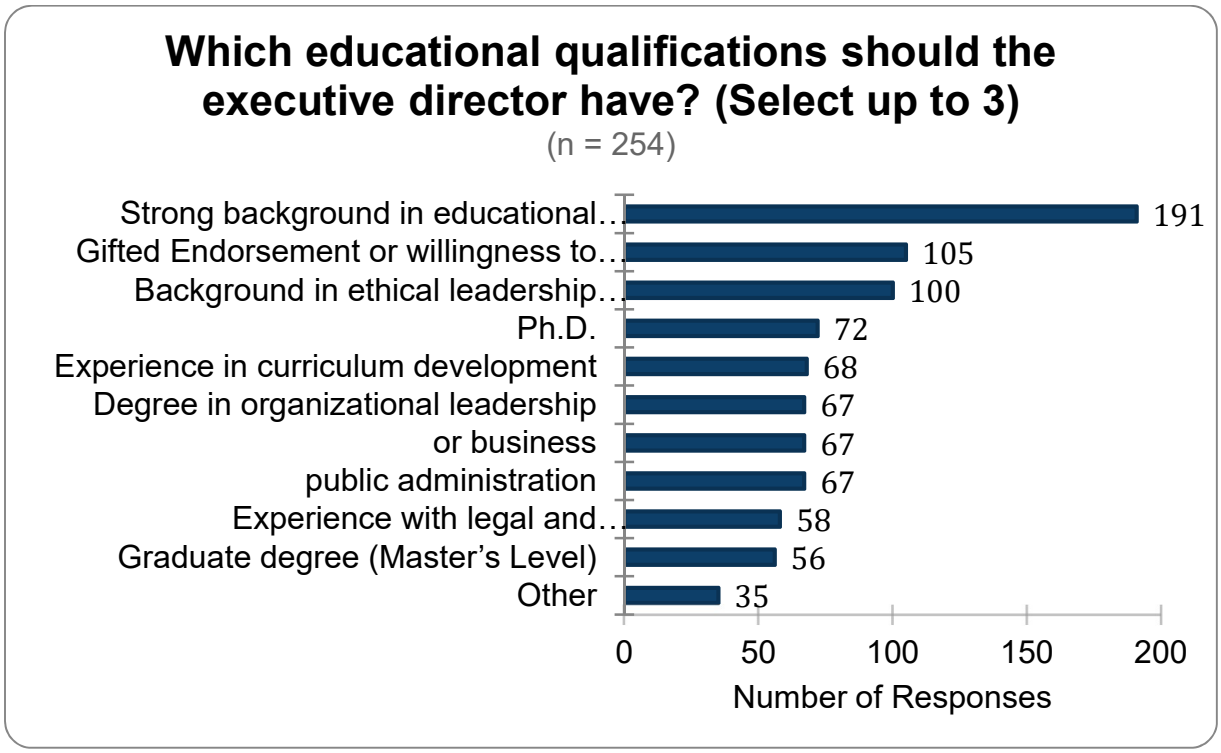

Figure 3

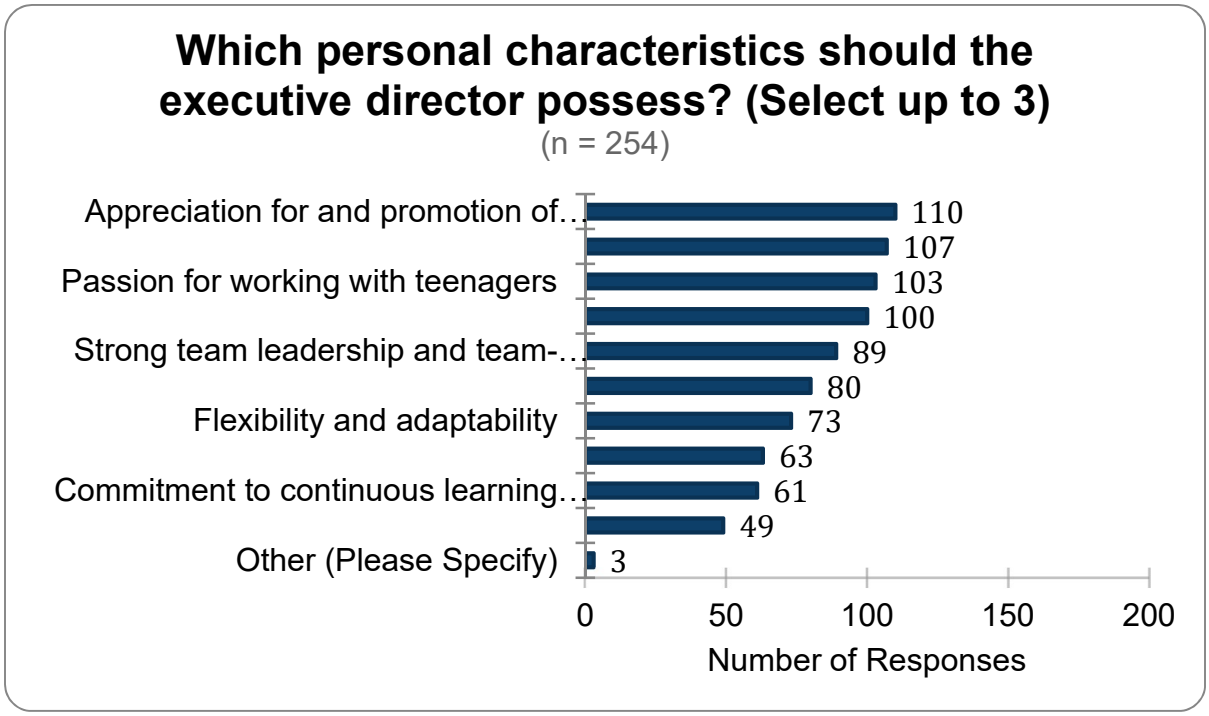

Figure 4

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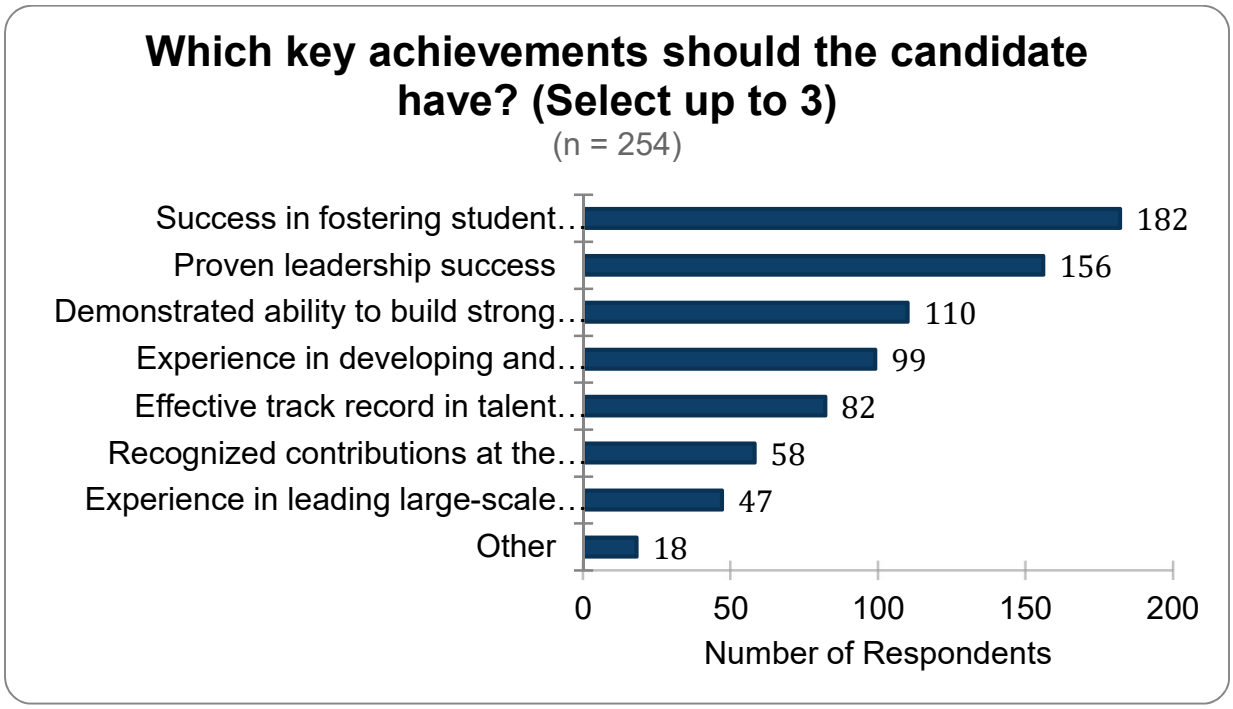

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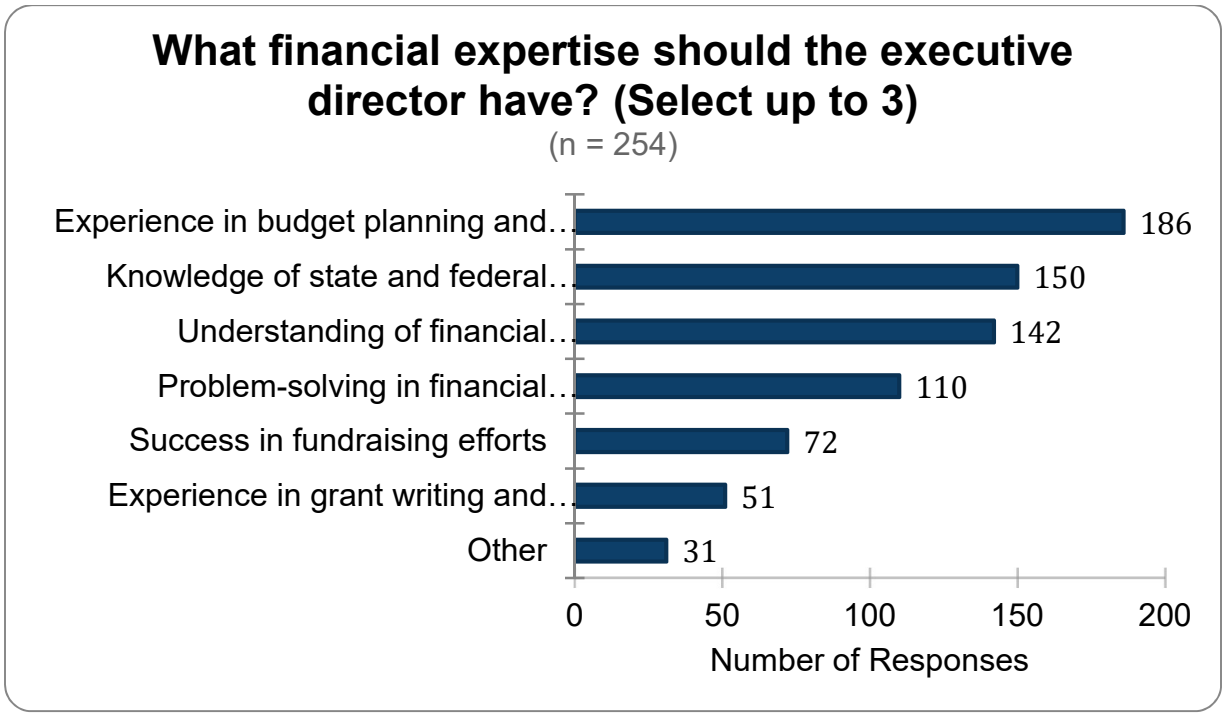

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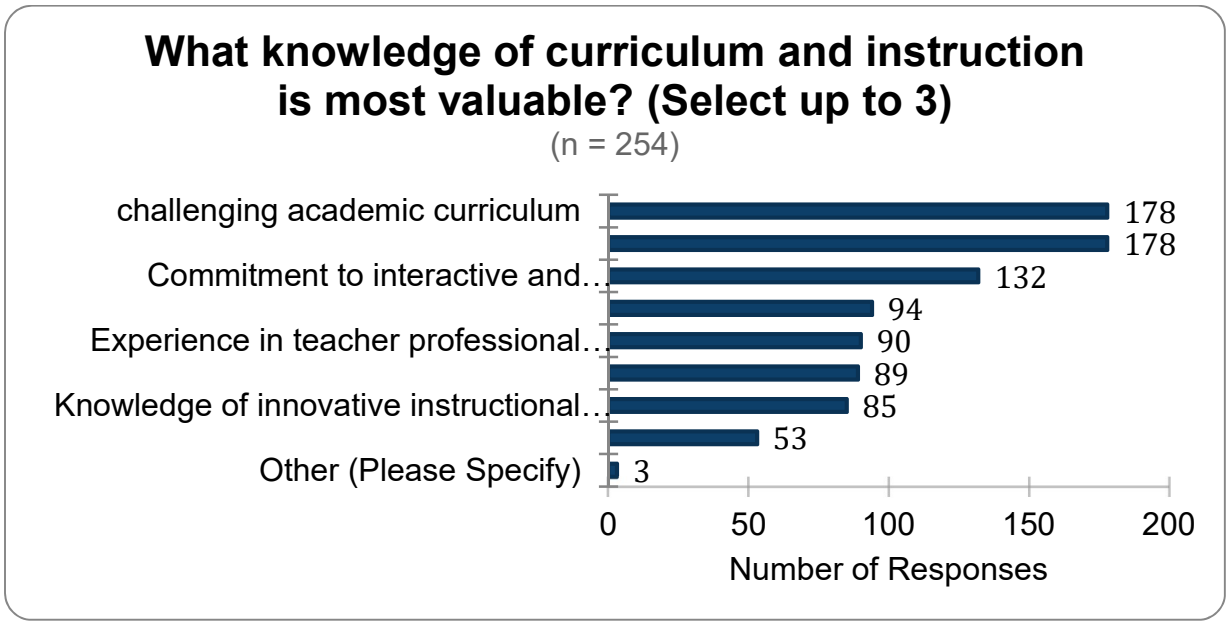

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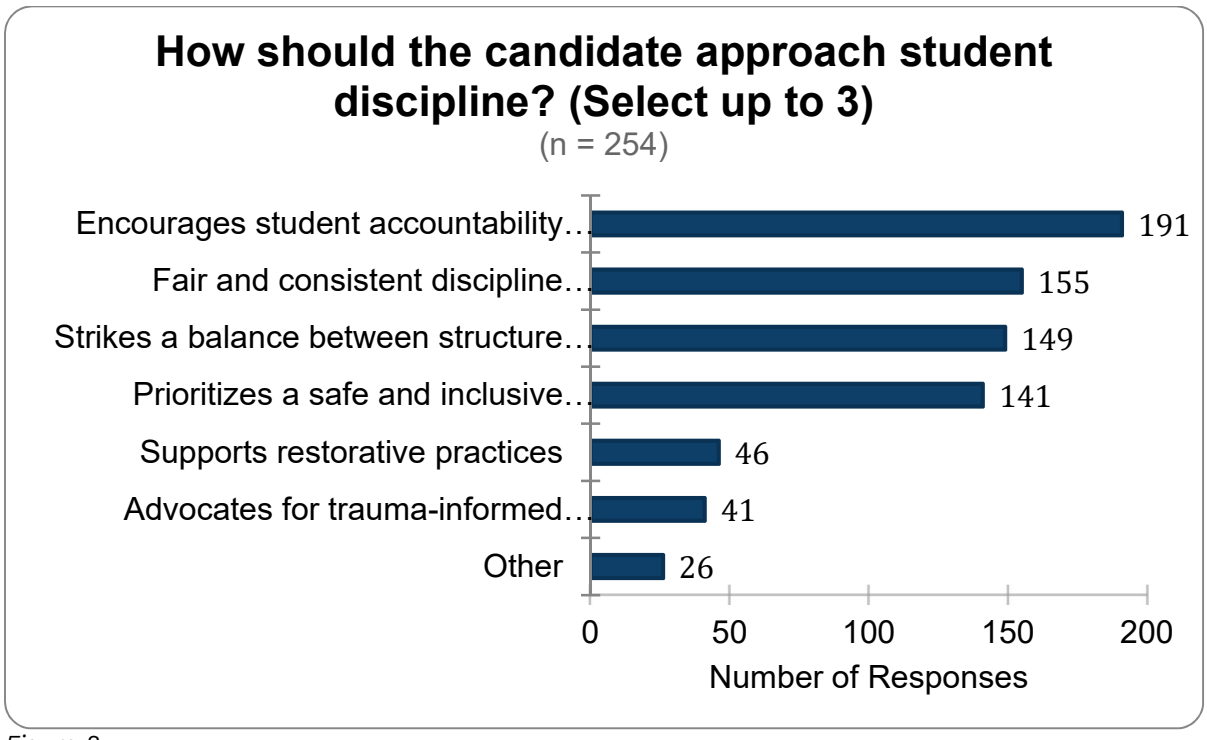

Figure 8

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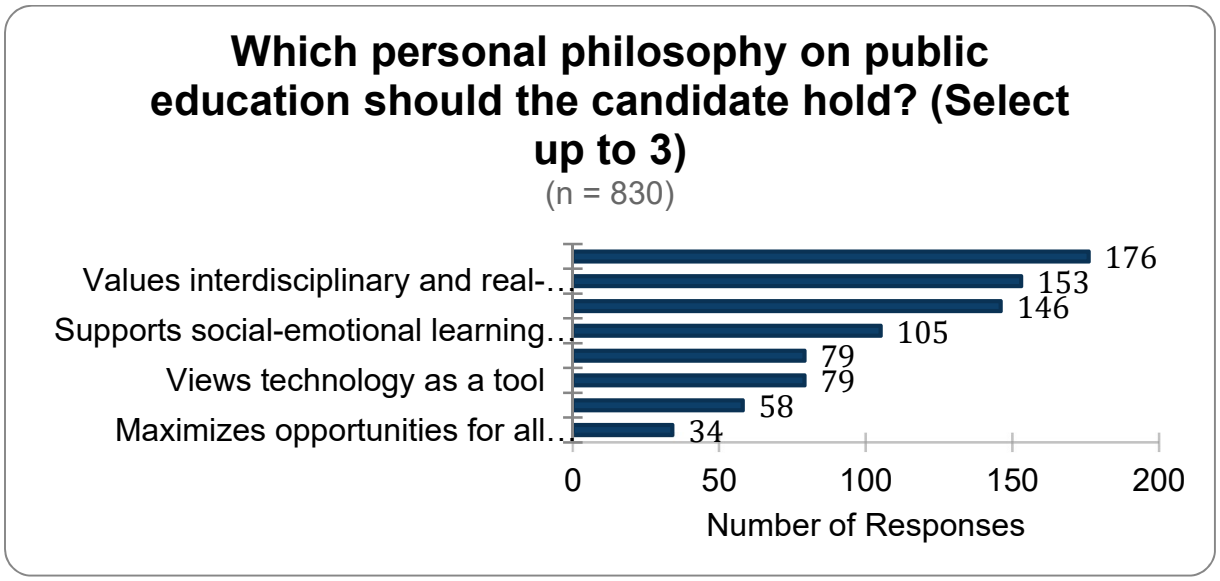

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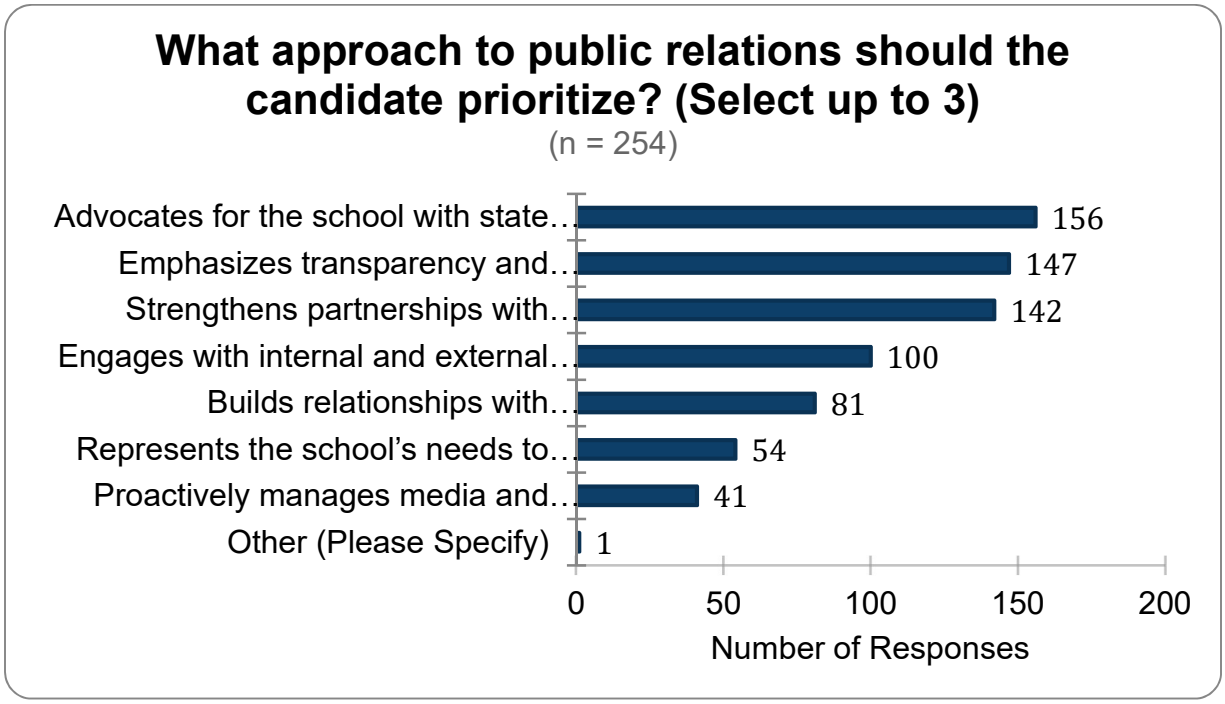

Figure 10

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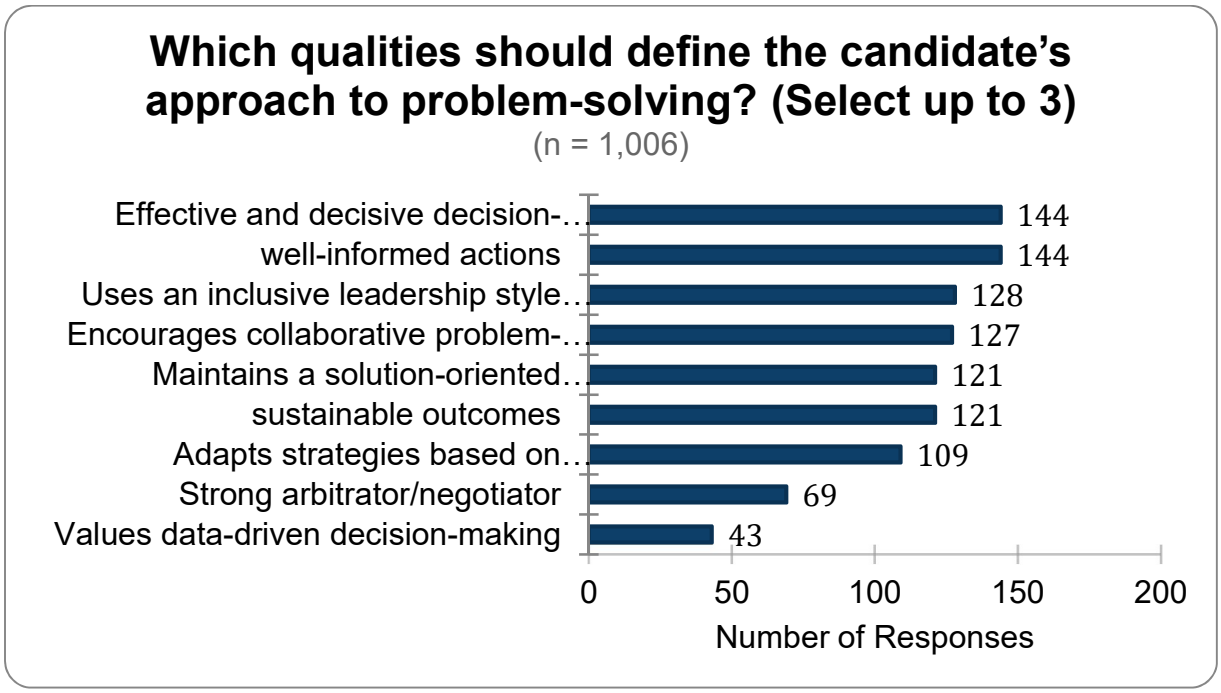

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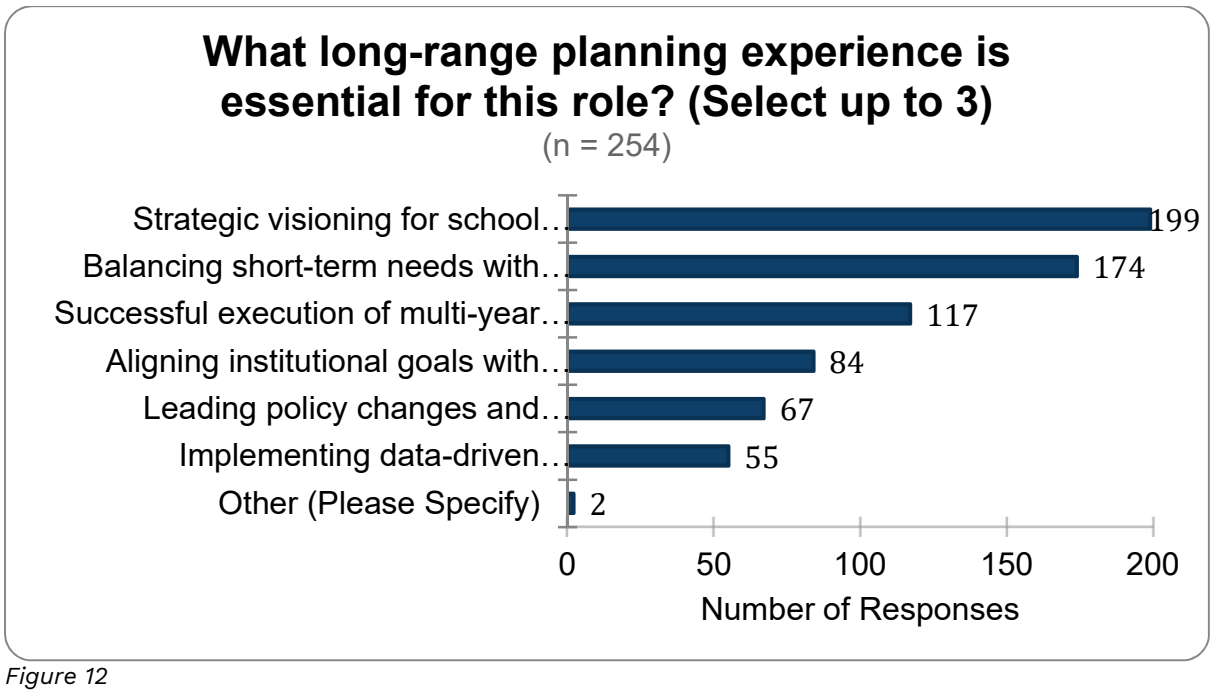

Figure 12

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Appendix

Q: Which of the following experience criteria do you believe are essential for the ideal executive director candidate? (Select up to 3) - *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent /Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Experience in gifted education	13	6	29	3	40	10	90	191
High school teaching experience (variety preferred)	7	3	28	0	39	7	57	141
High School Principal	5	3	23	2	44	12	44	133
Experience leading district or regional education initiatives	7	2	23	2	25	7	50	116
Experience in policy advocacy	2	0	3	0	17	2	39	63
Experience in nonprofit leadership	4	0	9	1	4	0	20	38
Experience in workforce development and industry partnerships	4	0	4	0	7	0	18	33
College Dean	2	1	2	0	2	0	13	20
Business CEO	1	0	1	0	4	1	6	13
Private School Headmaster	2	0	0	0	7	0	2	11
Other	0	0	1	0	5	0	2	8

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Q: Which educational qualifications should the executive director have? (Select up to 3)

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Strong background in educational leadership	10	5	31	3	45	8	89	191
Gifted Endorsement or Willingness to obtain it	9	2	14	2	26	9	43	105
Background in ethical leadership and governance studies	4	2	11	0	26	1	56	100
Ph.D.	3	2	17	2	19	5	24	72
Experience in curriculum development	4	0	8	1	12	5	38	68
Degree in organizational leadership or business or public administration	5	1	9	0	13	3	36	67
Experience with legal and compliance aspects of education	3	1	8	0	24	3	19	58
Graduate degree (Master's Level)	3	3	11	1	12	4	22	56
Eligible for Secondary Principal Certification	5	1	6	0	9	4	6	31
Other (Please Specify)	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	4

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Q: Which personal characteristics should the executive director possess? (Select up to 3) - *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Appreciation for and promotion of individual differences among students and staff	6	4	12	1	32	4	51	110
Emotional intelligence and cultural competence	5	2	22	1	24	2	51	107
Passion for working with teenagers	5	2	27	1	11	3	54	103
Honesty and integrity	8	1	18	1	29	6	37	100
Strong team leadership and team-building skills	5	4	18	3	21	4	34	89
Excellent interpersonal skills	5	2	13	1	25	7	27	80
Flexibility and adaptability	2	1	8	0	25	4	33	73
Visionary mindset	7	1	8	1	17	6	23	63
Commitment to continuous learning and professional development	4	1	10	0	12	5	29	61
Strong conflict-resolution skills	2	0	6	0	19	1	21	49
Other (Please Specify)	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	3

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Q: **Which key achievements should the candidate have? (Select up to 3)** – *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Success in fostering student academic growth and achievement	8	4	33	2	35	10	90	182
Proven leadership success	5	6	23	2	42	11	67	156
Demonstrated ability to build strong partnerships	6	2	16	2	30	4	50	110
Experience in developing and implementing a strategic plan	8	4	13	1	29	11	33	99
Effective track record in talent recruitment and retention	8	1	21	2	20	2	28	82
Recognized contributions at the community and/or professional level	5	1	6	0	16	1	29	58
Experience in leading large-scale organizational change	0	0	2	0	13	2	30	47
Contributions to research and policy development	1	0	2	0	2	0	10	15
Other (Please Specify)	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3

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Q: What financial expertise should the executive director have? (Select up to 3) – Number of Responses

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Experience in budget planning and implementation	11	6	33	2	50	13	71	186
Knowledge of state and federal funding processes	8	4	29	1	44	9	55	150
Understanding of financial transparency and accountability in education	8	4	26	1	38	7	58	142
Problem-solving in financial management	8	2	7	2	30	6	55	110
Success in fundraising efforts	6	1	10	1	9	1	44	72
Experience in grant writing and acquisition	0	0	6	0	12	1	32	51
Experience managing large financial portfolios	0	0	2	0	5	2	20	29
Other (Please Specify)	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2

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Q: What knowledge of curriculum and instruction is most valuable? (Select up to 3) – Number of Responses

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Strong belief in a broad, challenging academic curriculum	11	4	32	3	54	7	67	178
Commitment to interactive and experience-based learning	4	0	15	2	32	4	75	132
Understanding of differentiated instruction	4	1	9	1	30	3	46	94
Experience in teacher professional development	4	4	16	0	17	8	41	90
Proven ability to evaluate and implement curriculum innovations	9	3	10	1	22	5	39	89
Knowledge of innovative instructional technologies	4	3	19	2	16	5	36	85
Familiarity with competency-based education models	4	1	11	0	7	5	25	53
Other (Please Specify)	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3

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Q: How should the candidate approach student discipline? (Select up to 3) – Number of Responses

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Encourages student accountability while fostering a supportive environment	11	4	33	3	52	7	81	191
Fair and consistent discipline approach with clear expectations	8	4	22	3	49	9	60	155
Strikes a balance between structure and flexibility to promote responsible decision-making	10	3	25	2	29	6	74	149
Prioritizes a safe and inclusive school culture	6	3	22	1	31	9	69	141
Supports restorative practices	2	1	4	0	14	3	22	46
Advocates for trauma-informed disciplinary practices	5	0	4	0	9	2	21	41
Implements data-driven behavioral intervention strategies	1	0	3	0	7	3	9	23
Other (Please Specify)	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	3

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Q: Which personal philosophy on public education should the candidate hold? (Select up to 3) – *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Promotes well-rounded student development	12	3	32	2	38	8	81	176
Values interdisciplinary and real-world learning experiences	6	3	25	3	43	9	64	153
Advocates for fairness and opportunity for all	7	5	19	1	31	7	76	146
Supports social-emotional learning and mental health initiatives	8	3	17	1	23	5	48	105
Views technology as a tool, not an end in itself	3	1	7	0	28	3	37	79
Believes in a mission-driven approach	2	1	11	0	21	5	18	58
Maximizes opportunities for all stakeholders	4	0	5	2	8	2	13	34

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Q: What approach to public relations should the candidate prioritize? (Select up to 3) – *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Advocates for the school with state legislature	10	4	20	0	49	5	68	156
Emphasizes transparency and community engagement	6	2	20	3	37	11	68	147
Strengthens partnerships with community organizations	8	3	22	3	28	9	69	142
Engages with internal and external stakeholders	8	5	19	2	30	12	24	100
Builds relationships with philanthropic and nonprofit partners	4	3	15	1	20	3	35	81
Represents the school's needs to the business sector	4	0	6	0	12	0	32	54
Proactively manages media and public communications	1	1	3	0	6	0	30	41
Other (Please Specify)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

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Q: Which qualities should define the candidate's approach to problem-solving? (Select up to 3) – *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Effective and decisive decision-maker with a focus on timely well-informed actions	10	3	18	2	39	8	64	144
Uses an inclusive leadership style that values diverse perspectives	9	2	20	1	35	3	58	128
Encourages collaborative problem-solving approaches	9	4	24	3	30	7	50	127
Maintains a solution-oriented mindset focused on practical sustainable outcomes	7	4	18	2	35	5	50	121
Adapts strategies based on emerging challenges	5	0	15	0	23	4	62	109
Strong arbitrator/negotiator	0	2	6	0	19	5	37	69
Values data-driven decision-making	2	2	9	1	8	9	12	43

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Q: What long-range planning experience is essential for this role? (Select up to 3) – *Number of Responses*

Value	Community Member	Foundation and Advisory Members	Parent/ Family Member	School Board	Staff	Steering Committee Member	Students	Total
Strategic visioning for school improvement	11	6	27	2	49	11	93	199
Balancing short-term needs with long-term goals	10	2	27	1	49	6	79	174
Successful execution of multi-year planning	8	4	21	1	25	7	51	117
Aligning institutional goals with community needs	3	3	8	2	19	3	46	84
Leading policy changes and systemic reforms	4	0	7	2	15	6	33	67
Implementing data-driven improvement plans	2	0	10	1	14	8	20	55
Other (Please Specify)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

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