

# Community Engagement Report

Staunton Public Schools Superintendent Search

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## **BWP ASSOCIATES**

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## **REPORT FORMAT**

- I. Community Engagement Objectives
- II. Summary of Community Engagement Activities
- III. Quantitative Community Survey Results (Attachment 1)
- IV. Qualitative Feedback: Open Public Forums and Focus Groups
- V. Survey Responses and Groups: Common Themes
- VI. Draft Leadership Profile (Attachment 2)
- VII. Final Comments

## I. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

1. To identify perceived strengths and challenges of the Staunton Public Schools.
2. To identify desired qualities and characteristics of next superintendent.
3. To build community understanding and support for the superintendent search process.
4. To ensure broadest possible community participation in superintendent search process.

## II. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

BWP search team members conducted an extensive Community Engagement Process that involved Staunton Public Schools employees, students and Staunton residents. The process consisted of an online survey and numerous meetings with constituent groups.

On March 6 and March 9, the search team facilitated discussions that included 20 scheduled interviews and meetings. Sessions were held with school board members, central office staff, school employees, students, city governmental officials, and members of the community. Approximately 160 individuals participated in these sessions.

The online survey, *Finding a Leader for Our Future*, was designed and posted on the school system website. The survey, available since February 17, will close on April 1. As of March 10, 165 completed surveys have been received. (See Attachment 1)

This multifaceted approach to community engagement reflects the Staunton School Board's commitment to input from students, employees and members of the community. The process has yielded a significant amount of thought-provoking responses which provide clear guidance as the search process proceeds.

## III. QUANTITATIVE COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Listed below are the three highest rated responses to each of the five non-demographic questions from the online survey, *Finding a Leader for Our Future*. Preliminary data were gleaned from 165 responses and Attachment 1 contains the survey results.

- A. **Survey Question #3 requested responders to select the three most significant strengths of SCPS from the following list:** Supportive community, Excellent teachers

and staff, Size of district, Location of district, Available resources, Instructional quality, Good school facilities, Supportive parents, Reputation of district, Financial management, Technology, Effective leadership, Curriculum, Educational options and programs, Other. The top three results were:

1. Excellent teachers and staff – 61.6 %
2. Size of district – 35.4%
3. Supportive community – 34.8 %

**B. Survey Question #4 requested responders to select the three important skills you would like to see in a superintendent from the following list:** Communication skills, Instructional skills, Managerial skills, Financial skills, Organizational skills, Leadership skills, Interpersonal, Public relations skills and Curriculum expertise, Other. The three top results were:

1. Communication skills – 69.5%
2. Leadership skills – 68.9%
3. Interpersonal skills – 48.8%

**C. Survey Question #5 requested responders to select the three most important characteristics you would like a superintendent to exhibit from the following list:** Commitment to the community, Enthusiasm, Integrity, Good judgement, Innovation, Team builder, Change agent, Risk taker, Negotiator, Peacemaker, Visionary, Other. The three top results were:

1. Integrity – 58.8%
2. Commitment to the community – 50.9%
3. Team builder and Good judgment – 43.6%

**D. Survey Question #6 requested responders to indicate whether you believe the item is either extremely important, important, or not important in the new superintendent from the following list:** Doctorate degree, Experience as: a superintendent with a proven track record of success; superintendent experience in a similar size district; an assistant superintendent; district level administrator; a principal; a classroom teacher. Experience in or with: finance, personnel; instruction; facility construction and

management; technology; a multi-cultural environment; strategic planning; in the Southeast. The top three results were:

1. Experience in instruction– 98.2%
2. Experience in strategic planning – 97.5%
3. Experience as a classroom teacher– 95.7%
- (4.) Experience in a multi-cultural environment and personnel– 95.0%

E. **Survey Question #7 requested responders to select what they consider to be the three most important issues or concerns facing the district in the next five years from the following list:** Community relations, Curriculum, Growth, Facilities, Funding, Educational options and programs, Instruction, Personnel, Technology. The top three results were:

1. Facilities– 56.7%
2. Funding – 48.8%
3. Community relations– 48.2%
- (4.) Personnel – 46.3%

#### **IV. QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM OPEN PUBLIC FORUMS AND FOCUS GROUPS**

Listed below are the responses collected from the interviews, small group meetings and community meetings. Each session was structured to receive feedback related to three questions:

**What do you see as the strengths of the SCPS?**

**What do you see as the greatest challenges faced by the SCPS?**

**What qualities and characteristics does the next superintendent of SCPS need to possess and demonstrate?**

Below are the three questions and “prominent responses” received from each session. Responses were deemed to be “prominent” when they were expressed multiple times during the sessions and/or when they were considered uniquely relevant and insightful. For organizational purposes, the “prominent responses” were organized using the relevant top-rated categories on the Community Survey.

**A. Question 1 – WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATEST STRENGTHS OF STAUNTON CITY SCHOOLS?**

“Prominent responses” from the Community Engagement Sessions include:

- i. Excellent, teachers and staff (61.6%)  
Dedicated; hardworking teachers and staff; positive interactions between teachers and students; strong teachers who work together; keep best interests of kids first.
- ii. Size of district (35.4%)  
Manageable size; size of system; small town feel, close knit – everybody gets to know each other; like family; agile.
- iii. Supportive community - (34.8%)  
Engaged community; strong sense of community; resources available; good and supportive relationship with School Board and City Government.

Additional comments:

Students are a strength; great kids; safe schools; good system; cultural opportunities; arts and sports; sense of history; tradition; strong technology; progressive in terms of technology; sense of collaboration; accessible Board and staff.

**B. Question 2 – WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FACED BY STAUNTON CITY SCHOOLS?**

“Prominent responses” from the Community Engagement Sessions include:

- i. Facilities (53.2%)  
Review strategic planning to address equity in present and future infrastructure; successful completion of high school renovation.
- ii. Funding (48.8%)  
Funding to address capital needs of high school renovation; competitive salaries to attract and retain staff; increase staff diversity; support for school funding with significant number of tax payers who do not have children in school system.

iii. Community relations (48.2%)

Many different interest groups in community; diversity concerns with multiple layers; concerns related to lack of cultural sensitivity; perceived need for cultural competency training; need to increase family involvement; significant difference of opinions re: name of high school, difference of opinions regarding WRE issue.

iv. Personnel (46.3%)

Lack of diversity among staff and School Board; need to increase staff diversity to mirror student population; recruitment and retention of staff; teacher retention; small division cause some staff to wear many hats.

Additional comments:

Resistance to change; 2018 possible change in four Board seats; differences in constituents view points; lack of accreditation in elementary school; ability to deal effectively with controversial issues.

**C. Question 3 – WHAT QUALITIES AND CHARACTERISTICS DOES THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT NEED TO POSSESS AND DEMONSTRATE?**

\*\*\*Please note that Survey Questions 4, 5, and 6 relate to qualities and characteristics of next superintendent and there is some degree of overlap in listing prominent responses.

**I. Prominent responses (Survey question 5) from the Community Engagement Sessions follow:**

i. Communication skills (69.5%)

Strong communication skills; community oriented with ability to effectively reach out to all constituents; visible presence in schools and community; effective team builder who will employ collaborative approach to seek ideas from others; good listener who is approachable; demonstrated ability to build positive relationships with staff, students, parents and the community; ability to work with diverse groups of people; maintains transparency in all matters.

ii. Leadership skills (68.9%)

Forward thinking; ability to garner support using a collaborative style; effective problem solver and can bring people together while implementing change; committed to school system's mission and will support efforts to address concerns regarding diversity; encourages community involvement; promotes what's best for all students/families even when it is not popular.

iii. Interpersonal skills (48.8%)

Courageous, people person who is personable, has a sense of humor and is calm but firm in convictions; authentic, approachable, possesses high integrity; credibility; open and transparent; demonstrates courage; honesty, introspection, and has "thick skin".

Other:

Understanding of Staunton's history and culture; fiscal awareness; ability to manage financial resources to best serve all students; vested in the community; visibility in schools and engaged in community; can work effectively with school board, and city officials; does what's best for all students; willingness to confront issues related to diversity and naming of high school; advocate for public education; experience working with diverse community; skin in the game and will commit to staying a long time – longevity.

II. **Prominent responses (Survey question 5) from the Community Engagement Sessions follow:**

i. Integrity (58.8%)

Displays Integrity and credibility; open and transparent; is authentic.

ii. Commitment to the community (50.9%)

Vested in the community; understanding of Staunton's culture; cultural sensitivity; visibility in the schools and community; dedication to the community; seeks parental input; encourage community involvement and building sense of community.

iii. Team builder/ Good judgment (43.6%)



Builds relationships with multiple stakeholders; creates an environment that establishes trust; ability to work with diverse groups of people; good collaborator and team builder; collaborative approach in seeking ideas from others.

**III. Prominent responses (Survey question 6) from the Community Engagement Sessions follow:**

- i. Experience in instruction - (98.2%)  
Instructional leader and has solid understanding of instruction; knows curriculum trends in education; classroom experience and excellent understanding of effective use of technology; ability to assess school system programs and determine effectiveness; ability to address school accreditation challenges; understanding of school today and has knowledge of issues that affect well being of “whole child”.
- ii. Experience in strategic planning- (97.5 %)  
Strategic thinker with ability to leverage resources to better serve kids, strategic leader; ability to articulate a school system vision; build intentional internal coherence; continuity of programs; ability to move school system to next level.
- iii. Experience as a classroom teacher – (95.7%)  
Classroom experience and understands whole child approach that goes beyond focus on test scores.
- (iv.) Experience re: multi-cultural environment and personnel - (95%)  
Experience in working with diverse community; demonstrated experience with proactive approach to address achievement gap; willingness to confront disparities; proven track record recruiting diverse staff; fosters a healthy working environment; supportive of professional development.

**Other:**

Experience with school construction projects; appreciation of the Arts; savvy and attentive to positive relationships with media; understanding of trauma informed schools.

## V. COMMON THEMES ACROSS SURVEY RESPONSES AND GROUPS

**A thorough analysis of the data collected from the Community Survey, Public meetings, interviews and small group discussions yielded the following themes:**

- A forward thinking instructional leader who will articulate a clear vision and will strategically implement effective programs that improve student learning for all students.
- A leader with familiarity and successful experience in a school district similar to Staunton City Schools.
- An insightful leader with deep instructional knowledge and successful experience who will articulate a vision for programs that address all students' talents, interests and needs.
- A confident leader and excellent communicator who will work with staff and community, employing a collaborative approach in seeking ideas that support a culture which encourages participation in the continuous improvement of programs.
- An effective communicator who encourages and practices transparency and emphasizes the importance of student-centered decisions in order to develop trust in the school system.
- An active listener who communicates effectively both inside and outside the school system, maintains a presence in the schools and community, and models a team-oriented approach to problem solving.
- A leader who has demonstrated fiscal expertise and experience guiding school construction/renovation projects.
- An experience, transparent leader who has demonstrated fiscal expertise and the ability to lead a system which effectively assigns fiscal and human resources to initiatives and programs that benefit all students.

- An ethical manager who strategically utilizes data-informed operational expertise to assure the system’s resources are assigned in the best ways to benefit students and ensures accountability in quality performance for employees at all levels.
- A personable and approachable leader who is visible in schools, at school activities, and will fully participate in the community and will advocate for public education.
- A leader with integrity and courage who will confront disparities and will communicate effectively with constituents and build a positive culture of respect.
- An energetic problem solver who uses good judgement to make collaborative decisions to determine best way to serve all students,

To organize these thoughts, the BWP search team focused on four major descriptors that we believe capture the most frequent themes from the Community Survey and Community Engagement Sessions.

These include:

- Instructional Leader
- Effective Communicator
- Collaborative Manager
- Personal Qualities

## VI. DRAFT LEADERSHIP PROFILE

The recommended draft Leadership Profile expands upon these descriptors and identifies attributes gleaned from community engagement discussions and survey results. (Attachment 2)

## VII. FINAL COMMENTS

The BWP search team members have learned much about the Staunton City Public School System and community and were very impressed with the willingness of participants to share candidly. The team enjoyed meeting key community, school, and district leaders. We found the staff to be capable and dedicated. We were pleased to hear about opportunities for students and the commitment to address the needs of all students. We are hopeful that the next superintendent will take full advantage of a supportive School Board and community. The approved Leadership Profile will provide guidance during the recruitment stage of the search process for selecting Staunton City Public Schools' next leader.