

Groton Public Schools
Robert E. Fitch High School
Principal Search
Leadership Profile

Prepared by

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August 2023

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Introduction

Selecting a new high school principal is among the most important decisions a community undertakes. There are tangible and intangible aspects of leadership required in a principal who is going to work with students, faculty and staff, parents, other administrators, the Board of Education and other elected officials, and the whole community to provide high quality education for a district's children.

In light of the critical nature of this responsibility, the Groton Public Schools sought the input of its school and community stakeholders through focus groups and a survey conducted in July 2023. The focus group options were as follows:

Stakeholder	Date	Time
Board of Education	Monday, July 24	7:15 pm
Teachers	Tuesday, July 25	9:00 am
Staff (non-certified/support)	Tuesday, July 25	10:00 am
Parents & Community Members	Tuesday, July 25	6:00 pm
Administrators	Wednesday, July 26	9:00 am
Students	Wednesday, July 26	7:00 pm

This Leadership Profile presents findings from these focus groups and the survey, conducted between July 10 and July 27, 2023. The consultant scheduled six focus groups and spoke with 20 individuals, including parents, teachers, other staff, administrators, representatives of community organizations, and the Groton Board of Education.

In conducting the focus groups and developing the survey, the consultant used an unbiased, structured approach. Survey participants included 131 Groton residents and staff. In addition to asking about strengths and challenges of Fitch High School which could affect future leadership requirements, she asked about the qualities and expertise most desirable in the next principal. The Fitch High School Search Committee and Groton Administration will use these results in order to find the best possible Principal for Fitch High School at this time. We are presenting these findings to the Search Committee without revealing the identity of any individual contributor.

The Groton Administration made a commendable effort to include voices from as many constituents as possible from the schools and community. Many thanks to focus group participants and survey respondents whose commitment to the schools and Town were evident as they provided perspectives. Special thanks to Joyce Medling for her help scheduling and publicizing the opportunities to participate.

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August 2023

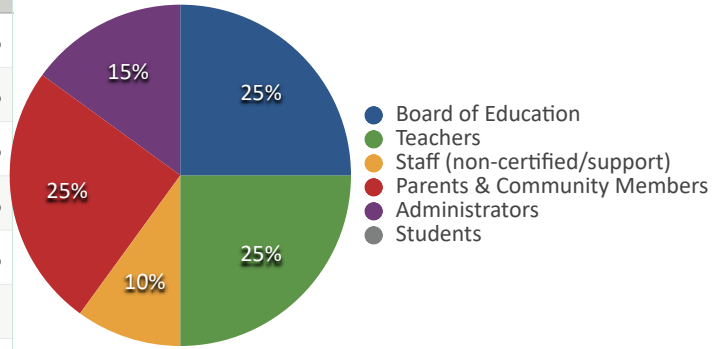
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Data Collection

In total, 151 individuals participated through focus groups and the online survey. The data collected do not constitute a scientific sampling, but a representation of Fitch High School and its community at a moment in time. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. Though the consultant heard the perspectives of many, this profile cannot entirely capture the complexity and nuances of the school and town. Nevertheless, the information yields useful insights for the search process. Items are included in the following report if, in the consultant’s judgment, they were repeated by a sufficient number of respondents to warrant the Search Committee’s attention.

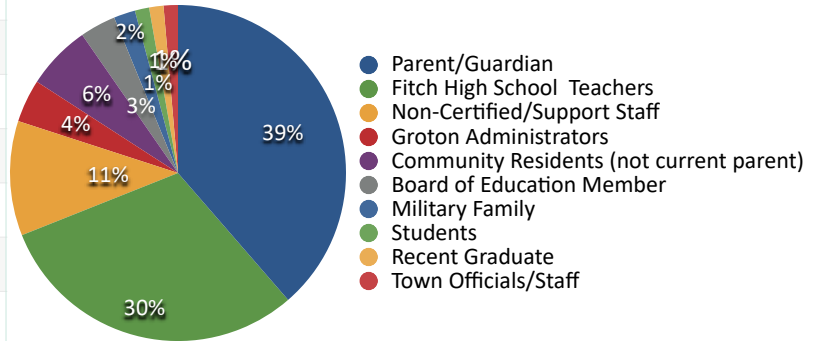
Focus Group Participants

PARTICIPANTS	20	%
Board of Education	5	25.0%
Teachers	5	25.0%
Staff (non-certified/support)	2	10.0%
Parents & Community Members	5	25.0%
Administrators	3	15.0%
Students	0	0.0%
	20	100.0%



Survey Responses

PARTICIPANTS*	131	%
Parent/Guardian	56	38.6%
Fitch High School Teachers	44	30.3%
Non-Certified/Support Staff	16	11.0%
Community Residents (not current parent)	9	6.2%
Groton Administrators	6	4.1%
Board of Education Member	5	3.4%
Military Family	3	2.1%
Students	2	1.4%
Recent Graduate	2	1.4%
Town Officials/Staff	2	1.4%
	* 145	100.0%



*Please note that survey participants identified themselves under multiple categories so numbers add up to more than 131.

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graduates of the Groton Public Schools. Many are veteran educators. Some participants mentioned administrators who are visible, engaging, transparent, and authentic. Many are effective communicators.

School culture

Eighteen (18) respondents mentioned some aspect of school culture as a great strength, citing school spirit and pride, welcoming and approachable students and staff, and a proud history. Some reported that students feel safe at school, “everyone feels happy there, seems comfortable,” and “students are where they need to be and understand high expectations.” Others mentioned an innovative spirit and ability to change.

Students and student voice

Twelve (12) participants identified students as a strength. “Faced with challenges, they manage to overcome them, become very involved and are vocal about their needs, wants, social/emotional learning....” Many are highly “successful in their educational endeavors.”

The community

Fitch also boasts a supportive community, according to 11 participants. The area is “rich in resources and talent.” The schools, in turn, are a good partner to such community organizations as the Navy, Groton Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention (GASP), the police, and other groups.

Facilities

Six (6) participants mentioned Fitch’s physical plant as a strength. The “school on the hill” is clean and well maintained, and “facilities are awesome.”

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The second most cited staff concern was morale (13). This is an issue across public education today, and “some significant personnel changes and tensions” have exacerbated the issue for Fitch.

Five (5) participants mentioned a lack of unity, and indeed, factions among the staff. The new leader will be challenged to “bring faculty onboard as a cohesive force to move education forward. The faculty is fractured from what it once was.”

Transitions or lack of sufficient staff, also a phenomenon across public education in the wake of COVID, are challenges cited by five (5) participants. In addition to staffing changes, some staff are pushing back against new initiatives which feel like a lot to manage. Others are unhappy with the elimination of basic level courses.

Several participants mentioned insufficient staffing and need for better salaries for substitute teachers, tutors, and paraprofessionals.

Leadership/Communications

As Fitch prepares to welcome a new leader, 37 participants identified challenges in leadership the new principal will want to understand. In general, participants would like a leader who encourages the administrative staff to work together and to support the school staff in strong teamwork. They want someone who will make concrete decisions “not for their popularity or because it is the path of least resistance, but... because it’s the right thing to do.” Several cited a lack of direction or clear vision that supports all stakeholders.

Eighteen (18) of these 37 respondents identified communication (administration to staff, students, and parents) as a major challenge. The school has lacked “straightforward, honest and open communication channels between leadership and staff.”

Another eight (8) respondents cited a lack of consistency as a problem. They noted inconsistencies in application of policies, especially regarding discipline.

Culture

Thirty-six (36) participants cited issues with the school culture as a major challenge for the new principal. Of those, half (18) identified safety of students and staff— and “lack of consequences for troublemakers” as a concern.

Another 13 suggested that there needs to be a greater sense of unity, community, and belonging. There is a “breakdown... in respect for each other and differences of opinion.”

Others mentioned a lack of student engagement, intrinsic motivation, and trust and support for teachers.

Program

Though 87 participants identified program breadth and depth as one of Fitch’s greatest strength, 34 identified some challenges with it. These included overall quality, scheduling and funding options, and loss of general courses.

Of the 34 who cited program areas, 14 felt there should be more consistently rigorous instruction and more individual support for all students, including relying less on technology and more on direct feedback about student work.

Eleven (11) of the 34 felt that the breadth of academic and enrichment activities, though a strength, was also a challenge “because there are limits to the fiscal capacity to respond to every desire/need.” In addition to funding challenges, “balancing (the) sheer amount of programming, IB, career and middle

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years in one school, AP, ECE, SpEd, ELL... each with its own unique needs for training, time preparation, and collaboration” stretches staff and has some students “feeling left out.” A couple of respondents cited a division between Advanced Placement “versus IB... funding and numbers game and scheduling. (It’s) hard providing for all students and getting (the) right number of classes....” Some spoke about conflicting schedules and course offerings.

Six (6) participants spoke of the loss of general courses and moving all students into college preparatory programs as a challenge. “They aren’t used to rigors that are expected. Supports aren’t sufficient.” Teachers also spoke of the challenge of having students who thrive with the rigor of the programs alongside students who are not academically motivated. Some spoke of “a conflict between the interests of IB and equity for all students.” They identified a “lack of support and class options for the students in the middle.”

Diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging

Finally, though diversity was cited as a strength by the majority of respondents, 13 identified issues with diversity the new leader will face. Most of these 13 cited the need for equal access and policies that better support and represent a diverse student body. Several felt that there should be a serious effort to ensure the teaching staff reflect the students: Though the school has 47% students of color, staff has 17%, and teachers of color are under 8%.

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Desired Expertise and Qualities in a New Principal

What would be the most important expertise and qualities in a new principal to tap Fitch High School’s strengths and meet its challenges? An analysis of survey responses yielded the following:

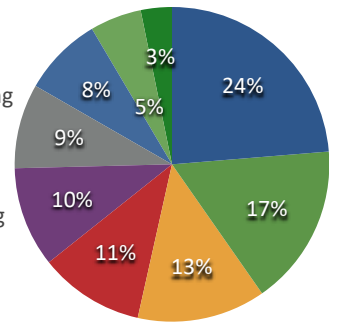
Expertise

Survey respondents weighted three of the eight areas of **desired expertise** in a new principal significantly higher than the other skills. If we look at participant’s **first choice**, *Communicates and collaborates effectively*, at 37.8%, was by far the top selection. Coming in a distant second was *Inspires growth and fosters professional development, team building, and coaching*, at 16.5%. Running third was *Shares district-wide vision of excellence*, at 11%. The order of these doesn’t change when we look at respondents’ **top three choices combined**. *Communicates and collaborates effectively in schools and community* (23.7%) is still decidedly in first place; *Inspires growth and fosters professional development, team building, and coaching* (16.6%) remains in second, and *Shares district-wide vision of excellence* (13.2) is in third. Now also in double-digits are *Encourages constant attention to issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging* (10.8%) and *Thinks and plans strategically* (10.3%).

DESIRED EXPERTISE IN NEW PRINCIPAL	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3 #	TOP 3 %
Communicates and collaborates effectively	48	37.8%	26	20.5%	16	12.8%	90	23.7%
Inspires growth and fosters professional development, team building, and coaching	21	16.5%	24	18.9%	18	14.4%	63	16.6%
Shares vision of excellence & innovative Instruction	14	11.0%	18	14.2%	18	14.4%	50	13.2%
Encourages constant attention to issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging	6	4.7%	21	16.5%	14	11.2%	41	10.8%
Thinks and plans strategically	7	5.5%	12	9.4%	20	16.0%	39	10.3%
Has a broad base of knowledge of educational issues/practices	11	8.7%	7	5.5%	15	12.0%	33	8.7%
Shares and delegates leadership effectively	4	3.1%	13	10.2%	14	11.2%	31	8.2%
Promotes the quality and virtues of Fitch High School	8	6.3%	5	3.9%	7	5.6%	20	5.3%
Other	8	6.3%	1	0.8%	3	2.4%	12	3.2%
Totals	127	100.0%	127	100.0%	125	100.0%	379	100.0%

First Choice Expertise

Top Three Choices



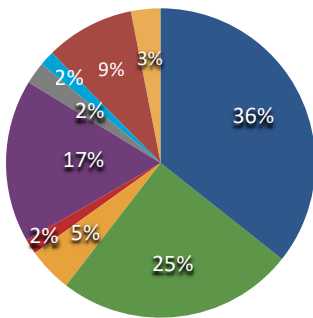
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Qualities

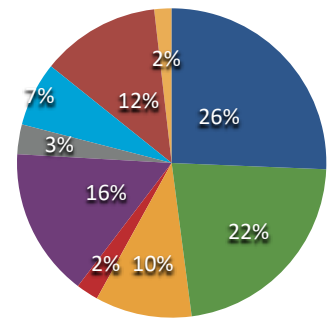
In addition to the leadership characteristics and expertise identified in the prior section, Fitch High School survey respondents reflected some clear preferences for **qualities** desired in a new principal. As a **first choice**, respondents want to see a leader who is *Accessible, approachable, visible in schools and community* (35.7%), who *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus* (24.8%) and who is a *Decisive, confident, objective problems solver* (17.1%).

These are the same choices when we look at respondents' **top three choices**, too, though percentages differ: *Accessible, approachable, visible in schools and community* (25.6%) is still the overwhelming favorite, and *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus* (22.3%) is a closer second. Though still third, *Decisive, confident, objective problems solver* has slipped to 15.5%. Now also in double digits are *Committed to transparent communication* (12.4%) and *Inspirational team builder* (10.1%).

DESIRED QUALITIES IN PRINCIPAL	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3 #	TOP 3 %
Accessible, approachable, visible in schools & community	46	35.7%	33	25.6%	20	15.6%	99	25.6%
Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus	32	24.8%	37	28.7%	17	13.3%	86	22.3%
Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver	22	17.1%	13	10.1%	25	19.5%	60	15.5%
Committed to transparent communication	12	9.3%	18	14.0%	18	14.1%	48	12.4%
Inspirational team builder	6	4.7%	9	7.0%	24	18.8%	39	10.1%
Knowledgeable and hardworking, with attention to detail	2	1.6%	14	10.9%	10	7.8%	26	6.7%
Dedicated commitment to Fitch's vision and mission	3	2.3%	2	1.6%	7	5.5%	12	3.1%
Life-long learner	2	1.6%	2	1.6%	5	3.9%	9	2.3%
Other	4	3.1%	1	0.8%	2	1.6%	7	1.8%
Totals	129	100.0%	129	100.0%	128	100.0%	386	100.0%



- Accessible, approachable, visible in schools & community
- Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus
- Inspirational team builder
- Life-long learner
- Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver
- Dedicated commitment to Fitch's vision and mission
- Knowledgeable and hardworking, with attention to detail
- Committed to transparent communication
- Other



Needless to say, all of these qualities and skills are essential in a leader, yet they point to the prioritized needs of Fitch High School at this point in time. This profile will explore these areas of expertise and dimensions of leadership, integrating perspectives garnered through focus group and survey comments.

Fitch High School and its community seek a bright, inspiring leader with a passion for student learning. A strong leader, savvy manager, and excellent communicator, this individual will unite the staff toward a shared vision and build the confidence of students, families, staff, and community.

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Communicates and collaborates effectively in schools and community & Committed to transparent communication

The successful new leader at Fitch High School will excel at communications of all kinds and with all constituents: students, families, teachers, fellow administrators, and community. Boasting a “big, welcoming personality, this leader will be an excellent listener, attentive to what is happening at all levels. Through open lines of communications, students and teachers will feel known and supported, with clear feedback and sharing ideas, follow-up and follow-through.

The next principal will be an advocate for Fitch and champion for its students and staff, valuing what each has to offer. In addition, this leader will continue Fitch’s valuable partnerships with local organizations and its support for the National Naval Defense Corp, the Interstate Compact, and the military liaisons. In addition, the leader will work in collaboration with Fitch Middle School (which shares the campus) and Grasso Tech.

Inspires growth and fosters professional development, team building, and coaching

The next leader will have superb “people skills.” Garnering the respect of students, faculty, and community, this leader will “harness human capital,” uniting them behind a common vision and inspiring them to work toward that vision. The leader will attract, unite, and motivate staff to want to stay current and to build their capacity.

The leader will bring a spirit of fun, but commitment to consistency in discipline while tapping the vast expertise in the school. The leader’s efforts will generate a positive, innovative school culture, where staff and students feel understood and supported in their growth and efforts.

Shares district-wide vision of excellence and innovative instruction

Passionate about the work, Fitch’s new principal will be a visionary, proactive leader who “sees beyond the four walls and thinks creatively about how we staff and do high school,” while supporting and “challeng[ing] the whole Fitch community to pursue excellence in academics, music, arts, and sports,” establishing high aspirations, standards, and expectations.

A unifier and galvanizer, the leader will generate a culture of trust and engagement, “aware of and dedicated to setting the tone of the school.” This leader’s “love for the students should be evident in all policies and procedures.”

Encourages constant attention to issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging

The successful new principal will warmly welcome individuals from all backgrounds, embracing “all ‘walks of life’ and understand[ing] the different motivating factors with such a diverse group.”

Thinks and plans strategically

Fitch’s successful new principal will bring fresh eyes and take the time to understand the school and its uniqueness, analyzing strengths and areas that are lacking or need change, “even if this means going against trends in order to support the students and their success as they grow into young, confident,

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happy, knowledgeable and productive adults.” Highly organized and able to keep multiple balls in the air, this individual will be current about sound educational practices and strong in child development in the high school years and instruction.

Accessible, approachable, visible in schools and community

The new principal will make a point of being highly visible in the school and community. Personable, friendly, and highly respectful, the new leader will build a rapport and strong bonds with students and staff and understand their environment. Firm, but empathetic, this individual will be a constant presence in hallways, developing relationships while maintaining the ability to enforce rules and policies.

Keeps students’ growth and wellbeing the primary focus

Fitch’s new principal will like students and have a passion for their success. Sensitive to the unique needs of varied student populations and their families, the leader will hold very high expectations for student academic and behavioral success. Setting clear and firm boundaries for behavior, the leader will “motivate staff as well as students to value and adhere to our group norms [of] acceptable behavior and will enforce agreed upon policies.” Fair and able to discipline, this leader will back up the staff.

Decisive, confident, objective problem solver

The strong new leader will have “two feet in [and be] willing to get hands dirty.” This courageous individual will be committed to doing what is right. Clear, consistent, decisive, and positive, the principal will be ready to make decisions that can “ruffle feathers.” This leader will be “fair and not play favorites.” A deep, independent thinker who has the long-term in mind, the principal will not be swayed by political diversions, but will hold high standards and fight for what is right for Fitch.

Other

In addition, respondents would like a leader who has taught in an IB district and who has performed successfully in a system with some of the qualities/characteristics of Groton, pulling together a diverse community. The leader will need to be able to schedule and balance the multiple academic opportunities students can access. Also helpful would be knowledge of and experience with restorative justice.

This individual will be trustworthy and lead with integrity, grit, passion, and full commitment. Experience as a principal would be very helpful, especially if it included promoting and generating a positive school climate and culture.