



## **Kirkwood School District**

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT AND SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE**

**October 28, 2024**

In preparation for the search for a new Superintendent of Kirkwood School District, the School Board requested that School Exec Connect consultants conduct a community engagement process that would document reflections and insights from District students, staff, and community stakeholders. Representative focus groups and an online survey allowed any stakeholder in the District to contribute on a voluntary basis.

Participation in the community engagement process was excellent. Information from the focus groups and survey was used to create a New Superintendent Profile that will guide the recruitment, screening, interviews, and selection of a new Superintendent.

Focus groups participants included the School Board, District administrators, teachers and staff from across the District, parents, students, community members, key volunteers, and former Board of Education Members. The district also held two (2) open forums for anyone who wished to share their thoughts about this process. Sixty-one (61) stakeholders took part in one of ten (10) focus groups. All participants were asked to express their views regarding the strengths of the District, challenges facing the District, first-year priorities for the new Superintendent, and the specific characteristics, skills, and attributes to be sought in the next Superintendent.

The District also sought input from stakeholders via an online survey, open from October 14-21, 2024. Four-hundred thirty-three (433) people answered questions about perceived educational and managerial strengths and challenges the new Superintendent will face. Respondents also identified priorities for the new Superintendent to address and characteristics they associate with a successful Superintendent in Kirkwood School District. A summary of the survey results can be found after the focus group report.

Due to the sampling methodology, this report should not be construed as scientifically accurate. The opinions set forth in the report may not reflect the opinion of all staff, students, and residents, but do reflect the opinions of those who participated. Judgments regarding what is included in this report are those of the consultants, based upon the frequency of statements received throughout the data gathering process.

The consultants used the information gathered in this report to develop the **New Superintendent Profile**, found on the final page of this document.

This report may be used in several ways. The profile will be helpful to the consultants as they screen and interview candidates. The Board of Education will gain an understanding of the community's view of the District and the superintendency, and can use the profile to prepare questions for the Board interviews with the candidates. The consultants also recommend the report be given to the newly appointed Superintendent for a better understanding of the issues and opportunities facing Kirkwood School District. The District may also choose to post the report on the Superintendent Search portion of the website to be viewed by stakeholders.



## Focus Group Response Overview

Focus Groups were held with all constituencies including Board members, parents, administrators, teachers, students, support staff and community leaders. Sixty-one (61) participants in ten (10) focus groups/open forums provided insights into the strengths and challenges facing the District, the priorities the new Superintendent should establish, and the qualities and skills the next Superintendent should possess. Below is a summary of the responses to each of the four questions asked in each Focus group.

### QUESTION 1

The first question asked participants to identify the major strengths of Kirkwood School District, and the community that supports the District.

- **Welcoming and Inclusive Community:** The district is known for being friendly and welcoming to new families, making it easy for families to get involved and feel a sense of belonging.
- **Deep-rooted Traditions and Community Engagement:** Long-standing traditions, like the Turkey Day game and the Friendship Dance, foster a strong sense of community and pride.
- **Outstanding Staff and Administration:** Staff are highly skilled, care deeply about students, and contribute to the district's strong academic outcomes and reputation.
- **Safe, Small-town Feel with Big-city Benefits:** The district offers a unique combination of safety and small-town charm, with convenient access to city amenities.
- **High Academic Achievement and Student Support:** Kirkwood provides a range of supports, including peer tutoring, counselors, and interventions, ensuring high academic performance and student well-being.
- **Vibrant and Engaged Community:** Community support is incredibly strong, with high levels of involvement from families, alumni, and local organizations.
- **Diverse Opinions and Respectful Discourse:** The district values and respects a diversity of views, promoting a culture of dignity and inclusive decision-making.
- **Excellent Teachers and Resources:** The district attracts and retains top-notch teachers, equipped with updated teaching practices and ample resources.
- **Financially Stable with Strategic Planning:** Kirkwood's financial health supports its goals, and the strategic plan guides the district with a clear vision and priorities.
- **Rich Opportunities and High Expectations for Students:** Students benefit from a wide array of programs, from arts to AP courses, and are encouraged to pursue their interests with high expectations for success.

## QUESTION 2

The second question for the Focus Groups asked participants to identify the biggest challenges facing the District next year and beyond.

- **Lack of Consistency in Accountability:** There are concerns about a lack of consistent accountability for staff and administration, leading to a perception of selective enforcement.
- **Bullying and Harassment Issues:** Incidents of bullying, including cases involving race and disabilities, have been reported, with victims feeling unsupported.
- **Persistent Achievement and Belonging Gaps:** Achievement disparities, particularly across racial lines, and a sense of exclusion for some students, highlight ongoing equity challenges.
- **Community and Staff Distrust:** A perceived lack of transparency and communication from the administration has created mistrust within the community and between staff and district leaders.
- **High Staff Turnover:** Frequent changes in administrative staff, including principals, disrupt stability and continuity within the district.
- **Pressure from Highly Engaged, Vocal Parents:** An active parent base, with a sense of entitlement, can sometimes hinder decision-making and create an adversarial atmosphere.
- **Tradition as a Barrier to Progress:** While traditions are valued, they can sometimes restrict innovation and the adoption of modern practices.
- **Disparities in Support and Resources:** Students with specific needs (such as those with IEPs or gifted students) may not receive adequate support, impacting equity and achievement.
- **Complex Socioeconomic Dynamics:** Socioeconomic diversity and a historically underserved area create challenges in achieving equitable support and resources for all students.
- **Facilities and Infrastructure Limitations:** Outdated facilities, including classrooms without windows, contribute to an environment that may not fully support modern learning needs.

### QUESTION 3

The third question asked participants to identify priorities for the next Superintendent to focus on in his/her first year.

- **Address the Achievement Gap:** Develop strategies and initiatives to close the achievement gap, focusing on equity and ensuring that all students have the support they need.
- **Rebuild Trust and Relationships:** Engage in transparent and genuine relationship-building with staff, students, and the community, especially in light of past challenges.
- **Foster a Positive Climate and Culture:** Work to create a warm, supportive environment within schools and the central office, listening to teacher concerns about workload and morale.
- **Evaluate and Enhance Gifted and Academic Programs:** Review and improve identification and support processes for gifted and general academic programs, aiming to retain students within the district.
- **Revise Bullying Policies:** Reevaluate and update the district's policies on bullying to ensure they effectively protect students and foster a safe school environment.
- **Support and Empower Staff:** Prioritize teacher and staff well-being, providing them with the resources, support, and respect they need to succeed.
- **Strengthen Community Engagement and Communication:** Establish a branding and communication strategy to improve outreach, responsiveness, and transparency with the community.
- **Build a Cohesive and Collaborative Leadership Team:** Work closely with principals and the new administrative staff to establish cohesion and clear expectations across all buildings and district offices.
- **Actively Listen to Student and Staff Voices:** Engage regularly with the Superintendent's Student Advisory Group and seek input from teachers to ensure all voices are heard and valued.
- **Develop a Clear Strategic Vision:** Clarify goals and create an actionable, data-informed strategic plan that aligns with community values and priorities for the district's future.

## QUESTION 4

The fourth question asked participants to identify those skills, personal qualities, and experiences that are important for the next Superintendent to possess.

- **Approachable and Engaging:** Demonstrates warmth, has an open-door policy, and actively engages with staff, students, and the community.
- **Visionary and Student-centered:** Brings a clear vision for the district that prioritizes student growth, achievement, and well-being.
- **Experienced Leader with a Collaborative Approach:** Works well with others, values teamwork, and fosters camaraderie among staff and community members.
- **Strong Moral Compass and Integrity:** Operates with honesty, integrity, and transparency, even when making tough decisions.
- **Politically Savvy with High Emotional Intelligence (EQ):** Skilled at navigating complex relationships with the board, community, and staff; communicates effectively and empathetically.
- **Equity-minded and Inclusive:** Has a strong commitment to equity and fairness, with an ability to address diverse needs and work across various groups.
- **Accountable and Action-oriented:** Takes responsibility, holds others accountable, and follows through on commitments with decisive action.
- **Financially Literate and Strategic:** Skilled in financial management, ensuring resources are allocated effectively to support district goals.
- **Visible and Invested in the Community:** Highly present and engaged, showing genuine interest in becoming part of the community and understanding local dynamics.
- **Creative and Flexible Problem-solver:** Brings innovative thinking and flexibility, willing to challenge outdated policies and adapt as needed.



**Kirkwood School  
District Survey  
Results**

The Kirkwood community completed the survey in significant numbers, with 433 individuals responding to twenty-one questions. Around 60% of respondents are parents, and over one hundred fifty teachers/staff filled out the survey.

The charts that follow show the responses to each question, beginning with a breakdown of respondents, then listing the top answers for each prompt. Each question offers a variety of forced-choice responses.

**ON-LINE SURVEY SUMMARY**

**Demographics**

● Parent:	61%	(265)
● Staff Member:	35%	(151)
● Community/Business Member	3%	(11)
● Other	1%	(4)
● Student	<1%	(2)
	Total:	(433)

**Perceived Strengths of the School District**

● Quality of Teaching Staff	73%
● Clean and Attractive Schools	49%
● Communication with Parents and Community	46%
● Image of the District	42%
● Positive, Nurturing Learning Environment	41%

**Perceived Needed Improvements of The School District**

● Quality of Leadership	52%
● Staff Morale	48%
● Visions for the Direction of the District	37%
● Student Conduct and Discipline	35%
● Challenging, Quality Curriculum	33%

### **Focus Priorities**

- Student Growth and Achievement 54%
- 21st Century Skills 47%
- Social and Emotional Health of Students 45%
- Respect for Staff 42%

### **Most Important Needed Characteristics and Skills**

- Is Trustworthy and Displays Courage and Integrity 70%
- Has Clear Vision for Leading Schools and District 58%
- Builds Good Teams and Brings Out the Best in Others 54%
- Holds Others and Self Accountable 47%
- Is Child-centered 43%
- Has Deep Knowledge of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning 43%
- Develops Meaningful Community Support and Partnerships 35%

### **Other Questions**

	<u>Agree/ Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Disagree/ Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
Proud of our District/Schools	81%	18%	2%
Meeting Students' Social Emotional Health	63%	29%	8%
Adequate Communication to Parents/Community	77%	21%	2%
High Expectations for Students/Staff	78%	18%	4%
Effectively Implements Social Justice/Equity Practices for Students	46%	30%	24%
Meets Needs of English Learners/Students w/Individualized Education	46%	20%	34%
Meets Needs of Students Experiencing Academic Difficulties	52%	25%	23% <i>(2 skipped)</i>
Meets Needs of Gifted/Talented Students	57%	18%	25% <i>(1 skipped)</i>
Provides Extracurricular/Sports to Meet Level of Interest	79%	15%	6% <i>(2 skipped)</i>
Handled Pandemic in Manner to Meet Needs of Students	60%	19%	21% <i>(2 skipped)</i>

**Note - % may not add up to 100 due to rounding.**



## **Kirkwood New Superintendent Candidate Profile**

The new Superintendent should be a person who embodies the following:

1. Strong strategic thinker with experience leading high-performing, like-sized districts.
2. Excellent communicator capable of rebuilding trust and fostering transparency.
3. Skilled in managing community expectations and navigating perceived privilege in a highly engaged community.
4. Proven ability to handle complex financial management with a focus on resource allocation and maximizing return on investment.
5. Visionary leader who understands the balance between tradition and innovation to drive progress.
6. Ability to close achievement gaps and address systemic disparities, particularly in historically underserved communities.
7. Expertise in fostering a positive climate and culture, with a focus on staff morale and retention.
8. Strong equity lens, ensuring all voices, especially marginalized groups, are represented and heard.
9. Collaborative leadership style, with an empathetic approach to building relationships with staff, board, and community.
10. Holds high expectations for academic excellence and is skilled in instructional leadership.
11. Experience managing strong, sometimes opinionated boards and maintaining proper governance roles.
12. Effective delegator who holds administrators accountable while providing building-level leadership.
13. Innovative and adaptable, unafraid to take risks and implement creative solutions to move from good to great.
14. Charismatic, approachable, and proactive, with a focus on student-centered outcomes and long-term vision.
15. Politically adept, with the ability to navigate complex community dynamics, including opposing views and diversity of opinion, while upholding dignity and transparency in decision-making.
16. Strong advocate for inclusive policies, with experience addressing sensitive issues such as bullying, harassment, and race relations to ensure a safe, supportive environment for all students.
17. Knowledgeable about the unique landscape of St. Louis County school systems, including special school district resources, and able to effectively support students with disabilities.
18. Skilled in fostering student engagement and community involvement, creating a welcoming atmosphere for new families while maintaining deep community ties and a vibrant tradition.