



Francis Howell School District

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT AND SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

January 27, 2025

In preparation for the search for a new Superintendent of Francis Howell 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, open forums, 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, open forums and survey was used to create a New Superintendent Profile that will guide the recruitment, screening, interviews, and selection of a new Superintendent.

Focus Group participants included the School Board, District administrators, community members, parents, teachers and staff, students, and key volunteers from across the District. The district also held two (2) open forums for anyone who wished to share their thoughts about this process. Eighty-one (81) stakeholders took part in one of fourteen (14) focus groups or open forums. 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 January 13-20, 2025. One thousand three hundred and seventy (1,370) 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 Francis Howell 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 Francis Howell 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 numerous constituencies including Board members, parents, administrators, teachers, students, support staff and community leaders. Eighty-one (81) participants in twelve (12) focus groups and two (2) 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 Francis Howell School District, and the community that supports the District:

Academic Excellence and Student Success

- The district consistently maintains high academic standards, with over 80% of teachers holding advanced degrees.
- Strong programs such as AP courses, Project Lead the Way, SPECTRA for gifted students, and robust SPED and ESL offerings ensure all students are prepared for post-graduation success.

Engaged and Supportive Community

- The district benefits from strong parental engagement, active PTOs, and partnerships with community organizations like police and fire departments.
- Many residents, including teachers, live in the district, creating a tight-knit, supportive environment with a "small-town feel."

Exceptional Extracurricular Opportunities

- The district boasts a wide variety of athletic, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, including a ranked journalism program and numerous opportunities for student involvement in clubs and sports.

Dedicated and Highly Skilled Staff

- Teachers, administrators, and staff are committed to student success, demonstrating longevity, resilience, and collaboration.
- Staff development and professional growth are prioritized, with ample opportunities for training and shared decision-making.

Strong Leadership and Vision

- The district is guided by a clear strategic plan and a culture of continuous improvement.
- The Board of Education at times understands its role, empowering the superintendent and district leaders to focus on high expectations for academics and student outcomes.

QUESTION 2

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

Contentious Board of Education

- The Board of Education is highly polarized, often overreaching into daily operations and creating a volatile environment.
- Public clashes, political agendas, and a lack of collaboration within the Board negatively impact trust and the district's focus on student success.

Erosion of Trust and Community Division

- Trust between the district, community, and staff has eroded due to issues like tax levy failures, past financial mismanagement, and public disputes.
- Perceptions of dishonesty and fiscal irresponsibility have damaged the district's reputation, making it difficult to rebuild relationships.

High Turnover and Staffing Challenges

- Significant turnover at all levels, including teachers, SPED staff, and district leadership, disrupts continuity and affects morale.
- Recruitment and retention of qualified staff, including filling high-level leadership positions, remain ongoing challenges.

Financial Strain and Uncertainty

- The inability to pass a tax levy has led to resource limitations, outdated technology, and inadequate funding for key programs.
- The depletion of ESSER funds and the health fund further exacerbate fiscal challenges, limiting long-term planning and investments.

Cultural and Demographic Shifts

- The district faces increasing challenges related to diversity and cultural competence, with some community members and some Board of Education members resisting possible change.
- Polarization around social and political issues, including equity and inclusion, undermines efforts to create a welcoming and supportive environment for all students and staff.

QUESTION 3

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

Rebuild Trust and Strengthen Relationships

- Prioritize building trust with staff, the community, and the teachers' union by improving communication and transparency.
- Develop and maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including principals, PACs, and marginalized groups, to create a cohesive and inclusive district culture.

Address Fiscal Challenges and Equity

- Develop a clear, actionable strategy to address the district's financial health, including preparing for the fiscal cliff and working to pass a tax levy.
- Ensure fiscal equity across schools, allocating resources to meet the needs of all students and programs.

Enhance Accountability and Student Achievement

- Focus on student achievement and equity by implementing accountability measures aligned with the CSIP and strategic plan.
- Work with principals and staff to improve school climates and address issues such as bullying and safety for all students, including transgender and marginalized students.

Build and Unify Leadership Teams

- Build a cohesive leadership team, including the Board of Education, focusing on collaboration, team building, and shared decision-making.
- Empower principals and district leaders with the resources and support they need to drive school-level improvements.

Communicate and Execute a Clear Vision

- Articulate and execute a clear, district-wide vision aligned with the strategic plan and CSIP.
- Be visible, approachable, and proactive in engaging with the community to restore the district's reputation and highlight its strengths.

QUESTION 4

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

Collaborative and Consensus-Building Leader

- Ability to work effectively with diverse stakeholders, including the Board of Education, staff, teachers, parents, and community members.
- Skilled in bringing opposing sides together, fostering unity, and ensuring all voices are heard and valued.

Student-Centered and Compassionate

- A genuine love for students and commitment to prioritizing their success, safety, and well-being.
- Demonstrates empathy, humility, and an ability to connect with students, staff, and families on a personal level.

Resilient and Courageous Problem Solver

- Strong backbone and courage to address contentious issues, defend staff, and stand firm on critical decisions.
- Resilient in the face of challenges, including navigating culture wars, financial uncertainties, and Board dynamics.

Visionary and Strategic Communicator

- Clear and effective communicator who can articulate a compelling vision for the district while being transparent and approachable.
- Proactive in addressing challenges, sharing both successes and difficult news with integrity and clarity.

Innovative and Fiscal-Savvy Change Agent

- Creative thinker with a strong understanding of complex systems and fiscal acumen to navigate financial challenges and resource equity.
- Willing to innovate and lead transformative initiatives to improve the district while maintaining stability and preserving what works.



Francis Howell School District Survey Results

The Francis Howell community completed the survey in significant numbers, with 1370 individuals responding to eighteen questions. Around 62% of respondents were parents, and two hundred seventy-four 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:	62%	(854)
● Staff Member:	20%	(274)
● Student:	13%	(179)
● Community/Business Member:	4%	(50)
● Other:	1%	(13)
	Total:	(1370)

Race/Ethnicity

● White:	81%	(1105)
● Prefer not to Answer:	14%	(186)
● Asian/Pacific Islander:	3%	(36)
● African American:	2%	(29)
● Hispanci/LatinX/Multi-racial:	2%	(25)
● Native American:	>1%	(8)

Total: (1363)

(7 skipped)

(26 selected multiple options)

Perceived Strengths of the School District

- Quality of Teaching Staff 66%
- Communication with Parents and Community 56%
- Student Safety 49%
- Clean and Attractive Schools 44%
- Positive, Nurturing Learning Environment 37%

Perceived Needed Improvements of The School District

- Staff Morale 47%
- District's Understanding/Support of Diversity 44%
- Racial Equity and Social Justice 40%
- Responsible Stewardship of Financial Resources 39%
- Image of the District 38%

Focus Priorities

- Student Growth and Achievement 48%
- 21st Century Skills 42%
- Social and Emotional Health of Students 40%
- Respect for Staff 40%

Most Important Needed Characteristics and Skills

- Is Trustworthy and Displays Courage and Integrity 69%
- Has Clear Vision for Leading Schools and District 59%
- Has Deep Knowledge of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning 45%
- Builds Good Teams and Brings Out the Best in Others 43%
- Holds Others and Self Accountable 41%
- Is Child Centered 39%
- Understands Finance and the Business Side of the District 36%

Other Questions

	<u>Agree/ Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Disagree/ Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
Proud of our District/Schools	69%	25%	6% (5 skipped)
Meeting Students' Social Emotional Health	53%	38%	8% (3 skipped)
Adequate Communication to Parents/Community	83%	13%	4% (5 skipped)
High Expectations for Students/Staff	79%	15%	6% (3 skipped)
Effectively Implements Social Justice/Equity Practices for Students	26%	49%	24% (4 skipped)
Meets Needs of English Learners/Students w/Individualized Education	48%	18%	34% (4 skipped)
Meets Needs of Students Experiencing Academic Difficulties	48%	29%	23% (4 skipped)
Meets Needs of Gifted/Talented Students	63%	16%	21% (2 skipped)
Provides Extracurricular/Sports to Meet Level of Interest	74%	17%	9% (6 skipped)

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



Francis Howell New Superintendent Candidate Profile

Key Attributes and Qualifications

1. Visionary Leadership and Strategic Planning

- Proven ability to develop, articulate, and implement a clear, district-wide vision aligned with the strategic plan and CSIP goals.
- Committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and high expectations for academic and extracurricular success.
- Experienced in leading districts with diverse program offerings, including AP courses, Project Lead the Way, and robust SPED and ESL services.

2. Academic Excellence and Student-Centered Leadership

- Passionate advocate for student achievement and well-being, with a history of prioritizing equity and ensuring resources meet all students' needs.
- Expertise in supporting gifted programs, addressing the needs of marginalized students, and creating safe, inclusive environments for all learners.
- Proven track record in enhancing accountability measures to drive academic performance and improve school climates.

3. Collaborative and Consensus-Building Skills

- Skilled in bringing together diverse stakeholders, including the Board of Education, staff, teachers, parents, and community members, to build unity and foster a supportive environment.
- Experienced in navigating polarized boards and contentious issues with diplomacy, ensuring all voices are heard and valued.

4. Fiscal Acumen and Innovative Problem-Solving

- Strong fiscal expertise to address budget challenges, including tax levy failures and resource limitations.
- Demonstrated success in securing funding, managing resources equitably, and navigating financial uncertainties while ensuring sustainability.
- Creative thinker capable of leading transformative initiatives to improve outdated systems and advance district goals.

5. Community Engagement and Trust-Building

- Committed to rebuilding trust through transparent communication, integrity, and active engagement with staff, families, and community stakeholders.

- Skilled in leveraging partnerships with PTOs, local organizations, and community leaders to strengthen district support and collaboration.
- Adept at creating a cohesive and inclusive district culture by building strong relationships with marginalized groups and key stakeholders.

6. Empowering Leadership and Team Building

- Experienced in hiring and supporting a cohesive leadership team, prioritizing collaboration, shared decision-making, and professional growth.
- Advocates for empowering principals and district leaders with the tools and resources necessary to drive school-level improvements and innovation.

7. Resilient and Courageous Leadership

- Demonstrates a strong backbone and resilience in addressing contentious issues, defending staff, and standing firm on critical decisions.
- Skilled in navigating cultural and political challenges, including diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, with empathy and humility.

8. Exceptional Communication Skills

- Clear and effective communicator who can articulate a compelling vision for the district while being transparent and approachable.
- Proactive in addressing challenges, celebrating successes, and sharing difficult news with clarity and honesty to maintain community trust.

Core Competencies

- **Cultural Competence:** Demonstrated success in leading districts through demographic shifts and promoting equity and inclusivity.
- **Leadership in High-Performing Systems:** Extensive experience in districts with high academic standards and exceptional extracurricular offerings.
- **Crisis Management:** Skilled in stabilizing districts facing challenges, including high turnover, financial strain, and community division.
- **Commitment to Excellence:** Upholds high expectations for students, staff, and the entire school community.