



Region 17 Public Schools Superintendent Search

Stakeholder Feedback Report and Leader Profile June 2025

Cooperative Educational Services – Executive Searches
Dr. Charles Dumais
Mr. David Erwin



Cooperative Educational Services – Executive Searches
40 Lindeman Drive
Trumbull, Connecticut 06611

Introduction

Dr. Charles Dumais and Mr. David Erwin, Search Consultants for Cooperative Educational Services, of Trumbull, CT, met with the Search Committee of the Region 17 Board of Education to establish parameters for the collection of stakeholder feedback for the purpose of identifying current district educational strengths/challenges and desired skills, qualities, and attributes for the next superintendent.

Stakeholder feedback, in the form of electronic surveys, focus groups, structured Board Member input, and research on high leverage executive leadership qualities, were synthesized to develop a comprehensive and representative set of leadership roles and leadership competencies to be assessed in the selection of the ideal candidate.

This report will provide summary information of the data collection process, perceived educational strengths and challenges of the district, qualities desired in the next district leader, and key skills and abilities essential for the ideal candidate. The roles and competencies developed with this information will serve as the foundation for the standards-based selection of candidates to be considered, and, ultimately, of the candidate to be recommended for election. It will also serve as a resource to the superintendent and Board of Education as they transition into their new relationship.

The Region 17 Board of Education Search Committee is grateful to the broad, diverse group of stakeholders from the Region 17 Community and the Region 17 Schools who provided their feedback and insight in this important process.

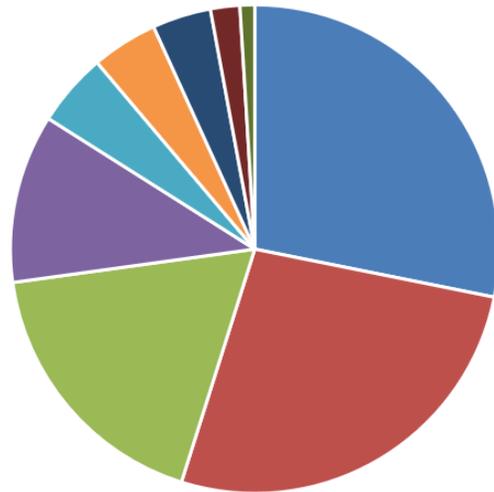
Stakeholder Feedback Collection

Over the course of several months in 2025, stakeholder feedback was collected through electronic surveys, focus groups, and structured Board Member input. The research methodology is intentionally inclusive, drawing insights from constituents in different formats over an extended period of time. Information regarding the data collection process was shared on the district web page, through direct emails to district contacts, and in an area press release. Feedback from all of the sources was translated into English, processed using qualitative coding techniques, reviewed for accuracy, synthesized, correlated with a comprehensive research-based library of leadership skills and attributes, and reviewed by a second individual for accuracy and completeness. Through this comprehensive process, a deep understanding of the district's current landscape, immediate challenges, and future potential has been developed.

Participant Demographics

More than one hundred and eighty stakeholders (186) participated in the data collection portion of this process over the span of two months. More than one hundred and twenty individuals (126) submitted survey responses; more than fifty (51) individuals participated in focus groups; and, Board of Education members completed a comprehensive evaluation of district strengths, district challenges, key stakeholder identification, key community resource identification, and preferred professional qualifications and experiences.

- Parent of a Regional School District #17 student
- Regional School District #17, certified staff
- Resident, not a parent of a school-age child
- Regional School District #17 student
- Regional School District #17, non-certified staff
- Board of Education
- Central Office
- Town Officials
- Other



Survey

An electronic survey was made available in *two* languages (English and Spanish), and distributed to stakeholders through direct email and a conspicuous link on the district

web page. More than 1,000 individual comments and responses were received from 126 respondents and reviewed. All participants had the opportunity to rate predefined proven leadership qualities and essential experiences, as well as to respond to open-ended prompts regarding district strengths, district challenges, and any additional comments.

Focus Groups/Key Individual Interviews

Fifty-one stakeholders took advantage of eleven combined opportunities to meet with a search consultant and share their perspectives regarding the superintendent search.

Board of Education Search Committee

The Board of Education provided in-depth feedback on district challenges; district opportunities and imperatives; detailed measures of success for the next superintendent over the first six, twelve, and eighteen months; critical values and beliefs of the next superintendent; essential elements of financial acumen; specific, critical stakeholder groups and keys for highly effective relationships with them; experiences; credentials; and, other desired qualifications of the ideal candidate.

Strengths

Region 17 Public Schools stands on a foundation of considerable strengths that provide a solid platform for future growth and achievement. The district's most celebrated asset is its exceptional teaching staff and their unwavering commitment to student success. Survey respondents consistently praised the “experienced teachers and excellent principal leadership,” with many noting the “tireless dedication of teachers and paras to the schools, students, and community.” The personal connections that define the district experience were repeatedly highlighted, with stakeholders appreciating how “staff really gets to know kids academically and personally, encouraging students based on students' strengths and weaknesses.”

The academic excellence achieved by Region 17 represents another fundamental strength. The district has been recognized with “schools of distinction” awards, and stakeholders noted that “the education we provide to students is of a high level.” This excellence is supported by comprehensive programming, particularly at the high school level, where stakeholders praised “the wealth of classes that we are able to offer based upon our building at the high school - tech wing, pool, etc.” The “amount of elective courses offered to our students, especially the technical education courses offered at the High School” provides students with diverse pathways for growth and development.

The close-knit community environment emerged as a defining characteristic that stakeholders value deeply. As one respondent noted, “RSD17 is a smaller community and the teachers/coaches support staff really get to know their students and the parents.” This personal approach creates an environment where relationships flourish and individual student needs are recognized and addressed. Students themselves are consistently

described as “amazing” and “talented,” reflecting both their capabilities and the supportive environment that enables them to thrive.

The district's commitment to individualized attention was frequently mentioned as a strength. Stakeholders appreciated that the district maintains “smaller class sizes” which ensure “greater student support,” and that teachers are skilled at “encouraging students to do their best and find their passions.” This focus on the whole child distinguishes Region 17 as a district that values both academic achievement and personal development.

Administrative leadership at the building level received strong recognition from stakeholders. The “excellent principal leadership” was specifically noted, and many respondents praised the “high academic standards” maintained throughout the district. The district also demonstrates commitment to supporting teachers professionally, with stakeholders noting that “the district does a good job in supplying teachers materials that are requested.”

Challenges

Despite these considerable strengths, stakeholders identified several areas where they perceived opportunities for improvement and growth under new leadership. The community expressed strong interest in enhanced organizational communication and transparency at the district level. Survey respondents indicated that strengthening communication systems would benefit the district, with focus group participants emphasizing opportunities to improve “communication from Central Office to schools.” This feedback reflects the community's investment in ensuring all stakeholders remain well-informed and engaged in district initiatives.

Facility infrastructure emerged as an area where stakeholders perceived significant potential for improvement. Respondents identified aging facilities as presenting opportunities for modernization and enhancement of the learning environment. The high school facilities were highlighted by stakeholders as having particular potential for updates that would create an even more supportive environment for both faculty and staff. Board members viewed the high school building project as a transformative opportunity to address infrastructure needs while building stronger community engagement and support.

Budget management and resource allocation were identified by stakeholders as areas requiring strategic leadership attention. Community members recognized the complex challenge of balancing educational excellence with fiscal responsibility, with one respondent noting the importance of helping taxpayers understand that “we are asking for the minimum, but that this is necessary.” Stakeholders perceived connections between budget considerations and staff retention, indicating opportunities for creative resource management that could enhance both financial stability and staff satisfaction.

Staff retention and organizational culture presented areas where respondents saw opportunities for positive transformation under new leadership. Survey participants identified teacher retention as an important focus area, while administrators perceived

opportunities for “building trust with a staff that has had three very different leaders over a short period of time.” The community recognized that leadership transition provides an opportunity to rebuild institutional knowledge and strengthen organizational culture.

Student support services emerged as an area where stakeholders perceived opportunities for enhancement. Respondents identified potential for strengthening support systems to address the social emotional needs of students, while others saw opportunities to optimize staffing ratios. The district was perceived as having potential to better differentiate instruction, with stakeholders noting opportunities to build upon existing high academic standards while enhancing support for diverse learning needs.

Governance and organizational effectiveness were identified by stakeholders as areas with potential for improvement. Board members perceived opportunities to strengthen relationships and communication protocols that could enhance district operations. Community members indicated interest in organizational structures that maximize resources for direct student support.

The feedback revealed a community deeply invested in the district's success and ready to support positive changes that build upon existing strengths while addressing areas for growth. Stakeholders demonstrated clear understanding that these challenges represent opportunities for the next superintendent to make meaningful improvements that benefit all students and strengthen the entire district community.

Superintendent Performance Criteria

Key Leadership Roles

Communicator emerged as the most critical leadership role across all stakeholder groups, receiving the highest priority in survey responses and consistent emphasis in Board feedback. Survey respondents specifically highlighted “effective communication and community engagement” as the top expertise needed, while Board members emphasized their vision for “clear, open and honest communication” and “transparency.” One Board member noted the importance of a leader who demonstrates “integrity, answers every question with fidelity.” Stakeholders perceived this communication role as essential for building upon existing strengths while addressing areas for improvement across all district operations.

Change Leader was identified as fundamental to guiding the district's continued evolution while respecting existing strengths. Board members emphasized their desire for someone who can “implement [a] strategic plan” and navigate organizational enhancement thoughtfully. However, stakeholders indicated the importance of measured change that builds understanding, with focus group participants emphasizing the value of leaders who invest time in “building relationships and understanding district culture” before implementing improvements.

Team Builder appeared prominently across all stakeholder feedback, reflecting the district's readiness for collaborative leadership that unites people around shared goals.

Survey respondents identified “effective team-builder” as one of the most important personal qualities, while Board members emphasized their vision for someone who can “build consensus among a team” and “inspire and rally the team around a shared vision of excellence.” Stakeholders perceived this team-building role as particularly valuable for strengthening staff morale and building confidence in district leadership.

Performance Manager was consistently emphasized as essential for ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. Board members specifically noted their expectation for someone who can “hold them to high standards, with appropriate system supports to get them there” and demonstrate “accountability and transparency.” Respondents viewed this role as encompassing both individual performance management and organizational effectiveness, seeking a leader who can implement systems that support success while maintaining high expectations.

Relationship Builder was highly valued across stakeholder groups, recognizing the community-oriented nature of the district and the importance of personal connections. Survey respondents emphasized their desire for someone who is “accessible, approachable, and visible within the schools and community,” while Board members noted the importance of building “strong relationships with people” and demonstrating “empathy.” The community perceived this relationship-building role as essential for maintaining the district's collaborative culture.

Instructional Leader was identified as essential for maintaining and enhancing the district's academic excellence. Survey respondents prioritized “educational leadership that emphasizes curriculum, instruction and assessment” and “distinguished record of improving student performance” as critical expertise areas. Board members emphasized their vision for someone with “knowledge of latest research in effective teaching strategies” who can build upon the district's existing academic strengths.

Budget Manager was consistently emphasized given stakeholders' perception of the need for sophisticated resource management. Board members specifically noted that the superintendent “must have a deep understanding of the full fiscal operations of the district” and be able to “clearly explain the financial operations, and provide well-informed answers to questions about finances.” The community viewed this role as essential for maintaining transparency and building confidence in financial stewardship.

Advocate emerged as crucial for representing district needs and building community support. Board members emphasized their vision for someone who can “lobby for critical funding, support innovative educational policies, and consistently advocate for student needs at local, regional, and state levels.” Stakeholders perceived this advocacy role as particularly important for advancing facility improvements and securing necessary resources.

Community Builder was identified as essential for strengthening connections between the schools and the surrounding communities. Respondents perceived the superintendent's role as understanding and working effectively with the unique dynamics

of the regional district structure, building unified support across different community perspectives while honoring the district's collaborative traditions.

Key Leadership Competencies

Building Trust and Credibility emerged as the most essential competency for the next superintendent, given stakeholders' perception of the importance of strong relationships during leadership transitions. Survey respondents consistently emphasized “integrity and professionalism” as the top personal quality needed, while Board members highlighted “trustworthiness, integrity, transparency and accountability” as fundamental requirements. One survey respondent emphasized the community's vision for leadership that fosters “open dialogue where staff can share questions and concerns in a supportive environment.” Stakeholders perceived this competency as particularly crucial for building confidence in district leadership and strengthening organizational culture.

Communicating was highlighted across all stakeholder groups as critical for success, with survey data showing this as one of the top expertise areas needed. Board members indicated their preference for someone with “solid communication skills” and the ability to provide “frequent, clear communication.” Survey respondents noted the importance of someone who can establish “effective communication and community engagement” while demonstrating transparency in decision-making processes that builds upon the district's collaborative traditions.

Emotional Maturity was frequently mentioned as essential for navigating the complex interpersonal and organizational dynamics of the district. Survey respondents valued “self-confident problem-solver and decision-maker” characteristics, while Board members emphasized their vision for someone who can maintain “calm demeanor” and demonstrate “empathy.” The community perceived this competency as extending to working effectively with diverse stakeholder groups and managing challenges constructively.

Financial Acumen was consistently emphasized given stakeholders' perception of the need for sophisticated fiscal leadership in the regional district structure. Board members specifically noted that the superintendent must understand “everything” about fiscal operations and demonstrate both financial expertise and strategic resourcefulness that builds community confidence in district stewardship.

Leadership competency encompasses the ability to create and implement vision while inspiring others toward common goals. Survey respondents emphasized their desire for “a motivator with a clear and compelling vision for district success; an educational visionary” while Board members sought someone who demonstrates “strong leadership and decisiveness” that builds upon existing district strengths.

Collaborative Leadership was consistently valued across stakeholder groups, reflecting the district's culture of inclusive decision-making processes. Survey respondents valued “effective team-builder” qualities, while Board members emphasized

“collaborative problem-solver” characteristics that honor the community's collaborative traditions.

Culture & Climate Management was identified as particularly important given stakeholders' perception of opportunities to strengthen organizational dynamics. The community envisioned a superintendent skilled at creating positive work environments while building upon existing strengths to address areas for improvement in staff satisfaction and retention.

Adaptability/Flexibility appeared in stakeholder feedback as important for responding to changing circumstances while maintaining focus on core priorities. Respondents perceived this competency as particularly relevant for addressing multiple opportunities simultaneously while preserving and building upon the district's considerable strengths.

Results Driven competency was emphasized by Board members who seek “evidence-based decision-making that are centered on positive student outcomes” and someone who can demonstrate measurable progress toward goals while maintaining the district's tradition of academic excellence.

Experiences/Qualities

While stakeholders valued diverse professional backgrounds, certain experiences and qualifications emerged as particularly important for the next superintendent of Region 17. Administrative experience was consistently valued, with survey respondents indicating preferences for “superintendent of schools,” “school principal,” and “central office administrator” experience. Board members specifically noted the value of “prior superintendent experience” and “superintendency experience preferred,” though they also indicated openness to strong candidates without superintendent experience if other qualifications are exceptional.

Instructional leadership experience was identified as essential, with survey respondents prioritizing “classroom teacher” experience as important background for understanding educational challenges from the practitioner perspective. Board members emphasized their vision for someone with “educational excellence” and deep understanding of curriculum and instruction that can build upon the district's academic strengths.

Financial management expertise was consistently emphasized across stakeholder groups. Board members specifically noted the need for “strong financial experience” and the ability to understand the complexities of regional district operations that can enhance community confidence in fiscal stewardship.

Capital project and facilities management experience was highlighted by Board members, particularly given stakeholders' perception of infrastructure opportunities. Experience with “capital project/building project leadership experience” was specifically mentioned as valuable for addressing facility enhancement needs.

Most importantly, stakeholders emphasized their vision for authentic commitment to student success and educational excellence. Survey respondents consistently prioritized “a strong focus on student personal and academic growth” as the most important personal quality. As one survey respondent noted, the district seeks someone who will “resist pressure from outside agencies to improve only measurable factors of education” and instead focus on “helping students find their passions” and supporting “the personal relationships developed between staff and students” that define the Region 17 experience.

Key Success Measures

Based on comprehensive feedback from the Board of Education, clear expectations for the next superintendent's success were articulated across different time horizons, reflecting the community's vision for positive district development.

First Six Months: The superintendent should focus primarily on relationship building and organizational assessment. This includes “building strong relationships with the cabinet, union leaders, and the BOE, to create stability throughout the district” and ensuring that “teachers, administrators and students can all say they have met the superintendent and most have a favorable first impression.” Initial progress should be evident in enhancing communication systems and advancing the high school building project, with board members expecting progress in “getting the board on the same page for the HS project” and ensuring the “HS project moving forward on time and on budget.”

Twelve Months: By the one-year mark, the superintendent should have implemented significant improvements to organizational stability and effectiveness. Board members expect “continued growth in all curricular areas” and evidence that “administrators are able to articulate what the district's priorities are in the near and short term and can articulate what their role will be in actualizing those priorities.” The budget process should demonstrate improvement with “clear consistent budget process and consistency (no more turnover) with CO staff.”

Eighteen Months: At the eighteen-month milestone, the superintendent should have demonstrated substantial progress in building upon existing strengths while addressing areas for improvement. Board members expect “standardized test scores in all tested subjects have shown an increase” and “surveys of parents indicate increased levels of satisfaction with the school district in terms of their students' education, safety and mental health.” The district should demonstrate “high levels of community support for the district as indicated through increased numbers of people willing to support district initiatives.”

Throughout this progression, success will be measured by the superintendent's ability to maintain and enhance the district's academic excellence while building organizational stability and community trust that reflects the collaborative culture valued by all stakeholders.

Potential Derailers

Based on stakeholder feedback, three specific factors could significantly undermine the next superintendent's effectiveness in Region 17:

Autocratic Leadership and Resistance to Collaboration: Stakeholders indicated that the most significant derailer would be leadership that fails to honor the district's collaborative culture by “coming in with their own agenda and not listening” to existing stakeholders or attempting to implement changes without building understanding and consensus. Survey respondents and focus group participants consistently emphasized the importance of collaborative leadership and indicated concern about leaders who might not value input from staff and community members who are deeply invested in the district's success.

Communication Failures and Lack of Transparency: Stakeholders perceived that poor communication practices would represent a critical derailer, given the community's strong desire for enhanced transparency and engagement. The community emphasized that communication failures would undermine leadership effectiveness and indicated that failure to establish clear, consistent communication protocols would significantly impair superintendent success in building upon the district's collaborative culture.

Financial Mismanagement and Loss of Community Confidence: Given stakeholders' perception of the importance of community support for budgets and capital projects, financial leadership failures would significantly derail superintendent effectiveness. Board members specifically noted that the superintendent must demonstrate deep understanding of regional district finance and be able to explain financial decisions clearly to community members who are invested in the district's fiscal responsibility and transparency.

Conclusion

The search for Region 17's next superintendent reveals a district positioned for continued growth and success, with significant strengths serving as the foundation for addressing opportunities for improvement. Stakeholders consistently celebrated the district's exceptional teaching staff, strong academic programming, and close-knit community relationships that define the educational experience. These strengths provide a solid platform for addressing the areas where the community perceives opportunities for enhancement, including communication systems, facility infrastructure, and organizational effectiveness.

The comprehensive stakeholder feedback process, involving 126 survey respondents, focus group participants, and detailed Board input, revealed clear consensus around the leadership qualities most essential for the next superintendent. Communication emerged as the paramount need, with stakeholders across all groups emphasizing the critical importance of transparent, effective communication to build

upon existing trust and move the district forward. Equally important are relationship-building capabilities, team-building skills, and the emotional self-regulation necessary to navigate the district's collaborative culture while addressing opportunities for growth.

Board member feedback reinforced community priorities while adding specific emphasis on financial acumen and change leadership capabilities essential for addressing the district's perceived opportunities for improvement. The Board's detailed success measures outline clear expectations for progress in organizational stability, communication enhancement, academic achievement, and community engagement across six, twelve, and eighteen-month timeframes that build upon existing district strengths.

The leadership profile that emerges from this comprehensive stakeholder feedback provides a clear framework for identifying candidates who possess the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for successful leadership in Region 17. The ideal superintendent will combine strong interpersonal and communication skills with technical expertise in education, finance, and organizational management that honors the district's collaborative traditions while addressing areas for growth. Most importantly, they must demonstrate authentic commitment to student success, collaborative leadership approaches, and the integrity necessary to build upon existing trust and confidence across the district community. Through thoughtful application of these insights, Region 17 is well-positioned to select a superintendent who can unite stakeholders around shared goals, address perceived opportunities for improvement, and advance the district's mission of providing exceptional educational opportunities for all students.