REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Superintendent Search Services

Evanston/Skokie School District 65 Board of Education

Issued by	Evanston/Skokie School District 65, Board of Education
Issue date	July 16, 2026
Proposals due	July 31, 2026— submitted to qureshia@district65.net
Contact	Nichole Pinkard, pinkardn@district65.net
Board Presentation	August 10th at 6pm
Engagement	Permanent superintendent search (full search)
Anticipated start	New superintendent to begin July 1, 2027

1. Introduction and Purpose

The Evanston/Skokie School District 65 Board of Education (**"the Board"**) is seeking proposals from qualified executive search firms to assist the Board in the recruitment, screening, and selection of a permanent Superintendent of Schools. The Board intends to conduct a full, open search supported by a professional firm, consistent with the District's prior practice and adapted to the District's current circumstances.

The selected firm will manage the search end-to-end: developing a community-informed leadership profile; recruiting and screening a diverse pool of candidates; supporting the Board through a structured **public community engagement process with a minimum of two finalists**; and assisting with interviews, selection, and transition. The Board values an inclusive, transparent process that engages the District 65 community and reflects the District's commitment to equity.

The Board has committed to three anchor milestones that will shape the firm's work:

- **Finalists identified** by **December 2026** — the firm's recommended slate is presented to the Board, which narrows to two or three finalists for community engagement.
- **Community engagement and selection** in **January–February 2027** — two or three finalists go through a structured public community-engagement process; the Board interviews, conducts references, and votes.
- **Start date** of **July 1, 2027** — calendar-aligned start, with the selected candidate shadowing and onboarding from February/March through June.

Interim leadership. Dr. Eric Witherspoon currently serves as the appointed Interim Superintendent through December 31, 2026. The Board will ensure interim superintendent leadership remains in place until a permanent superintendent officially begins employment with the District. Interim superintendent search services are not within the scope of this RFP.

2. District Background

Evanston/Skokie School District 65 serves approximately **6500** students from early childhood through grade 8 across **17**schools, with an elected seven-member Board of Education. The District

serves a diverse suburban/urban community and is committed to building a culturally diverse workforce as an equal opportunity employer.

Additional context, including the District's strategic priorities, demographics, and financial position, is available at **www.district65.net**. Respondents are encouraged to review publicly available District materials, including the District's recent facilities and budget work, in preparing their proposals.

3. Scope of Services

At minimum, the selected firm will be expected to provide the following services. Proposals should describe the firm's approach to each, with specific attention to feasibility under the timeline in Section 6.

3.1 Community engagement and leadership profile (Aug–Oct)

- Gather input from the Board, staff, families, students, and the broader community through **interviews, focus groups, a community forum, and a community-wide survey**, available in English and other languages as needed. Both prior searches engaged 600–1,000 community participants at this stage; the firm should be prepared to operate at comparable scale.
- Synthesize that input into a **leadership profile** describing the District's strengths, challenges, and the characteristics and skill sets sought in the next superintendent, for Board approval and public sharing.
- Apply the District's equity lens throughout, using its Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) tool in the search.

3.2 Recruitment (Sep–Nov)

- Develop and place advertising in appropriate regional and national outlets, including outlets that reach diverse and historically underrepresented candidate pools.
- Actively recruit qualified candidates, including those not actively seeking a position. **The firm's outreach should be explicit from the start** that this search includes a public finalist community-engagement step (Section 3.4), so candidates self-select for comfort with that exposure.
- Disclose to the Board if any presented candidate is being considered in another active search by the firm.

3.3 Slate presentation and finalist narrowing (early-to-mid December)

- Present the Board with a diverse slate of qualified candidates measured against the approved leadership profile, with supporting materials and a demographic analysis of the slate.
- Conduct screening interviews and preliminary reference/background inquiries before slate presentation.
- Support the Board through closed-session interviews from the slate, narrowing to a minimum of **two finalists** by mid-December.

3.4 Public finalist community engagement (January)

The District's recent searches have been criticized as too closed; in the current community-trust climate, the Board has determined that the two finalists must be publicly named and engage directly with the community before the Board votes. Firms should describe their approach to:

- **Comparable, equivalent finalist exposure** — each finalist receives the same schedule, access, and forum format.
- **A structured day or days in the District** — school visits, staff and parent sessions, and at least one public forum.
- **A financial-stewardship component** — given current community priorities, the engagement design should include a session or component where finalists demonstrate their understanding of the District's fiscal position and approach.
- **Structured input collection** — a comparable instrument across both finalists, synthesized for the Board *before* the vote. Community input informs the Board's decision; it does not bind it.
- **Candidate support and bias protocols** — protections for finalists during public exposure, and protocols for handling community input that crosses into bias.
- **Withdrawal contingency** — firms should describe how they handle a finalist withdrawal during the public step.

3.5 Final interviews, references, and selection (late Jan – early Feb)

- Provide interview guidelines, protocols, and sample questions; train and support the Board for finalist interviews.
- Conduct full reference and formal background checks of finalists; deliver findings to the Board before the vote.
- Provide salary/compensation guidance and, at the Board's request, support in negotiating and drafting the employment contract — noting the contract will be signed several months before the July 1 start (see Section 8).

3.6 Shadowing/onboarding and transition (Feb–June)

- Support the design of a **shadowing and onboarding plan** for the selected superintendent during the gap between selection and the July 1 start: structured access to budget discussions, key decisions, cabinet, and board meetings, with the interim superintendent leading day-to-day operations during the gap.
- Provide post-search support to the new Board–superintendent team (e.g., goal-setting or governance workshop), as in the District's prior practice.

3.7 Guarantee

- State any **replacement guarantee** (e.g., conducting a new search at no professional fee if the placed superintendent departs within a two-year guarantee.

4. Proposal Requirements

To allow consistent comparison, each proposal should include the following, in order. The items listed under each requirement are examples of **acceptable evidence** the Board may consider in evaluation (see Section 5). Firms should provide what is most relevant to their practice; the list is

illustrative, not exhaustive. The Board may waive any of the requirements below in its sole discretion.

1. **Firm profile, experience, and independence.** Background, Illinois and national superintendent search experience, organizational structure and to whom the firm answers, and any other consulting work that could create conflicts.

   Acceptable evidence may include number of completed Illinois superintendent searches in the past five years with a brief description of each; firm's organizational structure and reporting relationships; description of independence from other interests; specific experience with public finalist community-engagement processes.

2. **Proposed process and methodology.** The firm's approach to each element in Section 3, with explicit attention to the public finalist engagement step (3.4) and the shadowing/onboarding period (3.6), and the firm's assessment of feasibility under the Section 6 timeline (December finalists, January community engagement, January–February selection, July 1 start).

   Acceptable evidence may include: phase-by-phase description of the firm's standard search process and deliverables; the firm's community-engagement model (survey instruments, focus group structure, language and accessibility approach, input synthesis and reporting); experience handling comparable compressed timelines; at least one sample community engagement report or leadership profile from a prior search; a proposed calendar from engagement through the July 1 start, with major milestones.

3. **Approach to equity and diverse candidate pools.** How the firm builds diverse candidate pools and embeds equity in the profile, screening, and finalist process — with attention to outcomes, not just commitment.

   Acceptable evidence may include: demographic composition data from the firm's last three to five completed superintendent searches (applicants, slated candidates, placements); specific recruiting practices for diverse candidates (advertising venues, affinity-group networks such as ALAS and NABSE, recruitment of women); examples of equity practices embedded in screening (interview question design, bias protocols, candidate support during public exposure).

4. **Quality and depth of the candidate pool.** The substance and durability of the candidates the firm typically delivers.

   Acceptable evidence may include: placement and retention data (three- and five-year tenure) from completed searches, with the firm's methodology and definitions disclosed; typical slate composition (number of candidates, mix of sitting / assistant / between-roles / first-time superintendents); description of the firm's recruitment network and how reach converts into qualified applicants; track record placing strong first-time superintendents (relevant if the District profile is open to first-time leaders); at least **three** *full client references from comparable suburban Cook County or peer-district searches in the past* **five** *years, with contacts, and a full client list from which the Board may select additional references.*

5. **Evanston/Skokie / comparable-context familiarity.** Demonstrated familiarity with the District 65 community context, OR equivalent experience in comparable Evanston-area or North Shore Cook County school districts, OR similarly-sized diverse suburban districts with active community engagement traditions.

   Acceptable evidence may include: prior search work in D65 or in comparable Illinois suburban districts (e.g., District 202, North Shore K–8 or K–12 districts, or similarly-sized diverse suburban districts); demonstrated understanding of the District 65 context in the proposal narrative; relevant relationships with regional educational institutions and associations (Northwestern, area teacher preparation programs, IASA, IASBO).

6. **Fees, expenses, and guarantee.** An itemized fee for the base search, the cost of any optional/recommended services separately, an estimate of advertising and other reimbursable expenses, the fee for the public finalist engagement step (3.4) called out separately, a **not-to-exceed total**, and any replacement guarantee terms.

Acceptable evidence may include: itemized fee schedule with base and optional services separated; advertising and reimbursable-expense estimates; not-to-exceed total; replacement-guarantee terms and any statement of assurance.

7. **Sample materials.** Examples of recent work that demonstrate the firm's practice.

   Acceptable evidence may include: a sample leadership profile, sample vacancy announcement, and (if available) sample finalist-engagement protocols from a prior search.

5. Evaluation Criteria

This RFP is exempt from the School Code bidding provisions (see 105 ILCS /10-20.21(a)(i)) and therefore the District is not required to choose the proposal from the lowest priced responsive company. Instead, the Board will evaluate proposals on the criteria below. Each criterion includes the acceptable evidence the Board may consider, drawn from the corresponding Section 4 requirement.

The Board anticipates inviting finalist firms to present. The interview stage is also when the Board expects to verify pool-quality and equity outcome claims by contacting references on the firm's client list, including references the Board selects independently from the list provided.

6. RFP Process and Search Timeline

6.1 RFP timeline.

RFP milestone	Target
RFP issued	July 17th, 2026
Deadline for written questions	July 20th, 2026
District responses to questions	July 27th, 2026
Proposals due	July 31st, 2026
Firm interviews / presentations	August 10th, 2026
Firm selected by the Board	Mid-August, 2026

6.2 Search milestones (post-firm selection).

Search milestone	Target
Profile development and community engagement	September – October 2026
Leadership profile approved	October 2026
Recruitment and applications	October – November 2026
Application deadline	Early November 2026
Slate presented to the Board (closed session)	Early-to-mid December 2026
Finalists identified (minimum of two)	Mid-December 2026
Public finalist community engagement	January 2027
Final Board interviews, references, and selection vote	Late January 2027
Onboarding of selected superintendent	February – June 2027
New superintendent starts	July 1, 2027

Questions: All questions must be submitted in writing to pinkardn@district65.net by the date above. Responses will be shared with all known respondents to ensure a fair process.

7. Submission Instructions

- Submit **one electronic copy in PDF** to qureshia@district65.net no later than the deadline in Section 6. Late proposals may not be considered.
- Proposals should follow the order in Section 4.
- Direct all communication regarding this RFP to the designated contact only; do not contact individual Board members regarding this procurement.

8. General Terms and Conditions

- This RFP does not commit the Board to award a contract, pay any costs of proposal preparation, or accept any proposal. The Board may amend or withdraw this RFP at any time.
- The Board reserves the right to reject any or all proposals or any part thereof, to waive immaterial technicalities or informalities, and to select the proposal deemed most favorable to the Board after all proposals have been examined and evaluated.
- All proposals and other material submitted shall become the property of the Board and may be subject to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.
- Any resulting engagement will be subject to a written agreement and to applicable Board policies and approval thresholds. ***Note: engagements at or above the District's contract threshold require Board approval.***
- The **superintendent employment contract** will be executed in February or early March, several months before the July 1 start date. Board counsel will draft the contract.
- The selected firm will act as an independent contractor and comply with all applicable nondiscrimination and recruiting laws.