Leadership Profile:
Cherry Creek Schools Superintendent

Synthesis of Board of Education and Stakeholder Input

Position Purpose

The Board, survey respondents, and focus groups agree to a striking degree. **Integrity is the top characteristic in every source.** It ranked first in every survey segment. Every focus group named it, and nearly all named it first. The Board's own responses lead with it as well.

Stakeholder input sharpens the Board's original profile in four ways:

- **Integrity, defined by behavior.** Stakeholders want integrity they can see: doing what you say, owning mistakes, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, not treating Cherry Creek as a steppingstone, and staying out of partisan politics.
- **An educator first.** Many stakeholders, staff especially, want a leader with public education and classroom experience, not a business-world hire.
- **Rebuilding trust is the core job.** After the events of the past year, rebuilding trust, morale, and credibility is the main emotional theme. The survey rated transparency and financial management as the district's two weakest areas.
- **Fiscal stewardship means getting money to classrooms.** Stakeholders say the problem is less a shortage of money than money going to the wrong places. They want resources to be moved toward classrooms, special education, and staff, and away from outside consultants and central administration.

The profile below covers six leadership themes: Character & Values; Trust, Visibility & Relationships; Leadership & People Skills; Vision & Instructional Focus; Operational & Fiscal Stewardship; and Qualifications & Experience.

Leadership Themes

1. Character & Values

The non-negotiable foundation. Every source agrees.

- **Integrity and a strong moral compass:** Doing the right thing whether anyone is watching. It was the top survey characteristic in every segment, and every focus group named it.
- **Integrity defined by behavior.** Stakeholders spelled out what integrity looks like in practice:

  - Doing what you say, and owning it when you don't
  - Not seeking the spotlight or treating Cherry Creek as a steppingstone
  - Being strong enough to lead through cultural and political fallout without being co-opted by existing dynamics
  - Avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest in personnel decisions and appointments
- **Accountability and transparency:** A willingness to be held to state and district goals, and a bias toward transparency. Taking responsibility and is accountable ranked second in the survey, and transparency was the second lowest-rated area of district performance.
- **Humility and servant leadership:** Humble and not in search of headlines, free of ego, and demonstrated listening before acting. The survey also stressed empathy, emotional intelligence, and the ability to admit errors.
- **Courage:** The bravery to stand up for issues affecting the community, especially issues of disproportionality. Stakeholders added the courage to make hard personnel decisions and to acknowledge what happened and not bury it.
- **Apolitical and free of personal agenda:** Parents especially want a leader who will not be drawn into partisan or ideological disputes.
- **Composure under pressure:** Named by nine focus groups…someone who has gone through something really hard and succeeded.

2. Trust, Visibility & Relationships

A theme the stakeholder input raised to a central priority.

- **Rebuilding trust:** Named by 11 of 13 focus groups, and the dominant theme in open-ended survey guidance to the Board, accounting for nearly a quarter of all staff comments. Trust was described as broken at multiple levels and the distance between the district office and schools as at an all-time high.
- **Visible, authentic presence in schools:** Named by nine focus groups and drawing some of the most pointed language in the survey.
- **Listening before acting:** Entering with an open mind rather than predetermined conclusions, and seeking out multiple opinions of those most close to the work.
- **Clear communication:** Strong communication internally and with the public. Nine focus groups described communication failures as an operating problem, like families learning district news from the media.
- **Community ambassador and partner:** a superintendent who serves as an ambassador and resource for the community and who is genuinely part of the community.

3. Leadership & People Skills

- **Collaborative, action-oriented leadership:** Ability to garner building-level buy-in and move the district toward a shared direction.
- **Working with many stakeholder groups:** Specifically named were the Board, District Leadership Team, teachers, classified staff, certified and classified associations, students, families, businesses, and community partners. Stakeholders added the need to bridge a gap in perspective while teachers and building administrators describe inconsistency between buildings and growing distance from the district office.
- **Advocate for staff and their morale:** Board members asked for someone who advocates for and values educators.
- **Building and holding a leadership team accountable:** The capacity to build a strong district leadership team. Stakeholders added accountability for that team: evaluating cabinet members, holding principals accountable for personnel decisions, and having the backbone to make hard personnel decisions and remove underperforming administrators.
- **Diverse workforce pipeline:** A deliberate plan to recruit, retain, and develop leaders and educators of color so the workforce better reflects the student population.
- **Working effectively with the Board:** Strong board relations are imperative. Eight focus groups also raised the Board's own credibility, so the next superintendent will need to help rebuild trust in district governance.

4. Vision & Instructional Focus

- **Students at the center of every decision:** Placing student needs above anything else, ranked third in the survey.
- **Equity, belonging, and closing the achievement gap:** A commitment to true equity and to closing the achievement gap. Equitable access ranked fifth in the survey, and nine focus groups named equity and disproportionality. A leader who has a demonstrated record of anti-racist action rather than lip service to equity. Stakeholders also extended equity to belonging for staff of color and to consistency across schools.
- **The whole child:** The Board's strategic plan focuses on literacy, whole well-being, and disproportionality and matches stakeholder priorities. Valuing the whole child was expanded by parents adding mental health and safety supports.
- **Special education:** This was not in the Board's original responses, but stakeholders show it is an urgent and under-recognized priority.
- **Results:** A proven record of student growth and achievement. Student achievement is the district's highest-rated area and academic outcomes are a top three priority. Parents also prioritize teacher quality and college and career readiness.

- **Innovation and technology, including AI:** Board members asked for an interest in research on AI, screen time, and social media. Four focus groups, including students, noted the district has no policy on AI and educational technology. Parents asked for a district-wide cell phone policy and limits on AI in classrooms.
- **A realistic vision for the future:** The Board asked for a vision for leading the district forward amid declining enrollment and funding challenges. Stakeholders want that vision grounded in realism; the next five years won't be like the last 75.
- **School and student safety:** Safety is nearly twice as urgent for parents as for staff. It was noted that security investment is concentrated at high schools even as risk increasingly reaches elementary buildings.

5. Operational & Fiscal Stewardship

The district's lowest-rated area, and the top-ranked critical issue.

- **Financial management and taxpayer accountability:** The ability to build and manage a budget.
- **Getting resources to classrooms:** Stakeholders consistently said the issue is less a lack of money than money going to the wrong places.
- **Data-informed, transparent decisions:** Using data to make informed and transparent decisions.
- **Declining enrollment and constrained state funding:** Raised by the Board and by five focus groups. Possible school closures were mentioned in only one group.
- **Facilities and capital projects:** The Board asked for an appreciation of capital project management. Stakeholders ranked facilities last among critical issues in every segment, largely because of the district's strong history of bonds and mill levy support.
- **Legal compliance and policy gaps:** Stakeholders and the Board pointed to specific policy gaps, including a nepotism policy and an AI policy.

6. Qualifications & Experience

- **Educator background:** The Board's responses did not address this directly; stakeholders treated it as a core requirement.
- **Breadth across grade levels:** Stakeholders want experience across both elementary and secondary levels, though they disagree about where the current gap is.
- **Classroom time:** Staff valued time spent visiting or observing in classrooms far more than parents did.
- **Stability and commitment:** Cherry Creek should not be treated as a steppingstone.

Alignment Across Sources

Theme	Board	Online Survey	Focus Groups
Integrity / ethics	Very high	#1 in all segments (57.25%)	Named by all 13 groups
Accountability / transparency	High	#2 characteristic (35.94%); transparency rated 1.63/4	Widely raised
Students at the center	High	#3 characteristic (35.88%)	Widely raised
Rebuilding trust / morale	Moderate (staff morale)	Dominant theme in Board guidance	11 of 13 groups
Fiscal stewardship	High	#1 critical issue (49.19%); lowest-rated area (1.43/4)	All 13 groups
Educator / public-education background	Low (indirect)	33.56% overall; 47.81% of staff	9 of 13 groups
Equity / anti-racism / belonging	High	#5 characteristic (29.38%)	9 of 13 groups
Visibility / listening / humility	Low	Most pointed open-ended language	9 of 13 groups
Staff recruitment, retention, pay, benefits	Moderate	32.81% (staff 42.30%)	10 of 13 groups
Communication	High	Rated 2.39/4	9 of 13 groups
Special education	Not raised	20.88% (staff 28.20%)	4 groups, with the most detailed evidence
Safety	Low	22.00% (parents 28.55%)	Elementary security gap noted
Apolitical / no personal agenda	Indirect (political awareness)	Parents' #1 guidance theme	Only Leadership Cherry Creek
Innovation / AI / technology	High	Parent concern about AI and phones	4 groups noted the policy gap
Future-focused vision	High	Low (10.81%)	Grounded in realism
Prior superintendent experience	Implied (executive-level)	Last of 23 (8.63%)	District improvement experience valued
Advanced degree	High	Not emphasized	Not emphasized
Facilities / capital projects	Moderate	Last critical issue (6.19%)	Strength (bond and mill levy history)

Evidence to Seek from Candidates

Stakeholders repeatedly asked for demonstrated records rather than stated values. Board interviews and reference checks could look for:

- **Integrity:** specific examples of admitting error, managing conflicts of interest, and making unpopular ethical decisions.
- **Trust repair:** prior experience leading an organization through a crisis or turnaround.
- **Fiscal stewardship:** a record of moving resources toward classrooms, cutting administrative overhead, and explaining budgets transparently.
- **Equity:** a demonstrated record of anti-racist action and of building a diverse educator pipeline.
- **Visibility:** concrete habits of time in schools and two-way engagement with staff, students, and families.
- **Special education:** experience strengthening special education staffing and services.
- **Educator credibility:** classroom and school-level experience across grade levels.
- **Commitment:** evidence of long tenures and a long-term commitment to the district.

Candidate Implications

Cherry Creek School District's next superintendent should be, above all, a person of **unquestioned integrity**, proven by a record of honesty, accountability, humility, and freedom from political agenda and conflicts of interest. The district has a strong legacy, but the past year has strained its trust, so this leader must be able to **rebuild trust and morale** through transparency, regular presence in schools, clear communication, and real listening to staff, students, families, and the community.

This leader should be an **educator at heart** with public education and classroom experience, who keeps **students at the center** of every decision and brings a **demonstrated commitment to equity**. That includes closing the achievement gap, addressing disproportionality, strengthening special education, and building a workforce that reflects the students it serves. They should be a **careful fiscal steward** who directs resources toward classrooms and staff, makes data-informed and transparent decisions, and leads realistically through declining enrollment and constrained state funding.

Finally, this leader should be **collaborative and decisive**: able to unite the Board, district leadership, associations, educators, and a diverse community, and willing to hold leaders accountable. They should guide the district through the next phase of its strategic plan with a clear focus on literacy, whole-child well-being, and the challenges and opportunities of AI and technology.