



Carlisle Area School District
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Dr. Patricia B. Sanker • Acting Superintendent

Carlisle Area School District
Highlights of the Public Input to the CASD Superintendent Search

June 30, 2022

Dear Carlisle Area School District Parents, Students, Staff, and Community:

As part of the superintendent search process, the consultant (Chester County Intermediate Unit) retained by the Carlisle Area School District (CASD) Board of Directors conducted eight focus groups and a community survey. The Board committed to sharing the findings from this process.

The input from teachers and other staff, students, parents, and community leaders was instrumental in guiding the Board's review of candidates and in the final selection of Dr. Colleen Friend as the Superintendent. Dr. Friend has since used the input to help shape her priorities and that of her administrative team.

Focus Group Findings: The consultant conducted eight focus groups, including: two support staff groups, elementary professional staff, secondary professional staff, administrators, high school students, parents/guardians, and community leaders. Nearly 100 individuals participated. The consultant identified the following themes that emerged from the majority of these groups as priorities for a new superintendent:

- Ability to unify staff, student, parents, and community; build morale and school pride; sustain community partnerships
- Modeling integrity, trust, and respect, including balancing leadership with a servant heart and being able to explain decisions to the staff, students, and parents
- Being a visionary leader and a critical thinker, including bringing fresh ideas and perspectives and a willingness to make changes
- A skilled communicator who actively listens and engages with all stakeholders
- Ability to recruit and retain quality educators; taking proactive approaches to recruit a staff reflective of the student population; being visible within the schools and the community
- Having a holistic approach to education; prioritizing student mental health services
- Understanding the needs of special populations (special education, English language learners, homeless, gifted, etc.)
- Being student-centered; recognizing the uniqueness of the District's students and the importance of career pathways and/or further education; supporting teachers in meeting student needs
- Ability to manage financial and facility resources and provide equitable distribution of resources across the district

Other areas that emerged across half of the groups include:

- An experienced and proven school leader and educator
- Demonstrating courage of convictions, thoughtful clarity, and decision-making that considers the factual circumstances of a situation
- Understands, values, and respects the greater Carlisle community and the culture within the district
- Understands both the opportunity and impact of technology and innovation for learning for students, teachers, support staff, and administrators

Survey Findings: In addition, nearly 300 individuals responded to a survey that was distributed to teachers and other staff and parents, and made available on the District website for others to complete. The vast majority of these responses were by parents/guardians and District employees. Responses to survey questions included:

- Experiences important in a candidate were ranked as follows—classroom teacher experience, experience as a principal, experience as a superintendent, and experience in District administration
- Skills viewed as important in a candidate were ranked as follows—knowledgeable in curriculum, skilled human resource leader with the ability to delegate, knowledgeable in school operations, knowledgeable in school finances, and skilled in community and business engagement
- Leadership attributes viewed as important in a candidate were ranked as follows—communication, problem-solving, listening, work ethic, and empathy

In addition, there were a series of open-ended questions to identify key challenges for the District and some of the obstacles the new superintendent might need to overcome. An analysis of the qualitative responses were very comparable to the themes identified in the focus groups, including: unifying the staff and students within the District; assuring a student-centered focus by leaders; transparency in communications and ability to listen; mental health needs of students; addressing equity (particularly class sizes) across the elementary schools; recruiting, retaining, and empowering high-quality educators; being willing to bring fresh approaches and make changes; addressing the uneven progress of students during the pandemic; and engaging the community to support student needs.

Several areas that were highlighted as needing improvement across many of the responses included addressing the structure and programming of the elementary schools; strengthening consistent and transparent communications/messaging; and greater visibility of District leadership within the schools and the community.

Finally, the survey asked an open-ended question regarding the strengths that respondents see in CASD and what they would like to retain of those strengths. Themes emerging from these responses included: availability of the array of extracurricular programs and activities; building on the District's career and technical education program to maximize its value to more students; sustaining the many community partnerships the District has built to support students; sustaining a committed and dedicated staff; valuing the diversity of the student population; sustaining a wide range of course options and experiences for students at the high school level; and assuring access to technology to support the learning environment.

The qualitative and quantitative information obtained through both the focus groups and the survey helped guide the Superintendent search process and identification of Board priorities. They also have provided a wealth of information for Dr. Friend, as she shapes her entry plan and goals for the first year.

The Board is appreciative of the time and thoughts that all who participated in the focus groups and/or the survey gave to the District. While this report focuses on the key findings, there is a great deal of additional detail that the Board and the new Superintendent reviewed that also will factor into ongoing strategic thinking. There also will be continued opportunities for stakeholder engagement and input as the year unfolds and into the future.

Sincerely,

Board, Carlisle Area School District