

MEMORANDUM

To: Brookline Superintendent Search Committee

From: Glenn Koocher, MASC
Kathleen Kelly, MASC

Date: January 11, 2021

RE: Key Take-Aways from On-Line Surveys

Over 600 people responded to the on-line survey with the vast majority of comments coming from parents (442), community members (156) and teachers (105). The School Committee members of the search committee have been provided with the full text of all responses, including almost 2,000 individual comments on open response categories. MASC reviewed the entire document. What follows is a general summary of the key points raised by responders.

Brookline Superintendent Search – 2021		
Please tell us something about yourself? Check all that apply, including your town of residency. Note: many responders chose multiple categories.		
Answer Choices	Responses	
Parent/Guardian/Caretaker	70.72%	442
Student	6.24%	39
Community Member	24.96%	156
Faculty Member - Teacher	16.80%	105
Faculty Member - Paraprofessional	0.96%	6
School Support Staff	2.08%	13
Faculty Member - Administrator	3.20%	20
Business Person in the District	0.48%	3
Town Government Official	2.72%	17
Other or Town of Residency		124
	Answered	625

Also attached are the numerical data from the questions where responders were asked to rank important issues and characteristics of a desired superintendent.

We were able to disaggregate the data from parents/guardians and from teachers and have provided a side-by-side comparison of the average rankings with significant differences highlighted. This is not a “statistical significance” report, but those responses where the difference between parents and teachers (1-5) were at or greater than .3. As noted previously, a complete download of all data sorted by questions posed, including open responses, is being provided to the School Committee members of the search committee.

Based on the quantitative ranking data, where a score of 5 signifies most important, the top five issues for survey respondents are 1) Educational Leadership (4.53), 2. Staff Relations/Morale (4.46), 3. Transparency (4.39), 4. Quality of Instruction (4.35), and 5. Communication with the public (4.23). The top five attributes sought in the next superintendent are 1. Communication skills (4.61), 2. Retention of superior staff (4.57), 3. Respect for others' values (4.49), 4. Recruitment of superior staff (4.46), and 5. Inspiration of others (4.43).

GENERAL CONSENSUS

There was a general consensus that the next superintendent will need strong interpersonal, communication and leadership skills in order to be successful in confronting the COVID-related issues that have had an impact on education in Brookline. The past year has included turmoil generated by the COVID pandemic, and the accompanying financial/budget challenges. The Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) will need a superintendent who can both facilitate community healing and move student learning forward.

There was broad recognition across survey respondent groups that classroom teachers, special educators, coaches and support staff have helped to immunize children from many of the fears and anxieties that COVID has produced. Stability will be crucial in Brookline; considerable turnover in the central office in recent years has reduced consistency and lowered morale. Thus, while there seems to be an understandable concern about direction in the present, there is confidence that the educators will help lead a successful transition from the COVID era. While remote learning is not anyone's preferred strategy, the stakeholders have viewed the faculty as a positive factor in preparing for the next superintendency and returning to normalcy.

STAFF RESPONSES

Educators placed a very high priority on diversity, equity and social justice. This priority was explained in many dimensions but all related to integrating social and emotional learning and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for students, including for those with special needs. Although the METCO program has been a part of PSB for five decades, many respondents believe there is great potential to improve outcomes for both METCO and resident students who benefit enormously from learning alongside a diverse group of youngsters.

Teachers responded to concerns that are often attached to economically advantaged, high performing districts: that high demanding parents may have a disproportionate level of influence over the central office decisions or at the principal level. Generating a high level of parent engagement is often stated as

a goal of many other districts. In Brookline, educators warned that a balance is tilting away from the people who work in classrooms.

There were many respondents who worry that Brookline's great reputation is at risk as a function of diminished teacher morale, inadequate budget allocations to achieve excellence and equity, loss of individual school autonomy, and negativity from challenges that became local news items. On the other hand, both faculty and parents have been unambiguous in their praise of teachers, specialists, therapists, paraprofessionals, and administrative support personnel who have done their best to shield students from the challenges of 2020.

Many respondents want the search process to identify a leader who will prioritize stability and who will encourage and retain central office administrators and principals to commit to their work for the long term. Educators call for a communications strategy that incorporates transparency with an affirmative effort to promote the value of the work in schools. This is part of a strategy to establish the role of the classroom teacher and specialist who work directly with students as committed, courageous, and socially conscious advocates for children.

Teachers call for a superintendent who understands the many dimensions of leadership. Recent turnover in the central office of PSB has left many teachers hoping for a superintendent who will be more in touch with the faculty. They want candidates for the superintendency to be asked to provide clear examples of what they have done to demonstrate both what good leaders do and how they make an impact. This is a clear challenge to the search committee not to confuse buzzword literacy with knowledge and experience with actual action steps to improve educator morale, curriculum quality, diversity, and equity.

Educators remind us that the COVID pandemic will be both an opportunity and a challenge to think differently about learning going forward. This may include identifying the possibilities of the overall role of technology, alternative schooling, remote learning, extracurricular activities, evaluations, strategic planning, and independence of educators to be innovative. The next superintendent will find a faculty ready to identify specific strategies to balance a range of student experiences and outcomes.

Scattered throughout the responses were strong statements in support of music, drama, dance, and art which are always candidates for cuts in uncertain fiscal times. Educators call for high-quality professional development that relates to the specific needs of individual categories of teachers. As is the case in most districts, educators lament the roadblocks to more emphasis on building critical thinking skills created by a statewide policy of standardized testing, test-based assessments of teachers, schools and districts, and labeling of students.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY RESIDENT RESPONSES

Parents prioritize stability and commitment to Brookline as important criteria for selection. A significant number of parents are mindful of tensions between subsets of stakeholders and believe that a skillful superintendent who excels as a communicator will be essential toward moving forward. Parents seek a superintendent who can speak clearly in presenting the finances, academic outcomes, and key decisions to the public.

Parents express a high level of respect for teachers. They praise the special skills that faculty members have and deploy. They see the faculty as dedicated, creative, committed to children and very good at what they do.

While this is a higher priority among teachers, parents did express concerns about equalizing opportunities for students. There were several statements urging taking care of kids who cannot afford private, supplemental tutoring and coaching that is available to economically advantaged families. Concerns were similarly expressed around reviewing special education services to ensure access and participation for special education students.

Parents are strong proponents of the arts, athletic opportunities, and extracurricular activities and would like a superintendent who is well versed in the making of the well-rounded student.

Parents articulate strongly the value of a diverse student body and faculty, including the METCO program. They see value in professional development for teachers to help remediate bias and to identify strategies for achieving equity in its many formats. The concept of “opportunity hoarding,” for example, is an element that disadvantages certain cohorts of students, especially during the quarantine in a pandemic.

Community members are concerned about the reputation of the district and the assurance that tax dollars are targeted to getting effective services to students.

Survey Responses – Analysis of Some Numerical Data

Responders were asked to rank issues and concerns on a scale of 1-5. The lowest possible score is 1.0 and the highest is 5.0. The median possible score is 3.0. A full ranking is posted, below. Areas parents ranked higher than faculty by significant margin (.3) :

PARENTS/Criteria	Difference Higher Priority than Teachers
IMPORTANT ISSUES (Listed in order of appearance on the survey.)	
Curriculum Development	.91
Quality of Instruction	.85
Technology	.38
Academic Planning	.67
Academic Standards	.82
Student Assessment	.62
Staff Evaluation	.66
College/Career Readiness	.81
Extra-Curricular Activities	.89
Enrichment Education	.94
After School/Summer Support	.49
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
Encouraging Parental Involvement	.34
Responsive to Administrators	.58
Experience with Curriculum Development	.42
Improvement in Academic Performance	.70
Experience with Technology	.33
Appreciates STEM	.59
TEACHERS/Criteria	
Difference Higher Priority than Parents	
IMPORTANT ISSUES	
Diversity	.64
Equity and Inclusion	.67
Collective bargaining/Employment Policy	.51
Staff Relations/Morale	.35
Special Education	.38
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
Appreciating Diversity	.67
Working with Diverse Constituencies	.71
Understanding Special Education	.61
Responsiveness to Educators	.38
Visits Classrooms and Schools	.42

What are the most important issues for you as we begin the process to select a new superintendent?
Please rate each area with a score of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) Presented in Ranked Order

	1 (Lowest)		2		3		4		5 (Highest)		Total	Weighted Average		Rated 4 or 5	%
Educational Leadership	0.82%	5	1.97%	12	8.36%	51	20.98%	128	67.87%	414	610	4.53		542	86.6%
Staff Relations/Morale	0.80%	5	1.45%	9	10.13%	63	26.37%	164	61.25%	381	622	4.46		545	87.1%
Transparency	0.49%	3	2.94%	18	12.40%	76	25.77%	158	58.40%	358	613	4.39		516	82.4%
Quality of Instruction	1.62%	10	2.60%	16	12.50%	77	25.49%	157	57.79%	356	616	4.35		513	81.9%
Communication with the Public	1.64%	10	3.28%	20	12.81%	78	35.30%	215	46.96%	286	609	4.23		501	80.0%
Academic Planning	2.11%	13	5.04%	31	21.95%	135	31.87%	196	39.02%	240	615	4.01		436	69.6%
Academic Standards	3.27%	20	7.03%	43	19.44%	119	26.47%	162	43.79%	268	612	4		430	68.7%
Health/Safety	2.45%	15	4.08%	25	24.80%	152	29.36%	180	39.31%	241	613	3.99		421	67.3%
Financial Management	0.98%	6	3.76%	23	24.55%	150	37.48%	229	33.22%	203	611	3.98		432	69.0%
Strategic Planning	3.08%	19	5.52%	34	19.48%	120	36.53%	225	35.39%	218	616	3.96		443	70.8%
Social and Emotional Wellness	2.12%	13	5.05%	31	21.99%	135	37.30%	229	33.55%	206	614	3.95		435	69.5%
Equity and Inclusion	7.82%	48	5.54%	34	16.94%	104	27.04%	166	42.67%	262	614	3.91		428	68.4%
Curriculum Development	4.07%	25	7.80%	48	24.55%	151	31.22%	192	32.36%	199	615	3.8		391	62.5%
Collective Bargaining/Employment Policy	5.06%	31	9.79%	60	26.10%	160	30.83%	189	28.22%	173	613	3.67		362	57.8%
College/Career/Civic Readiness	4.91%	30	8.67%	53	31.75%	194	26.51%	162	28.15%	172	611	3.64		334	53.4%
Special Education	6.53%	40	8.65%	53	26.75%	164	30.83%	189	27.24%	167	613	3.64		356	56.9%
Professional Development	3.76%	23	7.04%	43	31.10%	190	37.81%	231	20.29%	124	611	3.64		355	56.7%
Diversity	10.20%	62	7.89%	48	24.18%	147	27.47%	167	30.26%	184	608	3.6		351	56.1%
Technology	4.07%	25	10.26%	63	37.46%	230	31.76%	195	16.45%	101	614	3.46		296	47.3%
Staff Evaluation	6.22%	38	9.00%	55	35.68%	218	32.90%	201	16.20%	99	611	3.44		300	47.9%
Enrichment Education	9.62%	59	13.05%	80	31.81%	195	25.61%	157	19.90%	122	613	3.33		279	44.6%
Student Assessment	10.51%	64	12.81%	78	35.80%	218	24.30%	148	16.58%	101	609	3.24		249	39.8%
Facilities Management	6.03%	37	14.01%	86	43.32%	266	26.55%	163	10.10%	62	614	3.21		225	35.9%
Extra Curricular Activities	11.69%	72	14.29%	88	34.42%	212	24.19%	149	15.42%	95	616	3.17		244	39.0%
New Facilities Construction	10.10%	62	18.40%	113	42.67%	262	20.52%	126	8.31%	51	614	2.99		177	28.3%
After School/Summer Support	16.99%	104	16.99%	104	34.15%	209	18.79%	115	13.07%	80	612	2.94		195	31.2%

Q6. What are the personal characteristics that you feel are important for the next superintendent to possess? Please rate these characteristics from 1-5 with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important. Presented in ranked order.

	1 (Lowest)		2		3		4		5 (Highest)		Total	Weighted Average	Rated 4 or 5	%
Communications Skills	0.33%	2	0.65%	4	6.69%	41	22.35%	137	69.98%	429	613	4.61	566	91%
Retains Superior Staff	1.30%	8	0.98%	6	6.68%	41	21.50%	132	69.54%	427	614	4.57	559	89.9%
Respects People's Values	0.83%	5	1.49%	9	8.11%	49	27.48%	166	62.09%	375	604	4.49	541	87.0%
Attracts Superior Staff	1.64%	10	1.64%	10	9.00%	55	24.55%	150	63.18%	386	611	4.46	536	86.1%
Inspires Others	1.31%	8	1.64%	10	10.82%	66	25.08%	153	61.15%	373	610	4.43	526	84.6%
Responsive to Educators	0.98%	6	2.62%	16	10.98%	67	28.03%	171	57.38%	350	610	4.38	521	83.8%
Supports/Mentors Staff	1.31%	8	2.29%	14	12.60%	77	32.73%	200	51.06%	312	611	4.3	512	82.3%
Understands Community Relations	0.66%	4	1.99%	12	15.42%	93	34.00%	205	47.93%	289	603	4.27	494	79.4%
Responsive to Students, Parents, and Community	1.64%	10	2.79%	17	16.75%	102	28.57%	174	50.25%	306	609	4.23	480	77.1%
Appreciates Diversity	4.46%	27	5.28%	32	16.01%	97	24.26%	147	50.00%	303	606	4.1	450	72.3%
Strategic Planning Skills	1.16%	7	4.13%	25	19.17%	116	36.86%	223	38.68%	234	605	4.08	457	73.5%
Personnel Administration Skills	1.48%	9	4.76%	29	20.03%	122	33.99%	207	39.74%	242	609	4.06	449	71.2%
Visits Classrooms/Schools	2.28%	14	6.68%	41	18.89%	116	29.80%	183	42.35%	260	614	4.03	443	71.2%
Organizational Skills	1.49%	9	4.13%	25	21.98%	133	36.03%	218	36.36%	220	605	4.02	438	70.4%
Success Working with School Committee	1.81%	11	3.95%	24	21.88%	133	36.35%	221	36.02%	219	608	4.01	440	70.1%
Responsive to Administrators	2.33%	14	4.66%	28	21.96%	132	33.11%	199	37.94%	228	601	4	427	68.7%
Collective Bargaining Skills	1.32%	8	4.30%	26	25.45%	154	35.37%	214	33.55%	203	605	3.96	417	67%
Working with Diverse Constituencies	4.79%	29	5.28%	32	20.96%	127	30.36%	184	38.61%	234	606	3.93	418	67.2%
Life Long Learner	3.78%	23	5.09%	31	24.47%	149	29.23%	178	37.44%	228	609	3.91	406	65.3%
Builds Innovative Partnerships	2.47%	15	6.26%	38	24.71%	150	34.27%	208	32.29%	196	607	3.88	404	65%
Appreciates STEM (Science/Technology/Engineer/Math)	1.98%	12	6.93%	42	28.05%	170	32.34%	196	30.69%	186	606	3.83	382	61.4%
Understanding of Special Education	3.14%	19	8.43%	51	26.61%	161	31.74%	192	30.08%	182	605	3.77	374	61.1%
Mastery of Budget and Finance	1.82%	11	6.28%	38	30.25%	183	37.52%	227	24.13%	146	605	3.76	373	60%

Previous Superintendent Experience	6.35%	39	9.12%	56	22.80%	140	29.32%	180	32.41%	199	614	3.72	379	60%
Experience with Curriculum Development	3.43%	21	8.01%	49	30.39%	186	34.97%	214	23.20%	142	612	3.67	356	57.2%
Improvement in Academic Performance	6.20%	38	9.46%	58	28.87%	177	25.61%	157	29.85%	183	613	3.63	340	54.7%
Experience as a Principal	5.12%	31	9.59%	58	30.08%	182	32.07%	194	23.14%	140	605	3.59	334	53.7%
Encourages Parental Involvement	5.29%	32	8.93%	54	33.72%	204	30.58%	185	21.49%	130	605	3.54	315	50.7%
Previous Central Administration/Leadership Experience in a Peer District	6.80%	41	10.61%	64	31.18%	188	29.19%	176	22.22%	134	603	3.49	310	49.9%
Personal Interest in Professional Development	4.29%	26	10.73%	65	35.97%	218	32.34%	196	16.67%	101	606	3.46	297	47.8%
Experience with Technology	4.10%	25	13.44%	82	35.25%	215	33.44%	204	13.77%	84	610	3.39	288	46.3%
Appreciates Arts	7.45%	45	10.76%	65	34.11%	206	31.62%	191	16.06%	97	604	3.38	288	46.3%
Secures Grants/Outside Funding	5.50%	33	12.67%	76	43.33%	260	27.33%	164	11.17%	67	600	3.26	231	37.1%
Appreciates Athletics	15.56%	94	16.56%	100	34.27%	207	21.36%	129	12.25%	74	604	2.98	203	32.6%
Other (please specify)											91			