

Salem Public School District Community Assessment Report

Appendix A: Individually Recorded Focus Group Responses

**Salem Public School District
Community Assessment
Individually Recorded Focus Group Responses**

**FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: Middle School Students
(Leadership Council)
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 25**

Question 1: What experience should the next superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- School principal or other administrative experience in the educational field
- Teaching experience
- At least five years of classroom experience (deemed desirable, but not mandatory)
- Experience as a Superintendent
- Experience working with middle school aged students
- Experience working with budgets and finance.

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Ability to create a climate of trust
- Supports student and school improvement
- Interacts with students
- Able to demonstrate involvement in the community via fundraising or other civic-minded activities
- Willingness to go beyond the call of duty
- Organizational skills
- Positive attitude

Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new superintendent?

- Ph.D or Ed.D desirable but not required
- Degree in psychology or experience in the field (useful but not mandatory)
- Background in educational finance
- Experience working with people

Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new superintendent?

- Ability to work with East Lyme; skill in facilities management; understanding of transportation services
- Good communication skills with neighboring schools and within Salem schools
- Ability to promote and offer additional activities between the Salem school and other schools (sports and extracurricular)
- Skilled in working with school policies and procedure

- Ability to understand the students’ as well teachers’ perspective
- Willing to improve the school if need be
- Ability to assume position without rushing to change things; honoring the work that’s been done to date.

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal superintendent?

- Kid-friendly; good communication skills; approachable to students; flexible; jolly; positive; not mean; helpful, able to deal with issues; sociable; patient; not condescending; calm
- Determined to improve school; understanding; nice; able to listen; trustworthy; able to come out of shell; not short-tempered; fun-loving, enjoys the company of kids; good leader; enthusiastic; has his or her own kids (desirable but not necessary); organized; hard-working; considerate; smart; decisive
- Good sense of humor; impartial; dedicated to the profession of Superintendent

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Managing the budget; making better decisions re: purchasing items—focusing on supplies and the “more needed” items so that school environment is comfortable; address busing overcrowding by analyzing bus routes.
- Finding ways to maintain the quality of educational program in light of declining enrollment
- Focus on facility issues on an ongoing basis with a commitment to continuous improvement rather than large projects; address the heating/cooling by moderating temperatures throughout the building
- Fair and consistent enforcement of the dress code and better clarification of this policy
- Focus on large issues that affect all students/teachers.

FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: All Administrators

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 4

Question 1: What experience should the next superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- Principal; experience as a superintendent; experience in presenting professional development
- Experience in curriculum and instruction (i.e. Central Office experience; Assistant Superintendent; Director/Assistant Director of special education—these are all desirable experiential backgrounds)
- Superintendent with wide-ranging experience in a leadership/mentorship capacity
- Experience in data driven decision-making.

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new Superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Creating a climate of trust in the community
- Excellent communication skills; ability to clearly articulate vision and mission direction
- Evidence of collaborative experience in a similar district
- Experience with budget; ability to provide budgetary clarity and to demonstrate how/why budget works as well as how to connect these issues with student learning
- Evidence of maintaining high student achievement; up to date in current trends in educational reforms and mandates
- Experience with supervision and evaluation of staff
- Experience dealing with district/school improvement plans.

Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new Superintendent?

- Doctorate degree in education or Ed.D (highly desirable but not mandatory)
- Advanced degree beyond a Master's Degree
- Some experience in a business background, provided there is also experience in an educational environment.
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Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new Superintendent?

- Experience with building project management and ongoing facilities management
- Ability to be proactive regarding planned and cycled maintenance
- Experience with school law; understanding of policies and procedures, including special education
- Technology; knowledge of the common core
- Knowledge of curriculum instruction and assessment
- Ability to manage transportation issues, with a broad understanding of what a successful transportation system should be
- Supervision: understanding the changes in performance evaluations
- Ability to manage declining enrollment--knowledge of how this will impact budget, personnel, facilities, etc.

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal Superintendent?

- Good communicator; exceptional interpersonal skills; courage; honesty; strong ethical values; ability to be fair and apply rules consistently; follow-through and reliability; available; ability to listen and consider input from others in order to make informed decisions
- Ability to multi-task; organized; caring; likes kids; supportive; values teachers and professional staff; continues to learn; shows appreciation; strong leader capable of working productively with the BOE and the BOF;
- Multiple hobbies and interests, which could bring new insight into school district.

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Budget; declining enrollment; accountability and consistency throughout district;
- Student achievement
- Future relationship with our cooperative school--what would a plan look like and how would a superintendent contribute to that dialogue?
- Economy: understanding of the impact of this issue with regard to changing demographics (including a more transient community);
- Addressing the needs of English language learners and special education students.

FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: Middle School Teachers and Staff
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 7

Question 1: What experience should the next superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- Classroom teacher; experience as a superintendent; well-versed in curriculum and common core (experience as a director of curriculum/instruction or similar)
- Building level administration experience—knowledge of ins and outs of running a building (should not second-guess or micro-manage)
- Management experience outside of a school district
- Understanding of budgets and finance.

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Understanding of school organizational structures
- Experience in pursuing and regionalizing the functions of a cooperative school district, such as a regional calendar or transportation and special education issues.
- Experience or exposure to (or understanding of) a cooperative agreement similar to Salem's arrangement with East Lyme
- Experience or a record of achievement in a small school district
- Experience with managing a building project.

Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new superintendent?

- Requirements of position (093 certification)
- More than a Master's Degree, though not necessarily a doctorate degree;
- Personal and communication skills are more important than degree status.
- Ph.D combined with a set of practical "in the trenches" skills (understanding of the day to day operation of the educational environment); a combination of these skills as well as scholarship.

Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new superintendent?

- Understanding of building issues; well-versed in common core; understands policy and legal issues;
- Contract negotiation skills; sharp awareness of responsibilities of BOE, in order to guide board and be able to facilitate meetings.
- Awareness of political climate in a small school district; has the courage to do the right thing despite political implications of “exposure;” having the courage of his/her convictions.
- Good survival skills for “keeping the school alive.”
- Showcase the district to other communities—ability to communicate the benefits of a small district.
- Understanding of what makes a k-8 school unique; ability to bring out these strengths.

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal superintendent?

- Ability and inclination to support/mentor school administrators;
- Willingness to listen and modify their own ideas;
- Good public relations/communication skills for community, staff.
- Spokesperson who clearly articulates message; ability to inform and provide rationale for decisions.
- Honesty; ethics; calm and considered; approachable, personable, accessible.

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Attracting students and families to the Salem community;
- What is candidate’s opinion on Governor Malloy’s proposals for small districts?
- How to share resources and also maintain our own identity? Leader should be able to offer some creative solutions to this issue.
- Continue the successful path that the district is currently on; sustain the positive effort and bring it forward.
- Person should be a role model for others and also maintain a professional stature; “We’re looking for consistency and commitment”
- Someone who appreciates the value of a library!

**FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: Elementary Teachers and Staff
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 6**

Question 1: What experience should the next superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- Experience as an educator, either a teacher or supervising teachers
- Management and leadership skills (with adults)
- Experience with mentorship, assisting others with leadership skills
- Superintendent experience is not essential, but helpful
- Assistant superintendent or a skill set to manage in that capacity
- Rural/urban experience in wide area is helpful.

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Ability to communicate clearly with various constituencies; ability to balance the needs of the Salem School with the broader needs of a cooperative district
- Diplomatic and assertiveness skills
- Ability to achieve lofty goals while also “walking the walk and talking the talk”
- Having the courage of one’s convictions; references should indicate a consensus builder who’s also open to accepting diverging opinions
- Evidence of a successful school climate demonstrated by past record
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Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new superintendent?

- In addition to a Master’s Degree and the 093 certification, candidate should have a background in education; Ph.D or Ed.D is desirable; scholarship is important, focus area should show evidence of a passion for education and learning; should value the meaning of the word “educator”
- Someone with a drive to do what’s best for students
- Doctorate degree is secondary to the above criteria
- Evidence of having done research in an educational environment
- Proficiency with data-driven decisions as well as an understanding of research.

Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new superintendent?

- Experience with building project management
- Understanding of the impact of declining enrollment and its implications
- Breadth of experience dealing with the challenges of differing parental styles
- Ability to advocate on behalf of sustaining educational/social standards
- Ability to deal with the “small town” environment and the pressures that such an environment places on staff.

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal superintendent?

- Sense of humor; strong communicator with clear articulation; consistent; passionate; transparent; professional mannerism/demeanor
- Straight-forward and diplomatic; offers constructive criticism in a positive, clear and supportive environment
- Willingness to hear differing opinions and accepting of constructive conflict
- Creativity—ability to think outside the box; financially resourceful
- Ability to see the “big picture”
- Visionary!

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Ability to facilitate the Common Core ideal
- Understanding of the standards-based report card (new system), and a willingness to address the challenges of revising it
- Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) is soon to be implemented: we need someone who will provide support and focus on this issue
- Understanding of union issues and an awareness of educational reform.
- Excellent leader
- Individual should love children!

**FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: Parents and Community Members
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 4**

Question 1: What experience should the next superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- Superintendent experience (principal as well as teaching experience in the traditional trajectory of education)
- Administrator who has not lost focus of “the classroom,” with a passion for students and accessible to staff
- K-8 structure is unique--Superintendent must understand the dynamics of this organization (i.e. separation of roles and responsibilities of Central Office and Administrative Staff)
- Fostering open communication
- Willingness to commit long-term to the Salem School District.

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Creating a climate of trust within the school and extended community; ability to connect with all constituencies.
- Someone who can identify the professional development needs within our schools to the board in their selection efforts
- Ability to manage declining enrollment issues—individual should be able to demonstrate success in this area
- Record of success with k-8 scheduling and positive behavior models
- Promoting opportunities for collaboration (team time) among teachers (embedding this model and selling it in the community)
- Technology: providing and advocating, in terms of budget, for technology concerns; candidate should be technologically literate.
- Able to demonstrate evidence of having advanced the technology element of the district; skill and understanding of integrating technology into instruction.

Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new superintendent?

- Doctorate is not mandatory; experience is more important.

Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new superintendent?

- Certified School Business Managers' experience would be useful
- Background in special education, which could translate into serving the full spectrum of student needs, including gifted and talented students
- Experience in leading a major change (SRBI-Scientific Research-Based Interventions, is an example that would require leadership and vision); track record as a positive change agent
- Ability to take on a leadership role in strengthening the school-home relationship
- A desire to sustain the ideal of continuous improvement
- PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support): ability to lead in this area.
- Facilities management: Candidate should have a good understanding of this issue
- Proposals regarding performance evaluation: candidate should have some familiarity with S.B.-24 (Senate Bill 24, legislation concerning education reform) and a capacity and willingness to lead in this area.

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal superintendent?

- Ethical; good communication skills; approachable to staff, students, parents;
- Fair; trustworthy; fiscally responsible; articulate
- Exudes a love of learning; understands a small town community; sense of humor; good listener; charismatic and persuasive
- Ability to see the big picture (visionary); someone with a big plan, who's also able to think about the implications; ability to understand complexity of the job;
- Not always top-down oriented; willing to share decision-making when appropriate
- Ability to recognize and allow staff to share in decisions—willing to listen to input
- Communicate the decision-making process and remain consistent throughout.

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Academic rigor is vital
- Issues related to declining enrollment
- Facilities management
- Renegotiation of cooperative agreement with East Lyme High School
- Plan to create a building culture that serves as a positive environment in which to support social competence and success, as this is the basis for all positive learning
- Establish an all-encompassing social mantra throughout the community that will teach students to be socially responsible individuals.

FOCUS GROUP DESIGNATION: Senior Citizens*
NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 10

*Due to the fact that this cohort did not participate in face-to-face discussion, we would ordinarily add their data to the results of the online survey. However, we believe this group warrants its own separate category as well as a brief narrative.

It is sometimes said that senior citizens do not have a vested interest in their school systems because their own children have moved on and they no longer have cause to be involved with education. Experience has told us that this is largely untrue. Seniors are engaged members of their community, frequently attending meetings or volunteering on boards and commissions. Like other informed citizens, they tend to base their votes on the information available to them. Which is why we think it's critical to include their opinions in this report. We firmly believe that the school/community relationship is a collaborative one; schools share information in order to inform voters who then decide whether or not to support a given proposal. Although it does not require a referendum, the search for a new superintendent is a significant task that's vital to all constituencies. A hiring decision that is validated by an entire community generally has a better chance of succeeding. Such validation likewise offers a new superintendent the assurance that he/she needs in order to lead with confidence.

The answers below represent the input of ten (10) senior citizens who took time during their regularly scheduled meeting to provide feedback for this community assessment. In most cases, they were given the option of choosing more than one response per category.

Question 1: What experience should the next Superintendent of Salem Public Schools have in his/her background?

- Superintendent of Schools 6
- School Principal 9
- Central Office Administrator 2
- Central Office Supervisor 3
- Private sector Management 0

Question 2: What kind of achievement record do you believe the new Superintendent should be able to demonstrate?

- Raising student achievement 10
- Creating a positive learning environment 6
- Creating a positive school/district culture 3
- Improving organizational productivity 1
- Creating a climate of trust in the community 2
- Creating a climate of trust with public officials 1
- Improving professional development programs 2
- Improving supervision and evaluation programs 2
- Recruitment/retention of high quality personnel 4
- Strategic planning 2
- Leading school reform efforts 1

Question 3: What kind of educational background would you prefer to see in the new Superintendent?

- Doctoral degree 3
- Advanced degree (beyond masters degree) 3
- MBA or business coursework 2
- Degree not as important as skills and abilities 5

Question 4: Given your understanding of the Salem Public Schools community, what personal expertise do you believe would benefit the new superintendent?

- Facilities management 2
- Negotiations and personnel 1
- Faculty relations and development 4
- Policy and governance 1
- Public relations 5
- Curriculum and instruction 5
- Student activities (sports, extracurricular, etc.) 1
- Special education 5
- Budget development 3
- Fiscal management 0
- Communications 1

Question 5: What personal characteristics best define your ideal superintendent?

- Strong ethical values
- Friendly
- Skilled in dealing with disciplinary issues

Question 6: Going forward, what do you believe are the most important issues facing the Salem Public Schools?

- Curriculum
- Students should be taught the essentials of reading, writing and math; they should be able to process problems in their head.