

Shelton Public Schools Superintendent of Schools Leadership Profile

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August 2020

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Introduction

Selecting a leader is the most important responsibility a school board undertakes. There are tangible and intangible aspects of leadership required in a superintendent who is going to work with the Board of Education, school staff, parents, city, and the whole community to provide high quality education for a district's children.

In light of the critical nature of this responsibility, the Shelton Board of Education has sought the input of its school and community stakeholders through a survey, interviews, and focus groups. This Leadership Profile presents findings from 11 focus groups and interviews and an online survey conducted in July 2020. The consultant spoke with 68 individuals, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, non-certified staff, community residents, members of the Board of Education and others. In addition, 196 Shelton residents and staff completed a survey publicized through the Shelton school website. In conducting the interviews and focus groups and developing the survey, the consultant used an unbiased, structured approach involving a series of consistent questions. In addition to asking about strengths and challenges of the Shelton Public Schools and community which could affect future leadership requirements, she asked about the qualities, characteristics, experience, philosophy, and skills most desirable in the next Superintendent of Schools. The Board of Education will use these results as it considers its applicants in order to find the best possible match for Shelton. The consultant is presenting her findings to the Shelton Board of Education without revealing the identity of any individual contributor.

The Shelton Board has made a commendable effort to include voices from as many constituents as possible from the schools and community. Many thanks to focus group participants and survey respondents whose commitment to the schools and City of Shelton was clear as they provided perspectives.

Mary Broderick

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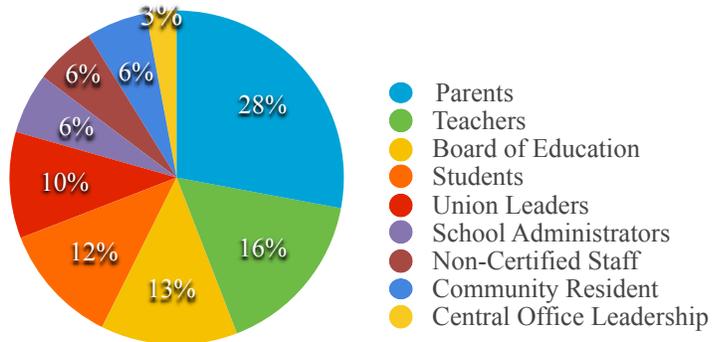
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Data Collection

In total, about 264 individuals participated either through interviews, focus groups, or the online survey. The data collected do not constitute a scientific sampling, but a representation of the Shelton Public Schools and community. The survey was voluntary. Though the consultant heard the perspectives of many, this profile cannot entirely capture the complexity and nuances of the schools and city. Nevertheless, the information yields some useful insights for the search process. Items are included in the following report if, in the consultant’s judgment, they were repeated by a sufficient number of respondents to warrant the Shelton Board of Education’s attention.

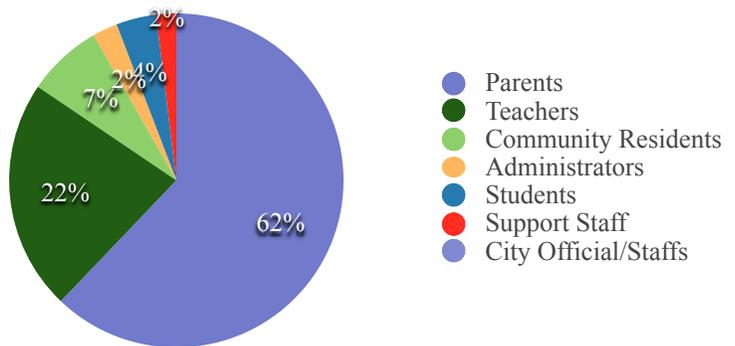
Interview & Focus Group Participants

PARTICIPANT	68	%
Parents	19	27.9%
Teachers	11	16.2%
Board of Education	9	13.2%
Students	8	11.8%
Union Leaders	7	10.3%
School Administrators	4	5.9%
Non-Certified Staff	4	5.9%
Community Resident	4	5.9%
Central Office Leadership	2	2.9%
	68	100.0%



Survey Responses

PARTICIPANT*	196	%
Parents	128	62.1%
Teachers	46	22.3%
Community Residents	15	7.3%
Administrators	5	2.4%
Students	8	3.9%
Support Staff	4	1.9%
City Official/Staffs	0	0.0%
	206	100.0%



*Please note that survey participants identified themselves under multiple categories so numbers add up to more than 196.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

about 25% of students at Shelton Intermediate School, with plans to expand to the high school. The program currently has a waiting list.

In addition, co-curricular, athletic, and other clubs and activities promote the growth of the “whole student.” The district continues to offer a lot of options (drama, music, arts, band from grade-five on) despite a lack of funding. Students spoke of ease in starting high school clubs, and a plethora of club options. There is a great athletic program, including youth football, baseball leagues, etc., with volunteer coaches. A strong robotics program is increasingly volunteer driven. Respondents said, “We have been very creative [in sustaining these], given our low budget.”

Some results of these offerings are students achieving merit scholarships, attending Ivy League schools, and other accolades. The community gets “a great bang for the limited buck” through creative use of resources.

The Town of Shelton: Community pride

Many participants (42) ranked the town as a strength. This beautiful, desirable town boasts a great downtown and a central location with easy access to New Haven. There are many businesses in town, many of which support the schools and the community offers arts festivals and concerts. Several respondents mentioned that the community values education, but has a low mill rate and can afford higher levels of educational funding.

There is a generations-old sense of “Shelton Pride.” The community “bleeds black and orange.” People are proud of the community and many graduates stay or return and work in Shelton.

Parents and community involvement

Participants (26) mentioned the support of parents and the community as a major strength. According to one respondent, “Even with all the problems in the Shelton Public Schools over the past several years ... because our parents care so much for our wellbeing and education, we are able to persevere and make it to graduation and continue to college.” Parents and staff “work as teams,” passionate about supporting the students. In addition, the “PTOs and parents encourage activities to let kids have fun while learning.” The PTOs also contribute significant resources to school operations.

Students

Twenty-five (25) participants cited Shelton’s students as a major strength of the district. According to respondents, the students have an “overarching passion for excellence despite current challenges.” One said, “...(W)e parents and students have pushed ourselves to grow so that our kids can prosper in their adult lives. Students are resilient, attentive, dedicated, focused, and willing to learn, if given the opportunity.” Students have generated a group entitled, “Students Fight for Change” to advocate for resources to meet their needs. Older students also have created a “multicultural ambassadors” group to talk about strengths of diversity and address misperceptions through discussion with younger students.

School culture

Twenty (20) participants referenced some aspect of culture as the greatest strength of Shelton and its schools. They spoke of a family atmosphere in most schools, a spirit of community and teamwork, a dedication to high standards and innovation. They also cited resilience, honesty, and transparency as important values. There is a bond, where people sense that “we’re all in this together, creative in using our own resources.” In this tight community, “students and families... know what they need and what they are worth.”

Diversity

Nine (9) participants recognized the growing diversity of Shelton as a strength. This city/suburb is home to many national firms that would like the community to celebrate diversity. Participants appreciate efforts to unify, but recognize there continue to be some issues as Shelton grows in diversity.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

represent.” This “dysfunctional relationship” and “negative political climate” leave students to suffer the consequences. The Mayor has been in office for 29 years and is viewed as “having a stranglehold on the district.” Participants suggested that the system was in crisis and at a “tipping point.” One represented the views of others in writing, “I feel like I have lost faith in this town’s ability to provide quality education. Our children need to be THE most important thing. We have been shortchanging them for years. Enough is enough!” Several participants felt this contentious relationship recently resulted in the loss of a highly talented superintendent.

Curriculum/Program

Though many aspects of the curriculum and program were viewed as representing the district’s greatest strengths, 88 participants cited some aspect of them as the greatest challenge facing the new leader. The district has articulated a “vision of a graduate,” but several respondents felt the community did not have an overall shared sense of direction. Some felt “the Town has lost direction on curriculum and education in general. What had been a strong program has been gutted.”

Curriculum needs focus and updating. Those working on updating need to have had recent experience in classrooms and be knowledgeable about current evidence-based practices and curricula.

Professional learning used to be a strength of Shelton, where teachers could choose from a broad array of learning “choice sessions.” Today, teachers pay out of pocket for much of their professional learning. There have been many district initiatives, but teachers haven’t felt supported in follow through with sufficient training.

A handful of participants noted lack of equality among schools in the district. Citing varying resources and expectations, instructional materials and programs, participants were seeking greater consistencies among the elementary schools. They noted that “not all students are coming into 5th grade hav(ing) the same exposure to learning previous(ly) taught standards.”

In addition, 18 participants felt special education and social and emotional learning need attention. Budget stressors, understaffing, difficulty finding paraprofessionals when other districts pay more, and changes in leadership have created a “gap growing between special education and regular education.” There is a rise in students performing significantly below grade level. Programs that serve special needs students are growing, with special education teachers handling larger case loads than ideal. Students need earlier intervention. Transitions in tutoring staff have meant there isn’t consistency in carrying out students’ individual education plans, as required by law.

An additional 18 participants expressed concern about growing class sizes resulting from the elimination of 40 teaching positions. Rooms are overfilled, which will present a challenge with COVID compliance. One participant noted, “We had a great framework. It worked wonderfully, but we can’t chip away at it any more. There were 16-20, but now 28 in a first grade classroom.”

Support staff loss is also a major issue. The guidance counselor is shared among schools. There are no assistant principals at the elementary level. As mentioned previously, the district can’t find substitutes, so teachers fill in for one another when someone is sick.

Finally, 22 participants talked about the recent erosion in extracurricular and co-curricular programming as a major challenge. The district implemented “pay to play,” limiting opportunities for some families. Students are missing many music, arts, and language programs previously offered. Volunteers for many programs have lost stipends and fewer teachers are taking coaching positions.

Culture

School culture was referenced as a strength by 20 respondents. However, a sizable number (67) of participants identified some aspect of culture, district reputation, and leadership issues related to culture.

Due to many of the budget and political issues raised above, 26 participants identified poor morale among staff, a culture of secrecy, gossip, fear, and patterns of conflict of interest that have eroded trust in the district. One captured many comments in writing, “The decades long culture will never change to be one

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

that genuinely exists to protect and educate and advocate for children due to corruption and coverups and protection of the people doing wrong to kids....” Several spoke of a “feeling of dread in the air.”

An additional nine (9) participants talked about Shelton suffering a declining reputation due to multiple factors. Some cited a series of controversies at the high school and ensuing national news coverage that “brought shame and dishonor to our schools” and eroded respect from other school districts and communities. Participants would like to see the new superintendent handle such events with appropriate disciplinary actions toward those employees breaking the rules.

Included in the responses about culture were 32 concerns about a lack of effective leadership in the district, where leaders failed to put students first. Some leaders were viewed to seek personal power and top down control over effective, collaborative, student focused leadership. Many mentioned the need for transparency and effective, honest communications in leadership.

Diversity/Demographics

Though nine identified Shelton’s diversity as a growing strength, 25 participants identified some aspect of diversity and shifting demographics as a major challenge. Several mentioned that there have been incidents with racial, antisemitic, and/or homophobic undertones, including bullying. Participants spoke of “community issues like racism and lack of empathy coming into classrooms.” Several also mentioned the need to “address undoing systemic racism in our schools and teaching anti-racism.”

In spite of a growing population of students of color, those students are not enrolling in college bound courses in numbers comparable to their white peers. Participants want to “make sure education is equitable and accessible for all.” Respondents want to see comparable quality instruction for students achieving at the highest levels to those performing below grade level. Shelton “need(s) to seriously work on recruiting and retaining teachers of color and from diverse backgrounds. The diversity of our district’s students is NOT reflected in their teachers.”

Other demographic shifts mentioned included a growing population of senior residents and a more transient student body “as more apartments in town are built.”

Board of Education

Though seven participants cited the Board of Education as a strength of the district, 22 participants felt the new leader will face challenges posed by the Board. Some expressed concern that the Board is partisan, putting political affiliation ahead of students. Some mentioned that the Mayor has unduly influenced the selection of Board members and attempts to control what they do. They would like to see the Board “put politics aside and do what’s best for kids.” Perceived agendas of some Board members generate fear. Some participants perceive that Board members come to meetings with their minds already made up.

Several expressed a desire that the search for a new superintendent be a legitimate process, but fear that the search itself is not a truly open one. Several wrote that recent leadership decisions were politically motivated and not in students’ interests. Participants want to trust the Board to conduct this process with integrity.

Turnover/Staff Issues

Sixteen (16) participants expressed concern about turnover in administrative and teaching positions in recent years. Since leadership positions have been in flux, curriculum has also been changing, and people are seeking some consistency. Teachers are concerned that new administrators will want to prove themselves, possibly abandoning past initiatives in favor of new ones. Such turnover can breed distrust and closed mindedness. Turnover in special education leaders has led to murky understanding of effective procedures.

Since tight budgets have generated reductions in the teaching force, participants are concerned that teachers won’t be as committed to staying in Shelton. Participants are also afraid the budget woes have caused teachers to burn out. In addition, an extreme lack of substitute teachers (and compensation that

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

can't compete with surrounding communities) place great strain on the building administrators to find coverage for classes when someone is ill.

COVID 19

Fifteen (15) participants believe the new leader will face a major challenge managing the Coronavirus crisis, given many unanswered questions and risky situations. Parents may not feel safe sending their children to school and staff may be uncomfortable returning, too. Students and teachers would, therefore, need support in the digital learning environment and handling the traumatic stresses they are enduring.

Professional Learning

Finally, five (5) participants cited the need to support teachers in their learning, inviting in experts, encouraging vertical integration of learning, and inviting teacher perspectives of what they would find helpful to support them in delivering their craft.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Desired Expertise and Qualities in a New Superintendent

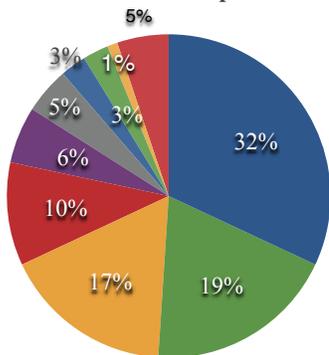
What would be the most important expertise, qualities, and characteristics in a new superintendent to tap Shelton’s strengths and meet its challenges? An analysis of survey responses yielded the following:

Expertise

Survey respondents weighted three of the ten areas of **desired expertise** sought in a new Superintendent of Schools vastly higher than the other skills. The first choice of participants was *Builds trusting relationships with students, staff, and community* (32%), followed by a distant second: *Communicates and collaborates effectively in schools and community* (19.1%), then *Shares vision of excellence and innovative instruction* (17%). These three areas garnered 68% of the top choices.

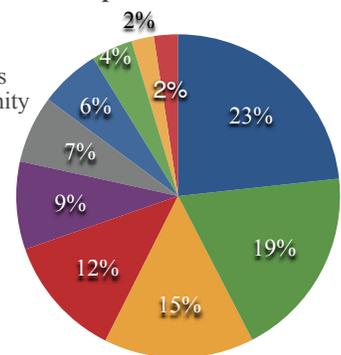
DESIRED EXPERTISE IN NEW SUPERINTENDENT	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3	TOP 3
Builds trusting relationships with students, staff, community members	62	32.0%	43	22.2%	30	15.6%	135	23.3%
Communicates and collaborates transparently in schools and community	37	19.1%	43	22.2%	31	16.1%	111	19.1%
Shares vision of excellence and innovative instruction	33	17.0%	29	14.9%	25	13.0%	87	15.0%
Develops good working relationships and communicates openly with the Board of Education and City Hall officials	20	10.3%	20	10.3%	31	16.1%	71	12.2%
Has a broad base of knowledge of educational issues and practices	11	5.7%	19	9.8%	21	10.9%	51	8.8%
Possesses strong budget and finance knowledge and skills	9	4.6%	13	6.7%	17	8.9%	39	6.7%
Fosters professional development, team building, and staff growth	5	2.6%	13	6.7%	17	8.9%	35	6.0%
Recognizes talents of the leadership group and willingly shares and delegates leadership effectively	5	2.6%	8	4.1%	11	5.7%	24	4.1%
Promotes the quality and virtues of the Shelton Public Schools	2	1.0%	2	1.0%	9	4.7%	13	2.2%
Other	10	5.2%	4	2.1%	0	0.0%	14	2.4%
	194	100.0%	194	100.0%	192	100.0%	580	100.0%

First Choice Expertise



- Builds trusting relationships with students, staff, community members
- Communicates and collaborates transparently in schools and community
- Shares vision of excellence and innovative instruction
- Develops good working relationships
- Has a broad base of knowledge of educational issues and practices
- Possesses strong budget and finance knowledge and skills
- Fosters professional development, team building, and staff growth
- Recognizes talents of the leadership group
- Promotes the quality and virtues of the Shelton Public Schools
- Other

Top Three Choices



If we look at respondents’ top three choices combined, we see the same top choices in the same order: *Builds trusting relationships with students, staff, and community* (23.3%); *Communicates and collaborates effectively in schools and community* (19.1%) remains in second place, and *Shares vision of*

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

excellence and innovative instruction (15%) ranks third. Following fairly close behind is *Develops good working relationships and communicates openly with the Board of Education and City Officials* (12.2%)

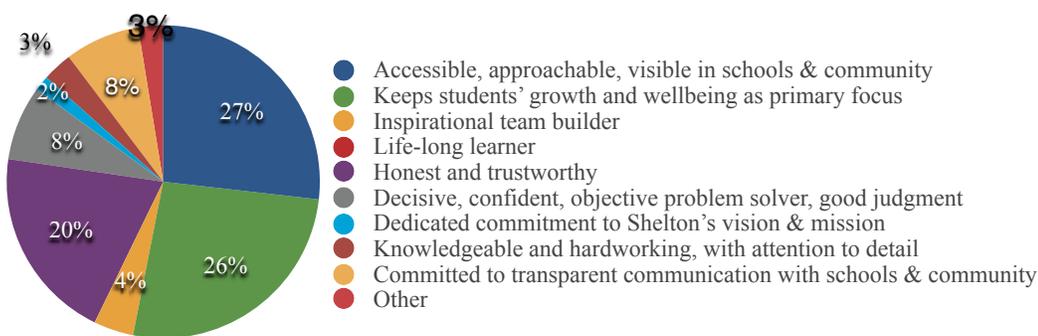
Qualities

In addition to the leadership characteristics and expertise identified in the prior section, Shelton survey respondents reflected some clear preferences for **qualities** desired in a new leader. By far top choices respondents identified were *Accessible, approachable, and visible in schools and community* (26.8%), followed very closely by *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus* (26.3%). The clear third choice was *Honest and trustworthy* (20.1%).

DESIRED QUALITIES IN SUPERINTENDENT	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3	TOP 3
Accessible, approachable, visible in schools & community	52	26.8%	32	16.5%	36	18.8%	120	20.7%
Keeps students' growth and wellbeing as primary focus	51	26.3%	46	23.7%	43	22.4%	140	24.1%
Honest and trustworthy	39	20.1%	47	24.2%	39	20.3%	125	21.6%
Committed to transparent communication with schools & community	15	7.7%	19	9.8%	27	14.1%	61	10.5%
Decisive, confident, objective problem solver, good judgment	15	7.7%	17	8.8%	17	8.9%	49	8.4%
Inspirational team builder	8	4.1%	11	5.7%	13	6.8%	32	5.5%
Knowledgeable and hardworking, with attention to detail	6	3.1%	8	4.1%	11	5.7%	25	4.3%
Life-long learner	0	0.0%	5	2.6%	0	0.0%	5	0.9%
Dedicated commitment to Shelton's vision & mission	3	1.5%	7	3.6%	4	2.1%	14	2.4%
Other	5	2.6%	2	1.0%	2	1.0%	9	1.6%
	194	100%	194	100%	192	100%	580	100%

First Choice Qualities

Top Three Choices



If we again look at participants' top three choices, the order shifts, *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus* (24.1%) emerges as the top choice, with *Accessible, approachable, and visible in schools and community* (20.7%) now in second. Still a close third is *Honest and trustworthy* (21.6%). All the other options lag considerably behind.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Needless to say, all of these qualities and skills are essential in a leader, yet they point to the prioritized needs of the Shelton Public Schools at this point in time. This profile will explore these areas of expertise and dimensions of leadership, integrating perspectives garnered through survey comments and focus groups.

Builds trusting relationships with students, staff, and community

Shelton study participants are looking for an individual who leads by example, is curious about what makes others tick, and is invested in the growth of students, support staff, teachers, and administrators. This embracing individual will listen carefully and model respect toward individuals at all levels of the system and town, demonstrating an open mind and heart, and ending a culture of fear and lack of trust. A “people person,” radiating humanity, this individual will be humble when not understanding, and will not micromanage, but trust staff to carry out their roles.

The successful new leader will build a strong, open, honest bond with the Board of Education, helping them become a strong and effective team. Also committed to building a strong team in central office, this leader will be able to delegate and help administrators gain skills and knowledge.

The leader will gain the respect and confidence of teachers, giving voice to staff, and ensuring they feel supported, validated, and included. Staff will know this leader cares about their personal and professional growth and will allow them to teach one another and learn together through highly effective professional development. Staff will feel they are valued for their work and contributions.

Finally, this leader will embrace the city, the business advisory council, and the city’s leaders. Understanding Shelton’s history and investing in the town, the leader will not be adversarial, but will build trust and mend fences while keeping the best interest of the students at heart. This leader will help parents feel involved and inspire their support. The successful superintendent will also develop natural, open, honest, respectful relationships with students... “open to hearing from the student body and working with them.”

Communicates and collaborates effectively in schools and community

Participants would like an open, effective, excellent communicator who is the district’s top advocate and champion. Manifesting excellent listening skills, this leader will take into consideration the voices and perspectives of all stakeholders, balancing those various perspectives, and encouraging all to work toward a common purpose.

This individual will be a “servant leader,” employing a facilitative style, building a spirit of and time for collaboration within schools and across the district. Central Office will support the schools, not be authoritarian toward them. Staff will have a sense that they are aligned with the district’s direction and moving together, not that their actions are only driven from the “top.” They will feel included, valued, respected, and heard, key players in the success of the district.

This leader will have an open door to all. The superintendent’s communications with the town will be two-way, recognizing the history and value of varied perspectives, and operating on a level playing field with the Mayor and Alderman. In addition to the city’s and staff’s, the new superintendent will also value student perspectives. The new leader will prioritize sharing successes of the district and its students and staff.

Shares vision of excellence and innovative instruction

This inspiring and motivating leader will engage stakeholders in defining a powerful shared vision of excellence and innovative instruction that taps into the myriad strengths of the Shelton staff and system. A visionary leader “who thinks about the future of the world and how education will be impacted by that,”

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

the next superintendent will be knowledgeable about what is current, relevant, and evidence-based, both in terms of educational content and process. The leader's approach will unite the schools, staff, and other stakeholders in a spirit of unity and determination to achieve this shared vision and a sense that "we're all in this together."

Under this leader's guidance, staff will examine "who we are" and "who we want to be," realistically assessing Shelton's program, then balancing Shelton traditions with moving the district forward. Looking to the future needs of students, the team will pull all pieces together in a world-class curriculum with a creative plan for improving teaching and equitable learning. Staff will receive excellent professional development to enhance everyone's ability to move toward that collective vision. The leader will encourage collaboration and vertical alignment of various initiatives.

In order to make all of this happen, this individual will be an exceptional **Educational Leader**, inquisitive, intelligent, a creative problem-solver, a life-long learner who keeps up with trends, resources, technology, and special education policies, and procedures. Experienced overseeing a large organization, managing central office, and hiring exceptional staff, the next superintendent will understand situational leadership, tailoring approach to the needs of the moment. Leading with an open heart and thick skin, the next superintendent will garner support for the schools, helping stakeholders, including the Mayor, understand the role schools play in the local economy and why it's in the city's best interest to have excellent schools. The leader will bring strong knowledge about educational budgeting and overseeing the district's resources.

Several participants mentioned the importance of the new leader needing a vision to guide us through the current COVID 19 pandemic, recognizing the inherent changes in schooling and education. This leader will help the district with a vision for technology for this crisis and include the city in the solution.

Accessible, approachable, and visible in schools and community

The successful new superintendent will have a strong personality— and that thick skin— while also being open-minded, charismatic, empathetic, approachable, and visible. The leader will appreciate the impact of a presence in the schools— even teaching, volunteering, or otherwise engaging in classrooms— helping staff feel known and competent. A people person who remembers people's names (especially students'), this leader will quickly be known to the students, teachers, staff, and community.

This successful leader will be dedicated to Shelton and want to stay around to see "the roots grow" and people flourish as a result of their collective efforts.

Keeps students' growth and wellbeing the primary focus

Shelton's new nimble, thoughtful leader will be guided by values rooted in what's best for the students, understanding that the work is not about himself or herself. Every challenge will be framed by doing the right thing, long term, for the wellbeing of the district's most important asset. This will require developing and securing sufficient resources to support students' academic, physical, social/emotional, mental health, and safety needs. Though the leader will balance the myriad perspectives of various stakeholders, actions will always be rooted in what's best for the students. This leader will love kids and help them feel pride in their schools and that they are valued and on a par with surrounding districts.

Honest and trustworthy

Shelton participants would like their next leader to be a respectable, likable, trustworthy, and honest person of high moral character— appointed through a fair and open search process. They would like the leader's work to be highly transparent. Able to admit and learn from mistakes, the successful leader will foster an open culture through kindness, integrity, and a great sense of humor.