



McPherson & Jacobson, L.L.C.

Executive Recruitment & Development

Fox Chapel Public Schools

Executive Summary of School/Community Input Groups for Superintendent Search

On Thursday, February 6, 2020 consultants Derrick Joel and Marjorie Wallace conducted multiple meetings to gather input regarding the selection of a new Superintendent of Schools for Fox Chapel Public Schools. In addition, stakeholders who could not attend any of the sessions could submit their thoughts electronically via a survey monkey on the school district's website that was live from January 27 – February 20.

Each group was asked to respond to the same four questions noted in bold below. Each group was provided a review of the selection process and were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the search process.

In the executive summary, consistent themes and ideas are recorded. They represent input that was consistent to all or most of the groups. After the executive summary is a summary of each of the school/community meetings that were held on February 6, 2020.

OVERALL THEMES

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Location to Pittsburg and the East Coast
 - Big enough, but small enough that cost of living is low
 - AI and technology is driving population growth
 - Strong tax base to support the school district
 - Extremely supportive to anyone in need
 - Young families are attracted to the area for the cost of living and high quality schools

- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Top notch facilities
 - High student achievement / test scores
 - Excellent teaching staff at all levels

- Wide range of course and extracurricular offerings for students
 - Economically diverse population that strives for excellence for all students
 - School community embraces diversity
 - Strong partnership with local EMS
 - Strong fund balance - highest credit rating
 - High staff retention levels
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - There is a “trust factor” between multiple groups
 - Some people feel there is too much of a focus on standardized test scores
 - Understand the diversity of the school district
 - School start time changes are being researched with mixed reviews
 - Review the current staffing/administrative plan and impact on students. It appears to be heavy on the top
 - Increase diversity in the teaching staff
 - Focus on expanding social emotional, mental health, and student services supports
 - Not replacing teacher positions after leaving causing class sizes to grow
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you’re looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Transparent
 - Someone who is able to engage multiple stakeholder groups including parents, teachers, staff, students, and community members
 - Strong communicator
 - Consistent
 - Ability to look at the whole child
 - Strategic thinker around curriculum, staff, and budget who can implement with fidelity for the district
 - Relationship builder

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (28)

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Close knit feeling between all communities
 - Feeling of pride to attend Fox Chapel Public Schools
 - Diverse communities which allows you to meet all people
 - Supportive community to ensure the success of students
 - Lots of opportunities to branch out
 - Great community center
 - Location - close to the big city, but with a rural feeling
 - Active community, a lot of opportunity to get involved
 - Community has excellent pools and parks
 - Community engagement to improve the environment

- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Fantastic facilities
 - Educational experience is personalized
 - A lot of programs in place to provide a better student experience
 - A lot of clubs and student activities
 - Success within the athletic and fine arts programs
 - Strong support for the arts
 - Great cafeteria food - lots of choices
 - Really good teachers
 - Schools are safe
 - Really easy to get involved
 - School counselors are helpful in future planning
 - Wide variety of classes to choose from
 - Open to anyone and welcoming
 - Flexible scheduling to provide for experiences outside of school
 - Supportive of student goals and dreams
 - Strong vocational programs
 - Flexible start time for students utilizing online courses
 - Dual credit and AP course offerings
 - Career speakers on Fridays throughout the year
 - Colleges come in to recruit students
 - Partnership with the military
 - Strong community outreach
 - Accepting of everyone, strong Best Buddies Program

- Positive leadership with law enforcement
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - Issues with high school start time - too early and cost of transportation. Students want resolution with the issue
 - More environmentally campus desired - use of electricity and water is excessive
 - Transportation for sports activity that run later
 - Funding of field trips - some clubs missed out on trips
 - Parking lot construction - feels like 3 years
 - Paint the lines of the parking lot
 - Vaping and drug issue
 - Too much stress on testing and rankings
 - Too much competition on academics - if you are not the best it makes it tough
 - Need for additional mental health supports for students - we talk about it all the time, however, nothing seems to change
 - Problems arise from the mindset of Chapel Hill - there is an economic and cultural divide within the school and community
 - Scheduling of after school programs and sports - not enough space
 - Dress code issues without reason
 - It is difficult to reach the superintendent and other district office staff. There is so much happening behind the scenes with little transparency
 - Superintendent was not visible
 - Address student and staff sexual harassment in school
 - We need to discuss controversial issues in school
 - "Safe to Say" has been misused - better regulations and monitoring - students are told not use for "small issues" - we need a reporting app for mental health issues
 - Emphasize strong morals at all grade levels in the district
 - Stronger sex education program, gets addressed in health class, but that is not enough
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you're looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Promoter of fine arts - do not cut programming
 - Visible in the school at school events
 - Positive relationships with students, we want to know more about them as a person and leader

- Approachable
- Strong supporter for the school district
- Take care of issues without pushing them off to someone else
- Understand how to delegate
- Someone who understands students
- Good communicator
- Promoter of sensitivity
- Conservative when using tax dollars
- Open to feedback to explain their “why” when making big budget decisions
- Open to the diversity Fox Chapel has to offer
- Promoter of diversity - strong connection to staffing
- Empathy skills
- Well rounded academic programming K-12
- Innovative
- Problem solver to make decisions for what is best for students
- Make BOE meetings more interactive with the community
- Fun leader who is positive - this will uplift everyone around them
- Understanding of student’s generation and pressing issues

PARENT/COMMUNITY I (28)

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Rural feel (trees, trail, etc.) but 10 minutes from the city
 - Midwestern nice
 - Access to the East Coast
 - Diverse community with rural, suburban, socioeconomic status, culture, etc...
 - Big enough, but small enough that cost of living is low (little big city)
 - Community members are involved
 - High expectations
 - Top performing with diversity
 - Multiple outlets and programs that collaborate to help families who are underserved
 - The community is willing to help those who are in need
 - Active parents who are educated on education (huge resource for the right leader)
 - Parents willing to work together to accomplish great things
 - Young families are currently moving into Fox Chapel which will cause an increase in enrollment (in transition with homes being turned over)

- A.I. and technology is driving population growth
- Strong tax base to support the school district
- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Test scores (ranked 5th in the state)
 - Compassionate
 - Compared to other states, local control. 80% of funds come from the local tax base. This is both positive and complicated at the same time.
 - There is not a lot of pressure from charter schools in the area
 - Viable activities department that has a lot of success
 - Provides a well rounded education for all students
 - Funding per pupil is the highest in the state
 - We have a massive amount of money to spend on kids
 - Title I elementary recently won an award
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - Focus and understand of the diversity of the school district
 - At the elementary level, low socioeconomic levels are primarily located at one school
 - More focus on technology and AI for students
 - More parent/family voice needed
 - Focus on test scores, parents want to ensure their kids are learning and developing - we don't care where we are on niche.com
 - At what cost has the focus on test scores done for the overall education of the whole child
 - Start school later movement
 - Opportunity to expand diversity in the teaching staff with early retirement
 - Philosophy on educating middle school vs. junior high model - Fox Chapel use to be a middle school model
 - How do they handle change and communicate it. What does the visioning process look like?
 - Prior superintendent and BOE were tone deaf to the community and families. There is fallout from the lack of engaging with the public
 - Relationships need to be rebuilt
 - In the past 6-7 years, \$70 million in bonds. Public would like to know how this money is being spent.

- Review the current staffing/administrative plan and impact on students (top heavy)
 - Unclear on how administrative compensation and benefits got to the level it has (golden handcuffs)
 - Over the years, distrust has grown
 - Focus on expanding social emotional, mental health, and student services supports
 - Elementary divide needs to be dealt with as students grow through the K-12 system (Kerr Elementary example)
 - PreK bus route using Title I funding
 - Nepotism in the district is an issue
 - Comfortable with a well educated parent base
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you're looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Transparent
 - Ability to explain their "why" when making decisions and how the changes will improve the student experience
 - Open to feedback
 - Doctorate level education
 - Very well researched and background check - Google should not be the spoiler alert
 - HR best practice and experience
 - Recognize parents and community as an asset
 - Strategic thinker around curriculum, staff, and budget who can implement with fidelity for the district
 - Strong communicator
 - Ability to provide the BOE with the pros and cons
 - Engage a broader range of parents and community members (parent engagement)
 - Understanding of the current district makeup
 - Courageous leader who raises issues that need addressed
 - Ability to build leadership capacity in others and support administrators in their work to connect with parents and students
 - Collaborative leadership style
 - Confident leader when going out to engage stakeholders
 - Keep their door open, not closed
 - Positive culture builder

- Creative and innovative thinker
- Foster a culture of trust and courage
- Balance between high stakes testing and understanding of testing anxiety

ADMINISTRATORS (16)

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Dedicated and focused on education
 - Economically diverse population while striving for excellent for all students
 - Location - suburban setting 10 minutes away from Pittsburgh
 - Diverse location
 - Community based organizations that provide opportunities for families
 - Health systems and colleges/universities are exceptional
 - Affordable housing
 - Foundations in the community to support educational experiences for students
 - History that is foundational to our country

- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Access to community partnerships
 - Economically diverse population that strives for excellence for all students
 - Collaborative staff and parents
 - Opportunities for students
 - School community embraces diversity
 - Strong partnership with local EMS
 - Rich in resources and supports for students and staff
 - Students have access to updated curriculum resources and student supports
 - Progressive, we do not wait for things to happen
 - Facilities are great
 - Strong fund balance - highest credit rating
 - Excellent teaching staff at all grade levels
 - Supportive teacher union with a positive relationship with the district
 - Seasoned (experienced) administrative team at the building and district office level with a track record for success
 - High teacher and administration retention levels
 - Strong professional development for teachers provided by the district
 - Culture of fostering teacher leadership
 - Teachers take a lot of pride that the next generation of teachers are supported and live up to the same standard

- Site teams were established to provide feedback from multiple stakeholders for hiring
- HR hiring practices are strong
- Size of district - positive change can be made collectively
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - There is a “trust factor” between multiple groups
 - Some people feel there is too much of a focus on standardized test scores
 - Complexity - 6 municipalities, special interest groups with their own agendas, each building site has their own challenges...
 - School start time changes
 - Leaving a time when the community, BOE, and staff had contentious views around certain topics
 - New BOE (6 new members within the last 3 years)
 - Include others when making decisions
 - Be a bridge between the BOE, administrators, staff, community and students
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you’re looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Transparency
 - Consistent (including communication)
 - Not a micromanager
 - Look at the whole child
 - Understanding the complexity of the district
 - Strong communicator across all levels
 - Knowledge of contracts and agreements
 - Humility
 - Shared decision maker
 - Belief people are fundamentally good, but may need to learn from a mistake
 - Supportive and respectful of a team
 - Understand the diversity of each community and building site
 - Respects and values people’s knowledge of the district

STAFF (16)

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Very supportive of Fine Arts
 - Diverse

- Supportive of those in need
 - Low cost of living
 - There are a lot of community activities
 - Museums are fantastic
 - There is not a bad place to live within the district, city
- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Students work really hard and are active outside the classroom
 - Parents are invested in their students learning experience
 - Parent truly care about the schools and help out
 - School are very responsive to family and student needs
 - Opportunities for our student are mind blowing
 - Investment into the specials program at each school site
 - The level of education and experience of the staff
 - Teacher and family interaction is positive and rooted in teamwork
 - Extensive offering of foreign languages for students
 - A formal negotiation has not occurred since 1985
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - Competitive nature in students and families (test scores, extracurricular activities, etc.). Such competition can lead to anxiety and other social emotional issues
 - Difficult parents who are demanding and a vocal minority - do not follow a chain of command
 - Learning how to meet the needs of all students, primarily with the changing demographics with culture
 - Pressure of testing for both teachers and students
 - Micromanaging of daily lessons for teachers with weekly observations to ensure compliance
 - Culture of “points” with students... Students have lost the love of learning
 - Skill and drill on core areas that are tested
 - Students are a data point - there is an overuse and misuse on a larger scale that is not benefiting the student
 - Numbers (student achievement) must go up, students cannot have a bad day
 - There has been a trickle-down effect with little known on the cost benefit to student learning
 - Teachers are trying to avoid using the term “test” and “assessment”.

- We do not let things simmer and set... For example, curriculum is not allowed to run its course
 - Administrators and teachers are being pulled out on training too often which prohibits their ability to be in classrooms... We need to allow teachers to teach (example, teachers missed 20+ instructional days from their classroom)
 - Teams and buildings are constantly shifting
 - Top heavy in district office - it is not fair to cut teaching positions for district office
 - “You gotta do what you gotta do to survive” - it has been a toxic culture
 - Structure of the school day is rigid with little to no time for creativity
 - Kids who may be slightly below grade level are missing STEM and enrichment activities and other “fun” experiences
 - Teachers have lost their freedom and fun, which was a priority prior
 - There is no more current best practice, now staff development is in house... staff have not been allowed to attend outside workshop and conferences
 - Fox Chapel is often compared to schools not like us
 - Dynamic between the Teachers Union and the BOE has shifted, but a desire to strengthen
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you’re looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Less emphasis on test scores, more on the whole child
 - Supports teachers and principals
 - Someone who believes in the middle school concept
 - Someone who had time in the classroom
 - Engaging
 - Is visible in school sites and at events (to support kids)
 - Respects employees
 - Someone who doesn’t look at them as products, but as children
 - Approachable
 - Genuine
 - Someone who wants to celebrate success
 - Vision for the district

PARENT/COMMUNITY II (27)

- **Tell us the good things about the community of Fox Chapel.**
 - Parents are involved

- Accessible outdoor space
 - People come back to Fox Chapel to raise their families
 - Affordable housing
 - Not too big, not too small
 - Location
 - Cultural life
 - Diversity
 - Great restaurants
 - Networks of organizations to support
 - Growing tech focus in Pittsburgh adding jobs
 - A lot of change, focus on green industry, accessible (you can be downtown in 10 minutes)
 - Pittsburgh was voted most “liveable” a few years ago
 - Safe
 - Excellent health care
 - Great universities
- **Tell us the good things about Fox Chapel Public Schools.**
 - Great teachers, highly educated
 - Teachers really care about their students
 - Great fine arts program - music program receives the highest rating
 - You can’t stereotype a student here - there is something for every student
 - Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools
 - Active parents
 - Well run schools
 - A lot of resources to support learning
 - Broad spectrum of courses (AP courses)
 - Positive culture and climate within the schools
 - Parent support
- **What are the hot topics the new superintendent should be aware of so they can get off to a great start?**
 - Not replacing teacher positions after leaving causing class sizes to grow
 - Intentionality around recruiting a diverse workforce at all levels of the district
 - Recent school board turnover
 - How to handle “over involved” parents and misinformation
 - Largest diversity among families as it relates to income in the state
 - Become more academically competitive

- Initiative being research in regard to school start time
 - Discussion is mute around programs that address people who do not have exceptionalism - there needs to be a focus on closing the achievement gap for low SES
 - Have an interest in how teachers are proctoring exams and how students may be finding ways around academic integrity
 - Level of distrust between the community, the superintendent, and school board
 - Improvement in communication
 - Fracking is being conducted close to the district, what impact will this have on students
 - School safety - the balance between security measures and safety regarding social emotional issues. Students need to feel emotionally safe
 - Increased focus on standardized testing and used as a curriculum resource not tool
 - The majority of residents who pay taxes in the district do not have students in the school system
 - Controversial middle school schedule change - how do we maintain the excellent music program
- **What are the skills, characteristics, and traits you're looking for in the next superintendent?**
 - Ability to separate fact from fiction
 - Change management
 - Technology savvy
 - Trustworthy
 - Willing to be part of the conversation surrounding the environment - protecting the health and wellbeing of the students
 - Strong communicator
 - Good listener
 - Trust the teachers and listen to what is working
 - Successfully managed change
 - Leader who is a creative thinker
 - Willing to not accept status quo
 - Have a vision and direction for the district
 - Look and see what is working in Central Office and what is not
 - Open to the help and support of local experts - well educated and successful community members
 - Partner with staff, students, families, community, and school board

- Whole child perspective - academic, social emotional, etc.
- Not controversial
- Support of fine arts (music, art, drama, etc.)
- Money manager with a long term understanding on how to maximize resources
- Ability to clearly articulate their vision and goals - there should be no secrets
- Transparent
- Culturally sensitive
- Create academic and career pathways for all students
- Balance high stakes testing with problem solving, creativity, and other 21st century skills
- Do not make change just to make change