

# **COMMUNITY SURVEY FEEDBACK**

This document contains responses from community members regarding the Superintendent Search. *Responses here have NOT been edited.* Most community members are responding to the following questions:

1. What makes your community a good place to live?
2. What makes this a good school district – for students and staff?
3. What are the issues that a new superintendent needs to know about as they come into the district?
4. What skills, qualities, and characteristics will the new superintendent need in order to be successful?

To submit your own responses to these questions, [please complete our survey](#).

## **#1: What makes your community a good place to live?**

1. Burlington is one of the most diverse cities in Vermont with a variety of organizations and groups we can be proud of.
2. Burlington has been a good place to live because it has had a small-town sensibility with neighbors knowing each other and residents personally involved in civic matters. That quality has been challenged lately, which jeopardizes the appeal of the city.
3. Access to nature, good local businesses, community members that care about their community.
4. Proximity to work places in downtown Burlington, family-friendliness of Burlington
5. Beautiful. Pretty close-knit. Good amenities. Vibrant.
6. Beautiful setting, environmental sustainability, liberal leaning local and state politics, relatively diverse community (for Vermont)
7. "Burlington is the cultural hub of the state. Several venues provide exemplary music, dance, theater. Area restaurants reflect the community with menus from Argentina, China, France, Japan, Nepal, Somalia, Vietnam and more. People are friendly and welcoming. The university and area colleges provide educational offerings for the community as well as sporting events.
8. Lake Champlain and the mountains provide not only beautiful vistas but also wonderful places to play, bike, hike, run, ski, snowboard, and more."
9. Vermont is a pretty wonderful place - it's beautiful and prioritizes humanitarian responses to problems and strong efforts to protect our environment and to foster a healthy place for Vermonters to live. Burlington has a diversity of cultures and varying points of view. It is active culturally - the music scene; the art scene; food sourcing; supporting local education and our local institutions of higher learning. We have new start-ups and support new businesses, as well as actively responding to social and political issues. There are neighborhoods that care deeply about the city and their local residents, creating their own unique characteristics.

## **#2 What makes this a good school district for students and staff?**

1. Students are exposed to classmates whose lives are nothing like their own, and staff is often professional and well supported.
2. Burlington schools have been good because of a genuine demand and honest support of quality education for all students. While this has been an issue in recent years, the focus on respecting and trusting the professionalism of principals and teachers to provide quality education can be resuscitated.
3. I feel there is wide room for improvement in this, but a diverse population is one reason I think the school district has potential to be great for our kids and staff.
4. strong teachers supported by administrators who care about education; talented students
5. Engaging, rigorous school that prepares all kids to flourish.
6. Relatively diverse student body, relatively good school funding (although could always use more) with community supportive of school budgets, supportive PTO
7. Burlington School District is a great school district for students. The teachers and staff are dedicated to providing the best education to our students. Moreover, teachers and staff are devoted to their students -- making sure

our teaching is not only reaching our students by addressing their individual educational needs but also their social and emotional needs.

8. Staff at our schools are deeply committed to effectively educating our kids. They work hard to help students learn academically and socially. They collaborate to develop curriculum that is responsive to student needs and they constantly rework their teaching. Staff also look to a wide spectrum of ways to increase students' experiences in and out of the classroom. Staff are respectful of and celebrate the diversity of our community and work hard to understand and meet the needs of our community members. Students respond positively to these experiences and are taking leadership roles in making change - in our schools and in our communities.

### **#3 What are the issues that a new superintendent needs to know about as they come into the district?**

1. Our school district continues to work to build capacities for handling acts of racism, sexism, and many other isms that take place within our schools and larger community. We need more restorative practices. Our district strives to build a unified curriculum at the middle and high school level. Students can be in the same grade or class, but receive very different educations.
2. A superintendent must get to know, understand and respect the city and its residents. Burlington is a political city; we've had good parent and community member involvement in the schools in the past but the connections need to be acknowledged and respected. And the individual must get to know all facets of the community; not be swayed by one facet. Must recognize that Burlington must serve a wide range of students, with different skills, needs and demands.
3. The spending is out of control, the staff issues around Mario Macias and the loss of trust that happened due to the administration's support of him, the diversity of our community is new and thus presents some challenges unique to an area that has been very white for a very long time.
4. Burlington has a wonderful, richly diverse student population. It many dedicated and effective teachers. It does not have a reputation as being an excellent school district for academics within Chittenden County and Burlington High School is in terrible physical shape. To make BSD the leading district it should be will require someone capable of finding the district's and the city's strengths and building from them.
5. "Academics has not been prioritized by the last couple of superintendents. The district is in need of a well thought out, organized plan for improving pedagogy in math and literacy. High teacher turnover and lack of coherent training in recent years means that there is little continuity through the grades in what is taught, how it is taught, and the quality of the teaching.
6. Research shows that closing the achievement gap that occurs in low-ses students requires community wide approach that starts at day 1 of birth. Though the district sent a strong cohort of teachers and administrators to Harvard to learn about how to close the gap, there was little desire or initiative on the part of leadership to learn about or actually implement the programs that would close the gap.
7. Principals have not been given the time to be instructional leaders. Instead, they spend inordinate amounts of time dealing with behavior issues.
8. Because of many instances that have been viewed as disrespectful, current administration has cause morale to be low among staff."
9. The goals for the last five years have been to close the achievement gap and raise the bar. Both very important goals. No progress notable on either one. And yet taxes go up and up and up.
10. The need additional staff training for students with mental health issues. As a parent of a child with a documented mental health disability, I have been dismayed by the lack of awareness and empathy expressed by many of his teachers in the 8 years he has attended Burlington schools. I have often heard ,I can't make an exception for your child because all of the other kids would want one, and even,I saw your child has a 504 plan but I didn't read it. The message from some is ,"you do the work to tell me what accommodations we should make," not ,  
let's work together on this." We are so grateful for the staff who "get it" but at the same time are exhausted from dealing with the ones who don't. Depression and anxiety are a mounting concern for our young people, and our staff needs more support to understand the issues and help them succeed.
11. Poor leadership, whimsical decision making around initiatives w/o teacher input or buy-in, too many new initiatives, a plethora of additional staff who don't work directly with students bloating the budget, leaders without knowledge of effective instruction nor management, dysfunctional administrative staff, poor hiring

practices (& transfers), mass exodus of teachers in the last 4 years, 25% New teachers over 2 years, major lack of institutional knowledge, chronic toxic climate, a focus on practices without evidence of positive effect size, not having a new teacher mentor system for years, not having student teacher placement requirements, a 10 year gap in effective PD (with no accountability), years of endless grievances preoccupying everyone, time, big egos, years with nobody doing evals of principals, years of principals not evaluating teachers, infrastructure flaws, lack of materials & systems, retaliation for dissent, involuntary transfers used as retaliation, lower suspension rates heralded as positive result of RP though actual behavior incidents were not reduced, student achievement data continues to be a problem

12. Our families have so much to offer and yet the needs of this community are formidable. Vermont is an expensive place to live. Housing costs are high compared to wages. Schools are currently providing free or reduced costs meals to many of our students. Providing resources for learning needs to be a priority, especially when many of our students do not have educational resources in their homes.
13. I think it is important that the candidates know the checkered history of our recent superintendent and boards: that we struggled with financial solvency and how to provide leadership that addressed those problems; that we had a pretty top-down superintendent leadership which, I believe, has led to problematic relations between the staff and the administration and between students & parents and the administration. Transparency, shared decision-making, true collaboration and shared leadership are very important going forward. I think our current school board members are responding very effectively to the spectrum of issues facing them, and have adopted processes in very intentional ways that work well.
14. Please support the magnet schools! They are being dismantled and it's heartbreaking to watch.

#### **#4 What skills, qualities, and characteristics will the new superintendent need in order to be successful?**

1. Our superintendent should be kind, above all else. The superintendent should have a good understanding of diversity and the bias' that they hold (that we all hold). Our superintendent should have a vision for a way to unify curriculum and bring new creative money management systems to light.
2. Must demonstrate mastery of educational skills themselves; understand or be willing to know state and federal education laws; and have a genuine interest in quality, challenging educational programming. Must demonstrate strong management skills; provide oversight of central staff and school based staff that will enable to the district to run fairly and effectively. The person needs to demonstrate an honest, professional respect of personnel that enables principals to manage their schools and similar professional respect of teachers. The candidate needs a track record that proves sound, fair and respected leadership skills.
3. They will need to have a defined philosophy of inclusion while still being able to hold staff accountable. They will need to be open to hearing, understanding and integrating a wide spectrum of views on how best to move forward with a growing diversity. They will need a strong fiscal understanding of how to work within a budget and where to cut bloated spending, which is undoubtedly not with direct services to our children or in teacher's salaries.
4. The new superintendent will need to be patient and a good listener. We need someone who will take time to learn about the school system--its strengths and challenges--rather than someone who comes in with a predetermined agenda. Because Burlington has so many unique schools and students, we need someone who has broad leadership skills, not just a narrow focus on particular issues.
5. "-A desire to prioritize academic achievement and social growth, and to provide teachers the tools and skills to achieve these priorities.
6. -An ability to organize community and implement proven programs programs to close the achievement gap.
7. -A view of employees as teammates rather than adversaries of the administration.
8. Figure out how to raise the bar, close the achievement gap, improve staff+student+parent morale, and keep taxes from going up much. GOOD LUCK!
9. Public relations skills are key to communicate with all members of our community.
10. It's important for the success of our school district that the new superintendent is collaborative and transparent. Ensuring that our students' needs are being met in each of our schools requires that our superintendent is meeting with staff to learn each school's priorities for its students and working with the principal and staff of each school to make sure those priorities are being met. The superintendent should be versed in Vermont education policy as well as federal policy. Thank you!

11. The new superintendent should be an honest, clear communicator. They need to be strong in decision-making processes and identifying effectively the responsibilities of the various administrative, staff, and board members. I expect them to be extremely knowledgeable and experienced in educational practices, research, and current initiatives. It's crucial that this new leader listen in an ongoing way to all the "stake-holders" because many people really do know what is important and how to accomplish our goals. I am hoping for a leader who will "get into the trenches" and work with staff to develop relationships that are respectful and effective moving forward. This leader needs to meet regularly with community members and with students to truly understand the needs of our students.
12. A true interest and faith in people and teachers, not technology, iPads, screens. Enough with the screens. We know what works- reduce class size.