

# **Columbia Public Schools Superintendent of Schools Leadership Profile**

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### **To the Columbia Community:**

Selecting a leader is a big responsibility. There are tangible and intangible aspects of leadership required in a superintendent who is going to work with the Board of Education and the whole community to provide high quality education to Columbia's children.

This Leadership Profile presents findings from nine focus groups and interviews, multiple conversations, and an online survey conducted in Spring 2018. I spoke with 31 individuals, including parents, teachers, staff, administrators, board of education members, town officials, and other residents. In addition, 119 Columbia residents and staff completed the survey posted on the Columbia Public Schools website. In conducting the focus groups and interviews and developing the survey, I used an unbiased, structured approach involving a series of consistent questions. In addition to asking about strengths and challenges of the Columbia Public Schools and community which could affect future leadership requirements, I asked about the qualities, characteristics, experience, and skills most desirable in the next Superintendent of Schools. I am presenting the findings to the Columbia Board of Education without revealing the identity of any individual contributor.

The Columbia Board has made a commendable effort to include voices from many diverse and varied groups within the school and community. They took the extra step of sending postcards to every home to invite stakeholders to a focus group and to participate in the survey.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the interviewees, focus group participants, and survey respondents whose commitment to the school and Town of Columbia was evident as they provided their perspectives. It has been a pleasure to meet these Horace W. Porter School and Columbia community members and learn about this school and town.

I would like to extend special thanks to Brenda Morey, Secretary to the Superintendent of Schools. Brenda worked hard to ensure that I met with as many H. W. Porter staff, parents, and community members as possible. I look forward to assisting the Columbia Board of Education in identifying the best possible match to serve your community.

Mary

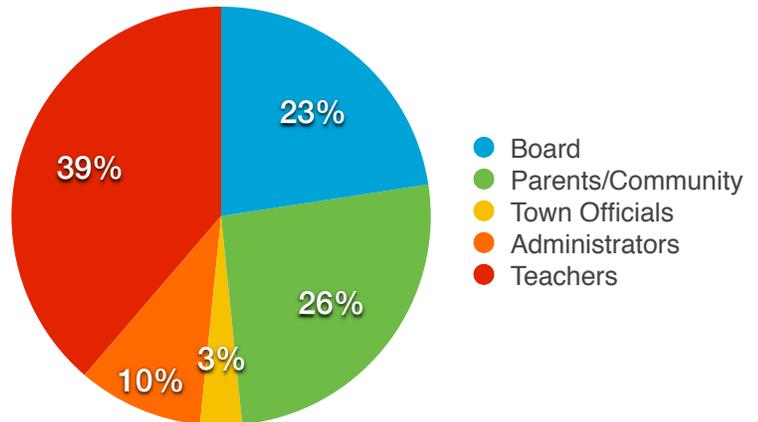
## SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

### Data Collection

In total, about 150 individuals participated either through a focus group, interview, or the online survey:

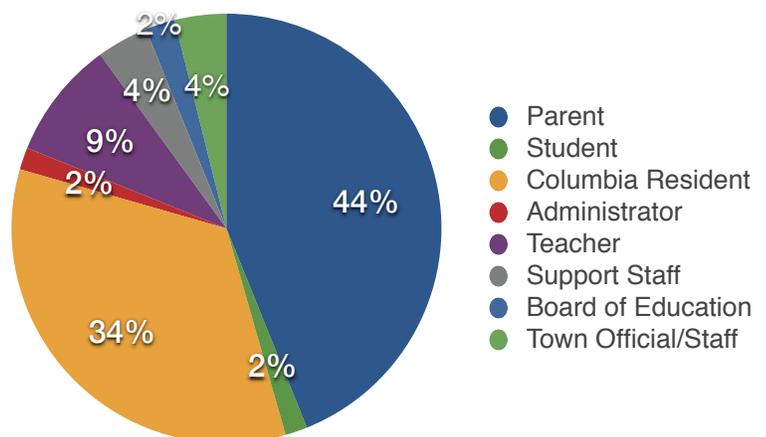
#### Focus Group/Interview Participants

PARTICIPANT	31	%
Board	7	22.6%
Parents/Community	8	25.8%
Town Officials	1	3.2%
Administrators	3	9.7%
Teachers & Staff	12	38.7%



#### Survey Responses

PARTICIPANT	119	%
Parent	79	43.9%
Student	3	1.7%
Columbia Resident	61	33.9%
Administrator	3	1.7%
Teacher	16	8.9%
Support Staff	7	3.9%
Board of Education	4	2.2%
Town Official/Staff	7	3.9%



\*Numbers add up to more than 119 because people identified themselves under multiple categories.

Please note that the data collected do not represent a scientific sampling, but a representation of the Columbia Public School community. Though the consultant heard the perspectives of many, this profile cannot entirely capture the complexity and nuances. 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 Columbia Board of Education's attention.





## SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Its size keeps Columbia from enjoying any economies of scale. A number of respondents identified Connecticut's fiscal status and budget issues every year as major concerns. Any unexpected expenses or special education surprises tend to hit Horace W. Porter School extra hard, since tuition to high schools is a fixed, non-negotiable expense. Several also spoke of unfunded state mandates as a concern.

Though the community has enjoyed collaborative relationships with town bodies, the new superintendent will be working with a First Selectman who will also be new to the role. Building trusting, transparent relationships will be important.

### **Staff issues**

Administrative:

A small school cannot delineate administrative responsibilities in the way a larger district can. Several respondents spoke of lack of clarity about administrative roles. Teaching and learning was the area most frequently mentioned as suffering. People felt curriculum was a hodgepodge, lacking alignment. It's also hard to align what the school offers with the receiving high schools' curricula. Respondents felt they needed an administrative leader to guide committee work. Historic administrative turnover has exacerbated these issues. In general, people felt staff enjoyed high levels of freedom and low levels of structure and would benefit from a little more structure and guidance.

Teachers and Support Staff:

Several spoke of the effect of budget constraints on attracting and retaining high quality teachers and support staff. A few reported low morale and a lack of sense of cohesiveness between elementary and middle schools. Scheduling changes have meant less time for staff to collaborate. Some also spoke of lack of transparency and open communications school-wide.

### **Program needs**

In addition to alignment of curriculum, participants mentioned the challenges of offering a broad array of options to a very small student population. Some regretted recent cuts in the arts. Several felt offering science and social studies only half the year was problematic.

Study participants' greatest concern by far was discipline. Social and emotional health issues have been on the rise, and students are feeling alienated. Many mentioned bullying and felt students were not receiving appropriate direction or follow-through. Respondents feel the school needs successful, consistent behavior intervention strategies.

### **Future needs and decision-making**

The Board of Education has a number of major issues it has been considering for some time. Should the district stay independent or regionalize? Should middle school be separated from Porter? (Would students benefit from a more narrow age range?) The contracts with E. O. Smith High School and Bolton High School expire in 2022. Does the town want to continue those relationships and opportunities for Porter graduates? These open issues are generating some anxiety among the school's stakeholders.

The community is looking for clear and thoughtful decision-making from the Board of Education. They would like to see the Board develop and maintain a good working relationship and high level of respect for the new superintendent. They also would like improved planning and allocation of resources.

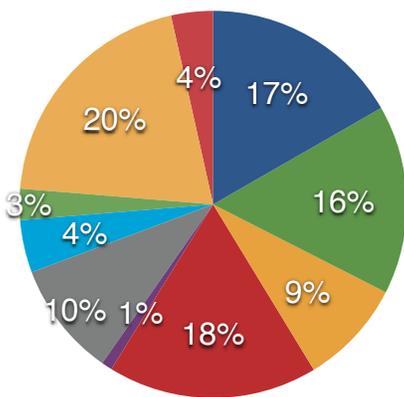
**SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP PROFILE**

## Desired Expertise, Qualities, and Characteristics in a Superintendent:

Given these strengths and challenges, what would be the most important leadership experiences and expertise, qualities and characteristics in a new superintendent to meet Columbia’s challenges and allow the students and H.W. Porter School to thrive? An analysis of survey responses yielded the following:

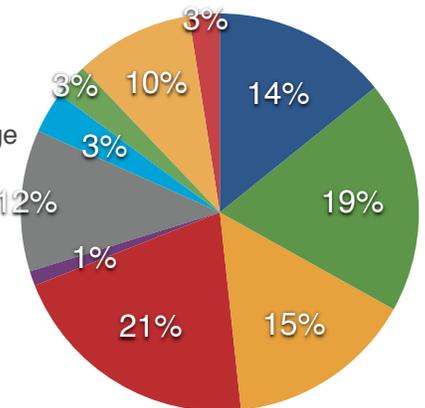
DESIRED EXPERTISE	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3	TOP 3
Develops a shared vision of excellence	19	16.7%	11	9.9%	16	15%	46	14.2%
Communicates & collaborates effectively	18	15.8%	33	29.7%	10	9%	61	18.9%
Possesses strong budget/finance knowledge	10	8.8%	20	18.0%	19	18%	49	15.2%
Builds trusting relationships	20	17.5%	18	16.2%	29	27%	67	20.7%
Emphasizes professional dev., team & staff growth	1	0.9%	6	5.4%	7	6%	4	1.2%
Has broad base of educational knowledge	11	9.6%	14	12.6%	12	11%	37	11.5%
Promotes qualities and virtues of Columbia	5	4.4%	1	0.9%	5	5%	11	3.4%
Knows long-term planning	3	2.6%	1	0.9%	5	5%	9	2.8%
Experienced as a superintendent	23	20.2%	4	3.6%	4	4%	31	9.6%
Other	4	3.5%	3	2.7%	1	1%	8	2.5%
	114	100%	111	100%	108	100%	323	100%

**First Choice Expertise**



- Develops a shared vision of excellence
- Communicates & collaborates effectively
- Possesses strong budget/finance knowledge
- Builds trusting relationships
- Emphasizes prof. dev., team & staff growth
- Has broad base of educational knowledge
- Promotes qualities and virtues of Columbia
- Knows long-term planning
- Experienced as a superintendent
- Other

**Top Three Choices**



The top three **first** choice selections in “desired expertise in a new superintendent” of the 119 survey respondents were: a) *Experienced as a Superintendent* (20.2%) b) *Builds trusting relationships throughout the community* (17.5%), and c) *Develops a shared vision of excellence* (16.7%).

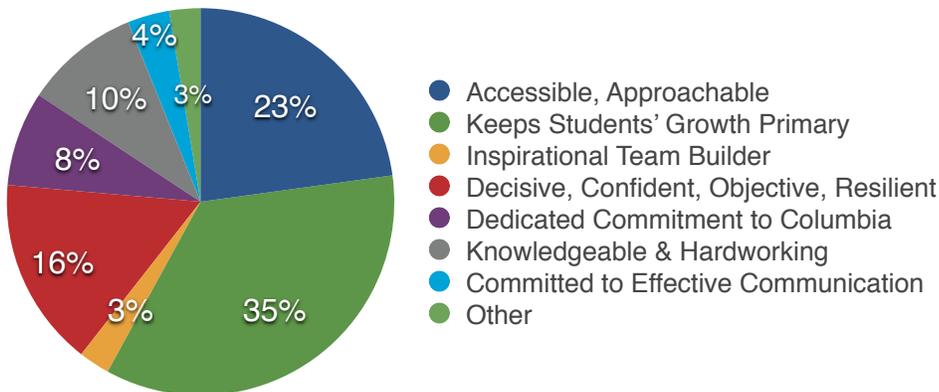
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In analyzing the top **three** desired areas of expertise, values shift a little. *Building trusting relationships* becomes #1 at 20.7%; *Communicates and collaborates effectively* moves into the #2 position at 18.9%, and *Possesses strong budget/finance knowledge* moves to #3, at 15.2%.

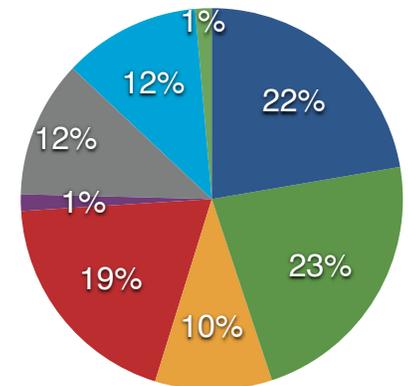
The survey respondents also indicated priorities for desired qualities for the new superintendent:

DESIRED QUALITIES IN NEW SUPERINTENDENT	#1	%	#2	%	#3	%	TOP 3	TOP 3
Accessible, Approachable	26	22.8%	20	17.9%	19	21%	65	22.3%
Keeps Students' Growth Primary	40	35.1%	26	23.2%	0	0%	66	22.6%
Inspirational Team Builder	3	2.6%	9	8.0%	17	18%	29	9.9%
Decisive, Confident, Objective, Resilient	18	15.8%	17	15.2%	21	23%	56	19.2%
Dedicated Commitment to Columbia	9	7.9%	14	12.5%	7	8%	4	1.4%
Knowledgeable & Hardworking	11	9.6%	10	8.9%	13	14%	34	11.6%
Committed to Effective Communication	4	3.5%	15	13.4%	15	16%	34	11.6%
Other	3	2.6%	1	0.9%	0	0%	4	1.4%
	114	100%	112	100%	92	100%	292	100%

**First Choice Qualities**



**Top Three Choices**



In addition to the leadership characteristics and expertise addressed in the prior section, survey respondents' top **first** choices for "qualities" in a new leader were a) *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing as primary focus* at 35.1%; b) *Accessible, approachable, and visible in the schools and community* (22.8%) a distant second; and c) *Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver with good judgment and resiliency* (15.8%).

Aggregating the **top three** choices, the results are the the same, though the weighting is a bit different: a) *Keeps students' growth and wellbeing as primary focus* (22.6%), nearly tied by b) *Accessible, approachable, and visible in the schools and community* (22.3%); and c) *Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver with good judgment and resiliency* (19.2%).

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

### **Experienced as a Superintendent**

Columbia seeks an experienced superintendent who understands the breadth and depth of running a school district, with expertise in curriculum and instruction. This individual will guide the Board of Education to maximize educational opportunities for the students of Porter School so that they are prepared to thrive in high school and life. This leader will mentor and support the administrative team. Calm in a storm, the successful candidate will be able to galvanize the schools and community to pursue a vision, set high expectations, encourage the growth and development of all staff and students, and inspire the whole community to work toward achieving the collective vision for Columbia.

### **Builds trusting relationships throughout the community**

Seeking first to understand, the successful candidate will be an excellent listener, unbiased, fair, and straightforward. Possessing superb people skills, the leader will have a track record of building great relationships with the community, the administration, teachers, support staff, and the kids. These will take diplomacy, a good sense of humor, level headedness, and an honest and positive character. This individual will bring out the talents and gifts of students and staff alike.

### **Develops a shared vision of excellence**

The successful leader will hold a “long vision and balcony view” of education in Columbia, with the knowledge, experience, and expertise to inspire administrators and teachers to be the best they can be for the children of Columbia. A change agent who can help staff envision and work toward a desired future of excellence, this leader will bring a breadth and depth of knowledge about the terrain of public education, including demographic shifts and educational trends. This individual will bring progressive thinking and visionary ideas, especially in areas of discipline and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math). Driving improvements in academics and culture, this leader won't be afraid to advocate for the services needed to meet students' needs. Holding high expectations for all children, this leader will move the district toward a cohesive, progressive curriculum and a safe, supportive culture to position Columbia's students for success.

### **Communicates and collaborates effectively in the school and community**

The successful leader will be active in the community. An excellent communicator and listener with great interpersonal skills, this leader will be open, honest, transparent, and forthcoming with the town, knowing how to generate effective two-way communications and share district priorities.

The leader will support the Board of Education in open exchange, helping members to understand one another's perspectives and values and make clear decisions.

Flexible and easy to work with, this individual will maintain an open-door policy. As a result of this leadership, the school's stakeholders will feel supported and connected.

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### **Strong budget and finance knowledge and skills**

Since the school district is so small, all budget and finance responsibilities fall on the superintendent. The successful candidate will fully understand the business function and overall district's operational needs and objectives. This individual will be willing to work collaboratively with the town on budget issues while maintaining the needs of Columbia's students as a first priority.

### **Keeps students' growth and wellbeing as primary focus**

Columbia wants a superintendent who is motivated by a passion to do what is in the best interest of students as the number one priority. The successful leader will understand the unique nature of a preK-Grade 8 school, including how to lead curriculum development and alignment and how to generate a safe, inclusive, emotionally healthy culture. Respondents want this leader to find a cost-efficient way to keep the school intact, PreK through Grade 8, to keep the community robust. They want the leader to encourage the Board of Education to maximize opportunities for Columbia's students.

### **Accessible, approachable, and visible in the schools and community**

The successful leader will be active in Columbia. This empathetic, personable, approachable leader will be visible and invested in the school and involved with the students, understanding the pulse of the school and its population. This leader will tap the teachers' vast store of information and knowledge.

### **Decisive, confident, and objective problem solver with good judgment and resiliency**

The next superintendent will be well-versed in all aspects of the superintendency. Knowledgeable about the educational landscape and able to use good judgment to position Columbia to thrive, this individual will be confident without being arrogant. "Hell-bent on empowering staff and making them feel validated," this leader will be able to provide the staff with the resources and determination to ensure maximum success for each H.W. Porter child. This dynamic superintendent will mentor the administrative staff, build morale, command respect, and hold the reins firmly.

Finally, this leader will have a passion for the work and the students, a love for the job and inherent responsibilities. An individual of good character, moral fiber, integrity, a learner with a humble attitude, honest, energetic, compassionate, and enthusiastic to bring change, this leader will understand the reality of a very small district and the complexity of the role. The leader will appreciate the uniqueness of Columbia and be committed to the success of her children.