



SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH Leadership Profile Report

April 19, 2023

Introduction

This report summarizes findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Education Support Services (ESS) from February 22, 2023, through April 12, 2023, for the new superintendent of the Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD). The data in this report was obtained from focus group meetings, individual interviews, and community forums.

The focus group meetings, interviews, and community forums were structured to gather input on the primary characteristics desired in CUSD'S next superintendent. These sessions also provided insight into what participants perceive as the current strengths and challenges of the District.

An online survey was also distributed to give interested parties an opportunity to share their thoughts about the important skills, attributes, and expertise the Board should consider in the selection of its next superintendent along with their views on the current state of the District. The input from the 2,164 survey respondents is summarized in Exhibit A.

Participation

A cross-section of 320 stakeholders participated in focus group meetings, individual interviews, and community forums. The participants enthusiastically shared their views about the District and its leadership. They were pleased to have been asked for input. They also expressed a sincere interest in the success of the District's next superintendent.

All members of the Board participated in individual interviews with the consultants. The following groups, organizations, and representatives participated in interviews, focus groups and/or community forums:

- Certificated and classified management staff, including principals, District-level administrators, and members of the superintendent's cabinet
- Classified staff members from all District departments
- District advisory groups, including PTA council presidents, the PTA Legislative Action Committee, DELAC, and the Special Education Community Advisory Committee
- City officials and city managers
- Associated Student Body presidents, and Affinity Group leaders
- Association leaders from CUEA, CSEA, and the Teamsters organization
- Parents of present and former District students
- Community members

While the data in this report is not a scientific sampling, the information represents consistent themes and trends heard across stakeholder groups or from constituents within a group.

Strengths of the District

Participants were eager to describe the many strengths of the District, as described below:

Quality and Depth of the Instructional Program

The quality and depth of the District's instructional program, coupled with comments about the District's excellent teaching and support staff, were mentioned in all sessions. Participants described District employees as dedicated and hard working. Many participants also shared that recently implemented instructional programs and innovations have contributed to the District's history of high achievement.

The depth of curricular and co-curricular options for students was also frequently mentioned as a District strength. Many participants indicated there is a Districtwide commitment to what's best for students. CUSD students participate in an array of innovative programs and services and have access to a significant number of athletic, performing arts, and other specialized before- and after-school programs. The following programs were identified by participants as strengths:

- Adult Transition Program
- Advanced Placement Classes
- Bridges
- Dual enrollment programs with community colleges
- Dual language immersion programs
- Elementary and secondary counseling programs
- Elementary block music program
- Equitable technology opportunities
- Family Partnership Teams
- Futureology College and Career Counseling Services
- Increased instructional support for English learners
- International Baccalaureate Program
- Online learning options
- Professional Learning Communities
- Career pathways in the Regional Occupation Program
- School of choice options
- Specialized instruction in biotechnical and aerospace engineering
- Sophisticated special education services
- STEAM instruction and STEM labs
- Variety of performing arts programs

Parent Support and Engagement

The support and engagement of current and former District parents was also frequently cited as a significant strength. Whenever this strength was mentioned, it was followed by accolades for the influence and fundraising of the District's Parent Teacher Association and its Legislative Advocacy Group. The PTA funds several special instructional programs, including the elementary art education initiative, and regularly donates funds to others.

Paradoxically, there is widespread support for most of the “school families” and their leaders from their respective communities, however it has not contributed to passage of recent modernization or construction bonds in the District.

Quality of Teachers, Administration, and Support Staff

Participants expressed support and confidence in the overall quality of teachers, administrators, and support staff at all levels of the District.

Structured Collaboration Between Administration and Leaders of the Employee Associations

Leaders of employee associations cited the positive impact of structured collaboration between administration and the associations as a significant strength. The District has also trained negotiators and association leaders on interest-based bargaining, which has contributed to the success of District negotiations. The Certificated, Classified, and Administration Partnering for Excellence Teams were also cited as an effective method of resolving workplace issues.

District Cities and Communities

All stakeholders, including student representatives, spoke positively about the regions served by the District. They described the cities and communities within CUSD as beautiful, and highly desirable places, where people want to live and work. It was also mentioned that many employees choose to reside within District boundaries so their children are able to attend CUSD schools.

Challenges, Concerns, and Issues Facing the District

Stakeholders identified a range of challenges, concerns, and issues an incoming superintendent will encounter. They hope the new superintendent will be a skilled and empathetic problem solver who engages stakeholders, from all facets of the District, in the resolution of such matters. The key challenges, concerns, and issues fell into six categories.

Facilities in Need of Modernization and Repair

All interview and focus group participants cited the overall condition of the District’s older campuses as a major concern. Many said facilities are not reflective of the instructional quality of the schools. These discussions prompted comments about the District’s recent inability to pass bonds for modernization and construction projects.

Distrust in the District by a Segment of the CUSD Community and Some Employees

Participants described a level of distrust with the District by a segment of the CUSD community and by some employees. Participants believe some of the community concerns stem from issues dating back seventeen years when residents rallied and declared, “We don’t trust Capo Unified,” when a new District office was constructed. Many participants also believe that residents are unaware of new fiscal oversights put into place in recent years, and are reluctant to abandon their negative perceptions about the District’s oversight of taxpayer dollars.

Some members of the teaching and support staff shared a reluctance to express themselves or “speak out,” despite having many opportunities to do so, because they fear personal retaliation. In a similar concern, some parents said they internalized fears during the COVID pandemic because they did not have control over what was happening to the education of their children. They acknowledged overreacting to COVID-related issues. Additionally, participants said some stakeholders wanted simple answers to extremely complex problems when the District was addressing COVID matters.

Political Discord in the Community

Highly involved PTA leaders and employees contacted the ESS consultants by email or phone with additional responses to questions asked during the focus group sessions. One stakeholder epitomized what was heard from others about the District’s political environment noting, “The political climate and conflicting philosophical views regarding public education will be an increasingly challenging aspect for CUSD’s leadership. Finding ways to acknowledge the diverse interests of all stakeholders, and to move forward in a professional and successful manner, could be challenging for the next superintendent.”

In related comments, many participants said new leadership of the District will need to define the underlying concepts and reasons for certain decisions and needs, and to communicate them to all stakeholders, including those not currently linked to the District. Participants believe such an effort will increase support from some of these stakeholders if they fully understand District issues, especially regarding facilities.

A number of stakeholders said education has become the center of a current day “political war,” and indicated the Board of Trustees needs to be “a united and strong front” to keep from being hampered by such conditions. To address these concerns, people suggested a focus on classroom instruction instead of cultural issues.

Potential School Consolidation and/or Closures

The need for school consolidation or school closures was shared as an issue for the near future. Stakeholders said District leadership has not addressed schools with very low student enrollment because of the discontent school closures cause.

Problem Resolution

Many parent and employee participants expressed concern about how problems are addressed at the District level. The following information was shared on this topic:

- The role of site leaders is undermined because complaints are not always referred to schools where they originated.
- Even minor complaints take too long to resolve and require unnecessary written summaries and reports.
- Many said the District’s existing complaint process is not followed.
- Participants indicated that a small number of “loud voices” become an “enormous distraction that takes a lot of time away from more important duties.”

Special Education and Staffing

Many stakeholders described a challenge in filling substitute teacher and paraprofessional positions as a major issue. Parents said this difficulty dramatically impacts special education students because paraprofessionals help deliver services in classrooms.

While stakeholders praised the learner-centered services within special education, they also described issues within the department and an urgency to remedy them. Stakeholders said these concerns have Districtwide impact because regular education and special education are closely linked. As an example, stakeholders expressed concerns about inconsistencies between sites in the implementation of some special education programs. Concerns were also expressed about the following:

- Inconsistency at schools in the designation of students as diploma-bound or not diploma-bound
- Lack of specific training of paraprofessionals once they are hired
- Need for concrete and meaningful inclusion between regular and special education
- Partial implementation of recommendations from the Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT)
- Inconsistent steps in implementing the strategic plan developed for special education
- Turnover in the leadership of special education at the District level

Desired Superintendent Characteristics

Stakeholders believe CUSD needs a leader with authentic interpersonal and communication skills. They seek a superintendent who will strive to understand the needs of each unique CUSD community by listening closely to constituents. They hope for a superintendent who will build meaningful and engaging relationships with all CUSD stakeholders, parents of District students, elected officials in the region, city and community leaders, and community members who do not have direct experience with the school system. There is a shared belief that these attributes should be balanced with personal confidence, calmness, and integrity. They want a superintendent who sees the big picture, has a caring and team building approach, trusts coworkers, is open to alternative views, and is highly visible and known in the schools and communities.

The participants also mentioned a variety of specific skills they would like the new superintendent to have, as follows:

- Actively manages the departments of the District
- Appreciates the history of the District's schools
- Brings employees together in support of the entire District
- Builds bridges with community resources and businesses
- Builds capacity for leadership in others
- Communicates the link between school facilities and enhanced property values

- Demonstrates experience and success with modernization and facility bonds
- Engages in, and manages, District publicity and communication
- Finds commonalities from divergent perspectives
- Is a leader who can walk into any classroom to support students and staff
- Is a natural and authentic public speaker
- Is a strong steward of taxpayer dollars
- Is tech-forward and open to new ideas
- Makes the superintendent’s office reachable and available to stakeholders
- Models excellent leadership characteristics
- Preserves the institutional knowledge of District teachers, employees, and parents
- Provides ease and calmness during chaotic times
- Regains community trust by sincere and honest outreach

The participants also envision a superintendent who is a skilled facilitator for the elected Board of Trustees. They consider such work one of the most important responsibilities of a superintendent. They are seeking a superintendent who will serve as a liaison between the Board and staff, help trustees achieve their goals, and knows how to counsel trustees so their work is productive for the District. They also hope a new superintendent will encourage trustees to work as a unified team, to look at the District in its entirety, while conceptualizing the various needs of each community.

Closure

The ESS consultants would like to thank everyone who participated in individual interviews, focus group sessions, community forums and completed the online survey. Thanks also go to those who helped manage this extensive endeavor, including members of the Board of Trustees, Interim Superintendent Clark Hampton, Chief Communications Officer Ryan Burris, Manager of Board Operations Colleen Hayes, and Executive Assistant Stacy Schwenke. The consultants would also like to acknowledge the people who reached out with additional observations and insights into the District and its leadership needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Joseph Farley

Dr. Suzette Lovely

Exhibit A: Online Survey Data

Participation/Respondents:

Role	Frequency	Percentage
Administrator	35	1.6%
Certificated Staff	335	15.5%
Classified Staff	159	7.3%
Parent	1,535	71.0%
Student	8	0.4%
Community Member	92	4.2%
Total Respondents	2,164*	100%
*Representation by Community (Note: Only 1,258 respondents completed this section of the survey)		Percentage
Aliso Viejo	150	12.0%
Dana Point	63	5%
Laguna Niguel	152	12.0%
Mission Viejo	155	12.3%
Rancho Santa Margarita	69	5.5%
San Juan Capistrano	88	7%
San Clemente	281	22.3%
Ladera Ranch	175	14.0%
Las Flores	28	2.2%
Coto de Caza/Dove Canyon	35	2.8%
Wagon Wheel	16	1.3%
Sendero/Rancho Mission Viejo	46	3.7%

Table 1: Most Important Leadership Skills (Top 6)

Online survey respondents identified the following *Leadership Skills* as most important for CUSD's incoming superintendent to possess:

Leadership Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1. Is knowledgeable about best practices around teaching and learning.	1,641	76.4%
2. Fosters a climate of trust and mutual respect.	1,586	73.8%
3. Maintains a culture of high expectations for students and employees.	1,488	69.2%
4. Is a forward thinker and open to new ideas.	1,157	53.8%
5. Ensures the district remains fiscally solvent.	1,112	51.7%
6. Is able to build a cohesive team.	1,105	51.4%

Table 2: Personal Attribute Rankings (Top 5)

Online survey respondents identified the following *Personal Attributes* as deserving the most attention by the Board when assessing candidates:

Personal Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Honest and ethical	1,969	91.7%
2. Problem solver	1,530	71.2%
3. Strong communicator	1,455	67.7%
4. Good listener	1,274	59.3%
5. Approachable and personable	1,145	53.3%

Table 3: Expertise and Experience

Online survey respondents rated the following areas of *Expertise and Experience* by scale of importance:

Area of Expertise/Experience	Critically Important	Mildly Important	Not Important
Teaching and Learning	2,044	90	0
Experience as a Site Principal	1,203	815	105
Understands School/Community Culture	1,601	472	66
Negotiations/Labor Relations	974	944	208
Fiscal Management	1,521	576	30
Facilities Management	1,232	829	67
Board Governance	945	1,030	147
Public Relations	826	1,075	233
Relations with City and Local Officials	791	1,147	190

Table 4: State of the District

Online survey respondents rated the overall quality of teaching and learning in the district.

EXCELLENT		ABOVE AVERAGE		AVERAGE		BELOW AVERAGE		POOR	
Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
404	19.0%	1,042	48.9%	579	20.1%	96	4.5%	12	0.5%

Table 5: In this next section, respondents selected their level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. The district provides a compelling vision for the future.	10.5%	49.5%	23.8%	4.7%	11.5%
2. The district maintains high expectations for student performance.	17.0%	55.0%	22.1%	3.4%	2.5%
3. The district is working to close achievement gaps.	14.6%	49.8%	16.6%	5.2%	13.8%
4. The district provides adequate resources to support student learning.	14.7%	53.6%	21.6%	6.7%	3.4%
5. Schools in our district are safe.	18.1%	57.3%	16.2%	5.8%	2.6%
6. District facilities are clean and well maintained.	13.2%	47.6%	26.3%	10.0%	2.9%
7. The district engages the community as a partner to improve the system.	10.5%	45.4%	27.4%	8.8%	7.9%
8. Communication from the District is transparent, effective and timely.	12.5%	48.0%	26.5%	9.7%	3.3%
9. The district embraces diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic groups.	17.6%	52.8%	14.9%	7.3%	7.4%
10. The district is heading in the right direction.	10.0%	43.7%	24.8%	10.0%	11.5%

Table 6: Additional Considerations

Online survey respondents identified the path/strategy they would like to see the Board of Education take in choosing Capistrano Unified School District’s next superintendent:

Path or Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Find a candidate who will stay the course of the previous administration.	995	48%
Find a candidate with the same general leadership style, but is able to make some necessary changes.	748	36%
Find a candidate who is ready to take the district in a different direction.	334	16%