



Quincy Public Schools 2020 Superintendent Leadership Profile Report

prepared by the
Massachusetts Association of School Committees

On behalf of the
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Introduction

This report presents the information and findings of the Superintendent Leadership Profile conducted by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) in June of 2020 to assist the Quincy School Committee in clarifying the criteria it would seek in their new superintendent. The data contained in this report was obtained via ten virtual focus group meetings with 120 members of the faculty and Quincy community at large, as well as an online survey with 973 responses. The survey and focus groups were structured to gather input to assist the School Committee in determining the desired characteristics. It is also believed that this data can be helpful to candidates interested in leading the Quincy Public Schools, as well as the new superintendent, once they are selected for the position. This report summarizes some of the key themes identified by the responders.

Online survey questions are detailed throughout this report. The following questions were asked of focus group attendees:

1. What are the strengths of the Quincy Public Schools that the next superintendent should cultivate and protect? In other words, what are we doing right?
2. What are the areas that require attention, including growth, development, improvement or change?
3. What are the characteristics you want to see in the next superintendent?
4. What else do we need to know?

The number of participants, by stakeholder group, for the online survey may be found below:

Please tell us about yourself and select the category that best describes you.		
<i>Answer Choices</i>	<i>Respondent Percentage</i>	<i>Respondent Number</i>
Parent or Guardian of a QPS Student	48%	467
QPS Teacher	23.64%	230
QPS Administrator	3.19%	31
QPS Staff	6.17%	60
QPS Student	8.02%	78
Quincy Resident	7.40%	72
Other	3.60%	35
Total		973

The MASC is a member-driven association whose mission is to support Massachusetts school leaders in their increasingly complex governance role. With over 30 years’ successful search consulting experience, the MASC has provided technical assistance and/or complete search management to more than 200 member school districts across the state.

General Themes

Quincy is a large metropolitan district that incorporates a blend of urban characteristics and suburban life. The district includes an early-childhood center, 11 elementary schools, five middle schools, two high schools, almost 10,000 students and 1,600 members of the faculty. As is typical in Massachusetts municipal districts, an elected seven-person school committee is chaired by the mayor who is a voting member. The presence of a mayor on the school committee brings an element of municipal administration into the oversight of schools and is a form of check and balance, generally considered an asset. The superintendent of schools is the chief executive officer and is appointed by the school committee. The incumbent superintendent, Dr. Richard DeCristofaro, is retiring after a long and successful career in the Quincy Public Schools.

A high proportion of responders, both online and through focus groups, were natives or longtime residents of Quincy and expressed varying degrees of support for the school district and its personnel. Even relative newcomers spoke highly of the city as a place to live and raise a family. As the data described below will reflect, this affinity for the city and tendency of people to remain as a faculty member or resident was praised on one hand, but cited as a problem on the other as the complexion of the city begins to change.

Newer community members had very specific priorities that have roots in bringing outside perspectives to public schools. They reflect the desire to encourage the next superintendent to bring change going forward. These views are also reflected below.

As is common following the retirement of a long-term leader, the school committee and community take advantage of a transition of leadership to reflect on the current climate for public schools and to look forward with different views of what changes might be needed in their community.

A selection of charts is attached to this report to reflect aggregate data provided from the online survey.

Strengths

The **faculty is highly respected** and their work appreciated as reflected generally in the responses. Several responded that “looking out for the need of children” is widely recognized as a core value. Because of the familiarity with each other, there tended to be more positive comments on approachability from long-time Quincy people. Teacher morale was cited as a positive despite the pressures of having to work remotely with students and live with the uncertainty of a return to school in September.

Neighborhood schools, with some open enrollment, were viewed as a real asset, except that several responders noted the age and equipment discrepancies between buildings.

Among the curriculum areas that were addressed positively, there was broad consensus that **the arts programs, including music, art, and theater are high priorities and have a long record of success**. There is genuine concern that the arts be prioritized going forward as the city goes through the process of budgeting in a financial crisis in light of the sharp decline in tax revenue because of the current pandemic and closure of businesses and resulting layoffs.

It is important to note that, while there exists relative peace between **labor and management and a respectful culture** prevails, the next superintendent is likely to inherit an expired collective bargaining agreement at a time when the economics that support favorable compensation policies are perilous. The willingness of the administrative team to maintain an open door with the bargaining units was viewed as a key component of a positive working environment.

Despite some discrepancies among schools, **parent involvement was viewed as an asset**. However, there were differences cited between “a seat at the table” and “influence over change.”

Stakeholders in **special education (SPED) noted that services in the district are strong**, but that the quality of these services attracts some students whose parents move to Quincy to benefit from the user-friendly access to services. Faculty members noted, however, that demands for services are growing and the balance between paying mandatory costs vs. the funding that is drawn from other programs will require thoughtful budgeting, planning, and school-based services overall. This is likely to occupy a great deal of attention from the next superintendent.

Areas for Growth, Development, and Change

Innovation. Many responders believe that the district may not respond as enthusiastically as necessary to newer strategies, innovation, and change. As one parent noted, “It’s great that we have a sense of community, but every once in a while, it’s nice to get the perspective of other communities.” More elaboration will be provided in the vision for the next superintendent, below.

It was recommended that the following questions be presented to candidates:

- Where do you see the key areas for innovation and change in curriculum, teaching and learning?
- What have you done to bring innovation to your previous positions and districts?
- How would you identify best practices in key areas to inform a strategy for Quincy?

Diversity. Quincy has a significant population of discrete minority cohorts and this segment is growing. However, as was noted, “People tend to want to hire the people they know, and the people they know are the people they grew up and worked with, and that isn’t representative of who is now living in Quincy.” There are very few representatives of the African American, Asian, Portuguese speaking, Spanish speaking, and other language constituencies on the faculty. One principal noted that it was typical to have as many as 30 or more languages being spoken at home by students in Quincy. Faculties tend to resemble the populations in the community on the dates they were hired, and, thus, it can take one or two decades of commitment to diversity the faculty unless a specific effort is made to hire from a broad spectrum of available candidates.

It was recommended that candidates be asked:

- How do you see the role of a diverse faculty in the education of our children?
- What have you done to achieve a more diverse faculty in your district and what should we do in Quincy to address this issue?

Communications. Many individuals seek more powerful communications among schools, teachers in similar and diverse subject areas, and with parents. “People in school buildings often live in their own small community and don’t often know what is happening elsewhere,” offered one teacher. Parents, representing concerns fueled by two months of pandemic isolation, are eager for as much information as possible. It is not unusual for stakeholders in a school district to be impatient when one segment knows something that another does not, but at this time, there seemed to be a greater level of angst over the need for vehicles for information. There were also comments about a desire for a district-wide “open-door” policy so

that teachers and parents could make concerns known discreetly and appropriately without concern for reprisal.

Recommended questions in this area included:

- How would you create a culture of communication between teachers and administrators, parents and school personnel, and community members and school stakeholders?
- What are some of the most effective communications strategies that you have created, used, or worked with?
- How do you deal with the proliferation of rumors that are constantly flowing among various stakeholders, especially in challenging social times?
- How have you communicated with those in the district for whom English is not the primary language at home?

Getting us Back to School. At this moment, we are about ten weeks away from reopening school in September, and much is to be provided in terms of guidance. Administrators who must lead the process, teachers who work directly with children and parents, and families are experiencing various levels of distress from the uncertainty over the pandemic and its aftermath. The next superintendent will need to lead the district to a successful back-to-school process that is shrouded by the uncertainty. The concerns expressed by the participants in focus groups and online responders are not unique to Quincy, but they do reflect a unique and unprecedented demand on the next superintendent to lead.

A proposed inquiry recommended was:

- How would you mobilize and organize our stakeholders to get school going again in September.

Equity. This theme was very frequently raised in terms of access to facilities, technology, and other resources. Responders called for a district-wide assessment of access to services, curricula, and resources. This is a common concern in school districts, but there were many responders who expressed frustration that historic inequities have existed for too long.

A proposed question that could be adapted for any of the areas for improvement was:

- How can you, as superintendent, effect change to bring about improvement in making resources more equitable, curricula more effective, teaching and learning more successful, or communities more supportive?
- Specifically, how can you review and recommend strategies for an equitable sharing of technology services?

Technology. Several responders pointed to a need for a system-wide plan to expand technology that will work for students and faculty. This was a major area for improvement as it was often cited. However, it was also noted that “Bells and whistles are nice, but many of them just don’t work for kids who don’t know how to use them, or for instruction that needs the right technology to be effective.”

A proposed question was:

- What do you see as the positives and the negatives of reliance on technology and what is the best scenario for teachers to use technology in their work with teachers? If you have worked with technology during the pandemic process, what have you learned?

Integration with Community Agencies. Parents cited the need to build strong relationships with the agencies and personnel who serve children and families. Several stakeholders called for the constrictive involvement of police to work with kids when not in school or when not in trouble, to build a good working relationship. (These comments were made prior to the national campaign to defund police, but there did not appear to be a problem between public safety officers and students in general.)

It was recommended that candidates address their work with community partners, including police, but also with social agencies and local non-profits.

Safety and Security. Faculty explained their prioritization of bolstering the social and emotional wellbeing of students. Parents echoed this theme as a priority. There is a general concern about student safety at this time, in general. Faculty and parents spoke to a growing exacerbation of student emotional stress coming from societal pressure, academic priorities, and the current effort to recover from the implications of the pandemic. Responders cautioned that candidates should be able to discuss social and emotional wellbeing from a practical perspective and not as a cliché.

Higher Order Goals and 21st Century Issues. Several parents want schools to be influential in addressing critical, long-term issues including environmental safety, social, ethical values, integration of our community and children through school, “creating an imaginative student who can think differently about how to solve problems.”

Arts Curricula. There was universal praise for the arts programs, as noted above. There is also widespread concern that art, music, drama, and related subjects may suffer in a budget crisis, and interviewers were asked to articulate strongly this area as one demanding preservation and growth.

Tuesday Early Release. For many years, school has ended early on Tuesdays so that teachers may engage in professional development. Parents find this an out-of-date practice and, almost uniformly, call for a change.

Profile of a Superintendent

Responders were asked to provide characteristics of an ideal superintendent for Quincy, not as a critique of any current or past superintendent, but one who would bring the best in leadership as perceived by the professional experience of educators, parents and community leaders. Interspersed among the feedback was a desire for a leader who is “pro-active rather than reactive” in being innovative and forward looking.

Superior and Knowledgeable Communicator. Responses in this area noted the importance of intradistrict communications and community-wide outreach. At this critical time, Quincy stakeholders want to set a tone and practice for communications that will carry over once the pandemic is resolved. These comments extended to teacher to Central Office; Central Office to each other; and school to community. The next superintendent should be not only articulate and knowledgeable, but also able to explain how communications will be executed in practice.

Collaborative Approach to Leadership. One responder offered a very perceptive notion to collaborative leadership by suggesting that candidates be asked, “What have you done in your work to date to build collaborations, participate in effective collaborations, or to hire teachers and administrators who are committed to collaborations?”

A Range of Experience. It was widely acknowledged that the next superintendent should have solid experience in the classroom, or as a direct-to-student educator (i.e., counsellor, therapist, etc.), principal and central office administrator. While this priority was less emphatic from community members, it was a strong priority for faculty who do not see “non-traditional” candidates as viable.

Visible and Accessible. Everyone wants to see the superintendent, and most responders would like to “know” the superintendent to the extent possible. Interviewees want to see the superintendent in schools and at community functions as well in order to build a strong relationship with the community.

A Good Listener. People want an “open door” and to be able to raise concerns that will be respected and considered. Many believe they have advice, ideas, or suggestions that they would like to offer to an outgoing and inquisitive leader.

Vision and Planning. Parents were particularly concerned that there be a strategic plan and/or clear vision and direction that incorporate traditional and futuristic goals. Several direct conversations addressed the challenge of a district “where everyone’s from Quincy and has always been from Quincy, and sometimes we just get too content with that.” There was a frequent articulation for a leader “who sees the big picture” and can bring the district forward in this way.

Instructional and Intellectual Leadership. Professionals and parents want a superintendent who understands teaching and learning and can also be a thought leader for the community and faculty.

Concerned About My Child. This was less a call for special treatment than a desire for a superintendent who will address the mental health of students (and also faculty) who learn or work at a very challenging time. Parents called specifically for a superintendent who understands how to integrate the social and emotional needs of children “into the practice and soul of public education.”

Understands the Nature of Relationships with the Unions. The district has enjoyed a relative tranquil relationship with its unions, but this is always fragile at a time of financial crises. It was recommended that candidates be questioned not so much about their actual bargaining history, but also about their understanding of what a good relationship with employees means and how the bargaining process can become a collaborative instrument.

Understands Finance. The state’s school finance system is complex and the relationship between local revenue and government support from Boston and Washington is not easy to understand. It is important that the next superintendent be sufficiently skillful to propose budgets tied to goals and prioritized with a student-centered approach, according to parents experienced in budget and finance. It is usually sought that a superintendent be able to communicate a proposed budget to the municipal authorities like the city council.

Principles of Equity. A good superintendent would have a good understanding of what it means to achieve equity in its varying formats and would have a strategy for achieving fair resources, equal opportunities, and broad and responsive attainment priorities to serve the various constituencies.

An Advocate for Quincy. Many responders recognize that there are many issues that require support from the state legislature, regional agencies, and the Congress as they debate future pandemic related legislation. Faculty members highlighted, and parents also echoed, the need for the issues of teachers and students to be raised in various forums and that the superintendent would advocate for concerns of the stakeholders with the state agency for education that has, historically, been more focused on directives and compliance than on strategies for serving students.

Commitment to Quincy. Quincy views itself, correctly, as a “destination” superintendency in that stakeholders view the commitment to the city as a long-term one. The next superintendent should be able to persuade the stakeholders that the candidate’s interest in Quincy is a strong and lasting one. Parents firmly believe that that commitment can come from any credible candidate who is willing to express a willingness to remain in the position for 5-10 years.

Culturally Proficient. Citing the diversification of the population of Quincy, parents prioritized a superintendent who would have a good background in working with different social, linguistic, and cultural communities and who would appreciate the integration of elements of the community profile into the daily school setting.

Online Survey Response Data

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***Data Tables continued
on next page***

When thinking about the current state of QPS, how would you rate each of the following categories in terms of importance to you? Please rate each category with a score of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

	All (973)	Parent /Guardian (467)	Teacher (230)	Administrator (31)	Staff (60)	Student (78)	Resident (72)	Other (35)
Educational Leadership	4.35	4.29	4.48	4.80	4.53	3.83	4.61	4.35
Public Relations	3.53	3.45	3.55	4.20	3.72	3.46	3.60	3.50
Analysis of Existing School Space/Facilities	3.74	3.63	3.91	3.97	4.00	3.47	3.71	4.00
Collective Bargaining/Employment Policy	3.70	3.39	4.22	4.10	4.12	3.32	3.77	4.03
Curriculum Development	4.17	4.25	4.10	4.40	4.02	3.82	4.30	4.29
Quality of Instruction	4.44	4.44	4.51	4.69	4.47	4.01	4.59	4.42
Financial Management/Budget Development	3.84	3.74	3.97	4.47	4.03	3.49	4.00	4.03
Staff Relations/Morale	4.18	4.11	4.30	4.45	4.34	3.91	4.20	4.35
Professional Development	3.87	3.89	3.77	4.27	3.78	3.68	4.06	4.06
Technology/21st Century Skills	4.00	3.99	3.91	4.33	4.12	3.73	4.27	4.21
District Goal-Setting	3.67	3.72	3.50	4.27	3.74	3.47	3.85	3.67
Academic Standards/Student Assessment	3.80	3.85	3.67	4.10	3.72	3.67	4.01	3.72
Staff Evaluation	3.68	3.80	3.39	4.00	3.54	3.76	3.83	3.56
College/Career Readiness	3.99	4.06	3.82	4.17	3.86	3.94	4.21	4.06
Special Education Services	4.09	3.99	4.22	4.50	4.26	3.87	4.17	4.27
English Language Learner Services	3.86	3.61	4.26	4.50	3.90	3.81	3.81	3.97
Student-Teacher Ratios/Class Size	4.10	4.07	4.37	4.23	4.16	3.50	3.96	4.21
Diversity of Staff	3.70	3.67	3.77	4.10	3.80	3.62	3.61	3.61
Student Extracurricular Activities	3.77	3.82	3.70	3.83	3.74	3.91	3.60	3.74
Creating a Safe and Supportive Multicultural School Community	4.24	4.17	4.41	4.53	4.41	4.13	4.10	4.18
Social and Emotional Well- Being of Students	4.33	4.30	4.49	4.59	4.46	4.00	4.19	4.30
Teachers' Instructional Technology Skills	3.84	3.86	3.80	4.13	3.86	3.43	4.09	3.94
Effective Communications with Parents (Verbal, Written & Listening)	4.19	4.28	4.19	4.53	4.24	3.44	4.17	4.28

What skills and qualities do you feel are important for the next superintendent to possess? Please rate each category with a score of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

	All (973)	Parent /Guardian (467)	Teacher (230)	Administrator (31)	Staff (60)	Student (78)	Resident (72)	Other (35)
Strong budgeting and fiscal management skills.	4.01	4.00	3.96	4.20	4.14	3.96	4.09	4.03
Success in grant writing/acquiring outside funding.	3.82	3.81	3.81	3.66	4.00	3.77	3.80	3.88
Experience working with diverse student populations.	4.41	4.34	4.58	4.57	4.52	4.34	4.15	4.65
Experience in collective bargaining.	3.76	3.65	3.93	3.77	4.00	3.42	3.91	4.09
Experience in classroom teaching.	4.25	4.19	4.49	3.97	4.12	4.08	4.07	4.53
Ability to articulate a long-term vision.	4.40	4.44	4.31	4.79	4.41	4.16	4.47	4.55
Success in improving/maintaining high academic performance.	4.48	4.53	4.38	4.59	4.53	4.38	4.54	4.50
Ability to provide transparent communication.	4.56	4.55	4.64	4.63	4.59	4.30	4.57	4.68
Effective management of the district's day-to-day operations	4.18	4.16	4.18	4.50	4.34	3.99	4.28	4.15
Provide opportunities for all Leadership Team members to demonstrate and develop their leadership abilities.	4.16	4.16	4.11	4.57	4.31	3.85	4.30	4.26
Awareness of instructional and administrative applications of technology.	4.07	4.10	4.02	4.10	4.03	3.81	4.14	4.29
Collaborative manager and team leader who can effectively delegate.	4.35	4.33	4.38	4.70	4.58	4.04	4.25	4.53
Ability to work cooperatively with the school committee and city officials & municipal departments	4.37	4.37	4.30	4.60	4.46	4.23	4.46	4.53
Strong interpersonal and school/community relations skills.	4.54	4.53	4.59	4.80	4.57	4.26	4.47	4.74
Values innovative instructional methods.	4.28	4.30	4.22	4.43	4.25	4.23	4.23	4.53
Demonstrates leadership on special education issues.	4.28	4.25	4.34	4.28	4.35	4.15	4.31	4.44
Encourages parental/community involvement.	4.26	4.29	4.28	4.43	4.32	3.76	4.27	4.41
Experience promoting professional development for all staff.	4.03	4.04	3.94	4.07	4.05	3.97	4.19	4.24
Ability to affect change and growth.	4.41	4.43	4.30	4.63	4.37	4.39	4.48	4.50
Understands and respects diverse views and backgrounds.	4.52	4.45	4.62	4.80	4.58	4.64	4.30	4.74
Builds a positive system-wide school culture.	4.64	4.55	4.76	4.90	4.78	4.59	4.51	4.82
Strong ethical values and leadership skills.	4.71	4.69	4.75	4.93	4.76	4.51	4.73	4.85
Visible throughout the district and actively engages in community life.	4.19	4.12	4.24	4.50	4.34	4.11	4.12	4.41
Ability to understand and recognize good teaching.	4.61	4.57	4.70	4.63	4.63	4.49	4.59	4.74
Pursues educational equity.	4.50	4.43	4.61	4.77	4.53	4.45	4.41	4.59
Demonstrates a willingness to commit long-term to the district.	4.31	4.27	4.30	4.33	4.44	4.29	4.46	4.39