

Stakeholder Input Report for

***Wallingford-Swarthmore
School District
Wallingford, Pennsylvania***

submitted by



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**Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
Wallingford, Pennsylvania
District Stakeholder Report**

Summary of Stakeholder Input Sessions for Superintendent Search

During weeks of October 28th and November 4th, McPherson & Jacobson consultants conducted virtual ZOOM meetings with stakeholder groups. The consultants met with high school and middle school students, teachers and staff, parents/community members, central office administrators, and building level administrators. In this summary, consistent themes and ideas are recorded which represent input that was consistent to all or most of the groups and could be considered to have broad support. Additionally, a survey with the same questions was available to stakeholders to complete online. The survey responses and the summary was compiled by K12 *Insight* and the summary of results is included at the end of this report.

The consistent themes and ideas that the consultants recorded are as follows:

Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

The responses to this question were consistent across all the groups interviewed. They all agreed that Wallingford-Swarthmore is a great place to live. The location is extremely beneficial as to the proximity to the airport, the mountains and the shore. In addition, the community is small enough, tight knit and extremely supportive of its schools. Volunteerism is important and community members are always willing to lend support and assistance when needed. Finally, all groups agreed that the community is also a safe and secure place to live.

Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

The district is extremely proud of its arts programs and the high school marching band. The marching band is the jewel of the district and is one of the largest in the state. As related to the high school, the fifth period block is also very important to all groups as it enables students to participate in a variety of co-curricular activities and get extra help if needed. It is not unusual for a high school football player to perform in the marching band at half time of the games. The number of advanced placement courses and tests taken in the high school was also emphasized as a positive aspect of the students' high school academic experience.

In the elementary schools, there is a high degree of parental involvement and volunteerism and there are many signature school-wide activities. One example is the Arbor Day program that is a collaborative effort with Swarthmore College. Those who were interviewed also praised the teaching staff as caring and going above and beyond. They emphasized how the staff continued its positive approach during the protracted contract negotiations process.

What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

There were several consistent themes that emerged from the stakeholder sessions to include the following challenges/issues:

1. The tax base in the district is primarily single-family homes and residential properties. Although there is a high support for the district, the budget continues to be a challenge as difficult decisions are made on an annual basis regarding the retention of district programs and activities.
2. The facilities are a major concern as voiced by the stakeholder groups. The buildings have run out of room in order to efficiently house the students. Office space is limited and some offices have been moved to closets. The twenty-year-old trailers at the high school do not present a positive learning environment for students and teachers.
3. Trust is a major issue. There was a consistent message sent to the consultants that the trust level throughout the district must be addressed by the next educational leader. Improved connections and in-person communication between the schools and the central office administration was emphasized.
4. Consistent visibility throughout the district, the schools and the community is important to the school community.
5. The district staff is overloaded by the many initiatives that have been instituted by the central office administration. There appears to be many initiatives and the staff indicated that it would be beneficial to identify the essential initiatives and implement these with fidelity. The district strategic plan strands are excellent however, the implementation of the plan to include timelines, who has the responsibility, resources necessary and evaluation of implementation should be communicated throughout the schools and community.
6. The achievement gap in the district must be addressed in an effective manner. There remains a gap regarding academic performance and discipline between black and brown students and the white students within the district. An effort must be made to close the achievement gap while also addressing the needs of all students to include those high achieving students, under-performing students and those students “in the middle”.
7. Although the district’s reputation is strong, some indicated that they believe that the district is “resting on its laurels” and there should be effort extended to improve in the area of academic achievement.

What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

There was a great deal of consistency among all the groups interviewed regarding the personal characteristics and experiences that they would like to see in their next educational leader. This individual must be personable and willing to make the effort to know all the faculty, staff and students throughout the district. Visibility in the district’s schools, the community and at school activities and community events are important to the stakeholders. The individual should be an excellent listener, collaborative and be a strong leader. He/she must take the time to gain a thorough understanding of the district and communities prior to implementing any new changes or initiatives. An understanding of the district’s culture and signature programs is essential.

Everyone agreed that the new superintendent should have classroom teaching experience and demonstrate a commitment to remaining long-term in the district. The constituents emphasized that the superintendent should not be using the district as a “stepping stone” to a new position in the future. Positive, daily interactions with the teachers, staff, students, parents/guardians and community members is a must. Excellent communication skills are also important to all groups.

Finally, the students emphasized the importance of including them within the decision-making process and communicate in-person with them on an ongoing basis.

There are many other personal characteristics and experiences that were expressed during the interview process. An individual who values equity and inclusion was also important to many interviewed throughout the stakeholder meeting process.

Stakeholder Input – Open ended Qualitative Questions

9:00 AM. Monday, October 28, 2024– Families and community members - Number of participants – (10)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Sense of community – tight knit and welcoming
- Different neighborhoods – connections are strong
- Volunteer nature of parents and community members
- Parents always stepping up – donations - supportive
- Rotary, Lion's club, scouts
- The town has high standards
- Excellent location and positive demographics of the community
- Socio-economic capital where students will score well on standardized tests
- Small town feel, physical location, close to Philadelphia
- Access to Poconos, New York City
- Swarthmore College
- Farmers market
- Sports and arts offerings in the community
- Proximity to excellent colleges and universities
- A more progressive community

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Teaching staff at the schools – amazing teachers drawn due to community, depth of knowledge
- School district collaboration with Swarthmore College – student teacher programs, teacher in-service, collaborative book clubs, speakers, Arbor Day
- STEAM night and Earth Day programs with Swarthmore
- Focus on inclusion and learning about many cultures – example – Asia Week, African Dance
- Desire to expose children to wider cultures and values
- The fifth block – an example is that this permits athletes to participate in the arts – extra help, make up tests, etc. takes place during this flexible period
- Travel opportunities for students, the language program – international experiences
- Music program is very strong, the marching band is one of the largest in the area
- High school language programs are exceptional

- German program – sister cities program with Germany – students spend time in each other’s country
- Extra-curricular activities – strong sports program, music programs, visual arts programs
- Strong assistance provided in the special education programs

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- District should develop more collaboration with Swarthmore – the collaboration comes and goes
- Challenge of dealing with a highly educated community who will share their opinions
- Observe what is working in the district and not impose changes that will not work in the district
- Develop programs that are consistent across the district – an example is the exploration of foreign languages
- Equity throughout the district – NPE title one school
- Three elementary schools run as silos – consistency and collaboration is essential
- Dealing with overcrowding effectively across the district
- Elementary schools are too small to address student population
- Lack of funding despite the high tax base
- Budgetary challenges
- Facility issues
- Administrative heavy – teachers in temporary administrative positions
- Effectively address the inequities that exist throughout all the communities
- Navigate the school tax situation in the district
- Still has half day kindergarten in the district – creates an equity issue for kindergarten aged children – parents/guardians have to determine how to address the other half of their child’s day
- District owned athletic fields in the community are not well maintained
- Maintain an up-to-date website

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Draw on and collaborate with the teachers
- Can embrace debate and discourse and to have conversations around these issues
- Don’t try to fix things that are not broken, don’t impose your programs on the district if there isn’t a need or a fit
- An individual who is not coming to the district to “make a name for him or herself”
- Dealt effectively with budgetary constraints
- More of an education and less of a manager
- Creative thinking around how to deal with student enrollment
- Put education first – focus on teachers, students, teaching and learning that is not test based
- Grounded in education
- Supporter, listener – let the community shine
- Community minded

- Less about strategic planning and more about action
- Building the school's reputation based on merit
- Someone who is not using this position as a "stepping stone"
- Transformative leader as opposed to transactional
- Experienced
- Strong background in finance
- Work collaboratively with the Board in the area of the change process
- Understanding about how the school tax system works in Pennsylvania
- Put more balances emphasis on both high school, elementary school and middle school
- Willingness to involve community partners
- Effective communicator – effective, clear, concise messaging
- Balance academics with all other social/emotional programs

3:30 PM. Monday, October 28, 2024– Families and community members - Number of participants – (2)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Swarthmore College is in the community
- Excellent schools
- Neighborhood community
- Tight knit community – look out for each other
- Sense of community and parental involvement
- Community came together during Covid

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Smaller district – better meets the needs of students
- The smaller size better meets the needs of the students/parents
- Communication from the school has been positive
- Onboarding of new students/families has been a positive experience
- Teachers and staff involvement – many teachers live in the community
- School Board attempted to meet everyone's needs
- Wide variety of programs in the elementary school
- Excellent music program – starts in third grade complimented by a summer program
- "A unicorn district"
- Summer sports camp supported by high school students
- Reading Olympics
- Teachers really reach outside of their normal day tasks – after school programs -examples yoga, chess

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Address questions regarding where the school district is going - -bring stakeholders together to determine a collective vision for the students to meet the needs of the students
- Healing will be necessary – teacher morale decreased

- Appeared to be a lack of respect for teachers and staff regarding what they were doing on a day-to-day basis
- Took time to settle the teacher contract
- Teachers are focused on the students' needs – they need to be supported and respected

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- A candidate who will embrace the community
- Need an excellent communicator
- Background in finance
- Someone who will have positive daily interactions with teachers and staff
- Improve the school district while embracing the current excellent school programs – examples – music and athletics
- Be aware of the unique aspects of the district, its size, culture, etc.
- Respect parent/guardian involvement and sense of ownership
- Someone who will be visible within the district and community – attend school and community events
- Knowledge of effective educational programs related to mathematics and reading instruction and curriculum – knowledge of best practices – understands that the community tends to lean toward “old school” the basics, etc.
- Ability to explain the process that was used to arrive at decisions

9:00 AM – Tuesday, October 29, 2024 – Superintendent’s Cabinet (3)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Awesome community, proximal to Philadelphia
- Welcoming people. Cannot name a negative
- Able to focus on the academics and the arts
- Students come with self-confidence and poise.
- Solid financially. Good budget

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Arts program is impressive. Largest marching band in the state
- Strive for the well-rounded student
- Lots of professional development days

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Significant reliance on property taxes
- Everyone needs to know. Kind of a Quaker town
- The system relies heavily on “we don’t do it that way”
- District needs systems
- An impulse to be “too accommodating” erodes adherence to district policy
- Cannot continue operating like a “mom and pop” shop

- District is not adhering to the common core standards.
- District has had initiative fatigue.
- Some stakeholders feel emboldened because of the expulsion of the last superintendent.
- Principals feel left out of the decision-making process. Central Office V. Principals is unhealthy

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Must have an ear to the community
- Cannot operate without relationships
- Commitment to inclusivity and equity
- Know when and how to deliver messages
- Must honor the history of the district
- District wants family style relations
- Must explain “why” of decisions
- Should have a doctorate
- Should have teaching experience
- Don’t always think the doctorate it’s important
- Cannot “need” to be liked
- Should be able to move the current strategic plan

11:00 AM – Tuesday, October 29, 2024 – Department Heads (7)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Brings in everything you think of as a suburb, close to the city, transportation access
- The community believes deeply in and is committed to a robust public school system
- Residential tax base – commitment to the schools
- Swarthmore College leads to intellectual capacity of the community

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Renowned for its music program – fosters student being able to develop their musical talents
- Don’t have to choose between being an athlete and music
- Technical classes offered to students without the necessity to go to technical school
- High degree of academic achievement – 20-30 national merit schools
- AP and honors level courses
- Full continuum of services for special needs students – committed to educating students in least restrictive environment
- Comprehensive system of behavioral health assessments for students

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Sense that the community needs to heal – true or not
- Much turnover – leadership and staff
- Central office leadership turnover
- Finances are an issue since there is a lack of industry and ratables
- Lack of physical space
- Moment of discussion for a potential for a new high school
- Being a very successful school system however lack of systems in place such as effective use of software to track teacher attendance

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Build relationships while establishing relationships to get everyone to row in the same direction
- Someone who could break down silos
- Collaborative
- Supportive
- Having Pennsylvania experience would be helpful
- Understanding of politics of Delaware County

3:30 PM – October 29, 2024 – Principals and Assistant Principals (6)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- High achieving district
- Family oriented, small community
- Supportive community members
- Welcoming, kind and nice community
- Much of the activity in the community is centered around the schools
- Community values the teachers and the schools
- Community and district have a great sense of pride

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Large marching band – can participate in marching band and sports
- Renewed interest in struggling students
- Quality of students that graduate from the district is outstanding
- The creativity and individuality of the people
- The marching band is one of the largest in the state – one third of students participate
- The flex period at the high school facilitates participation in a wide variety of activities
- World language program is strong – starts in grade six and throughout the middle school which leads to high school program being successful – global feel – larger view of the world

- Altruistic toward community service
- Mandarin, French, German and Spanish
- Mandated AP exams – district will cover costs where necessary – over 900 exams
- PBIS is strong throughout the district at all levels
- Behavioral health counselors in the schools
- District invested in health and wellness of students and staff – mental health issues
- Team centered approach toward addressing needs of struggling students

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- A respectful environment needs to be re-established throughout the district
- Counseling department at the high school needs to feel better respected – their morale needs to be repaired – the high school counseling department is an issue that must be addressed by the new superintendent and the new high school principal
- Disconnect between the building levels and the central office
- Rebuild trust – no faith in any process
- Principals don't meet with other – feel like they are “talked down to”
- Morale at the elementary level could not be worse – a great deal of mistrust
- Review how the strategic plan is being implemented the future

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- A relationship builder
- Someone who has principal leadership background
- A people person
- Effective communicator in a positive way
- Visible in the buildings
- Regular conversations with the teachers
- Get to know the staff
- A learner – how the district does things and why
- Someone that understands leadership – get people to follow them – buy in developed
- Honor the history of the school district
- Understand the district and community regarding the change process

7:00 AM – Wednesday, October 30, 2024 – Teachers and Staff (3)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Logistically, close to city, airport, close to the shore
- Small town feel
- Community that values education
- Bedroom community – school taxes high but to support the schools
- Some teachers went through the district and now teach in the district
- Tight knit district and community
- Can walk to every school in the district if needed

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Values academics, the arts, education
- The district values its sports program
- Orchestra and vocal program strong
- Theater program is strong
- Robots, debate, many clubs and activities
- Diverse community – LGBTQ, transgender community -accepting of all children
- Unified sports program

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Parents and community members like to have say in the district
- Athletic fields need to be updated
- Challenge of teachers lack of trust – understand that it is going to take time to build trust
- Morale in the district is low
- Coming into a protracted, contentious contract negotiation
- Too many programs trying to be implemented all at once
- Determine what is appropriate for the district
- Budget is a challenge
- Adding positions at the central office however not adding positions at the school level
- Great deal of work being put on the school counselors

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Values community, small town feel, values the district
- Strong leader with a background
- Listen to the teachers
- Not to see a superintendent that is not all about putting on a show to make them look better
- Not someone who is always looking for photo opportunities
- Superintendent should be visible throughout the district
- Someone who gets to know the teachers
- A relationship builder – someone who can be strong but also an emphasis on development of relationships
- Consensus builder
- Willing to take a second look at the administrative structure in the district and evaluate upper administration to determine their effectiveness – evaluate staff in an effective manner
- Identify problems and address them appropriately
- Someone who is good at analyzing what is really needed regarding staffing in the district
- Someone who is looking to be in the district long term – not a stepping stone
- Teaching experience

9:00 AM – Friday, November 1, 2024 – High School Students – (10)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Very supportive community
- Diverse student body
- Very strong and involved community – everyone is supportive and involved with the school district and wants to see change

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Outstanding opportunities in the high school, clubs, the marching band, opportunity to be involved in many different activities
- Overlap in participation – example – football player goes over to play the band
- Electives that the school offers
- Helps students figure out what they want to pursue after graduation
- Fifth block – permits students to participate in multiple activities – fifth block is important – avoids conflict between different activities that students are involved in – gives time for homework for students highly involved in activities
- Tech school – technical offerings – some students go to technical school, some take advantage of programs through a half day program coordinated by the school
- Overwhelming sense of opportunities for the students
- Student government – class cabinets – sophomores can run for officer of the student government
- Marching band – opportunities to be a squad leader, drum major
- Students can be anyone you want in the school

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Temporary buildings/trailers – not the best environment – odor – high school needs to be renovated
- School is old – needs updating
- Swimming pool requires renovation and updates – pool is in the building
- Not enough tennis courts at the high school – have to use the swim club facility – the courts are old
- Basketball courts need renovation and upgrading – main gymnasium
- The students want to be heard by their superintendent of schools – some things are just brushed under the rug
- District is a revolving door with staff

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Superintendent needs to be connected to the students and listen to their concern
- The superintendent should make an effort to get to know the students
- The teachers and principals that are more involved are more well-liked

- Make connections with the students
- Develop positive relationships with the students
- Superintendent needs to be visible and needs to interact with the community
- Lead by example
- Selfless
- Someone who will facilitate and create a better environment
- Someone who respects the staff, students- show respect
- Wants to see everyone succeed
- Eager to learn more and be curious
- Visible – don't be "distant"
- Attend school events, sports, concerts, etc.
- Someone who wants to be in the district for the long haul
- Understands what it's like to be a teacher and what it is like to be in the classroom and be a student as well
- An excellent listener who is willing to listen to a variety of potential solution
- Humble
- Don't fold under pressure – develop a team so don't have to do things by themselves
- Get to know all students – students who get in trouble and the "good kids"
- Run solutions to issues by the students to get their feedback prior to implementation
- Don't always work to please the parents/community – do what is best for the students – example the cell phone policy
- Students first – student advocate
- Verbal – in-person interactions with the students – don't just use generated surveys
- Students don't take the surveys seriously
- Not a top-down approach – involve the students in the decision-making process
- Inclusive
- A change agent – willing to make changes and involve students in the process
- Respectful of the teachers
- A strong leader – leading by bringing people up with you for a common cause
- Recognizes the potential of the district and the high school and to build upon this reputation
- Ability to take criticism and not be defensive
- "Buckle down and do the work"
- Make change and be there as a "friend"
- Sees the students and teachers as "people" not just a category such as teacher or student

1:00 PM – Friday, November 1, 2024 – Middle School Students – (10)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- I moved here a while ago. Much more of a community
- Very safe environment
- I like the music and arts program
- We always help each other
- Lots of support there are people in school and the community to help you
- Feels like a big support school
- Everyone is super friendly

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Hope for Haley program
- Love the music program and theatre, and student council
- Music and arts
- Lots of options for participation
- Haven't seen anyone where there isn't something for you
- Lots of different projects
- Lots of clubs

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Not enough time for lunch or going outside
- Some people can be at school for 8 or 9 hours and hard to find time for homework
- Maybe study halls for kids who need time to do homework
- School bathrooms require so much more regulations because of what some people do.
- More support for kids who cannot go to Board meetings
- So many kids live in two households and it would be less stress if there was a place to study
- Kids have things changed but we don't have the chance to speak out
- Figure out how to get student opinions about things because we are the ones that are affected.
- Budget should reflect all of the activities
- Lots of great teachers are retiring so we need great teachers to keep us great
- Should have an events calendar so teachers can see how students in conflicting activities.
- Sometimes we have lots of tests on the same day along with activities
- We have a ton of tests on the same day trying to study for multiple tests on the same day
- Communication between teachers and coaches could be better. Just being a student is difficult for us.
- Large support for a shared calendar would be much better
- Our agenda helps but maybe there is something better.

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Support extracurricular activities
- Support our teachers
- Visit our school and see what is happening
- Be transparent and honest
- Understand what “us as children are going through”
- Be kind and sympathetic
- Must know what is going on
- Needs to be a part of the community
- Honesty
- Come up with alternatives , be honest
- We want to know what is going on because it is happening to us
- Concerned about what I was seeing in the newspaper. Need information where we can be informed.
- Heard about a new math curriculum on the first day of school.
- We shouldn't have to read about what's going on in our school. We should be informed
- Should have heard about the new math program
- We want honest and maybe if we had our own newsletter for us
- Should be supportive of the teachers as well as the students.
- Should have good communication skills
- Should understand how a teenagers mind works

9:00 AM – Saturday, November 2, 2024 – Group ZOOM – Wallingford Elementary School – (0)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

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2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

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3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

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4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

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10:00 AM – Saturday, November 2, 2024 – Group ZOOM – NPE – (0)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

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2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

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3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

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4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

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11:00 AM – Saturday, November 2, 2024 – Group ZOOM – SRS – (1)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- The parents/community members are really engaged in with the district
- Really active, engaged community
- New and young families moving into the community at all times

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- NPE is a great school – a huge positive in people's lives
- Elementary schools are really strong – great programs
- STEAM night – many scientist parents
- Read across America
- Turnout for the events strong
- MLK event
- Emphasis on service
- Schools serve as the gathering areas for the community
- Thanksgiving morning – PTO organizes a turkey trot – 5K – great event

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Opinions of parents
- Tax base – challenge
- Swarthmore doesn't have a great deal of engagement with the district

- Parents of black students – complain to NAACP
- Middle school meeting the concerns of parents for their students
- Structures
- School board doesn't answer questions
- Structural barriers for getting information and answer to questions

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Listening meetings at schools – superintendent did all of the talking – didn't give time for those in attendance to speak
- Need an excellent listener
- Use the tremendous volunteer capacity in the community
- Build bridges
- Development partnerships
- Responsive with a plan
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Less of this is what I want and more toward this is what the people want
- A leader – someone who can get others to follow

6:00 PM – November 4, 2024 – Teachers and Staff (0)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

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2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

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3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

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4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

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7:00 PM - November 4, 2024 – Families and Community – (1)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- We are two educators one at secondary level and one at higher education. We bought a school district. Based on the situation with the district we are looking at other schools
- We wanted both music and athletics. Hoping a new superintendent will turn things around
- The district drew educators to the district

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Middle School Science programming was good.

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Spending too much money on the buyout, the interim superintendent and the search firm.
- Not finding that the programs are as strong as its reputation
- Hard for students to take part in multiple activities
- School climate especially coming out of the pandemic
- Students in the middle are not getting the support that they need.
- Spelling and grammar are programs that need attention
- Not quality coaching at middle and high school level. Trouble having a full spectrum of freshman, JV, and Varsity sports.
- Families with strong ties have a lot more pull than new families.

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Must be somebody who has taught and spent ten years in the classroom. And was successful.
- Someone who uses advice from the teacher resources instead of hiring external consultants
- Absolutely value what our practitioners are saying
- This position shouldn't be a stepping stone to another position. Should be a terminal position.

3:30 PM – November 6, 2024 – Teachers and Staff (4)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- Parents are engaged in their child's education
- Safe neighborhoods

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- Feel like a part of a team within the district
- A great deal of volunteering in the district
- Student centered in the buildings – parents/staff and teachers
- Provides a well-rounded educational experience for the students
- District does more with less
- Leadership is building centered – each building has its own identity
- Positive relationships developed at the building level
- Principals are invested in what is happening in the building
- Fine arts and music programs are outstanding
- Extra-curricular offerings is extraordinary
- Renowned marching band
- Students are engaged in the extra-curricular programs within the high school
- There was a culture of valuing the teachers' expertise, collaborative environment
- A culture of teacher growth
- Big touchstone projects in the elementary schools - however the district has moved away from these during recent times

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Funding and the budget
- Facilities issues – the schools are out of space – using closets as office space
- Fields need upgrading at the buildings
- 20-year-old trailers at the high school
- Faculty in the district is dispirited
- Instability at the high school – principal turnover
- Student mental health issues
- Difficult and protracted contract negotiations
- There is a very “us versus them” between the central administration and the staff
- Morale is very low in the district
- Disconnect between central administration and building level staff
- Staff asked to give feedback however not certain anything comes from the feedback
- Surveys used instead of talking directly with the teachers and staff
- District is top heavy – layers of administration
- Documentation gets in the way of working with the students

- Streamlining as related to what initiatives are important
- Create an environment where retaliation is unacceptable when staff speaks out
- Hiring process needs to be revised and teacher retention is an issue

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Ability to come in and observe before making any changes
- A leader who is able to lead effectively
- A caring individual who cares about staff and institutional history
- A humanistic approach
- Visible in the schools
- Someone who could work collaboratively with the staff
- Someone who could build trust throughout the district
- A good listener
- A relationship builder – building a team culture
- Develop a culture of respect
- An excellent communicator

5:00 PM – November 7, 2024 – Parents and Community Group ZOOM meeting -(6)

1. Tell us about the positive aspects of living in the Wallingford-Swarthmore area? Why is this area of Pennsylvania a great place to live?

- A candidate living in Rutledge, close to a metropolitan area with sidewalks
- Strong recreational opportunities.
- Wallingford is great for getting around, close to the train
- Swarthmore has a town center that builds community
- Welcoming community in an authentic way
- Great elementary schools
- Close knit but very welcoming.
- Almost old fashioned in a good way
- While it is a well-off community people are not materialistic
- In Rose Valley the mayor visits new residents, loss of folk festivals
- Police have a great relationship with Nether
- Wallingford and western Delco is different and very safe and walkable even in no sidewalks
- Like getting to know our neighbors. But close to airport and easy access to the city.

2. Tell us about all the excellent programs and educational opportunities that the district offers to its students?

- The music department has community advocacy groups
- Great Marching band. Kids attend band events and want to be a part when they get older
- Teachers are very committed to their students
- Lots of resources for special needs
- Solid academic program
- Music is a big jewel in the crown of the district

- Flexibility to learn an instrument and kids learn through the district without parents paying for lessons
- Performing arts
- Strength of transition from one level to the other
- Speech and Debate
- Awesome ultimate frisbee team
- The gifted program is very good
- Halloween parade is great to attend
- Heavy involvement in the wrestling program
- Outstanding teachers and they worked without a contract but they still were invested in the kids
- Very nurturing teachers and we have the funds to support them we
- Acknowledgement that even gifted kids need and receive support

3. What are the issues and challenges that the new superintendent is going to have to address if he/she is going to be successful?

- Equity in our outcomes is abysmal. We should be a model for the country
- Low attendance rates of Black and brown students
- While we value inclusivity, we need to make sure resources are available for all students
- Not convinced that we are not committed to the data.
- There is some tracking based on ability which may impact inclusivity along with discipline.
- We do have a race problem and the district response has been disappointing. Very performative.
- We have some committed teachers on race were not received well and left the teacher including teachers of color
- Residential with limited tax base and that has resulted in below standard trailer.
- Biggest employer is the college and that is not a good situation
- Academics have slipped and opportunities slipped. Programs need a boost.
- Our teaching style is less interactive than it should be. Have not embraced the newer methodologies.
- Couldn't get teachers of world languages that we need
- We are living off our history
- Over reliance of technology is a problem he
- Putting a halt on the use of personal device usage
- Using computers without using good keyboarding techniques
- The reliance on technology is also an equity issue
- A lot of work was put in but it is an aspirational strategic plan. Especially in SEL
- Too much emphasis on resource officers which is not conducive to a good climate
- The strategic plan needs definite outcomes.
- Lack of trust with the leadership so that will be an uphill battle.
- We've rested on our laurels
- Some teachers are unwilling to adjust to new methods

4. What are the personal characteristics, experiences, etc. you would like to see in your next superintendent of schools?

- Need a community builder
- Needs to listen but really supports what they hear.
- Control is not leadership
- Support for prior administrator who left
- Maybe a little old school. We need well rounded students
- Sensitive to students of color
- Need someone who has implemented a multi-tiered system of support
- Building principal experiences
- High performing district experience
- Needs someone who realizes we have high expectations
- Experience can come in a lot of different ways
- Evidence they can close an achievement gap
- An authentic magnetic personality
- College prep and career support.
- Personality and has emotional IQ
- Integrity is key
- Fully vetted

Wallingford-Swarthmore School District Superintendent Search Survey

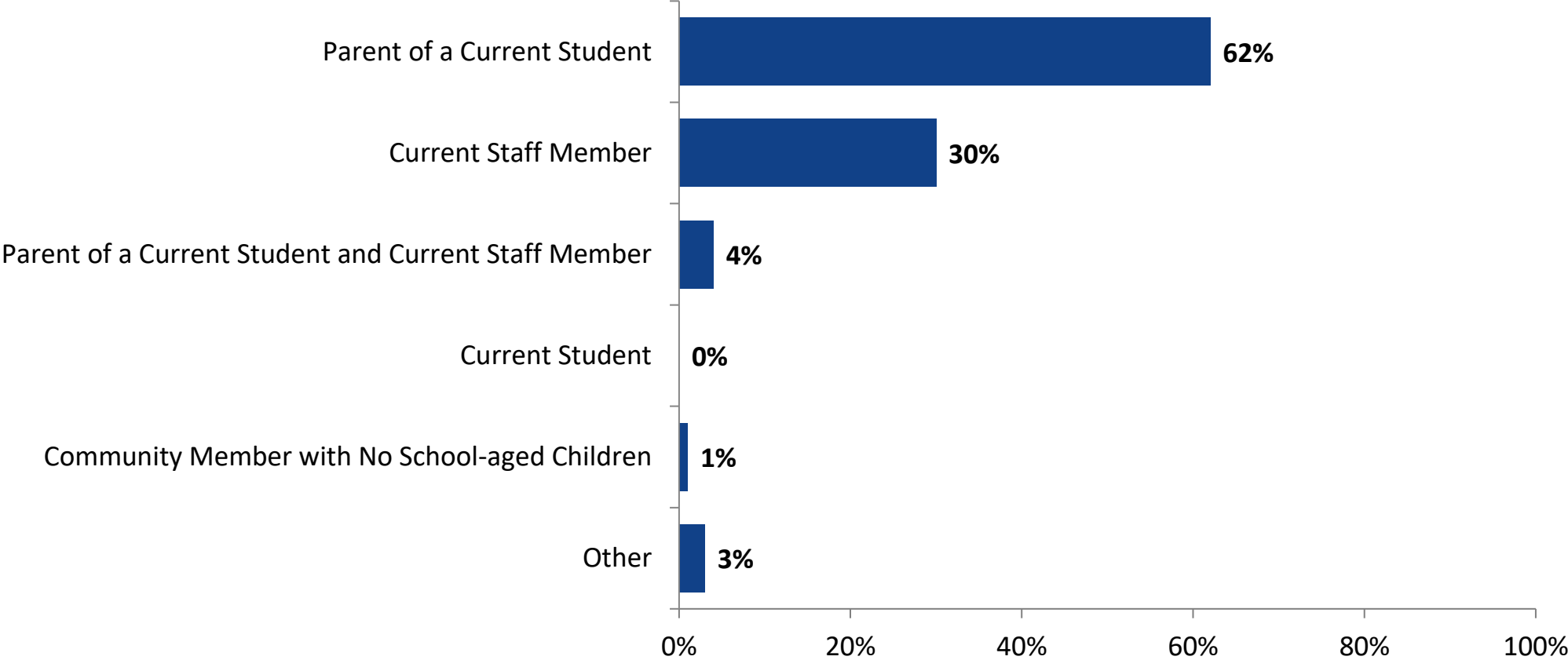
Results and Analysis

McPherson & Jacobson
October-November 2024



Relationship to the District

Which of the following best describes your relationship to the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District? (N=336)





Good Points About the Community and School District



Good Points About the Community and School District

Please tell us great things about your community and the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District that potential candidates for superintendent should know.

The Wallingford-Swarthmore School District is a highly engaged, close-knit community renowned for its commitment to academic excellence, inclusivity, and the holistic development of students.

Parents and community members are actively involved, contributing to a supportive environment that values strong partnerships between families, educators, and students.

There is immense pride in the district's high standards, talented teachers, and robust programs, particularly in the arts and music, which are complemented by diverse extracurricular and athletic opportunities.

Many families are drawn to the area specifically for the quality of the schools, and a strong sense of community spirit fosters collaboration and volunteerism.

The district balances high expectations with an emphasis on student well-being, with stakeholders invested in maintaining a nurturing, innovative environment where students can succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Good Points About the Community and School District

Please tell us great things about your community and the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District that potential candidates for superintendent should know.

Wallingford-Swarthmore School District is a small, tightly knit community with a strong commitment to academic excellence, inclusivity, and the arts.

The district's dedicated educators and staff are highly experienced and work collaboratively to support students' academic and emotional growth.

There is a strong sense of tradition and pride, with many families choosing to remain in the district across generations.

Parents are actively involved, supporting both school events and their children's education, creating a family-like atmosphere.

Known for its outstanding music program and vibrant extracurricular offerings, WSSD fosters an environment where students feel valued and encouraged to participate fully.

This community-centered approach makes WSSD a supportive, high-achieving district that embraces diversity and values collaboration and innovation.

Good Points About the Community and School District

Please tell us great things about your community and the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District that potential candidates for superintendent should know.

The Wallingford-Swarthmore School District is a close-knit, highly engaged, and well-educated community that deeply values the education and development of its students.

Residents are active in decision-making processes and prioritize both academic excellence and robust arts programs, particularly music, which is a significant source of community pride.

WSSD is dedicated to supporting all students, providing strong extracurricular opportunities, and fostering a culture of curiosity, creativity, and inclusivity.

While the community boasts many post-graduate educated residents and takes pride in public education, there are social-economic disparities, highlighting the need for focused support for students from lower to middle-income families.

Despite recent challenges, the community remains committed to nurturing a unique educational environment that balances high academic standards with a supportive and inclusive atmosphere.



Characteristics, Attributes, Skills



Characteristics, Attributes, Skills

What qualities, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent needs to have in order to be successful?

The ideal superintendent for the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District should be a visionary leader with strong communication skills, transparency, and a collaborative approach.

They should prioritize academic excellence, while respecting the district's traditions and valuing input from all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and students.

The superintendent must bring a focus on inclusivity, equity, and support for diverse needs, along with a commitment to maintaining high standards in both academics and extracurricular programs.

They should embody empathy, humility, and a community-centered approach, fostering trust and morale across the district.

A strong background in education and classroom experience is crucial, enabling them to connect authentically with staff and understand classroom dynamics.

The superintendent should value constructive feedback, engage actively in the community, and have the financial acumen necessary for effective resource management.

Characteristics, Attributes, Skills

What qualities, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent needs to have in order to be successful?

The ideal superintendent for the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District should possess strong emotional intelligence, warmth, and approachability, paired with significant experience in educational leadership, ideally within the Philadelphia area.

This leader should demonstrate genuine empathy, prioritize active listening, and engage meaningfully with teachers, staff, students, and parents, ensuring all voices are valued.

The superintendent must have classroom experience, an understanding of modern educational demands, and the ability to support teachers' autonomy while trusting them to make classroom decisions.

Effective communication and transparency are essential, as well as the ability to make data-informed and sometimes difficult decisions for the district's best interests.

Building strong, supportive relationships and embodying integrity, resilience, and a focus on students' well-being and academic success are key.

Ultimately, the superintendent should be a unifying, visible presence committed to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and high-performing educational environment.

Characteristics, Attributes, Skills

What qualities, skills, and characteristics do you feel the next superintendent needs to have in order to be successful?

The next superintendent should be a collaborative, transparent leader with strong communication skills and a deep understanding of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District.

They should prioritize building positive relationships with students, staff, and the community, listening actively to varied perspectives and fostering shared decision-making.

An effective superintendent will value the strengths of the existing team and empower staff while avoiding a top-down approach.

A background in teaching and familiarity with the district would be beneficial, along with a focus on prioritizing students' educational standards, community involvement, and addressing challenges like mental health and technology-related issues.

Transparency, fairness, and a commitment to student and staff well-being are essential qualities in this role, as is the ability to lead with humility and vision, helping to restore and enhance the district's educational reputation.



Significant Opportunities



Significant Opportunities

What do you see as significant opportunities for improvement for the next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District?

The next superintendent of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District should focus on rebuilding trust within the community, enhancing communication and transparency, and fostering a positive work environment that supports long-term teacher retention.

Priorities include addressing outdated facilities, especially at the high school, and implementing a consistent, high-quality curriculum that strengthens academic rigor across all grades.

Many in the community advocate for a cell phone ban to improve student focus and mental health, and they seek stronger support for social-emotional learning, special education, and student safety.

Ensuring equity in resources for all students, especially high achievers and those with special needs, is essential.

Addressing budget constraints thoughtfully, while prioritizing direct classroom and student needs, and creating a respectful, collaborative culture between administration and teachers are seen as critical for a successful tenure.

Significant Opportunities

What do you see as significant opportunities for improvement for the next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District?

The next superintendent of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District has an opportunity to improve morale, build trust, and foster stronger relationships among staff, administration, and the community.

Prioritizing efficient, well-planned professional development and time management will allow teachers more focus on direct instruction and student needs.

Key areas of focus should include supporting socio-economically disadvantaged students, reducing class sizes, expanding specialized middle school courses, and enhancing communication and transparency across the district.

Teachers and staff seek a superintendent who values their expertise, listens to their needs, and advocates for a more efficient, student-focused budget, reducing administrative bloat in favor of increasing teaching staff and improving facilities.

Visible, respectful, and empathetic leadership is essential to re-establish a positive, collaborative environment where educators feel valued and empowered.

The new leader should work towards creating a supportive district culture that respects tradition while progressively enhancing educational outcomes.

Significant Opportunities

What do you see as significant opportunities for improvement for the next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District?

The next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District should prioritize open communication, community outreach, and targeted support for teaching staff across all levels—elementary, middle, and high school.

A primary goal should be to enhance fiscal responsibility by assessing and streamlining central office roles, reducing unnecessary administrative layers, and focusing funds on student-centered resources, such as additional teaching and support staff.

The district needs a leader who values constructive feedback, engages with alumni, and supports a balanced focus on academics, arts, athletics, and altruism to promote well-rounded students.

To build trust within the community, the superintendent must prioritize student achievement and practical improvements while addressing tax and budget concerns effectively.



Significant Challenges



Significant Challenges

What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront?

The next superintendent faces the crucial task of rebuilding trust among the community, staff, and parents after recent leadership challenges, as well as addressing the lasting impact of a strained administrative culture.

Key priorities should include restoring confidence in district leadership, managing finances responsibly, and fostering an inclusive atmosphere that respects the diverse needs of the district.

Critical areas of focus will be reducing administrative overhead, enhancing teacher support, and addressing facility improvements, particularly at the high school.

Community members also hope to see a superintendent who is neutral, transparent, and resistant to undue influence while advancing DEI initiatives in a balanced manner.

With lingering effects from the pandemic, the district must also focus on supporting students' academic recovery and social-emotional needs while fostering a collaborative, forward-looking educational environment.

Significant Challenges

What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront?

The next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District will face the complex task of rebuilding trust and morale among teachers, staff, and the community after a period of strained relationships and administrative turnover.

A primary challenge will be addressing overcrowding at the elementary level, upgrading aging facilities, and managing limited financial resources, all while maintaining a balanced approach that aligns with both the strategic needs of the district and the actual needs of students and teachers.

The new superintendent must also focus on healing a fractured district culture by fostering open communication, collaborative decision-making, and supporting a positive, inclusive environment.

Restoring staff confidence and demonstrating a genuine commitment to long-term growth, stability, and transparent leadership will be essential in rebuilding a supportive, unified district.

Significant Challenges

What do you believe will be the most significant challenges the next superintendent will have to confront?

The next superintendent of Wallingford-Swarthmore School District will face the critical challenge of rebuilding trust and fostering unity among a community of parents, teachers, and administrators left skeptical and strained by the previous leadership's management style.

This position requires a leader who can set aside ego, focusing instead on genuinely supporting staff, students, and the broader district goals without seeking personal recognition.

Key issues include addressing budget constraints, maintaining and hiring quality staff, tackling infrastructure needs, and updating academic structures to restore high achievement standards.

To establish credibility, the superintendent will need to lead transparently, develop consistent policies (such as a district-wide phone ban), and prioritize effective communication that values the voices of faculty, students, and families alike. This collaborative, trauma-informed approach will be essential to healing a district marked by past challenges and guiding it toward a stable, successful future.

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