

Wayland Superintendent Search

Community Leaders Interview Report

Prepared by Future Management Systems

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The Wayland School Committee provided the names of nine individuals who represented a cross section of leaders from the community. Interviews were conducted via telephone on October 14 and 15, 2010. Each person was asked the following questions:

1. What do you view as the strengths of the schools?
2. What do you feel the schools in general, or one or more specific levels (elementary, middle or high), need to address in order to improve?
3. What do you view as the immediate challenges that will confront the next Superintendent of Schools?
4. Are there emerging issues that may not require the Superintendent's immediate attention, but nonetheless should have his/her ears open to them?
5. What are the personal and professional skills that the next Superintendent must possess in order to be successful?
6. In terms of personal and professional skills, what do we need to be careful of, what won't work in Wayland?

The following serves to report the information that was gathered from the telephone conversations:

1. What do you view as the strengths of the schools?

Most individuals identified the students to be a major strength of the schools. Some noted that the families value education and provide their children with enriching and supportive educational experiences that complement the school program. One person noted, "We are indeed an advantaged community." It was noted that most students from the community attend Wayland High School; few attend private schools. This indicates a high level of parent satisfaction with the schools.

The faculty was almost always mentioned. "They do a good job of educating the students; many people reside here because of the reputation of the school system." Some mentioned the principals, describing them as "very good" to "great," with one person describing one of the principals as perhaps the best principal in the United States. The past history of building principals has been excellent. The principals have been valued and greatly appreciated.

The academic program is viewed to be strong, although many noted it is time to move forward with a vision that supports educating students for the global economy. While class size has increased in recent years, there is still a nice student-teacher ratio within the schools. Students reportedly leave high school very well prepared for college. The public schools maintain high academic standards. Students attend many of the most prestigious colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The schools provide a well rounded program that serves to balance academic, athletics, arts, and clubs with students' abilities and interests. The high school and middle school reportedly do a very good job of serving the students who are academically advanced. Some feel the middle school and its high academic expectations are the strongest level in the district.

Historically, the parents and community have provided additional financial support to the schools. The Wayland Public Schools Foundation (WPSF) annually has provided as much as \$200,000 to underwrite creative programs. Recently, the WPSF funded the purchase of a significant amount of technology. Previously they paid to conduct an audit of the district's math program and the professional development program that supported the new math program. The parents and community are represented to be extremely bright, highly motivated, and incredibly strong supporters of the schools.

2. What do you feel the schools in general or at one or more specific levels (elementary, middle, high) need to address in order to improve?

Staff: While most teachers are very good, it was reported that some do not measure up to standard; it is felt that this issue needs to be addressed. "The system hasn't taken sufficient force to address this issue." We need to weed out the underperformers.

The evaluation system needs to be improved. "Too few administrators can actually observe and write evaluations".

Student focus: "While the middle school is our strongest level, the high school needs to work at becoming more student-centered". One person mentioned that the high school is extremely focused on the adults who work there. Another noted that the new high school principal is student-oriented and is attempting to lead the staff in this direction. Future support from the Superintendent in this area was cited as a need. Similarly, the elementary schools need to better serve the academic needs of the brightest students. One person expressed the opinion that the schools don't "push" elementary students sufficiently. This person noted that the elementary curriculum has been described as developmentally appropriate. Another person perceived a need to make a smoother transition for students entering the high school from the middle school, especially when it comes to preparing students for more independent learning opportunities.

Finance: “We have a high tax rate, the second highest in eastern Massachusetts.” The next Superintendent needs to work with the School Committee to address issues related to faculty compensation and benefits. It was represented that many in the community (especially those who do not have children attending the schools) feel the schools are not doing enough to control costs. Some feel the School Committee acquiesces to the teachers’ union. Others feel the current method of paying teachers needs to be revised. A move away from paying people for years of experience and years of service was mentioned, with a new focus on performance and results. “Our eyes are bigger than our stomach; we don’t have the finances that we need in order to accommodate what many of the parents want,” represents another opinion of those who do not have children currently attending the schools.

The Town has been paying the maximum of money to the schools. Recently, there has been a slow erosion of what the schools are able to deliver due to declining funding.

One person expressed his displeasure with parents who attend the Town Meeting, vote approval of the school budget, and then leave. He felt this was a divisive action that communicated lack of support for the town as a whole. The Town has two armed camps: “the override moms and the people who have to pay the bills.”

Instructional Program: We need to continue to work on the implementation of the differentiated instruction initiative.

The elementary level should have a gifted and talented program. The high school needs more advanced placement opportunities for more students. Currently we restrict enrollment in these courses to the brightest students. If the program is so good, why aren’t we offering it to more of our students?

We need to define how instruction and learning could be improved through the use of technology. Some respondents indicated they thought the schools could reduce some of the staffing needs through better use of technology. Others felt students need to regularly use technology as a learning tool, as this is representative of the time in which we live.

One person stated that 25% of the third grades reading scores were below “proficient;” he/she believed that the “whole language” approach to reading contributed to this. Earlier identification and intervention programs were recommended by this individual.

The integration of curriculum at all levels could be stronger by placing a stronger emphasis on 21st century skill development.

Leadership: The system is lacking a vision. We need to be able to identify where we are going and how we intend to get there. We need visionary leadership that we haven’t had recently. We need someone who has a vision for the use of technology as a teaching, learning, management, and communication tool. We have a good technology director but this individual needs support, especially when it comes to developing and implementing plans.

3. What are the immediate challenges that will confront the next Superintendent?

School finance will be an ongoing challenge. Health care costs are out of control. “We need to re-engineer” education so we can deliver services in a more cost-effective manner. We need to find ways to deliver quality education at a lower cost. What will be the impact of decreasing funding while trying to maintain quality programs?

There may be fall-out from current negotiations with the teachers that he/she will need to address. Teachers are currently “working to rule.” Aligned with this is the need to implement creative ways that serve to motivate and compensate staff for services provided. There is a perception that Wayland teachers are better paid than others, but we have too many teachers who are mediocre and not up to standard. This needs the next superintendent’s attention. The next superintendent will have to address contract management and future negotiations. We need someone who doesn’t “bite the bait.” The superintendent can’t have a mercurial attitude. As a community we have treated our teachers very well. They have been provided with a great deal of autonomy. We have even provided secretaries to the high school department heads. Now that there are leaner budgets, some of these fringe benefits may disappear. This may result in some “attitude” issues that will need to be dealt with. We have enjoyed a good relationship with our teachers, but we are concerned with some of the things that are currently taking place. Work to rule will not win the support of parents. It has the potential to alienate them.

We have had a vacuum of strategic leadership. We need a vision from pre-K through high school. We need to identify what we stand for and what we intend to become over the next five to ten years

We need to use technology more effectively and more frequently in the delivery of services. This could help to lower costs. Along with the use of technology, there is a big push toward the use of data in making educational decisions. We need to set up data teams; the collection of data needs to be more frequent. However, we also need to ensure that we don’t become so caught up in collecting data that we forget about the overall needs of the students.

There are some trust issues that have surfaced. The recent reorganization of the elementary schools has resulted in some parent dissatisfaction. Some parents feel the decision was made before all the facts were available. Some parents are angry and are not supporting some of the district administrators and other aspects related to the operations of the schools.

The administration appears to be “stretched.” As a result, there are times when they drop the ball. This doesn’t occur too frequently, but it is something the next superintendent needs to know.

The current focus at the high school isn’t on the students. There’s a lot of dancing around things without effectively impacting the student. There needs to be a great deal more

collaboration at the high school. Some feel there are two distinct tracks at the high school: those who are tracked at a very high level and those who are tracked at a much lower level, resulting in a significant gap between the two.

There may be a tendency for people to swarm the new superintendent with issues they want addressed that perhaps haven't been discussed in the recent past or were addressed but not to the liking of some parents.

4. What are the Emerging Issues Facing the New Superintendent?

Finance: Several individuals talked about issues related to finance as a current emerging issue. Wayland parents were described to be very active and vocal. A small faction within the community was placing pressure on the schools to reduce the budget while parents will continue to expect more for their children. Three individuals talked about the need for cost controls with the teachers' union. The need for reforming teachers' salaries by making them more performance-based was stated to be a strong need to be addressed in the not-too-distant future. These issues represent a delicate balance that will require the immediate and long-term attention of the next superintendent of schools.

Teachers before students: Three people discussed issues about matters being "swept under the rug." The high school was described to be very much adult-oriented. It was not described as a place for the students. While parent feedback is allowed, it isn't asked for and feedback or input is not solicited. The disincentive of having to identify oneself was described as a problem.

Curriculum: The need to infuse changes into the curriculum without jumping to the latest fad was discussed. While those interviewed do not want to throw the good out without knowing what could be lost they want assurance that the schools are offering the curriculum opportunities that prepare students for the global economy. The majority of concern appeared focused on the high school. Those interviewed indicated they want to create a vision of what the high school needs to look like, with skills for the 21st century identified and developed. One individual commented, "We have rested on our laurels too much; I want to see excitement reinstated. Things have become too flat. We need to be doing things that are good for the kids." We could be doing more with our foreign language program; there are substantive areas of service (including programs that encourage student exchange learning opportunities) that our students could benefit from.

Enrollment: While recent enrollment numbers have declined, there are indicators that enrollment starting in the lower grades may be on the increase. This could have an impact on the recent reconfiguration of students throughout the schools.

Administration: Some comments were offered indicating that new administrators require ongoing supervision and mentoring.

Social-Emotional Learning: While the school's primary focus is on academic achievement, we cannot lose sight of students' needs to learn how to function effectively in all settings; this requires training concerning social and emotional skills. More attention needs to be placed in these areas.

Skill Set Needed:

- Outstanding **communicator** (listener, speaker, writer) (4);
- **Effective decision maker** who is capable of making trade offs (1);
- **Creative thinker (2);**
- **Strategic thinker;**
- **Fair;**
- Holds high expectations/standards for self and others (2);
- **Intellectual** (not just pragmatic); sharp, bright, well read, understands the classics (6);
- **Savvy in the use of technology** for teaching, learning, communicating, and managing (5);
- Creative, **non-traditional look at school finances;**
- Understands curriculum; **has a strong vision of what future curriculum/schools need to look like;**
- Capable of moving a high performing district to the next level; will generate excitement, is intent on making Wayland the best school district in the country;
- **Very familiar with the education process;** true to a process and true to a vision (3);
- **Strong in finance:** knows the difference between reducing and consolidating; needs to be wise enough to anticipate and smart enough to know when to pull back in anticipation of getting through difficult periods; able to lead innovation at reasonable cost (5);
- **Strong educational leader with a strong theoretical base** (we don't want the "same old same old") (6);
- **Outstanding people skills,** good with people and conflict resolution management; able to balance a variety of constituencies while remaining true to the vision; in this very judgmental community, we need someone who can handle him/herself in this climate; able to work well and hold his/her own in this type of community (6);
- Responsive;
- Capable of **working effectively with the teachers' union;**
- **Visible** in the schools and in the community;

- **Organized;**
- Maintains a **sense of humor;**
- Genuine interest in developing children;
- Has an ability to use the Myers Briggs (“we need an ENTP as our next Superintendent; light on the J”);
- We should hire someone who has used Myers Briggs to the benefit of the organization.

5. What won’t work in Wayland? What does the selection process need to be cautious about?

- Poor communication skills, not a good listener;
- Continuing the status quo; “same old same old;” we want to start a journey on a new and exciting path; we don’t want a continuation of current superintendent’s thinking (7);
- Someone who is not flexible; not open to change; rigidly assigns job roles (3);
- Someone who is not collaborative; not willing or able to work with the Town as a whole;
- A maintenance manager; someone using this as a step to his/her next job or retirement (3);
- Someone who tries to change things too quickly;
- Slick won’t work here; neither will clandestine.