

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Christine Edwards, Project Coordinator, Founder and Principal Consultant,
Civility Localized

Khrystle Bullock, Project Manager, Community Engagement Project Manager,
Civility Localized

Elizabeth Flemister, Content Manager, Senior Content Specialist,
Civility Localized

Melody Gross, Interviewer, Facilitator, Founder, Courageous Shift

Milagros Ugueto de Sánchez, Spanish Language Facilitator

Charlotte Executive Leadership Council, Project Sponsor

PREPARED FOR



PREPARED BY



Many thanks to our Partners for all the hard work and invaluable contributions made to this work. We are better because of your support, insight, encouragement, and expertise.

To all who participated, our sincerest thanks. Your voices are the most important part of this work and we are indebted to you. Our commitment to seeing communities grow with dignity begins and ends with you. Thank you for trusting us with your time, energy, and words.

Contents

01 Introduction

02 Methodology

03 Results Overview

- Online Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Listening Sessions

04 Summary of Findings & Recommendations

05 Appendix



1

Introduction

In late 2022, Civility Localized was contracted by the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council to lead the community engagement process to inform Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' (CMS) 2023 superintendent search. The strategy of seeking public input for this process mirrored the recent efforts to create greater trust and provide leadership expertise in the form of their executives in residence program. The consultant team approached this project from a community engagement research lens, making sure to center the needs of the community through inclusive dialogue and tactics designed to heighten opportunities to give voice to those historically excluded from civic processes.

A project of this sort is highly needed in school districts across the country. With many large and urban school districts nationwide facing unprecedented challenges, superintendent turnover has become notoriously high. The challenges facing such districts range from health, safety, social, and economic disparities, to social-emotional and infrastructure concerns due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

A February 2022 article from Edweek.org ([Superintendent Turnover Is a Real Thing. How Bad Is It?](#)) lists superintendent turnover at about 18% for urban school districts in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. Understanding this background is important for this project.

In the public realm, local challenges often mirror national trends. It is very important to understand the local impact of this national issue, and to also react to local challenges within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District specifically.

Between 2011 and 2021, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools have had five superintendents; all of whom served under 3 years, as referenced in this November 10, 2022 WFAE article:

[Meet the CMS Superintendent Carousel](#)

Entering into this process, it was imperative to learn the community's preference for leadership qualities, leadership experience, and visibility to ensure longevity in the next superintendent. This understanding may be the key to changing long-term outcomes in superintendent tenure.

To see communities grow with dignity, it is important to remember that those closest to a problem often have the best solutions to those very challenges.

Despite widespread turnover in education as a whole, there are bright spots and reasons to celebrate in Charlotte Mecklenburg. In a district with 148,000 students, 9,000 employees, and 84 facilities, the consultant team understood the need for a trusted partner to extend capacity and reach corners of the community most impacted by this important decision.

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Project Purpose

- To engage stakeholders and key constituents from diverse communities in shaping the job description for the ideal CMS superintendent
- To collect lived experiences of those most impacted by the hiring decision for the next CMS superintendent

The team at Civility Localized presents the feedback herein as a written narrative of the both the qualitative and quantitative data. The hope of the Civility Localized research team is that this report illustrates and reflects the voices of the community.



“The goal is to gain as many perspectives as possible. We value the lived experiences of each participant and hope to illuminate the needs and priorities of the Charlotte–Mecklenburg community in an authentic way.”

**– Christine Edwards, MPA
Founder Civility Localized**

2

Methodology



A variety of engagement activities were needed to create trust within this process, starting with a focus on four central values. Those values included:

Belonging Visibility Motivation Trust

To best encompass these values, four strategies were employed to engage the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community:

- Online Survey
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Listening Sessions

Online Survey

For the online survey, the consultant team used third-party community engagement software PublicInput.com and it was designed to achieve two goals. The first goal was to gain a better understanding of the awareness of the current state of CMS leadership, and the second goal was to gather preferred characteristics of the next CMS superintendent. The survey also revealed quantitative feedback on skills, personal & professional qualities, as well as values and characteristics of the ideal superintendent for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The eight week survey period ran from September 27, 2022 to November 18, 2022.



BELONGING



VISIBILITY



MOTIVATION



TRUST

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Stakeholder Interviews

For one-on-one stakeholder interviews, the goal was to collect impactful narratives from key audiences identified early on as influential in, and directly impacted by, CMS leadership. Interviews were conducted via video conference and phone for a duration of 60 minutes. The research team asked a list of questions to ascertain the interviewees' experience with CMS schools, perception of the current state of affairs, and desires for the future. Interviewees represented: CMS Families, CMS Teachers, CMS Staff, CMS Principals, CMS Students, Faith Community, Nonprofit Leaders, and Business Leaders. Interview questions are linked in the Appendix.

Focus Groups

Focus Groups were used to collect qualitative feedback with a cross-section of participants from each key constituent group. Focus groups allowed for deeper dialogue and space to share common lived experiences. These were carefully curated safe spaces where participants could learn about the role a superintendent plays, voice their concerns in a smaller group setting, and make suggestions on how best to recruit the next talented CMS superintendent. Ideally, focus groups range from 12 to 30 participants.

Listening Sessions

Listening Sessions were structured for general audiences to provide feedback through guided discussion. These sessions fostered greater awareness of the community engagement initiative, and allowed for greater participation across the district. Listening sessions range anywhere from 10 to 100 participants.

Methodology Overview

1. Online Survey Responses (1,714 total)

- English Survey Responses: 1,672 total
- Spanish language survey responses: 42 total

2. Stakeholder Interviews (21 total)

- CMS families
- Faith Community
- CMS Teachers
- CMS Staff
- Principals
- Nonprofit Leaders
- Business Leaders
- CMS Students

3. Focus Groups (120 total attendees)

- Youth - October 12, 2022
- Business Leaders - October 12, 2022
- Non-Profit Organizations - December 1, 2022
- Educators - December 3, 2022
- Faith Leaders - December 2 and December 8, 2022

4. Listening Sessions (64 total attendees)

- October 18, 2022
- October 27, 2022
- November 15, 2022 (Spanish language)

Communications Strategy

The communications strategy encompassed a wide variety of approaches to reach across Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Civility Localized drafted and published a joint press release with the CMS Communications Department to alert local media to the project. This went out on September 27, 2022. As initial survey responses came in between September 27 and November 8th (2022 Midterm Election Day), the consultant team sent additional pitches to journalists about the need for more engagement from CMS stakeholders in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity.

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

As early survey results rolled in, the consultant team noticed the data being gathered was not inclusively representative of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. At every stage of this process, the goal was to reach communities historically left out of decision-making processes like this one. That is why Civility Localized Project Coordinator Christine Edwards explicitly pursued the determination to reach more diverse audiences. This was a deliberate move to drive more awareness in Black and otherwise non-white Charlotte-Mecklenburg communities. Ms. Edwards openly called for more widespread and diverse participation and awareness of this important engagement initiative in interviews and articles such as this one from the **Charlotte Post**:

[CMS Seeks Wider Engagement with Public Input on Superintendent Search](#) - October 17th, 2022

Through multiple targeted press releases, Civility Localized successfully saw the CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Initiative featured in over a dozen local television news broadcasts, radio programs, print media articles, and education newsletters from September to December, 2022 (see appendix for full list). This widespread and ongoing local media coverage boosted awareness of this project and contributed significantly to project participation goals.

Newsletters, Email, and Robo-Calls

Seven announcements were sent in the Civility Localized bi-weekly newsletter between October 4th and December 13th. These newsletters averaged 40% open rates, and 4-6% click-through rates. In short, more than 600 newsletter recipients were largely reading and engaging with this content on a consistent basis throughout the lifecycle of this engagement initiative. Highly shareable newsletter content is an important facet to any engagement project, and this proved true once again.

CMS sent ConnectEd Calls, Texts, and Emails to CMS Families asking for survey participation. Using this method of reaching the CMS community was an important part of the strategy as it ensured CMS constituents knew the survey was part of the overall CMS network of surveys.

These emails and calls were also one of several attempts to bring CMS educators, administrators, and staff members into the engagement initiative. Other strategies to draw participation from CMS faculty and staff included pushing the online survey via emails and calls, as well as hosting Listening Sessions and Focus Groups specifically for CMS educators and employees.

Outreach Partners

Some of the outreach partners who shared engagement opportunities via email and hosted focus groups include: Generation Nation, GenOne, Our Bridge for Kids, My Brother's Keeper, Communities in Schools, Community Building Initiative, Leadership Charlotte, CMS Schools, YMCA, Mecklenburg Ministries, CELC Executives in Residence, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Libraries, and many others.

Social Media

Social Media is always an important aspect of our communications strategy, although certainly not the bulk of it. Through our internal Content Creation and Communications team, Civility Localized provided CMS with customized graphics and links for this project.

Civility Localized posted corresponding graphics and calls to action on average 3 times per week, sometimes 5 times per week. The CMS Communications Team and Board Members used these graphics on the CMS website and social media platforms as well. Civility Localized also ran paid advertisements (in English and Spanish) on the Meta Platform. These ads reached an audience of 23,000 targeted social media users on Facebook and Instagram over the course of four weeks. 05

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

In-Person Outreach

Over the eight week time period that the CMS Superintendent Community Engagement project ran, the Civility Localized Team tabled at two in-person community events in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity.

These included the Fall Festival at the Arbor Glen Outreach Center on Clanton Road, and Johnson C. Smith University's Security Day on Beatties Ford Road.

At each event Civility Localized team members distributed dozens of hard-copy flyers and postcards. These printed materials contained QR codes linked to the online Survey and Listening Session schedules. Flyers were printed in both English and Spanish with calls to action for participants to attend in-person and virtual Listening Sessions as well as to take the Survey.

These materials were also made available as digital graphics in an effort to make all CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement highly recognizable and consistently branded, both for visibility and share-ability.



Images From Top:

1. Civility Localized Project Manager Khrystle Bullock and Facilitator Melody Gross table at the In-Person Listening Session.
2. Branded CMS Community Engagement Flyers & Postcards on the Civility Localized table.
3. Community Members visit the Civility Localized table at West Charlotte's Arbor Glen Outreach Center Fall Festival.



CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Website

As a Public Input Certified Consultant Partner, the Civility Localized team leveraged expert knowledge of Public Input's online platform to design and launch a unique community engagement website for this project in less than 3 weeks time.

As an online community engagement platform, Public Input offers a robust suite of tools for government and public outreach initiatives. Using a host of those offerings, Civility Localized launched an online portal with custom domains and project-specific tools to create a home for the Online Survey, Focus Groups, and Listening Sessions.

A Community Engagement landing page (In English: PublicInput.com/CMSCommunityEngagement, and in Spanish: PublicInput.com/CMSEspanol) with background information on the role superintendents play within a school district served as a first point of context for the community. Next, a unique survey page, translatable into dozens of languages via Google Translate, allowed participants to take the online survey, and to see results at the conclusion of the survey. Finally, informational pages with RSVP links to all virtual and in-person events, including community listening sessions and individual focus groups rounded out the Public Input portal offerings for this project.

Data points on the Public Input's Equity Mapping Tool brought attention to demographic and location data coming in as the project progressed. At the start of the survey, it was noted that more survey participants identified as white and were taking the survey in geographic areas in what is known as the "wedge" of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. This led a push by the consulting firm to host more in-person events in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity.

Using real-time data collection and monitoring has proven to be an invaluable tool for community engagement initiatives like this one. Public Input's equity mapping tool allowed the consultant team to take early proactive measures to correct for demographic areas of opportunity.

Communications Strategy Overview

- Multiple press releases to announce the project launch, events, and progress
- Media interviews and county-wide coverage via T.V., online, and print news outlets
- ConnectEd Calls (i.e. robo-calls) made to all CMS families and staff
- Emails to all CMS teachers and families
- Multiple announcements in Civility Localized Newsletter with more than 600+ subscribers
- Social Media promotion on Civility Localized, CMS platforms and Board members' social media platforms (2 to 3 posts per week)
- Paid social media ads on Meta in English and Spanish with a reach of more than 23,000
- Reached more than 200 publicinput.com subscribers via email and text updates
- Links to the survey on the CMS website
- Tabling at community events in Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity
- Flyers & Postcards at Public Libraries
- Spanish translation of print media and social media

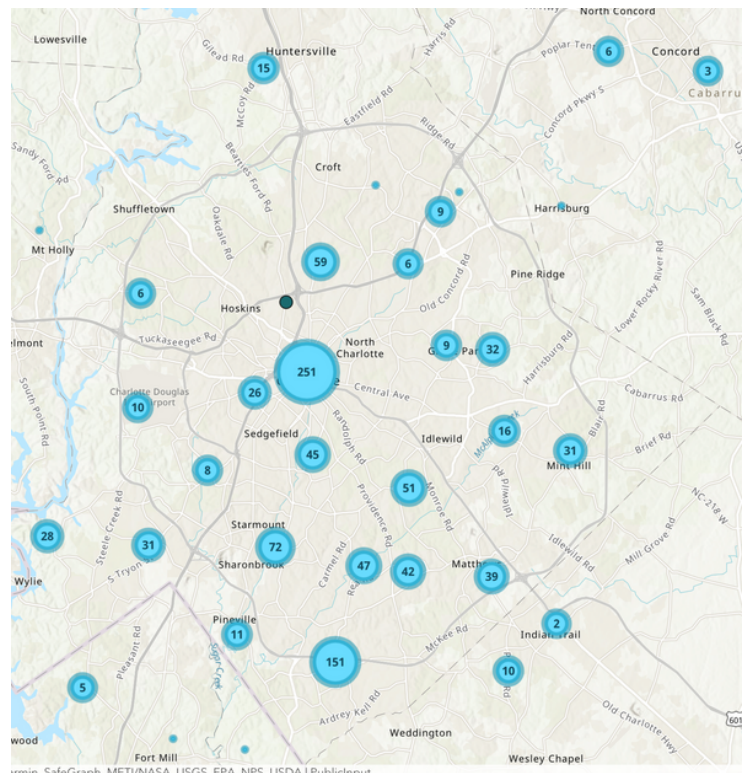


Image: Equity Mapping via PublicInput.com

Social Media Graphics & Project Flyers



Top: Social Media graphic for the CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Survey in English

Bottom: Social Media graphic for the CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Survey in Spanish



Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools welcomes you to help shape their search for the district's next superintendent

Community Listening Sessions:

October 18
Virtual

October 27
Allegra Westbrooks Library:
2412 Beatties Ford Rd
Charlotte, NC

COMPLETE THE
ONLINE SURVEY
BY NOVEMBER 18



scan this code or visit the website

www.PublicInput.com/CMSCCommunityEngagement



Top: English Language Flyer for the CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Survey & Listening Sessions

Bottom: Social Media Graphic for CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Listening Sessions

3

Results Overview

Online Survey

The survey was launched on September 27th and ended November 18, 2022 (an eight week duration), as one component of the community engagement process. A total of **1,714** participants responded to the survey. According to the 2022 [Mecklenburg County Pulse Report](#), the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Director noted that **1,114,482** people reside in Mecklenburg County. For a representative sample size of this population using a 3% margin of error and 95% confidence level, a minimum of 1,067 survey respondents were required.

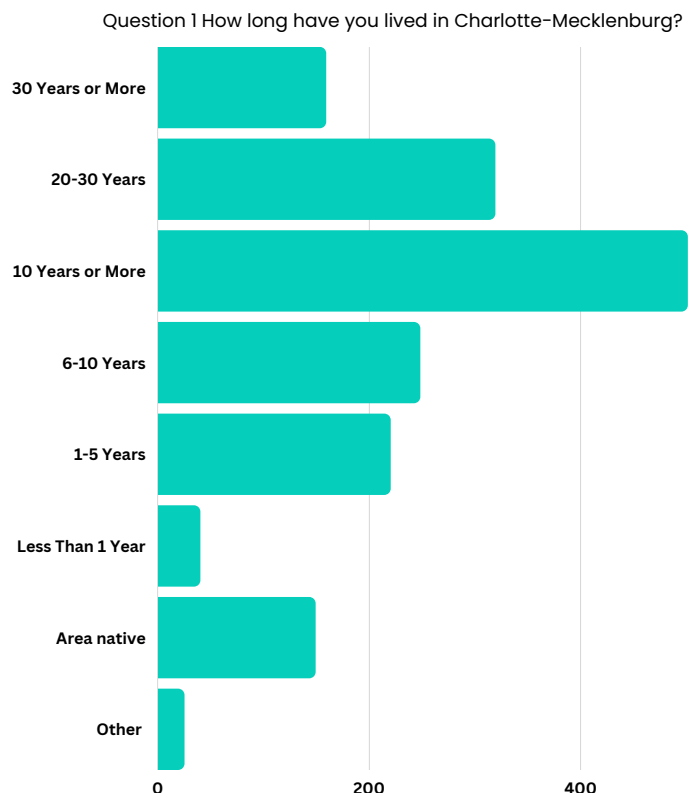
There were seven (7) survey questions and four (4) optional demographic questions. The following breakdown shows the results of each question.

Question 1: How long have you lived in Charlotte-Mecklenburg?

Number of Responses: 1,661

- 501 participants (30%) selected 10 years or more.
- 319 participants (19%) selected 20-30 years.
- 248 participants (15%) selected 6-10 years.
- 220 participants (13%) selected 1-5 years.
- 159 participants (10%) selected 30 years or more.
- 40 participants (2%) selected less than 1 year
- 25 participants (2%) selected "Other".
- 149 participants (9%) identified as being Charlotte natives.

Based on the responses from **Question 1**, over half (59%) of participants have lived in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area for 10+ years. This indicates the majority of survey participants are long-time, invested residents of the Charlotte community.



Other responses included:

- Union
- Cabarrus
- Surry
- Rock Hill
- Fort Mill
- Gaston
- York

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Question 2: Please rate your level of engagement with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in terms of involvement in supporting students, educators and initiatives that have a direct impact on education in the region.

Number of Responses: 1,661

- 1040 participants (65%) selected “Very Engaged”
- 515 participants (32%) selected “Somewhat Engaged”
- 56 participants (3%) selected “Not At All Engaged”

Overall, 97% of participants identify as engaged with CMS in some capacity. This demonstrates that community members have high engagement with the CMS ecosystem, a signal of trust, loyalty and closeness with the school system.

Question 3: How confident are you that you understand the roles and responsibilities of a superintendent?

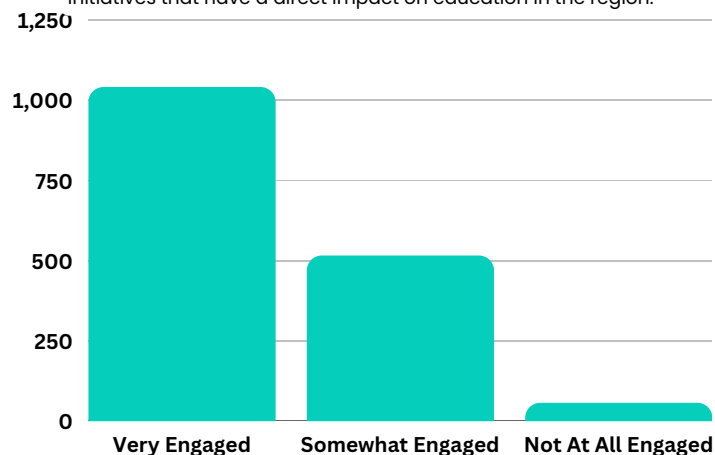
Number of Responses: 1,585

- 720 participants (45%) selected “Somewhat Confident”
- 716 participants (45%) selected “Extremely Confident”
- 151 participants (10%) selected “Not Confident”

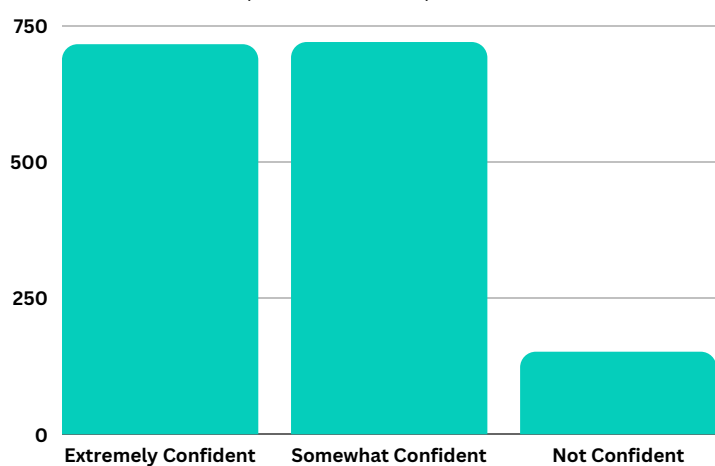
Overall, 90% of participants self-identified as somewhat to extremely knowledgeable of the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent. However, 10% of participants indicated they are not. Publicly accessible documents and resources listing and explaining roles and responsibilities of the CMS superintendent will be beneficial to the community at large.

The consultant team was provided with a definition of the superintendent and the definition was posted on the project website during the duration of the study.

Question 2 Please rate your level of engagement with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in terms of involvement in supporting students, educators and initiatives that have a direct impact on education in the region.



Question 3: How confident are you that you understand the roles and responsibilities of a superintendent?



What is the role of a school Superintendent?

Superintendents are administrators in charge of a school district. They are part of the local governing body overseeing public schools. All school principals in the district report to the superintendent.

The superintendent is responsible for the leadership and management of a school district. The superintendent is charged with improving student outcomes by making strategic, tactical, and operational decisions and recommendations about educational programs, budget, staff, and facilities. All this is done in alignment with the school board's strategic goals while honoring specified guardrails/values.

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

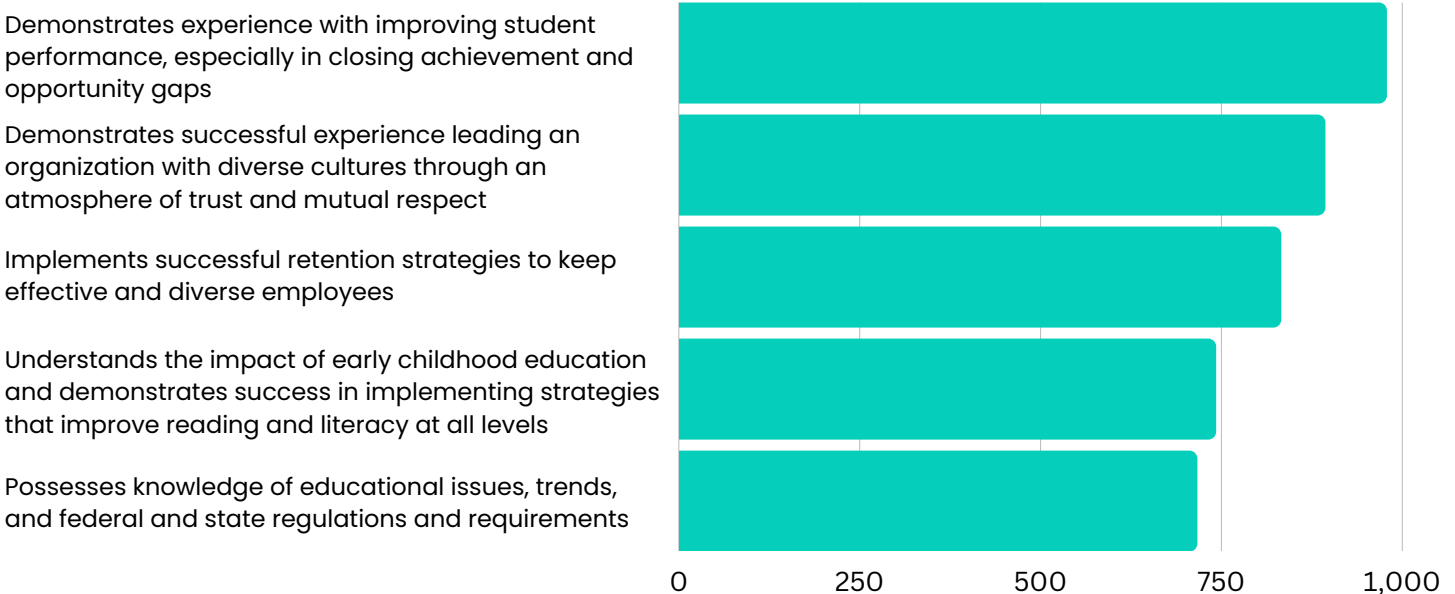
Question 4: Select the 5 Qualifications that you feel are most important in the selection of a new Superintendent in the area of *High Capacity Leadership*: which includes student learning, and managing educating and operational staff.

Number of Responses: 1,439

The top 5 qualifications selected are in bold and reflect the mode of participants' selection.

- 978 participants (68%) selected: **Demonstrates experience with improving student performance, especially in closing achievement and opportunity gaps**
- 893 participants (62%) selected: **Demonstrates successful experience leading an organization with diverse cultures through an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect**
- 832 participants (58%) selected: **Implements successful retention strategies to keep effective and diverse employees**
- 742 participants (52%) selected: **Understands the impact of early childhood education and demonstrates success in implementing strategies that improve reading and literacy at all levels**
- 716 participants (50%) selected: **Possesses knowledge of educational issues, trends, and federal and state regulations and requirements**
- 676 participants (47%) selected: Has experience with increasing student performance in low performing schools, either as a school or district leader
- 662 participants (46%) selected: Demonstrates success recruiting and selecting high-quality staff throughout the district
- 604 participants (42%) selected: Prioritizes employee's physical and emotional well-being
- 446 participants (31%) selected: Demonstrates experience with supervising employees at all levels and delegates authority appropriately
- 389 participants (27%) selected: Provides staff with opportunities for improvement through relevant professional development

Question 4: Select the 5 Qualifications that you feel are most important in the selection of a new Superintendent in the area of High Capacity Leadership: which includes student learning, and managing educating and operational staff.



CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

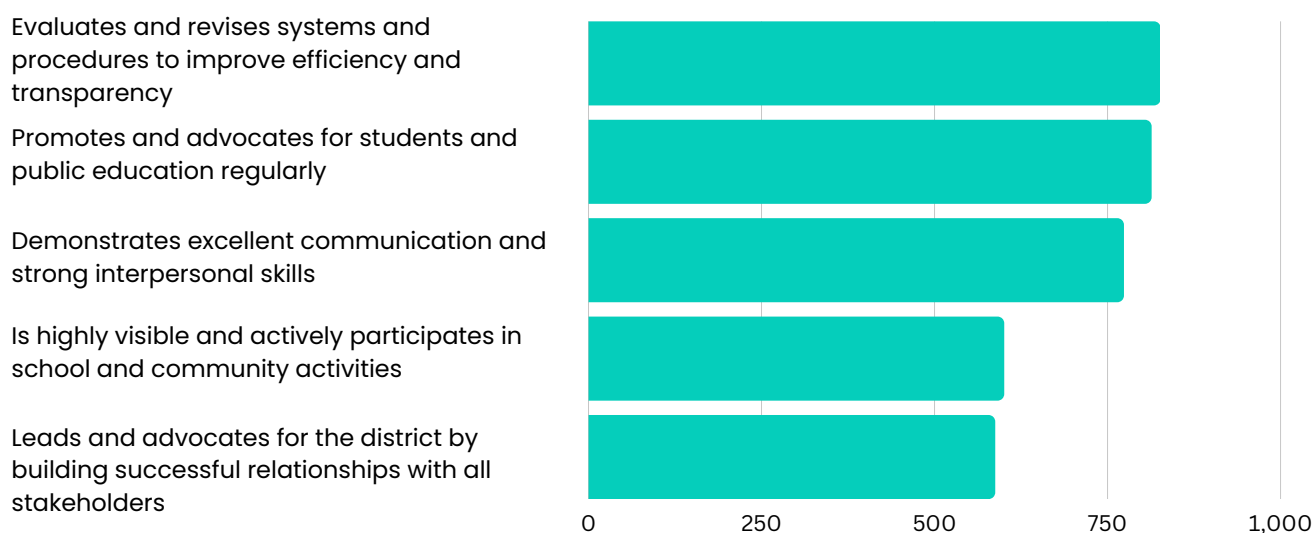
Question 5: Select the 5 qualifications that you feel are the most important in the selection of a new Superintendent in the area of *Engaged Communities*: which includes involvement in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region and sustainable use of community resources.

Number of Responses: 1,333

The top 5 qualifications selected are in bold and reflect the mode of participants' selection.

- 826 participants (62%) selected: **Evaluates and revises systems and procedures to improve efficiency and transparency**
- 813 participants (61%) selected: **Promotes and advocates for students and public education regularly**
- 773 participants (58%) selected: **Demonstrates excellent communication and strong interpersonal skills**
- 600 participants (45%) selected: **Is highly visible and actively participates in school and community activities**
- 587 participants (44%) selected: **Leads and advocates for the district by building successful relationships with all stakeholders**
- 559 participants (42%) selected: Understands the legislative process and can collaborate with lawmakers on key topics to benefit the district
- 557 participants (42%) selected: Has experience in assessing and improving support operations of a school district, such as maintenance, food and nutrition services, and transportation
- 546 participants (41%) selected: Demonstrates a commitment to the community by serving as a key leader and working with diverse organizations and community groups
- 520 participants (39%) selected: Has familiarity with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the surrounding community
- 427 participants (32%) selected: Leads governmental, community, and business partners to enhance educational opportunities and economic development
- 267 participants (20%) selected: Interprets and articulates complex educational and financial data to all stakeholders

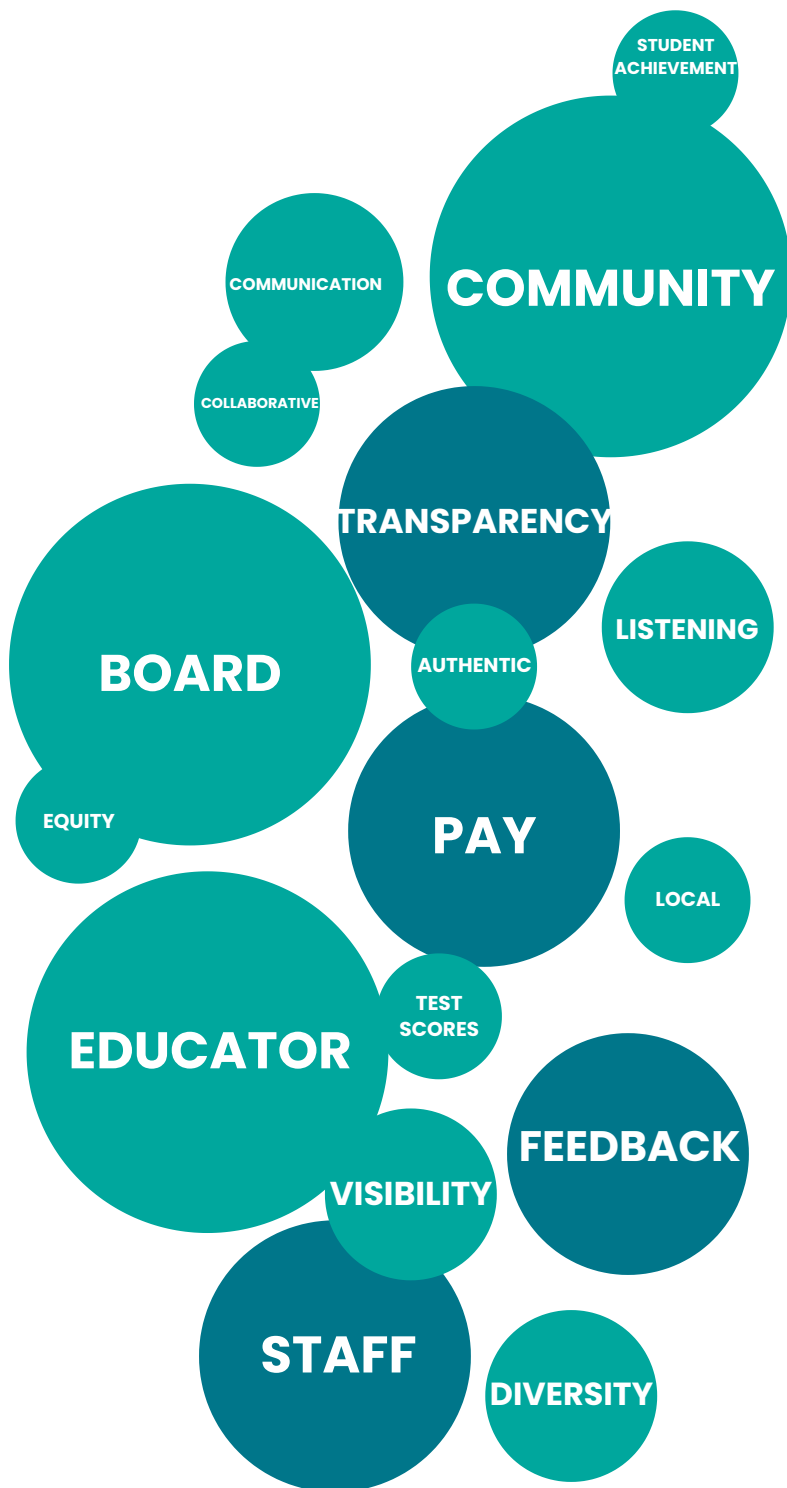
Question 5: Select the 5 qualifications that you feel are the most important in the selection of a new Superintendent in the area of Engaged Communities: which includes involvement in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region and sustainable use of community resources.



Question 6: School districts throughout the country are seeing high turnover for superintendents. What do we, as a community, need to do to recruit and retain high-achieving superintendent to lead CMS for the next 10 years?

Number of Responses: 855 Question 6 was an open-ended question which prompted respondents to type their opinions as anonymous comments which were not publicly shared on the project website. Respondents had the option to sign in with their name and contact information to subscribe for notifications about the project. There was no character limit on the comment response box. Publicinput.com recognized and organized recurring keywords in the comments and produced a table of keyword tags. The consultant team coded similar words together to create common themes and understand overarching perceptions. For example, comments containing the word "salary" were tagged with "pay" and comments containing the word "teacher" were tagged "educator" while words like communicative and communicate were grouped together, and so forth.

View the word cloud with the most frequently mentioned keywords pictured much larger while less frequent keywords are smaller. View a list in the table below of keywords along with their frequency count and an example of a corresponding comment from the survey results. View the full list of 855 comments in the survey full report linked in the Appendix.



Word Cloud

The most frequently mentioned keywords in response to Question 6 are pictured much larger while less frequent keywords are smaller.

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Question 6: School districts throughout the country are seeing high turnover for superintendents. What do we, as a community, need to do to recruit and retain high-achieving superintendent to lead CMS for the next 10 years?

Number of Responses: 855

Keyword	Tag Count	Comment Example
Community	157	"Listen to the input of all impacted and involved with the schools and community, as well as understand that no positive changes are going to be immediately seen and takes time to implement positive changes and to see results of those changes"
Board	150	"The superintendent needs to be able to make sound effective decisions without fear of what the Board or others think especially if it is for the improvement of student achievement and retention of staff."
Educator	116	"Ensure educators understand career paths and have opportunities to progress within the district. Incentivize educators who elect to teach in low performing schools. Similar to hazard pay since they are expected to achieve same results with less resources and parental support"
Pay	100	Pay and benefits package needs to be highly competitive. There needs to be a strong and knowledgeable group of direct support staff in place to assist the new superintendent in quickly executing critical improvements so our teachers can concentrate on teaching and the kids can concentrate on growing and learning."
Staff	80	"Support the superintendent but provide staff below and around him/her that are competent and student focused. Do not expect someone to change the world or show intense change."
Diversity	58	"Seek a person with strong interpersonal skills who values various stakeholders and different opinions. Diversity, equity and inclusion is critical to the success of our diverse district. She/He must also be knowledgeable of educational processes and be a visionary to help all schools improve."
Transparency	51	"Create Transparency throughout the system to the community. Work together with the community to continue to strive to raise our performance and graduation rates. The Board and the community need to support our superintendent."
Visible	37	"A superintendent should be visible to the public that they support. They should care for the well-being of the schools/ community they serve. They should care for the students and make sure that they hire the best school staff available to ensure that the students will have a great future and school life."
Feedback	33	"A record of proven leadership in an extremely large, urban, and diverse school district. Tangible examples of positive academic growth across various grade levels in a variety of school settings preferably in a school district that mirrors that of CMS that is receptive to community feedback."
Listening	33	"Someone who has a firm grasp on the needs of the community and truly listening to teachers and their concerns"
Communication	22	"Provide consistency, support, and continuous communication. We also need to demonstrate that we are willing and able to provide our superintendent with flexibility to perform their job well while being clear and concise in our expectations, performance metrics, and accountability measures."
Funding	21	"We need to set clear expectations and provide an opportunity for the candidate to articulate how they would achieve them and what resources/funding they anticipate needing to be successful."
Local	19	"Engage on a local level CMS is a VERY large system to run and a local presence is required to make it work. This will take both sides of the team to engage."
Student Achievement	11	"Have a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision. Value the educators and support staff and include their input and needs within the overall plan."
Collaborative	10	"Work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure we get the most qualified leader for our district. Once chosen, support his or her efforts (if they are the voice of the district). Work together to recreate a tangible vision then bring the vision of CMS to fruition."
Equity	6	"Seek a dedicated individual with expertise in improving large school systems with major gaps in equity. Proven ability to bridge equity gaps in student performance, high quality teacher retention, strong commitment to school safety, and enhancing overall educational environment for students and staff"
Test Scores	5	"Ensure that the new superintendent's views align with the greater good and for growth. We need a leader who can listen and is empathetic yet strong. Put teachers and children first, test scores and money next"
Authentic	3	"Find someone who is Authentic and courageous. Support him or her even if unpopular."

Table: Keywords along with their frequency count and a corresponding comment from the survey results.

Optional Demographic Questions

Question 7: This question asked participants to select their category of community member identity. Participants were allowed to select all categories that applied.

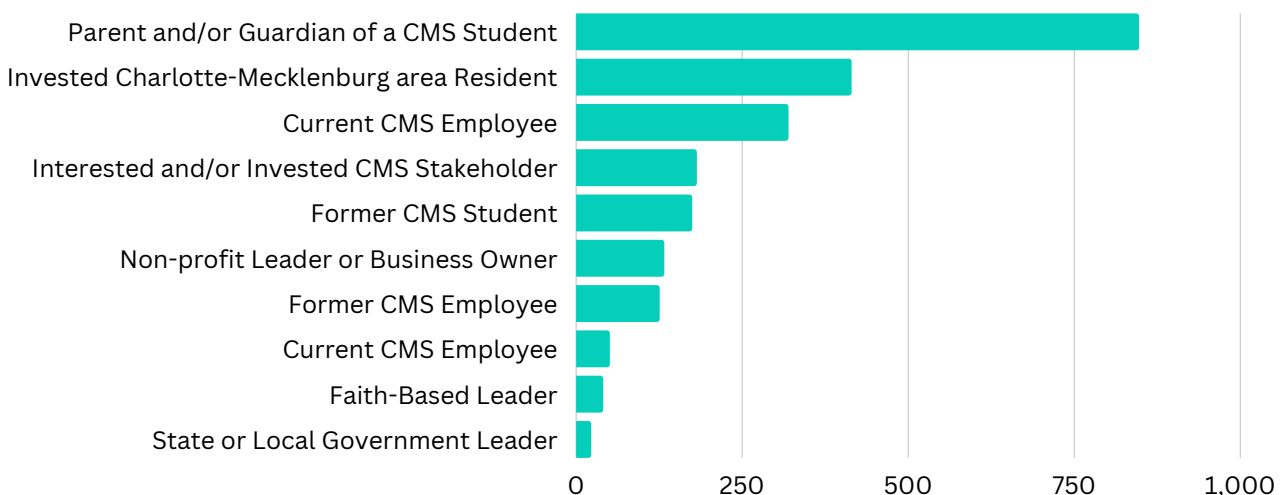
Number of Responses: 1,359

- 847 participants (62%) identify as Parent and/or Guardian of a CMS Student
- 414 participants (30%) identify as Interested and/or Invested Charlotte-Mecklenburg area Resident
- 391 participants (29%) identify as Current CMS Employee
- 181 participants (13%) identify as Interested and/or Invested CMS Stakeholder
- 174 participants (13%) identify as Former CMS Student
- 132 participants (10%) identify as Educational Support Non-profit Leader or Member or Business Owner
- 125 participants (9%) identify as Former CMS Employee
- 50 participants (4%) identify as Current CMS Employee
- 40 participants (3%) identify as Faith-Based Leader
- 22 participants (2%) identify as State or Local Government Leader

62% of survey participants identify as a Parent and/or Guardian of a CMS Student

29% of survey participants identify as a Current CMS Employee

Question 7: This question asked participants to select their category of community member identity. Participants were allowed to select all categories that applied.

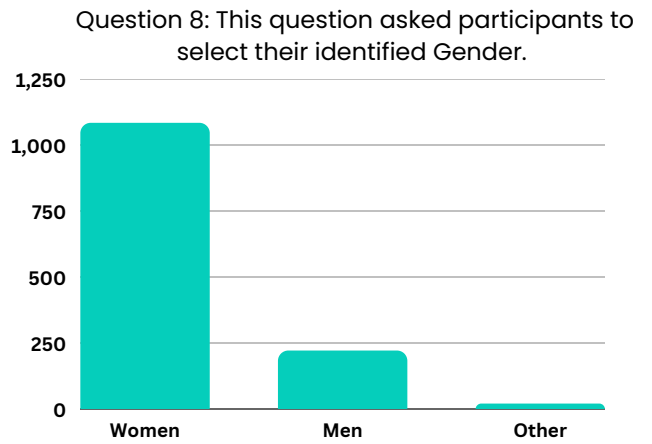


CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Question 8: This question asked participants to select their identified Gender.

Number of Responses: 1,320

- 1,084 participants (82%) identify as Women
- 221 participants (17%) identify as Men
- 20 participants (2%) identify as Other

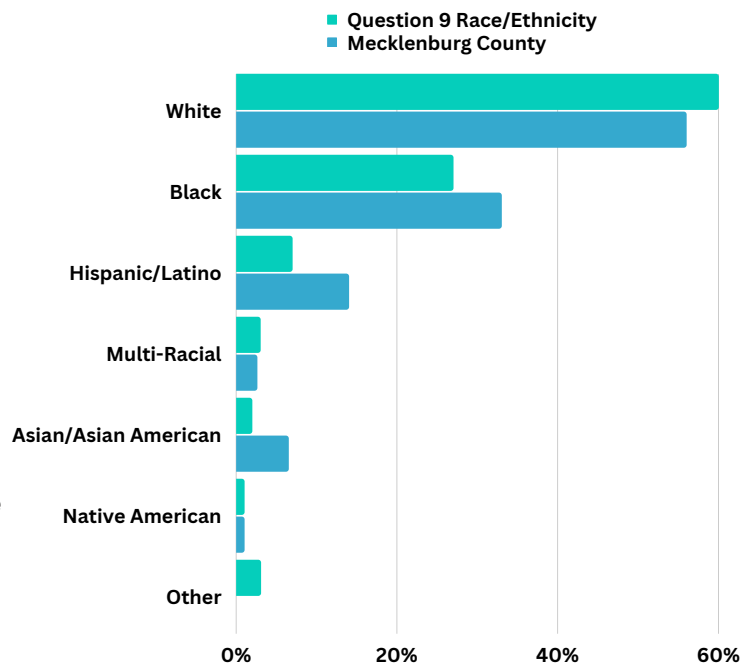


Question 9 of the survey asked participants to identify their race / ethnicity.

Number of Responses: 1,291

- 772 participants (60%) identify as White
- 345 participants (27%) identify as Black
- 96 participants (7%) identify as Hispanic/Latino
- 40 participants (3%) identify as Multi-racial
- 27 participants (2%) identify as Asian/Asian-American
- 10 participants (1%) identify as Native American
- 39 participants (3%) identify as as Other

According to the 2021 U.S Census Bureau report, the racial/ethnic breakdown of Mecklenburg County is: 56.6% White, 33.3% Black, 14.1% Hispanic or Latino, 6.5% Asian, 1% Native American, and 2.6% Multi-racial.



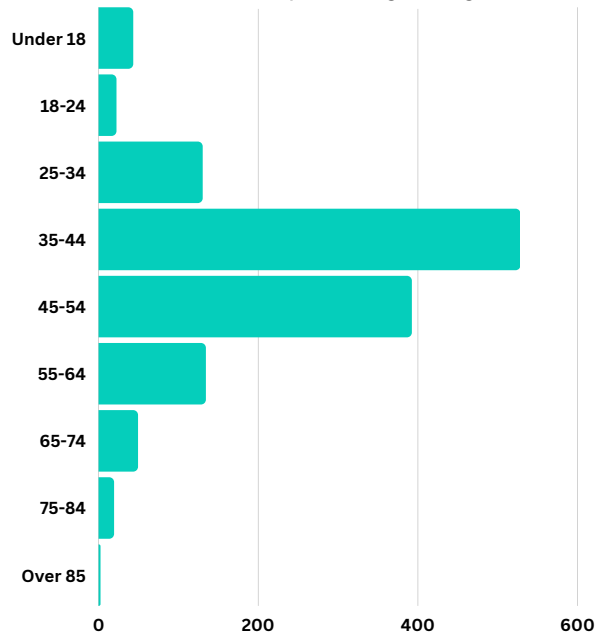
Question 10: This question asked participants to identify their age range.

Number of Responses: 1,318

- 528 participants (40%) are between 35-44 years
- 392 participants (30%) are between 45-54 years
- 134 participants (10%) are between 55-64 years
- 130 participants (10%) are between 25-34 years
- 49 participants (4%) are between 65-74 years
- 43 participants (3%) are under the age of 18
- 22 participants (2%) are between 18-24 years
- 19 participants (1%) are between 75-84 years
- 2 participants (less than 1%) are over the age of 85

With roughly 70% of participants between the ages of 35-54, this reflects that many survey participants may be current CMS parents/guardians/families.

Question 10: This question asked participants to identify their age range.



Stakeholder Interviews

A total of 21 interviews were conducted with various community stakeholders throughout the district over the course of eight (8) weeks. The CMS Board proposed names of different community members, principals, teachers, and staff. Additional names and community contacts were suggested and shared with the Board prior to scheduled outreach for interviews. Interviewees were residents of different districts and were categorized as follows:

- CMS Employee (Non-Teacher)
- CMS Employee (Principals)
- CMS Employee (Staff)
- CMS Parent/Guardian
- CMS Student
- Community Advocates across sectors

Virtual interviews allowed for more flexibility in schedules and all participants consented to interviews being recorded for note-taking purposes only. Interview questions are summarized below, with recurring themes and responses highlighted. Samples of direct quotes are also provided - with anonymity - to protect identities of interviewees.

	Key Audience Type	School/Organization	Board District	Gender	Race
1	Board	CMS Board Member	4	F	W
2	Board	CMS Board Member	at large	F	B
3	Board, Student	CMS Board Member, East Mecklenburg High School	4	M	H
4	Community Advocate	UNCC College of Education	3	M	B
5	Principal	UNC Engineering Early College	3	M	W
6	Principal	Allenbrook Elementary	2	F	B
7	Principal (Retired)	Julius Chambers High School	3	M	B
8	Teacher	Garinger High School	3	M	W
9	Teacher	Palisades High School	6	M	W
10	Teacher	Garinger High School	3	F	W
11	Teacher	River Oaks Academy (Pre-K)	1	F	B
12	Teacher	West Charlotte High School	2	F	B
13	Faith	Friendship Missionary Baptist Church		F	B
14	Non Profit	My Brother's Keeper		M	B
15	Non-profit	Communities In Schools		M	B
16	Non-profit	Generation Nation		F	W
17	Non-profit	DigiBridge		F	W
18	Non-profit	Community Building Initiative		F	B
19	Non-profit	BCBSNC Foundation		M	B
20	Parent, Community Advocate	Private Business		M	B
21	Parent, Community Advocate	Private Business		F	B

Table: List of interviewees' audience type and demographic description.

Stakeholder Interviews

Question 1: What has been your experience with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the school system and supporting education as a whole in Charlotte-Mecklenburg?

Interviewees had a wide range of experiences with CMS acknowledging a variety of reasons as to why they chose to support the school system. A majority of interviewees had multiple connections to CMS and desire clear pathways to continue to support the school system.

- “I am a former CMS student who has returned to the school system as: a mentor, volunteer, parent and STEM advocate for girls in tech”
- “I’m a former teacher, and Principal for 15 years, dedicated to public schools and CMS schools”
- “Retired CMS teacher and youth activist for 22 years”
- “29 years as CMS staff and parent of 3 CMS student”
- “I am a Charlottean, retired principal and local community leader in Charlotte and grandparent of 5 CMS students”

Question 2 Is visibility of a superintendent in the community important to you? Please give examples of what that looks like to you?

Majority of interviewees state that visibility of the superintendent in the community is important however, not at the expense of honing in on the goals and visions that support the quality of life and enhance the educational experience of CMS students. Interviewees noted that visibility in the schools and community are important so parents and students have an opportunity to connect with the superintendent. Additionally, there are several responses suggesting having the superintendent’s goals and vision being visible and accessible would be beneficial as well.

Quotes from interviews:

- “Visibility is important. There has to be a type of leader who prioritizes proximity, and community outreach.”
- “Yes, visibility is important, but in a very specific way, such as reaching out for, includes and listens to student voices. CMS has made good strides by having a student on the CMS board but I would like to have a superintendent who includes student voices in decision-making.”
- “The Superintendent needs to be the chief academic person but in terms of operations, they should be able to designate other people to help with that. For example, be able to communicate what’s going on.”

Question 3 Are there characteristics of the school system that motivate you to be actively engaged around education in your community? If so, what are they?

The desire to see children succeed and interviewees’ relation to Charlotte were the majority of responses to question 3. Interviewees also responded to question 3 giving praise to the teachers and staff of CMS as a major catalyst of motivation of being engaged around education in the community. Seeing the impact of dynamic teachers and staff, motivates others to engage and support CMS as well.

Quotes from interviews:

- “Teachers in CMS are extremely talented and I can see their investment in my kids.”
- “More resources are available in the district than in smaller districts across the state”
- “The diversity of the district”
- “Being a native Charlottean makes me naturally care and be invested in CMS”
- “The support staff of CMS are amazingly caring and approachable. I can visibly see the impact of their work.”

Stakeholder Interviews

Question 4: Are there challenges/barriers that prevent you from being actively engaged? If so, what are they?

For question 4, interviewees highlight that there is not a streamlined process for engagement. Interviewees who are not parents or CMS staff note it takes a lot of research and/or phone calls to learn how to support CMS outside of being a registered volunteer. Additionally, there were suggestions that CMS should create more communication to engage populations who do not speak English as a primary language.

Quotes from interviews:

- “There’s too much red tape and there’s too much work to do as a volunteer.”
- “I don’t know how I’m supposed to plug in.”
- “There needs to be a streamlined communication tool for the entire district”
- “CMS needs to create greater avenues of engagement for non-English speaking families”
- “The district does not make it easy to support their programs all the time. I have to take a lot of time to do the research and see where and how my organization can support instead of a publicly accessible process.”

Question 5: What are the top 3 traits and/or actions of a superintendent that you would like to see reflected throughout CMS? How would these traits and/or actions be beneficial to CMS students?

Based on the majority of interview responses, the top traits and/or actions of a superintendent fall under the following themes :

- Effective Communication
- Commitment
- Competency

A common refrain when answering Question 5 was for a superintendent able to foster strong internal *and* external communication, as well as to create transparency with the public. This would ensure all members of the community remain informed and involved. Interviewees wanted a superintendent who could demonstrate commitment to CMS and the greater Charlotte community. They specifically want to avoid installing a superintendent who may use the role as a short-term stepping stone in their career journey.

Commitment to student success and to improving student outcomes were also strong themes. Lastly, there was a desire to see a superintendent ready to navigate and create systems and processes that ultimately get the job done with visible success and improvements in CMS.

Quotes from interviews:

- “Commitment to being here - priorities, goals and culture become rooted in a way that wants everyone in the district to buy into it; students need consistency and it helps educators become better for the students as well”
- “Listening to students, including student voices. There needs to be a defined process for that which checks in with students about the process itself.”
- “Transparent communication strategy that reflects their own accountability.”
- “Can give a clear charge...someone that is able to help work with and through people to actualize the vision.”
- “We need someone that is results-oriented even if that means having to make hard and unpopular decisions.”

Stakeholder interviews

Question 6: How do you plan to use your influence and leadership to amplify and support the superintendent and their goals for CMS?

Interviewees ultimately plan to leverage their networks, partnerships, and coalitions to elevate the superintendent's goals. Based on the previous responses, as long as those goals are communicated publicly, those invested in CMS want to contribute from their respective lanes and fields.

Several interviewees described the key importance of internal alignment within their organizations and networks, in order to strategize and plan for external alignment with the superintendent's goals and vision. The diversity of interviewees reflect how everyone in the Charlotte community can contribute to the overall success of CMS and the next CMS superintendent.

Quotes from interviews:

- "Staying in the fight. Aligning my work and work of my leadership and next steps as a professional with the fight."
- "Being a consistent and present parent not only for my kid...but for kids that may not have a parent that can do so."
- "Leveraging my network...we have great minds in the business sector. Let's utilize them but let's not worship them."
- "I plan to actively engage with my church congregation to create a process to get us aligned with the superintendent's goals"
- "If the superintendent's goals are outlined, I know how to plug in and connect them to right people who are equally invested in CMS"



Focus Groups and Listening Sessions

Focus groups were held for the following key audiences: Youth (October 12th), Business Leaders (October 12th), Non-Profit Leaders (December 1st) , Faith Leaders (December 2nd and 8th) and Educators (December 3rd). The Listening Sessions and Focus Groups collect qualitative data and impactful narratives of community members. A total of 64 community members participated in the listening sessions and a total of 120 community members participated in the focus groups. In the following section, the question, a summary of major themes and recurring responses, not direct quotes, are listed. Find notes from each focus group linked in the Appendix.

Listening sessions were held on the following dates:

- October 18 (virtual)
- October 27 (in-person)
- November 15 (virtual)

The November 15th listening session targeted members of Charlotte-Mecklenburg’s Spanish-speaking community. Placement and outreach for the listening sessions were coordinated to address common engagement gaps. This included reaching Charlotte’s English as a second language households, Black communities, lower income households, lower educational attainment households, as well as communities historically barred from community engagement.

Question 1 Icebreaker Question –What is one word you would use to describe the ideal CMS Superintendent? Listed below, in no particular order, are words offered during the focus groups and listening sessions from the CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement.



Focus Groups and Listening Sessions

Question 2 What's working? List the strengths of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools that the next superintendent will need to understand and continue to support.

Diversity of families in CMS and diversity of the Charlotte community is a strength identified by community members. Community members want a superintendent able to address the educational needs of diverse groups. This individual should know that what may work for one community or district, may not necessarily be the solution for another.

Community members also highlight the quality of talent CMS educators provide. They want a superintendent able to foster an environment where CMS educators can thrive and develop. The next superintendent should support and enhance the recruitment and retention of quality educators in CMS. Additionally, the ability to partner with local businesses and non-profits is a strength identified by community members. They want a superintendent interested in supporting and leveraging local business and non-profit organizations serving as resources in the community. Community members are aware that a superintendent is not able to address every need, but they are clear they want a superintendent able to source solutions in the community.

- Diversity of the community
- Quality of educators
- Local Partnerships with Businesses and Non-Profit Organizations

Question 3 What are the most critical needs and challenges of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools that the next superintendent will need to understand and address?

Community members note that internal CMS communication, and external communication with the media is a challenge of CMS. Community members also expressed the desire for an internal culture of shared values such as honesty, transparency, equity, and accountability.

Community members discussed the need to improve relationships with the media, and to have positive stories of CMS shared more often with the public. This would serve to elevate the brand and reputation of CMS, as well as help recruit the next superintendent.

Due to the diversity and size of the school district, an equitable approach to managing each unique board district and community was mentioned repeatedly. Community members note that CMS leadership is not always transparent with goals and vision, leading to a lack of trust with the community.

- Internal / External Communication
- Distinct District and Demographic Needs
- Coalition Partnership and Collaboration
- Transparency of Goals and Vision



Image: Young Community Member responds to the Civility Localized icebreaker activity at West Charlotte's Arbor Glen Outreach Center Fall Festival, October 29, 2022.

Focus Groups and Listening Sessions

Question 4 What personal qualities, professional experience, and other skills should the School Board look for in the next superintendent? Is visibility an important attribute in this role?

Community members want a superintendent who is able to be strategic with their decisions and have the community be a part of those decisions (within protocol). This would help re-establish trust. The next superintendent should be able to balance the demands and priorities of the School Board while also getting the job done of supporting CMS employees and students. Supporting CMS employees and students is not a sole responsibility, so community members are seeking a superintendent who knows how to build and develop a strong team internally and externally with coalitions to get it done. While the community expects a certain level of competence with the next superintendent, they want someone who is humble and eager enough to still learn and grow with an ever-changing urban district like Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Visibility is an important attribute as well; the next superintendent should be visible in schools and the community. This must be balanced with not chasing every distraction and an ability to equitably prioritize their time and presence. The community is seeking an individual who has an overall "It-Factor" in their persona; someone able to represent CMS on a state and national platform with pride.

- Systems-thinker
- Strategic decision-maker
- Balance of executing School Board driven priorities and supporting students and CMS needs
- Can build and develop a strong team
- Visible in the community and in the schools
- Has the "It Factor"

Question 5 School districts throughout the country are seeing high turnover for superintendents. What do we need to do in Charlotte-Mecklenburg to recruit and retain a high-achieving superintendent to lead CMS for 5 years? For 10 years?

Recruitment and retention strategies for the next CMS superintendent had some dichotomous perspectives. First, some community members want a CEO with organizational leadership and business savvy proven through leading a large organization. Others want a former educator knowledgeable in educational policy and trends, student achievement, and teacher needs. Some members stated having someone that is familiar with CMS and its history is important, and others claimed having someone come in unbiased would be a better fit for the position.

As mentioned in the previous question, having more positive stories of CMS in the media could be a potential recruitment strategy for the next superintendent. Competitive salary and clear process of how the Board will support and develop the superintendent were commonly mentioned retention strategies.

Additionally, community members suggested a SWOT analysis and focus group of previous superintendents to gain insight and learn ways CMS can improve retention. Conversely, it was mentioned several times that 10 years was somewhat of a stretch goal for retention and there should be milestones check-ins put in place to ensure the role is sustainable over the long term for the next superintendent.

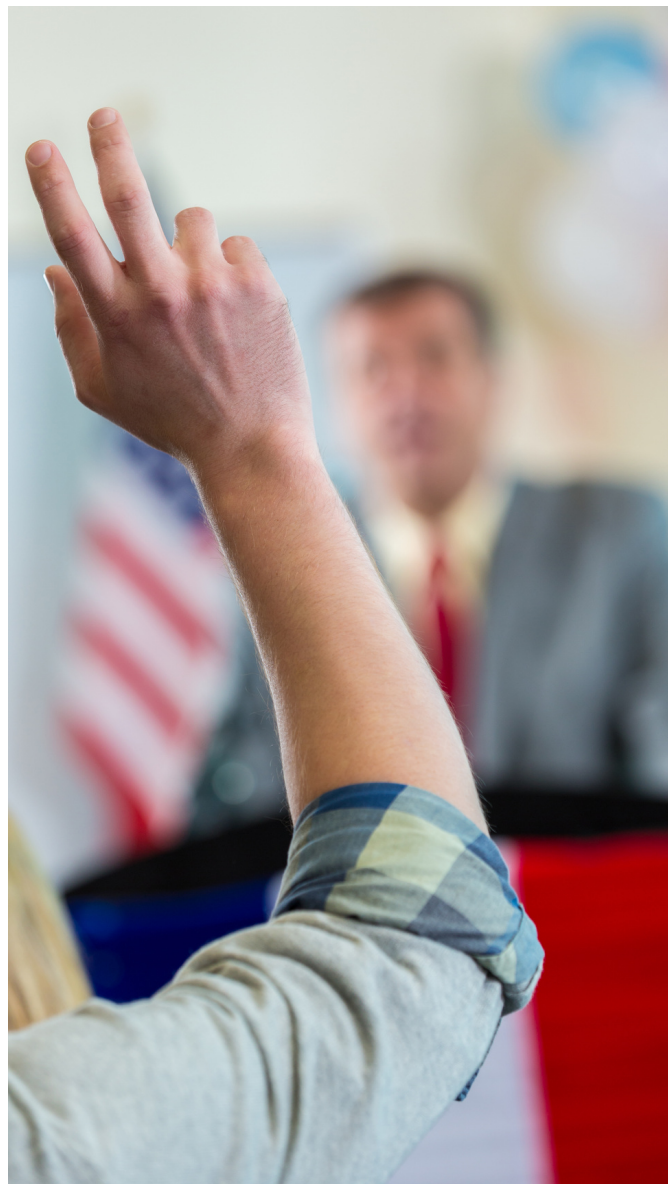
- CEO vs Former Educator
- Internal vs External to Charlotte-Mecklenburg
- Amplify the success stories of CMS in the media
- Competitive salary
- Board support and resources to develop
- SWOT analysis & Focus Group

Focus Groups and Listening Sessions

Question 6 In what ways could CMS and community partners collaborate more effectively to create more equitable and long-lasting success and quality of life for students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg?

Community members eagerly want to be seen and recognized as a vital part of the success of CMS. Community members express that if the superintendent's goals, visions, roles and responsibilities are clearly accessible to the public, they will leverage their relationships and resources to contribute to the success of CMS and the superintendent. The community wants to see the data of what CMS students and their families' needs are and clear instructions and information on how they can address those needs. Community members want to be involved in the beginning stages of the strategy so their perspective and expertise is valued throughout the process. Community members also want the superintendent to have the resources to receive leadership coaching from superintendents in similar districts and see Board support for leadership development.

- Clear definitions of roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability
- Connect with invested businesses and local non-profits from the beginning of the goal and objective development process
- Board supported leadership development
- Leverage relationships
- Identify family needs and address how all partners and community stakeholders can address those needs



Community members eagerly want to be seen and recognized as a vital part of the success of CMS.

Community Voices

Honest opinions from real people from interviews, focus groups and listening sessions.

Black Female, Faith Leader, CMS Grandparent/Guardian

Stakeholder Interview

“Personable, approachable, someone who can relate to people from different backgrounds, someone who knows their audience. Not all audiences are the same. And someone who will make students more comfortable being open and honest”.



White Female, Nonprofit Leader

Stakeholder Interview

“It’s important because it takes a village to support students and schools. It’s important to know the strategic goals of the superintendent. Clear lines of communication for strategic direction and vision.”

Hispanic Female, Non-profit Leader

Spanish Focus Group

“Our Hispanic parents say there is not enough Spanish speaking personnel to interact with at their children’s schools. They also say that they do not understand the educational system and nobody can explain it to them in a language they understand.”



Black Female, CMS Parent/Guardian

Stakeholder Interview

“A leader who has a proven track record of working with students most and worst impacted by education injustice and inequalities and has successfully identified and created sustainable solutions to bridging these gaps in education disparities.”

White Female, CMS Teacher

Stakeholder Interview

“Yes, visibility is important, but in a very specific way, but not about visibility. Reaching out for, includes and listens to student voices. CMS has made good strides by having a student on the CMS board but I would like to have a superintendent who includes student voices in decision-making.”



Community Voices

Honest opinions from real people from interviews, focus groups and listening sessions.



Black Male, Non-profit Leader

Non-profit Focus Group

There has been a great deal of internal process improvement regarding early literacy instruction. This has not shown up on state assessments yet, but good work is happening in the district. The next Supt needs to build upon this foundation and support continued improvement in early literacy.

Hispanic Female, CMS Student

Student Focus Group

“We want a leader that understands our needs as students. We want a curriculum that we can relate to and a leader that can address our mental health and safety.”



Black Male, Faith Leader

Faith Focus Group

“This is a person who can bring diverse sectors of our community together, who’s not afraid of the noise that’s going to happen. This is a person who understands that the system is in crisis...the large number of Black and brown students who are failing state exams, with racial disparities exacerbated by pandemic disruption to learning.”

Asian Female, Non-profit Leader

Non-profit Focus Group

“I would like to see the superintendent to be a former teacher (or has been in the classroom). Definitely transparent, committed to CMS and committed to equitable and just education.”



Black Male, Nonprofit Leader

Stakeholder Interview

“A leader who prioritizes proximity and community outreach. The new one has to prioritize the community in an innovative way. [He/She/They] can’t stay “in the ivory tower.” Young people need to see the superintendent.”

4

Summary of Findings & Recommendations



In summary, it is important to note, that while there was some trepidation surrounding this community engagement process during a highly contentious election season, every focus group, listening session, and interview was conducted with fairness and professionalism. The CMS Community is motivated to implement positive changes to achieve growth and success. Student success and faculty retention are major motivators, and those tuned in to the CMS superintendent search largely desire to work together to achieve shared goals. This in itself is encouraging, and came across loud and clear. With over 200 responses per week, it is clear that people want to be engaged.

There was no clear indication whether people preferred a local or national candidate for the role. In focus groups and listening sessions, there was a mixture of feedback about the Superintendent understanding the ins and outs of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community but wanting someone with a depth of classroom and leadership experience regardless of whether they were recruited locally or nationally.

CMS Superintendent Search Community Engagement Playbook

Recommendations for future outreach

- Engage Spanish speaking community in-person
- Provide translators and sign language interpreters at all in-person and virtual events
- Tabling at in-person community events in the Charlotte's Corridors of Opportunity
- Send survey home with students
- Provide participation incentives like cash, gift cards, or vouchers.
- Provide open facilitation in virtual event settings allowing every participant to speak and participate in the conversation

Desired Characteristics

- Innovative
- Communicative
- Passionate
- Involved
- Responsive
- Mindful
- Productive
- Flexible
- Empathetic
- Good Listener
- Sincere
- Collaborative
- Open to Feedback
- Reliable
- Goal oriented
- Committed
- Knowledgeable
- Servant leader
- Experienced
- Student-centered
- Follow-ship (ability to have influence)
- Charismatic
- Friend-raiser (intentional about developing allies)

Community Desired Superintendent Qualities

- Genuine investment in the Charlotte Community
- Professional at leveraging local partnerships and state level relationships to provide foresight
- Balance between internal and external focus
- Present and visible
- Knowledgeable of educational practices trends and policies and has the mindset for organizational leadership on a macro and micro level
- Understands the unique needs of students from today's generation
- A practitioner of diversity, equity and inclusion and educational justice
- Understands the classroom landscape and the school system landscape
- Holistic understanding of students and their families



Conclusion

Across the country, superintendent turnover is a challenge, however, the current school board is in position to get it right for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. It is clear that people want to see change.

The insights contained within this playbook should guide the new school board to ensure the next superintendent is invested in CMS students and families, community members, non-profit leaders, business leaders, and faith leaders - all who want to be seen as resources for district success.

Diversity is a super power of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community, however it also brings unique challenges to district operations. Community members want a leader who is able to establish a culture within CMS highlighting community-based shared values, consistency with feedback, and continuous improvements.

The ideal superintendent is a leader who is able to build a competent, dedicated team to balance the demands of the role, while addressing achievement gaps and social determinants of health to ensure the well-being of ALL CMS students.

5

Appendix

Media Mentions

- [CMS board appoints new interim superintendent](#) - QCity Metro
- [CMS board swears in five new members](#) - QCity Metro
- [Nooze Hounds: CMS Board of Education Rep Jennifer De La Jara](#) - Queen City Nerve
- [Interim CMS Superintendent Announces Early Departure](#) - Queen City Nerve
- [CMS superintendent to resign in December](#) - QCity Metro
- [Superintendent Search Community Survey Results Presented to CMS Board](#) - WCCB
- [CMS leadership will take shape at Tuesday's school board meeting](#) - WFAE
- [CMS superintendent wish list: What do Charlotte nonprofits want in next education leader?](#)
- The Charlotte Observer
- ['Want to have a say': As CMS superintendent vacancy looms, community shares expectations of new hire](#) - WSOC
- [Listening sessions kick off for search for next CMS superintendent](#) - WCNC
- [CMS Seeks Wider Engagement with Public Input on Superintendent Search](#) - The Charlotte Post
- [CMS moves forward with superintendent search. Here's how to offer your input](#) - The Charlotte Observer
- [CMS Seeks Community Input Before Hiring Process For Next Superintendent](#) - WCCB
- [CMS parent urges families, community members to provide input on search for next superintendent](#) - WBTV
- [CMS Board seeks public's input on new superintendent](#) - WBTV
- [The interim superintendent for CMS steps down in June 2023. School leaders want input on the next permanent one](#) - WCNC

Media Summary

- [Media Coverage Report](#)



Project Documents

[Survey Results Report \(Spanish Audience Segment\)](#)

[Survey Results Report \(English\)](#)

[Raw Survey Data](#)

[Interview Protocol](#)

[Listening Session and Focus Group Notes](#)

[Presentation to the School Board, December 13, 2022](#)

[CMS District Map](#)

Additional Sources

Meet the CMS Superintendent Carousel - WFAE

<https://www.wfae.org/education/2022-11-10/meet-the-cms-superintendent-carousel>

Superintendent Turnover Is a Real Thing. How Bad Is It? - Edweek.org

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/superintendent-turnover-is-a-real-thing-how-bad-is-it/2022/02>

2022 Mecklenburg County Pulse Report

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e0fd5db8babe4f23a7116ec808fc19ce>

QuickFacts - Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mecklenburgcountynorthcarolina/PST045221>



Established in 2018, Civility Localized (formerly Amplify Charlotte) is a minority-owned and woman-owned consulting firm located in Charlotte, NC. Our firm consists of professionals experienced in multiple disciplines, including community outreach planning, community development, marketing, communication, local government policy, public health and public administration. Civility Localized works with governments and nonprofit organizations to enhance their community engagement capacity and increase awareness of special projects.

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