


East Central Kansas
Cooperative
in Education
Interlocal # 614

Focus Groups

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Dr. Marcia Weseman
Kansas Association of School Boards



Notes from the East Central Kansas Cooperative in Education Interlocal # 614 Characteristics Survey and Focus Groups

February 6, 2024
Dr. Marcia Weseman

This report was prepared for the East Central Kansas Cooperative in Education Interlocal # 614. KASB staff conducted focus groups on the 6th of February with administrators, classified staff, certified staff, students, office staff, and parents. The purpose of these sessions was to obtain input for the board regarding characteristics that others recommend for the new superintendent.

Although there are common characteristics that each community and organization desires, there are frequently board and organization-specific characteristics that will separate a candidate from others during the screening process. Our hope is the identified characteristics from the focus groups and the community survey will assist the board and screening team with these unique characteristics in the candidate.

The following questions were asked in each focus group:

- ❖ Describe or list the most important leadership and personal qualities you would like to see in the new superintendent?
- ❖ Describe or list the strengths and the good points of your school district the new superintendent will need to understand and support?
- ❖ Describe or list the most critical needs of your school district the new superintendent will need to understand and support?
- ❖ What single characteristic or quality will separate the best candidate from the other highly qualified candidates who will apply for the superintendent position?

The following report contains recommendations collected from the survey and focus groups. The final decision determining the characteristics to be used to select superintendent candidates will be made by the board of education.

Sincerely,



Marcia Weseman, Ed.D.
Leadership Field Specialist
Kansas Association of School Boards



ECKCE
Interlocal #614
February 6, 2024

Focus Group Schedule

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM	Administrators
8:15 AM – 9:15 AM	Classified Staff
9:45 AM – 10:45 AM	Certified Staff
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Students
2:45 PM – 3:45 PM	Office Staff
4:00 PM – 5:00 PM	Parents
7:00 PM	Board Meeting



Focus Groups - 6

Focus Groups	
Administrators	4
Classified Staff	7
Certified Staff	6
Students	2
Office Staff	4
Parents	3
TOTAL:	26



Describe the most important leadership and personal qualities you would like to see in the new superintendent.

Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
5	Systems thinking - maximize tools available to find solutions, situational awareness
4	Deep experience in sped. Understand systems involved
1	Humility
	Communicator
	Advocacy at the state level
	Knowledge of KS and Federal law
	Relationship focused: sped and gen ed staff, families, students
Stakeholders	
14	Communication skills, Active listener, can have tough conversations with district leaders in 3 different communities, not conflict avoidant, effective communicator in all aspects, quick and timely responses, keeps staff well-informed
7	Know sped law, know KS law
6	Sped experience, has been involved in facilitating an IEP
5	Personable, approachable, builds relationships, Will know staff, will build relationships with staff, will see and hear providers, Solution-focused, healthy discourse, not a bully
4	Know the area and the 3 communities, Understands the uniqueness of each district, Understands dynamics of smaller systems
3	Systems thinker, systems approach, consistent communication with follow through across districts
2	Visible in schools, classrooms, and in meetings providing input and support, hands-on
1	Deep knowledge of sped and early childhood, knowledge base related to sped needs in self-contained programs and the training required and the needs that must be met; progressive regarding early childhood
1	Children First
	Visionary
	Will provide for professional development to ensure appropriate training for best practices
	Won't use position as steppingstone, will make a commitment
	Tech savvy
	Open to change, willing to "stir the pot" – not "this is the way we always done it", think outside the box; won't base decisions on past practices
	Transparency
	Respectful to all levels of employees and care about them as people, recognize their capabilities and unique skills, kind
	Humble and will admit mistakes
	Sees students as individuals, not diagnoses; Advocates for kids and staff
	Collaborative -- Sees multiple perspectives at one time and can process multiple positions, sets of opinions, and experiences



Describe or list the strengths and the good points of the district the new superintendent will need to understand and support.

Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
4	Buildings are empowered to do what is needed for students
3	Great staff and providers, retention is high
2	compliance
1	Excellent recruitment
	Staff feel connected to the buildings where they work
Stakeholders	
7	Good community in our buildings who care
7	Each district has its own sense of community and identity
4	Adequate levels/numbers of paras, admin are trusted to determine need and the freedom to determine need
4	Feel a part of building where working
4	Instructional (integration)coach
4	Salary/benefits align with districts' creating equity
4	Administrators are trusted to hire their own staff, Trust that staff will be professional and do their job – staff is empowered to do their job
2	Great things are happening in buildings, though sometimes in isolation
1	Hard-to-fill positions are filled
1	Early Childhood Center is under renovation and a new universal model implemented
1	Parent engagement group component under development, parents who advocate for their kids are heard and related services are provided
	Staff, including great office staff, great providers
	When asked, resources needed are usually provided
	Resources are on par with other districts and other sped providers
	Pay paras well and considers degrees and experience, COL raises, pays snow days, trying to improve pay, paras receive PTO
	Sometimes we are shown our value
	Inclusive hiring
	Community centered – family ties important
	Students first
	Young/new supts in all 3 districts who want to make improvements-creates opportunity to partner for change
	Strategic plan

Describe or list the most critical needs that the new superintendent will need to understand and address.

Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
5	Support for professional learning for gen ed and sped staff to become more inclusive working together to meet student needs.
4	Recruitment and retention
1	Pair support staff strengths with student needs
	Follow through, avoiding lack of action.
Stakeholders	
6	Retention of staff including team leaders needed to maintain consistency
6	Exec. Dir. Needs to be in buildings and programs...challenge to balance with the logistics of geography
5	Pair support staff capabilities more appropriately with student needs
5	3 Unique communities to navigate relationships with districts and share resources
4	Staff has a lack of connection to coop
3	Scheduling of training (professional learning) leaves programs without support, needed for gen ed and sped staff, Staff support including professional learning is not always provided, more training for all in neuro-diversity
2	Lack of action after meetings
2	Paperwork is stifling
2	Family dynamics can be difficult
1	Can't get a hold of someone to get an answer
1	Need more prioritizing of needs over gatekeeping, lack of equity
1	Scope of education has changed
1	Need more support staff such as instructional(integration) coach
1	Mid-year onboarding nonexistent. No process results in staff placed w/out support.
1	Student situations i.e. foster care can be difficult to find appropriate setting
	Prioritizing local needs has been placed below state advocacy
	Lack of delegation, communication is weak with administrators
	Compensation studied to consider education & experience more fairly.
	Lack of support for students transitioning from elementary programs to middle school
	Recruit quality people: teachers, subs, paras
	Paras are pulled to cover other programs and are required to sub without compensation
	New Director should shadow current director
	There is too much triage because kids are not placed where their needs can be met
	WEBS program (behavior support) needs attention
	More support for social emotional needs is needed
	Need more transition support for students moving into adulthood and expanded vocational programs
	Need more parent engagement support
	Had been a good 'ole boys club with some appearance of nepotism
	Not much diversity except SES, marginalized population is our core
	When parents don't advocate for kids, they may not receive related services, info for parents regarding IEPs, their rights and how to advocate and how to initiate an IEP
	Website



What single characteristic or quality will separate the best candidate from the other highly qualified candidates who will apply for the superintendent position?

Frequency	Response
	Board of Education
4	Deep experience in special education including special ed law and finance, understands the business side of special education
1	Good communicator and relationship focused, will build a positive culture with buildings, districts, and staff.
	Systems thinker/systems approach
	Passion for special education – students first!
	Stakeholders
9	Create a vision and demonstrate out-of-the-box thinking, find new solutions
6	Passion for sped
5	Build positive culture, will build relationships and rapport with districts, visible
4	Good communicator: 2-way, interactive, shares info regarding the law, etc.
3	Students first - compassion
1	Understand diagnoses and needs in our programs
1	Knowledge of sped law and business law, knows the business side of education including finance
1	Experience in sped, lived experience with IEP
	Classroom experience
	Personable, approachable, genuine
	Humble in position and knowledge
	Staff recruitment
	Experience in smaller organizations
	Clear expectations
	Collaborator, team player w/ all parties
	Open to new ideas
	Everyone feels appreciative of and supported by the director
	Teaches instead of preaches – shares the “Why”
	Visionary: can see big picture
	Advocates for sped education, public relations to help increase understanding of sped, will educate the ECKCE board about programs currently provided
	Tech savvy