

Delaware County Intermediate Unit

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SEARCH

STAKEHOLDER REPORT

October 2026

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Introduction

The selection of an Executive Director is one of the most consequential responsibilities of the Delaware County Intermediate Unit Board of Directors. The individual selected will lead a complex regional educational organization serving students, families, school districts, employees, and communities throughout Delaware County. An effective search process therefore requires more than identifying candidates with appropriate credentials and experience. It requires an understanding of the organization they will be asked to lead and the expectations of those who know and experience DCIU from different perspectives.

As part of the search process, McPherson & Jacobson consultants sought input from several important stakeholder constituencies. Separate discussions were conducted with Delaware County superintendents and with DCIU Directors and Cabinet members. In addition, a broader stakeholder survey provided parents, employees, teachers, administrators, students, and others an opportunity to offer their perspectives. The survey generated 171 responses, including substantial written commentary.

Stakeholder input is advisory rather than determinative. It is not intended to represent a vote on the qualifications of the next Executive Director or to suggest that every participant shares the same perspective. Instead, it provides the Board and prospective candidates with a fuller understanding of DCIU—its strengths, the challenges and opportunities ahead, and the leadership qualities stakeholders believe will be important in its next Executive Director.

This report presents the findings from each stakeholder group separately so that the distinct perspectives of those constituencies are preserved. It begins, however, with an Executive Summary identifying themes that emerged across the different sources of input.

Executive Summary

Across the superintendent discussions, DCIU leadership discussions, and stakeholder survey, there was substantial appreciation for DCIU's people, programs, expertise, and potential. Participants described committed employees, important special education and related services, strong career and technical education opportunities, innovative programs, professional development and instructional support, and an organization capable of responding to needs that individual school districts and families cannot always address alone. Directors and Cabinet members also pointed to significant organizational growth, facilities investments, partnerships, and opportunities for continued innovation.

At the same time, several themes crossed stakeholder groups. Communication, relationships, trust, organizational stability, and responsiveness were repeatedly identified as areas requiring the attention of the next Executive Director. Superintendents emphasized the importance of rebuilding and sustaining relationships with constituent districts and ensuring that DCIU understands and responds to their needs. Internal leaders described the need to strengthen organizational culture and systems while managing the complexity that has accompanied significant growth. Survey

respondents similarly emphasized communication, listening, employee morale, retention, and the importance of stakeholders feeling heard and valued.

Staffing and organizational stability emerged particularly strongly. Survey respondents raised concerns about turnover, workload, compensation, caseloads, and morale, while DCIU leaders also identified significant turnover and the resulting questions about organizational and leadership stability. Parents added another dimension to this concern: continuity of staffing can directly affect the experiences of children and families who depend upon relationships with teachers, therapists, and other service providers.

There was also a consistent expectation that DCIU continue to examine its role as a service organization and regional partner. Superintendents expressed concerns about the quality, responsiveness, cost, and value of some services and noted instances in which districts have looked to other intermediate units for assistance. DCIU leaders likewise recognized competition from other intermediate units and the need to strengthen DCIU's value proposition to its member districts. These concerns existed alongside considerable praise for many DCIU programs and employees, suggesting an opportunity for the next leader to preserve successful work while examining where services, relationships, and systems can be strengthened.

Stakeholders also recognized the complexity of the organization. DCIU has experienced growth in programs, facilities, partnerships, responsibilities, and organizational demands. Directors and Cabinet members described the need to balance continued innovation with organizational capacity, stronger infrastructure, effective systems, fiscal and operational discipline, and a healthy organizational culture. Superintendents similarly emphasized fiscal transparency and sensitivity to the financial impact of DCIU services on member districts.

Although constituencies sometimes differed in the experience they emphasized for the next Executive Director, there was considerable agreement about how that person should lead. Stakeholders consistently described a leader who is visible, accessible, trustworthy, transparent, collaborative, decisive when necessary, and willing to listen before acting. They want someone who can build authentic relationships with employees, superintendents, families, students, the Board, and community partners; who recognizes and develops the considerable talent already within DCIU; and who understands the complexity of special education, career and technical education, regional services, operations, and public education.

The stakeholder input therefore does not suggest a mandate for wholesale change. Rather, it describes an organization with significant strengths and significant opportunity. Stakeholders are asking the next Executive Director to understand what is working, listen carefully to those DCIU serves, strengthen areas requiring attention, restore or deepen trust where necessary, and position the organization for its next stage of development.

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Superintendent Stakeholder Report

Ten Delaware County superintendents participated in stakeholder discussions during four Zoom meetings regarding the search for the next Executive Director of the Delaware County Intermediate Unit (DCIU). They appreciated the opportunity to provide direct input and expressed a strong desire for leadership that can bring the county's diverse districts together around their shared commitment to public education. Participants recalled the sense of collaboration and "Delco pride" demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic and believe DCIU can again become a unifying and highly valued regional partner.

Views regarding current programs were mixed. Several participants had difficulty identifying a signature DCIU service and reported using neighboring intermediate units for specialized assistance, professional development, and program evaluation. Others identified special education services—including autistic support and programs for students with multiple disabilities—as providing good-quality support. Career and technical education also offers important opportunities, although participants expressed concerns about tuition costs, waiting lists, student placements, transportation, and the need for a clearer long-term vision.

Communication, transparency, trust, and collegiality were the most consistent themes. Superintendents want DCIU to regard itself as an extension of its member districts and to seek their input before developing programs or making decisions that affect students, staffing, transportation, budgets, and district operations. They called for more regular communication from program leaders, greater openness to constructive feedback, and timely information about personnel and program changes. They also believe DCIU must communicate and market its purpose, accomplishments, and value more effectively so that districts and the broader public better understand the role of an intermediate unit.

Participants requested greater financial transparency and a clearer explanation of how DCIU establishes charges and allocates costs to districts. Concerns were raised about significant cost increases, staffing decisions that were not clearly explained, and comparatively high fees for some services. Some participants recommended a thorough independent review of DCIU's finances and operations. More broadly, they want programs developed from demonstrated district needs, with clear measures of quality, responsiveness, and cost-effectiveness. Several reported that neighboring intermediate units currently provide certain services at lower cost or with greater responsiveness, contributing to a perception that DCIU must strengthen its regional reputation.

Administrative turnover and organizational culture were also identified as concerns. Participants believe frequent personnel changes have weakened continuity, relationships, and confidence, and some perceived a culture that may inhibit candid dialogue and contribute to the loss of talented staff. They emphasized that the next Executive Director must rebuild trust, value employee expertise, accept feedback without assigning blame, retain strong personnel, and draw upon experienced educators throughout the county. They also want leadership that can work effectively with the DCIU Board while maintaining professional independence, clear priorities, and a consistent focus on serving districts and students.

The superintendents strongly favored a proven educational leader with successful superintendent experience, although some indicated that comparable senior-level experience could be considered if a candidate demonstrates a deep understanding of district operations and governance. The ideal candidate will know—or quickly learn—Delaware County, navigate its political and socioeconomic diversity, and serve as a visible coalition builder. Participants are seeking a visionary, accessible, financially knowledgeable, and service-oriented leader who can strengthen programs, support

districts through high-quality professional development, rebuild DCIU's standing among neighboring intermediate units, and create a renewed culture of collaboration and shared purpose.

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Directors/Cabinet Stakeholder Report

The Directors and Cabinet described DCIU as an organization with considerable strengths and significant opportunities for continued growth. They emphasized the dedication and expertise of the staff, the strong working relationships within the Cabinet, and the organization's partnerships with school districts, nonpublic schools, superintendents, and other regional stakeholders. They identified Teaching and Learning, Career and Technical Education, Early Intervention, professional development, coaching, and training as particular areas of strength. They also noted DCIU's ability to develop innovative programs, promote its work effectively, and draw upon a strong sense of Delaware County pride.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that DCIU's rapid programmatic and organizational growth has created new pressures. The expansion of programs, facilities, and properties has increased workloads, operational demands, legal exposure, and organizational complexity. Participants expressed concern that the systems and infrastructure supporting this growth have not always kept pace. They cited the need for more connected internal systems, stronger business-office and registration processes, better use of data, and a clearer understanding of staffing capacity before additional initiatives are undertaken. A well-defined business plan, aligned with the organization's strategic priorities, was viewed as an important next step.

Organizational culture and stability also emerged as important concerns. Significant employee turnover has raised questions about continuity and leadership stability, while participants expressed a desire for stronger relationships, clearer norms, greater internal connection, and a warmer organizational environment. They also identified the need to overcome an "us versus them" dynamic involving CTE and to build a stronger sense of unity across programs and departments.

Externally, the next Executive Director will need to strengthen trust, transparency, and collaboration with member districts. Although DCIU has many strong partnerships, participants recognized that some districts obtain services from neighboring intermediate units. The next leader must listen carefully to superintendents and other stakeholders, understand district needs, clearly demonstrate the value of DCIU's services, and position the organization as the region's trusted and preferred partner. CTE expansion, program costs, waitlists, and the placement of DCIU-operated classes within school districts will require particular attention.

Participants described the desired Executive Director as an experienced, people-centered connector who can unite the organization while making confident and timely decisions. The individual should be trustworthy, transparent, authentic, and capable of strengthening organizational culture, internal systems, and long-term stability. Experience with complex organizations, special education, CTE, underfunded school districts, and equity-focused environments would be valuable. Participants emphasized demonstrated leadership ability over titles alone.

Diversity and representation were also identified as areas requiring attention. Participants expressed concern about the limited representation of people of color within DCIU and indicated that the organization should be a regional leader in equity-focused practices and support for schools. The next Executive Director should understand these concerns and demonstrate a record of working effectively in diverse and economically challenged communities.

Overall, the Directors and Cabinet see DCIU as a talented and innovative organization at an important point in its development. The next leader will inherit strong programs, committed employees, capable administrators, valuable partnerships, and substantial opportunities. Success will require balancing continued innovation with organizational capacity, fiscal and operational discipline, stronger systems, and deliberate culture-building. Participants particularly emphasized the importance of a leader who begins by listening and learning, recognizes the talent already within the organization, empowers effective leaders, and builds the trust necessary to bring DCIU together.

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Stakeholder Survey Report

Overview

As part of the Delaware County Intermediate Unit Executive Director search process, stakeholders were invited to provide input regarding the strengths of DCIU, challenges and opportunities facing the organization, and the qualities and experience they believe should be considered in selecting the next Executive Director. A total of 171 individuals responded to the survey. Parents represented the largest group of respondents, with 98 responses, followed by 39 staff members, 18 teachers, eight administrators, four students, and four respondents identifying with other stakeholder groups. In addition to the structured survey questions, respondents provided substantial written commentary, offering additional insight into their experiences with DCIU and their expectations for its next leader.

Strengths of DCIU

Respondents expressed considerable appreciation for the programs and services DCIU provides to students, families, schools, and communities throughout Delaware County. Special education programs and related services were frequently identified as important strengths. Parents described the value of individualized services, therapies, Early Intervention programs, and the support provided to students with specialized needs. Career and technical education was also viewed positively, particularly the opportunities for students to develop practical skills, obtain certifications, and participate in experiences connected to employment and future careers.

A recurring strength identified throughout the responses was the commitment of DCIU employees. Respondents frequently described staff members as caring, dedicated, knowledgeable, and committed to the students and families they serve. Even when respondents raised concerns about organizational practices, many distinguished those concerns from their positive experiences with individual teachers, therapists, support personnel, and other employees.

Respondents also identified the diversity of Delaware County as an important strength. The county was described as diverse, engaged, resilient, family-oriented, and rich in educational and community resources. Stakeholders indicated that DCIU's ability to serve communities with differing needs and circumstances is an important part of its mission.

Challenges and Opportunities

The most consistent concerns centered on staffing, employee retention, morale, organizational communication, and trust. Respondents described concerns about employee turnover, workload, compensation, caseloads, burnout, and the difficulty of retaining qualified personnel. Several respondents suggested that employees do not always feel sufficiently heard, recognized, or involved in decisions affecting their work.

The issue of employee stability was also raised by parents and families. For them, staff turnover can directly affect continuity of services. Changes in teachers, therapists, and other service providers may require students and families to repeatedly establish new relationships. Consequently, respondents often connected staff recruitment and retention not simply to internal organizational operations, but to the quality and consistency of services provided to children.

Communication emerged as another significant theme. Stakeholders expressed a desire for communication that is timely, transparent, consistent, and two-way. Parents want clear information regarding programs, services, opportunities, and decisions affecting their children. Employees expressed a desire to be informed and consulted before significant organizational decisions are made. Across stakeholder groups, respondents emphasized the importance of listening and providing meaningful opportunities for individuals affected by decisions to offer input.

These concerns were frequently connected to the broader issue of trust. Some respondents described a need to strengthen relationships between organizational leadership and employees, families, districts, and other stakeholders. The responses suggest that improving communication is not viewed simply as an operational matter. Rather, stakeholders see communication, accessibility, responsiveness, and listening as essential components of building and maintaining organizational trust.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of organizational stability and continuity. In addition to concerns regarding employee turnover, stakeholders expressed interest in consistent leadership, preservation of institutional knowledge, and stronger relationships across the organization and with the communities DCIU serves.

Characteristics of the Next Executive Director

When describing the qualities desired in the next Executive Director, stakeholders consistently emphasized communication, listening, collaboration, integrity, visibility, accessibility, and relationship-building. Respondents want a leader who listens before acting, communicates openly, welcomes differing perspectives, and develops authentic relationships with employees, families, students, school districts, and community partners.

Stakeholders also expressed a strong desire for a leader who understands and values employees. The next Executive Director will be expected to recognize the contributions of staff, address issues affecting morale and retention, create opportunities for employee voice, and develop an organizational culture in which individuals feel respected and supported.

Experience and knowledge were also considered important. Respondents referenced experience in K–12 education, special education, career and technical education, Intermediate Unit services, and the management of large and complex educational organizations. The survey responses did not identify one particular professional pathway as an overriding requirement. Instead, respondents emphasized demonstrated leadership ability and an understanding of the range and complexity of services provided by DCIU.

Above all, stakeholders consistently described a leader whose decisions remain centered on students and families. They expressed a desire for an Executive Director who understands that DCIU exists as a service organization and who can balance the needs of students, families, employees, districts, and communities while maintaining a clear focus on improving opportunities and outcomes for children.

Overall Survey Themes

Taken together, the survey responses present a picture of an organization whose programs, services, and employees are highly valued, while also identifying opportunities to strengthen organizational culture, communication, stability, and relationships. Stakeholders appear to be seeking a leader who can build upon DCIU's existing strengths while addressing concerns regarding employee morale and retention, communication, trust, and organizational responsiveness.

The responses suggest that the next Executive Director should be a visible, accessible, collaborative, and service-oriented educational leader who communicates transparently, listens carefully, values employees, develops strong relationships with families and school districts, understands the complexity of DCIU's programs and services, and maintains a consistent focus on students.

These themes provide the Board with an additional perspective to consider alongside the input gathered directly from superintendents, Directors and Cabinet members, and other stakeholder groups as it develops the leadership profile and evaluates candidates for the next Executive Director.

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Overall Conclusion

Taken together, the stakeholder input presents a thoughtful and balanced picture of the Delaware County Intermediate Unit. DCIU is an organization with substantial assets: talented and committed employees, important programs and services, considerable professional expertise, strong community and regional relationships, expanding facilities and resources, and a history of developing programs in response to emerging educational needs. Stakeholders clearly value much of what DCIU does and recognize the important role it plays throughout Delaware County.

The input also identifies important work ahead. Communication and trust need continuing attention. Employee stability and organizational culture matter. Member districts expect services that are responsive, high-quality, competitively priced,

and developed with an understanding of their needs. Families value continuity and communication. Internal leaders recognize that continued growth must be accompanied by appropriate organizational capacity, systems, infrastructure, and fiscal discipline. These are meaningful challenges, but they are also characteristic of a complex organization that has grown and whose stakeholders have high expectations for its performance.

Perhaps most notable is the degree of agreement about the leadership approach stakeholders hope to see next. They are looking for an Executive Director who listens, communicates, builds relationships, earns trust, understands complex educational organizations, values employees, remains focused on students and families, and recognizes that DCIU ultimately succeeds through service to others. They want a leader capable of making decisions and leading change, but also one who takes the time to understand the organization before determining what should change.

For prospective candidates, this stakeholder input should be understood not simply as a description of challenges but as an invitation to leadership. The next Executive Director will inherit an organization with considerable talent, established programs, regional importance, and opportunities for continued innovation and growth. The opportunity is to build upon those strengths while strengthening relationships, culture, systems, and confidence in the organization.

The Board's challenge, therefore, is not to identify a candidate who arrives with a predetermined agenda. It is to identify a leader with the experience, judgment, curiosity, interpersonal skills, and organizational capacity to listen first, understand DCIU and the communities it serves, preserve what is working, address what requires attention, and bring people together around a shared vision for DCIU's future.