



Executive Recruitment and Development

**Cherry Creek School District
Superintendent Search
Executive Summary of Stakeholder Focus Groups**

Prepared for the Board of Education

Final Draft Updated 10/7/2026

Phase II — Stakeholder Input

Fourteen focus groups

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SCOPE AND METHOD

About This Summary

This narrative summary synthesizes fourteen stakeholder focus groups conducted during Phase II of the Cherry Creek School District Superintendent Search. Participating groups included Teachers, Building Administrators, Central Office Administrators, the District Leadership Team, High School Students, Voices of Color, the Cherry Creek Schools Foundation, the District Accountability Committee, Leadership Cherry Creek, the Long-Range Planning Committee, the Parents' Council, the Medical Advisory Board, the Special Education Advisory Council, and Non-Licensed Staff (paraprofessionals, grounds and maintenance, and transportation). Online survey results are reported separately and are not reflected here.

Each group responded to the same five questions. This document reports, for each question in turn, the themes that recurred across groups and what those themes imply for the Board's decisions. Direct quotations are drawn from facilitator notes as recorded.

The five employee groups that participated account for the largest share of the recorded input based on number of participants. Voices of Color represented the largest single stakeholder group while the Special Education Advisory Council was the smallest. Findings described here as widely shared reflect themes raised independently by unconnected groups rather than emphasis within any single session. Where a theme appears in only one group, that is noted.

QUESTION ONE

Strengths of the District

Every group described Cherry Creek as a district of genuine and sustained quality, and the language was remarkably consistent: a destination district, a place families relocate to and employees stay in, with a reputation built over seven decades. Strengths were characterized as "sustained excellence and strong national/state reputation over 70+ years" and "legacy families whose children are now parents in the district." One group, unprompted, called it "a no-joke district."

Beneath the reputation, four assets recurred. The first is people: twelve of fourteen groups named the quality and commitment of teachers and staff, and most pointedly, called them "the greatest resource, often overlooked by administration." One group added that classified staff, who "make the wheels turn," are often overlooked. Educators were described as "fully invested in children," and the Aspiring Educators program was credited with cultivating the next generation of teachers. The second is community financial support, described repeatedly through the district's history of passing bonds and mill levy overrides — more than a billion dollars. The third is structural: neighborhood schools, strong feeder systems, and site-based management that allows schools and departments meaningful autonomy. The fourth is diversity, described as not a demographic fact, but an operating strength, and noting the district serves "a wealth of economic and cultural diversities," and more than 130 spoken languages. Also named was diversity of race, religion, culture, and LGBTQ+ identities present in the district.

Programs and pathways drew consistent praise, particularly the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus, dual enrollment, gifted and talented programming, and career pathways. One group was the most enthusiastic in the entire study and the most specific, naming the innovation campus, DECA, leadership programs, college credit, and resume and interview preparation. A service infrastructure that few districts can match, including a nurse in every school, dedicated mental health resources, and a marked decrease in student suicides since 2018 was also identified.

Two qualifications run beneath the praise. The first is tense. Several groups described excellence in the past rather than the present — "historically placing kids first," and listing the Board of Education itself among the district's strengths only "in prior years." The second is perspective. Some described an organization with "no siloed departments" and "autonomy and trust at department level," while others described inconsistency between buildings and a widening distance from the district office. Both accounts may be accurate at different altitudes of the organization.

QUESTION TWO

Characteristics the Next Superintendent Should Have

This question produced the clearest consensus in the study. Every group named integrity, and nearly all led with it. One facilitator recorded that integrity was "named as the single most repeated theme given events of the past year." What distinguishes this finding is that stakeholders did not leave integrity abstract. They defined it behaviorally: do what you say and take accountability when you don't; do not crave the spotlight or treat Cherry Creek as a steppingstone; own accountability and "speak the truth." One group tied integrity directly to transparency, observing that "what staff knows and what staff hears are different things," and asked for meaningful communication to staff rather than "fluff." Be, as one group put it, "strong enough to lead through cultural and political fallout without being co-opted by existing dynamics." Another group paired integrity with honesty, humility, and servant leadership, and added a concrete test: avoiding "real or perceived conflicts of interest in personnel decisions and appointments," a concern that echoes another group's questions about connections among senior positions.

Ten of fourteen groups required an educator's background, and four went further by naming what they did not want. Two groups recorded "concern raised about non-educator leaders (business, military) losing sight of students." A third asked for an "educator at heart with direct classroom or school-level experience; not a business-world hire." A fourth wanted "genuine love of children; not a business executive profile." Groups also asked for breadth across grade levels, though they disagreed about where the current blind spot lies — one group said elementary-heavy leadership creates gaps at the secondary level, while another argued elementary experience is the undervalued credential.

Visibility was named by nine groups, and unusually, stakeholders specified what would count as evidence. One group suggested the superintendent "spend full days subbing at different grade levels, not just 10-minute drop-ins." Another asked for presence in schools "without the communications team and camera crew." A third set the bar at ordinary approachability: staff should feel comfortable saying hello in the hallway. A fourth offered a benchmark from experience, praising a previous superintendent who "attended all of our meetings, listened, and told us how concerns would be addressed."

Humility recurred with unusual insistence, particularly from one group, whose notes record "humble and not in search of headlines," "humility," and "no ego" as separate entries, along with listening before acting and "discernment of what is really important and what are shiny objects." Another group extended the idea to cultural humility and curiosity about people and their cultures and asked for a leader who enters "with an open mind rather than predetermined conclusions." Nine groups asked for composure under pressure, and several converted that into a concrete screen: one group wanted "someone who has gone through something really hard and succeeded," and another considered prior experience turning around a district with a trust problem essential.

One group set out the most specific equity standard in the study, and it is framed as a record to be demonstrated by candidates rather than a value to be stated. A leader who is "actively anti-racist, not merely non-racist," with "a demonstrated record of anti-racist action rather than lip service to equity" was highlighted. A deliberate plan to recruit, retain, and develop a pipeline of leaders and educators of color so that the workforce better reflects the student population was also a priority. These requests extend themes raised elsewhere — another group described the district as "a flagship for equity work in the western US" and named belonging for staff of color as a priority — but no other group stated them as hiring criteria.

QUESTION THREE

Critical Issues to Prioritize

Fiscal concern appeared in all fourteen groups, but almost never as a claim that the district lacks money. The consistent claim is that money is reaching the wrong places. One group described funds "spent on outside consultants and programs while special ed paras and interventionists were cut." Another described "teachers spending personal money while large administrative contracts are paid out." A third noted departments that grew "from 3–5 people to 15" without a clear line to student outcomes, and another described the top of the district as "heavy," with administrators receiving "perks that the hardest workers don't get." A fourth summarized the perception plainly: "the district has significant funds; families don't feel it reaching classrooms." Another group asked for fiscal responsibility and for budget decisions that reflect equity priorities, including equitable treatment of feeder systems. Alongside this, groups asked for realism about constrained state funding, with one group observing that "the next five years won't be like the last 75."

Rebuilding trust was named by twelve groups and is the emotional center of the study. One group described trust "broken at multiple levels — staff, community, between district office and schools" and called the distance between the district office and schools "at an all-time high." Four groups independently described that same disconnect, and three asked for something strikingly basic in an organization of this size: a published, knowable chain of command so people know whom to approach.

Staff well-being and retention were raised by eleven groups, and the specifics were corroborated from outside the employee voice, which strengthens them considerably. One group cited declining real wages and rising insurance premiums. Another called the benefits situation "deplorable and shameful." A community group, not employees, independently reported that the district opted out of Colorado family leave and that health insurance costs rose roughly thirty percent with reduced coverage. Another non-employee group, asked about district priorities, raised teacher pay and insurance without being prompted. One group extended the concern to support staff pay and equity among employee groups and offered the starkest description of the insurance burden in the study: "people are working only for their health care."

One group cited educator retention and the need for safe, supportive spaces for educators of color. It also asked that principals be held accountable for personnel decisions, citing concerns about the non-renewal of teachers of color, and that the superintendent act decisively when principals underperform — a request that parallels another group's call to remove underperforming administrators.

Special education emerged as the most under-recognized priority. It was named by only four groups, but those four supplied the most operationally specific evidence in the entire study. One group reported that budget cuts eliminated many mild-to-moderate paraprofessional positions, that students who previously had one-to-one support are now sharing aides, and that paras are "overworked, some experiencing physical harm." Another called it a crisis and noted that specialized instructional staff had already left mid-year. A third named the specific vacant disciplines — speech, occupational and physical therapy, psychology, and behavioral health. Common among many groups was the notion that paraprofessional pay lags behind other districts and that they need to be supported and valued.

Several other issues recurred. Communications failure was named by ten groups, described less as messaging preference than as an operating deficiency: long unread Friday emails, unannounced successes, and a community that learns district news from media and social platforms. Equity and disproportionality appeared in nine groups, and one group extended it to belonging for staff of color, not only students; another named

racial disproportionality as a priority and asked for the next superintendent to challenge inequitable assumptions, decisions, and systems. A third framed equity in terms of facilities and programs across all campuses. Declining enrollment appeared in five, with only one group willing to name the likely consequence — preparing for school closures — a position directly at odds with another group, which lists the absence of closures as a point of pride. Four groups noted the absence of any district policy on artificial intelligence and educational technology.

Three items surfaced in a single group each and are recorded here because they are consequential rather than common. One group raised concerns about connections among senior positions and the possible absence of a formal nepotism policy. A second described "a fearful community at this time because of family situations involving parents being taken," and asked for a leader who understands "the humanity behind children who have a parent taken every day." A third observed that security investment concentrates on high schools while risk increasingly reaches elementary buildings.

QUESTION FOUR

Community Draws for Candidates

This question produced the closest agreement in the study and the least conflict. Ten groups named the mountains and the outdoor life that comes with them — skiing, hiking, fishing, camping, and year-round access. Nine named the combination that defines the Front Range for newcomers: a metropolitan area of roughly two million people that still, in one group's phrase, feels like "a small town in a big city." Nine named diversity and cultural openness, and several observed that much of the community has itself relocated here, which makes it unusually welcoming to arrivals. One group emphasized safety, describing an area of choice and a great place to raise children, where most people want what is best for kids. Weather and four distinct seasons recurred throughout.

Groups closer to the profession described draws of a different kind. One group pointed to the district as "a flagship for equity work in the western US" with "room to lead boldly," and to a culture in which "leaders will be pushed and matched with energy at every level." Another noted that Colorado's politically balanced climate is an advantage for a superintendent navigating national pressures, and that the district's business and industry partnerships are already built rather than aspirational. A third offered the most practical framing available to a recruiter: the district is the largest employer in Arapahoe County.

The strongest recruitment language, however, treated the job itself as the draw. One group described "the opportunity to return a nationally recognized district to greatness," adding that the "groundwork already laid by the community" means this is "not a rebuild from scratch." Another called it "a phenomenal opportunity for a skilled leader." For a candidate motivated by consequence rather than comfort, this is more persuasive than scenery.

Cost of living is the one factual disagreement in the study, and it should be handled candidly. One group flagged housing as "a real barrier to consider." Another said real estate is "out of control" and noted grocery costs above the state norm. A third countered that the area is "more affordable than Boulder or other parts of Denver for comparable school quality," and a fourth simply described housing as affordable. These positions likely reflect different vantage points rather than different facts.

QUESTION FIVE

Guidance to the Board of Education

Eleven of fourteen groups asked the Board to open, broaden, or explain the search process. This is the most widely shared position in the entire study, and it is notable because it unites groups that disagree with one another about nearly everything else. One group asked the Board to name more than one finalist, observing that a single-finalist announcement "feels like a predetermined choice," and noted pointedly that "building-level principal hires involve more stakeholder voices than the superintendent search currently does." Another asked for principals, teachers, classified staff, and community members on interview panels, and for at least one student on each panel representing all six communities. A third proposed geographically distributed open forums with Board members attending separately as listeners rather than as a panel. Even a group that otherwise defends the district vigorously asked the Board to "clearly explain why there are no plans for public participation in the selection process" and warned of "bad optics and negative public opinion about this search process that the Board needs to address."

Eight groups raised the Board's own credibility. One group was the most direct, expressing low confidence in the current Board's ability to make this hire well, and asking members to "quit infighting." Another noted that two sitting members selected the previous superintendent and that "process credibility is at stake," and asked the Board to "reflect on what questions the Board failed to ask in prior years and build those into this process." A third stated that the Board is "currently distrusted by teachers and community." A fourth asked the Board to "admit you have to regain our trust." Another group framed the same concern inwardly, asking members to "examine own biases" and to "seek out silenced voices, not just the loudest ones in the room." Only one group offered unqualified support, describing "a very strong Board who work to find the gaps."

Beneath the process guidance lies the study's central unresolved question: what the next superintendent is being hired to do. Groups closest to district leadership urged continuity. One group warned against reacting "to media noise by dismantling what's working." Another asked the Board to "separate the public noise from the reality of the district" and to "name the fact that a small number of people have caused a very large problem for all of us." A third went furthest, stating that the "district leadership team needs to stay intact." School-based groups urged the opposite. One group asked that all eleven cabinet members be evaluated, not only the superintendent, and that the Board "ask hard questions about who knew what and when." Another asked for the "backbone to make hard personnel decisions and remove underperforming administrators." A third asked for a superintendent "willing to acknowledge what happened, not bury it." A fourth asked the Board to "have the courage to disrupt the status quo leadership," and asked for an equity audit of Human Resources practices which tracks proximity to the central office rather than politics. A fifth asked the Board to look for a candidate who would change the district leadership team, citing "low morale because of leadership at the top," to choose someone willing to seek feedback from employees.

The same split shapes the question of an internal or external hire. Four groups were explicit in preferring an outside candidate, one citing "a current culture of promoting friends" and another asking the Board to move away from "who you know" toward "what you know" by considering an outside candidate who has worked in classrooms. Another was the most categorical group in the study, urging the Board to "consider only external candidates if the Board is serious about breaking the cycle that has led to this point." Three groups leaned internally, citing the district's record of growing its own leaders. One of these made an urgency argument for historical knowledge, warning that "someone without historical context will face a steep lift and the district may not have time to wait." Two groups declined the framing altogether and proposed a standard instead —

one asked to "hire the best candidate instead of internal/external," and the other held that an internal candidate is acceptable "only if genuinely the best candidate, not as an easy off-ramp." A group favoring an external hire made a parallel point from the other side, cautioning against selecting a candidate "merely because the candidate is the 'easy' choice."

Finally, three groups surfaced calendar facts that interact. Four of five Board seats are up for election in November, which one group noted ties the chosen candidate to the following election cycle. Another reported that an operational review is expected to conclude in December and twice urged that its findings inform the search. A third flagged "mid-year transition risk with a January start," and the investment required to hold trust through a handover.

Prepared by McPherson & Jacobson, L.L.C., Executive Recruitment and Development, as consultant to the Cherry Creek School District Board of Education. Findings reflect fourteen stakeholder focus groups conducted during Phase II of the search process. Online survey results are reported separately.



Executive Recruitment and Development

**Cherry Creek School District
Superintendent Search
Executive Summary of Online Survey Results**

Prepared for the Board of Education

Final Draft Updated 10/7/2026

Phase II — Stakeholder Input

1,624 survey submissions · August 24 – September 11, 2026

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SCOPE AND METHOD

About This Summary

This narrative summary synthesizes the online stakeholder survey conducted for the Cherry Creek School District superintendent search. The instrument drew 1,624 submissions between August 24 and September 11, 2026, in English (1,600), Spanish (18), Dari (2), Chinese (2), and Amharic (2). Findings from stakeholder focus groups are reported separately and are not reflected here.

Respondents identified their primary connection to the district as parents of current students (54 percent), staff members (39 percent), other (4 percent), parents of former students (2 percent), community members (1 percent), and students (under 1 percent). Disaggregated results are reported for the two groups exceeding five percent of the sample: parents of current students (873 responses) and staff members (617 responses).

The survey combined multiple-choice selections, four-point rating scales, and constructed-response questions. This document reports, question by question, the themes that recurred, the figures that carry them, where parents and staff diverge, and what each finding implies for the Board's decisions. Quoted language is respondents' own, as recorded.

Interpretation note: this was an open, self-selected survey rather than a probability sample, so the results describe the people who chose to respond and should not be read as a broader opinion. Students, community members, and parents of former students responded in numbers too small to disaggregate. Percentages on the critical-issues and characteristics questions reflect multi-select items and therefore total more than 100 percent.

SURVEY QUESTION ONE

How Stakeholders Feel About the District

Asked for the one word that best describes how they feel about the district, respondents produced a vocabulary that is genuinely split rather than mixed. The largest terms in the combined response are proud, concerned, hopeful, disappointed, and conflicted, with satisfied, frustrated, uncertain, worried, and good close behind. Pride and dismay appear at nearly the same scale, and several of the most frequent words — conflicted, uncertain, unsure — name an ambiguity rather than a demonstrative position.

The two disaggregated groups arrive at the result from different starting points. Parents' most frequent words lead with good, hopeful, and disappointed, followed by great, satisfied, concerned, and positive — an evaluative vocabulary about service received. Staff lead with proud, hopeful, and disappointed, followed by concerned, conflicted, frustrated, uncertain, and skeptical, with embarrassed and betrayed appearing at smaller scale. Staff language is more invested and appears more internalized.

SURVEY QUESTION TWO

Strengths of the District

Asked to name three strengths that candidates should know about, respondents produced a consistent rank order. The quality and dedication of teachers and staff was the single most frequent theme, with respondents describing staff as dedicated and highly qualified and noting long tenures.

Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging followed, framed overwhelmingly as an asset rather than a demographic fact — strength in diversity, commitment to valuing diversity, and support for multilingual learners.

Community and family engagement came next, described through invested parents, strong partnerships, and a tradition of support. Academic excellence and achievement, breadth of programs and opportunities, resources and facilities, and reputation and tradition completed the list.

The programs cited were specific: Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, concurrent enrollment, career and technical pathways, the innovation campus, athletics, fine arts, clubs, and school-choice options. Respondents also named the district's funding position, facilities, technology, and pay scale as strengths in their own right.

The two segments weigh this question differently. Parents rank leadership, governance, transparency and integrity markedly higher as a strength than the full pool does, and they add whole-child supports — mental health services and campus safety — as a distinct theme. Staff do the opposite: they rank diversity, equity and inclusion substantially higher than the full pool, and they rank leadership, governance and integrity the lowest of any segment. Where staff do credit leadership, they credit it at the building level rather than the district level. Staff also extend credit explicitly to classified and support staff, not only teachers, and cite the teacher pay scale as the best in the area.

SURVEY QUESTION THREE

Perceptions of District Performance

Respondents rated seven operational facets of the district on a four-point scale. The results are notable less for their ranking, which is stable across every segment, than for their spread: the highest-rated facet sits near 2.8 while the two lowest sit below 1.75, a gap of more than a full scale point within the same instrument.

Operational facet	All	Parents	Staff
Student achievement	2.77	2.74	2.82
Preparing students for college and career	2.75	2.58	2.95
Relationships with families	2.43	2.38	2.54
Communications	2.39	2.50	2.26
Relationships with staff members	2.15	2.14	2.20
Transparency	1.63	1.71	1.55
Financial management	1.43	1.41	1.42

Weighted averages on a four-point scale. All respondents (1,624), parents of current students (873), staff members (617).

Financial management is the lowest-rated facet in every segment, and the figures are nearly identical: 1.41 among parents and 1.42 among staff, against 1.43 overall. That convergence matters. The usual explanation for a low internal score — that employees judge management more harshly than families do — does not apply, because the two groups landed within one one-hundredth of each other. Transparency is the second-lowest facet at 1.63 overall, with staff harsher (1.55) than parents (1.71).

Instruction fares considerably better. Student achievement is the highest-rated facet overall at 2.77, and staff rate preparation for college and career highest of anything in the survey at 2.95, against 2.58 from parents. The one reversal in the table is instructive: staff rate the district's relationships with families higher (2.54) than parents rate that same relationship (2.38), and parents rate communications higher (2.50) than staff do (2.26). Each group is more satisfied with the district's treatment of the other than with its treatment of itself.

SURVEY QUESTION FOUR

Critical Issues to Prioritize

Respondents selected the three most critical issues from a list of thirteen. Financial management ranked first overall at 49.19 percent and first among staff at 61.91 percent — the highest single figure anywhere in the survey. Staff placed recruitment and retention second at 42.30 percent. Parents ordered the list differently, leading with teacher quality at 39.28 percent and financial management at 39.16 percent, effectively tied, then academic outcomes, college and career readiness, and school safety.

Critical issue	All	Parents	Staff
Financial management	49.19%	39.16%	61.91%
Staff recruitment and retention	32.81%	26.81%	42.30%
Academic outcomes	32.63%	35.31%	27.71%
Teacher quality	30.19%	39.28%	18.64%
College and career readiness	22.94%	30.77%	12.97%
School safety and security	22.00%	28.55%	14.10%
Special education services	20.88%	16.08%	28.20%
Diversity and engagement	20.13%	17.83%	22.37%
Communication	17.50%	13.87%	21.88%
Family and community relations	17.13%	14.80%	18.48%
Mental health services	13.94%	13.75%	14.26%
Social emotional learning	12.31%	14.22%	10.53%
Facilities and grounds	6.19%	6.99%	5.02%

Respondents selected three of thirteen options, so columns total roughly 300 percent.

Four divergences in this table are large enough to garner specific attention. Teacher quality is a parent priority at 39.28 percent and a staff priority at 18.64 percent. School safety is nearly twice as urgent to parents (28.55 percent) as to staff (14.10 percent). Special education services reverse the pattern, at 28.20 percent among staff against 16.08 percent among parents. College and career readiness is a parent priority at 30.77 percent and a staff priority at 12.97 percent — although staff rated the district's current performance on that facet highest of anything in the survey, which suggests they see it as already handled. Facilities ranked last in all three columns.

The constructed-response follow-up named five recurring additional priorities: fiscal stewardship and spending priorities, with repeated calls for financial transparency and reduced spending outside classrooms; trust, transparency and communication, framed as rebuilding credibility and organizational integrity; family and community engagement; academic rigor, curriculum and outcomes, with college and career readiness among the most repeated exact phrases; and staff pay, morale and retention, with morale described as declining and experienced staff lost following layoffs.

Parents added two priorities of their own. Special education and learner supports drew some of their most frequent comments, spanning individualized education program services, neurodiverse students, and gifted and talented programming. Student behavior, discipline and safety was notably elevated among parents, with calls for continued security investment and for genuine transparency about safety and behavior

incidents. Staff added equity and consistency across schools, citing disparities in educator quality, physical safety, and building resources, and were specific about service delivery: removing paraprofessional support from buildings was singled out as having a significant negative effect, and staff described special education staffing as under-supported. Staff also framed community engagement as a partnership that has eroded, citing a need to more frequently invite parents to be directly engaged.

SURVEY QUESTION FIVE

Characteristics the Next Superintendent Should Have

Respondents selected five characteristics from a list of twenty-three. Integrity ranked first in every segment and by a wide margin: demonstrates high integrity and ethics and leads by example drew 57.25 percent overall, 57.58 percent among parents, and 55.92 percent among staff. No other characteristic reached 40 percent in the combined pool. Taking responsibility and being accountable (35.94 percent) and placing student needs above anything else (35.88 percent) followed, then a background in public education (33.56 percent), commitment to equitable access (29.38 percent), valuing the whole child (27.00 percent), and using data to make informed and transparent decisions (26.25 percent).

The widest segment gap in the entire survey appears here. A background in public education drew 47.81 percent among staff and 23.66 percent among parents — a twenty-four-point difference, and the second-ranked characteristic for staff overall. Staff also weighted equitable access (35.33 percent against 24.59 percent) and time spent in classrooms (28.20 percent against 16.78 percent) considerably higher. Parents weighted safety and security far higher (26.81 percent against 13.94 percent), along with placing students first and using data transparently.

What respondents declined to prioritize is equally informative. Previous experience as a superintendent finished last overall at 8.63 percent, below valuing school autonomy (9.88 percent), adapting to changing circumstances (9.81 percent), resolving conflict with dignity (10.31 percent), and maintaining a future-focused vision (10.81 percent). Respondents want an educator, not necessarily a sitting superintendent, and they rank character above credential.

The constructed-response follow-up sharpened the picture. Listening, accessibility and visibility in schools drew the most pointed language in the dataset, with staff asking for a leader frequently visible in buildings who authentically listens to the people closest to the work with students. Community engagement and relationship building followed, with respondents seeking a superintendent who is genuinely part of the community. Empathy, humility and emotional intelligence recurred, framed as the ability to admit error and rely on a team. Cultural competence and understanding of the district's growing communities of color completed the shared list. Parents added two of their own: strong fiscal and operational management, and a leader who is apolitical and free of personal agenda, with explicit concern about hiring someone easily drawn into partisan or ideological disputes.

SURVEY QUESTION SIX

Community Draws for Candidates

Asked to name three things that might encourage a candidate to relocate, respondents produced a stable and unsurprising list, with one exception worth noting. Outdoor recreation and natural beauty ranked first. The strength and reputation of the school district itself ranked second — ahead of weather and climate, ahead of diversity of people and cultures, ahead of community character, and ahead of location and access to metropolitan amenities.

The two segments differ only at the margin. Parents added compensation and district resources to the list; staff added the regional economy, jobs, and professional opportunity. Both retained the same top three in the same order.

SURVEY QUESTION SEVEN

Guidance to the Board of Education

The final question invited any additional considerations for the Board, and 1,011 respondents answered it — a participation rate on an open-ended question that itself indicates authentic engagement. Rebuilding trust, culture and morale after the events of the past year was the dominant theme by a wide margin. Among staff it accounted for nearly a quarter of all comments and produced the largest single-theme gap over parents in the dataset. Staff asked for a leader who will be transparent about the district's actual condition, who values the people in it, and who acknowledges the trust problem among employees rather than managing around it.

Search-process transparency and stakeholder involvement ranked second overall. Respondents called for an open process, candidate forums, and the deliberate inclusion of critical voices rather than only safe and supportive ones. Staff added a request for timely communication and input into candidate selection, along with a willingness on the Board's part to hear perspectives that present challenging ideas — and raised a specific concern that the search timeline would not produce a pool of qualified and experienced candidates.

Accountability and board governance ranked third, and its character is distinctive: a substantial share of respondents directed their comments at the Board itself rather than at the search, asking the Board to hold itself accountable, rebuild trust with the community, and regain public confidence. Selecting an internal candidate versus an external candid ranked fourth and was frequently raised but rarely resolved. The plurality urged fairness to every candidate, stressing that all qualified applicants should have an equal opportunity while cautioning that a superintendent who does not respect the district's existing culture and success will struggle. Where a preference was stated outright, those favoring an outside candidate for fresh perspective and those favoring an internal candidate for continuity were roughly equal in number.

Parents ordered this question differently, and the difference is significant. Politics and ideology rose to first place among parents, up sharply from the full pool, with the dominant framing being "leave politics out of it" rather than advocacy for any position. Rebuilding trust remained near the top but lower than in the full pool, and parents framed trust as needed inside the district as much as between the district and the community. Fiscal accountability followed, with parents asking for a candidate who can repair a perception of irresponsible spending, then the role of the Board itself, citing low confidence in current governance, insufficient oversight, and limited engagement with marginalized neighborhoods. Parents closed with school climate, behavior and safety, including a call for a district-wide cell phone policy, limits on artificial intelligence in classrooms, and screening candidates for ethical track records. Staff, for their part, asked for financial competence paired with shared sacrifice in budget reductions, and for money allocated to classrooms rather than to central initiatives and administration.

SEGMENT COMPARISON

Where Parents and Staff Diverge

Because parents and staff together account for 93 percent of the sample, the differences between them are the most actionable comparison the survey supports. Five divergences are large enough to shape recruitment and interviewing. Staff prioritize a public-education background at nearly twice the parent rate (47.81 against 23.66 percent). Parents prioritize school safety at nearly twice the staff rate (28.55 against 14.10 percent) and teacher quality at more than twice (39.28 against 18.64 percent). Staff prioritize special education services well above parents (28.20 against 16.08 percent) and financial management far above them (61.91 against 39.16 percent). And on guidance to the Board, parents lead with keeping politics out of the decision while staff lead with rebuilding trust and morale.

The convergences matter just as much, because they are the findings no constituency can dismiss as someone else's complaint. Integrity ranks first for both groups at roughly 56 to 58 percent. The current status of financial management is the lowest-rated facet for both, within a hundredth of a point. Transparency is the second-lowest for both. Facilities and grounds rank last as a priority for both. Both groups name the quality of teachers and staff as the district's leading strength, and both name the district's own reputation as the second-strongest reason a candidate would relocate.

Prepared by McPherson & Jacobson, L.L.C., Executive Recruitment and Development, as consultant to the Cherry Creek School District Board of Education. Findings reflect 1,624 online survey submissions gathered August 24 through September 11, 2026. Stakeholder focus group findings are reported separately.