McPherson & Jacobson, LLC

Executive Recruitment and Development

Ignacio School District
Superintendent Search
Executive Summary of Stakeholder Input Sessions

Prepared for the Board of Education

Stakeholder Input — November 11, 2026

Approximately fifty participants

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SCOPE AND METHOD

About This Summary

This narrative summary synthesizes eight stakeholder focus groups conducted during Phase II of the Ignacio Superintendent Search conducted by consultant Dr. Christy Sinner on Wednesday, November 11, 2026. Participating groups included Teachers, Building Administrators, Central Office Administrators, High School Students, Administrators, Non-Licensed Staff (paraprofessionals, grounds and maintenance, and transportation) and Community and Parents. Online survey results are reported separately and are not reflected here.

Each group responded to the same four questions: the good things about the community, the good things about the school district, the issues the incoming superintendent should be aware of, and the characteristics the new superintendent should have to be successful. This document reports, for each question in turn, the themes that recurred in the input and what those themes imply for the Board's decisions. Direct quotations are drawn from facilitator notes as recorded.

Facilitator notes were compiled as a single record for each question rather than separated by group. For that reason, this summary does not report how many groups raised a given theme. Findings described here as widely shared reflect ideas that appear repeatedly and in different words across the record, rather than emphasis within a single comment. Where a theme appears only once, that is noted. The complete, unedited input follows this summary.

QUESTION ONE

Strengths of the Community

Participants described Ignacio first and most often through its people, and the language was remarkably consistent: close-knit, supportive, family oriented, and connected. The image of family recurred in several forms, from "like siblings and come together" to "families have known each other forever," and the record for this question closes with the simplest version of the idea: "It's home." Generational roots run deep.

Beneath that sense of belonging, three assets recurred. The first is diversity, described not as a demographic fact but as a source of identity and pride. Participants called the community multicultural, culturally driven, and rich in culture, and observed that it "knows tolerance, acceptance, and being kind" and that young people "learn a world view of differences." One comment captured the history behind the present: "Tribal, cowboy, agricultural rivalry have come together." The second is a reflex to show up. Participants described "all hands on deck," neighbors who "can drop what you are doing and pitch in," and a community that came together during flooding. "Members have differences but come together in times of need." The third is support for the schools themselves: strong local businesses that back the district, community funding, volunteers, and, in one memorable detail, bleachers that "are packed at sporting events."

Participants also pointed to resources unusual for a rural setting, including a quality library, supermarket, and recreation center, resources available through the tribe and the school, good jobs, and housing for working-class families. Several described a community that is "growing" with "new things happening," and one comment observed that the local newspaper does not always tell the positive story.

Two qualifications run beneath the praise, and both bear directly on a newcomer. The first is that belonging is earned over time. The community "can be quirky and hard to get in - takes a while to gain trust," and a new arrival "can feel like an outsider for a while." The second is that closeness has a cost. "Everyone knows each others business - blessing and a curse," and one participant described the community as "kind of like a family: tight but has some rifts from time to time." Another described it as "tight knit when it needs to be." Taken together, these comments describe a welcome that is genuine but conditional, a theme that returns with greater force when participants describe the superintendent they want.

QUESTION TWO

Strengths of the District

The defining feature of this question is momentum. Participants described a district that is "getting better," has "changed and grown," and is "always trying to improve." Communication and transparency were both described as improving, and participants offered concrete evidence rather than general impressions: a Sunday phone call previewing upcoming events, weekly updates from the high school and middle school, an attendance banner "personable with student faces," and attendance messages on the grocery store monitor and the library marquee. A five-year strategic plan was described as built "with lots of community input," and the district's three-year accreditation was credited to academics "improving through hard work."

Beneath that momentum, four assets recurred. The first is people. Staff were described as "like family with a common goal of students," and several comments went further, describing work that has become identity: "Don't view the work as a job - it's who they are and their identity," and "other duties as assigned but many go even above that." Students made the same point about their coaches, who make clear that you are "a student first then an athlete." The second is an employment package that functions as a recruiting tool. Benefits were called "top notch" and insurance "amazing," and participants were candid that the package is "helpful in recruiting even if not at top of salary schedule." Fifteen staff houses, strong mentoring for new teachers, and a willingness to hire and promote from within were cited alongside it.

The third asset is scale. Participants repeatedly described the district as "small enough that its hard for kids to fall through the cracks," where staff know students individually and teachers can "hone in on who needs help." A strong RTI system, Friday school and tutoring, and opportunities that range "from GT to needing extra support" were named. The fourth is the breadth of what a small district provides: welding, wood shop, agriculture, FFA, FBLA, college classes, career pathways, and strong athletic programs, along with a track, football field, and auditorium that participants said are "a lot for a small town." Technology was described as "ahead of the curve," supported by a responsive staff, and food service, transportation, and maintenance were each credited by name.

Leadership and culture drew notably positive comment. Staff described having a voice and being able to "speak without it coming back at them," and one comment offered a mature version of support: "Don't always agree with admin but are supportive." The administrative team was described as stable and cohesive and as working to "be one district and not individual schools." The Board was described as visible, supportive, and invested in staff, with members who attend events and whom people recognize. Participants also said the district "feels like in a good place with tribal relations."

Two qualifications run beneath the praise. The first is tense. Much of the strongest language is written in the present progressive: communication "is improving," transparency "is getting better." These are recent gains, and they will depend on continuity in the next superintendent's approach. The second is that the same commitment participants celebrate here is the source of the strain they describe in Question Three. A staff that goes "even above" other duties as assigned is a staff at risk of being stretched too thin.

QUESTION THREE

Issues the Incoming Superintendent Should Know

Declining enrollment and its financial consequences form the most concrete challenge in the record. Participants named the pressures plainly: families choosing online, homeschool, and charter options; a town "landlocked from growth"; and a community that is aging, with declining birth rates. One comment asked the question a new superintendent will need to answer first: "Declining enrollment - do we know the why?" The fiscal effects are already visible. Participants described "less money coming in," a declining budget, and the possibility that a levy override may be needed. Grant funding was described as essential, and the district currently holds several grants. Participants also described the internal cost of cuts: maintenance "being neglected," downsizing that "has impacted all staff," and a pattern of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" that is "having a negative impact." One comment asked that budgeting "be discussed with leaders and not handed out."

Understanding the community, and above all the relationship with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, was the most insistent theme in the record. Participants reminded the next superintendent that "Ignacio is within the reservation," that the tribe is "a huge piece of community," and that "any sense of prejudice is noted." The guidance was specific: learn reservation knowledge "in, on, and around"; understand that "tribal expectations are critical to learn"; and "work with the tribe instead of against them." Participants described the district as "tri-ethnic" and asked for a leader who welcomes every background without judgment. A strong relationship with the town council was also named, along with an awareness of "small town politics." The record is equally clear that acceptance takes time and requires presence. Participants expect the next superintendent to live in the district and attend games, powwows, and community events, and warned against an outsider's prescription: "Don't want someone who lives in Durango to tell them how to do it in Ignacio." As one participant put it, "District is mirror of the community."

Staff workload and retention were raised with unusual candor. "Staff is being burned out as expectations keep growing," one comment recorded, and others asked for a change in the culture that produces that strain: "'A good soldier would do it' mentality needs to change," and "let staff know it is ok to say 'no.'" Participants questioned whether all meetings are needed, asked for clear roles and expectations after downsizing, and noted that the middle school has only one administrator. Compensation was raised as a competitive concern for all staff and substitutes relative to surrounding districts. Professional development drew specific criticism: it "needs to align with the teachers needs and currently it isn't," should be differentiated for veteran and new staff, and should include ongoing training on implemented programs rather than a single session. Paraprofessionals were described as needing training "beyond what BOCES does." At the same time, participants noted that staff retention has increased, that quality staff are attracted by the district's strengths, and that "when teachers know they are supported and encourage, respected, rewarded, they will go above and beyond."

Student needs are rising, and the record describes them from several vantage points. Participants cited an increase in students with disabilities, the difficulty of outsourced special education services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech, and the challenge of staffing and budgeting for high-need behavior. Paraprofessionals "are hard to find for intense jobs with minimal training." One comment stated that "advanced learners are neglected," a view that sits in tension with the praise for gifted programming in Question Two. Attendance was named repeatedly, particularly in first and second hour, as

were student engagement, accountability, and "lack of consequences for not doing work." Discipline was described as lacking and inconsistent, with a request for policy and reporting on behavior "that is the same throughout the district." Students added their own perspective, asking adults to "make sure students are learning and not just passing" and observing that "state testing isn't school testing." Participants also asked the next leader to understand the home environments and social issues that shape students' lives.

The record also carries the study's central tension: how much to change. Many comments urged caution. "A lot of good systems are working," one participant noted; "be mindful of what is working before making changes." Others added "don't change things that are working," "just cause it worked elsewhere doesn't mean it will work here," and "talk about things before change is made." Yet the same record asks for movement. One comment acknowledged that the district can "get stuck in a rut and don't always make changes that needs to happen," another warned that it "can't be stuck in the past," and others asked for a leader "prepared to hold a high standard throughout all three schools" who treats them as one team while respecting each school's unique needs. These positions are less contradictory than they appear. Participants are asking for a leader who learns before acting, and then acts. The record offers its own summary of the expectation: "Yes, our kids can."

Several items surfaced only once and are recorded here because they are consequential rather than common. One comment noted the interesting dynamic of teachers in a building who are only able to work with tribal students. A second observed that sports that do not perform well receive more funding than those that do, and asked for funding based on equity or participation. A third asked that the new superintendent begin learning the district before the start of the school year so that a real transition can occur. Participants also noted that Facebook is the community's primary platform and that fluency with social media is part of the job.

QUESTION FOUR

Characteristics the Next Superintendent Should Have

Integrity was the most consistently named characteristic, and participants did not leave it abstract. They defined it behaviorally: "If you say you are going to do it, do it"; "acknowledge and own what is yours"; and "can admit if a mistake is made and learn from it." One comment set the standard at all hours, describing the superintendent as the "face of the district - all the time and when no one is looking." Participants tied integrity directly to candor about the district's own performance. They want a leader who "isn't afraid to tell stakeholders where district is struggling - be real," and who does not hide difficult information, because "it needs to be known." One participant also asked that staff surveys be anonymous.

The record describes a leader who learns before acting, and it is notably precise about the balance. Participants want someone who "wants to learn and respect community and diversity of area before determining change needs to happen," who will "listen to directors" because "they know how things run," and who has a "drive to learn and not a know it all." One comment drew the line sharply: "Don't come in to fix us - we bring a lot to the table." Yet the same record asks the candidate to bring something. Participants want a leader who will "have ideas of your own and be open to share," who is "not afraid to ruffle feathers when they need to be ruffled," and, in one of the more striking comments, someone from outside who can help the district grow because "we don't know what we don't know." The standard that reconciles these views was stated directly: "Someone who wants to make our district better but not change everything."

Decisiveness recurred with unusual insistence. Participants asked for a leader who can "hear all sides then make a clear decision," "makes hard decisions and sticks with them," and "can't be wishy-washy." Several comments accepted the personal cost: "Be OK not being liked by everyone," and "decision is made for what is best and not to be liked." Participants asked for a strong backbone, a willingness to have hard conversations, and "thick skin personally and for social media." They also asked the superintendent to hold standards and not be "too lenient," while still showing "grace and mercy."

Support for staff was framed as trust rather than oversight. Participants want a leader who "stands up for staff," will "protect staff as needed," and is "willing to back the teacher," but who will also "trust your staff - don't micro manage" and "delegates." Accountability was welcome when paired with growth: "Tell us we screwed up and coach on how to do better then move on." Participants asked for respect for employees' time, a leader who is "not above any staff member and will do any job needed," and someone "who has been in the trenches and can respect the positions." One comment stated the expected background directly: "Person should have past principal and teaching experiences."

Visibility and community membership were described in concrete terms. The next superintendent "must be seen at events, shop in town, be part of the community," should "believe their job is beyond their desk and meetings," and should spend time at every location, which participants listed as "schools, departments, bus barn." Cultural awareness was framed as immersion: understand the history of Ignacio, be aware of the cultures in the community, and be trauma informed. Participants also asked for a particular kind of public neutrality, a distinctive request in a close community. The superintendent should "walk the line and stay neutral - no personal agenda," because "personal opinions spoken can get messy."

Two final screens recurred. The first is longevity. Participants stated it three separate ways, asking for a leader who is "not looking for stepping stone and will commit to the district for longevity - 10 year solution,"

who is "not a stepping stone for political or job advancement," and who will not "use this as a stepping stone." The second is substance over style. Participants want someone who is "not a buzz words person - need to see the walk and not the talk," is "not a check off the box person," and will personally "dig down and get dirty with the data" rather than relying on AI. Given the fiscal pressures described in Question Three, one participant also named fundraising ability as an asset.

Taken together, the input describes a superintendent who leads with integrity, earns trust through actions, values people, and is willing to listen, learn, and work alongside others to move the district forward, while holding every school to the shared belief that "our kids can."

Prepared by McPherson & Jacobson, L.L.C., Executive Recruitment and Development, as consultant to the Ignacio School District Board of Education. Findings reflect open stakeholder input sessions conducted on November 11, 2026, with approximately fifty participants. Online survey results are reported separately.

McPherson & Jacobson, LLC

Executive Recruitment and Development

Ignacio School District 11-JT
Superintendent Search
Executive Summary of Online Survey Results

Prepared for the Board of Education

Phase II — Stakeholder Input

59 survey submissions · October 29 – November 13, 2026

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SCOPE AND METHOD

About This Summary

This narrative summary synthesizes the online stakeholder survey conducted for the Ignacio School District 11-JT superintendent search. The instrument drew 59 submissions between October 29 and November 13, 2026, in English (58) and Spanish (1). Findings from stakeholder focus groups are reported separately and are not reflected here.

Respondents identified their primary connection to the district as staff members (59 percent), parents or guardians of current students (32 percent), parents or guardians of former students (7 percent), and community members (2 percent). No students and no respondents in the "other" category took part. Staff therefore account for a clear majority of the sample, and the combined results below lean toward the staff perspective. The survey export reports each question in aggregate and does not link answers to the respondent's role, so results are reported for all respondents together rather than disaggregated by group.

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, and what each finding implies for the Board's decisions. Quoted language is respondents' own, as recorded; comments naming individual employees have been summarized rather than quoted.

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. With 59 submissions, a single respondent moves a percentage by nearly two points, so small differences between items should not be over-read. Percentages on the critical-issues and characteristics questions reflect multi-select items and therefore total more than 100 percent. The Spanish-language form omitted two critical-issue options and substituted one characteristic option; affected percentages are calculated on the respondents who were shown each option. Themes from written responses are ranked by approximate frequency rather than reported as exact counts.

SURVEY QUESTION ONE

How Stakeholders Feel About the District

Asked for the one word that best describes how they feel about the district, respondents leaned positive but not uniformly so. Community was the single most frequent answer, appearing on its own or as community focused, close knit, connected, family, and home. Proud, dedication, committed, hopeful, positive, satisfied, and great followed. The survey platform tagged 27 of the 58 English responses as positive, 16 as negative, and 12 as neutral; the lone Spanish-language respondent answered conforme, or content.

The negative vocabulary is smaller but pointed. Disappointed and disappointment appeared four times, dysfunctional twice, and concern twice, alongside mediocre, failing, discontent, conflicted, confusing, unappreciated, and needs improvement. A middle band of answers — neutral, ok, decent, unsure, developing, evolving — described a district in transition rather than one in either good or poor condition.

The pattern that emerges is attachment to the place paired with concern about how the district is run. Respondents' warmest words describe the community and its people; their sharpest words describe performance and function. That distinction recurs throughout the survey and frames much of what follows.

SURVEY QUESTION TWO

Strengths of the District

Asked to name three strengths that candidates should know about, 54 respondents produced a clear rank order. The community itself was the most frequent theme by a wide margin — described as close knit, supportive, generational, and quick to rally. Respondents wrote of a community that "comes together in a tragic event," of neighbors who help each other when there is a flood, and of a district that is "small but mighty," a phrase that appeared repeatedly. Several described generational Ignacio graduates who fill the bleachers, auditorium, and cafeteria for student events.

Cultural richness and diversity followed, framed as a defining asset. Respondents named the district's tri-ethnic community, the Southern Ute way of life, and pride in Hispanic, Indigenous, Caucasian, and other heritages. One respondent cautioned that a newcomer must understand that "there are traditions and ways of doing things that need to be accepted and honored," placing cultural sensitivity at the top of what a candidate needs to know.

The dedication of staff came next, with respondents citing caring, long-tenured, and largely local employees who "go above and beyond for kids," teachers willing to learn, and strong leadership in individual buildings. Academic progress followed — improving state scores, student achievement, and the view that Ignacio students can compete academically statewide and nationally.

Respondents also named concrete features: small class sizes that allow one-on-one attention, new facilities, curriculum and technology, a well-regarded technology department, career and technical education, college course availability, extracurricular activities, trauma-responsive classrooms, the food program, health benefits, and the four-day week. A supportive school board and a strategic plan respondents want carried beyond its five-year horizon were each mentioned. Some respondents singled out the elementary school for strong communication with families, a point that recurs, in contrast, in later questions about the middle and high schools.

SURVEY QUESTION THREE

Perceptions of District Performance

Respondents rated seven operational facets of the district on a four-point scale from poor (1) to excellent (4). The survey platform scores "I don't know" as zero, which pulls down the reported average for any facet that many respondents felt unable to judge. The table therefore shows an adjusted average among respondents who gave a rating, alongside the platform's reported average and the number who answered "I don't know."

Operational facet	Adjusted	Reported	Good or excellent	Don't know
Financial management	2.91	2.12	76.7%	16
Communications	2.78	2.78	69.0%	0
Relationships with staff members	2.70	2.42	64.2%	6
Relationships with families	2.66	2.66	66.1%	0
Preparing students for college and career	2.58	2.19	58.0%	9
Student achievement	2.37	2.33	43.9%	1
Transparency	2.30	2.26	43.9%	1

Adjusted averages exclude "I don't know" responses; reported averages are the survey platform's figures, which score them as zero. Good or excellent is the share of respondents who gave a rating. Combined English and Spanish responses; 58 to 59 respondents per facet.

The adjustment changes the story for one facet in particular. Financial management has the lowest reported average at 2.12, but that figure reflects the 16 respondents — more than a quarter of the sample — who said they did not know. Among those who did rate it, financial management is the highest-rated facet at 2.91, with more than three in four calling it good or excellent. The finding is less a judgment on financial performance than a signal that many stakeholders do not have enough information to judge it. Preparation for college and career shows the same pattern at smaller scale, with nine respondents unable to rate it.

Transparency and student achievement are the two lowest-rated facets on either measure, at 2.30 and 2.37 adjusted, and they are the only two where fewer than half of raters chose good or excellent. Transparency also drew the largest share of poor ratings of any facet, at roughly one in four. Communications and relationships with families, by contrast, drew no "I don't know" responses and moderately favorable ratings. Read together with the written comments, the results suggest stakeholders see day-to-day communication as reasonably good but feel less informed about how decisions are made and how students are performing.

SURVEY QUESTION FOUR

Critical Issues to Prioritize

Respondents selected the three most critical issues from a list of fifteen. Staff recruitment and retention ranked first at 40.68 percent, followed closely by academic outcomes at 37.29 percent. District leadership and culture (32.76 percent) and trust within the community (27.59 percent) ranked third and fourth — two items that together describe the organizational climate rather than any single program.

Critical issue	All respondents
Staff recruitment and retention	40.68%
Academic outcomes	37.29%
District leadership and culture*	32.76%
Trust within community*	27.59%
Communication	23.73%
Family and community relations	23.73%
School safety and security	20.34%
Teacher quality	20.34%
College and career readiness	18.64%
Special education services	18.64%
Mental health services	11.86%
Diversity and engagement	8.47%
Social emotional learning	6.78%
Facilities and grounds	5.08%
Financial management	5.08%

Respondents selected three of fifteen options, so the column totals roughly 300 percent. Percentages are based on 59 respondents. *Not offered on the Spanish-language form; percentage based on the 58 English-language respondents.

Two findings at the bottom of the table matter as much as those at the top. Financial management and facilities and grounds tied for last at 5.08 percent each — consistent with the performance ratings, where those who could rate the district's finances rated them highest of any facet, and with respondents' praise for new facilities. Neither is where stakeholders want the next superintendent's attention. Diversity and engagement also ranked low as a priority, even though cultural diversity was among the strengths named most often; respondents appear to treat it as an existing asset rather than a problem to solve.

The constructed-response follow-up drew answers from 50 respondents and named several recurring additional priorities. Staff support was the most frequent: competitive wages from administration through support staff, filling vacant positions, morale and mental health, and compensation for coverage and work beyond contract hours. Academic expectations followed, with respondents asking why some middle school students cannot read or write at grade level, calling for consistent intervention systems and an established core curriculum, and asking for support for advanced learners. Several asked that academics be treated as a priority alongside athletics.

Accountability and the consistent enforcement of policy came next, framed with some of the sharpest language in the survey. Respondents asked that administrators and directors be held to the same standard as everyone else, that policies and procedures be followed by all staff and students, and that problems be addressed rather than "swept under the rug" — a phrase that appeared in several separate comments. Favoritism and a "good ol' boy" culture were named directly. Student behavior and safety were tied to this theme, with teachers describing a lack of meaningful support in correcting behavior and one parent describing behavior as "beyond out of control."

Three priorities surfaced in Ignacio that are not on the multiple-choice list. Attendance and chronic absenteeism drew repeated mention, with respondents asking for new approaches and for building relationships with the affected families. Declining enrollment and its effect on funding was raised several times, with some linking it to families choosing other districts or homeschooling because of low trust. Relations with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, including academic support from the Tribe, were named as a priority, as was early learning — preschool, infant, and toddler care for staff and community members. The Spanish-language respondent asked for smaller class sizes, more paraprofessionals, and priority for speech and occupational therapy services, echoing other comments that special education students "fall through the cracks."

SURVEY QUESTION FIVE

Characteristics the Next Superintendent Should Have

Respondents selected five characteristics from a list of twenty-three. Two characteristics led by a wide margin and are nearly tied: demonstrates high integrity and ethics and leads by example (47.46 percent) and takes responsibility and is accountable for their actions (45.76 percent). No other characteristic reached 35 percent. Communicates effectively followed at 32.20 percent, then visible and accessible in the community and classrooms (29.31 percent), resolves conflicts with dignity and grace (28.81 percent), builds strong community relationships (27.12 percent), and places the needs of students above anything else (27.12 percent).

Two results stand out against what superintendent searches often show. Previous experience as a superintendent drew 25.42 percent, tied with standing firm behind decisions that may not be popular and placing in the top ten — a notably strong showing for a credential that often ranks lower. The same preference for experience appears in the written comments and in the guidance to the Board. Possessing a background in public education drew 18.64 percent.

What respondents declined to prioritize is equally informative. Using data to make informed and transparent decisions finished last at 5.08 percent, below maintaining a future-focused vision (8.47 percent), adapting to changing circumstances (10.17 percent), and valuing school autonomy (11.86 percent). Strategic thinking, building diverse teams, and equitable access each drew 15.25 percent. Respondents placed personal conduct and presence well ahead of planning and analytical skills.

The constructed-response follow-up, answered by 45 respondents, sharpened the picture. Listening, approachability, and visibility drew the most frequent comments, with respondents asking for a leader with an open door who is active in the schools and at extracurricular events and who hears “both sides of the story” before deciding. Understanding of the community came next: respondents asked for a leader willing to learn about Tribal ways, who understands the community’s cultural makeup, and who is genuinely committed to rural education and community partnerships. Support for staff followed, framed as backing employees in the face of conflict, seeking staff feedback before staff-related changes, respecting contractual hours, and valuing morale.

Integrity, honesty, and transparency recurred in the respondents’ own words, often paired with a request to stop “hiding things under the rug.” Fairness was named explicitly — no favoritism, equal accountability, and impartial treatment of all staff. Respondents also asked for experience at the building level, particularly as a principal, and for grant, accounting, and fiscal background. Humility, emotional intelligence, a sense of humor, and the ability to stay level-headed under pressure completed the list.

Percentages based on 59 respondents. The Spanish-language form listed “spends time in classrooms” in place of “visible and accessible in the community and classrooms”; that item’s percentage is based on the 58 English-language respondents.

SURVEY QUESTION SIX

Community Draws for Candidates

Asked to name three things that might encourage a candidate to relocate, 48 respondents produced the most uniformly positive answers in the survey. The close-knit, supportive community ranked first — a place where "ask for help and it shows up in unexpected ways" and where community connections "become family." Outdoor recreation and natural beauty and the area's cultural diversity followed at roughly equal scale. Respondents cited the La Plata Mountains, skiing, fishing, hiking, hunting, and boating, alongside the tri-ethnic community, cultural events, and the district's working relationship with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

Small-town, rural life ranked next, described as slower paced and less stressful than city living. Location and access followed, with respondents noting proximity to the Durango airport, Albuquerque, and larger towns for shopping. Several respondents described the role itself as a draw: the opportunity "to make a REAL difference in people's lives" and "a tough, yet rewarding challenge." Cost of living, the four-day week, and the possibility of district-provided housing were each mentioned.

One respondent called Ignacio "one of the Southwest's best kept secrets." The answers to this question supply the core of a recruitment message: a strong and welcoming community, an exceptional natural setting, a rich cultural heritage, and a district where a leader's work will be visible and consequential.

SURVEY QUESTION SEVEN

Guidance to the Board of Education

The final question invited any additional considerations for the Board, and 42 respondents answered it — nearly three in four of those who took the survey. Whether to hire from inside or outside the district was the most pointed theme. About a quarter of those answering urged the Board to look outside the district, citing the need for "a new, fresh set of eyes," objectivity "unencumbered by existing district dynamics," and a leader with no prior obligations inside the district who can make hard changes. One respondent who credited the Board's "grow your own" approach with serving the district well in the past suggested it may now be time for an experienced external superintendent. One respondent stated they would withdraw their child if an internal candidate from a particular school were selected.

Not every comment on the question pointed the same way. A smaller group asked for continuity of what is working and for a leader who will continue building the vision already in place. Others set conditions rather than preferences: an internal candidate should have a stellar reputation, and the Board should be satisfied with that candidate's work in their current role. No respondent argued outright for an internal hire.

Experience was the other major theme and, by approximate count, the most frequent. Respondents asked for prior superintendent experience, experience with school improvement, a career that includes significant classroom time, and familiarity with every level from classroom teacher to principal, special education, and athletics. Several asked the Board to look carefully at what candidates have actually accomplished in previous districts. Respondents also asked for commitment and longevity — a leader who is not "using us for experience" or treating the role "as a political stepping stone."

Fit with the community completed the list. Respondents asked for experience in rural and small communities, with community diversity, and with Indigenous Tribes, and for a leader willing to work with all community members and entities. Individual comments asked the Board to seek staff input on candidates, to be open to raising salaries to a livable wage, and to better unify the preschool, elementary, middle, and high schools. Two respondents noted that the current administrative team is predominantly female and asked the Board to consider gender balance in leadership; candidate evaluation should remain focused on qualifications, consistent with employment law.

CROSS-QUESTION FINDINGS

Where the Findings Converge

Because the survey export reports results in aggregate rather than by respondent role, this summary cannot compare parents and staff directly. The more useful comparison is across questions, where several findings reinforce one another and are therefore the most reliable guidance the survey offers. Staff make up 59 percent of the sample, so these findings carry the staff perspective most strongly.

Accountability and integrity run through nearly every question. The top two characteristics — integrity (47.46 percent) and taking responsibility (45.76 percent) — are matched by written priorities calling for consistent policy enforcement and equal accountability, by repeated references to problems “swept under the rug,” and by transparency’s place among the two lowest-rated facets. Respondents are describing a culture problem, and district leadership and culture ranked third among critical issues at 32.76 percent.

Staff are both the district’s most-cited strength after the community and its top priority for improvement. Dedicated, long-tenured staff are named as a leading asset, while staff recruitment and retention ranked first among critical issues at 40.68 percent and pay and support dominated the written priorities. Academic outcomes follow the same pattern: improving scores are named as a strength, yet academic outcomes ranked second among priorities and student achievement was among the lowest-rated facets.

Experience and an outside perspective converge as well. Previous superintendent experience ranked in the top ten characteristics at 25.42 percent, the written comments asked repeatedly for experienced leadership, and the guidance to the Board leaned clearly toward considering external candidates. Finally, the community itself is the constant: it was the most frequent one-word description, the leading strength, and the leading reason a candidate should relocate. Respondents want a leader who earns trust in that community through visibility, listening, and respect for its cultures — including the district’s relationship with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.

Prepared by McPherson & Jacobson, L.L.C., Executive Recruitment and Development, as consultant to the Ignacio School District 11-JT Board of Education. Findings reflect 59 online survey submissions gathered October 29 through November 13, 2026. Stakeholder focus group findings are reported separately.