



SEARCHING FOR EXCELLENCE:

Considerations for the next

Worcester Public Schools

Superintendent

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The Research Bureau

Overview

The Worcester Public Schools are at a pivotal moment in education for our children. Along with the search for a new Superintendent of Schools, the next few years will see changes in the composition of the school committee, an unprecedented infusion of federal recovery funding, and the continued implementation of the long-term change in the school funding formula as a result of the Student Opportunity Act.

The decision that we make regarding a new leader for our school district will impact not just teaching and learning in our schools or the lives of our students, but the trajectory of our city well into the future. Worcester's new superintendent will cultivate and lead a system of schools in a city rich with possibility. A municipality of close-knit neighborhoods and strong civic pride, Worcester is in the midst of a renaissance. It is home to a thriving creative community, a strong group of colleges and universities, a rich set of cultural institutions, and strong business, non-profit and philanthropic sectors all of which are part of education eco-system determined to contribute to the success of our K-12 public schools. The new superintendent will have at hand the tools and community commitment to build a system that sets the standard for urban education.

The forum hosted on December 1st of 2021 by the Worcester Education Collaborative and the Worcester Regional Research Bureau, *Searching for Excellence: Considerations for the Next Worcester Public Schools Superintendent* offered insights from national and statewide leaders in education on the types of expertise and range of qualities important to address the challenges and embrace the transformational opportunities at hand in the second largest school district in our state.

Local Context

The Worcester Public Schools is the third largest public school district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, serving 23,735 students.

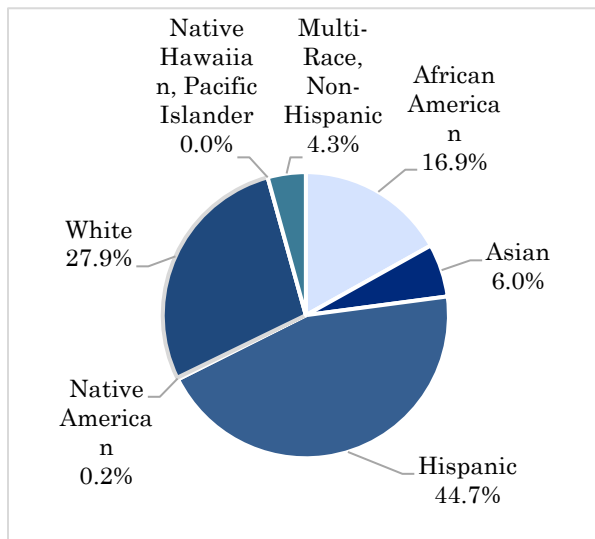
The Worcester School Committee, composed of 6 members elected at-large and chaired by the Mayor of Worcester, serves as the legislative body of the WPS. In 2022, a process is underway to shift the School Committee to district-based representation. The School Committee sets district-wide school policies, approves the district budget, and oversees the activity of the Superintendent of Schools, who serves as the Chief Executive Officer.

Enrollment

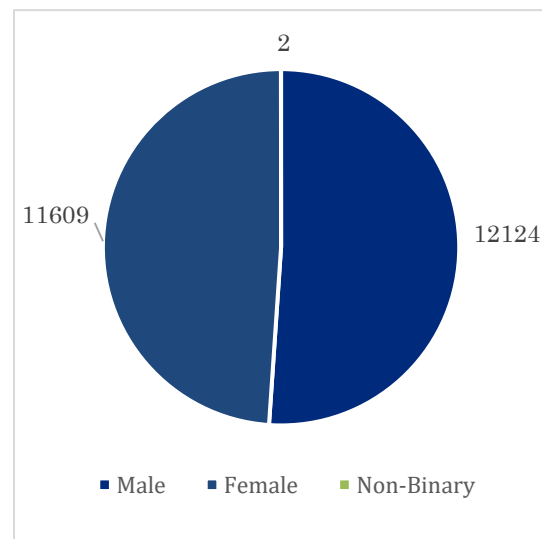
There has been a decrease in enrollment over the last year, particularly in pre-k and kindergarten. The below table overviews enrollment in 2021-2022 and the charts below that outline enrollment by race/ethnicity, gender, and race/ethnicity compared to the state.

Enrollment: 2021-2022		
	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Elementary Schools	34	12,687
Middle Schools 6-8	1	870
Middle Schools 7-8	3	2,399
Grade 7-12 Schools	2	760
High Schools	5	6,815
Head Start Program	1	204
<i>Total</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>23,735</i>

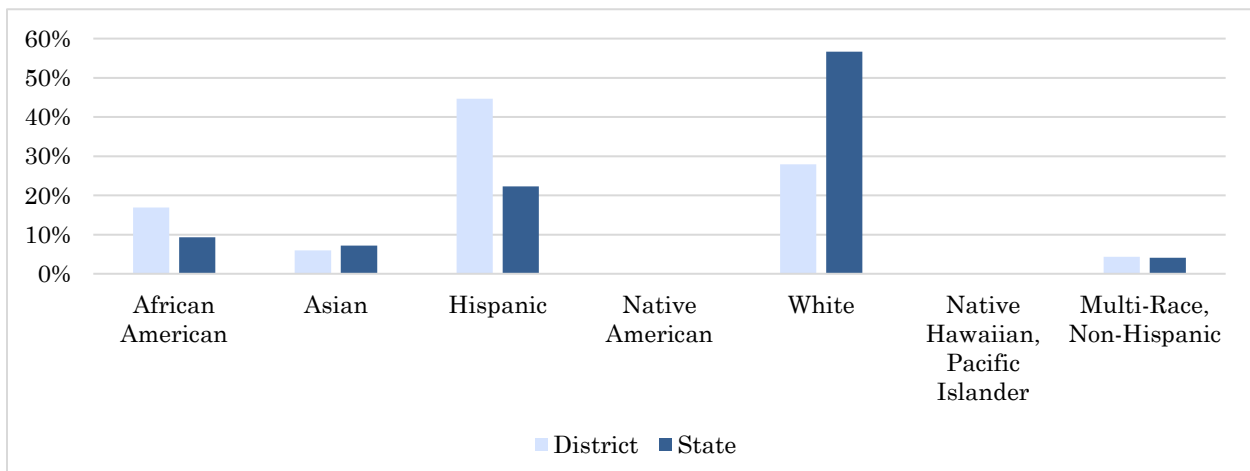
Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, 2021-2022



Enrollment by Gender, 2021-2022



Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, compared to the state, 2021-2022



In addition to enrollment information, below represent specific educational indicators from the past school year as well as statistics for selected populations in the coming year. Approximately 60% of the student body's first language is not English, more than 21% of students have a disability, and almost 75% are economically disadvantaged.

Indicators, 2020-2021	
Grade 9-12 Drop Out Rate	1.7%
Retention Rate	0.9%
Attendance Rate	95.3%
Average Number of Days Absent	7.6
Percent of Students with Unexcused Absences Greater than 9 Days	22.2%

Selected Populations, 2021-2022	
First Language not English	58.9%
English Language Learner	28.3%
Students with Disabilities	21.1%
High Needs	84.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	74.3%

Approximately 4,640 enrolled students aged 6-21 have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with 52% full inclusion in the classroom, 18% partial inclusion, 21% substantially separate and 9% in another school or placement. In grades 9-12, 1,293 students have an IEP, approximately 22% of the high school student body. For 2020 graduates, 69% of students with an IEP graduated as compared to 92% of general education students.

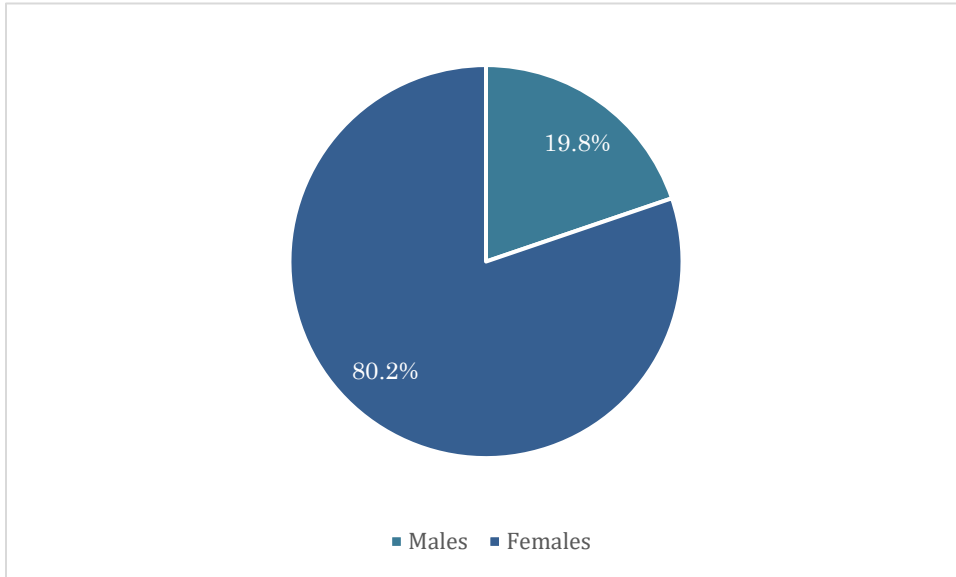
Staffing

There are approximately 1,841 teachers and 223 administrators in the Worcester Public Schools. Additionally, there are approximately 223 administrators in 2020, which remains consistent with other Gateway Cities. Below are other data points related to teacher and staffing data.

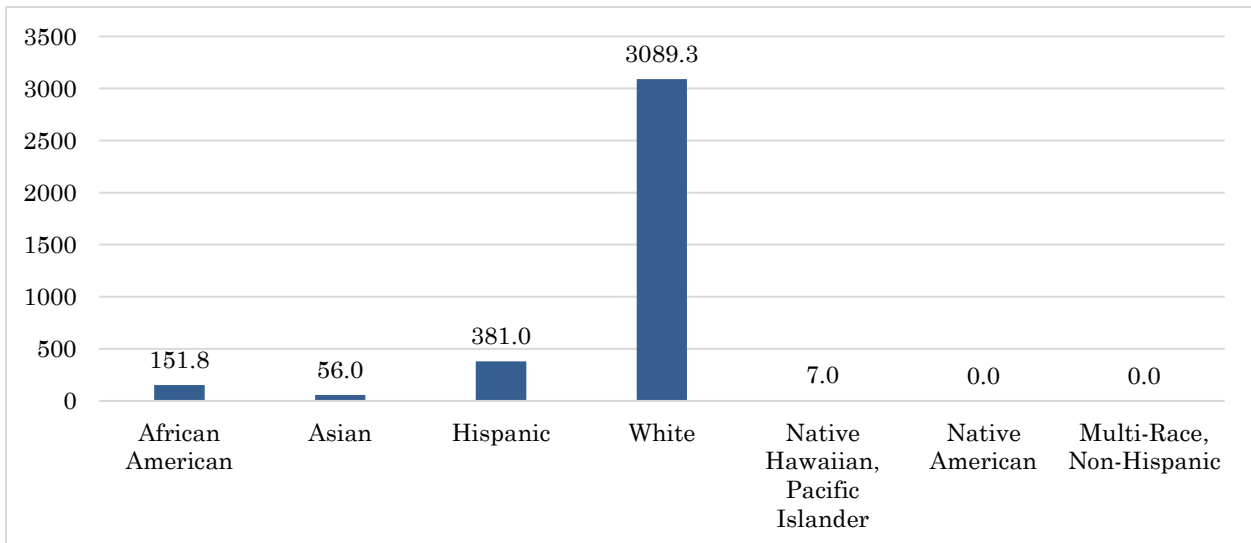
Teacher Data, 2020-2021		
	Worcester	State
Total Number of Teachers - Full Time Equivalent	1840.6	75,146.7
Student-Teacher Ratio	13.0 to 1	12.1 to 1
% of Teachers Licensed	97.9	97.6

Worcester Public Schools: Teacher by Program Area, 2020-2021		
	Worcester	State
General Education	1,680.9	61,947.2
Special Education	0.0	9,316.5
Career Vocational Technical	65.7	1,895.9
English Language Learner	94.0	1,987.1
Totals	1,840.6	75,146.7

Staffing by Gender, 2020-2021



Staffing by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2021

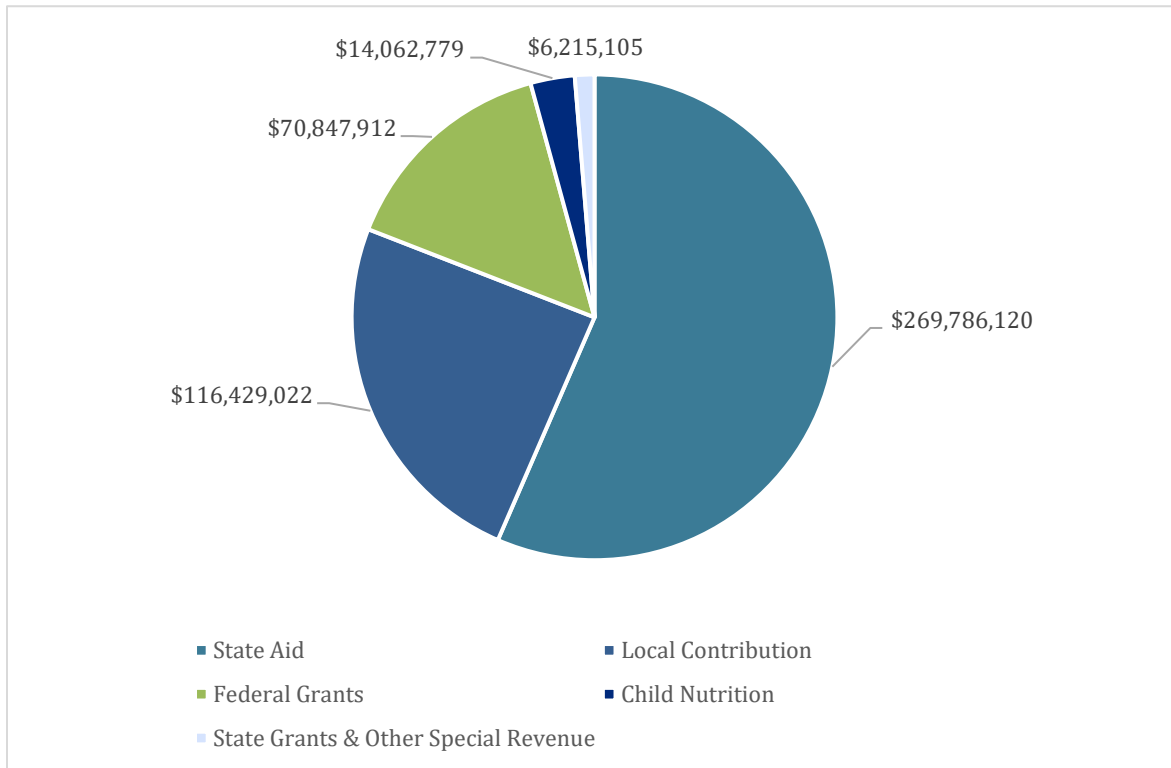


Administration & Finance

The Worcester Regional Research Bureau and the Worcester Education Collaborative, with assistance from the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, and in partnership with the Worcester Public Schools assembled the Worcester Public Schools Strategic Plan: *Defining our Path*. This document was adopted by the Worcester School Committee and has been in implementation since 2018. Included in *Defining our Path* is Appendix B, which outlines metrics to measure its implementation.

Another guiding document for the Worcester Public Schools is its seven-point financial plan: 1) continued long term budget planning, 2) continued annual budget review, 3) continued transparent budget process, 4) continued quarterly financial reporting, 5) the development of supplemental and sustainable programs, 6) the creation of a cap on administrative spending, and 7) identifying targets for new revenue.

Revenue, FY22



Expenditures, FY22	FY22 Budget	Change from FY21	FY21
Instruction	\$255,978,207	4.8%	\$244,336,415
Fixed Charges	\$95,211,282	16.6%	\$81,680,143
Other School Services	\$69,844,529	46.0%	\$47,843,149
Operations & Maintenance	\$19,767,701	-18.0%	\$24,093,533
Tuition Programs	\$23,114,304	-2.2%	\$23,627,111
Administration	\$5,372,442	-5.4%	\$5,679,085
Community Services	\$723,469	14.2%	\$633,394
Fixed Assets	\$7,329,004	1062.3%	\$630,542
Debt Service	\$0	0.0%	\$0
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$477,340,938</i>	<i>11.4%</i>	<i>\$428,523,372</i>

Total In-District Per Pupil spending in 2020 is \$15,830.74 which is an increase of \$1,023.24 since 2019.

Searching for Excellence: National and Statewide Leaders Weigh In

On December 1, 2021, Worcester Education Collaborative (WEC) and the Worcester Regional Research Bureau (WRRB) jointly hosted a panel of state and national education leaders and experts to share insights on the opportunities and needs facing Worcester as it searches for the next Superintendent of Schools.

Leading the facilitation of this discussion was Karin Chenoweth, a national expert in effective urban school district leadership. Chenoweth has spent over 15 years as a writer-in-residence with the Education Trust out of Washington, DC. Tasked with researching and understanding what makes for an effective school—one that improves the academic achievement of all children, particularly children of color and children from low-income homes—Chenoweth has extensively visited and studied schools and districts across the nation. From this large body of work, Chenoweth shared the three most common effective practices she has observed:

School Systems Support Collaboration through a Data-Driven Approach

Every effective school Chenoweth observes regularly holds data-driven meetings and cultivates a culture of collaboration among educators. In these meetings, teachers have the opportunity to review data to identify trends and challenges, explore possible solutions, and review the impact of previous solutions put in place. Schools and educators also use these meetings to identify expertise among their teams and any gaps in knowledge they may have. This work requires deep collaboration that many teachers are not trained or experienced in. In order for this work to be successful, Chenoweth has observed that this collaboration and data-driven work must be cultivated by system-level supports.

Effective School Leaders Prioritize Collaboration with an Asset-Based Mindset

Chenoweth's second observation is that establishing the culture and environment for collaboration and data-driven decision-making requires strong leadership. Effective schools have principals that consider it their responsibility to lead collaboration by putting in place systems to support that work. Further, these principals organize the work of schools around the adamant belief that all kids can learn.

District Leadership Supports Strong School Leadership

Following the insights that strong school leadership and collaboration lead to effective schools, Chenoweth noted that inevitably, those strong leaders will move on, whether to new opportunities or for retirement. For school-level improvements to be lasting, it

is therefore critical to have district leadership that understands how important school leaders are and to organize districts around that belief. ***A key skill and practice among effective superintendents is the ability to hire and place strong principals, and support their work.*** This includes everything from how a district organizes budgets, schedules, curricula, discipline policies, and professional development, and a recognition that doing so in ways that support the success of principals will support the success of students.

"If I lived in Worcester, I'd want the selection criteria to include a proven track record of improvement, an understanding of the key role of principals, and a clear idea of how to support them."

-Karin Chenoweth

Following her opening remarks, Chenoweth was joined by Massachusetts education leaders Keri Rodriguez, President of the National Parents Union and founder of Massachusetts Parents United, Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and Paul Reville, former Massachusetts Secretary of Education and Professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Each shared their own reflections on key considerations in the search for Worcester's next Superintendent:

Keri Rodriguez: "We need a transition from administrators that are transactional to those that are transformational"

Insights from Rodriguez:

- **Strong Leaders Value Deep, Authentic Family Engagement:** The voices of parents and community are critical in this process, particularly at this time, and go toward ensuring that we have an equity-infused adaptation to the ongoing pandemic. Families are raising their voices and showing up. Families want to be active participants in *creation* and *collaboration*, not just downstream recipients of communication. Schools need leadership that respect and authentically collaborate with families, and Districts need courageous and bold leadership from superintendents who set the tone for what relationships with families are going to look like.

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- **Create the Conditions for Equity Work to Be Successful:** If you want to attract someone who is reflective of the diversity of the community of Worcester, you are also going to have to set that person up for success and give them the conditions that actually make it possible for equity to happen.
 - **Acknowledge the Need for Restorative Justice and Build Trust:** Acknowledge that community leaders from different avenues and perspectives can all agree that there has been deep harm and no movement toward justice. The next superintendent is going to have to work on building trust.

Glenn Koocher: "Good communicators working with the faculty, with the School Committee and with the community, are almost always successful "

Insights from Koocher:

- **It Starts with the Contract:** In creating the contract, it is critical to develop mutually respectable terms of employment, mutually agreeable goals, a sense of what the vision is and a sense of what it's going to take for the superintendent to lead in getting those things done.
- **Focus on Courageous Leadership:** Courageous leadership requires an ability to cultivate courageous followers. Worcester needs a Superintendent that encourages people to be prepared for and a part of the success of the district.
- **Strong Communication Skills are Critical:** Lines of authority are often vague and need to be worked out. Effective leaders are excellent communicators that are able to resolve those ambiguities, and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of—and distinctions between—the superintendent, school board members, and principals.
- **Prioritize Stakeholder Engagement:** When making decisions—from policies and budgets to strategic plans—it is critical that the Superintendent and the School Committee work with the stakeholders to identify goals and mutually agreeable strategies to achieve them. Strong leaders will organize their work plans with communications and collaboration protocols in place to involve stakeholders and effective outreach to the community.
- **Ensure Effective Evaluation Systems are In Place:** Once policies and practices have been set, it is critical to have effective evaluation systems in place. Effective evaluation practices will ensure that the Superintendent knows what is expected of

them and the school committee knows how to measure the effectiveness of the progress along the way.

- **Engage in Collective Bargaining That Focuses on Students First:** Effective Superintendents have a strong grasp on collective bargaining and how to center collective bargaining around student achievement and meeting the needs of students and families.
- **Create Inclusive Practices for Decision-Making Across the District:** District leadership that regularly involves principals and teachers in purposeful meetings and decision-making leads to stronger systems.
- **Be An Advocate for Students and the District:** A successful Superintendent is visibly active in the advocacy of district needs and centers these efforts around what is best for students and student achievement. Strong leadership puts systems in place to ensure collective and effective practice around setting district goals and vision, and values principled dissent and disagreement as a part of that process.

Paul Reville: "A strong leader can get things done in Worcester, can know everybody in the overall ecosystem, set priorities, and get things accomplished."

Insights from Reville:

- **Take Very Seriously the Responsibility of Attracting a Strong Pool of Candidates:** It is the responsibility of the Search Committee to think very intentionally about how to attract as strong a pool of candidates as possible. This involves extensive outreach to potential leaders, and an ability to clearly articulate the leadership opportunity in Worcester.
- **Strong Leaders Know How to Optimize Student Learning:** The core business of schools and districts is centered around the teacher-student-curriculum relationship and the ability to implement student learning through that interaction. Strong leaders know how to optimize this and organize districts to continually enhance learning opportunities.
- **A Vision that Reimagines Student Learning:** Schools are facing unprecedented times, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the racial reckoning taking place across the country. These times require visionary leadership and the capacity to use this crisis to reimagine what schools and learning look like, and a grasp that students' lives are more than just school. With students spending just 20% of their waking hours in

school, the work of education requires deep, and authentically collaborative partnership with a broad set of community stakeholders.

- **Embrace Innovative Approaches:** To be effective, districts must work to meet every child where they are and create the conditions for them to be successful. An effective superintendent will utilize cutting edge, research-based approaches to achieving this, whether that means individual success plans, each child having a navigator, or continually advancing the sophistication of which we are using technology in the classrooms.
- **An Equity Mindset:** When it comes to the equity question, effective leaders have a genuine understanding of what the equity issues are and are willing to be transparent about the data and where the district stands in meeting the needs of all students.
- **Political Empathy:** Strong leadership requires an ability to work alongside all kinds of people from different backgrounds and perspectives, to understand where they are coming from and why they believe what they believe. Strong leaders have an ability to engage with people around the issues effectively and successfully.

Closing Thoughts

Searching for Excellence illuminated significant considerations for the Worcester Public Schools Superintendent Search Committee. As outlined throughout this document, there are many skills and qualities needed in the next Superintendent of Schools. One through-line that was emphasized by all of the speakers was community engagement. This has been echoed by the Worcester School Committee's motion to undertake the Superintendent search - "the School Committee, in collaboration with the consultant, will develop and implement a comprehensive, inclusive, public process to solicit input from all members of the Worcester community regarding the needs of the district and the characteristics and skillsets required in the next Superintendent of schools." Consistent and thoughtful engagement is a responsibility for all stakeholders – the School Committee, Superintendent Search Committee, the next Superintendent, and the community members at-large.

A series of public, virtual engagement sessions will be hosted from January 18–26, 2022. A list of the sessions is available: <https://worcesterschools.org/search-for-the-next-superintendent-engagement-sessions/>.

Additionally, the executive search firm, Greenwood/Asher & Associates, are collecting feedback directly by emailing jangreenwood@greenwoodsearch.com, itzawalters@greenwoodsearch.com, or jand016@kellyservices.com. The guiding questions are as follows:

- What are the professional leadership competencies needed in the position as superintendent or the Worcester Public Schools?
- What are the interpersonal competencies needed in the position as superintendent?
- Is there a particular background you think is needed in the position as superintendent?
- What are the accomplishments you would like to see the new superintendent achieve in the next few years?
- What do you see to be the main challenge(s) facing the new superintendent?
- What are your points of pride within the system?

Worcester's new superintendent's inbox will hold significant challenges but equally significant opportunities to build a system of schools in the context of and in concert with a robust and varied education ecosystem. It is important that every sector of our city stands ready to support the important and exciting work ahead.