



Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District Superintendent Search Community Survey Report

May 7, 2025

Ketchikan Superintendent Search: Community Survey

Introduction

Between March 28 and April 18, 2025, the Association of Alaska School Boards conducted a community survey to gather input on the qualities, priorities, and leadership attributes most important for the next superintendent of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District. A total of 185 individuals responded, offering a broad and passionate reflection of the community's hopes, concerns, and expectations during a critical time of transition.

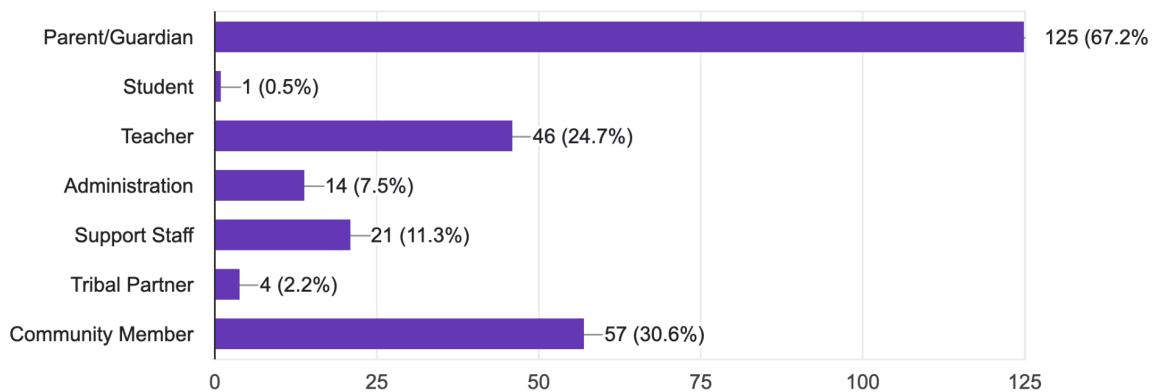
This report summarizes the themes that emerged across multiple questions, including desired professional skills, insights about the community and district, and general thoughts about superintendent leadership. The responses reflect the complexity of Ketchikan's current challenges—especially in terms of budget, transparency, and trust—and also reveal a commitment to student success, staff support, and collaborative problem-solving.

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Who Participated in the Survey?

1. Participants were asked to “please identify which group best fits your affiliation with the school district (Check all that apply).”

185 responses



Response Summary

2. Participants were asked to “select the three most important professional skills and experiences you would want to see in the new superintendent.” The skills and experiences selected most often were:

- Strong skills in district budgeting and financial management (105 / 57%)
- Demonstrates integrity, professionalism and a commitment to ethical decision-making (55 / 30%)
- Transparent and open communication style (43 / 23%)
- Experience fostering a positive and collaborative work culture for teachers and students (38 / 21%)
- Strong listening skills and willingness to engage with parents and the community (36 / 19.5%)

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3. Why do you believe these skills and experiences are the most important for the next superintendent?

Below are the themes that emerged in response to this question:

Budgeting & Financial Management: A majority of respondents referred to the district's current budget situation. Respondents expect the next superintendent to have strong financial skills and provide clear communication about budget development and related decision-making.

- "Our district is deeply divided over how to best navigate severe budget cuts and develop a viable solution. The new Superintendent needs the ability to create a clear and effective plan to meet the budget while maintaining a unified mission of educating students, and strong leadership to include and hold all parties responsible for success in moving forward."
- "Our current budget crisis needs someone with knowledge and experience on how to help us navigate this situation in an ethical manner."
- "Alaska is in a budget crisis and the superintendent needs to know what to prioritize and how to get community input on prioritizing things."

Communication & Transparency: Respondents expressed a desire for a superintendent who communicates clearly and frequently, listens to concerns and engages all voices, and has an accessible and visible leadership style.

- "We need someone who is transparent in their communication with parents, teachers, staff, students, and the entire community."
- "We need to heal a breach between the district and the staff; between the district and the community; between the district and the borough."
- "Tough choices are inevitable. A leader who can transparently and clearly communicate their vision has a higher chance of success."

Leadership Style & District Culture: Stakeholders call for a collaborative and accountable leader who connects with staff, empowers them, and holds everyone to fair standards.

- "We need to have a clear vision for student success in the future. We also need to have a superintendent that is going to collaborate with the teachers who are doing the day to day work. Bad management equals bad outcomes no matter what the budget is. Great management fosters creativity and success. If this year has taught us anything it's that to balance the budget is going to take all of us."

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4. What do you think is important for the next superintendent to know about Ketchikan and the school district?

Below are the themes that emerged in response to this question:

Get to Know Our Community: Respondents expressed that Ketchikan is a unique place with a strong identity, deep cultural roots, and interconnected relationships.

- “We are not like any other district or school, it is important to get to know our schools individually, get to know our district, get to know our community and get to know our island.”
- “We are a small island town with big opinions. You must earn our trust before proposing change.”

Communication and Community Engagement are Imperative: Many respondents mention the need for genuine, two-way communication. Community members want transparent and timely updates, input before decisions, and respect for different stakeholder groups. Some respondents acknowledge the challenge of a reactive public.

- “We are a small town, listening to all stakeholders is incredibly important.”
- “The community, tribal entities, and parents like to be heard and give input.”
- “It’s valuable for families to be heard, considered, and for there to be transparency. Otherwise, you have an uproar in the community.”
- “There are teachers, school staff, and townspeople who are very loud, and rude, and anything that is decided the faction will be against. The townspeople can be verbally aggressive online and in person at board meetings.”
- “We have incredible schools, with wonderful staff and families. We want to give new people a chance, to welcome them to our community. But if you don’t listen to what the community wants, it can go badly.”

Ketchikan is Both a Caring and Divided Community.

- “[Ketchikan] is tense, divided, and going to be a lot of work. But most importantly, our staff cares so much and works so hard. Get to know them, their names, and celebrate the work they are doing.”
- “The community cares deeply about the quality of our children’s educational programming and the teachers and staff supporting them.”
- “Tough decisions will need to be made and those decisions will upset a portion of the community no matter what they are.”

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5. Please share any other thoughts and comments you have about the next Superintendent.

Below are the themes that emerged in response to this question:

Leadership Qualities: Respondents are seeking a superintendent with integrity and fortitude. The next leader should be humble, authentic, and focused on student outcomes. Multiple respondents emphasized the need for someone emotionally resilient and able to navigate conflict diplomatically.

- “Lead with collaboration, honesty, and transparency. We know we are in a dire financial situation and solutions will be difficult. We can handle that easier if we feel like we’re on the same team as leadership, and that our voices are being heard.”
- “We need a no nonsense person with a thick skin and has the ability and the fortitude to make tough decisions to help us get on our feet.”

Community Trust & Relationships: Themes of disillusionment, frustration, and mistrust run through many responses. The new leader must be a bridge-builder.

- “We need someone who is going to continue moving this district towards excellent educational outcomes for our students, and communicate exactly what she/he is doing to the community. We must rebuild the trust of the community. Actions must follow words, words must follow evidence of listening. Rebuild the trust.”

Local vs. External Candidates: Mixed perspectives on hiring local: while some advocate for a local hire with demonstrated leadership and investment in the community, others urge the board to seek an external candidate with a fresh perspective, emphasizing experience over familiarity.

- “If we have someone who is qualified and already lives here, PLEASE think about hiring locally.”
- “I think that you are going to hear from a lot of people that you should hire someone local and maybe there is a good local person, however, please try to hire the best, don’t hire someone just because they are local. Good luck!”
- “I would not say being from Alaska is as important if we get a highly qualified candidate who can tolerate a lot of rain and deal with the current financial crisis.”

Selection Process Recommendations: Several suggested public forums for candidates, involvement of educators and families in interviews, and open lines of feedback throughout the process.

- “Please do open forums much like the city does for their top candidates at Ted ferry! Also, please do expansive background checks...”