



STAKEHOLDER SURVEY REPORT

Presented To
**Southeast Polk Community
School District**

Presented In
January 2026



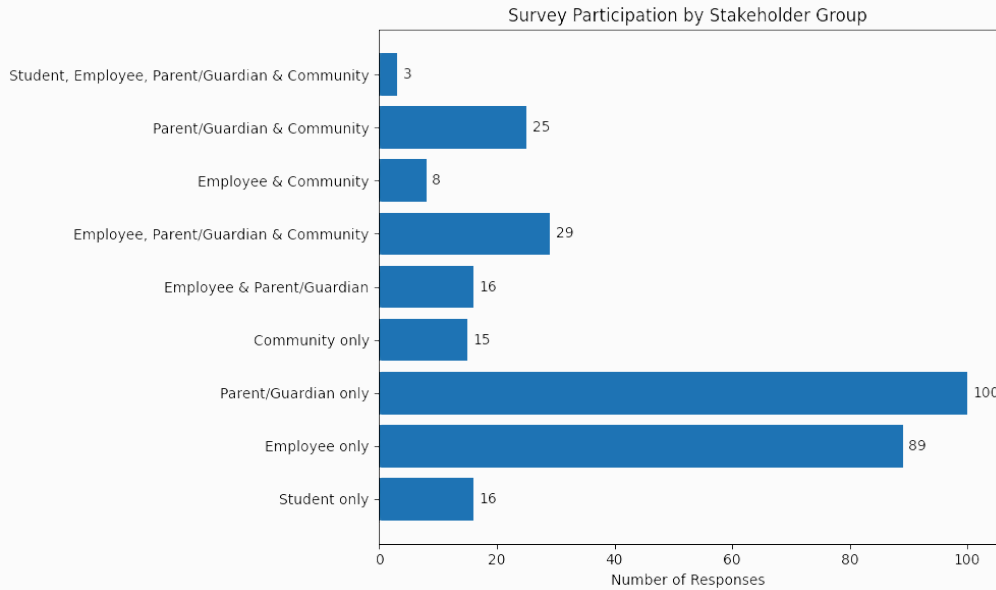
Purpose of the Report

This report is intended to inform the Southeast Polk Community School District Board of Education about the desired qualifications constituents hope to have in the next superintendent

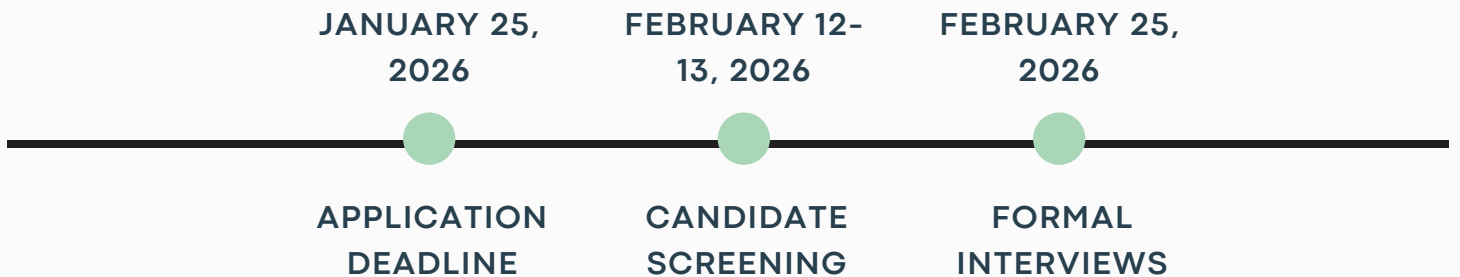
The search team from Grundmeyer Leader Services recently conducted a survey from December 11 through January 10, 2026. The survey received 301 responses from parents, teachers, community members, support staff, students, and others. Many participants selected more than one option.

The feedback from the survey report will be used to guide the hiring process to ensure the next superintendent is a good fit for the district and community.

Survey Participation



Search Timeline



Current Challenges or Opportunities for Southeast Polk CSD

- **ENROLLMENT GROWTH AND PRESSURE ON FACILITIES**
- **STUDENT BEHAVIORS**
- **EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND MORALE**
- **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

"I think our growth is our biggest challenge. Keeping class sizes smaller and manageable in certain elementary buildings."

"We will face the challenges of the number of students and having the space, staff, and resources for all of them."

"One challenge may be managing enrollment growth and ensuring that class sizes, facilities, and transportation keep pace with the community's needs."

"The growth of our district needs to be anticipated and addressed so that we keep up with the needs of students and we have staff in place to address these needs, including support staff (counselors, social workers, etc) to help with the growing needs of our student body."

"Rising anxiety, trauma, and behavioral challenges. Increased need for specialized supports and alternative settings. Strain on school staff who are not trained mental health professionals."

"Managing student behaviors is a problem in our schools across the board."

"Making sure that students and staff are both supported. Retaining quality staff, as there will probably be a turnover at the end of this year due to various things."

"We are in a teacher shortage, and teacher burnout is real. It is difficult to keep positions filled, which adds a burden to all staff. We need someone who has possible solutions for both of those issues."

"Ongoing shortages of teachers, substitutes, counselors, and administrators. Increased workload, burnout, and turnover."

"Maintaining fiscal stability — especially amid inflationary pressures and funding constraints — requires careful budgeting, proactive planning, and clear communication with taxpayers on investment priorities."

"The next leader of Southeast Polk must be a 'Financial Architect.' They will need to balance the construction of a new elementary school with the reality that state funding (SSA) is not keeping pace with inflation."

Top Priorities for Superintendent's First Year

- **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CONSTITUENTS**
- **STRENGTHEN THE DISTRICT CULTURE**
- **FOCUS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**
- **EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

"Priorities should include building strong relationships with students, staff, families, and the broader community. Listening, learning, and understanding the district's strengths and needs will be critical."

"Conduct a structured 'listening tour' with teachers, support staff, administrators, students, families, and community partners."

"The district needs to have a stronger culture of togetherness and cohesiveness to help with morale for both the staff and students."

"Fostering a positive district culture. One that values respect, collaboration, and continuous improvement will be critical in building momentum and trust during that first year."

"Working on culture within the district and among buildings so that each school in the district has a clear understanding of their role both as an individual school and as a part of Southeast Polk as a whole."

"The district needs to return its focus to student achievement. We have drifted away from the mission and focused the district on things not related to academic achievement."

"Improving the student curriculum for everyone to have an opportunity for an education that is tailored to each student's needs."

"Provide challenging curriculum and engaging opportunities."

"High rigor, high expectations for academics."

"Address teacher and leader shortages. Redesign roles to reduce burnout and administrative overload."

"Retention of quality veteran teachers by making the work environment one in which teachers feel appreciated, valued, respected, and listened to. Support your staff and listen to them."

"Supporting and retaining high-quality educators through professional development and workload awareness."

Desired Qualities, Characteristics, and Leadership Strengths

Respondents provided input on the top qualities, characteristics, and leadership strengths they hope to have in the next superintendent, including:

- Visibility and accessibility - Active in the district and community.
- Strong communication skills - Including listening.
- Student-centered decision-making - Keeps the focus on students.
- Integrity and honesty - Transparent decision-making and communication style.
- Relationship building - A true “community-builder.”
- Instructional expertise - Supporting and developing teachers and leaders.
- Strategic, systems-thinking leadership - Honors traditions and facilitates progress.
- Accountability and follow-through - Does what they say they are going to do.
- Hires and supports their team - Including promoting overall wellness.
- Fiscal responsibility - Forecast into the future.
- Collaborative and transparent leadership style - Also willing to address challenges directly.

The Southeast Polk Community School District seeks a superintendent who is a visible, accessible, and student-centered leader with strong communication and listening skills. This leader demonstrates integrity and transparency, builds strong relationships across the community, and brings instructional expertise to support teachers and leaders. The superintendent leads strategically with a systems perspective, follows through with accountability, hires and supports a strong team with attention to wellness, practices sound fiscal stewardship, and collaborates openly while addressing challenges directly.

ABOUT SOUTHEAST POLK CSD

As Iowa's 13th-largest school district, the Southeast Polk Community School District serves more than 7,500 prekindergarten through 12th-grade students from Altoona, Pleasant Hill, Mitchellville, Runnells, Des Moines, and the surrounding areas.

The district covers 114 square miles in southern Polk County, operates 12 schools, and employs roughly 1,200 talented professionals.

Advice for the Next Superintendent

“Be present in our buildings or at events. We have a great group of staff, so please take the time to get to know them. Be transparent and communicate well the purpose of the changes you may make.”

“Lead with humility, compassion, and a genuine desire to listen. Take the time to understand Southeast Polk's unique strengths, challenges, and culture by engaging directly with students, families, teachers, and staff. Building trust early through open communication and transparency will make a lasting difference.”

“Be present. Listen first. Support your staff. Communicate clearly with families, even when the message isn't easy.”

“Be transparent in all dealings, particularly with regard to the budget, district challenges, and opportunities for growth.”

“Southeast Polk is a wonderful community with a ton of support. Please lead the district with the future in mind.”

“Have an open mind and be willing to have a growth mindset.”

“Address the challenges of continued student population growth. Ensure equitable access to resources and programs. Support staff professional growth. Promote a culture of academic excellence and student success.”

“Prioritize open communication with families, listen to the community, and ensure that every student feels supported (both academically and emotionally).”

“A successful first year will be about listening deeply, aligning people around a shared vision, and laying the groundwork for lasting improvement.”

“This school district is full of support from all people involved. Acknowledging and returning that support is crucial.”

“Always remember that every decision ultimately affects students. Keep their safety, well-being, and long-term success at the center of your leadership.”

“Be transparent and communicative throughout this process. Clear, consistent communication helps the community feel informed, valued, and included in the work ahead.”

“**This is an amazing community! Take time to get to know the people you're serving to understand our needs and the direction our district is headed.**”

Iowa's Standards for School Leaders

(adopted 11.18.20 / effect date: July 2021)

STANDARD 1. MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

STANDARD 2. ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL NORMS

Educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 3. EQUITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 4. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

Educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 5. COMMUNITY OF CARE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

STANDARD 6. PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 7. PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 8. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 9. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 10. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.