



South Coast Education Service District Superintendent Search Leadership Summary and Ideal Profile

February 4, 2022

This report presents the findings of the leadership assessment conducted by Human Capital Enterprises in January of 2022 for the position of Superintendent of the South Coast Education Service District. The data contained herein were obtained from input received by Human Capital Enterprises consultants Hank Harris and Robyn Bean when they conducted individual interviews and focus groups as well as from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The survey, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups provided information for the consultants and for prospective applicants regarding the strengths of the District and some of the opportunities and challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

In all, nearly ninety internal and external stakeholders participated in our project. Of these, 43 individuals served in focus groups and 46 individuals participated in the online survey. The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group are listed below:

Focus Group/Interviews	Number Involved
SCESD School Board Directors	6
Administrators, Supervisors, and Confidential Staff	7
Licensed Staff and Classified Staff	51
Parents and Community Members	17
Component School District Superintendents	8
Total	89¹

We would like to thank all the participants who attended interviews, focus group meetings, or completed the online survey, with a special call-out to Peggy Ahlgrim and Brandie Monroe for their great assistance with scheduling and logistics. We are deeply appreciative of the coordination and commitment to the important work that takes place every day at South Coast ESD and we are excited to help the Board find the next extraordinary leader.

Strengths of the District

South Coast ESD is a highly regarded ESD that enjoys a very favorable perception in the public, and specifically among the ten constituent districts. Stated succinctly, one local superintendent responded, "They've built a strong ESD – pound for pound, one of the best in Oregon". Focus group participants

were eager to share the many outstanding characteristics that make SCESD a place where people want to work. In addition, respondents were quick to remark about the wonderful quality of life in the region, particularly for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy hiking, golfing, water activities, fishing, hunting and all that the area has to offer. Covering more than 135 miles up and down the southern Oregon coast from Douglas County all the way to the California border, and inland for as many as 50 miles in places, the SCESD service area covers significant geography and terrain.

The agency's guiding principles of ***Equity of Access, People Centered and Quality Services, and Professionalism*** were all front and center in the highlights shared by stakeholders who agree that "Together We Can" is being achieved every day.

While there are numerous strengths within the district that deserve mention, below are the most prominent themes that emerged from interviews, focus groups, and the online survey. The insights offered in interviews, focus groups and via the online survey responses were tremendously informative, however it should be emphasized that the delineations below are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing a majority opinion. Items are included if, in the consultant's judgment, they warranted the Board's attention, and are listed in order of prevalence.

1. An exceptional workforce

Without exception, every focus group began by commending the highly dedicated, extraordinarily talented staff at all levels of SCESD. Staff across the agency - whether direct student service providers or SCESD district office staff, were commended not only for their exceptional knowledge and skills in their area but also for their customer service. It was noted that staff are "extremely easy to get ahold of", responding to questions or concerns quickly and helpfully.

Throughout the region there is a deep recognition that special education staff are passionate about providing high caliber, best-practice services to students with complex needs. Student-facing staff were commended for not only their commitment to the students they served, but also to parents, families, and the community. Frequently noticed for going the extra mile, one parent described staff as "do-ers, who get things done!" Parents appreciate their service providers' excellent knowledge and skills, their kindness, professionalism, respect and their regular and clear communication. Beyond recognition for their discipline-specific expertise, teachers and support staff are characterized as caring, and genuinely committed to their students and to one another. Administrative staff was also lauded for their expertise and notably for the breadth and depth of their knowledge, noting they each wear many hats and do so admirably.

2. Well-respected and appreciated services to students, families, and districts

SCESD is respected in the region, and enjoys support from parents, businesses, non-profit organizations and the ten component school district superintendents and their staff. Component superintendents identified the exemplary high quality special education programs and personnel, and the high level of responsiveness on the part of SCESD staff to the needs of their districts. One said, "I can call and get help with anything, and I do", specifically noting that the ESD can serve a neutral role and can be called on in difficult situations for support and assistance.

Quick and responsive communication and two-way engagement between SCESD administration and school district superintendents was commended. Community partners also identified the district's communication practices as a strength and note that administrators' participation in local service organizations has been one especially effective way for the community to stay abreast of what is

Parents were quick to declare their appreciation of the high quality services provided by special education staff across all of the disciplines in support of their students. Specifically, special education staff were praised for their communication, creativity and their willingness to try every avenue to help students achieve academically, socially and emotionally. One parent who has had children in SCESD programs for ten years expressed that “staff care so much, they are amazing ... if one thing hasn’t worked, they try something else.”

3. Employee culture focused on teamwork and collaboration

There is a pervasive belief that SCESD is a place of collaboration, that staff are welcoming, dedicated to supporting each other and to making a difference in the schools and the community together. This was called out consistently by internal and external stakeholders as a key hallmark of the SCESD. Staff are deployed across a large geographic region, often working in isolation from their SCESD colleagues, and even in those circumstances there was pride expressed in how well staff reach out to one another to maintain connection. Examples were given of an “all for one” comradery and support when a staff member is struggling personally or professionally. One staff member described their collaboration as rooted in the respect they show and are shown, the specialized skills they have learned and willingly share, and the pride they have in seeing the measurable difference they are making in the lives of some of the region’s most vulnerable students. Together they set goals, and rely on each other and the administration to provide the support they need to achieve those goals on behalf of students, families, and the community.

There is strong connectivity and collegiality within and between departments, and staff are eager to partner for greater productivity. Staff expressed that they are given the tools they need and then trusted to autonomously accomplish their assignments. They also expressed appreciation for the work to prioritize staff safety and staff wellness when returning to in-person learning in the context of positive work culture.

4. A seasoned and professional School Board that works well together.

Prospective superintendents will ask about the quality and caliber of a district’s Board, and SCESD has a lot to boast about in this regard. The Board is well known to be comprised of thoughtful, intelligent, hard-working individuals who work well together in a respectful, professional, and lawful manner. The school board is strong and high-functioning, and the district has greatly benefitted from continuity in leadership. Board subcommittee work aligns with member strengths and expertise, and ensures that the workload is shared between board members. There is good communication among Board members, and trust in subcommittee reviews and recommendations that are brought to the entire board for action or approval. The many unanimous decisions do not reflect a “rubber stamp” kind of a board, but a board that is well informed, well read, and perceived to be focused always on what is best for the students rather than in service to a personal agenda.

5. Sound fiscal management

The District demonstrates sound fiscal management practices and oversight. Included in the context of fiscal oversight were expressions of pride related to the improvement of facilities in recent years. The Board has acted to ensure ample ending-fund balance year to year, and that fiscal management will ensure the continuity of services if/when budget uncertainty – as is not uncommon in Oregon – ensues. The budget priorities are grounded in the service to districts as required in Oregon statute. In addition, the district commendably works to secure grants and funding with partners such as ODE, non-profit organizations, local government, and the business community in order to leverage resources for students

Challenges for the New Superintendent

1. Covid/Post-Covid

Hardly unique to SCESD, the current public health complexities will give way to new and different ones beyond this year and the district will need a leader able to steward this work for SCESD. This will include being mindful of the fact that not all students were impacted in the same ways and there is work to be done to regain academic, social, and other skills particularly for students served by SCESD's special education staff. This will require communication, responsiveness, and plans that are quickly and thoughtfully developed to effectively support students and staff.

2. Staffing and workload

The ESD is widely praised for the talent of its current workforce, but virtually every focus group identified that hiring in the region in nearly all of the ESD's specialty areas is difficult. Recruiting is hampered by a lack of affordable housing. The difficulty recruiting highly technically skilled staff requires an even stronger focus on maintaining staff already committed to SCESD. It was noted that the difficulty in maintaining "fully staffed" levels often results in existing staff having to manage increasingly higher workload demands. Perhaps no other issue will be more essential for SCESD's new leader and their team, in collaboration with licensed and classified staff, to address – that is, the identification of strategies for recruiting and retaining staff.

3. Superintendent turnover in the region

There has been significant turnover recently among superintendents in the component districts, and there will be additional new district leaders at the helm in the 2022-23 academic year. The lack of stability in the component superintendent ranks can create some challenges in unifying the superintendents around a common set of goals and expectations, and presents a need for the SCESD Superintendent to provide additional mentoring and specialized leadership across the region. The loss of historical perspective presents challenges as new innovative ideas and services are imagined by a new group of superintendents who may not have a complete understanding of how decisions related to current services were made. There are always challenges with respect to determining delivery of services due to disparate needs in the region - tiny school districts and much larger ones; wealthier ones and others that are considerably poorer. Having so many new superintendents in the region impacts the smoothness of maintaining and improving the delivery of these services.

4. Continuing to meet the needs of districts

The current leadership is commended for keeping all 10 constituent districts engaged and committed. This is, however, a continually important requirement to which the ESD superintendent must attend. It is essential that the ESD continues to offer and to expand its services to districts in response to their ever-evolving needs at an affordable price. An example of an expanded service this year has been SCESD's working to establish an online school in response to the needs of component districts. Ongoing strong support of special education will continue to be essential to SCESD's success, as will an examination of where there may be opportunities for growth in technology including instructional technology, curriculum and instruction, and administrative services.

5. Public Awareness

Several groups and respondents felt that the ESD is still not well known in the community, and would benefit from finding more ways to “tell our story”. It was noted that community members were often unfamiliar altogether with SCESD until they had a child who was referred for services. More work promoting “who we are and what we do” in the coming months and years is a hoped-for outcome by several who engaged in focus groups. It was also noted that while getting to know the community is an important part of any superintendent’s work, it is unique for an ESD Superintendent where there are 10 (or more) communities in play.

Further participation in service organizations and community activities by representatives of SCESD at all levels of administration, not only the superintendent, was suggested. Community partners are eager to further strengthen their relationship with SCESD.

Ideal Profile of the Next SCESD Superintendent

The next section refers to the specific criteria that the consultants will use in identifying outstanding prospects for the position of Superintendent. It is also a document which the Board will use in its deliberations in the *Select* phase of the search.

These Characteristics emanate from feedback from the Focus Groups and Interviews and from the results of the *Superintendent Search Survey*. Within the Focus Groups, Interviews, and Survey, our first two questions ask about strengths and complexities of the District; and the third question asks specifically about Desired Characteristics of a new leader. The responses to all three questions help inform and shape the establishment of this criteria.

Distilling a list from so much input is both an art and a science, but ultimately must reflect the desires of the elected school board. To that end, we provide to the Board these fourteen Desired Characteristics as a composite voice from your community and your stakeholders – and as a draft for you to consider.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robyn Bean" followed by a stylized flourish.

Human Capital Enterprises