



Northbrook School District 28

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT AND SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

October 26, 2021

In preparation for the search for a new Superintendent of Northbrook District 28, the School Board requested that School Exec Connect consultants conduct a community engagement process that would document reflections and insights from District staff and community stakeholders. Representative focus groups and an online survey allowed any stakeholder in the District to contribute on a voluntary basis. Participation in the community engagement process was excellent. Information from the focus groups and survey was used to create a New Superintendent Profile that will guide the recruitment, screening, interviews, and selection of a new Superintendent.

Focus groups participants included the School Board, District administrators, District support staff, building administrators, teachers from across the District, building support staff, parents, students, community members, and business leaders. Ninety-eight (98) stakeholders took part in one of thirteen focus groups or nine individual interviews. All participants were asked to express their views regarding the strengths of the District, challenges facing the District, first-year priorities for the new Superintendent, and the specific characteristics, skills, and attributes to be sought in the next Superintendent.

The District also sought input from stakeholders via an online survey, open from September 22 to October 14, 2021. Four-hundred and sixty-eight (468) people answered questions about perceived educational and managerial strengths and challenges the new Superintendent will face. Respondents also identified priorities for the new Superintendent to address and characteristics they associate with a successful Superintendent in Northbrook 28. A summary of the survey results can be found after the focus group report.

Due to the sampling methodology, this report should not be construed as scientifically accurate. The opinions set forth in the report may not reflect the opinion of all staff, students, and residents, but do reflect the opinions of those who participated. Judgments regarding what is included in this report are those of the consultants, based upon the frequency of statements received throughout the data gathering process.

The consultants used the information gathered in this report to develop the **New Superintendent Profile**, found on the final page of this document.

This report may be used in several ways. The profile will be helpful to the consultants as they screen and interview candidates. The Board of Education will gain an understanding of the community's view of the District and the superintendency, and can use the profile to prepare questions for the Board interviews with the candidates. The consultants also recommend the report be given to the newly appointed Superintendent for a better understanding of the issues and opportunities facing District 28. The District may also choose to post the report on the Superintendent Search portion of the website to be viewed by stakeholders.

Focus Group Response Overview

Focus Groups were held with all constituencies including Board members, parents, administrators, teachers, students, support staff and community leaders. Ninety-eight (98) participants in thirteen focus groups and nine individual interviews provided insights into the strengths and challenges facing the District, the priorities the new Superintendent should establish, and the qualities and skills the next Superintendent should possess. Below is a summary of the responses to each of the four questions asked in each Focus group.

The first question asked participants to identify the major strengths of Northbrook District 28, and the community that supports the district.

- Almost every respondent noted their pride in the strong teaching and administrative staff who have created a close-knit community of learners in the schools. As one parent indicated, “There is a nice feeling of family at all of my children’s schools.” Many parents and teachers indicated that they specifically chose to live in this district because of its reputation for excellence, including the small class sizes and the balance between a focus on test scores and students’ social-emotional health.
- Teachers, administrators, business people, and parents praised the engaged and committed parent community who place a high value on education.
- A very high teacher retention rate and stability in the administrative and support staff indicate a culture of trust and collaboration, resulting in high job satisfaction.
- Northbrook is a well-resourced district in a desirable location with a strong reputation for excellence. Every group noted that the small class sizes and the use of teaching assistants in every elementary classroom make an impact on student engagement and learning.
- Community members noted the spirit of collaboration and trust that exists between the school district and village governments and business organizations.
- Students from Northbrook 28 attend Glenbrook North High School, a highly respected school in Illinois and the nation; a strong value is placed on collaboration with the high school district.
- A highly-regarded early childhood program draws families to the District, providing programs for students who are at-risk, who have special needs, and who are typical learners. Other programs that were frequently mentioned were the music program, the Spanish program that begins in first grade, and the rich diversity of activities and programs available to all students.
- A strong administrative team works well with the Board of Education, teachers, and parents, providing strong support to curriculum, instruction, and professional development.
- Teachers have a meaningful role in decision-making and governance of the school district, and this relationship is valued by all constituencies. Teachers meet regularly with administrators and Board members.
- Parents expressed appreciation for their children’s experiences in the Special Education program, and noted the collaborative approach to establishing interventions for students with an IEP or 504 plan.

- Many parents and teachers noted their appreciation for the District's COVID-19 response during the 2020-21 school year, with schools open all year and a rigorous online program available for those families who wished their children to learn remotely.
- Students feel supported by teachers, expressing confidence in teachers' willingness to provide feedback, demonstrate kindness, and listen to multiple points of view. They want a superintendent who is kind, honest, loyal, and positive and who will get to know them personally.
- A growth mindset is apparent in the schools, among teachers, administrators and the Board. A willingness to consider new ideas was cited as a strength.

The second prompt for the Focus Groups asked participants to identify the biggest challenges facing the District next year and beyond.

- A high-achieving school district will inevitably experience pressure to raise/maintain test scores, but many participants noted that they want to see District 28 continue to focus on both academic rigor and social and emotional health of students, a balance that can be challenging to maintain.
- Many focus group participants indicated a desire to see closer collaboration and articulation with Glenbrook North High School, making sure that Northbrook 28 students are very well-prepared for high school. Math and Spanish were frequently cited as areas of concern.
- While the District has been financially stable, fiscal constraints may be an issue in the future due to many circumstances including costs associated with COVID-19, shifting enrollment, changes in the business community, and a period of higher-than-normal inflation.
- A strong desire to diversify the teaching and administrative staff was expressed in almost every focus group, along with the hope that diversity, equity, and inclusion are priorities of the new Superintendent. Some respondents had questions how these concepts would be integrated in the curriculum.
- Continuing to attract and retain the most qualified and talented individuals in every work group in a time of growing shortages will be a challenge.
- District and building level staff expressed a desire for more formal systems for hiring and organization of human resources, though they also value the autonomy they experience in selecting staff that meet the needs of their building or office.
- After a period of listening and reflection, the new Superintendent needs to examine what programs and practices should stay and where the District needs to change or evolve. Balancing the interests of various constituencies will be challenging.
- The expectation for close collaboration with teachers, administrators, and the Board place demands on a Superintendent's time that may be greater than in some districts. Northbrook 28 also expects the new Superintendent to be highly engaged, visible, and active in the schools and community.
- Many focus group participants indicated they would like to see greater use of data in providing parents and the community information about student progress and also to use data in making decisions about programs, instruction, and curriculum.
- Continue to consider the impacts of the pandemic on students, staff, families, and community and implement academic or emotional supports where needed.

The third question asked participants to identify those skills, personal qualities, and experiences that are important for the next Superintendent to possess.

- The new Superintendent should be a proven leader with specific accomplishments, as well as being hard-working, proactive, transparent, visionary, and strategic. Experience in the classroom and leadership at the building level are important to many constituents.
- The new Superintendent needs to have a deep knowledge of curriculum and instruction and be comfortable with the use of data to drive decision-making. Focusing on the success of every student and balancing academics and social-emotional health is of critical importance.
- Understand how to motivate and manage high-performing teams, and use the talents of each individual. Clearly identify and focus on a common vision for the future.
- Demonstrate openness, accessibility, thoughtfulness, likability, and responsiveness. The new Superintendent should display humor, compassion, warmth, and approachability while also showing humility and a willingness to listen.
- Understanding finance, business operations, and board governance is important for the new Superintendent.
- Communication is a key to success; the new Superintendent should be able to inform and inspire others through eloquent speaking, skillful writing, and the effective use of multimedia.
- Understands the needs of all students, including students with IEPs, 504 plans, ELL designations, and talented or gifted identification.
- Demonstrate skill at collaboration with other districts, including the other Northbrook sender districts and Glenbrook High School District; show a willingness to acquire and share information from the high school about the progress of District 28 students.
- The Superintendent should be the face of the District while sharing the spotlight, recognizing the work of others and providing opportunities for growth among all staff.
- The new leader should have the ability to balance confidence and humility, to act decisively, but to listen carefully and work collaboratively in reaching those decisions.
- Engage with community partners and prioritize visibility in Northbrook and in the schools.
- Remain calm under pressure and demonstrate respect for multiple viewpoints. Carefully review information and collaborate with others before decision-making, then support that decision publicly.

Participants in the focus groups want the new Superintendent to possess a deep understanding of existing programs and practices while also inspiring the entire community with a vision for the future of the District. A community passionate about education and willing to support its schools, Northbrook 28 is a destination district; the strong hope is that the new Superintendent will become deeply rooted in the community and stay in that position for many years.

Asked to identify priorities for the next Superintendent, Focus Group participants' responses expressed a desire for balance in providing a rigorous academic program while maintaining the emphasis on the whole child, including social-emotional health and safety.

- The new Superintendent must craft a careful transition plan, becoming familiar with the District's programs, initiatives, and practices. Significant time should be spent with District employees, parents, students, and community leaders, closely listening to their past experiences and hopes for the future.

- Be prepared to collaborate, to listen, and to respond to all constituencies, modeling civility and openness. Take time to understand Northbrook 28 before making significant changes.
- Continue to focus on hiring and retaining the best teachers and administrators, prioritizing professional development and a growth mindset. Seek to hire a more diverse teaching and leadership staff, and establish clear systems and practices in the human resources department.
- Build trust and establish strong relationships from the very first day. Demonstrate competence, insight, empathy, and excellent listening skills.
- The need for financial planning was frequently mentioned as a priority, including an assessment of facilities, enrollment trends, and budgeting.
- Develop strong ties with Glenbrook North High School and elementary sender districts, and establish contacts and allies in local and state government. Engage in the community through visible and active participation.
- Respect the strong foundation of success, assess what works and what can be improved, and plan for incremental change rather than wholesale replacement of existing programs and practices.
- Build strong teams and establish effective working relationships with administrators and teachers, providing support for building principals and seeking their input on a regular basis.
- Help all parents to become engaged in a positive way with their children's schools, setting meeting times/places that are accessible to all; treat all schools equitably and get to know staff and students in each building.
- The new Superintendent should be a visionary leader who will develop a clear, ambitious strategy for the future that enjoys support among the staff and community.



Northbrook District 28 Survey Results

The Northbrook 28 community completed the survey in significant numbers, with 468 individuals responding to twenty-one questions. More than two-thirds of respondents are parents, and over one hundred teachers/licensed staff filled out the survey.

The charts that follow show the responses to each question, beginning with a breakdown of respondents, then listing the top answers for each prompt. Each question offers a variety of forced-choice responses.

1. Survey Respondents

Parent of current/past student (past 4 years)	71%	333
Community member/Business leader	6%	28
Teacher/licensed staff	22%	103
Administrator	2%	11
Support Staff (aides, custodians, clerical, maintenance)	5%	25
Other	5%	24
TOTAL (Individual respondents – some in multiple categories)		468

2. If you are a parent, what school(s) do your children attend?

Greenbriar Elementary	25%	85
Meadowbrook Elementary	26%	88
Westmoor Elementary	32%	111
Northbrook Junior High	48%	166
TOTAL (Parents have students at multiple schools)		344

3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Optional)

American Indian/Native American	0%	0
Asian	8%	32
Black/African American	<1%	1
Hispanic/Latinx	1%	5
White/Caucasian	88%	351
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	<1%	1
Two or more races	2%	10
TOTAL (70 people skipped this question.)		400

4. What is your gender? (Optional)

Male	22%	89
Female	77%	320
Nonbinary	1%	4
TOTAL (57 respondents skipped this question.)		413

For several of the survey questions, responses were disaggregated for the two largest groups of participants: parents and teachers/licensed staff. These responses demonstrate some of the differences among the subgroups, though throughout much of the survey, all constituents were

remarkably similar in their responses. I found the teachers and parents to be unusually aligned in their answers, including identification of strengths, challenges, and priorities. Some differences are apparent in the question about the qualities desired in the new Superintendent, with teachers placing the highest value on relationships and communication and parents prioritizing academic skills and success.

The survey data provides information about the educational community’s needs and expectations, and lays out a roadmap to action that can help a new Superintendent succeed in Northbrook 28.

5. Please select up to five (5) items that represent the greatest strengths of Northbrook 28’s educational environment.	
	ALL
Safe student and staff learning environment	56%
Development of well-rounded students through an emphasis on communication, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving	55%
Engaged and supportive parents and community	48%
Support for the needs of special education students	41%
Student social/emotional support	31%

Educational Strengths of Northbrook 28 - Subgroups	
	Parents
Safe student and staff learning environment	57%
Development of well-rounded students through an emphasis on communication, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving	55%
Engaged and supportive parents and community	50%
Support for the needs of special education students	39%
Student social/emotional support	31%
	Teachers/Licensed Staff
Safe student and staff learning environment	58%
Engaged and supportive parents and community	54%
Development of well-rounded students through an emphasis on communication, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving	52%
Support for the needs of special education students	49%
(Tie) Student social/emotional support and Overall student achievement	36%

6. Please select up to five (5) items that represent the greatest challenges of Northbrook District 28's educational environment.

	ALL
Instructional methods that engage all students	37%
Challenging, state-of-the-art curriculum	35%
Student readiness for the next level of learning	34%
Closing achievement gaps among subgroups	29%
Opportunities for students outside the classroom	29%
Parents	
Student readiness for the next level of learning	40%
Instructional methods that engage all students	36%
Challenging, state-of-the-art curriculum	35%
Opportunities for students outside the classroom	33%
Breadth and depth of programs and academic courses	30%
Teachers/Licensed Staff	
Student social/emotional support	42%
(TIE) Instructional methods that engage all students/Closing achievement gaps among student subgroups	34%
Challenging, state-of-the-art curriculum	32%
Clearly articulated vision for the direction of Northbrook District 28	28%

7. Please select the areas you consider the top four (4) managerial or organizational strengths of Northbrook 28.

	All
Class size	64%
Modern, clean, and well-maintained schools and grounds	45%
Image/reputation of the District	42%
Strong communication with parents and the community	39%

8. Please select the areas you consider the top four (4) managerial or organizational challenges of Northbrook 28

	ALL
Understanding and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion	45%
Long range strategic planning and implementation	39%
Decision-making driven by data and research	33%
Environment that attracts and retains highly effective personnel	24%

9. Please select up to four (4) priorities that the new Superintendent should focus on during the first year in Northbrook 28	
	ALL
(TIE) A culture focused on academic growth and achievement for all students AND Development of students' 21 st century skills	46%
Collaboration, trust, transparency, and respect among all District 28 stakeholders	45%
Student well-being (physical and emotional safety and confidence)	41%
Instructional practices that maximize student engagement	40%
Priorities - Subgroups	
	Parents
A culture focused on academic growth and achievement for all students	54%
Development of students' 21 st century skills	51%
Student well-being (physical and emotional safety and confidence)	45%
Instructional practices that maximize student engagement	43%
	Teachers/Licensed Staff
Collaboration, trust, transparency, and respect among all District 28 stakeholders	66%
Clear, two-way communication and relationships with all staff and the community	59%
Strong relationships with staff, parents, and community members	47%
Instructional practices that maximize student engagement	35%
10. Choose the top five (5) characteristics/skills that you believe are most important for a person to be successful as the new Superintendent of Northbrook 28.	
	ALL
Possesses a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and student learning, and is aware of educational research and emerging best practices	60%
Makes decisions based on what is best for students	50%
Builds effective teams and brings out the best in others	47%
Works collaboratively and includes others in decision-making	37%
(TIE) Practices transparency in decision-making AND Articulates a clear vision for leading our District that inspires others	36%
Demonstrates a high level of skill in interpersonal relationships; shows warmth, humor, and interest in others	31%

Characteristics/Skills - Subgroups	
	Parents
Possesses a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and student learning, and is aware of educational research and emerging best practices	65%
Makes decisions based on what is best for students	54%
Builds effective teams and brings out the best in others	46%
Articulates a clear vision for leading our District that inspires others	38%
Practices transparency in decision-making	35%
Works collaboratively and includes others in decision-making	30%
Demonstrates a high level of skill in interpersonal relationships; shows warmth, humor, and interest in others	26%
	Teachers/Licensed Staff
Works collaboratively and includes others in decision-making Practices transparency in decision-making	61%
Demonstrates a high level of skill in interpersonal relationships; shows warmth, humor, and interest in others	51%
Practices transparency in decision-making	48%
Builds effective teams and brings out the best in others	47%
Possesses a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and student learning, and is aware of educational research and emerging best practices	45%
Is open-minded and flexible	39%
Demonstrates excellent communication skills	25%

11. I am proud of our District/Schools and would encourage families to move into our community/communities due to the quality of schools.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	51%
Agree	33%
Somewhat agree	10%
Neither agree nor disagree	1%
Somewhat disagree	3%
Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	1%
12. The District is effectively meeting the social emotional needs of our students	
	ALL
Strongly agree	19%
Agree	40%
Somewhat agree	22%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%
Somewhat disagree	7%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	1%
13. The District provides adequate communication and information to parents and community members.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	33%
Agree	48%
Somewhat agree	12%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%
Somewhat disagree	4%
Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	<1%
14. The District has high expectations for our staff and students.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	34%
Agree	44%
Somewhat agree	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	3%
Somewhat disagree	2%
Disagree	1%
Strongly disagree	1%

15. The District effectively implements diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	15%
Agree	27%
Somewhat agree	22%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Somewhat disagree	9%
Disagree	5%
Strongly Disagree	4%

16. The District meets the needs of students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELL) and those with Individualized Education Plans (IEP).	
	ALL
Strongly agree	23%
Agree	31%
Somewhat agree	14%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	1%

17. The District meets the needs of students who are experiencing academic difficulties.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	14%
Agree	36%
Somewhat agree	19%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Somewhat disagree	8%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%

18. The District meets the needs of students who are gifted and talented.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	17%
Agree	39%
Somewhat agree	15%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	2%

19. The District meets the needs of students who are considered typical and are performing at grade level.	
	ALL
Strongly agree	21%
Agree	50%
Somewhat agree	14%
Neither agree nor disagree	7%
Somewhat disagree	5%
Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	1%
20. The District provides enough extracurricular activities and athletics to meet the levels of interest of our students.	
Strongly agree	16%
Agree	35%
Somewhat agree	20%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%
Somewhat disagree	10%
Disagree	3%
Strongly disagree	3%

21. Is there anything else you would like the School Exec Connect consultants to know that could be helpful in the search for a new Superintendent for Northbrook 28?

One hundred and eighty-five survey respondents left comments in this section, with most of the comments being closely aligned to statements made in focus groups or interviews. The comments fell into several categories.

- Around one hundred of the comments included positive observations about the District and Dr. Hewitt or suggestions about qualities or priorities they would like to see in the next Superintendent. Fourteen people expressed the importance of continuing to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and eleven people made statements that simply expressed their overall satisfaction with the District. Suggestions for desired qualities in the next Superintendent included visionary, trustworthy, visible, friendly, and open. Appreciation for specific programs were mentioned including art/music, Spanish, and special education. A number of people advised the new Superintendent to take the time to learn about the District and become immersed in its culture.
- Approximately forty-five comments were primarily negative, including comments about unclear grading practices, too much emphasis on test scores, not enough emphasis on test scores, a lack of after-school activities and sports, and concerns that a focus on diversity and equity are taking time from academic studies or imposing a political perspective.
- Twenty people simply wrote that they had no comment, and six people wrote about specific experiences with their children.
- Conflicting opinions were reflected in widely varying comments about test scores/social emotional health as well as the District’s approach to the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.



New Superintendent Profile: Northbrook District 28

The new Superintendent should be a person who:

- Possesses a deep knowledge of best practices in teaching and learning; the Superintendent is student-centered, innovative, confident, and resilient.
- Makes decisions based on what is best for students; keeps students at the center of planning and decision-making and communicates decisions with clarity, reason, and empathy after considering input from stakeholders.
- Possesses a genuine, warm, caring, personable, transparent, flexible, and approachable personality, and is skilled at building trust and maintaining a positive culture and climate.
- Passionately embraces the current traditions and values of the District, including a focus on the well-being of all children in every aspect of their growth and development.
- Uses a proven track record of success as an educator and leader to positively impact student achievement and District outcomes, building strong teams that focus on the mission and vision of the District.
- Models active listening, encourages and supports stakeholder voice/input, and fosters a collaborative process for shared decision-making, showing an openness, transparency, and a willingness to give credit to others.
- Exhibits excellent communication skills; builds on existing methods and strategies to ensure timely and transparent communication that keeps internal and external stakeholders informed and supports a positive image of the District.
- Communicates a clear vision for the future of District 28 and inspires others to act in accordance with that vision; establishes and maintains high expectations for all students and staff.
- Works effectively with the Board of Education, aligning decision-making with the District vision and goals and pursuing those objectives with passion, transparency, and persistence.
- Prioritizes the recruitment, training, and retention of highly effective teachers and leaders, guided by clear human resource practices; focuses on hiring staff who are diverse in race, gender, and background.
- Collaborates closely with sender elementary districts and Glenbrook North High School to align curriculum and articulate instruction and assessment across grade levels in all subjects.
- Demonstrates understanding of and commitment to issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, focusing on the academic and social-emotional development of all students and inclusion of all families in school life.
- Possesses successful experience as a teacher and building-level leader; understands curriculum, teaching, and learning and promotes instructional methods that are engaging and supportive of high academic achievement.
- Values the unique needs of every student and allocates resources for programs in and out of the classroom that support students' academic, personal, and social-emotional growth, including the development of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- Displays skill in financial management and knowledge of legal requirements affecting the District; successfully forges close connections with local and state leaders and is familiar with national trends in education.
- Becomes immersed in the life of District 28 schools and the community, maintaining a strong presence in classrooms, at activities, and in community events.