



# Superintendent Leadership Profile Report

April 2025

## **Introduction**

This report presents the findings from the Engagement Phase of the Superintendent Search facilitated by Education Support Services (ESS) Group between April 14 and April 30, 2025. Data were gathered through in-person and virtual focus groups, individual interviews, and community forums, with approximately 140 stakeholders participating in this phase.

Each engagement session focused on three primary areas:

- a) strengths of the District,
- b) challenges or issues facing the District, and
- c) qualities and characteristics desired in the next superintendent.

To broaden participation, an online survey was also conducted, allowing employees, high school students, parents, and community members to provide input on district conditions and the leadership qualities the Board should prioritize. A summary of findings from the 942 online survey respondents is provided in Exhibit A.

## **Engagement Phase Report of Findings: Themes and Trends**

Across the organization, education partners were consistent in describing the strengths of Palm Springs USD. The qualities that draw people to the District fell into three general findings:

### **Comprehensive Array of Options for Students**

Palm Springs Unified School District provides a wide-ranging and inclusive menu of academic and enrichment opportunities that cater to the diverse interests, strengths, and future aspirations of its students. The district implements targeted interventions—such as tutoring, small-group instruction, and individualized learning plans—to ensure struggling students receive the support they need to succeed academically and emotionally. At the high school level in particular, students can pursue robust college and career readiness programs, including Advanced Placement (AP) and honors coursework, International Baccalaureate (IB), Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways, dual enrollment options, and specialized academies. The district also invests heavily in visual and performing arts, athletics, student leadership, and a broad spectrum of clubs and organizations, creating multiple avenues for student engagement and success.

### **A Positive, Healthy School District Culture**

Palm Springs Unified School District is defined by its positive, family-like culture where people are truly the district's greatest strength. Many people, when asked about the strengths of the district, simply said "It's the people!" Parents and education partners across the district demonstrate a deep commitment to student success and well-being. Site-based parent organizations and the Education Foundation consistently go above and beyond, investing time and resources to help all students thrive. Business partners and philanthropic organizations have built strong, collaborative relationships with the district, contributing vital support and resources. Staff members describe a warm, collaborative environment where colleagues support one another and foster a sense of belonging. A strong, respectful relationship with the employee associations contributes to open communication, effective problem-solving, and shared commitment to student success. At its core, this is a student-centered district—decisions are consistently made with students' best interests in mind. Innovation is encouraged, and employees feel safe and supported in trying new ideas.

### **An Ideal Locale with Vibrant Amenities and Inclusive Appeal**

People flock to the Coachella Valley—and Palm Springs in particular—for its unique blend of natural beauty, cultural vibrancy, and welcoming community spirit. The area is home to a richly diverse population living side by side, fostering an inclusive environment where all are valued. Residents and visitors alike enjoy a wide array of amenities, from family-friendly parks and outdoor recreation to world-class arts festivals, music venues, and dining experiences. The region is home to theatrical productions, renowned film festivals, and local performance venues that showcase both professional and student talent. Opportunities for lifelong learning abound through local colleges and university satellite campuses, providing access to higher education for residents of all ages. Whether hiking the nearby mountains, exploring the region's art scene, or participating in community events, Palm Springs offers something for everyone in a setting that celebrates individuality, mutual respect, and connection.

### **Challenges/Issues**

When asked to describe challenges the district might face in the ensuing years, three themes emerged.

#### **Maintaining Academic and Student Support Programs in Tough Times: Navigating Funding Cuts**

Through the years, PSUSD has maintained an enviable commitment to a sustainable, long-term financial plan. A significant downturn in the California economy and declining enrollment brings a less than positive forecast from the State Legislative Analyst. When combined with the expiration of state and federal one-time Covid relief funds, California schools are bracing for significant reductions in funding. In virtually every setting, online and in-person, respondents identified protecting student welfare while plotting a course through fiscal cutbacks as a significant challenge currently facing the District. PSUSD has so far kept reductions away from the classroom, and has maintained family support programs, as well as the physical and mental health programs that are appreciated throughout the District.

### **Continuing Efforts to Improve Student Achievement**

Almost 90% of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that students in PSUSD receive a high-quality education that prepares them for life. Educators take great pride in the teaching and learning happening every day in classrooms across the district. Still, there is a strong desire to have more students across the district successfully demonstrate their learning on local and state assessments. Parents and employees seek continued focus on consistent, high-quality, and inclusive instruction for all students, as well as continuing academic intervention programs.

### **Focus on School Safety**

Students, parents, and employees across the nation have expressed concerns about school safety. The Palm Springs community voiced that same concern. 85% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school safety is a high priority in PSUSD. Students, parents, and employees expressed a desire to see continued efforts to make schools as safe as possible, fair student discipline policies that are implemented with consistency in schools across the District, and continuing work with students to create schools that are inclusive and respectful of all students.

### **Desired Characteristics of the Incoming Superintendent**

Stakeholders stated they would like the new superintendent to celebrate the achievements of the District, be highly visible, frequently engage with and support students, employees, and the community, and be a leader willing to lead and stay the course in order to implement programs that help all students achieve.

Specifically, this individual should:

- Possess a track record of success at the executive level of a school district
- Be approachable, genuine/authentic, and be a quality listener
- Be a role model with the highest levels of integrity and character
- Be extraordinarily visible in schools, classrooms, district events, and community events
- Work effectively with the governing board
- Seek first to know and value existing efforts before making changes
- Maintain positive relationships with labor partners
- Welcome all voices; celebrate and foster an inclusive and open district culture
- Be a highly effective communicator: timely, proactive, and transparent
- Faithfully implement the District's current fiscal plan, while seeking additional revenues to maintain or even expand academic offerings
- Be able to communicate in a direct manner, and have the capacity to engage in difficult conversations
- Be a passionate advocate for PSUSD, promoting the district's image, accomplishments, and reputation

- Be a champion for all students' personal and academic growth
- Be a courageous educational leader who can lead programs that will help all students to achieve
- Be a creative problem-solver, open to worthy innovation and unique solutions
- Continue to partner with and support the efforts of the PSUSD Education Foundation
- Build trust among and between all internal and external constituents
- Engage with community agencies and businesses that serve students and families
- Invest in and get to know the culture and needs of different school communities over the 500 square miles of PSUSD.
- Build shared and distributed leadership capacity at all levels of the organization
- Collaborate to set clear expectations; hold all members accountable for fidelity to those agreements
- Employ creative/effective methods to engage all families, especially those under-represented

The search advisors would like to thank the 140 participants who attended meetings along with the 942 individuals who completed the online survey. We would also like to express our gratitude to Erika Barragan and Joan Boiko who orchestrated a seamless process to gather the thoughts/interests of multiple constituents and for their assistance in engaging education partners in the online survey and community forums.

The ESS search advisors and Governing Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses the leadership skills, personal attributes, expertise, experiences, and drive to successfully lead the Palm Springs Unified School District into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

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## **Exhibit A: Online Survey Report of Findings**

An on-line survey was conducted to enlist input about the overall quality of education in PSUSD along with the desired leadership skills, personal attributes, and expertise of the next superintendent. **942** individuals completed this survey, with the following representation:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Administrator	36	3.8%
Certificated Staff	173	18.4%
Classified Staff	86	9.1%
Parent/Guardian	122	13%
Student	471	50%
Community Member	45	4.8%
Other	9	1.0%

### **Top Five Leadership Qualities**

*From your perspective, which qualities are the most important for the next Superintendent to possess? (Select five that are the most important to you.)*

- |    |   |              |
|----|---|--------------|
| 1. | Creates an atmosphere of trust  | <b>67.0%</b> |
| 2. | Forward thinker and open to new ideas                                 | <b>64.1%</b> |
| 3. | Knowledgeable about current practices surrounding teaching & learning | <b>64.4%</b> |
| 4. | Present and visible throughout district and community                 | <b>51.9%</b> |
| 5. | Can effectively navigate political and/or controversial issues        | <b>44.1%</b> |

### **Top Five Personal Attributes**

*From your perspective, which attributes should be given the most attention by the Board when assessing applicants? (Select five that are most important to you.)*

- |    |                             |              |
|----|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Honest and Ethical          | <b>79.2%</b> |
| 2. | Approachable and Personable | <b>65.7%</b> |
| 3. | Problem Solver              | <b>58.6%</b> |
| 4. | Good listener               | <b>52.2%</b> |
| 5. | Exceptional Communicator    | <b>45.9%</b> |

## Top Three Areas of Experience and Expertise

*From your perspective, what are the top three experience and expertise factors are the most important for the next superintendent to possess?*

- |    |  |                      |       |
|----|--|----------------------|-------|
| 1. | Teaching and Learning                      | Critically Important | 81.8% |
| 2. | Understanding School and Community Culture | Critically Important | 78.4% |
| 3. | Community Relations                        | Critically Important | 66.8% |

**District Conditions:** *The most favorable four conditions are highlighted in green.*

<i>%age is calculated less "No Opinion" count</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion	% of Strongly Agree to Agree
Students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for life.	354	458	74	18	28	89.8%
Academic goals are aligned across the District.	233	477	112	29	76	83.4%
Adequate resources are provided to support student learning.	300	419	122	33	52	82.3%
Students feel valued and connected to their schools.	249	405	158	48	68	76.0%
Staff members feel valued and connected to their workplace.	252	410	102	40	40	82.3%
School safety is a high priority.	434	326	93	44	29	84.7%
District facilities are clean and well kept.	305	409	130	40	13	80.8%
Communication from the District is clear and timely.	256	414	120	44	95	80.3%
The District is responsive to the diverse interests and needs of its families.	288	415	105	30	89	83.9%
The District is constantly improving.	287	386	117	34	105	81.7%

## Summary Open-Ended Question

*A closing, open-ended question was posed to elicit the single most important issue the new superintendent would need to address upon arrival. Based on the extensive list of responses, here are the **top five** trends and themes as reported by each of the stakeholder groups:*

### **ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM (36 respondents)**

#### **Fiscal Stewardship and Budget Challenges**

Administrators expressed serious concern about current and future budget cuts, the impact of a potential financial downturn, and the need for responsible fiscal management that prioritizes student and staff needs. They emphasized the importance of transparency, strategic planning, and aligning spending with core educational priorities.

#### **Visionary and Goal-Oriented Leadership**

There is a strong desire for a superintendent who brings a clear and ambitious vision, sets measurable goals, and follows through with accountability. Many emphasized the importance of building upon Dr. Signoret's foundation while breaking away from past stagnation to lead the district forward.

#### **Alignment Across the District**

Respondents highlighted the need to better align district-wide goals with the day-to-day operations at school sites and across departments. They seek a leader who can foster coherence, streamline initiatives, and reduce confusion through clear communication and unified direction.

#### **Trust and Goodwill Building**

Rebuilding trust with employees and the community emerged as a central theme. Administrators want a leader who is visible, genuine, and invested in the well-being of all stakeholders—someone who fosters goodwill and ensures that every voice feels heard and respected.

#### **Student Achievement and Equity**

Administrators emphasized the need to keep student success at the forefront, with targeted support for closing achievement gaps and expanding equitable access to learning opportunities. They advocated for strong academic interventions and a continued focus on high-quality, inclusive instruction for all students.

### **CERTIFICATED EMPLOYEES (173 respondents)**

#### **Student Behavior, Safety, and Discipline**

A dominant theme throughout the responses focused on the urgent need to address student behavior and campus safety. Teachers expressed concern about a lack of clear consequences, increasing disrespect, and disruptions to learning. They seek leadership that enforces consistent discipline policies.

### **Strengthening Trust, Transparency, and Staff Morale**

Staff members acknowledged that the visibility and accessibility of the superintendent's office have played a key role in rebuilding trust and fostering transparency. Moving forward, there is a strong desire for a new superintendent who will embody these traits to further strengthen the district's culture and reinforce confidence in its leadership.

### **Fiscal Stewardship and Resource Allocation**

Teachers are keenly aware of budget constraints and want a leader who can navigate financial shortfalls while protecting classrooms and staffing. Concerns include cuts to arts, class sizes, teacher pay, and essential programs, as well as administrative bloat.

### **Equity, Inclusion, and Programmatic Consistency**

There's strong support for continuing DEI initiatives, expanding special education and arts programs, and ensuring all students across sites have equitable access to learning opportunities, including math, literacy, and science.

### **Teacher Voice and Professional Respect**

Employees want to be respected as professionals and listened to when district decisions are made. There's resistance to top-down micromanagement and a call for leaders to work alongside teachers, not above them.

## **CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES (86 respondents)**

### **Student Behavior, Safety, and Discipline**

Classified employees expressed deep concern over escalating student misconduct, including fights, disrespectful interactions, and inconsistent consequences across schools. Many called for a clear and districtwide discipline policy, stronger enforcement, and renewed focus on creating safe, supportive environments that also address student mental health and overuse of screens.

### **Budget Cuts, Compensation, and Equity**

There is anxiety about current and future budget cuts, especially as one-time federal funds disappear. Classified employees emphasized the urgent need for a fair and accurate compensation study to address current salaries, cost-of-living increases, and understaffing that is driven by financial constraints.

### **Accountability, Ethics, and Governance**

Frustration was voiced over a lack of accountability and perceived inaction by district leadership in the past. They hope the new superintendent will hold all staff accountable, support ethical governance, and help the Board function effectively while empowering staff to lead daily operations.

### **Communication, Morale, and Relationships**

High quality communication and authentic relationship-building were repeatedly emphasized. Classified employees want to feel respected, heard, and valued—urging district leadership to engage directly with frontline staff, and create spaces where all employees can safely share concerns.



### **Equity, Inclusion, and Cultural Competence**

Classified staff stressed the importance of cultural awareness, inclusive practices, and support for immigrant families. They want leadership that reflects the diversity of the PSUSD community, understands the unique needs of each school, and is committed to advancing equity in all areas—from curriculum to campus climate.

## **COMMUNITY MEMBERS (45 respondents)**

### **Academic Achievement and Core Learning**

Stakeholders overwhelmingly called for a return to foundational instruction in reading, writing, math, and science. There is a shared urgency to improve test scores and academic performance across all student groups, with particular attention to addressing long-standing gaps among BIPOC and special education students.

### **Campus Safety and Student Behavior**

Parents, students, and staff emphasized a pressing need to address bullying, physical altercations, and other dangers on campus. There is a growing sense that schools must reassert behavioral expectations and create safe environments where all students and staff feel secure and protected.

### **Trust, Communication, and Leadership Vision**

There were repeated calls for a superintendent who is visible, empathetic, and willing to establish trust through transparency and engagement. Stakeholders want a leader with a long-term vision—one who sets clear goals, invites community input, and fosters a unified, student-centered culture.

### **Equity, Inclusion, and Representation**

Many comments focused on the need for equitable treatment of students across schools, greater inclusion of special education students, and faculty representation that reflects the district's diversity. Parents and staff stressed that equity in funding, programs, and opportunity must remain central, even amid budget constraints.

### **Budget Stability and Resource Allocation**

Concerns about declining enrollment, political funding volatility, and the long-term sustainability of programs were top of mind. Stakeholders want a superintendent who can navigate fiscal challenges wisely while preserving essential resources like vocational programs, arts, and classroom support.

## **PARENTS (122 respondents)**

### **Academic Performance and Emphasis on Core Learning**

Parents voiced strong desire to increase test scores in reading, writing, and math, calling for a renewed focus on academic fundamentals and traditional instruction. Many called for a shift away from distractions and back to academic education that prepares students for future success.

**Student Behavior, Safety, and Accountability**

Concerns about bullying, physical altercations, drugs, and a lack of consistent discipline were frequent. Parents emphasized the need for stronger behavioral expectations, equitable enforcement of rules, and ensuring all students feel safe and supported on campus.

**Trust, Listening, and Family Engagement**

Parents want a superintendent who genuinely listens, includes families in decision-making, and builds trust across the district—especially following perceptions of predetermined leadership decisions.

**Equity in Access, Programs, and Special Education**

Calls for equal opportunities across schools were widespread, especially in special education and extracurricular access like robotics and field trips. Parents also highlighted inconsistencies between sites and advocated for fairness in how resources and support are distributed.

**Career Readiness and Whole-Child Development**

Parents want less pressure in early grades and more practical, future-oriented education in high school, including vocational training. There is support for a child-first leader who nurtures learning without political interference and supports students as individuals, not just test-takers.

**STUDENTS (471 respondents)****Campus Safety and Student Behavior**

Students raised serious concerns about physical altercations, bullying, and the presence of drugs on campus. Many feel that safety policies are inconsistently applied and that disruptive behavior is not adequately addressed, making it harder to focus and feel secure at school.

**Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

Students expressed a strong support for mental health support, citing high levels of stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. They want trusted adults on campus, safe spaces to decompress, and schoolwide efforts to promote emotional wellness.

**Equity and Respect Across Student Groups**

Issues of fairness, inclusion, and representation came up frequently. Students want to be treated with respect regardless of background and called out favoritism, lack of cultural representation, and the need for staff to deeply understand and support all communities.

**Student Voice and Leadership**

Students want more meaningful ways to be heard and involved in shaping their educational experience. They asked for more input in school decisions, increased communication with leadership, and opportunities to lead initiatives that matter to them.

**Academic Relevance and College/Career Preparation**

Many students want learning to be more relevant to their futures. They asked for less focus on standardized tests and more access to career pathways, college prep resources, and hands-on learning.