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## Surveys ID schools chief qualities

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Nearly 2,000 tell board what they want in the next superintendent

What's next?

Applications for the Durham public school superintendent's job will be accepted until Feb. 5. The board will meet with its search coordinator, Allison Schafer of the North Carolina School Boards Association, in late February to tell her which candidates to invite for in-person interviews.

There will be no further formal opportunity for public input into the search. The board could vote to hire a new superintendent in April. Board members have shown no inclination to name in public finalists for the job.

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DURHAM -- The community has had its say on qualities it wants in its next local schools chief. But as it turns out, locals did most of their talking without speaking.

More than 1,300 Durham Public Schools employees submitted anonymous surveys on the superintendent search in recent weeks. Some 563 community members returned a similar survey. Three organizations submitted written comments. And two individuals commented to the school board Thursday night during a special session scheduled to give the public its last formal opportunity to say what the next superintendent should be like.

One speaker, Bill Bryant, represented Durham's Partnership for Children. He read a letter from his group that praised Carl Harris, the former superintendent, and encouraged the board to find someone who will support early-childhood education.

The other speaker, federal environmental engineer Kelly Leovic, also praised Harris, but added, "I'd like to see someone come in and take it to the next level."

She said she would like to see more emphasis on honors and Advanced Placement courses in high schools.

Allison Schafer, the attorney for the N.C. School Boards Association who is coordinating Durham's superintendent search, summarized survey results. The public's top priorities were to find someone who can get staff, students, parents and community to collaborate to educate children, who can provide safe school environments and who can effectively advocate for school resources.

DPS employees had the same top priorities. By a small margin, they put providing

safe environments ahead of getting everyone to work together to educate youngsters.

The bottom five priorities -- there were 22 in all -- were similarly matched for community and staff. For the public, they were delegating authority effectively, having been a successful superintendent, having been a successful associate or assistant superintendent, being someone who spends time in individual classrooms and having prior experience in North Carolina public education.

Staffers said spending time in classrooms was the least important quality, prior North Carolina education experience the second-least-important.

There was no overarching theme in the comments, Schafer stated. Some public submissions included:

n "We need a superintendent who will be [an] advocate for the parents and children alike!"

n "Re-evaluate the benchmark testing process [which] takes away too much instructional time."

n "Too many ineffective administrators."

n "Speak Spanish, support language and cultural development and understand Latino and Afro communities and their needs."

n "We need to return to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic and that includes grammar and punctuation."

Some staff submissions included:

n "More small high schools, strong choice program and involved community."

n "Decrease endless, pointless testing."

n "Put a stop to the frequent and abundant curriculum changes that put stress on teachers."

n "The next superintendent ... needs to be a great communicator with educators, staff, parents and the community, listening to and taking into consideration our needs and concerns."