ROCK HILL Schools

Superintendent of Schools
Leadership Profile
April 5, 2025

ZEAL
EDUCATION GRP

ZEAL

EDUCATION GRP

ZEAL
EDUCATION GRP

Leadership Profile
Superintendent of Schools
Rock Hill, South Carolina
April 5, 2025

One of the primary responsibilities of a Board of Trustees is to hire and evaluate a superintendent of schools. Because this task is the Board's alone, there is no obligation to seek input from or engage stakeholders in their selection process. However, Boards that do elect to engage their community enjoy at least three benefits: First, the Board will learn what is important to their constituents, gain important feedback about the public's perception, and acquire a valuable perspective as they interview each candidate. The second benefit is afforded to the applicants who are eager to know what might be expected of them, assessing their own capabilities before they consider applying to determine if they are a good fit. The third benefit affects students – who will directly benefit when the Board and selected Superintendent, functioning as a 'governance team' built on a foundation of trust, have a clear understanding for what is going well, what needs to change, and what changes should be prioritized.

Methodology

In March of 2025, the Rock Hill Board of Trustees retained Zeal Education Group to deeply engage with the community to appreciate what skills and dispositions the community believe the Rock Hill Schools need for the next superintendent to be successful. Our team had the pleasure of meeting in person and virtually with hundreds of stakeholders. We used a methodology that results in two streams of input. The first stream of information came from Zeal Team members Dr. Joe Micheller, Dr. Michael O'Guin and Dr. Lory Morrow who conducted in person and virtual interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. Each participant was asked to respond to the following questions:

- *What are the district's greatest strengths?*
- *What are the district's greatest immediate challenges?*
- *What areas should be the focus of change?*
- *What should be the new superintendent's change priority?*
- *Is there anything else you want to share?*

The second stream of input came from a proprietary tool called an Exchange that facilitates open-ended discussions where participants can anonymously share thoughts and rate others' ideas. The Exchange presented one open-ended question, in each participant's native language: "W*hat is your top priority for the next superintendent of schools?*

Participation

Both in person and virtual meetings and focus groups were held to engage as many stakeholders as possible. A total of 279 individuals generated 619 independent ideas in response to the five questions that were posed. Three stakeholder groups that had no attendees were canceled due to lack of attendance and/or scheduling conflicts. The distribution of responses were as follows:

Stakeholder Group	*n*	Stakeholder Group	*n*
Board of Trustees	7	Catawba Nation	3
Elected Officials	1	NAACP	8
District Leadership	26	Religious Leaders	2
Central Office	72	Parents and Guardians	8
Building Administrators	26	In Person 'Town Hall' - All	20
Certified Staff	11	Virtual 'Town Hall' - All	~700
Non-Certified Staff	9	Facebook Live 'Town Hall' - All	~4,300
Students	106		

In addition to the stakeholders participating in our in person and virtual interview and focus groups, our Exchange included 1,129 participants who shared 886 independent responses to the prompt, "W*hat is your top priority for the next superintendent of schools?*" Participants responded to each other's ideas, providing 21,962 ratings. 95% of the participants responded in English and 5% responded in Spanish. The following table illustrates how responses from each of the stakeholder groups were distributed:

Stakeholder Group	*n*	%
Parent or Guardian	583	54
Certified Staff	360	33
Resident	314	29
Rock Hill School Alumni	166	15
Non Certified Staff	122	11
Administrator	63	6
Other	55	5

Business Owner	46	4
Rock Hill Student	42	4
Government / Community Official	20	2

The Rock Hill community was warm and welcoming throughout our engagement, and participation was overwhelmingly positive and appreciative. We believe the next superintendent of schools will receive a similarly warm reception.

Results of Interviews and Focus Groups

This sentiment analysis categorizes participant feedback into positive, neutral, and negative sentiments. Each category includes the most common theme that emerged, along with a summary and a verbatim comment to illustrate the participants' perspectives. Each of the five questions were analyzed independently and are presented to help inform the skills and dispositions needed in the next leader of Rock Hill Schools.

What are the district's greatest strengths?

The district's greatest strengths include a safe and supportive school environment, strong community involvement, and dedicated, knowledgeable staff. The diversity of the student and staff population is highly valued, along with the district's commitment to providing a wide range of academic and extracurricular opportunities. The district benefits from its strategic location near Charlotte, fostering strong partnerships with local businesses and universities. Leadership and resources are also highlighted, with a focus on continuous improvement and innovation. The district's history, tradition of excellence, and family-oriented atmosphere contribute to a strong sense of community and pride.

1. **Community support** is frequently mentioned as a significant strength of the district. Participants highlight the involvement and engagement of the community in various aspects of the school district, including support for athletics, academics, and extracurricular activities. The community is described as close-knit, supportive, and willing to help, which fosters a positive environment for students and staff. This support extends to partnerships with local businesses and organizations, enhancing the resources available to the district. Overall, the perception of community support is overwhelmingly positive, with many participants emphasizing its importance in the district's success.
2. **Diversity** is another prominent strength identified by participants. The district is noted for its diverse student population, staff, and community, which includes various ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity is seen as a valuable asset that enriches the educational experience and fosters an inclusive

environment. Participants appreciate the district's efforts to cater to and celebrate this diversity, which is perceived positively. The diverse community is also seen as welcoming and supportive, contributing to a vibrant and dynamic school environment.

3. The **quality and dedication of the staff and teachers** are frequently highlighted as a major strength of the district. Participants commend the knowledgeable, caring, and passionate educators who are committed to student success. The staff is described as supportive, talented, and willing to go the extra mile for their students. This positive perception extends to the leadership within the schools, including principals and administrators, who are seen as effective and supportive. Overall, the staff and teachers are viewed as a cornerstone of the district's success.

4. The district offers a wide range of **opportunities for students**, which is seen as a significant strength. Participants mention various academic programs, extracurricular activities, and sports that provide students with diverse options to explore their interests and talents. These opportunities include advanced courses, immersion programs, and career pathways, which are highly valued by the community. The district's commitment to providing these opportunities is perceived positively, as it helps students achieve their goals and prepares them for future success. The variety and quality of these programs are seen as a key factor in the district's appeal.

5. The **safety of the school environment** is frequently mentioned as a strength of the district. Participants emphasize the importance of having a secure and safe environment for students and staff. The district's efforts to maintain safety and enforce expectations are appreciated and seen as effective. This focus on safety contributes to a positive and conducive learning atmosphere. The perception of safety within the schools is generally positive, with many participants expressing confidence in the district's ability to keep students safe.

What are the district's greatest immediate challenges?

The district's immediate challenges include staffing shortages, communication and collaboration issues, a lack of focus on student achievement, budget constraints, declining enrollment, and inadequate facilities. There are concerns about transparency, accountability, and leadership stability, as well as the need for better community and parental involvement. Discipline, student engagement, and safety are also significant issues. The district faces competition from charter and private schools, and there is a need for improved marketing and public perception. Additionally, there are calls for better support for arts programs, mental health resources, and addressing the vaping and drug problems in schools.

1. **Staffing and retention** issues are a significant challenge for the district, with many responses highlighting the difficulty in hiring and retaining quality teachers and support staff. Participants noted the high turnover rates and the need for competitive

pay to attract and keep staff. There is also concern about the lack of experienced teachers and the impact this has on student achievement. The perception is that the district needs to improve its hiring practices and provide better support for new and existing staff. Additionally, the need for stability in leadership positions was frequently mentioned as crucial for long-term success.

2. **Communication and transparency** are seen as major issues within the district. Many responses pointed out the lack of clear and consistent communication from the administration to staff, parents, and the community. There is a perception that decisions are made without adequate input or notification, leading to mistrust and frustration. Participants emphasized the need for better communication channels and more transparency in decision-making processes. The district is also perceived as needing to improve its public image and rebuild trust with stakeholders.

3. **Budget and funding challenges** are frequently mentioned, with concerns about financial management and the allocation of resources. Participants noted issues such as budget deficits, the need for more funding for essential programs, and the perception of wasteful spending. There is a call for better fiscal responsibility and transparency in how funds are used. The district is also seen as needing to prioritize spending to ensure that resources are directed towards improving student outcomes and supporting staff.

4. **Improving student achievement and addressing discipline issues** are critical challenges for the district. Responses highlighted concerns about low test scores, the need for better academic support, and the importance of focusing on student growth. Discipline problems, including bullying and drug use, were also frequently mentioned as areas needing attention. Participants believe that a stronger emphasis on academic excellence and consistent enforcement of discipline policies are necessary to create a positive learning environment.

5. **Leadership and governance** issues are seen as significant obstacles to the district's success. Many responses pointed to the need for strong, ethical leadership and better collaboration between the school board and district administration. There is a perception that the board is often divided and that this impacts the district's ability to operate effectively. Participants also mentioned the need for stability in leadership positions and the importance of having leaders who can inspire and guide the district towards its goals. The overall sentiment is that effective leadership is crucial for addressing the district's challenges and improving outcomes for students and staff.

What areas should be the focus of change?

The responses emphasize the need for improved communication, transparency, and accountability across the district. Key areas of focus include enhancing student achievement, addressing discipline issues, and ensuring financial stability. There is a call for better support for teachers and staff, including competitive salaries and professional development. Respondents also highlight the importance of community and family engagement, equitable access to resources, and maintaining a safe and conducive learning

environment. Additionally, there is a strong desire to depoliticize the school board, streamline operations, and prioritize the needs and success of students above all else.

1. **Student achievement** is a major focus area, with many responses highlighting the need for improving academic performance, access to advanced coursework, and overall student success. Participants emphasize the importance of addressing achievement gaps and ensuring that all students have the resources and support they need to succeed. There is a call for more realistic expectations and goals, as well as a focus on student learning and engagement. The perception is that improving student achievement is critical for the district's overall success and competitiveness. Responses also suggest that student achievement should be prioritized over other initiatives and distractions.
2. **Effective communication** is seen as essential for the district's success, with many responses calling for better communication between the district, schools, parents, and the community. Participants highlight the need for transparency, open communication channels, and consistent messaging. There is a perception that improved communication can help build trust, foster collaboration, and ensure that everyone is on the same page. Responses also emphasize the importance of listening to feedback and keeping all stakeholders informed. Overall, better communication is viewed as a way to address various issues and improve the district's overall functioning.
3. **Facilities and resources** are a significant concern, with many responses highlighting the need for better management and allocation of resources. Participants mention the importance of upgrading facilities, ensuring proper maintenance, and addressing issues related to budgeting and financial stability. There is a call for more funding for schools, extracurricular programs, and support staff. The perception is that improving facilities and resources can create a better learning environment and support student achievement. Responses also suggest that the district should focus on long-term planning and efficient use of resources.
4. **The role of the board and leadership** is a critical area of focus, with many responses calling for better governance, accountability, and support for the superintendent. Participants emphasize the need for the board to remove personal and political agendas, allow the superintendent to do their job, and focus on the best interests of students. There is a perception that the board's involvement and leadership can significantly impact the district's success. Responses also highlight the importance of clear roles, consistent decision-making, and building trust between the board, leadership, and the community.
5. **Support for students and staff** is seen as essential for creating a positive and effective learning environment. Many responses highlight the need for better support systems, including mental health resources, staff recognition, and professional development. Participants emphasize the importance of addressing student discipline, improving teacher morale, and ensuring that all staff feel valued and supported. There is a perception that providing adequate support can lead to

better student outcomes and overall district success. Responses also suggest that the district should focus on creating a safe and welcoming environment for both students and staff.

What should be the new superintendent's change priority?

The responses emphasize several key priorities for the new superintendent, including improving school safety and discipline, enhancing communication and transparency, building trust within the community, and focusing on student achievement and mental health. There is a strong call for better resource allocation, fiscal management, and support for teachers and staff. Respondents also highlight the need for the superintendent to be visible and engaged with students, parents, and the broader community, while ensuring accountability and fostering a positive school culture. Additionally, addressing outdated policies, promoting community involvement, and retaining quality staff are seen as critical areas for change.

1. Participants frequently mentioned the importance of focusing on **student achievement**. This includes improving academic progress, increasing test scores, and ensuring students are prepared for college and career readiness. There is a strong emphasis on creating an academic environment that fosters excellence and growth. The perception is that student achievement is a fundamental priority that impacts the overall success of the district. Ensuring that students are engaged and motivated to learn is seen as crucial for the district's future.
2. **Community engagement** is highlighted as a key priority for the new superintendent. This involves building relationships with students, parents, and community members, and being visible and involved in school and community events. Participants believe that fostering a strong connection with the community will help in gaining trust and support for the district. Engaging with various stakeholders and understanding their needs and expectations is seen as essential for creating a positive district image. The perception is that a superintendent who is actively involved and communicates effectively will be more successful in leading the district.
3. **Mental health and safety** are significant concerns for participants. There is a call for better mental health programs and support for students and staff. Ensuring that schools are safe places where students feel secure is also a priority. Participants believe that addressing mental health needs and improving school safety will create a better learning environment. The perception is that these issues are critical for the well-being and success of students and staff.
4. **Accountability and strong leadership** are seen as essential for the district's success. Participants emphasize the need for clear expectations, accountability at all levels, and effective leadership from the superintendent. There is a call for the superintendent to hold staff accountable and ensure that the right people are in the right positions. The perception is that strong leadership and accountability will lead to better decision-making and improved outcomes for the district. Participants

believe that a superintendent who can lead with transparency and integrity will gain the trust and support of the community.

5. **Managing the budget** and ensuring adequate resources are available is a key concern for participants. There is a focus on prioritizing financial management, addressing budget shortfalls, and ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to support student achievement. Participants believe that prudent fiscal management and strategic allocation of resources are essential for the district's success. The perception is that a superintendent who can effectively manage the budget and ensure that schools have the necessary resources will be better positioned to lead the district towards its goals.

Is there anything else you want to share?

The responses emphasize the need for a superintendent who is experienced, approachable, and genuinely cares about students and staff. Key qualities include strong leadership, transparency, and the ability to build relationships within the community. Respondents desire someone who values diversity, supports the arts, and prioritizes educational excellence. There is a call for better communication, consistent support for staff, and a focus on improving school programs and facilities. The new superintendent should be involved in schools, listen to student and teacher input, and stand up to the school board when necessary. Overall, the community seeks a committed leader who will bring positive change and stability to the district.

1. Participants emphasized the need for a superintendent who demonstrates **strong leadership qualities**. They highlighted the importance of having someone who is experienced, confident, and capable of making tough decisions. Many responses mentioned the need for a leader who can stand up to the board and not be micromanaged. There was also a call for a leader who is genuine, transparent, and accountable. Overall, the perception is that strong leadership is crucial for the success and improvement of the district.

2. A significant number of responses focused on the importance of **prioritizing students and staff**. Participants want a superintendent who cares about student safety, engagement, and well-being. There is also a call for better support for teachers and staff, including pay raises and recognition. The perception is that a superintendent who values and listens to both students and staff will create a more positive and productive school environment. Ensuring that the needs and voices of students and staff are heard and addressed is seen as essential.

3. **Community engagement** emerged as a key theme, with participants expressing the need for a superintendent who is approachable and involved in the community. Responses highlighted the importance of building relationships with students, parents, and local organizations. There is a desire for a leader who is visible in the schools and actively engages with the community to understand their needs and

concerns. The perception is that strong community ties will foster a supportive and collaborative environment, benefiting the entire district.

4. Participants stressed the importance of **educational excellence**, calling for a superintendent who appreciates the diversity of the district. There is a strong desire for a leader who understands and addresses the needs of minority students and promotes equal opportunities for all. Responses also mentioned the need for programs that benefit everyone and the importance of addressing issues like 'white flight' and economic disparities. The perception is that focusing on educational excellence will lead to a more inclusive and fair school environment.

5. The importance of **arts and extracurricular activities** was a recurring theme. Participants want a superintendent who values and supports programs beyond academics, including the arts, clubs, and other student activities. There is a call for better funding and resources for these programs, as they are seen as essential for student development and engagement. The perception is that a well-rounded education that includes strong arts and extracurricular programs will benefit students and enhance their overall school experience.

Results of ThoughtExchange Engagement

The responses emphasize the need for a superintendent who prioritizes students and teachers, fosters unity among principals, and ensures equitable education across schools. Key priorities include improving student success, supporting teachers, enhancing communication, and maintaining a safe learning environment. Respondents also stress the importance of instructional leadership, community engagement, and stability within the district. There is a call for a leader who is present in schools, values diversity, and can manage resources effectively. Additionally, addressing behavioral issues, mental health support, and reducing unnecessary administrative positions are highlighted as critical areas for improvement.

Of the 885 thoughts that were shared in the exchange, the following were the 10 highest ranked:

Character

One of integrity and honesty, and someone willing to have open communication with parents, students, teachers, and staff about goals, plans, etc.

🙂 Positive
👤 29

★★★★½ 4.6
Ranked #1 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

Address the teacher shortage and make changes to retain good teachers.

Quality teaching in the classroom is a critical need in every school.

🙂 Neutral
👤 32

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #2 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

I have been in the district for 15 years and have had four superintendents. Everyone comes in with big "vision" and then leaves. We need stability.

Teacher retentions and STUDENT retention are a huge issue...I feel we need to focus on the good things we have and not reinvent the wheel every time.

☹ Negative
👤 31

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #3 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

I think it is very important for the sup to put teachers & students 1st. More than ever we need to make teachers WANT to be in the classroom.

Good teachers are leaving! The culture of the classroom is changing.

🙂 Neutral
👤 31

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #4 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

Supporting teachers

Teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. Teachers need to feel supported and treated as professionals.

🙂 Neutral
👤 30

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #5 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

This person needs to be supportive of teachers and support staff.

In order for the schools to run the way they should everyone should feel welcome and supported

🙂 Neutral
👤 30

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #6 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

One that is not a micromanager but one who cares about teacher needs (mental, financial, physical)...accurate planning time, etc.

This is important because teacher morale gets very low when there is not enough support from management, which leads to teachers leaving the field.

🙂 Neutral
👤 20

★★★★½ 4.5
Ranked #7 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

Allow teachers to teach without placing restrictions on them and constantly adding programs that have proven ineffective. Hire good teachers. Support

Hire good teachers, support them, pay them to keep them, reward them when goals are met. Make teaching easier, not harder.

🙂 Neutral
👤 33

★★★★½ 4.4
Ranked #8 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

Look at student performance and see how that can be improved quickly. And fix behavior related issues-change policy to bring back consequences.

The education of the children is what this is all about. Falling test scores and interruptions due to student misbehavior is unacceptable.

🙂 Neutral
👤 33

★★★★½ 4.4
Ranked #9 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

Supporting and recruiting teachers.

We struggle to recruit teachers, leading to larger class sizes, long term subs, and international teachers who struggle to teach.

🙂 Neutral
👤 33

★★★★½ 4.4
Ranked #10 of 885
5 ★
4 ★
3 ★
2 ★
1 ★

SWOT Analysis

The feedback from participants provides a comprehensive view of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the priorities for the next Superintendent of Schools. This analysis highlights the key areas of focus and the concerns that need to be addressed to ensure effective leadership and positive outcomes for the district.

Strength	Weakness
Summary: Participants identified strong support for teachers, a student-centered focus, and effective building leadership as key strengths. These areas are seen as essential for creating a positive educational environment and ensuring the success of both students and staff.	**Summary**: Weaknesses include concerns about financial management, academic performance, lack of transparency, and inconsistent leadership. Participants feel that these issues have led to uncertainty and inefficiencies within the district.
Key takeaways: • Support for teachers is crucial. • Student needs should be prioritized. • Effective leadership is essential.	**Key takeaways**: • Improve financial management. • Increase transparency. • Ensure consistent leadership.

Opportunities	Threats
Summary: Opportunities include enhancing community engagement, improving academic achievement, and addressing high achievement and well-being for all students. Participants believe that focusing on these areas can lead to significant improvements in the district's performance and reputation.	**Summary**: Threats include ongoing issues with student behavior and discipline, potential financial instability, declining enrollment, and the risk of losing talented teachers and staff. These threats could undermine the district's efforts to provide a high-quality education.
Key takeaways: • Engage with the community. • Focus on academic achievement. • Promote well-being for all students.	**Key takeaways**: • Address student behavior issues. • Ensure financial stability. • Retain talented teachers and staff.

Conclusion and Summary

The Rock Hill Schools Board of Trustees initiated a comprehensive and inclusive process to develop this Leadership Profile with the primary goal of attracting the best possible candidates for the Superintendent of Schools position. By partnering with Zeal Education Group and engaging hundreds of stakeholders through interviews, focus groups, and a ThoughtExchange platform, the district gained deep insight into the community's values, strengths, concerns, and aspirations. This process not only informed the board but also served as an open invitation to prospective candidates who wish to understand the unique character and priorities of the Rock Hill community before applying.

The feedback collected highlights a district with strong community support, a diverse and dedicated staff, and a commitment to academic and extracurricular excellence. At the same time, it reveals pressing challenges that demand attention—ranging from staffing shortages and communication gaps to financial constraints and leadership instability. Stakeholders are eager for a leader who is visible, transparent, student-centered, and capable of uniting the district through bold yet thoughtful change.

Ultimately, this Leadership Profile paints a realistic and hopeful picture of Rock Hill Schools—a district with deep roots, strong potential, and a community ready to rally behind a leader who shares their vision for a thriving and future-focused school system. This document is intended to guide the Board in making an informed selection and to help prospective superintendents determine whether they are the right fit to lead Rock Hill Schools into its next chapter.

. . . . .

Interested candidates are encouraged to apply at www.zeal-ed.com/rockhill.
The application deadline is April 20, 2025 at 11:59 PM.
Questions can be directed to rockhill@zeal-ed.com.