Washoe County School District Stakeholder Assessments of Superintendent Candidates' Strengths and Reservations

This report summarizes stakeholder feedback on the final five (5) candidates in the Washoe County School District (WCSD) Superintendent Search.

The report includes a summary of responses collected via an online form that allowed all WCSD Stakeholders to identify perceived strengths and/or reservations about each candidate. The online form was made available to the public following an April 25, 2024, Public Candidate Forum and remained available through May 3, 2024.

In total, 488 online submissions were received. The majority of respondents (53%) self-identified as WCSD Employees. Parents or Guardians made up the next largest percentage (26%) of respondents, followed by Community Members (13%). Respondents self-identifying as Students or “Other” accounted for the remaining submissions.

The pages that follow summarize the most common themes expressed by stakeholders when asked to identify perceived strengths or reservations about each candidate (listed alphabetically). Common themes are presented initially based on all stakeholder responses in aggregate. This is followed by common themes disaggregated by individual stakeholder groups. For this presentation, respondents identifying as “Other” were combined with Community Members based on the limited number of respondents in that category. Student responses are not disaggregated as there were fewer than 10 responses collected.
All Stakeholder Responses

Mr. Joe Ernst:

- **Professionalism and Leadership:** Mr. Ernst is consistently described as professional, well-prepared, articulate, and a strong leader. His ability to speak clearly and engagingly about specific details and plans indicates strong communication skills and leadership qualities.

- **Experience and Knowledge:** Many comments highlight his extensive experience within WCSD, ranging from classroom teaching to administrative roles. His varied experiences at multiple levels of education are seen as a significant asset, as they provide him with a comprehensive understanding of the district's needs and operations.

- **Community Connection and Commitment:** Stakeholders frequently mention local ties and long-term commitment to the district. His understanding of community issues and needs, combined with a dedication to the WCSD, positions him as a candidate who is deeply invested in the community's long-term success.

- **Relationship Building:** Mr. Ernst's capacity to develop relationships with teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community is frequently noted. Stakeholders appreciate his approachability and the respect he shows to staff and community members.

- **Passion and Dedication:** Mr. Ernst is often described as passionate about education and dedicated to improving the district. His enthusiasm for teaching and his strategic vision for WCSD are frequently mentioned, alongside his dedication to student success and academic achievement.

- **Data-driven and Analytical Skills:** He is recognized for his ability to handle data and use it strategically to make informed decisions. This skill is essential for managing district operations effectively and leading improvements.

Dr. Elizabeth Fagen:

- **Experience and Leadership:** Dr. Fagen's experience as a superintendent in multiple districts is frequently noted. Her extensive background in educational leadership, including her ability to implement effective programs and initiatives, is seen as a significant asset.

- **Support for Teachers:** Dr. Fagen is recognized as investing in teachers, both in terms of innovation and compensation, to retain quality staff. This stance is particularly praised by stakeholders who see teacher support as crucial for the district's success.

- **Fresh Perspective:** Coming from outside the area, Dr. Fagen is seen as bringing a fresh perspective to the district. Her approach to problem-solving and her openness to new ideas are valued by those who believe that an external perspective could be beneficial to the district.

- **Communication and Articulation:** She is described as articulate, poised, and an excellent communicator. Stakeholders appreciated her ability to give direct and clear answers to
questions, providing specific examples that demonstrate her understanding of educational issues.

- **Innovative and Supportive Approach:** Dr. Fagen is recognized for her innovative ideas, particularly in supporting teachers and enhancing student readiness for the real world. Initiatives like creating systems to track book usage in schools are cited as examples of her forward-thinking approach.

- **Global Understanding and Problem Solving:** She is perceived as having a global understanding of the job of a superintendent and is willing to listen to and address new district concerns thoughtfully. Her strategies for dealing with challenges such as book banning and supporting team teachers are particularly noted.

**Dr. Paul LaMarca:**

- **Local Experience and Knowledge:** Dr. LaMarca is recognized for his long-standing involvement with the WCSD. His deep understanding of the district’s dynamics and challenges, gained through various roles within the system, is seen as a crucial asset. Stakeholders appreciate his familiarity with the district’s needs and his commitment to the community.

- **Advocacy:** Dr. LaMarca is noted for his ability to advocate for students and staff, particularly in legislative arenas.

- **Focus on Student and Community Needs:** Dr. LaMarca is commended for his dedication to understanding and addressing the needs of students and the community. His work in promoting student voice and engagement, as well as his efforts to support mental health and well-being, are particularly highlighted.

- **Equity and Inclusion:** He has a strong focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion, aiming to ensure that all students have access to the necessary resources and opportunities. His experience in handling equity issues within the district is seen as a significant strength.

- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** His approach to leadership includes a strong reliance on data to inform decisions, which stakeholders believe helps in addressing challenges effectively and efficiently.

- **Community and Educational Partnerships:** Dr. LaMarca’s ability to forge and maintain important relationships both within and outside of the district is highly valued. His connections with local universities, community organizations, and educational bodies enhance his leadership capabilities.

**Dr. Charles McNulty:**

- **Leadership and Experience:** Dr. McNulty’s experience as a superintendent and an educator is frequently highlighted. His background provides him with a comprehensive understanding of educational systems, which stakeholders view as beneficial for leadership roles.
Engagement and Communication: He is noted for his engaging manner and effective communication skills. His ability to connect with the audience and articulate his ideas is also noted.

Focus on Equity and Special Education: Dr. McNulty's commitment to developing equity within educational settings and his experience with special education are highly valued.

Positive and Candid Nature: He is described as warm, passionate about education, and not afraid to acknowledge his weaknesses, which stakeholders see as signs of a transparent and approachable leader.

Vision for Education: His passion for education and his vision for improving student outcomes are compelling to many stakeholders. His ideas about integrating joy and engagement in learning environments are particularly appreciated.

Outside Perspective: As an outsider, Dr. McNulty is perceived as someone who could bring fresh perspectives to the district, potentially offering new solutions to longstanding challenges.

Dr. Troy Parks:

Local Understanding and Commitment: Dr. Parks is praised for his long-standing commitment and deep understanding of the local community and the school district. His local upbringing and professional background in Washoe County are seen as significant advantages.

Experience Across Educational Levels: He has a broad range of experience in various roles within the educational system, including positions as a teacher, principal, and district administrator. This varied background is viewed as beneficial for understanding the district's diverse needs.

Strong Relationships and Communication: Dr. Parks is noted for his ability to build and maintain strong relationships within the community, including with teachers, staff, and families. His skills in communication and collaboration are often mentioned as key to his leadership style.

Student-Centered Approach: His focus on student outcomes and commitment to improving instructional quality are frequently mentioned. Stakeholders appreciate his student-centered approach and his dedication to enhancing educational experiences.

Leadership Qualities: Many stakeholders describe Dr. Parks as a strong, fair, and knowledgeable leader who is well-respected within the community. His leadership is seen as instrumental in fostering a positive and effective educational environment.
All Stakeholder Responses

Reservations

Mr. Joe Ernst:

- **Vagueness in Responses:** Stakeholders felt that Mr. Ernst often circled around questions without committing to a clear stance or providing specific answers.
- **Lack of Global Vision:** There are doubts about his ability to understand and manage the broad responsibilities of the superintendent role due to a perceived lack of a comprehensive vision for the district.
- **Questionable Collaboration and Engagement:** Feedback suggests that Mr. Ernst may not value community engagement or collaboration highly, which stakeholders see as critical for the role of superintendent.
- **Continuation of Status Quo:** A concern is that Mr. Ernst might continue with the current practices without introducing the necessary changes to improve the district.
- **Micro-Management:** There are worries about Mr. Ernst potentially being a micro-manager, which could affect his ability to effectively lead a large and diverse district like WCSD.
- **Experience and Background:** Some stakeholders are apprehensive about his depth of experience and whether his background aligns well with the needs of a superintendent overseeing a diverse and complex district.

Dr. Elizabeth Fagen:

- **Lack of Local Knowledge:** Stakeholders are concerned that Dr. Fagen does not have a sufficient understanding of the district or the local community, which could hinder her effectiveness in addressing specific local needs.
- **Concerns About Commitment:** There’s a perception that she might use the WCSD position as a stepping stone and not stay long-term, which could disrupt continuity and progress within the district.
- **Previous Controversies:** Dr. Fagen’s background includes involvement in controversies in previous positions, which raises concerns about her potential leadership impact and the distraction she might bring to WCSD.
- **Relocation Issues:** As she is from outside the area, stakeholders worry about the time it would take for her to acclimate to WCSD, build community ties, and effectively lead the district.
- **Perceived Lack of Preparation:** Some feedback suggests that Dr. Fagen did not demonstrate adequate research or preparation about WCSD prior to her interviews, leading to doubts about her seriousness or capability to lead the district effectively.
Dr. Paul LaMarca:

- **Lack of Direct Educational Experience**: Stakeholders express concerns that Dr. LaMarca has never been a teacher or principal, which they feel is crucial for understanding the complexities of school dynamics and educational needs.

- **Leadership Style Concerns**: There are mentions of him potentially being a micro-manager, or not being transparent and collaborative in his leadership approach.

- **Questionable Decision-Making**: Some feedback points to issues with decision-making, perhaps placing trust in personal connections over merit and that his decisions might not always be in the best interest of the district.

- **Perceived Lack of Knowledge**: Doubts are raised about Dr. LaMarca’s depth of understanding of the local community and the specific challenges it faces.

- **Community and Staff Relations**: Concerns about how Dr. Lamarca relates to and is perceived by the community and staff are noted, with some suggesting that his approach might not be as inclusive or supportive as needed.

Dr. Charles McNulty:

- **Lack of Local Knowledge**: There are multiple mentions of Dr. McNulty’s unfamiliarity with Washoe County and the specific challenges of the WCSD, suggesting a steep learning curve that could hinder his effectiveness.

- **Experience with Smaller Districts**: Concerns are raised about his previous experience being limited to much smaller school districts, which might not equip him to handle the broader and more complex issues of a larger district like WCSD.

- **Long-Term Commitment**: Stakeholders express worry that Dr. McNulty might view the position as a stepping stone, indicating a lack of commitment to staying long-term and building stability within the district.

- **Weak Interview Performance**: His interview performance was noted as lacking in substance and specifics, particularly about strategies tailored to the needs of WCSD.

Dr. Troy Parks:

- **Continuation of Status Quo**: Concerns about Dr. Parks’s potential to continue along the path of the status quo without significant innovation or progress are noted.

- **Communication and Public Speaking**: While he is considered knowledgeable, his public speaking skills and nervous demeanor in interviews are noted as potential weaknesses, especially given the superintendent’s role as a public figure and communicator.

- **Leadership Style**: Feedback indicates a mixed perception of Dr. Parks’s leadership qualities. Some responses highlight a lack of engaging leadership and innovation,
suggesting he might rely heavily on established methods rather than introducing necessary changes.

- **Bias and Decision-Making**: There are concerns about potential bias in decision-making and a management style that might not be sufficiently inclusive or progressive to meet the district's needs.

- **Connection with Staff and Community**: Some question Dr. Parks’s ability to connect with and engage school staff and the broader community effectively. His approach is seen by some as possibly too detached or bureaucratic.
Stakeholder Group Perceptions: WCSD Employees

Mr. Ernst

➢ **Strengths:**
  ➢ **Strong Understanding of the District:** Many comments highlight Mr. Ernst’s deep knowledge of the district’s operations, needs, and history, which suggests that he is well-prepared to address its specific challenges and opportunities.
  ➢ **Experience and Background in Education:** His experience as a teacher, principal, and administrator is frequently noted. This diverse background is seen as beneficial for understanding the various roles and responsibilities within the district.
  ➢ **Leadership Skills:** Mr. Ernst’s ability to lead, communicate effectively, and make strategic decisions is often mentioned. Employees respect his leadership style and find him approachable and personable, which enhances his effectiveness as a leader.
  ➢ **Commitment and Dedication:** Mr. Ernst is recognized for his commitment to the district and its community. His long tenure and personal investment in the area are seen as strengths that align with the long-term goals of the district.
  ➢ **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Several responses point to his ability to use data effectively to make informed decisions. This skill is crucial for improving school operations and student outcomes.
  ➢ **Collaborative Approach:** He is praised for his collaborative leadership style. His ability to work well with others, including building relationships and engaging with various stakeholders, is frequently mentioned.
  ➢ **Communication Skills:** Mr. Ernst’s capabilities as a communicator are highlighted, both in terms of public speaking and his interactions with staff and stakeholders. This is seen as key to leading the district effectively.
  ➢ **Focus on Improvement and Accountability:** Mr. Ernst is recognized for his focus on accountability and continuous improvement, which aligns with the goals of enhancing educational outcomes and operational efficiency.

➢ **Reservations:**
  ➢ **Leadership Style:** Concerns about Mr. Ernst’s leadership style being potentially divisive or overly authoritative are noted. There are indications that he may have a managerial approach that could be perceived as micromanaging, which some employees find demotivating or stifling.
  ➢ **Lack of Inclusivity and Understanding:** Some employees feel Mr. Ernst does not fully understand or adequately address issues related to the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups. There is a perception that he may not have offered robust plans or solutions for fostering inclusivity and equity within the district.
  ➢ **Change and Innovation:** There is skepticism about his ability to bring about necessary changes within the district. Some employees question whether he can
move beyond the status quo or bring innovative solutions to longstanding problems, particularly given his long tenure within the district.

- **Communication and Approachability:** Issues with communication and perceived approachability also arise, with some employees feeling that Mr. Ernst may not be as open or responsive as needed for the superintendent role. There is a desire for a leader who actively listens and responds to all staff levels, fostering a more open dialogue.

- **Educational Focus and Policy Understanding:** Some reservations highlight a perceived lack of detailed understanding or commitment to specific educational policies, especially concerning special education and other critical areas.

### Dr. Fagen

- **Strengths**
  - **Extensive Superintendent Experience:** Dr. Fagen has a strong background as a superintendent, which is frequently cited as a key strength. Her experience in this role is seen as a valuable asset for managing a large school district like WCSD.
  - **Innovative and Forward-Thinking:** She is noted for her innovative approaches to education, including implementing programs that address specific challenges within schools and districts. Her ideas about using grant money to fund additional teaching positions and creating “at-risk” point systems are examples of her innovative thinking.
  - **Strong Communication Skills:** Many respondents praised Dr. Fagen’s ability to articulate her vision clearly and respond to questions effectively. Her communication style is described as personable, warm, and articulate, which helps in engaging with various stakeholders.
  - **Focus on Quality Teaching and Staff Support:** Dr. Fagen emphasizes the importance of investing in qualified staff rather than merely increasing resources. She advocates for quality teaching and has clear plans involving teacher input, which resonates well with WCSD employees.
  - **Understanding of Diverse Communities:** Her experience in diverse school districts and her straightforward approach to addressing allegations and controversies suggest a balanced and clear vision for improvement, which is appreciated by WCSD employees.
  - **Experience with Challenges and Change Management:** She has been noted to handle challenging situations effectively, including addressing controversies directly, which is seen as a part of the necessary skill set for a superintendent.
  - **Community Involvement and Outreach:** Dr. Fagen has demonstrated a passion for community outreach and has proposed several community-involvement initiatives. Her approach to engaging with students and the community through events and social media is viewed positively.
  - **Educational and Administrative Expertise:** Her background as a teacher, administrator, and superintendent, combined with a Ed.D. in education, adds to her credibility and depth of knowledge in educational leadership.
Reservations

- **Outsider Status**: Some employees are concerned about Dr. Fagen's lack of familiarity with the local community, culture, and the specific challenges faced by the Washoe County School District.

- **Past Controversies and Performance**: Dr. Fagen's previous tenures in other districts have left a record that some employees find concerning. Issues mentioned include her handling of policies and her general leadership style, which some perceive as having led to negative outcomes in previous positions.

- **Potential Short-Term Commitment**: There are doubts about Dr. Fagen's long-term commitment to WCSD. Some employees fear that she might view the superintendent position as a stepping stone, leading to a lack of sustained leadership and continuity for the district.

- **Readiness and Learning Curve**: Concerns are raised about the time it would take for Dr. Fagen to acclimate to WCSD's unique needs. Employees worry that this adjustment period could delay necessary actions and reforms.

- **Leadership and Decision-Making Style**: Some responses suggest that Dr. Fagen may not have provided satisfactory answers regarding key issues, such as support for LGBTQ+ students and dealing with behavioral problems effectively. Her decision-making style, particularly regarding stakeholder involvement and legislative advocacy, also raised concerns.

Dr. LaMarca

- **Strengths**
  - **Extensive Local Experience**: Dr. LaMarca's long tenure with WCSD is frequently cited as a major strength. His deep understanding of the district's history, operations, and challenges positions him well to address its specific needs.
  
  - **Data-Driven and Knowledgeable**: He is recognized for his data-driven approach and his broad knowledge across various facets of the district's operations. His expertise in handling complex district-wide issues, including attendance, behavior, and equity, is particularly noted.
  
  - **Strong Leadership Skills**: His ability to lead with professionalism is highly valued. Employees appreciate his thoughtful and transparent leadership style, which includes a willingness to engage with legislative issues and build strong teams.
  
  - **Community Engagement and Support**: Dr. LaMarca is praised for his engagement with the community and his ability to maintain strong relationships with various stakeholders, including families and local organizations. His commitment to fostering a positive district culture and supporting student and family needs is seen as vital.
  
  - **Focus on Equity and Student Support**: His commitment to equity and his understanding of diverse student needs are frequently mentioned. He is recognized
for his efforts to support all students, particularly those who face greater challenges.

- **Educational and Administrative Expertise**: Dr. LaMarca’s background in educational psychology and his experience in various administrative roles within WCSD contribute to his comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape.

- **Effective Communication and Personability**: His ability to communicate effectively and his personable nature are seen as important attributes that enhance his leadership effectiveness and are valued for building trust and rapport within the district.

- **Innovative and Forward-Thinking**: He is noted for his innovative ideas and readiness to implement changes that address current challenges while preparing for future needs. His approach to leadership includes a focus on shared decision-making and empowering others within the district.

- **Reservations**
  - **Lack of Direct Classroom Experience**: Stakeholders are concerned that Dr. Lamarca has never been a teacher or principal, which they feel is essential for understanding the realities and challenges of school environments. This lack of firsthand educational experience is seen as a significant gap, potentially affecting his credibility and decision-making.
  - **Insider Status and Continuity Concerns**: There’s a worry that being an insider may perpetuate existing problems within the district rather than bringing necessary change. Some fear that Dr. LaMarca’s long tenure within the system aligns too closely with past administrations that might not have been effective.
  - **Leadership Style and Team Dynamics**: Concerns about being potentially autocratic or favoring a top-down approach to management were noted. There’s apprehension about his ability to foster a collaborative and supportive work environment.
  - **Lack of a Broad Educational Background**: Some responses indicated a lack of a comprehensive educational background, which could limit his effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of the district.
  - **Perceived Lack of Commitment to Improving Student Learning Outcomes**: Some highlighted a concern that Dr. LaMarca did not adequately focus on the need to enhance student learning outcomes during his discussions or previous roles.

**Dr. McNulty**

- **Strengths**
  - **Experience in Diverse Communities**: Dr. McNulty has worked in various educational settings, which has equipped him with a solid understanding of diversity and the importance of equity in education. His experience in addressing deep inequities is frequently noted.

  - **Leadership and Vision**: His background as a superintendent and his experience outside of the WCSD offer a fresh perspective that many see as beneficial. His approach to leadership includes a strong focus on building capacity and improving performance across all levels of the school system.
Approachability and Engagement: Dr. McNulty is described as approachable and personable, with an ability to connect with staff and the community. His desire to be actively involved in schools daily and his engagement with various stakeholders are seen as positive leadership traits.

Special Education Expertise: Having a background in special education, Dr. McNulty brings valuable insights into one of the critical areas of need within the district. His experience is seen as a potential asset in enhancing the services provided to special education students.

Innovative and Student-Centered: He is regarded as innovative and student-centered, with a strong commitment to making education enjoyable and inclusive. His emphasis on celebrating diversity and supporting inclusive practices, such as recognizing Pride month, is particularly appreciated.

Strong Communication Skills: His communication style is noted as being effective, with a calm and even-keeled demeanor that helps in building trust and confidence among colleagues and stakeholders.

Professional and Educational Credentials: Dr. McNulty’s professional credentials, including his experience as a superintendent and his academic qualifications, are seen as aligning well with the demands of the superintendent role.

Reservations

Outsider Status: Many are concerned about Dr. McNulty not being from the area, lacking understanding of local culture and community dynamics. There is skepticism about his ability to adapt quickly to the specific needs and history of WCSD.

Lack of Longevity and Commitment: Employees worry about his history of moving frequently between jobs, suggesting he might see the WCSD position as merely a stepping stone rather than a long-term commitment. This is coupled with fears that he won’t stay in the position long enough to make a meaningful impact.

Experience with Large Districts: There is doubt about Dr. McNulty’s experience managing a district as large as WCSD, given his background in smaller districts. Employees are concerned whether his past experiences have adequately prepared him to handle the complexities of a larger district.

Vision and Leadership Qualities: Stakeholder feedback indicates that Dr. McNulty’s vision didn’t stand out and his public speaking skills and ability to engage and inspire others seem to be in question.

Dr. Parks

Strengths

Deep Local Experience and Knowledge: Dr. Parks is consistently praised for his thorough understanding of WCSD, including its history, culture, and the specific
challenges it faces. His extensive experience within the district at various levels—from teacher to chief academic officer—provides him with a comprehensive perspective.

- **Commitment to the Community**: His long tenure and deep roots in the community are seen as major strengths. Employees value his commitment to staying in the district and not using the position as a stepping stone, which suggests a long-term dedication to the district’s success.

- **Strong Leadership and Relatability**: Dr. Parks is described as relatable, approachable, and effective in communication. His leadership style, which includes being responsive to the needs of schools and being present and engaged, is highly appreciated.

- **Educational and Administrative Expertise**: Having served in various educational roles within WCSD, Dr. Parks has a solid background in instructional leadership and a strong grasp of academic administration. His experience is viewed as directly relevant to the superintendent role.

- **Focus on Student Learning and Teacher Support**: He is committed to improving student learning outcomes and supports initiatives that enhance educational practices. His background in teaching and understanding of instructional needs resonate well with the staff.

- **Personable and Easygoing Nature**: His personality traits, such as being kind and easygoing, are frequently mentioned as enhancing his ability to lead effectively. This approachability is seen as crucial for building trust and fostering collaborative relationships within the district.

- **Vision for Improvement**: Dr. Parks is credited with having a clear vision for the district that includes both acknowledging its past successes and areas needing improvement. His strategic planning skills are viewed as key to driving forward the district’s objectives.

- **Reservations**
  - **Leadership Qualities**: Some employees feel that Dr. Parks does not exhibit the necessary leadership poise or energy required for the superintendent position. Concerns include his perceived inability to make decisive, independent decisions and his lack of presence and eloquence in public speaking.

  - **Connection with Community and Staff**: There are concerns of Dr. Parks failing to connect well with the community, staff, and students. Employees note his limited presence in schools and his seeming lack of personability and approachability.

  - **Professional Competence and Experience**: Staff question his impact and effectiveness, especially in terms of advancing student achievement and handling administrative tasks efficiently. His tendency to lean heavily on his team rather than being actively involved in decision-making is also noted.

  - **Vision and Communication**: Employees are concerned about Dr. Parks’ vision for the district and his ability to communicate it clearly and compellingly. His
responses in interviews are described as inarticulate and lacking depth, which raises doubts about his capability to advocate effectively for the district.

➢ **Management Style and Practices**: There is a sentiment that he is part of an outdated administrative cohort not suited to addressing modern educational challenges.
Mr. Ernst

➤ **Strengths:**

➤ **Local Connection:** Many appreciate that Mr. Ernst is a local Washoe County resident, which they believe gives him a better understanding of the district's specific challenges and needs. His long-standing ties to the community are seen as beneficial for stability and commitment.

➤ **Experience within WCSD:** Mr. Ernst's extensive experience in various roles within the district is frequently mentioned. Parents feel this experience equips him with a deep understanding of the district’s operations and the challenges faced by teachers and students.

➤ **Leadership Skills:** Several comments praise his leadership qualities, describing him as strong, fair, and capable of making positive changes. His past leadership roles, particularly as a principal, are often cited as evidence of his effective leadership.

➤ **Advocacy for Education:** Parents note his dedication to public education and his advocacy for students and teachers. He is seen as someone who prioritizes high standards and is committed to improving educational outcomes.

➤ **Communication and Personability:** Mr. Ernst is recognized for his good communication skills and his approachable nature. Parents describe him as personable, a great listener, and someone who is responsive and follows up on concerns.

➤ **Understanding of Educational Needs:** His background as an educator is a significant strength. Parents believe his firsthand experience in classrooms allows him to truly understand the needs of teachers and students.

➤ **Community Engagement:** Mr. Ernst’s efforts in family engagement are highlighted, with parents appreciating his focus on creating supportive environments for families and enhancing community involvement in schools.

➤ **Professional Qualities:** Attributes such as integrity, dedication, and a strong ethical compass are frequently mentioned, suggesting parents see him as a morally upright leader who would act in the best interests of the district.

➤ **Reservations:**

➤ **Lack of Experience as a Superintendent:** Some parents express concerns about Mr. Ernst's lack of experience in the role of superintendent. They question whether he is ready for such a significant leadership position within the district.

➤ **Perceived Focus on Elementary Schools:** Parents report that Mr. Ernst may be too focused on elementary schools and may not adequately address the needs of high schools, particularly concerning graduation rates and other high school-specific issues.

➤ **Communication and Leadership Style:** There are reservations about Mr. Ernst’s communication style and leadership approach. Some parents mention instances of perceived lack of communication or responsiveness from Mr. Ernst in the past, which raises concerns about his ability to effectively lead and engage with
stakeholders. There are concerns about Mr. Ernst’s past leadership style, including perceptions of micromanagement or a focus on compliance rather than visionary leadership.

- **Being Part of the Status Quo**: Some parents view Mr. Ernst as too entrenched in the district’s current system, leading to doubts about his ability to bring about meaningful change or innovation. They express a desire for fresh perspectives and new ideas in district leadership.

- **Lack of Vision or Specific Plans**: Some parents feel that Mr. Ernst’s responses during the interview lacked specificity and concrete plans for addressing key issues facing the district. They express a desire for a candidate who can articulate a clear vision for the district’s future and provide actionable solutions to current challenges.

**Dr. Fagen**

- **Strengths**

  - **Experience and Leadership**: Many parents appreciate Dr. Fagen’s extensive experience, particularly her background as a superintendent in various districts. They see her as knowledgeable, well-spoken, and possessing the leadership qualities necessary to make positive changes.

  - **Innovative Ideas**: Some parents commend Dr. Fagen for her innovative ideas and solutions, especially regarding resource allocation and support for at-risk students. They believe she can bring fresh perspectives and strategies to address challenges in the district.

  - **Community Engagement**: Dr. Fagen’s demonstrated interest in education, learning, and community involvement resonates with some parents. They appreciate her focus on the holistic development of students and her efforts to engage with teachers, families, and students.

  - **Communication Skills**: Her clear and articulate communication style is highlighted by several parents. They find her answers honest, direct, and easy to understand, which they see as essential qualities for effective leadership.

  - **Experience in Similar Districts**: Parents who value Dr. Fagen’s experience note that she has worked in districts with similar enrollments and challenges to WCSD. They believe this background equips her well for the role of superintendent.

- **Reservations**

  - **Out-of-District Candidate**: Concerns are raised about Dr. Fagen’s status as an out-of-district candidate and her potential lack of familiarity with the specific challenges and needs of WCSD. Parents worry that she may not be well-equipped to address the district’s unique issues without prior experience within WCSD.

  - **Perceived Lack of Understanding of WCSD**: Some parents note a lack of research or preparation on Dr. Fagen’s part regarding WCSD and its specific challenges. They worry that this could indicate a lack of commitment or investment in understanding the district’s needs.

  - **Divisiveness**: Parents express concerns about Dr. Fagen’s perceived history of contention and division in previous roles. They worry that her leadership style may
not be conducive to building consensus or fostering positive relationships within the district.

- **Perception of Previous Leaders:** Some parents compare Dr. Fagen to previous superintendents or district leaders, expressing concerns that she may bring similar approaches or attitudes that were unpopular or divisive in the past.
- **Controversies:** There are reservations about Dr. Fagen’s past controversies, particularly regarding a recent investigation and other issues from her previous district. Some parents question whether this history could impact her ability to effectively lead and earn the trust of the community.

**Dr. LaMarca**

- **Strengths**
  - **Knowledge of the District:** Being internal to the district, Dr. LaMarca is perceived as knowledgeable about the specific needs of Washoe County Schools. Parents commend his understanding of the community and its educational requirements.
  - **Experience and Dedication:** Dr. LaMarca’s extensive experience within WCSD, including his role as Chief of Student and Family Supports, is seen as a significant strength. Parents believe that his dedication to the district and its students makes him a strong candidate.
  - **Advocacy and Leadership:** Some parents highlight Dr. LaMarca’s advocacy for students and families, particularly in areas such as mental health support. His leadership skills, demonstrated through various roles within the district, are also recognized as valuable assets.
  - **Community Engagement:** Dr. LaMarca’s ties to the community and his ability to build relationships are mentioned as positive attributes. Parents appreciate his approachability and believe that he can effectively bridge communication between administration and frontline stakeholders.
  - **Communication Skills:** Dr. LaMarca’s clear and articulate communication style resonates with parents. They find his responses to questions genuine, thoughtful, and relatable.
  - **Honesty and Humility:** Parents appreciate Dr. LaMarca’s genuine demeanor, describing him as honest and humble. They value his sincerity and willingness to acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses.

- **Reservations**
  - **Desire for Fresh Perspective:** There is a desire among parents for new leadership and fresh ideas within WCSD. They express reservations about promoting from within the district and believe that a candidate like Dr. LaMarca may not bring the necessary innovation or change.
  - **Lack of Experience in Education:** Many parents express concerns about Dr. LaMarca’s lack of experience in classroom teaching or school administration. They worry that this could result in a disconnect between him and the needs of teachers, staff, and students within the district.
  - **Previous Controversies or Concerns:** Parents raise concerns about Dr. LaMarca’s past or current role within WCSD, citing issues such as controversies or perceptions of questionable behavior. They question whether he has the integrity or leadership skills necessary to serve as superintendent.
Perception of Insufficient Leadership Skills: Stakeholders express reservations about Dr. LaMarca's leadership abilities, citing instances where they feel he has failed to effectively communicate or lead within his current role. They worry that he may struggle to make tough decisions or implement meaningful change as superintendent.

Concerns About Collaboration and Communication: Concerns about Dr. LaMarca's ability to collaborate with others and communicate effectively across the district are noted. They worry that his leadership style may not foster a positive working environment or prioritize the needs of all stakeholders.

Dr. McNulty

Strengths

Public Speaking Skills: Dr. McNulty is praised for his impressive communication skills and his ability to articulate complex ideas clearly and effectively. Stakeholders find his presentations engaging and informative.

Commitment to Educational Equity: Dr. McNulty's dedication to promoting equity within the Washoe County School District is recognized as a significant strength. Stakeholders believe that his focus on equity initiatives will help improve outcomes for all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups.

Experience in Educational Assessment: Stakeholders highlight Dr. McNulty's extensive experience in assessment and data analysis. They appreciate his ability to use assessment data to identify areas for improvement and develop targeted interventions to support student success.

Positive Examples for Attendance Improvement: Dr. McNulty's innovative approaches to improving attendance, such as attendance contests for food trucks, are viewed positively by stakeholders. They believe that his creative strategies will help address attendance issues within the district.

Diverse Background: Stakeholders value Dr. McNulty's diverse background and experience working with diverse student populations. They believe that his varied experiences will bring valuable perspectives to WCSD and help address the district's unique challenges.

Likability and Genuine Care: Dr. McNulty is described as likable and caring, with a genuine concern for the well-being of students, families, and staff. Stakeholders appreciate his personable demeanor and his evident passion for serving the community.

Experience as a Superintendent: Dr. McNulty's previous experience as a superintendent is seen as a strength by stakeholders. They believe that his leadership experience will enable him to effectively lead WCSD and implement positive changes.
Reservations

- **Lack of Local Experience**: Parents express concerns about Dr. McNulty's lack of experience within the Washoe County School District and the broader community. They worry that he may not fully understand the unique challenges and needs of the district and its students.

- **History of Moving Between Positions**: Stakeholders note Dr. McNulty's history of moving between different districts and positions, raising questions about his commitment to staying in Washoe County long-term. They express concerns about his ability to provide stability and make lasting changes within the district.

- **Questions About Motivation**: There are concerns about Dr. McNulty's reasons for seeking the superintendent position in Washoe County, particularly given his previous attempts to leave his current district and pursue opportunities elsewhere. Parents question whether he is genuinely invested in the community and its students.

- **Size of Previous District**: Dr. McNulty's experience in a smaller district raises concerns about his ability to handle the complexity and scale of the Washoe County School District. Parents worry that he may not have the necessary experience or skills to effectively lead a larger district.

- **Perceived Lack of Preparation or Engagement**: Some parents feel that Dr. McNulty did not adequately address questions or demonstrate sufficient knowledge about the district and its issues during his interview. They question his preparedness for the role and his level of engagement with the community.

Dr. Parks

- **Strengths**
  - **Local Roots and Experience**: Dr. Parks is praised for his deep ties to the community and extensive experience within the Washoe County School District. Stakeholders appreciate his familiarity with the district's operations, culture, and needs.
  
  - **Previous Teaching Experience**: Stakeholders value Dr. Parks' background as a former teacher, seeing it as an asset that provides him with valuable insights into the challenges faced by educators and students.
  
  - **Steadfast Leadership**: Dr. Parks is recognized for his steadfast and organized approach to leadership. Stakeholders view him as a reliable and experienced leader who has demonstrated commitment to the district over many years.

  - **Strong Advocacy for Students and Families**: Dr. Parks' dedication to serving students and families is highlighted as a strength. Stakeholders believe that he genuinely cares about the well-being and success of all members of the school community.

  - **Versatile Background**: Dr. Parks' diverse professional background, including experience in both the private sector and education, is seen as a strength.
Stakeholders believe that his varied experiences make him a well-rounded and effective leader.

➢ **Proven Track Record**: Stakeholders point to Dr. Parks' successful tenure as a principal and area supervisor as evidence of his leadership abilities. They trust in his ability to lead the district and make sound decisions.

➢ **Effective Communication Skills**: Dr. Parks is praised for his strong communication skills and ability to bring people together. Stakeholders appreciate his ability to listen to diverse perspectives and collaborate with others to achieve common goals.

➢ **Reservations**

➤ **Status Quo Concerns**: Stakeholders report that Dr. Parks' answers focused too much on how the district is already addressing concerns, rather than proposing significant changes or improvements. They worry that his leadership may not bring the necessary changes they desire.

➤ **Lack of Connection to Community**: Some express concerns about Dr. Parks' lack of understanding of real-life community experiences, which may impact his ability to effectively address the needs of the district and its diverse population.

➤ **Concerns About Leadership Style**: His leadership style is perceived as potentially authoritarian or disconnected from the needs of teachers and students. Some feel that he may not be receptive to feedback or open to alternative perspectives and may promote individuals based on personal relationships rather than merit.

➤ **Political Acumen**: There are reservations about Dr. Parks' ability to navigate the political aspects of the superintendent role, particularly in engaging with the public and managing confrontational situations effectively.

➤ **Performance in Current Role**: Concerns are raised about Dr. Parks' performance in his current role, suggesting that he may have been overwhelmed and not properly supported to succeed. This raises doubts about his ability to handle the demands of the superintendent position.
Mr. Ernst

- **Strengths:**
  - **Deep Local Connection and Commitment:** Mr. Ernst is repeatedly praised for his long-standing involvement with the Washoe County School District. His local roots and dedication to the district are emphasized as key attributes that make him a favored candidate.
  - **Extensive Experience in Education:** His varied experiences as a teacher, principal, and area superintendent within the WCSD are frequently noted. This extensive background is seen as providing him with a comprehensive understanding of the district’s needs.
  - **Strong Leadership and Vision:** Many comments focus on Mr. Ernst’s leadership skills, describing him as a visionary who can effectively lead and implement strategic plans. His ability to engage with the community and lead with integrity and dedication is also highlighted.
  - **Effective Communication and Interpersonal Skills:** Mr. Ernst is noted for his articulate nature and exceptional communication skills, which help him build strong relationships across various groups, including teachers, staff, students, and parents.
  - **Professionalism and Knowledge:** He is consistently described as professional, knowledgeable, and well-prepared, with a clear understanding of the educational system and its regulations.
  - **Passion for Education and Community Engagement:** Mr. Ernst’s passion for education and commitment to the community are emphasized, with mentions of his hands-on approach to improving academic achievement and engaging with community stakeholders.
  - **Positive Personal Attributes:** Attributes such as honesty, work ethic, and personability are mentioned, portraying him as a well-liked and respected individual within the community and the education system.

- **Reservations:**
  - **Concerns About Continuity and Lack of Change:** A common concern is that Mr. Ernst’s leadership might continue on the same path as the current administration, which community members feel is inadequate. There’s a desire for new ideas and directions rather than maintaining the status quo.
  - **Lack of Specificity and Directness:** Community members report that Mr. Ernst tends to evade direct answers to questions, often circling around without providing concrete responses or clear stances. This raises concerns about his transparency and decisiveness.
  - **Perceived Lack of a Broad Vision:** There are doubts about his understanding of the global needs and the broader vision required for the Washoe County School
District. His experience is seen as not comprehensive enough to grasp the full extent of his responsibilities.

- **Questionable Collaborative Skills**: Some feedback suggests he may not come across as collaborative or as someone who values community input, which is crucial for the role of a superintendent who needs to engage with various stakeholders effectively.

- **Focus on Past Achievements**: Critiques include a perception that Mr. Ernst overemphasizes his past awards without clearly connecting them to the needs of WCSD. This could suggest a lack of forward-looking strategies or an inability to adapt his past experiences to new challenges.

**Dr. Fagen**

- **Strengths**:
  - **External Perspective with Fresh Insights**: Although being an external candidate is viewed unfavorably by some, others see Dr. Fagen’s fresh perspective as beneficial, believing it could bring necessary changes and new ideas to the district.
  - **Strong Communication and Directness**: Dr. Fagen is commended for her articulate and poised communication style. She is noted for directly addressing questions during interviews and providing clear, specific examples to support her points.
  - **Experience and Expertise in Education**: Her extensive experience as a superintendent is frequently highlighted. Her background includes managing similar-sized districts and spearheading various initiatives, which suggests she brings a wealth of practical knowledge to the role.
  - **Innovative Approach**: Several comments point to her innovative ideas for enhancing education, including specific programs and initiatives to support teachers and increase their pay to retain quality staff.
  - **Global Understanding and Vision**: Dr. Fagen is recognized for her broad understanding of educational administration and her vision for implementing new and effective educational strategies.
  - **Support for Teachers and Community Engagement**: She is seen as a candidate who supports teacher innovation and has solid plans for community and student engagement, which are crucial for the school district’s growth.
  - **Potential Longevity**: There’s a mention of her potential for a long tenure with the district, which could bring stability and sustained leadership.

- **Reservations**:
  - **Lack of Local Knowledge**: A frequent issue highlighted is her unfamiliarity with Washoe County and the Washoe County School District. There’s also worry that she may not integrate well into the community and may leave the district prematurely.
Leadership Style: Questions of whether Dr. Fagen’s leadership style is possibly too strident for the local district and community were noted.

Past Controversies and Leadership Style: Some concerns are raised about her past leadership roles and reported controversies in previous districts.

Concerns About Commitment: There are concerns about Dr. Fagen’s long-term commitment to WCSD. This raises questions about whether she views the position as a stepping stone rather than a long-term commitment.

Dr. LaMarca

Strengths:

Deep Commitment to Student Safety and Well-being: Dr. LaMarca is frequently recognized for his focus on student safety, support for marginalized groups, and a strong understanding of social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health issues.

Local Experience and Knowledge: His long-standing involvement with the Washoe County School District and his deep local knowledge are viewed positively. His experience in various capacities within the district is seen as an advantage, making him a well-versed candidate for the superintendent role.

Data-Driven and Analytical Approach: He is appreciated for his data-oriented perspective, which is considered crucial for making informed decisions and addressing educational challenges effectively.

Strong Leadership and Visionary Qualities: Dr. LaMarca is described as a visionary leader with a clear and attainable vision for the district’s path forward. His leadership is noted for being both results-oriented and inclusive.

Support for Community and Mental Health Initiatives: He is recognized for his efforts to connect and work towards serving community needs, especially in mental health, educational, and medical areas. His experience in building partnerships and collaborating with local entities is highlighted as a major strength.

Effective Communication and Advocacy: Dr. LaMarca is praised for his communication skills and his ability to advocate for the school district, both legislatively and within the community. His ability to facilitate discussions and engage with community partners effectively is often mentioned.

Support for Equity and Diversity: His passion for equity and diversity and his commitment to ensuring that all students have equal opportunities for success are noted as core elements of his professional ethos.

Experience Across Educational Roles: Although some feedback points out a lack of direct teaching or principal experience, Dr. LaMarca’s extensive leadership experience within educational settings at both the district and state levels is seen as valuable.

Reservations:

Lack of Educational Experience: Many stakeholders emphasize that Dr. LaMarca has no direct experience as a teacher, principal, or school leader, which many community members view as essential for understanding the needs and challenges of the educational environment.
Questionable Decision-Making: Specific criticisms are directed at decision-making processes, such as appointing positions of influence not based on merit. This raises concerns about fairness in leadership.

Poor Communication and Engagement: Concerns were noted about effective communication and community engagement skills. Specific mentions of being disorganized, not prepared for meetings, and failing to deliver on promises, contribute to a negative perception among stakeholders.

Perceived Negativity and Lack of Visibility: Some feedback points to a negative outlook and a lack of visible, positive engagement with the community and other organizations, suggesting Dr. LaMarca may not be the inspiring or motivational leader that the community seeks.

Dr. McNulty

Strengths:

Positive Leadership and Educational Philosophy: Dr. McNulty is recognized as a positive leader who is enthusiastic about education and possesses a solid leadership philosophy. His ability to admit weaknesses and engage warmly with others is appreciated.

Focus on Equity and Inclusion: His commitment to developing equity within the education system is noted, with specific mention of his experience working with marginalized groups, such as Native Americans, and his background in special education.

Engaging Personality: His warm, engaging, and humorous personality is frequently mentioned, contributing positively to his public image and approachability.

Proven Administrative Experience: Dr. McNulty's past roles as a superintendent and educator, with achievements in these positions, are seen as significant strengths. His hands-on educational experience and leadership at various levels are valued.

Effective Communication and Community Engagement: He is seen as candid and genuine, with the ability to connect well during community interactions, such as forums. His open and honest communication style is particularly noted.

Vision for Education: Dr. McNulty’s vision for bringing joy into the educational environment, making it a positive place for both students and teachers, is highlighted as a unique and compelling aspect of his candidacy.

Reservations:

Lack of Local Knowledge and Engagement: A significant concern is his unfamiliarity with Washoe County and the specific needs of its school district.

Inexperience with Larger Districts: Dr. McNulty’s background in smaller school districts raises doubts about his ability to manage the larger and more complex environment of WCSD. There’s skepticism about his capacity to handle the broader issues and challenges that come with a larger district.
Questionable Longevity and Commitment: Many are wary of his potential as a short-term leader, concerned that he might view the position as a stepping stone rather than a long-term commitment. This perception is compounded by a history of not staying long in previous positions.

Interview Performance and Communication Skills: Dr. McNulty's performance in interviews and public communications appears to have been unimpressive, with descriptions of his answers as shallow and lacking specificity.

Perceived Lack of Fit with WCSD Culture: Some feedback suggests that his personality and professional style may not mesh well with the existing culture and expectations within WCSD. This includes concerns about his approach to discipline and general interactions within the community.

Dr. Parks

Strengths:

Strong Local Connections: Dr. Parks is highly valued for his deep roots in the community. His long-standing presence and personal investment in the district, having raised his family and educated his children here, are frequently mentioned as significant strengths.

Extensive Experience in Education: He has a broad background in various educational roles, including as a teacher, principal, and central office leader. This diverse experience within the district is seen as providing him with a comprehensive understanding of the needs and operations of WCSD.

Community and Staff Relationships: Dr. Parks is recognized for his good relationships within the community and with school district staff. His ability to connect with and be respected by those directly involved in education, such as teachers and other school staff, is seen as a key asset.

Leadership and Management Skills: His capabilities in management and leadership are noted, especially his ability to navigate the political dynamics of the district effectively. His past leadership roles have left a positive impression on those he has worked with.

Focus on Student Safety and Educational Outcomes: Dr. Parks is commended for his commitment to student safety and improving instructional outcomes, aligning well with the district’s goals. His approach to education is seen as both practical and student focused.

Ethical and Trustworthy: His ethical standards and trustworthiness are emphasized by those who know him personally. He is described as an honest, reliable, and considerate individual who always places the students’ best interests at heart.

Data-Driven Decision-Making: Dr. Parks’s ability to use a research lens for data-based decision-making is acknowledged, which supports effective and informed leadership.
Reservations:

- **Public Speaking and Communication Skills:** Some community feedback points to concerns about Dr. Parks’s nervousness and the potential impact this could have on his public speaking and communication, which are critical for the superintendent role.

- **Perceived Continuation of Status Quo:** There are worries that Dr. Parks might continue existing practices without significant innovation or change.

- **Leadership and Innovation:** Doubts about Dr. Parks’s ability to bring necessary innovation to the district are mentioned, alongside some perceptions of rigidity and arrogance in his approach. Additionally, there are concerns about his leadership skills and whether he has the ability to drive the district forward.

- **Follow-through and Work Ethic:** Concerns about his work ethic and follow-through on commitments are noted, particularly in relation to delegating responsibilities and fulfilling agreed-upon actions.

- **Potential for Short Tenure:** There are also concerns about his potential for a short tenure, either due to retirement or other factors, which could affect long-term planning and stability within the district.