Whittier Elementary School
Principal Profile

Survey and Focus Group Summary
April/May 2023
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Multiple Feedback Collection Pathways
Key Takeaways: Leadership Characteristics and Values of the Next Whittier Principal

- Diversity - Promoting a Culture of Equity and Inclusion
- Instruction and Student Learning
- Special Education and Early Childhood Programming
- Social-Emotional Wellness and Supports
- Relationships and School Culture
- Visibility and Accessibility
Survey Participation

What is your current connection to Whittier Elementary School?
82 responses

- 51.2% Whittier Parent/Guardian
- 45.1% Whittier Staff Member
- Future Whittier Parent/Guardian
- Whittier Staff Member AND Parent/Guardian
- Community Member
Illinois Performance Standards for School Leaders (Survey Responses)

Please select the three performance standards (explained above) that are most needed at Whittier Elementary School at this time.

82 responses

- Living a Mission and Vision: 29 (35.4%)
- Focused on Results: 30 (36.6%)
- Leading and Managing Systems: 32 (39%)
- Change: 44 (53.7%)
- Improving Teaching and Learning: 44 (53.7%)
- Building and Maintaining Professional Relationships: 51 (62.2%)
- Leading with Integrity and Professionalism: 59 (72%)
- Creating and Sustaining a High Culture of Expectations: 59 (72%)
Experience (Survey Responses)

Please rate each of the statements below on how important it is for the new principal of Whittier to possess.

- Administrative experience
- Expertise in curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Successful experience as a classroom teacher
- Experience working with diverse populations
- Experience in and knowledge of special education
Most Important Characteristics (Survey Responses)

- Flexibility: 37 (45.1%)
- Problem Solver: 47 (57.3%)
- Kind: 49 (59.8%)
- Effective communicator: 58 (70.7%)
- Empowers others: 41 (50%)
- Fair and consistent: 35 (42.7%)
- Values diversity: 42 (51.2%)
- Highly visible: 38 (46.3%)
- Effective listener: 34 (41.5%)
- Motivational leader: 30 (36.6%)
Open-Ended Feedback

Themes and examples from the survey and focus groups
April 20 Listening Session: Teachers and staff shared feedback on three open-ended questions and affirmed ideas shared by others.
1. In your own words, describe the type of principal you believe would be the best fit for Whittier Elementary School.

Someone Who Values Diversity

● “We are a complex building with a very diverse student population. We need an experienced principal who has already demonstrated strong leadership skills.”
● “Whittier is one of the most diverse elementary schools in Oak Park. We need a principal who understands the many needs of a diverse community. We also have a large population of special education students. They need a principal who understands their unique needs and integrates them into the Whittier community.”
● “The best fit for Whittier Elementary would be someone who applies an equity and inclusion lens to approach leadership, decision-making, communication, and community engagement.”
● “Because we are a co-taught building, this person needs to understand the importance of diverse classrooms and how to have meaningful conversations and planning about them.”
● “One of a principal's strengths (to me) would be them being aware of their own biases and working to prevent/reduce their biases from affecting staff, students, and families.”
● “We need someone who can continue to promote a culture of inclusion and community at Whittier.”
1. In your own words, describe the type of principal you believe would be the best fit for Whittier Elementary School.

**Someone Who Is Visible and Accessible**

- “A leader who is visible (in the hallways/lunchroom/playground/arrival and dismissal times) to staff and students. A leader who is accessible to staff. A leader who communicates clearly and follows up on plans ... A leader who is flexible, kind, and present. A leader who will foster our already strong sense of community at Whittier.”
- “Highly visible, connects with people at all levels especially the kiddos, values diversity, smart, easy to get along with.”
- “A very visible, interactive person who values diversity and understands student and parent needs across the spectrum of abilities.”
- “Someone exactly like Principal Robinson- kind, visible, ingenious, authentic.”
- “Someone who can use his/her expertise and positive values and be a visible, empathic, challenging and supportive leader for all roles in the building.”
- “Whittier needs a principal that is visible and available to staff and teachers. I'd like to see a principal that is consistently on the playground, in and out of classrooms, and in the cafeteria.”
1. In your own words, describe the type of principal you believe would be the best fit for Whittier Elementary School.

Someone With Special Education Experience

- “The best fit would be someone who has experience with co-taught or other special education situations. Whittier has instructional, co-taught, and early childhood special education classes as well as student from the Hephzibah program. The best fit would also be someone who knows how to engage with the Whittier staff, listening to their experiences needs, and expertise, in order to create a space in which the staff and students are able to perform to the best of their abilities.”
- “A principal that is present in the building and has experience with special education as we have a large population of children with needs/IEPs.”
- “Someone who has experience as a teacher or a principal in a school with special education programs.”
- “I would like to see a principal that embraces a positive and inclusive learning environment for all students and staff (EC-5th). A principal that has experience with EC and help develop our inclusive programming. A principal that has knowledge of SpEd and the importance of inclusion.”
2. What do you believe is the top priority at Whittier Elementary School?

- “Continued educational success for the students, and maintaining Whittier's track record of excellence.”
- “I believe that a top priority is helping teachers to improve instruction, especially ELA instruction. We are a hard working and skilled staff, but I wonder if we are using our time with students most effectively. By building relationships with the staff and students, an effective principal will be able to understand our weaknesses as a building and work to address them.”
- “Supporting teachers in keeping curriculum fresh and offering students new and different opportunities.”
- “Keep the focus on high expectations and academic excellence while bringing back some of the fun that makes kids want to be at school.”
- “Closing the achievement gaps for race and special education to better prepare students for middle school.”
- “A principal who continues to really look at curriculum, classroom teaching, and extra interventions to help each student reach their potential.”
2. What do you believe is the top priority at Whittier Elementary School?

- “Creating an environment that is welcoming and safe to all students and staff.”
- “Community building and family relationships. Whittier is a family atmosphere and should lead with that in mind.”
- “Strong connection to community and staff, openness, flexibility, fairness and a willingness to support us.”
- “The top priority at Whittier is keeping us a family along with our climate continuing to be welcoming, supportive and accepting of all.”
- “Building trusting relationships with staff and community.”
- “Relationships with students, especially those who struggle.”
- “Whittier has a strong community and a track record of supporting student growth and academic excellence, as evidenced by the exemplary rating. I'd love to see that continue.”
- “Just continuing Principal Robinson's legacy which create a culture of belonging, respect, and kindness in our building.”
2. What do you believe is the top priority at Whittier Elementary School?

Social-Emotional Wellness and Supports

- “Social-Emotional wellness. Kids and teachers are being pushed to limits, instead of more chill zones, maybe we need to do some reflecting and ask ourselves why. Teaching and learning is not effective when kids aren't ready.”
- “Treating students and staff as whole people.”
- “Closing the "achievement gap" and fostering the emotional and academic health of students.”
- “Top priority is our students social-emotional well-being and academics. Allowing and teaching students "how-to" and giving them opportunities to demonstrate their learning and guiding them is part of our school life. Once the social-emotional needs are met, students will be in a better place to focus on academics.”
- “Helping each student learn to the best of their ability - but not at the expense of their health and happiness. Having happy and well-rounded students whose teachers are tuned into their socio-emotional as well as academic needs is so important.”
3. What do you believe is important for principal candidates to know about Whittier School?

Diversity

- “We are a school community that gets along well and values difference. Our family body is so diverse and I feel that our school does a better job than others of celebrating that diversity and not putting the welfare of 'my child' over that of the collective.”
- “We are diverse and have a large population of special needs students and a mix of low, mid and high income families”
- “Whittier is a diverse and tight knit school with invested parents and wonderful engaged kids.”
- “Whittier is a diverse school in many regards - especially when it comes to the individual needs of students. It's important to understand the diverse (behavioral) needs and approach them with empathy and understanding.”
- “Whittier is a beautiful school community with diverse learners that add to the tapestry of learners in District 97. The successful Principal candidate should be able to enhance the Whittier school community.”
- “The principal put great effort into building relationships with black boys. They need to do the same.”
3. What do you believe is important for principal candidates to know about Whittier School?

Special Education and Early Childhood Programming

- “Early Childhood has worked hard to be included—Whittier is a Pre-K to 5 school.”
- “Early Childhood Special Education is housed at Whittier and to have a principal that would embrace that population and the staff would be very important. Whittier is sometimes the 1st school experience and/or exposure to the district and at this time, is very well received by our EC parents and I believe that this is due to the welcoming environment Whittier has created.”
- “Should be knowledgeable about the different programs (early childhood, co-teaching, SPED).”
- “Whittier has a large special education population, with a co-taught model throughout the grade levels - knowledge of the continuum of sped services and how to meet the needs of a diverse population will be important for principal candidates to consider and be able to effectively support our students and staff.”
- “We have unique programs: co-taught, special education (resource and instructional), early childhood and Hephzibah.”
- “We are a school with a lot of learning diversity and understanding special education and MTSS will be important.”
3. What do you believe is important for principal candidates to know about Whittier School?

**Strong, Tight-Knit Community**

- “Overall, we are a very warm, caring, and supportive community.”
- “A great school and community of scholars with bright futures as well as dedicated teachers and community members.”
- “The community's attachment to Whittier is strong. My children are still excited to go to school every day, particularly post covid and remote learning. It's an enthusiastic place.”
- “We are a close community and we want someone who wants to stay the course not a stepping stone in their career.”
- “There is a reason so many of us choose to stay in the Whittier school zone. The teachers are amazing and we love the community. The principal should truly love the school and the children who attend.”
- “Whittier is a special place where building relationships is key. We are not only colleagues but also friends. We have a high regard and respect for one another. We also challenge one another to be our best. We are innovative, creative, and hard working.”
May 3 Listening Session: The Whittier Student Council (Grades 4–5) shared feedback on their school and their hopes for the next principal.
May 3 Listening Session: The Whittier Student Council (Grades 4-5) shared feedback on their school and their hopes for the next principal.
Student Feedback

• Many students remarked that Principal Robinson knows everyone’s name and takes time to get to know them.

• Multiple students shared that they hope the next principal will listen to students (e.g., “Talk to students like they are real people.”)

• Students said that it’s important that the principal is enthusiastic and fun, and that they are involved in school events.
Student Feedback

- Students shared that Whittier has amazing teachers and noted the strong relationships between students and teachers.

- Multiple students shared that they love the school’s Prides (multi-age groups focusing on relationships and social-emotional learning).

- Many students said that they would like to see the bathrooms and water fountains updated or remodeled.