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## **WALNUT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL NEW PRINCIPAL PROFILE REPORT**

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The Walnut Hills New Principal Search Committee and the Local School Decision Making Committee (LSDMC) wanted to gain an understanding of the views of teachers, alumni, parents (past and present), students and support staff about Walnut Hills High School and current issues the school is facing. They also wanted input from various groups in the school community about the skills and characteristics needed in a new leader, as they search for a new principal. The LSDMC requested that *School Exec Connect* gather information from various constituent groups regarding the strengths and challenges of the school as well as the attributes, skills and characteristics desired in the new principal. This ***New Principal Profile Report*** presents a summary of the comments from discussions the search consultants have had with individuals and groups and from 2623 people who responded to an online survey distributed by email to staff, current parents, students and alumni (with contact information). All staff members, the student body, and all parents were given the opportunity to respond to the survey.

Due to the sampling methodology used, this report is not “scientifically accurate.” Respondents may have been interviewed and completed the online survey. The opinions set forth may not reflect the opinion of most members of any given constituent groups, but rather those that responded to the survey. Judgments of what to include in this report were those of the consultants, after conducting interviews and reviewing the survey responses and comments.

This document will first present overall comments, which were developed by combining the survey responses and comments from various interviews. More detailed information about the survey responses follows these overall comments. In addition to the overall responses, the information on the survey includes examples of where specific groups within the school community differed as to their comments and especially as to the characteristics they desire in the new principal.

These responses and the themes they uncover are intended to give direction to the New Principal Search Committee and the LSDMC, as they screen candidates and select the new principal.

### **OVERALL COMMENTS COMBINING THE SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS**

#### **Strengths of Walnut Hills High School**

Parents, students, alumni and staff are proud to be associated with the Walnut Hills High School and often mentioned that it is the highest rated high school in Ohio and one of the top 100

public high schools in the country during interviews and in written comments on the survey. The fact that it is a unique school serving students from throughout Cincinnati was mentioned within every interview and mentioned over and over in survey responses. The importance of the classical curriculum and the academically rich environment it affords was especially important to alumni. Students highlighted the academic rigor and the many academic and extracurricular opportunities at the school. Parents, students and staff reported liking the diverse nature of the school, including the mix of students who attend Walnut Hills.

Here is a list of the key strengths mentioned in the interviews and the survey:

- Culturally diverse student body
- Challenging classes and curriculum
- High expectations for all students to excel
- Quality teaching staff
- Getting students ready for career and college
- A classical six-year college preparatory program
- High student achievement
- Extensive menu of extracurricular activities
- Fine arts programming (classwork and extracurricular offerings)

### **Challenges Facing Walnut Hills**

The primary challenges facing Walnut Hills are in many ways a result of the success of the school. It currently enrolls 2900 students in a facility built to house closer to 2400, which causes many teachers to have to travel from room to room during the day and increases the average class size. Enrollment growth over the past decade has resulted from the school convincing families throughout Cincinnati of the quality of the academics and the range of opportunities available at Walnut Hills. The resulting diversity within the student body is a strength of the school, but it also is causing some of its current challenges. Even with the student body all needing to “test into the school,” there is an achievement gap among student groups. For example, it was often mentioned in interviews that most students enrolled in Advance Placement or honors classes are white and “middle class.”

Here is a list of the key challenges mentioned in interviews and the survey:

- Helping all students attain high academic achievement
- School size (enrollment growth)
- Ability to make a large school seem smaller for individual students
- Working to close achievement gaps among student groups
- Class size
- Providing needed support for college selection and the college admission process
- Keeping student committed to education
- Maintaining quality facilities

### **Top Goals for the New Principal**

The current administration is working on ways to reduce enrollment growth and is committed to providing academic support to students who are not as academically prepared, no matter their academic ability. These issues are important for the next principal to continue to address.

Here is a list of the top priorities mentioned in the interviews and the survey:

- Maintain the high level of student achievement, especially as shown in college enrollment and the academic success of students
- Maintain opportunities for all students within academics, fine arts and extracurricular activities
- Align student enrollment with the school's size and resources
- Focus on implementing a curriculum that allows students to compete in today's (21st century) global environment
- Ensure there are programs that meet the needs of all students enrolled in Walnut Hills
- Improve staff morale by addressing the above priorities

### **Profile of the New Principal**

There is some disagreement among various groups making up the Walnut Hills school community as to the key characteristics sought in the new principal. The details around these differences are explained in more detail in the summary of the survey responses presented below.

The faculty is keen to have a leader who can improve morale by addressing problems associated with growth and with the enrollment of students who struggle to achieve academic success. Parents seek a leader who can recruit and support outstanding staff members. Students desire a leader who will continue the positive, approachable style of the current principal. Alumni desire someone who "gets the school" and who will maintain important traditions and continue its classical approach to education. It is important to find a new leader who can address these somewhat diverse needs.

Here is a summary of the key characteristics of the new principal shared in the interviews and in the survey:

- Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools
- Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging
- Has a clear vision for leading the school that is consistent with the school's strategic plan
- Can recruit and support outstanding staff members
- Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn, including having a strong educational background
- Has excellent communication skills; speaks and writes well
- Is collaborative, includes others in the decision-making process, and is willing to delegate responsibly
- Is visible in the school and the community
- Develops effective partnerships within the community
- Is innovative, creative and flexible
- Understands the business side of running a school and can work with the school's alumni foundation
- Has a background as a strong, respected secondary teacher
- Works to nurture the strengths of each student

- Holds others accountable to expectations
- Can oversee the process of getting all students ready for college and a career

### **Ways to Use This Report**

This report may be used in several ways. First, after reviewing this summary of the input from members of the Walnut Hills High school community, the Search Committee should approve, with whatever revisions it deems appropriate, the “profile of the new principal,” which will serve as the criteria to be used as candidates are screened and interviewed. Second, the LSDMC should review this report to become informed about the thinking of the different constituent groups regarding the perceptions of the school. Third, the consultants recommend the report be posted on the school website and given to candidates to help them gain a better understanding of Walnut Hills High School and the problems and opportunities associated with becoming its next principal.

Thank you to those who took the time to respond to the survey and to those who were interviewed. The results of this report will assist the Search Committee and the LSDMC, as they enter the next phase of the search for a new principal.

Respectfully submitted,

*Craig Larson and Kevin O'Mara*

*School Exec Connect*

## ONLINE SURVEY SUMMARY: (2623 Respondents)

| <u>Demographics</u>                                   |       |     |
|---|-------|-----|
| <u>Number and Percentage of the 2623 Respondents*</u> |       |     |
| Parent (current or past)                              | 596   | 23% |
| Alumni  | 1,245 | 47% |
| Teacher/Certified staff                               | 119   | 5%  |
| Administrator   | 16    | 1%  |
| Support staff   | 21    | 1%  |
| Student   | 688   | 26% |
| Other   | 29    | 1%  |

(\*Totals may not equal 100% due to respondents identifying in more than one category and to rounding.)

### SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

#### **1. Walnut Hills' strengths** (with percent of respondents who listed the item as a strength):

- Culturally diverse student body – 55%
- Challenging classes and curriculum – 51%
- High expectations for all students to excel – 45%
- Quality teaching staff – 44%
- Getting students ready for career and college – 42%
- A classical six-year college preparatory program – 41%
- High student achievement – 35%

(The next item had 22%)

Note: While most of the constituent group responses were similar, the students' rankings were somewhat different. Students ranked the following as the top strengths of Walnut Hills High School:

- Culturally diverse student body – 59%
- Challenging classes and curriculum – 51%
- Getting students ready for career and college – 45%
- Extensive menu of extracurricular activities – 38%
- Fine arts programming – 35%
- High student achievement – 32%
- High expectations for all students to excel – 32%

(The next item had 23%)

#### **2. Walnut Hills' challenges:**

- Helping all students attain high academic achievement – 46%
- School size (enrollment growth) – 37%
- Ability to make a large school seem smaller for individual students – 30%
- Working to close achievement gaps among student groups – 27%

- Class size – 26%
  - Providing needed counseling support – 24%
  - Keeping students committed to education – 21%
  - Maintaining quality facilities – 20%
  - The Latin requirement for all junior high students – 19%
  - District financial support – 18%
  - Being truly student-centered – 18%
  - Providing support for college selection and the college admission process – 17%
  - Providing time for students to take foreign languages beyond Latin – 17%
- (The next item had 15%)

Note: While most of the constituent groups rankings were similar, the teachers differed somewhat and ranked these as the top challenges of Walnut Hills:

- School size (enrollment growth) – 69%
  - Class size – 57%
  - Helping all students attain high academic achievement – 41%
  - Ability to make a large school seem smaller for individual students – 30%
  - Providing needed support for college selection and the college admission process – 29%
  - Working to close achievement gaps among student groups – 23%
  - Effective school governance – 23%
  - Keeping students committed to education – 22%
  - Maintaining quality facilities – 21%
- (The next item had 18%)

### **3. Top three goals for Walnut Hills:**

- Maintain high levels of student achievement – 39%
  - Support and enrichment for all students within academics, fine arts, extracurricular activities and social/emotional welfare – 34%
  - Focus on implementing a curriculum that allows students to complete in today's (21st century) global environment – 32%
  - Focus on faculty growth and development to make Walnut Hills a model of education programming – 24%
  - Align student enrollment with the school's size and resources – 22%
  - Create ways to support and enhance the unique culture of Walnut Hills HS – 22%
  - Ensure there are programs that meet the needs of all students enrolled in Walnut Hills – 22%
- (The next item had 15%)

Note: Teachers ranked these items somewhat differently, with the top three goals as:

- Align student enrollment with the school's size and resources – 57%

- Maintain high levels of student achievement – 44%
- Improve staff morale – 32%

In addition, teachers rated “Focus on faculty growth and development to make Walnut Hills a model of education programming” at 9.4% compared to the overall rating of 24%

#### **4. Characteristics sought in the new principal:**

- Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging – 44%
  - Has a clear vision for leading the school that inspires others – 43%
  - Can recruit and support outstanding staff members – 42%
  - Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn – 36%
  - Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools – 36%
  - Has excellent communication skills; speaks and writes well – 35%
  - Is innovative, creative and flexible – 34%
  
  - Is collaborative and includes others in decision-making process – 30%
  - Is visible in the school and the community – 30%
  
  - Understands finance and the business side of running the school – 21%
  - Has a background as a strong, respected teacher – 19%
  - Works to nurture the strengths of each child – 19%
  - Holds others accountable to expectations – 18%
  - Prepares students for college and a career – 18%
- (The next item has 11%)

#### **Order of the importance of top characteristics divided by respondent groups:**

Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging – 44% overall

- Parents – 41% (#3)
- Alumni – 37% (#3)
- Teachers – 30% (#7)
- Students – 67% (1)

Has a clear vision for leading the school that inspires others – 43% overall

- Parents – 47% (#2)
- Alumni – 48% (#2)
- Teachers – 33% (#5)
- Students – 29% (#6)

Can recruit and support outstanding staff members – 42% overall

- Parents – 49% (#1)
- Alumni – 48% (#1)
- Teachers – 25% (#12)
- Students – 24% (#11)

Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools – 36% overall

- Parents – 33% (#5)
- Alumni – 34% (#5)
- Teachers – 44% (#1)
- Students – 39% (#3)

Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn – 36% overall

- Parents – 35% (#6)
- Alumni – 37% (#4)
- Teachers – 41% (#3)
- Students – 34% (#4)

Is innovative, creative and flexible – 35% overall

- Parents – 28% (#7)
- Alumni – 34% (#5)
- Teachers – 25% (#11)
- Students – 44% (#2)

Has excellent communication skills; speaks and writes well – 35% overall

- Parents – 41% (#4)
- Alumni – 33% (#8)
- Teachers – 31% (#7)
- Students – 34% (#5)

### **Top five characteristics for parents, alumni, teachers and students**

#### **Parents—**

- Can recruit and support outstanding staff members – 49%
- Has a clear vision for leading the school that inspires others – 47%
- Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging – 41%
- Has excellent communication skills; speaks and writes well – 41%
- Is visible in the school and the community – 37%

#### **Alumni—**

- Can recruit and support outstanding staff members – 48%
- Has a clear vision for leading the school that inspires others – 48%
- Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging – 37%
- Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn – 37%
- Is innovative, creative and flexible – 34%
- Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools – 34%

#### **Teachers—**

- Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools – 44%
- Is collaborative and includes others in decision-making process – 43%
- Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn – 41%
- Is visible in the school and the community – 36%



- Has a clear vision for leading the school that inspires others – 33%

**Students—**

- Has warm people skills; is approachable and engaging – 67%
- Is innovative, creative and flexible – 44%
- Has experience with diversity as a leader in diverse schools – 39%
- Has a deep knowledge of curriculum, instruction and how students learn – 34%
- Has excellent communication skills; speaks and writes well – 34%

**5. What question(s) would you like the Search Committee to ask candidates as it screens potential new principals?**

There were nearly 900 responses to the “suggested interview questions” section. Here are the predominate themes:

- How would you maintain the current high level of academic achievement and foster even more academic growth by students?
- How would you ensure the achievement of all students at Walnut Hills, regardless of background?
- How would you foster communications with our parents, alumni and the community at large?
- How would you work with staff, especially teachers, to create and foster a sense of purpose and high morale?
- How knowledgeable are you about the traditions and history of Walnut Hills?
- How can you convince us that you are here because you love Walnut Hills High School?