

DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science Executive Director Search

Stakeholder Engagement Executive Director Search Survey

Overview: On April 10, 2024, the “DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science Executive Director Search Survey” was made available to the public both online and in hard copy. The survey remained open for respondents until April 17, 2024, and a total of 126 people completed the survey.

RESULTS: Survey takers were asked to identify the role that best reflected the basis for their responses. The categories selected by the survey takers are provided below.

- 49.21% of respondents selected “Staff Member”
- 46.03% of respondents selected “Parent/Guardian”
- 2.38% of respondents selected “Other”
- 1.59% of respondents selected “Principal”
- 0.79% of respondents selected “Superintendent”
- 0.00% of respondents selected “Board Member”

Areas of Expertise: Those who responded to the survey were also asked to identify the top six desirable areas of expertise they believe the new executive director must possess. The most frequently noted areas of expertise are listed below in order of preference.

- Collaborative Leadership
- Budget and Finance
- School Reform (i.e. Strategic Planning, etc.)
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Personnel Management
- Curriculum Development/Evaluation

Specialized Skills: The top six specialized skills the new executive director must possess were identified in the survey results as shown below.

- Acts with honesty and in an ethical manner in dealings with the School Board, staff, and community
- Develops and directs an effective leadership team
- Is visible and accessible to the School Board, staff, students, parents, and community
- Is a “people person” with proven abilities in human relations and communications
- Develops trust and works collaboratively with diverse groups of stakeholders
- Effectively mediates and accommodates different perspectives; values teamwork

Previous Experience: Respondents were asked if previous superintendent or executive director experience is important. Based on the results, 65.25% of the respondents selected “Yes,” while 34.75% of the respondents selected “No.”



Personal Characteristics: Survey takers were also asked to identify the top six personal characteristics they believe the new executive director must possess. The most frequently noted personal characteristics are listed below in order of preference.

- Honest and ethical
- Effective communicator
- Transparent
- Problem solver
- Consistent
- Personable

Additional comments: Finally, respondents were given the opportunity to answer open-ended questions in the survey, and on average, 85 of the 126 respondents provided additional commentary. These results were then reviewed by MSBA representatives, with reappearing ideas identified and grouped into themes. These themes are highlighted below for each of the questions.

The stakeholder survey asked the following four questions:

1. What are some of the good things taking place in DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science today?
2. What challenges do you see for our district over the next five years?
3. What does the new executive director need to know about the history of the education district and community to be successful?
4. Additional comments.

1. What are some of the good things taking place in DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science today?

<p>At DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science, the positive atmosphere is defined by a dedicated, creative, and collaborative staff who deeply care about student success and are committed to innovative, personalized teaching.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Great staff that love Davinci.</i> • <i>We are creative. We have a lot of creative teachers that want to use their talents in many ways.</i> • <i>We have a staff that cares a lot.</i> • <i>I believe that the grade team of teachers that I work with are a bright spot. We work collaboratively and communicate well.</i> • <i>We have amazing teachers that care deeply about their students. We have many intelligent, creative people who are willing and able to solve problems.</i> • <i>Great teachers. Staff know most of the students.</i> • <i>Middle School Staff works well together as a team.</i> • <i>Great staff and students. Teachers doing their best to meet the needs of their students.</i> 	<p>51 related responses</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have people that are committed to doing what's best for their students.</i> • <i>A strong core of staff willing to do what it takes for the kids.</i> • <i>Great teachers are inspiring learning for some students.</i> • <i>Our teachers are amazing. We are creative, out of the box thinkers who put students first.</i> • <i>Wonderful staff that care about our children.</i> • <i>Lots of passionate and creative teachers and staff who are allowed to use that passion and creativity to offer unique opportunities for the students.</i> • <i>Some amazing teachers that put their heart and soul into their teaching! And keep teaching year after year.</i> • <i>The staff are really great and roll with the punches like none other.</i> • <i>We have mostly amazing staff.</i> • <i>We have some wonderful teachers that I want to continue to see thrive at DaVinci.</i> • <i>I think that all of the staff want what's best for our school and everyone has been working hard to support each other.</i> • <i>Davinci cares about its students. The teachers and office staff remember student's names and actually get to know them.</i> 	
<p>DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science Public Schools is celebrated for its strong sense of community, inclusive and equitable environment, and the positive, engaging relationships between students, teachers, and parents, fostering a family-like atmosphere.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>DaVinci has been an inclusive and progressive school.</i> • <i>The sense of community in classrooms and kindness shown to all.</i> • <i>A focus on equity and inclusion of vulnerable LGBTQ populations.</i> • <i>Student-teacher relationship is amazing.</i> • <i>New commitment to equity and inclusive environments. I am proud to be at a school committing to be an inclusive space for LGBTQ+ students, families, and staff.</i> • <i>My kids love their school.</i> • <i>Kids seem to be happy here, and I think overall the behavior is pretty good here compared to other public middle schools in the area.</i> • <i>I love the interaction of staff and students and the creation of building character as part of the curriculum</i> • <i>Both of my students feel included, do not speak of any bullying.</i> • <i>Spark and monthly traits awards have really helped my children want to do great and learn new ways to be good friends and classmates I really love the encouragement.</i> • <i>I appreciate DaVinci's commitment to inclusion.</i> • <i>Increase in community building and involvement.</i> • <i>DaVinci is like a big family, we take care of each other.</i> • <i>I love the community we are building.</i> • <i>Tight knit community feel. High parent engagement and involvement. Low behavior issues with kids compared to other schools.</i> • <i>The staff is extremely positive with one another and with the students.</i> 	<p>43 related responses</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teamwork mentality. Staff lean on each other for support, guidance, and consultation.</i> • <i>Sense of community, engagement and support of faculty and staff.</i> • <i>Strong sense of community amongst parents, teachers and students.</i> 	
<p>At DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science Public Schools, there is a strong focus on academic excellence, particularly in arts and sciences, with students benefiting from high academic standards, hands-on learning, and extracurricular activities that exceed state averages and effectively engage and challenge students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I think the school still does a good job of focusing on arts and sciences.</i> • <i>Standardized tests are better than state averages.</i> • <i>Academics are the priority.</i> • <i>My kid seems to be getting a more advanced education than I did at that age.</i> • <i>The teaching of high academic standards.</i> • <i>I love all the extra arts and science things that this school has to offer. Academic competitions and Theater.</i> • <i>Academic excellence programming such as history day and Zooms is a mainstay for our students. We are expanding our elective courses to strengthen knowledge in science and art exposure.</i> • <i>Davinci is excellent at encouraging students to participate and excel in the class as well as in extracurricular activities.</i> • <i>I believe my kids are getting a good education with ability to engage in meaningful extracurricular activities including sports, arts and additional education.</i> • <i>We have really cool academic things happening at all levels. The competitions and contests we enter kids in provides opportunities for them to shine.</i> • <i>Leading the way in academic projects, education outside of the classroom, providing individualized learning when needed.</i> • <i>Students are excited to learn; teachers are looking for ways to differentiate for and engage students.</i> • <i>The science and arts are well represented.</i> • <i>Hands-On learning!</i> • <i>We have closed the ethnic gap with test scores AND our test scores are above average.</i> • <i>We are also building well rounded students with extra experience in sciences and arts.</i> 	<p>39 related responses</p>

2. What challenges do you see for our school over the next five years?

<p>DaVinci Academy faces significant challenges in maintaining and improving staff morale and retention, with concerns about competitive compensation, increased workloads without adequate support, and high turnover rates potentially impacting the quality of education and school culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Keeping staff moral up and keeping staff,</i> 	<p>54 related responses</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I fear teacher retention is a raising national challenge for schools. I would hope that new director addressed this challenge head-on and doesn't cut any programs or specialized teachers.</i> • <i>Hiring and keeping quality teachers (pay difference and decreasing “perks” are making this a less desirable place to be).</i> • <i>The staff culture has been suffering and that takes time and intentionality to improve.</i> • <i>Staff retention. I would love to see our school be a place where staff like to be and stay.</i> • <i>I understand for the leadership it's all about the kids and budget, but the staff needs to look out for themselves and their families too. I'm not really looking to lose retention bonuses, receive minimal pay increases, have more kids in my classes, and have extra duties (without pay) in order to save the school's budget. It feels like the staff are the ones making the largest sacrifice to make it work and bring the budget back to a healthy place.</i> • <i>Keeping quality staff and special education staff to make sure students are getting the students what they need.</i> • <i>Retention, retention, retention of teaching staff.</i> • <i>Keeping good teachers and staff.</i> • <i>Staff retention.</i> • <i>Teacher turnover: long-time teachers are amazing, but there are so many new faces each year my children never seem to be able to form supportive relationships.</i> • <i>There has been a lot of staff turnover. Staffing is a huge concern and an obstacle so there may need to be creative solutions on how to retain staff.</i> • <i>Increased staff turnover.</i> • <i>I think one of the biggest challenges is the ability of the school to treat their staff as well as they treat their students.</i> • <i>Staff retention will be a challenge if we do not start paying a more competitive wage.</i> • <i>Compensating teachers so that we are able to retain and attract teachers.</i> • <i>Better support the special education staff with adequate resources.</i> • <i>We are also facing staff turn-over so looking for ways to increase retention will be important.</i> • <i>Trust and having the ability to maintain staff members due to financial issues.</i> • <i>I am worried about losing our experienced teachers because of schedules, added duties with a minimal increase in pay and more students.</i> • <i>The expectations being put on teachers with no support or sop for sped is deeply concerning. Good teachers are leaving due to the lack of support and consistency.</i> • <i>How to grow the school without burning out the energetic, innovative elementary teachers who are getting less and less preparation time?</i> • <i>Teacher are leaving the profession at an unprecedented rate and all schools will struggle to keep class sizes manageable and to retain teachers.</i> 	
<p>DaVinci Academy faces the challenge of balancing an inclusive, progressive educational environment with diverse family beliefs and political pressures, which could affect curriculum choices, particularly around LGBTQ+ issues,</p>	<p>44 related responses</p>



equity, and the arts and sciences focus, amidst varying opinions on what should be prioritized in education.

- *We chose Davinci because we saw an enthusiasm for progression and growth as well as standing up even when it's hard to do so. We have the chance to make the choice that supports our students and that choice is including diverse materials. I know there are caregivers/parents/guardians that are looking for a school that is LOUD about creating a place where students are accepted - because THAT is how you create a safe enough place to grow and learn.*
- *Transparency, and respect parent's choice and be able to have a variable boo list to share with parents, especially books for the teacher's libraries inside the classroom.*
- *Maintaining an inclusive and progressive school environment where all feel welcome and seen while the political environment continues to get more divisive and restrictive.*
- *Working with families that have very different belief systems.*
- *Removing curriculum that educates youth on LGBTQ+ (this is a family conversation and relates to religious preferences).*
- *Implementing Gender fluid concepts with school age children. These can be harmful to kids without gender dysphoria. Gender discussion should not be a part of the curriculum with the curriculum at Davinci Academy.*
- *I think that politicians and administrators pushing woke agendas are wasting resources that should be put towards math, reading, science, history. Things that will actually help students succeed in the real world.*
- *Religious influences over well-being of students and staff.*
- *I think it will be challenging for DaVinci to maintain a true arts and science focus while managing many other priorities, but without that, DaVinci loses what sets it apart.*
- *I know that the AmazeWorks books are making some families leave and feel maybe the focus for books should be on just what they need to learn for tests and stuff it doesn't need to be all the extra.*
- *The school also needs to maintain it's commitment of equity and inclusion for all, not for those that are the most vocal.*
- *If the school continues to disregard concerns of the community I am afraid it will continue to see a decline of enrollment. It has already lost a significant number of students from conservative families.*
- *The school needs to completely reject DEI and SEL if it is going to survive.*
- *Issues with enrollment if they keep the AmazeWorks curriculum.*
- *The integration of varying cultures with different goals and visions for education and the Muslim minority community pressure to change the school for everyone. Developing and keeping our status as a PBIS school.*
- *Continuing to grow equity and inclusion of vulnerable LGBTQ populations and not fall to the voices of those with opposing views.*
- *Learning to navigate diverse perspectives will continue to be a challenge.*
- *Staying focused on the basic curriculum that kids should be learning at school, reading, math, writing, science, etc.*
- *Teaching educational subjects in school and leaving personal subjects to be taught at home*



<p>DaVinci Academy may face challenges related to student retention, compounded by financial pressures and the need to effectively communicate with and meet the needs of a diverse student population.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Decline in enrollment due to losing kids to other schools with high school available.</i> • <i>One of the challenges that might take place could be lower enrollment rates.</i> • <i>Plan for the demand of enrollment.</i> • <i>Low enrollment.</i> • <i>Enrollment and financial challenges after the events of the past couple years seem like they could be a potential issue.</i> • <i>Student retention - Families are leaving because of a serious lack of communication and broken trust.</i> • <i>Meeting enrollment challenges.</i> • <i>Enrollment! The idea of the number of kids that they want to enroll doesn't seem to match the classroom space designed.</i> • <i>Student retention in middle school.</i> • <i>Enrollment and the ability to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population.</i> • <i>Address the lower enrollment numbers in middle school.</i> • <i>Finding new ways to recruit students and advertise the accomplishments of Davinci kids.</i> • <i>Finances and growing our enrollment.</i> • <i>Continued pressure for a high school, especially as growth increases enrollments at area high schools.</i> • <i>Low student attrition this past year-more than most schools.</i> 	<p>39 related responses</p>

3. What does the next executive director need to know about the history of the school and community to be successful?

<p>The next executive director needs to understand the unique value of charter schools, know the operational differences between charter schools and traditional public schools, and focus on rebuilding trust with staff, parents, and the administration through effective communication and transparency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understand what makes charter schools unique and they must have a genuine belief they can offer something regular public and private schools cannot.</i> • <i>A person that is aware of what has been going on and is well respected and trusted by the community would be the most affective leader to move forward and make the adjustments needed to bring back trust to the leadership team.</i> 	<p>44 related responses</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The new ED needs to be an experienced school administrator that can bring new fresh ideas to help our school grow and thrive.</i> • <i>How to create personal relationships with all staff members and the community.</i> • <i>I think the executive director should be someone who had/has experience with charter schools, and it would be the best if the executive director had experience with DaVinci.</i> • <i>Our building is full of great things, but also challenges. We need someone who can lead us through those challenges and evoke calm.</i> • <i>Need to be able to repair trust and relationships.</i> • <i>Right now our school community needs someone willing to make connections and build relationships.</i> • <i>We need someone that actually engages with students and staff, not sitting in their office/meetings all day every day.</i> • <i>Staff wants to be heard and not ignored or gaslighted. ALL STAFF</i> • <i>Our school would benefit from repairing relations between staff and leadership (re: building trust and transparency).</i> • <i>That parents have lost faith in school leadership and do not feel heard.</i> • <i>Staff wants to be heard and not ignored or gaslighted. ALL STAFF</i> • <i>We experienced division, lack of trust and transparency.</i> • <i>Parents are demanding transparency and communication.</i> • <i>See the importance of clear communication.</i> • <i>The community is frustrated with lack of communication from leadership and lack of transparency.</i> • <i>There is resentment from parents who feel their beliefs were not heard or respected.</i> • <i>Be open to communicate with families and install policies to have the teachers practice good communication with parents.</i> 	
<p>The next executive director must address staff distrust and burnout by fostering a culture of professional growth, celebrating strengths, improving communication, and enhancing accountability and stability in leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We need someone to come in who can notice and develop strengths in those around them. Someone that can pull the best out of others and celebrate the good things happening.</i> • <i>Our staff has a lot of distrust of the board and leadership. We need someone to join the staff to leadership...find common ground and lead clearly and effectively.</i> • <i>Whatever drama and internal politics is happening with the staff - parents can see it is tense, but don't know the details, just that it isn't happening in a vacuum and is affecting the school.</i> • <i>Previous lack of responsibility and accountability has driven a wedge in the community. The staff/faculty at the school have become disengaged - They talk about all the drama and anger within the team.</i> • <i>The lack of stability in leadership and staff is making it hard for DaVinci to find its footing in a post pandemic world.</i> • <i>The new ED needs to know how to create space to grow the professional practice of our new teachers and validate/honor the work of the veteran staff.</i> 	<p>32 related responses</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We also have a burnt out staff who would love the school and their students, but have a hard time doing that with the current amount of duties that are expected of them. • More needs to be done in ways of trainings and education of culturally relevant practices and there needs to be more done to bring the community together and not pit them against each other. • We must find a way to embrace and support the transitional nature of the staffing at the school, since most teachers move on to more permanent positions after a few years--particularly because our staff is so young and our pay is below average. • Teachers are expected to differentiate for students, but NOT given the time necessary to do this. Prep has been compromised for 2 years. Projections are that this may continue, but now without extra compensation. We are a dynamic staff who go above and beyond. However, the burnout rate is high. 	
<p>The next executive director needs to understand the school's evolution from a small, tight-knit community to a larger and more diverse institution, recognizing the challenges brought by rapid growth and changes in student demographics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's still an odd connection to "old DaVinci" and who we were before 2017. I love our new big school, and our new big population. Some of our community misses our small school community and has had a hard time moving forward with our larger, more diverse population. • They should understand that changing to a bigger school and covid has shifted the schools student population and understand that adjustments need to be made to run an effective school and make sure students are being successful. • This school started very small and was a tight-knit community. After growing, the school demographics changed, and the sense of community lessened. There has been a lack of consistency in leadership/policies since the expansion, and teachers feel like they are being asked to change procedures every year. • My children have been at Davinci since the new "BIG" school opened. We've loved it. When we started it was expected there would be a high school on 3rd floor by now. I don't see that happening anytime soon. • DaVinci has grown significantly in the last decade. With growth comes change and there will always be struggles. • That there has been a shift from the small charter school that it once was to what it is today, and that a lot of the foundational components that DaVinci was built upon seem to have gotten lost in the shuffle somewhere along the lines of expansion. • Started off as a small school that is run by a selective few, makes it challenging to enforce clear boundaries and hold people accountable. Over the years the school community has become a lot more diverse; upper management and staff lacked knowledge and tools to support this new diverse wave of students/parents. • Went from small to HUGE in 2017 and have had bumps in the road since then because the rapid increase created need for change, but it wasn't always handled appropriately and methodically. 	<p>24 related responses</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apparently "old DaVinci" was something to be cherished - very small staff, all on one floor, lots of community. However, most of the current staff didn't experience "old DaVinci." • We have "stretch marks" from our expansion out of the old building, and only a few of those exceptional and long-time staff remain. 	
<p>The next executive director should be familiar with the school's commitment arts and sciences, its high standards for academic excellence, and understand the specific dynamics and expectations of a charter school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our school values having the grades of K to 8 and the ability to bring different aged learners together to benefit both the older and the younger students. We encourage teamwork and like to connect different grades or different subject matters together. • Our school values our diversity and the specific focuses on art and sciences. We value social emotional learning and the whole child and try to celebrate students when we can. • We have been a school with high academic and behavioral expectations and we would like that to continue. • They need to know that we are hardworking problem solvers that love our community. Many of us love our school and are fighting for it. I want the next ED to be as committed and knowledgeable about our school. • DaVinci Academy is a close community that puts the students first. We want to do what is best for the students and families of our school. We are excited to give them the best possible educational experience. • In exchange for exemptions from many of the state laws and regulations that govern traditional public schools, charters are bound to the terms of a contract, or "charter," that lays out a school's mission, academic goals, fiscal guidelines, and accountability requirements. • We still have the same values and commitment to quality education since the first day, the doors opened. • The dynamics of a charter school, and how it may differ from other public schools. • Its a great school that has been a solid example of focused education. • That we care about every student's success and contribution to the world. • Diversity is a key part of Davinci and Academic excellence is what draws people to Davinci. The focus on art and science - the founding ideas of the school are what drew many people to the school. 	<p>23 related responses</p>
<p>The next executive director needs to be aware of the diverse perspectives within the school community, including a rift over curriculum content that has polarized opinions between the more conservative and progressive stakeholders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DaVinci families seem to want academic rigor, a sense of community, a "different" educational experience. But the geographic and demographic diversity means it is hard to reach consensus on how to meet these goals. 	<p>19 related responses</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They need to know about the diversity of the school and the recent controversy they are being brought into. • That there is a rift between religious zealots and bigots and the LGBTQ community and their allies. There is an attempt to stifle progress and equity by a vocal minority. • Prior to the AmazeWorks curriculum being pushed this year, DaVinci always had a waitlist in almost every grade. Since this was pushed this year many have left. Leave school to teaching the basics and not a one sided agenda and you will have a thriving school again with waitlists. • The less vocal majority of Davinci families are more conservative when it comes to political issues. This frequently does not align with the more liberal political views of educational staff and administration. • The implementation of the AmazeWorks program should not be apart of the curriculum at Davinci. The promotion of sexual orientation and gender fluidity has not place within a public school program • Understand the challenges of the religiously conservative folks at odds with the progressive, LGBTQ+ representation in classroom advocates. • Create inclusivity of all cultures, more transformative, transparency, and consistency. • Focus has shifted from academic excellence to diversity / inclusion priorities which has been topic of debate and fracture with parents. • In recent years academics have taken a backseat to social agendas which have created division within our community. 	
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4. Additional Comments:

<p>DaVinci Academy requires a visionary executive director with a strong understanding of charter school dynamics, who possesses integrity, strong leadership skills, and a commitment to community engagement, ready to actively listen and respond to staff, parents, and students while fostering an innovative, supportive, and trust-building environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I want an executive director that sees a vision for DaVinci and someone that will still around to see it through. • Knowledge of charters and authorizers would be helpful • DaVinci needs someone with integrity, ethical values and strong leadership skills that can rebuild trust with teachers, staff and parents. • I think we need someone who wants to know the staff and is out and about talking to people through the day like he does now. Not someone who sits and hides in an office all day. • Needs to be an out of the box thinker and problem solver who can come to the challenges with a fresh perspective. Dedicated to advocating for and supporting staff - a teacher's work environment is a student's learning environment. • The next leader should make it a point to listen to their staff. Create feedback loops with area high schools to identify how DaVinci students do when they 	<p>13 related responses</p>
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<p><i>leave, both socially and academically. Create opportunities to hear from parents that aren't just a board meeting.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• We don't need someone to micromanage...we need an innovative leader that can think futuristically and be inspiring.</i><i>• We deserve someone who wants to stay at DVA for more than a couple years and truly wants teachers to be heard.</i><i>• The new director needs to understand the community and be ready to take a stand on the issues. They also need to have a plan as to how to revive the school and increase enrollment or find others who will have a plan.</i>	
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