

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CEO Search Community Engagement Report

Presented March 3, 2026



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Preface

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) is one of the nation's oldest public school systems. Established in 1829, City Schools is home to the nation’s oldest all girls public high school, Western High School, and the third oldest public high school overall, Baltimore City College. Today, the district includes more than 150 schools and programs that serve more than 75,000 students and employ approximately 12,000 staff.

City Schools remains a vibrant and continual source of pride and identity for generations of Baltimore residents and neighborhoods. The district operates a diverse portfolio of schools, including neighborhood, charter, and choice programs.

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (School Board) is committed to honoring City Schools' long history and focused on ensuring each school evolves in ways that allow every student to pursue their desired futures.

The School Board and Alma Advisory Group extend their appreciation to the thousands of students, families, staff, and community members who contributed their time, insights, and perspectives to inform this work. Their voices are foundational to selecting the next leader of Baltimore City Public Schools and to advancing the district’s mission in the service of all students.

Executive Summary

Introduction: Purpose and Scope of the Engagement

The School Board initiated a comprehensive community engagement process to inform the search for City Schools' next Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The purpose of this engagement was to ensure that the recruitment, screening, and selection of the next leader is grounded in the voices, experiences, needs, and priorities of students, families, staff, and community stakeholders across its district.

Engagement outreach extended citywide and employed multiple strategies to maximize participation, inclusivity, and accessibility. Input gathered through this process was used to identify strengths to build upon, challenges to address, and leadership qualities and competencies most critical for the success of the next CEO. The findings directly informed the CEO job profile and will continue to guide the Board throughout the screening and selection process.

Process Overview

The community engagement process was designed to:

- Gather broad and representative input from students, families, staff, and community stakeholders.
- Identify community-defined priorities for the next CEO.
- Understand district strengths to build on and challenges to address.
- Inform the CEO job profile and ensure alignment between community expectations and leadership selection.
- Reinforce transparency and trust throughout the search process.

Timeline of Community Engagement Efforts

Community engagement activities occurred primarily between September and October 2025, aligned with early recruitment planning for the CEO search. This phase followed summer planning and preceded finalizing the job profile and launching active recruitment. Findings from the community engagement sessions and surveys were used to inform recruitment, screening, and interview design.

Search Timeline



Methodology: Engagement Process

The community engagement employed a multi-week strategy across multiple communication channels. There were five key opportunities for community engagement in September 2025:

1. **Student and Community Surveys** - The Alma team partnered with City Schools to distribute two surveys using City Schools' K-12 Insight platform with the district community. Accessible through various channels, the survey served as the primary vehicle for gathering input from as many members of the Baltimore City community as possible. School leaders in middle and high schools were extremely helpful in allowing time during the school day for students to complete the survey. In total, we received over 2,200 responses to the student survey and 492 responses from the community survey.
2. **Board-Sponsored Community Gatherings** - Board members from each school network had the chance to co-host a gathering with the goal of maximizing outreach and participation in each part of the city. There was one virtual community gathering held "to maximize participation.
3. **In-person focus groups by stakeholder type** - Alma held 22 focus groups by role. For example, teachers, principals, students, members of the district office staff, City Schools partners, etc. These meetings took place when the Alma team was in Baltimore from September 15-23, 2025.
4. **Virtual meetings** - Alma held 44 virtual meetings to enable deeper outreach and more flexible stakeholder participation, particularly for those unable to attend in-person events.
5. **Participation in existing community meetings** - The Alma team took advantage of meetings that were already scheduled to meet during the month of September to reach established networks, in addition to scheduling meetings with existing groups while on-site.

Summary of Key Findings and Themes

Strong Foundation of Commitment & Care

Participants expressed deep appreciation for the dedication of City Schools teachers, school staff, principals, and support teams who often work in challenging conditions, yet remain focused on supporting students academically and emotionally. Stakeholders highlighted the City Schools' community school model, long standing relationships with anchor institutions and local nonprofits, as well as partnerships that expand access to art, mentoring, and workforce programs. Families and community members also noted the district's commitment to equity and multilingual learners, including advocacy for immigrant and newcomer students and efforts to sustain culturally-responsive programming, amid fiscal pressures.

“Young people have tremendous potential, and the system is full of people who believe in that potential.”
– City Leader

“Teachers are a core strength.”
– Parent

Academic Pathways Rooted in Student Support

Stakeholders recognized the value of City Schools' diverse academic and career pathways. Specialized programs called out included programs in the arts and STEM, CTE programs that connect students to regional industries, dual enrollment partnerships with local colleges, and advanced coursework such as Advanced Placement classes. Investments in early literacy, whole child initiatives, restorative approaches and school based mental health partnerships were viewed as essential given the city's economic stress, historic trauma, and student mobility. Together, these academic pathways and student supports were seen as positive steps toward improving outcomes while addressing students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

“I love that the arts have been a point of commitment in recent years, and I hope this only grows.”
– City Schools
Community Member

“What I love most about my school is how they prepare us for the real world in regard to the workload, writing in a professional manner, etc.”
– Student

“I love how they help a lot with work and getting to college.”
– Student

Persistent Systemic Challenges

Participants identified long standing inequities across neighborhoods, including variation in resource distribution, facilities conditions (heat, water, maintenance), transportation reliability, staffing, access to high-quality programming, and the unintended consequences of school choice. Staffing shortages, retention issues, and inconsistent leadership were seen as barriers to stability. Attendance and chronic absenteeism-often tied to housing, food and income instability, safety concerns, and trust between families and the district were cited as ongoing challenges. Students emphasized concerns related to facilities conditions, limited course offerings, lack of enrichment opportunities, and insufficient student voice in school decision-making. Participants also highlighted the need to strengthen special education services, including earlier identification of student needs, more consistent access to supports and a stronger commitment to inclusive learning environments across all schools.

“Transportation barriers limit access to opportunities and make it harder for families to navigate the system.”
– Parent

Desire for Focus, Coherence, and Accountability

Stakeholders called for a clearer system-wide direction that aligns the School Board, Central Office, and schools to reduce the perception of initiative churn. Participants called for more coherent operational systems, stronger collaboration between traditional and charter schools, and investment in sustainable pipelines for teachers, special educators, and principals. Many emphasized that accountability in City Schools must include both transparency and trust building, which includes publicly recognizing what is and is not working, addressing leadership gaps, and ensuring that families and school communities have meaningful visibility into how decisions are made.

Potential immediate areas of focus for the next CEO

Based on stakeholder feedback, several potential shorter-term areas of focus emerged for consideration for the next CEO. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of stabilizing conditions across schools, building trust, and addressing the most immediate barriers to teaching and learning.

Possible short-term priorities may include building upon targeted support to principals and school teams experiencing significant climate, turnover, or staffing pressures; strengthening the consistency and relevance of professional learning; reinforcing clear and fair schoolwide behavior expectations; and expanding access to SEL, enrichment, and after-school opportunities in schools where these supports are least available.

At the operational level, respondents also noted opportunities to continue improving central-office processes, accelerate high-impact facility repairs, and provide targeted budgeting and operational support to principals to create more predictable and functional conditions for staff and students.

Stakeholders further highlighted the value of continuing to improve communication, transparency, and responsiveness with families and community partners. Suggested areas of focus included clearer communication about decisions and initiatives, stronger support pathways for parents of multilingual learners and students with disabilities, and more intentional efforts to cultivate consistently welcoming and respectful school environments.

Many participants viewed these types of actions as visible demonstrations of responsiveness that could help build momentum and trust while laying the groundwork for deeper system-level improvements.

Potential longer-term initiatives/strategies for the next CEO

Looking ahead, stakeholders identified several longer-term opportunities that could support more sustainable systems and structures aligned to equity, instructional quality, and workforce stability.

Possible areas of strategic emphasis may include strengthening teacher and leadership pipelines, developing clearer career pathways and retention strategies, and advancing a more coherent professional learning framework tied to classroom practice and student needs.

In addition, many participants encouraged continued focus on systemwide instructional priorities, particularly accelerating math achievement, expanding equitable access to CTE, arts, and enrichment opportunities, and improving post-secondary and workforce transition supports through coordinated investments, cross-school collaboration, and sustained program design.

At the broader systems level, stakeholders pointed to multi-year opportunities to address resource equity, modernize facilities, and refine the balance between school autonomy and centralized support in ways that promote both fairness and operational effectiveness.

Longer-term priorities also included strengthening student mental-health and wellness infrastructure, deepening restorative and belonging-centered school cultures, and expanding authentic structures for family and community partnership.

These longer-term options reflect stakeholder aspirations for durable improvement, stronger relationships, and more consistent outcomes for students and educators.

Desired skills for the next CEO

The engagement findings suggest that the next CEO should be a strong leader who is/will:

- Experienced in improving academic outcomes while balancing support of the whole child.
- Committed to addressing students' social, emotional, and developmental needs
- Centered around student voices by expanding enrichment opportunities and creating safe, welcoming school environments.
- Capable of aligning vision, resources, and execution across a complex district.
- Utilize data to drive improvements in academics, operations, and equity.
- Build trust with students, families, staff, and community partners.
- Strengthen operations, including transportation, facilities, procurement, and human capital systems.

These implications directly informed the development of the CEO job profile, including core responsibilities, leadership competencies, and evaluation criteria.

Stakeholder priorities for the next CEO based on community feedback

Students

The most common keywords—teachers, student voice, safety, transportation—reflect the priorities students believe should shape future improvements. They value strong relationships with teachers, want their voices included in decisions, and are asking for safer, more reliable conditions that allow them to focus on learning. Their feedback conveys both urgency and hope: that meaningful change is possible when students are genuinely heard and supported.

“I love that my school carries the resources to guide me to my ideal future and I want every student in all schools to have that opportunity.”

Students are hoping that the next CEO will be visible, and responsive to student voice. They want a leader who listens directly to students and takes their concerns and feedback seriously. They are hoping for a CEO who ensures that opportunities such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, the arts, clubs, and tutoring are available across all schools, and who prioritizes well-maintained, safe, and welcoming learning environments.

Students want a leader who believes in their potential, communicates clearly, and who is willing to advocate for student well-being and long-term success.

Parents

The keywords most frequently cited—trust, parents, teachers, special education, transparency—underscore both the urgency and the direction of parents’ priorities. Families want a district that values their voices, ensures fair access to resources, strengthens special education supports, and communicates openly.

Parents’ feedback reflects a clear message: strong relationships between parents and City Schools are possible, but they depend on consistent respect, transparency, and meaningful partnership.

Parent-Identified Priorities (Community Survey):

55.8% Providing academic support and helping all students succeed

47.0% Leading and managing the district effectively

39.7% Expanding opportunities for activities

39.7% Supporting student well-being

Parent-Identified Areas for Improvement (Community Survey):

55.1% Developing and supporting teachers, staff and school leaders

52.3% Preparing students for the future

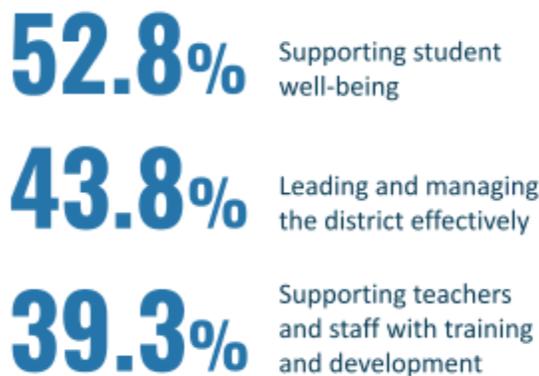
48.8% Listening to students and supporting their well-being

Teachers and school-based staff

Teachers and school-based staff emphasized the importance of a CEO with strong operational management skills suited a school system with a more than \$1.8 billion budget, paired with political acumen to work effectively with unions, state leaders, the media, and funders. Staff expressed a desire for a transparent, collaborative “bridge-builder” who can increase morale and who is either homegrown or fully committed to honoring Baltimore’s context and community.

Teacher and school-based staff called for an equity champion with expertise in urban education, multilingual learners, special education, and someone with real instructional credibility, “a leader who has taught and led a school.”

School-Based Staff Priorities (Community Survey):



School-Based Staff Areas for Improvement (Community Survey):



District leaders and staff

District leaders and staff are hoping for a CEO who recognizes and builds upon the district’s commitment to students and staff, while addressing some of the long-standing structural and operational challenges. They want a leader who possesses strong fiscal leadership, and one who can build trust, enhance communication and collaboration, and remain resilient and steady under pressure.

“Principals manage large budgets without CFO-level expertise, which takes them away from instructional leadership.”

“We have good kids, good people, and staff who care deeply—despite the challenges, people are willing to stand in the fire for students and families.”

Above all, district leaders and staff hope for a CEO who sees Baltimore as a place of opportunity rather than deficit, stays long to see plans through, and leads with an abundance mindset.

**Central Office Staff Priorities
(Community Survey):**

- 55.6%** Leading and managing the district effectively
- 47.6%** Providing academic support and helping all students succeed
- 41.3%** Supporting teachers and staff with training and development
- 41.3%** Supporting student well-being

**Central Office Staff Areas for
Improvement (Community Survey):**

- 60.3%** Preparing students for the future, including college and careers
- 54.0%** Developing and supporting teachers, staff and school leaders
- 42.9%** Creating a welcoming, joyful, safe and positive school environment

Community partners

Community partners spoke to several strengths across City schools that provide a strong foundation for continued progress.

They hope for the next CEO to combine educational credibility with strong operational and financial leadership. They want a career educator with classroom experience who can lead instructionally while also managing a complex, billion-dollar organization with discipline and transparency.

Community partners feel the incoming CEO must be a trusted communicator who is visible throughout the community and willing to engage with all stakeholders.

“Community pride in schools grows with facility improvements and visible leadership.”

“The next CEO must balance continuity of progress with urgent innovation, holding together partnerships and resources in an uncertain political and funding landscape.”

Above all, community partners would like a leader committed to Baltimore for the long-term. Someone who is willing to make difficult decisions with integrity, and build upon existing progress while urgently addressing attendance, safety, staffing, and academic coherence across the system.

City leadership and elected officials

City leaders and elected officials hope the next CEO will provide continuity while thoughtfully building on what is working. They want a leader who listens closely, earns trust through visibility and follow through, and brings greater coherence to the system. They also shared the desire for someone who will raise standards for all students, address persistent gaps, and take on difficult decisions around attendance, safety, and long-term sustainability.

“Continue the strong work of the Office of the Chief Executive.”

There is a strong desire for a CEO who prioritizes equity through diverse hiring, strengthened leadership pipelines, and systems to address attendance and access barriers for families.

Stakeholders stated they want a credible, steady, public leader who collaborates, communicates honestly, navigates political and fiscal realities skillfully, and leads with an asset-based belief in Baltimore’s students, staff, and communities.

Higher Education Partners

In discussing expectations for the next CEO, higher education partners were clear about the leadership profile they believe Baltimore City Public Schools needs.

The partners emphasized the importance of a CEO who is a credible instructional leader with a deep understanding of teaching and learning and a proven ability to improve academic outcomes at scale.

Partners stressed that instructional leadership must be paired with the ability to navigate complex political, economic, and community contexts, describing the need for a leader who can understand the lived realities of students and families while also engaging confidently and effectively with policymakers, funders, and institutional leaders.

Additionally, higher education stakeholders expressed a desire for a CEO who values partnership, alignment, and long-term vision, and who can sustain collaborative relationships with colleges and universities to strengthen pipelines into higher education and the workforce. They emphasized that the next CEO must be able to hold a steady course, resist short-term disruptions, and remain focused on improving attendance, academic readiness, and postsecondary success for Baltimore City students.

Charter school partners

They called for a CEO who can establish clear norms for collaboration, accountability, and shared responsibility for outcomes particularly for students with the greatest needs. Instructional credibility was cited as essential, along with the ability to use data transparently and fairly to drive improvement across all schools.

In articulating expectations for the next CEO, charter school partners emphasized the need for a systems-minded leader who views charter and district schools as part of a single public education ecosystem rather than competing entities.

Charter partners also stressed the importance of strong operational leadership and political acumen, noting that the next CEO must be able to navigate complex regulatory environments, manage external relationships, and balance autonomy with accountability. Above all, they expressed the importance of a leader who is willing to listen, build trust across sectors, and create conditions for authentic partnership—leveraging the strengths of both charter and district schools to improve outcomes for all Baltimore City students.

Philanthropy Partners

Local, state, and national funding partners underscored the importance of stable leadership and fiscal stewardship. Several noted that frequent leadership transitions in schools and departments or shifts in strategic direction can weaken confidence and make it difficult to sustain long-term investments. Transparency, accountability, and clear communication about outcomes were cited as essential to maintaining trust with funders and policymakers.

Given the scale of the district’s budget and the complexity of its funding landscape, partners stressed the need for a CEO who can manage resources strategically, make disciplined trade-offs, and demonstrate measurable impact.

In discussing expectations for the next CEO, funding partners emphasized the need for a leader who combines vision with operational rigor. They described the ideal CEO as someone who can articulate a compelling, long-term strategy for the district while also ensuring strong implementation and continuous improvement. Instructional leadership remains important, but funders placed particular emphasis on the ability to align dollars to strategy, use data to demonstrate impact, and make tough decisions in service of equity and student success.

Finally, funding partners stressed the importance of external leadership and political acumen. They expressed a desire for a CEO who can effectively engage with local and state leaders, philanthropic organizations, and national partners, positioning Baltimore City Public Schools as a credible, accountable, and innovative system worthy of continued investment. Above all, they called for a steady, trusted leader who can build confidence, sustain partnerships, and ensure that investments translate into meaningful, lasting outcomes for Baltimore’s students.

Quotes such as “Teachers staying in one school long enough to build deep relationships is valuable” and “Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers is a challenge” illustrate the tension between workforce strengths and instability that undermine staff morale and instructional progress.

Strengths and Opportunities

Strengths Identified

Stakeholders overwhelmingly expressed appreciation for the dedication and commitment of City Schools, educators, and staff. Teachers and school personnel were commended for going above and beyond to meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs, creating a culture of care, trust, and mentorship throughout the district.

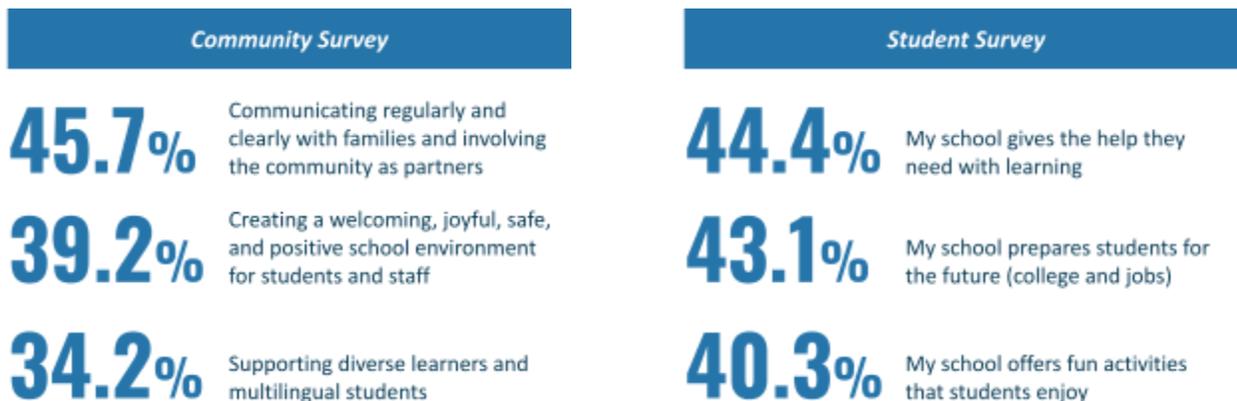
“There are so many dedicated, amazing teachers who love their students. The heart of city schools is the staff who interact every day with students, celebrating with them, consoling them, hearing their hopes, dreams, loves, and sorrows.”
– Adult Stakeholder

The district’s network of public-private partnerships was praised for driving program innovation, improving facilities, and expanding student opportunities. Engagement through Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and community schools was recognized as a critical strength that builds trust and fosters collaboration between schools and families.

City Schools’ diverse academic offerings such as magnet programs, career and technical education (CTE) pathways, Advance Placement/International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) courses, and dual enrollment programs were highlighted as assets that broaden educational choice.

Recent investments in literacy and social-emotional learning initiatives were viewed positively by community partners, district and charter leaders, alongside the district's commitment to equity, particularly in supporting multilingual learners, LGBTQ+ students, and immigrant families.

The top three (3) things that Baltimore City Public schools does well today:



Opportunities for Improvement

While stakeholders acknowledged the district’s progress and dedication, they also identified systemic challenges that will require focused attention. Concerns were raised regarding the equitable distribution of resources, disparities in facilities conditions, transportation reliability, and consistency of access to high quality programs and enrichment opportunities.

Improving academic performance remains a top community priority. Stakeholders called for stronger evidence-based instruction in literacy and mathematics, modernized CTE and dual-enrollment programs, consistent development of rigorous and culturally-relevant curricula, and improved collaboration with charter school partners.

Operational challenges emerged as a notable theme. Participants urged for more efficient procurement, transparent hiring and staffing processes, and alignment across the Board, central office, and schools. There was strong agreement on the need to reduce initiative overload and provide a more coherent strategic direction.

***“Please select someone with
a demonstrated track record in
improving academic outcomes!!”
– City Schools Student***

Building trust across the system was a recurring community theme. Community members called for more transparent, two-way communication and systems that would foster respect, professionalism, and belonging. Many highlighted the need for improved customer service across departments and stronger structures to support multilingual families, and families of students with disabilities.

***“More consistent rigor in curriculum, connected
to students’ culture and experiences.”
– Community Member***

Safety, chronic absenteeism, and transportation challenges surfaced as concerns in nearly every engagement activity. Students echoed many of these concerns, adding their own experiences related to facilities, bathroom conditions, overcrowding, and gaps in access to basic classroom supplies. They voiced frustration with limited course options and the inequitable availability of enrichment programs across schools. The issues raised underscore the importance of ensuring equitable access to safe, well-resourced learning environments.

Community Survey: The top three (3) areas the next CEO should focus on improving:

- 54.1%** Preparing students for the future, including college and careers
- 52.2%** Developing and supporting teachers, staff and school leaders
- 44.3%** Listening to students and supporting their well-being, including their safety and mental health

Student Survey: The top three (3) areas that need improvement:

- 54.1%** Listen to students' voices and ideas
- 52.2%** Make the school feel welcoming, safe and positive
- 44.3%** Offer fun activities and students enjoy

Community engagement demographic data

Survey respondents reflected the racial and ethnic diversity of Baltimore City Public Schools. Participants represented a wide range of stakeholder groups including caregivers, students, alumni, staff, and community members. Student participation was concentrated in grades 6–12, ensuring middle and high school student voices were strongly represented.

Summary of Outreach and Participation

Total survey responses: 2,706

- 492 responses from community stakeholders (caregivers, staff, alumni, community members)
- Approximately 2,200 responses from middle and high school students

Community Gatherings

- 6 total (5 in-person, 1 virtual)
- Approximately 230 participants across North, South, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Northwest regions

Interviews and Focus Groups:

- 44 sessions
- Approximately 140 participants, including teachers, principals, staff, students, union leaders, and community partners

In-person Meetings:

- 22 meetings with approximately 189 student, staff, and community participants

Organizations Represented:

- Community-based organizations, advocacy groups, service providers, unions, business leaders, and civic partners

This level of participation demonstrates sustained community interest and investment in the selection of the next CEO and provides available input for informed decision-making.

Stakeholder Survey - Data Analysis

Survey Design, Administration, and Analysis

As part of the broader community engagement strategy supporting the Baltimore City Public Schools CEO search, surveys were administered to both community members at-large and students to capture broad, representative input across stakeholder groups. Leveraging the K-12 Insight platform, two distinct surveys were developed and deployed: one designed for community stakeholders and one specifically designed for students. This approach ensured that the perspectives of adults and students were captured through developmentally-appropriate questions and response options, while also allowing for comparative analysis across groups.

Together, the community and student surveys provided critical quantitative and qualitative data that deepened the Board’s understanding of district strengths, challenges, and leadership expectations. The findings from these surveys—analyzed both in aggregate and across key demographic and stakeholder groups—directly informed the development of the CEO job profile and will continue to guide decision-making throughout the screening and selection process.

Community Survey

The community survey was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative input from a wide range of stakeholders connected to Baltimore City Public Schools. Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences with the district, identify strengths to build upon, and articulate priorities and expectations for the next CEO.

Specifically, the community survey asked respondents to provide input on the following areas:

- Their connection to Baltimore City Public Schools (e.g., caregiver, staff member, community member, alumnus, partner)
- Aspects of Baltimore City Public Schools that are currently working well
- What respondents love most about the district or their school that the next CEO should promote and protect (open-ended)
- Areas the next CEO should focus on improving
- The top priorities that are most important for the next CEO to address
- The skills and experiences the next CEO should possess to be successful
- Additional comments or reflections respondents wished to share about the district or the CEO search (open-ended)

In addition, the community survey included demographic questions to better understand who participated across different groups. Demographic items included:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identification
- Whether respondents had children receiving special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Whether respondents had children identified as Multilingual Learners
- School affiliation
- Zip code
- Community Survey Analysis

Survey results were analyzed in multiple ways to ensure both a holistic and nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives. Analysis was conducted:

- Overall, including all community survey respondents
- By subgroup
- Connection to Baltimore City Public Schools (e.g., school leaders, instructional staff, parents/caregivers, community members)
- Race and ethnicity

Slight variations in stakeholder groups' feedback were observed in the relative ranking of priorities and skills (for example, which priority was ranked first versus second or third), **the overall top three priorities and top three critical skills for the next CEO remained consistent across stakeholder groups.** This alignment suggests a strong degree of shared understanding and consensus regarding what the district most needs from its next leader.

Open-ended survey questions were optional, and not all respondents chose to provide narrative responses. All open-text submissions were reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes, ideas, and concerns. Because participation in open-ended questions varied, results from these items are reported as total counts of themes rather than percentages, providing clarity about the frequency with which key ideas emerged without overstating representativeness.

Student Survey

The student survey was designed in collaboration with the Board’s Student Commissioner to elevate student voice and ensure that students’ lived experiences meaningfully informed the CEO search. Questions were tailored to be accessible and relevant to middle and high school students and focused on school experiences, leadership expectations, and areas for improvement.

Students were asked to respond to questions related to:

- School level affiliation
- Ratings of statements about their school, using a scale from “needs a lot of improvement” to “doing very well”
- Ratings of skills and experiences for the next CEO, using a scale from “not important” to “very important”
- What students love most about their school that the next CEO should support or protect (open-ended)
- Any additional comments or thoughts they wished to share about their school or the CEO search (open-ended)

The student survey also included demographic questions, including:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender identification
- School affiliation (representation from all schools in the survey)
- Student survey analysis

As with the community survey, open-ended questions on the student survey were optional, and not all students provided narrative responses. All open-text responses were carefully reviewed and analyzed to identify key themes, patterns, and priorities expressed by students. These responses were similarly reported as total theme counts rather than percentages, reflecting the frequency of themes while accounting for variation in response rates.

Student survey findings were reviewed both independently and alongside community survey results to identify areas of alignment and divergence between student and adult perspectives. This analysis helped surface student-specific priorities—such as enrichment opportunities, student voice, facilities conditions, and safety—while also reinforcing shared priorities around academic support, well-being, and effective district leadership.

The community's expectations for the next CEO

CEO Job Profile Responsibilities and Competencies

THE KEY RESPONSIBILITIES - THE "WHAT"

- **Strategic Leadership and Vision**
- **Academic Achievement and Student Success**
- **Talent Management and Culture Development**
- **Community and Family Engagement**
- **Operational and Financial Stewardship**
- **External Relations and Advocacy**

... AND THE SKILLS & EXPERIENCES NEEDED - THE "HOW":

- **Visionary and Strategic Leader**
- **Effective Communicator and Collaborator**
- **Instructional and Operational Steward**
- **Equity-Driven and Culturally Responsive Advocate**
- **Culture Builder and Emotionally Intelligent Leader**
- **Innovative, Data-Informed Decision Maker**

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will serve as a trusted partner to the Board, collaborating closely with the Board to translate strategic priorities into clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and robust operational plans. In this role, the CEO will act as steward of the Board's vision and strategic agenda, ensuring alignment across all levels of the organization, providing transparent governance reporting, and upholding accountability to the Board and the broader stakeholder community. In addition, the CEO will cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships with city government leadership, philanthropic funders, and public-private partners, representing City Schools as both ambassador and convener. The successful candidate will work across sectors to build shared frameworks of action, advance policy and funding partnerships, and marshal the resources and collaborations needed to drive systemic progress and mission-critical impact.

Recentering on Student Perspectives

At the heart of this community engagement feedback is a clear call to center student voice. Student insights and perspectives must be treated as a strategic driver, not an afterthought.

Students across City Schools articulated a vision for leadership that centers their lived experience, learning conditions, and sense of belonging— offering a powerful lens for what the next CEO should consider and prioritize.

Students also emphasized that they want a leader who listens to them, treats them with respect, and takes their perspectives seriously when decisions are made. They expressed the importance of feeling heard and valued in their schools, and they want a CEO who demonstrates empathy, builds trust with students, and creates an environment where their voices matter.

Students highlighted the need for more consistent academic and social-emotional supports. They identified tutoring and reliable, sustained help - not one-time or uneven interventions - as critical to their success. They want support that is accessible, ongoing, and aligned to what they are experiencing in the classroom, so that every student has a fair opportunity to stay on track and thrive.

“I’m looking for opportunities to express thoughts, ideas, and concerns about our school system. I believe that there are some opportunities available now, but they are not broadcasted and can often be difficult to find or access.”
– Student

Critical skills for the next CEO

The skills identified as most important for the next CEO reflect the community’s aspirations for leadership that is grounded in instructional expertise and cultural competence. Across stakeholder groups, three skills emerged with the strongest consensus:

1. **Instructional Leadership and Mentorship (61.6%)** – Experience leading schools, strengthening teaching, and supporting staff development.
2. **Problem Solving and Data-Driven Decision-Making (59.4%)** – Ability to use evidence and information to make timely, effective decisions.
3. **Cultural Awareness and Respect (57.3%)** – Capacity to lead a diverse community with humility, respect, and understanding.

Students emphasized similar themes, prioritizing a CEO who understands Baltimore (53.8% of responses), communicates effectively, uses data responsibly (51.4%), and brings people together (51.4%).

Skills prioritized by the stakeholder group

	Skill #1	Skill #2	Skill #3
All community	Instructional leader/mentor	Problem solver and decision maker	Respectful and culturally aware
Current City Schools parent, caregiver, or family member	Instructional leader/mentor	Problem solver and decision maker	Respectful and culturally aware
City Schools instructional school-based staff member	Instructional leader/mentor	Respectful and culturally aware	Communicator and collaborator AND Problem solver and decision maker (TIED)
City Schools central office staff	Problem solver and decision maker	Instructional leader/mentor AND Communicator and collaborator (TIED)	

Conclusion and next steps

The insights shared through this community engagement process highlight a system with deep resilience, committed educators and families, and a strong foundation of programs, partnerships, and community pride. Stakeholders were candid about the areas where consistency, equity, and capacity must continue to strengthen to fully meet the needs of students and staff.

The themes in this report reflect both a recognition of progress made and a clear-eyed understanding of the work that remains ahead.

The leadership profile and priority focus areas identified here are intended to support the selection of a CEO who can build upon existing strengths while thoughtfully addressing the most pressing challenges facing the district.

Stakeholders emphasized the need for a leader who is steady, collaborative, equity-centered, and grounded in the lived experiences of students, families, and staff and someone who can effectively advance the district while guiding a coherent, long-term strategy for improvement.

With leadership that can extend the work in place, deepen strategic partnerships, and uphold the district's collective commitment to students, these findings can serve as a catalyst for meaningful, sustainable progress over time.

This report helped guide the job description for the next CEO of City Schools and will be provided to candidates in the final round of interviews.

Appendix

Organizations and Stakeholder Groups Engaged

- Baltimore City Community College
- Access Art
- ACLU-MD
- Advocacy Network
- Aetna Foundation
- AFSCME Maryland Council 3
- AFT Maryland
- Arts for Learning Maryland
- Associated Black Charities
- Baltimore Algebra Project
- Baltimore City Council
- Baltimore City Health Department
- Baltimore City Mayor's Office
- Baltimore City Police Department
- Baltimore City Public Schools
- Baltimore City Recreation & Parks
- Baltimore Community Foundation
- Baltimore Corps
- Baltimore Education Research Consortium
- Baltimore Police Department
- Baltimore Promise
- Baltimore Teachers Union
- Baltimore Urban League
- Behavioral Health System Baltimore
- Black Girls Vote
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Baltimore
- BUILD
- Campaign for Grade-Level Reading
- Center for Educational Equity
- Center for Hope
- Central Scholarship Bureau
- Children's Guild
- City Neighbors Foundation
- Communities In Schools
- Community Law in Action
- Coppin State University
- Council of Great City Schools
- Creative Alliance
- Department of Social Services
- Downtown Partnership of Baltimore
- Education Trust
- Family League of Baltimore
- Greater Baltimore Committee
- Heart of America
- Higher Achievement
- Johns Hopkins University
- KABOOM!
- Local Management Boards
- Maryland Department of Education
- Maryland Philanthropy Network
- Mental Health Association of Maryland
- Morgan State University
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- Open Society Institute – Baltimore
- Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)
- Parks & People Foundation
- Promise Heights
- Public Justice Center
- Reading Partners
- Safe Streets
- ShareBaby
- Strong Schools Maryland
- Teach For America
- The Abell Foundation
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation

- The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
- The Maryland Community Health Resources Commission
- The Schott Foundation
- The United Way of Central Maryland
- Thread
- Under Armour
- University of Baltimore
- University of Maryland, Baltimore
- We “R” Us
- Weinberg Foundation
- YMCA of Maryland
- Youth as Resources (YAR)
- Youth Empowered Society