

Brown County Kansas Special Education Interlocal Focus Groups

Thursday, March 13, 2025

**Dr. Michelle Hubbard
Kansas Association of School Boards**

Notes from the BCK-SEI 615
Characteristics Survey and Focus Groups
March 13, 2025
Dr. Michelle Hubbard

This report was prepared at the request of the BCK-SEI 615 Board of Education. KASB staff conducted focus groups on the 13th of March 2025 with administrators, 615 certified and classified staff, USD 415 and USD 430 certified and classified staff, and parents of student receiving special education services in Hiawatha USD 415 and South Brown County USD 430. The major purpose of these sessions was to obtain input for the school board regarding characteristics that others recommend for the new director.

Although there are common characteristics that each community desires, there are frequently board and community-specific characteristics that will separate a candidate from others during the screening process. Our hope is the identified characteristics from the focus groups and the community survey will assist the board and screening team with these unique characteristics in the candidate.

Characteristic questions that were asked during the focus groups were as follows:

- ⊖ Describe or list the most important leadership and personal qualities you would like to see in the new director?
- ⊖ Describe or list the strengths and the good points of your school district the new director will need to understand and support?
- ⊖ Describe or list the most critical needs of your school district the new director will need to understand and support?
- ⊖ What single characteristic or quality will separate the best candidate from the other highly qualified candidates who will apply for the director position?

The following report is only recommendations collected from the survey and focus groups, and the final decision will be left to the board of education to determine what characteristics will be used while selecting director candidates.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michelle Hubbard
Leadership Field Specialist
Kansas Association of School Boards

**Brown County Kansas
Special Education Interlocal 615
March 13, 2025**

Focus Group Schedule

March 13, 2025		
Time	Focus Groups	Location
9:00 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	USD 415 and USD 430 Admin Focus Group	615 Interlocal Annex 301 South 1st Street Hiawatha, KS 66434
10:00 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.	South Brown County General Ed. Certified Teachers	Horton High School 1120 First Ave E Horton, Kansas Rm. 208
11:00 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.	South Brown County Parents	South Brown County District Office 522 Central Ave Horton, Kansas Rm. Board Room
12:45 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	615 Staff	615 Interlocal Annex 301 South 1st Street Hiawatha, KS 66434
1:45 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Hiawatha	615 Interlocal Annex 301 South 1st Street Hiawatha, KS 66434
2:45 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Hiawatha	615 Interlocal Annex 301 South 1st Street Hiawatha, KS 66434
6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.	Board of Education	615 Interlocal Annex 301 South 1st Street Hiawatha, KS 66434

Describe the most important leadership and personal qualities you would like to see in the new director.

Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
	Knowledge and experience
	Communication
	Passionate about special education
Stakeholders	
6	PreK-12 knowledge base and knowledge of different disabilities
5	Effective, clear and consistent communicator
5	Compassion and passion for special education
5	Relationship builder with multiple constituents – fairness in both districts
4	Approachable
3	Visionary - Risk taker - innovator - think outside of the box
3	Visible in buildings - Willing to be in the trenches – present – hard worker
1	Ability to recruit and retain staff - onboarding
	Problem solving ability - tactical
	Honest - Transparency- Integrity
	Efficient
	Not a micro manager - follow through
	Support all staff as needed
	Child advocate
	Patient, calm voice tone
	Willing to work collaborative with regular education and advocate for 615
	Morale booster - positive attitude
	Invested in the job/area

Describe or list the strengths and the good points of the district the new director will need to understand and support.	
Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
	People
	Community
	Kids are our purpose
Stakeholders	
6	Hard working, passionate people, creative, para and teachers are amazing - adaptable
4	Good relationships with families - Realistic knowledge of our families - Small, close-knit community
3	Doing what is best for kids - general education interventions first - productive SIT teams
2	Advantage of small interlocal - Director can work closely with both administrative teams due to size of interlocal
2	Strong support from community businesses
2	Parental support
2	Great rural scenic location
2	Sensory room - elementary
2	Great kids
	Overall compliance and budget are in a good place
	Low cost of living
	High expectations for students - want success for all of them
	Capturing Kids Hearts
	Supportive building administration
	Hiawatha MS facilities are great for sped
	Adaptive specials for elementary kids
	Life skills programming at MS/HS

Describe or list the most critical needs that the new director will need to understand and address.

Frequency	Response
Board of Education	
	Ability to recruit and retain
	Communication
Stakeholders	
6	Staffing is a concern - both certified and classified - both qualified and availability - we need more teachers; we just don't have enough, caseloads are high
5	Preschool needs to be evaluated - PreK Numbers increasing - Brown County PreK
4	Coordinated, focused professional learning - onboarding
4	Parent communication - education/understanding parental rights/parent newsletter/progress monitoring
4	Increased student behaviors, number of students in foster care
3	Equal sharing between districts
3	Financial responsibility - and willing to understand the nuances of sped funding – maximizing funding sources
3	Mastering skills vs. homework/passing classes - Meet kids where they are - we aren't meeting educational goals - Curriculum development - innovative for accommodations/modifications
2	Accountability of all staff - product and timely
2	Sensory needs - rooms
2	Time management - IEPs/Evaluations are not getting done
2	Support everyone - paras need recognition
2	Special education student achievement - Graduation rate and post-secondary success
	Systemic procedures/processes from special education
	Mental health resources - wrap around services are lacking
	Understanding diversity of the district
	Director must be accountable for what is happening in all buildings in the two districts.
	We need a Parents As Teacher program to fill the gap
	Understanding you can't make everyone happy
	Classified pay scale
	Communication with follow through
	Lack of Speech path services - ABA
	Collaboration between regular education and special education

What single characteristic or quality will separate the best candidate from the other highly qualified candidates who will apply for the director position?

Frequency	Response
	Board of Education
	Passionate
	Communication
	Approachable
	Stakeholders
4	Passionate engagement
4	Communication - hear us
4	Approachable - follow through
3	Productive - proactive - creative
3	Efficacy - one who believes we can make this better and do what is best for kids
2	Flexible
	Resilient - perseverance
	Outside perspective
	Patience
	Overall Experience with special education components
	Trustworthy
	Superhero!
	This is where they want to be - doing it for the right reasons
	Willing to do the hard work!

After review of focus group feedback, survey data, and board discussion the following characteristics have been developed:

Overall, Board or selection committee identified characteristics:

The interlocal board of education has identified the following characteristics as essential for a new special education director:

1. **Passionate About Special Education:** A genuine passion for special education is essential for inspiring and leading the team towards excellence.
2. **Effective, Clear Communicator:** The director must be able to convey information clearly and effectively to all stakeholders, including staff, students, parents, and the community.
3. **Strong Background in Special Education:** This includes extensive knowledge of special education law, specific disabilities, and funding opportunities, including grants.
4. **Recruitment and Retention Skills:** The ability to attract and retain talented staff is crucial for maintaining a high-quality special education program.
5. **Personable and Approachable:** The director should be likable and approachable, fostering positive relationships with staff, students, and parents.
6. **Team Player:** The director must be able to manage people across multiple buildings and represent both school districts effectively, working collaboratively with all team members.
7. **Consistent Follow-Through:** Ensuring that commitments and initiatives are seen through to completion is vital for building trust and achieving goals.

These characteristics will help ensure that the new director can effectively lead and support the special education program, benefiting all students and staff involved.