

Nearly 5,000 Nashvillians weighed in about the search for a new director of schools as part of a community survey conducted Dec. 30–Jan. 19. When you take into account feedback received during the last phase as well, that means more than 6,200 pieces of feedback have been received. That is an unprecedented level of engagement compared to past searches of this nature.

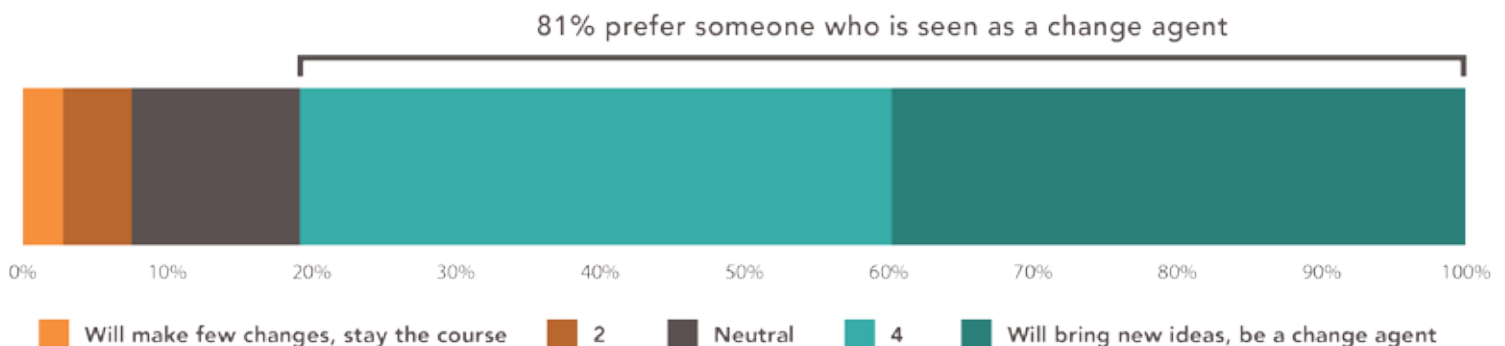
In particular, the response of the city in the most recent outreach efforts of the Search Advisory Committee is particularly telling – both in the volume of responses and the overwhelming unanimity around what people are seeking in a new leader.

The primary way we solicited feedback was through an online survey managed by the Nashville Public Education Foundation on behalf of the Search Advisory Committee. During the three weeks the survey was in the field:

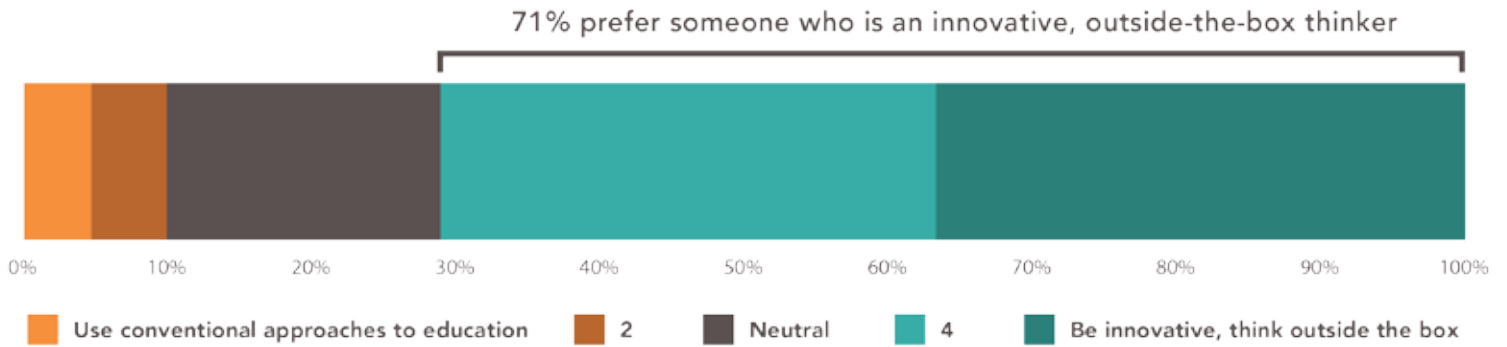
- There was a 360% increase in the response rate overall compared to the initial outreach conducted by Hazard, Young & Attea last spring.
- Among teachers, there was a 470% increase – 1,534 responses compared to 322 last spring. That represents a full one-third of the teaching workforce.
- Parent response also increased significantly – 2,217 responses compared to 438 from last spring – a 500% increase.
- Feedback was received from every ZIP code in the city.

Key findings from the survey include:

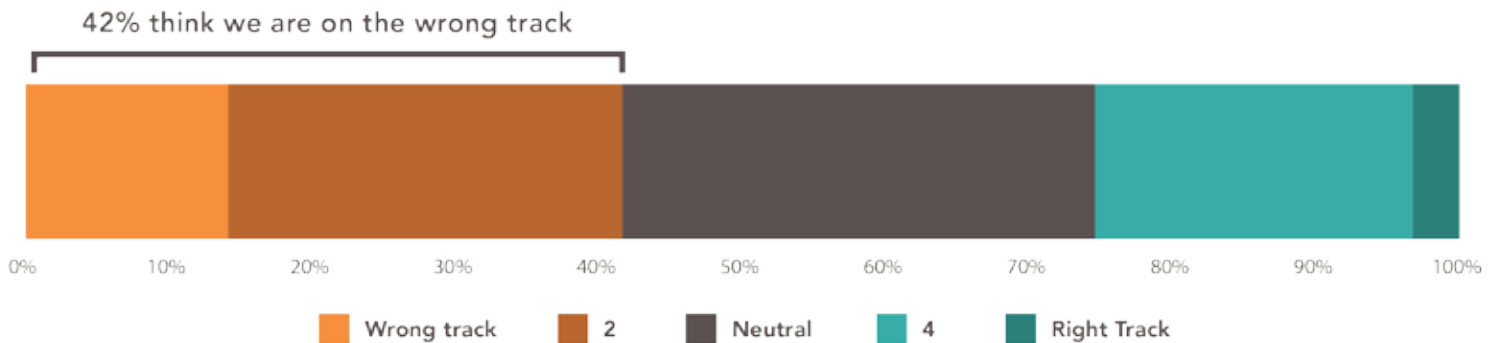
1 **Nashvillians want someone who can bring about more systemic change to the schools.** When asked whether they preferred someone who would make few changes and mainly stay the course or someone who would bring new and different ideas and be seen more as a change agent, the answer was unequivocal – 81% prefer someone who is seen as a change agent.



2 People are looking for a less conventional, more innovative approach. When asked whether they preferred a leader who used a more conventional approach to education or someone who would be more innovative and think more outside the box, there was overwhelming support for an innovative, outside-the-box thinker – 71% preferring that compared to only 10% leaning toward someone with a more conventional approach (19% neutral or in the middle).



3 Few Nashvillians feel the district is moving in the right direction, although many recognize promising programs. When asked whether they thought we were on the right track, only 25% agreed. Of that, only 3% felt strongly we were on the right track. Conversely, 42% felt we were on the wrong track and 33% were somewhere in the middle.



Despite this overall sentiment, many programs were consistently highlighted as promising initiatives. Later in the survey, respondents were asked to identify three things they felt were working. The high school Academies, the Music Makes Us program, Limitless Libraries, programs like Reading Recovery, student-based budgeting and expanded school options for parents were all consistently cited.

Our interpretation of this is that people see things that are working but see those things more as “pockets” of success that should be maintained but accompanied by deeper, more systemic improvements.

4 Teachers and parents share the views of the public as a whole. There was no significant difference in how educators or parents saw the state of affairs in our schools compared to the public as a whole. For example, take teachers as a subset:

- Slightly more teachers felt we were on the wrong track (44% vs. 43%) compared to the public as a whole. Consistent with overall respondents, 24% thought we were on the right track and 32% fell in the middle.
- 10% of teachers hope for a leader who will make few changes and mainly stay the course (compared to only 7% of the public as a whole). Conversely, 76% (compared to 80% in the population as a whole) want someone who will bring new ideas and be seen more as a change agent and 14% were neutral or in the middle.
- 12% believe we should be looking for someone more inclined to use conventional approaches vs. 65% who hope for someone who is innovative and thinks outside the box about solutions (23% were somewhere in the middle) – again within a couple of points of the overall public feedback.

5 Talent, testing and academic improvements top the list of concerns. People were quite clear what issues they felt the next director of schools would need to be able to tackle. These rankings were consistent across all subgroups, including parents and teachers. Of particular note, addressing concerns related to overreliance on testing and keeping and attracting great teachers were by far the top two concerns across all subgroups. The issues falling into the top third of concern were (listed in descending order):

	All respondents	Teachers	Parents
1	Keeping and attracting great teachers	Addressing concerns related to overreliance on testing	Keeping and attracting great teachers
2	Addressing concerns related to overreliance on testing	Keeping and attracting great teachers	Addressing concerns related to overreliance on testing
3	Improving academic performance	Improving pay for teachers	Making our schools more competitive with other school systems and/or private schools
4	Making our schools more competitive with other school systems and/or private schools	Addressing the needs of kids who come from disadvantaged homes	Improving academic performance
5	Improving underperforming schools	Improving academic performance	Improving underperforming schools
6	Improving pay for teachers	Giving schools, educators and families more decision-making authority	Giving schools, educators and families more decision-making authority

There were some slight differences in the ranking of these issues among teachers and parents, though the list of top third concerns remained the same.

6 Educational experience, expertise with decentralization/school autonomy, experience managing change, and turnaround top the list of preferred skills. When asked what experience was most appealing in a strong director of schools candidate, the top five were (listed in descending order):

- Experience as a classroom teacher (60%)
- Someone who values a less centralized school system (56%)
- A proven educational leader (48%)
- Experience leading change, bringing about systemic cultural change (40%)
- Experience improving low-performing schools (40%)

The only fundamental differences between the views of teachers or parents and the views of respondents as a whole were that teachers placed a higher priority on classroom experience and parents placed a higher priority on decentralization and experience leading change.

7 We asked people to think about successes over the last several years. While the answers were quite varied, some common themes emerged:

- The high school Academies and community partnerships
- Arts, gifted, and library/literacy programs – with many citing initiatives like Music Makes Us, Limitless Libraries and Reading Recovery
- Increased school options for parents – whether magnet, themed, charter, etc.
- Academic improvement – increased graduation rate, improved test scores
- Having good teachers/leaders and supporting them

8 We also asked people how they would measure success of a new superintendent in his or her first year – things that if they saw would build confidence in them as a leader. Several common themes emerged:

- Being much more visible in the schools – visiting schools frequently, making unannounced visits to schools, etc.
- Listening more intentionally to key stakeholders – in particular parents and teachers
- Addressing concerns related to overemphasis on testing
- Laying out an ambitious strategy for recruiting and retaining great teachers
- Addressing organizational issues (i.e., increasing school autonomy, restructuring the way the central office supports schools, improving School Board collaboration)