

Julian Principal Search Q&A, Based on Questions from Staff and Families

([Click here for a recording of the virtual staff/family Q&A held on June 3](#))

Q: What is the timeline/process for the Julian principal search?

A: An overview of the principal search and timeline can be found [here](#).

Q: Why is the District hiring a permanent principal rather than an interim?

A: The district gave serious consideration to all of the options available for filling the principal position at Julian Middle School. This included reviewing the pros and cons of hiring an interim principal and discussing the current pipeline of candidates. We also carefully considered feedback we received from the community. Ultimately, the team decided that it would be best to seek a permanent principal for the following reasons:

- We are seeking consistency for the school (less turnover).
- The district can work with a permanent principal on goal-setting tied to the school's needs and improvement plan, and work with them to ensure the school's long-term success.
- The candidate pool will be larger with a permanent position than it would be for an interim.

Q: How can we do an effective search in only one month? This is especially concerning due to remote learning and the Assistant Principal turnover at Julian.

A: Principal recruitment is an ongoing process for school districts; we are always recruiting and seeking talented and diverse leaders for our schools. A few examples of this work include ongoing networking by district administrators, utilizing candidate pools from previous principal searches and establishing partnerships with universities.

The lengthiest part of any principal hiring process is typically the time between on-site interviews, since most candidates have other jobs that need to be accommodated. Remote learning and the summer provides us with an opportunity to decrease the time between interviews.

In terms of addressing the school's needs during remote learning, we plan to utilize a suggestion by the Julian PTO for candidates to create a transition plan specifically related to remote learning (evaluating student needs, establishing strong relationships, managing teaching and learning across different settings). Students have also provided excellent insight as to what they would like to see during this time of transition, which we will utilize during our search.

We are confident in the assistant principal team that will be in place at Julian next year (Chemaine Carr, William Lee and Jerome Green), and we believe their leadership will be a strong asset to the new principal.

Q: What is included in a longer search process that will be left out?

A: We are following the same search process that we utilized for the two elementary principal searches that were completed earlier this year. Although those searches were spread over several months, most of the additional time was due to the length of time between each step in the process (focus groups, interviews, etc.). Some key differences include:

- Staff and family focus groups are typically held on site. We held the virtual Q&A sessions with students and then staff/families due to COVID-19.
- Dr. Kelley typically does a site visit at the candidates' current schools. We are currently seeking alternative options for this step, and would encourage feedback from parents if they have any creative ideas that they would like us to consider.

Q: Have the strongest SY20-21 principal candidates already been hired?

A: A strong candidate for Julian will be different from strong candidates for other schools. We are committed to finding the best individual for Julian, and believe that we still have an opportunity to find someone who is a good fit for the school's needs and goals. A critical part of this search will be developing our [principal profile](#) based on feedback from staff, students and families so that we can identify the characteristics and experience that would most benefit the Julian community.

Q: How do we set clear standards to ensure that we don't settle for a less than ideal candidate?

A: We believe that creating the [principal profile](#) is an important step in defining the qualities and standards we are seeking for this position. Again, stakeholder voice is a critical part of this process.

We have also established a rigorous interview process (four rounds) that includes administrators, staff and families. During that process, we are including questions on culture, climate, diversity, equity and inclusion, and will be asking candidates to share specific examples of their experience and how it would be applied to Julian. We are also including performance tasks and are considering ways to elevate student voice during the later stages of our search.

Finally, the district will conduct multiple reference checks to ensure that we have all relevant information on our final candidates. We have no intention of settling on a candidate at the end of this process, and will make a decision based on the best interest of the students, staff and school.

Q: Are we pursuing contingency plans as we go through the search process?

A: Yes. The Human Resources Department has been reviewing applicants every day to ensure that we have a high-quality candidate pool. As of June 3, there were more than 100 candidates who have opened the application for the position, which is significantly more than we had during previous searches. We are encouraged by the number of talented, experienced and diverse candidates within that group. However, if we get to the end of the process and do not have the right individual to fill the position permanently, we will consider hiring an interim principal for 2020-21.

Q: Will teachers, parents and students have a role in the hiring process?

A: Absolutely. All stakeholders provide extremely valuable insight into who will be the best candidate for Julian, and that feedback is important to us. All stakeholders have the ability to provide their thoughts by filling out the [principal profile survey](#).

The interview process will also include staff and parents, but the number of participants is limited ([please click here if you are interested](#)). The survey will close at noon on Monday, June 8. Everyone who applies to serve on the teams will be notified about the results of the selection process by Wednesday, June 10.

As we assemble the teams, it is important that they represent the needs and diversity of the school's students, families and staff. The district is committed to keeping its stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the hiring process.

Q: Who is participating in the third-round interviews? Will parents and/or staff have an opportunity to participate in interviews with the final four to seven candidates?

A: Staff and parents will have the opportunity to participate in second-round interviews. During the third round, candidates will interview with senior district administrators, Brooks Principal April Capuder and Julian Climate and Culture Coach Gina Harris. We believe that Ms. Capuder's perspective is valuable, as she knows and understands the role of a middle school principal in Oak Park. Ms. Harris is a trusted member of the Julian staff and Oak Park Teachers Association (OPTA), and has excellent insight into the school's current strengths, challenges and priorities.

Q: What has the District learned from the recent principal turnover at many of the D97 schools? What steps are you taking to prevent this from happening at Julian?

A: The District 97 administrative team engages in a reflection process any time a principal leaves one of our schools. The hiring process and procedures have been revised this year based on that reflection, as well as feedback from staff and families. We recently completed two successful principal searches (Beye and Mann elementary schools), and believe we hired two strong, talented principals.

As an organization, we believe in continuous improvement. We reflect and refine each time we go through a search process, and we are committed to engaging with our stakeholders to learn how we can improve moving forward. We truly view this search as a community effort, and believe that a strong partnership with staff, students and families will ultimately help us find the best candidate for Julian.

Q: What is District 97's commitment to looking for talent within our community?

A: We are always working to groom and build talent from within our district. We are currently solidifying a formal talent management and success plan in order to support our current staff and develop a solid pipeline of strong administrators.

Q: Will you consider hiring a leader from another District 97 school?

A: Yes. We always encourage growth opportunities for all of our leaders and staff. We would love to see internal applicants, if there is interest.

Q: Is the district doing anything to minimize the risk of turnover or ensure that the next principal is committed to staying at Julian?

A: The district is looking for individuals who share its values, passions and interests (equity, diversity, high-quality education, etc.). We will utilize interviews to assess whether the candidates are a good match for the district, school and community.

The district is also developing a [mentorship program](#) to support all new principals. The goals of the program are to:

- Build leadership capacity that is culturally responsive.
- Increase retention rates of principals.
- Ensure proactive community involvement.
- Build leadership teams at school level.

If there are any additional questions, please email Gina Herrmann, senior director of human resources, at gherrmann@op97.org.