



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Washington Township
Public Schools
November 16, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in October 2022 for the new superintendent of the Washington Township Public Schools. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

For the most part, the responses in the survey were consistent with focus group input, especially with regard to the need for transparency. Technology integration and infrastructure were cited as strengths from the survey report although not highlighted in focus groups.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below: *Not all focus groups were a group that was disaggregated for the on-line survey.*

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	8	
Building level/Supervisors/Admins	8	14
Central office administrators	12	
Faculty	1	106
Community (2 sessions)	75	15
Support Staff	0	19
Parents/PTA/PTO	0	254
Students (2 sessions)	34	18
Non-unit Managers	5	
Bargaining Unit Leadership	14	
Total	157	426

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report.

It should be emphasized that the data are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Board's attention.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Participants in the focus groups/individual interviews most frequently highlighted the pride of "Township" as pervasive throughout the community. Being from "Township" whether a recent resident or descendent of a multi-generational family, residency in "Township" seems to convey a sense of pride in comparison to other Gloucester County communities. Washington Township High School was also viewed as the town center that contributes to the reputation of the district and community. Community members support the district, staff, and students through attendance at the varied and numerous district events as well as by their support of fund raisers and an overall pride in their graduates. Many WTHS graduates remain in the community or return to raise their families. Although there may be room for improvement, the district and community are generally viewed as being safe and "well-off" in South Jersey.

The scope of programs, course offerings and extracurricular activities for students across the district was also considered a strength. These opportunities for students span interests and grade levels. Some opportunities include SEL initiatives, academics, athletics, arts, performing arts, robotics, and media. The dedicated staff and teacher: student ratio was also listed as a strength. The PreK program has been well received and may be driving younger families to the community. Although not reported consistently in focus groups, technology and technology integration into the learning environment was considered a strength in the survey results. Ninety-one percent of all survey respondents reported technology integration into the classroom as a strength.

An increasing emphasis on opportunities for student leadership, student voice, empowerment, and advocacy resonated as a strength throughout the focus groups. The presence of a WTPS

student serving on the Board of Education further amplifies student voice and provides a platform to ensure students have a seat at the table.

The geographical locale of WTPS encompasses suburban and some rural areas and is considered highly desirable due to its proximity to Philadelphia. Changing demographics have increased the diversity of community and student population and is considered a strength. There is a perceived diversity across 'racial, ethnic, and socio-economic' lines'. The focus groups noted, 'diversity and differences of the community need to be recognized and understood'. To this end WTPS has recently hired a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. While growing the level of diversity was found to be a strength, it was also identified as one of the challenges within the school district.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Concern was expressed during focus groups and individual interviews around the divisiveness within the community and board of education. The need to unify, build trust and incorporate transparency was echoed throughout focus groups. There was mention of "healing" after the pandemic and the ability of the community and district to come together as demographics change. A repeated solution to address community divisiveness was addressing the "cronyism," "old boys' network," or sense that being "connected" is the key to a family's success in the district.

The declining academic performance and budget concerns were voiced as challenges and potential threats to the community's reputation. School safety continues to be a concern especially at the middle and high school where enrollment numbers have declined in contrast to the increasing enrollment at the elementary level.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) were noted as a significant challenge related to both curriculum and recruitment/retention of staff reflective of the student population. While it was noted that DEI work was underway, the implementation of the work has yet to reach the full scope, depth, and breadth throughout the entire school district. This divide has reverberated throughout the community and into the school setting. There are community groups who strongly support the move towards deeper implementation of DEI. There are also community groups who are adamantly opposed to certain curricula changes. Stakeholder(s) indicated that there is a need to erase the gap that exists between communities so that all children feel safe and supported in school.

The district's ability to recruit/retain teachers from diverse backgrounds was illuminated as a concern. Students and teachers spoke of the need to increase training in diversity, equity,

inclusion, and SEL. However, the most significant concern is the district's ability to address the continued adjustment to learning after the pandemic, as Covid-19 has impacted both the academic, social, and emotional as well as the mental health well-being of both students and staff. Parents, teachers, and students spoke of multiple and numerous challenges in keeping up with the continual changes. Discipline and/or the lack of consistent discipline policies and implementation has caused confusion, and in some cases, distrust of students with teachers and vice versa. The adjustments required in school transition to middle school and high school has been exacerbated in the post pandemic learning environments.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the district. The search team will seek a successor superintendent who can work with the Washington Township Board of Education and all stakeholders to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its students, schools, and communities.

The search team thanks all the participants who attended focus groups meetings and/or completed the online survey and the Washington Township Public Schools staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Elaine Alestra and Janine Wechter who organized the search team's time in the district.