



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Mt. Lebanon School District, Pennsylvania



HISTORY/BACKGROUND

Mt. Lebanon is a suburb of Pittsburgh, PA with a national reputation for excellence. Located six miles from downtown, this predominantly residential community is home to approximately 35,000 residents. Mt. Lebanon is a full-service municipality and ranks as one of Western Pennsylvania's few suburban communities that has very healthy and traditional business districts, as well as lovely neighborhoods that have attractive homes, sidewalks, and tree-lined streets. The population is highly educated, with most adults having a college education. The community has a strong commitment to education and is actively involved in an educational partnership with the school district.*

The Mt. Lebanon School District is a nationally recognized and award-winning school district. The District operates seven neighborhood elementary schools (grades K-5), two middle schools (grades 6-8) and a high school (grades 9-12). The combination of a highly trained staff with educated and committed families results in students who come to school ready to learn and who achieve local, state and national honors in instructional, athletic, and artistic forums.* Some notable statistics for the District include ranking in the top 10 in Pennsylvania as "Best Teachers", "Best School District", and "Best Places to Teach".**

The mission and vision of the District are to provide the best education possible for each and every student through the relentless pursuit of excellence. The core values of the educational community include exhibiting high expectations, respect, honesty, integrity, student-centered learning, teamwork, and collaboration by continuously utilizing data to inform decisions and recognizing the value of stakeholder contributions. The goals of the District include providing a program of academic excellence including core competencies, while addressing social-emotional needs in a safe, secure, and inclusive environment for learning.*

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in January 2023 for the purpose of recruiting a new superintendent of the Mt. Lebanon School District. 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 provided information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

* [Mt. Lebanon School District Strategic Plan](#)

** [Rankings](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It should be stated 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. This caution is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the input that was provided by each stakeholder, but rather to put all of the data points into perspective.

The draft of the desired characteristics is provided under separate cover.

Participation

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

Group	Personal Interviews or Focus groups	Virtual Focus Groups	Survey
Board	9		
Secondary Administrators	7		
Elementary Administrators	8		
Central Office Administrators	9		
Central Office Support Staff	11		
Union Leadership - Teachers	3		
Union Leadership - Support Staff	7		
Government Leaders	5		
Former Directors		10	
HS Staff	5	11	
MS Staff	3	6	
Elem Staff	2	27	
Staff			97
PTA Leadership	10		
Town Halls/Community Members	85	32	98
Parents			288
Parent Boosters Leadership		5	
Students High School	11		24

Middle School	19		
Subtotal	194	91	507
TOTAL	792		

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Among the most frequent strengths perceived and discussed by focus group participants and during interviews, as well as reflected in the survey, is the strong academic performance and reputation of the school district. Additional strengths of the Mt. Lebanon School District include the enthusiastic and well-prepared students, the highly dedicated staff, the comprehensive and exemplary curricular and extracurricular opportunities for students, a professional and supportive Board of Directors, and the efforts made by all stakeholders to create a welcoming and inclusive environment in the schools.

Mt. Lebanon is a walking community with each neighborhood elementary school providing a focus and identity for the local residents. The well educated and highly engaged citizenry appreciate the value of and demonstrate strong support for the schools. Mt. Lebanon is a progressive community committed to continuing the tradition of providing an exceptional public education to all students. Participants in the focus groups consistently mentioned the great reputation of the schools as the reason to move to and remain in the district. Keeping this robust commitment to student success and a strong sense of community will be priorities for the new superintendent.

The Mt. Lebanon School District has dedicated and hard-working staff members, including outstanding teachers, administrators, and members of the support staff. The teachers are described as highly qualified, caring, and willing to work to remove any obstacle that hinders student success. Teachers and staff focus on providing a high-quality education and the tools for academic success balanced with a commitment to the well-being of each student. The students regularly report that they are well prepared for college and career after graduating from Mt. Lebanon High School.

The district offers a wide variety of curriculum options, academic offerings, and extracurricular programming for the students in well-maintained, technology-rich, and aesthetically-pleasing buildings and facilities. The strong Fine & Performing Arts programs were consistently mentioned during the focus group sessions as a source of pride for the stakeholders. Additionally, the athletic teams are well supported and the students enjoy participating in a wide variety of opportunities outside of the classroom setting.

Recently, a taskforce comprised of community stakeholders engaged in a systematic and progressive effort to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all students. A mission statement for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) was developed and approved. The new superintendent will be responsible for developing and implementing action plans designed to achieve the mission and will have the support of the community, staff, and Board of Directors in this important effort.

The strong rapport between the schools and the municipal departments, specifically the police, is considered a strength of the district. Safety is a primary concern for all stakeholders and there exists a good working relationship between district and municipal personnel in order to keep the best interests of the students in mind. The partnership between the schools and police is strong and the community appreciates the focus on student safety and well being.

Despite the challenges presented in the following section, the Mt. Lebanon School District has significant foundational pillars on which to continually improve. These include a history of academic excellence including a wide variety of programming, dedicated and supportive staff, robust programs for students in athletics/extracurricular activities, and an engaged and supportive student body and community. It was evident during the focus group sessions and in the results of the survey that the stakeholders have an overall desire to enhance the already positive reputation of Mt. Lebanon School District while preparing students to be academically and socially prepared for the future.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

While the family-like atmosphere of the neighborhood elementary schools provides for a great source of pride and identity for the community, the need to fully staff each of the schools in an equitable manner is an ongoing challenge. Working to ensure that students attending each of the elementary schools are offered a similar variety of programming and support in a fiscally responsible manner will be issues on which the new superintendent will focus.

Given the historically high levels of student achievement, overcoming institutional complacency in order to provide an innovative instructional program for all students was mentioned during focus group sessions as something that is necessary to keep the reputation of the district strong. The staff, community, and students will welcome a new superintendent who has the courage to recommend and implement innovative programs that are rooted in research and best practices in order to improve the overall performance of the students. In addition, continuing to collect and analyze student data to identify and address learning gaps for all demographic groups is an expectation for all professionals in the district. Working to ensure that all students, including those with special learning needs, are provided with appropriate and challenging programs in a

supportive and welcoming environment will be an area of significant focus for the new superintendent.

It was noted during individual interviews and focus group sessions that over the last several years a higher level of polarization developed as a result of concerns related to the pandemic, curriculum, district finances, and the perceived quality of the overall academic program. Meetings of the Board of Directors are attended by vocal stakeholders who are concerned generally about the current state of education, as well as upset with specific aspects of local educational programs. Transparent communications, the ability to balance competing interests, mitigating a higher level of frustration than in prior years, and demonstrating the courage to do what is right for students in the face of criticism will be areas on which the new superintendent will need to focus. Finding common ground between individuals and groups by addressing specific concerns expressed by stakeholders while keeping the focus on moving the district forward in a progressive manner for the betterment of the students are challenges that the new superintendent will face.

Similar to the situation facing most school districts as a result of societal and pandemic-related tensions, recruiting highly qualified staff to fill open positions, as well as retaining the current staff will be ongoing concerns that the new superintendent will be expected to address. Comments by participants in the focus group sessions indicate a desire to build a more diverse staff that better reflects the student population. Working to improve staff morale, implementing a succession plan for anticipated administrative openings, and supporting the negotiations process for a local collective bargaining unit contract will be areas of focus for the new superintendent.

Curriculum enhancements, specifically at the elementary level, will be a priority for the new superintendent. A coordinated effort to supervise the adoption and implementation of an English/Language Arts program in a strategic manner is necessary. Management of the initial curricular changes, as well as providing a structure for the ongoing supervision of all programs of instruction will be areas on which the new superintendent will need to bring significant experience and expertise.

While community support for the schools is strong, planning for a strong financial future for the district will require the new superintendent to balance suggested spending increases with a realization that the citizens of Mt. Lebanon directly fund the majority of programs. Maintaining and improving the district without overburdening the taxpayers will be an ongoing challenge.

Since 2020, the Board of Directors and a stakeholder taskforce have worked to address DEI issues in the district. The mission developed by the taskforce is to provide a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environment that recognizes and celebrates the diverse identities of all members of the school community, including students, their families, faculty, and staff. In

addition, the district is committed to providing resources in a just and equitable manner and removing barriers to allow students to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.* An ongoing challenge for the new superintendent will be to continue to work with the taskforce to operationalize the goals in order to achieve the mission.

*[District Website: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#)

CONCLUSION

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 new superintendent who can work with the Mt. Lebanon Board of Directors and 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.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and staff who assisted with our meetings, particularly **Kristen James, Kim Walters, and Christopher Stengel** who organized the Focus Group meetings, assisted in the promotion and communication with stakeholders, provided technological support, and managed the search team's time in the district.

VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUP/COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

The MLSD Community Feedback Survey was completed by 507 stakeholders electronically. The largest stakeholder group represented in the survey were Parents of Current Students with 288 (60.3%) of the responses. Community members and Staff members made up the next most populous stakeholder groups with 98 (20.5%) and 97 (20.3%) respondents respectively. Finally, 24 Students responded to the survey (5%).

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of potential challenges facing the district the one that is most important for the new superintendent to address. The four highest priority challenges identified by respondents are as follows:

- Planning for a Strong Financial Future for the District: 22.2% of respondents indicated that this challenge is most pressing
- Improving Student Achievement for All Demographic Groups: 20.7% of respondents indicated that this challenge is most pressing
- Operationalizing the District Goals for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI): 18.6% of respondents indicated that this challenge is most pressing

- Continuing and Enhancing the Positive Reputation of the District through the Implementation of Innovative Programming: 16.7% of respondents indicated that this challenge is most pressing

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of strengths of the district the one that needs to be the primary focus for the new superintendent. The four highest priority strengths identified by respondents are as follows:

- Strong Academic Performance of Students & Reputation of the District: 30.8% indicated this should be the primary focus of the new superintendent
- Highly Qualified, Professional, & Dedicated Staff: 16.9% indicated this should be the primary focus of the new superintendent
- Initiatives around Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI): 16.3% indicated this should be the primary focus of the new superintendent
- Comprehensive, Exemplary Curricular & Extracurricular Offerings: 11.1% indicated this should be the primary focus of the new superintendent

Respondents were asked to choose the one characteristic they would most like to see in a new superintendent. The four characteristics that were most commonly identified were:

- **Student-Centered Leader** who values the uniqueness of individuals and works to provide programming and supports for students regardless of their background, intellectual ability, or plans for the future: 19.5% indicated this is the most important characteristic for the new superintendent to possess
- **Experienced, Confident, and Innovative Leader** who will bring passion for education and fresh ideas to the district: 16.3% indicated this is the most important characteristic for the new superintendent to possess
- **Instructional Leader** who values the process of continuous improvement, sets high expectations for everyone involved in the schools, and understands the teaching and learning process: 16.1% indicated that this is the most important characteristic for the new superintendent to possess
- **Progressive Leader** who is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environment for all stakeholders: 13.4% indicated this is the most important characteristic for the new superintendent to possess

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS, INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS, & PUBLIC FORUM

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do you consider the greatest current strengths of the district and what strengths do you wish to see maintained and/or expanded?
- What do you consider the greatest immediate challenges for the district and what do you consider the greatest challenges over the next three years?
- What are the 3 - 5 most desired characteristics that you believe the next superintendent will need to possess in order to succeed and to take the district to the next level of success?

Individual interviews were conducted in the same manner for members of the Board of Education. To conclude each session, the HYA consultant asked if the participant(s) have any recommendations for specific candidates who should be notified of the process.

It should be emphasized again 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. This caution is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the input that was provided by each stakeholder, but rather to put all of the data points into perspective. To achieve this, raw data is provided in an unfiltered manner.

The results of the interviews and group meetings are compiled into a single document based on the interviewer's interpretation of the responses. These results will be presented to the Board of Education and then utilized for recruiting and candidate evaluation purposes. Given that permission was not overtly granted, quotations from the interviews and focus groups, as well as the names of individuals recommended as an executive leader of possible interest will not be shared in this document. The HYA consultants will try to contact those suggested and notify each about the process.

The summaries from community forums, focus group meetings, and individual interviews are reported to the Board and will be used to assist in its deliberations regarding the desired characteristics of the successor superintendent.
