



Executive Summary

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Lower Merion
School District
March 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in March 2023 for the new superintendent of the Lower Merion 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 collected information regarding the strengths of the district and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below. The survey was offered during the 2021 search and was not repeated in 2023. Extensive surveying was conducted during the search for Dr. Mumin less than two years ago, so the district opted to rely on the 2021 survey data for this search, rather than impose on stakeholders once again.

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey Conducted April/May 2021
Board	6	
Building level administrators	13	
Central office administrators	9	
Supervisors/administrators	29	25
Faculty	13	83
Community	16	74
Support Staff	0	20
Parents/Guardian Groups	35	517
Students	16	195
Total	137	914

A draft of the desired characteristics is provided under separate cover and is meant to be stand-alone complementary piece 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. Input received from the same set of questions, centered on challenges and strengths of the district, and on the characteristics and skills, desired in the successor, superintendent is reported as received. Names of individual participants in focus group and open sessions are not reported, nor are any comments attributed to a single individual.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Among the most frequent strengths perceived and discussed by focus group participants and during interviews is the strong academic performance and reputation of the school district. This includes the highly dedicated staff and the supportive and involved parent community. The students, however, continue to be the district's greatest point of pride.

Lower Merion School District is a high achieving, dynamic school system with high expectations. Lower Merion is rated as one of the top school districts in Pennsylvania. LMSD offers numerous and varied programs to meet the many different interests and needs of all students. The district values the breadth of students' interests and offers an abundance of programs in athletics, arts, music, and extracurricular activities. LMSD is also known for their special education programs and opportunities, having a reputation whereby families have moved to the district for special ed services. Students tout the Lunch and Learn program, classes that discuss current social justice issues and the ability to have a voice in their educational journey as differentiators for the district. There is also an emphasis on connectivity, communication, and diversity. Although there is room for improvement, in general, the schools are perceived to be safe and conducive to learning including access to technology and teacher availability (teacher/student relationships).

LMSD staff including administrators, supervisors, teachers, and support staff is made up of high quality, hardworking, and passionate professionals. LMSD has phenomenal educators that are driven by students' needs. Staff consistently go above and beyond as they care deeply about the students. Lower Merion has always been able to recruit and retain high quality teachers although there is a desire to recruit and retain a more diverse staff that reflects the student enrollment.

The Lower Merion community is extremely supportive of the schools. It is a generous community with a strong level of participation and adequate funding. Parents and community members contribute significant amounts of time and financial resources to the schools to support the students and the staff.

Along with the perception that the schools are adequately funded is the perception that facilities are maintained. There are, however, concerns from some focus groups participants that facilities and access to resources should and must be more equitable. Additionally, there is the concern that with community growth there could be a potential lack of space for current programs, special education, and the approved fulltime Kindergarten program. Over time, and to meet the needs of 21st century learners, the need for space may become an increasing concern.

Lower Merion has a strong sense of pride in their schools and is very supportive of their students. Despite the challenges presented in the following section, the Lower Merion School District has significant foundational pillars on which to continually improve.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

There exists considerable concern among students, staff, the board, parents, and community members for the state of the district over the past few years. There is desire for stable leadership to address concerns with delays in decision making regarding academics, student and staff supports, start times, facilities, curriculum, and equitable financial allocations. Additionally, the new leader will need to balance competing interests between stakeholder groups in a highly political and somewhat divided community.

A significant goal for the new superintendent will be balancing the traditions and excellence of Lower Merion while having the fortitude, savvy, and people skills to develop, plan and implement creative and futuristic ideas and programs to best support Lower Merion students, parents, and staff. Additionally, addressing inconsistencies that exist among the schools and grade levels both academically and in terms of support, focus, and equity will also need to be a focus for the new superintendent.

The new superintendent should possess the skills and experience to drive thoughtful decisions, district goals, and the strategic plan. With an eye toward the future, the successor superintendent will need to address the impact of increased growth in the community as well as the new construction that is expected. Facilities are currently being used to their maximum

potential. The current approved full day Kindergarten program will face challenges in implementation due to logistic and facility limitations.

Improving the relationships between the district and stakeholder groups will continue to be a need addressed by the successor superintendent. While the Lower Merion community offers an abundance of financial resources, they are also a demanding, passionate, and involved community. A relationship builder who can build trust with internal and external stakeholders will be key to the success of the next superintendent.

Transparent communications, the ability to balance competing interests, building relationships with all stakeholders, evaluating curricular and program outcomes using data, and supporting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are all areas in which the new superintendent will need to focus. Prioritizing trust across the district with stakeholders will be a critical first step to address the lack of unity and the need for continued school and community healing.

There is a collective desire for an experienced, visible, engaged leader who is an innovative, transparent, collaborative, student-centered educator who has a long-term commitment to creating the best possible learning environment for all students in the Lower Merion School District.

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 Lower Merion School Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools, communities, and each student.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings and the Lower Merion SD staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Denise LaPera who organized the search team's time for the virtual sessions.