



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

October 23, 2024

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) beginning in August for the new superintendent of the South Whidbey School District. The data contained herein was obtained from input the HYA consultants received from internal and external stakeholders of the South Whidbey Community via an online survey, individual interviews, focus groups, and staff/community forums.

The survey, interviews, focus groups and forums were structured to gather information to assist the South Whidbey Board of Directors in determining the primary characteristics desired and needed in the new superintendent. Additionally, HYA consultants collected feedback regarding the strengths of the District as well as current and future challenges.

Participation

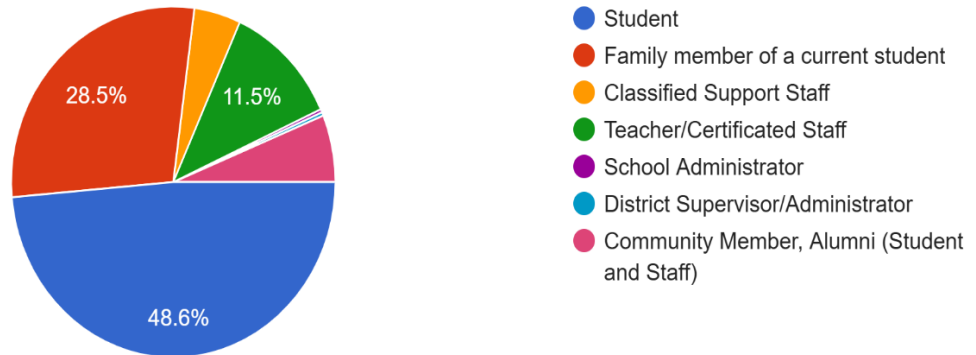
The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in all methods of data gathering are listed in the following chart:

Group	Interviews, Focus Groups, Forums & Survey
Students	158
Family Members	119
Community	42
Certificated Staff	43
Classified Staff	21
Administrators/ Supervisors	9
Total	392

Survey Results:

What is your primary connection to South Whidbey School District?

323 responses



Summary of Stakeholder Input

All discussions were thoughtful, insightful, and very helpful. HYA associates conducting the focus groups, forums and interviews would like to thank the participants for giving so freely of their time and for the depth of the discussions regarding South Whidbey School District during the sessions.

It should be emphasized that the data from focus groups and forums are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups. Items were included if they emerged as a significant theme or, in the consultants' professional judgment, they warranted the board's attention.

Strengths of the District

Data collected through personal contacts and survey responses provided overall an encouraging and optimistic view of the district. The following themes surfaced often and across these multiple data sources:

Small/close knit
Community support & partnerships
Kind, caring, committed staff
Financial stability

Safe
Focus on equity, inclusion & social justice
Innovative/progressive
Program offerings for students

A consistent theme across multiple stakeholder groups is that the size of the district and community is a real strength. Participants shared that people know one another and care for one another. It was described as close knit.

Community support and partnerships are clearly a strength. The history of the community's involvement and support for the schools is impressive. There are a significant number of community organizations that work to provide wrap-around services for students and families.

Kind, caring and committed staff was frequently cited as one of the greatest strengths of the district. Knowing each student and family deeply, and working hard to meet their needs was a strong asset.

A long history of financial stability was a major theme. Individuals recognized that the district's long-range planning; fiscal conservative practices; and responses to declining enrollment and impacts of federal and state funding impacts have resulted in a healthy and stable financial condition.

A common theme centered around a safe environment. Individuals cited steps the district has taken to ensure physical as well as social emotional safety. Most all respondents cited this important strength.

Equity, inclusion and social justice programs and practices were consistently cited as a strength. Policies, procedures, practices, and professional learning that have been implemented were commended.

Multiple stakeholder groups reported that the district and the community are innovative and progressive. There is a sense of open-mindedness and always looking for ways to improve and create. This is seen as unique and as a great strength.

While it can be challenging for a small school system to offer a wide array of programs for students, it was cited as a strength. Programs such as outdoor education and the garden program were offered as specific examples.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

No district, of course, is without challenges. The following emerged as common themes:

School Funding
Declining Enrollment
Education Program Expectations & Staffing
Facility Needs
Special Education & Social Emotional Support
Political/Economic/Geographic Challenges

The need for ample and stable school funding was identified by the vast majority of stakeholders as a long standing significant challenge. While the district's conservative approach to fiscal management was recognized as a strength, reductions in programs and staffing over time were mentioned as associated challenges.

Compounding school funding challenges is the district's declining student enrollment trend. Stakeholders shared a variety of factors they believe contribute to this trend including a high cost of living, lack of affordable housing, families choosing private school/homeschool options, and demographic trends suggesting a declining number of young families with children moving into the community over time.

Several stakeholders expressed a need to expand program offerings and learning opportunities for students including more performing arts programming, AP/Honors, CTE options, enrichment/activities (beyond athletics), and more elective options. In the context of the district's financial challenges, balancing these expectations with the district's fiscal realities remains one of the greatest leadership challenges facing the district.

Facility needs were cited by many stakeholders as a significant challenge. While the high school campus (athletic venues/field, bathrooms, campus grounds) was mentioned most often, aging facilities and the overall need for building maintenance and repairs/renovations were also mentioned. Community passage of the district's bond request in 2023 provides funding to address many of these needs.

In addition to wanting expanded learning opportunities for students, many stakeholders expressed a need for additional staff and related supports for students with special learning needs as well a growing need for social emotional/mental health support for students. The same school funding challenges already mentioned are a significant factor contributing to this challenge.

Many stakeholders described the South Whidbey community as politically "purple" and identified political division as a challenge requiring skilled leadership and significant ongoing

engagement to ensure community understanding and support for the district’s students and their schools. The high cost of living and lack of affordable housing in the community was also mentioned as a hardship facing current staff as well as a factor impacting recruitment and retention of employees. Access to family wage employment opportunities on the island was shared by some as another community factor impacting population trends and student enrollment. As an island community the added challenge and cost of reliance on the state ferry system/schedule for access to some services and/or commuting to/from work was also shared.

Desired Characteristics

Participating stakeholders were asked to name the desired characteristics for the next superintendent of the South Whidbey School District. The following summary of personal characteristics, attributes, skills, and experiences reflect input gathered:

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

Superintendent

South Whidbey School District

Active, engaged member of the community

Communicator/listener

Values all voices

Forward thinking/innovative

Accessible & visible

Honest & humble

Transparency – explains “the why”

Fiscally responsible and resourceful

Builds/supports partnerships

Creates & expands philanthropy

Proven instructional leader

Charismatic/personable

Equity leader

We would like to thank all the participants who attended focus group meetings, forums, individual interviews, or participated in the survey.

We found this to be an amazing school district and community with a bright future ahead. Thank you for the opportunity to serve!

Respectfully submitted,

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