HYA | HAZARD YOUNG ATTEA ASSOCIATES

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

INDIAN PRAIRIE SCHOOL DISTRICT 204

September 22, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY for IPSD 204 Superintendent Search

From August 26th through September 3rd, 2025, Hazard, Young, Attea, and Associates (HYA) Senior Consultants Glenn "Max" McGee, Brian Harris, Connie Collins and Consultant Vahn Phayprasert had the opportunity to conduct a thorough Engagement Phase that resulted in speaking with 190 stakeholders through twenty focus groups, eight individual interviews, and four open community forums. Additionally, 1,734 stakeholders responded to the online survey.

The purpose of this Engagement Phase was threefold:

1. Identify strengths of Indian Prairie School District 204 that could be used to recruit candidates as well as inform them of successful, proven practices and policies that should be sustained.
2. Identify both challenges the next educational leader will face as well as priorities that they will need to address. These challenges and priorities will be used in identifying candidates with recent and relevant experience to tackle and address them and form the basis for interview questions, scenarios, and candidate presentations during the interview process.
3. Ascertain the desired qualifications and characteristics the next leader needs to have in order to succeed as a leader and to effectively serve Indian Prairie School District's students, families and educators.

Results are presented in great detail in the following pages but summarized in these next four paragraphs.

Strengths: Indian Prairie District 204 prides itself for having strong academic programs with high achievement. The district is recognized for consistent high academic outcomes and student preparedness for college, earning state and national accolades. The district has a diverse and inclusive community which fosters an inclusive environment that values diversity, including support for ELL students and multicultural initiatives. The community is robust with high levels of parental support and benefits greatly from significant community and active parental involvement, with open communication channels. The district provides a comprehensive K-12 program with resources for diverse learners and offers a wide array of programming, including strong athletics, arts, extracurricular activities, special education, gifted, and mental health services, with resources available for both teachers and students. The district has dedicated and highly qualified staff at all levels, with a culture of collaboration and is consistently lauded for their commitment to teaching and learning and understanding of student needs. It is noted that there is a high level of support from administration across the

district and at the board level. The district has been fiscally responsible and is known for efficient and resourceful financial management, and being good stewards of funds, evidenced by successful bond facility passages and referendum and operating leanly while providing a high quality educational program.

Challenges: The district operates leanly, and there is a need for long-term budget planning due to future increasing cost of operating, continuation of building projects and maintaining strong academic and supplemental programs. There are noted challenges due to the management of growth and demographic shifts. The ongoing growth presents a concern regarding under/over enrollment, boundary reviews, and potential class sizes, which also presents challenges related to adequately providing consistent services to the diverse student populations (e.g., ELL, Special Education, students from low income families). While stakeholders currently rate communication highly, there are challenges with timely, consistent, and clear communication from the district to parents, staff, and within schools, along with a desire for more transparent decision-making. In the area of staffing and retention, the district faces challenges with a high number of near-future teacher retirements, maintaining staff wellness, recruiting and retaining diverse staff, and ensuring adequate staffing levels across various roles in the district. Concerns exist regarding achievement gaps, particularly among students of color, students on free and reduced lunch, and the ELL population, and a need for improved support for struggling students at all levels. There were noted concerns in terms of the ability of maintaining mental health services (increased student mental health needs - post Covid) and the need for updated curriculum (aligning literacy standards/practices to the state's new literacy standards was specifically mentioned). Lastly, stakeholders expressed concerns of how the district will navigate external challenges which impact local control including state and national issues, macro economic influences, the ever growing social media presence in students' lives, and pressures related to politically charged topics (e.g., DEI, school safety, transgender issues).

Priorities: Based on stakeholder feedback, the new superintendent will have multiple priorities and it will be a challenge to determine those which are most critical to address. Thus, the most important priority will be to listen and learn. Focus group participants and survey respondents all noted that they expect and desire a leader who makes approachability, visibility, and developing authentic relationships with stakeholders a top priority. The next superintendent will need to demonstrate how they will ensure that they have more than just an "open door policy," but get out through that open door to be a genuine, immersive presence in the schools. As for key priorities stakeholders have for the new leader, these appear to be the top five:

1. **Student and Staff Safety and Well-being,** which encompasses physical/campus security, social-emotional health, and creating a welcoming, equitable, inclusive, bully-free

environment. It would be important to continue and expand the current mental health programs, addressing post-COVID mental health issues, and providing comprehensive support for all students and staff.

2. **Recruiting and Retaining Staff -** Given a potential wave of retirements, the leader must focus on hiring and keeping high-quality employees with a focus on transparency of process, diversity and on-going professional development.
3. **Addressing Achievement Gaps and Academic Improvement:** A key focus is on closing achievement gaps for diverse student populations, updating curriculum, strengthening intervention supports, maintaining high academic achievement and preparing students for future success through innovative programs.
4. **Fiscal Planning and Resource Management -** Priorities include long-term financial planning, effective management of referendum funds and construction projects, expenditure evaluation, and securing adequate resources.
5. **Strategic Planning and Innovative Opportunities**: Priorities include honoring the existing strategic plan, establishing a shared vision for the near future, and exploring innovative approaches such as leveraging AI and focusing on developing new programs that prepare students for future careers.

Desired Characteristics: Indian Prairie's next Superintendent must be an experienced student and staff centered leader with exemplary integrity with a passionate commitment to every students' growth and success. Stakeholders seek a leader who is authentically approachable and highly visible in schools and the community. The next superintendent must also be a caring, compassionate, empathetic leader who brings a clear, collaborative, and visionary approach to leadership, communicates effectively, values equity, academic excellence and innovation, and makes fiscally responsible, balanced decisions that serve all students and families.

This Leadership Profile Report (LPR) is a public document and will be posted both on HYA recruitment web page and on the IPSD's Superintendent Search web page. Ideally, the Board of Education will use this document to assist them in selecting the next Superintendent. To that end, HYA will assist the Board in using this LPR in recruiting and screening candidates, developing interview questions and activities for the board members as well as rubrics for the board to evaluate the candidates.

Finally, we would like to express our profound gratitude to Lisa Barry, Executive Director of Communications, and other staff who worked long and hard to schedule and ensure participation in the Engagement Sessions, assist HYA in developing the recruitment flyer from initial board interviews, and posting and distributing the customized online survey.

FULL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Dr. Max McGee, Dr. Brian Harris, Dr. Constance Collins and Vahn Phayprasert of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in July - September 2025 for the new superintendent of Indian Prairie CUSD 204 to replace Dr. Adrian Talley upon his departure at the end of the 2025-26 school year. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews, focus group settings, community forums, and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, community forums 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, community forums 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 and the immediate and future priorities that the new Superintendent will need to address.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

IPSD 204 is Illinois' fourth largest school district serving 26,000 students in 34 schools. A highly diverse district, it is recognized as a high-performing, "destination district" that attracts both families and employees due to its strong reputation, excellent facilities, and deeply rooted community values. Its strengths include a well-maintained infrastructure, robust student success, and a 95% teacher retention rate. The district has received numerous accolades—such as Blue Ribbon schools, state awards for principals and teachers, and national recognition for student achievement, including three of the five statewide Presidential Scholars. The fine arts programs and the athletic and academic teams are outstanding as are the array of opportunities for students to participate in these and other extra-curricular activities. Academic performance and growth measures place the district in the top tier of districts in Illinois and nationwide. Due to the shared vision of staff, the thoughtful governance of the board, engaged parents, and extensive community support, the district's culture is unmatched, with a broad and deep commitment to excellence, collaboration, and student well-being.

PROCESS

During August and September 2025, the HYA Associates conducted focus groups, interviews, and community forums. Twenty focus groups were held, eight individual interviews completed, and four open community forums were provided for the community. In all, we had 190 stakeholders attend the focus group sessions and community forums. Additionally, 1,734

stakeholders responded to the online survey. The online survey was available to stakeholders from August 18th through September 12th and provided an additional avenue for stakeholders to participate in the process of determining key attributes of the district and the desired qualifications and characteristics for the next Superintendent.

Here is a summary of the key stakeholders who participated in the focus groups/interviews:

Interviews and Focus Groups

- Board Members/Superintendent
- Central office administrators
- Civic Leaders and Community Partners
- Parent Leaders (PTA/IPPC/Boosters/P-3/ELL)
- City government officials
- Community Members with No Current Connection to IP 204
- Parents of Students
- Teachers/Certified Staff
- Support Staff
- Union representatives
- Administrators/Instructional Leaders
- Students

The structure of the focus groups and community forums was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. The focus group sessions were conducted in person and virtually via Zoom. Those involved in providing input into the selection of the Superintendent were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are the strengths of the district and community?
- What are the challenges facing the district?
- What are the immediate and future priorities for the next Superintendent?
- What are the personal and professional qualifications and attributes that you desire in the next Superintendent?
- Do you know any candidates that you believe would be a great fit for this position?

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.

SURVEY

Quantitative Results

The District provided all stakeholders with ample notifications regarding the opportunity to participate in the online survey between August 18th and September 12th, and staff are to be commended for their concerted outreach. As a result, 1,734 stakeholders responded to the survey and completed it. This number is in line with our initial target of 1,500 participants based on HYA surveys with districts of similar size, achievement, and demographics. The total number of 1,676 comments also were within our expectations and speaks well to the community's interest and engagement in the search process.

By group, the final tally was:

- 1,004 parents/guardians of current students
- 416 teachers and certificated staff members
- 55 support staff members
- 44 administrators
- 139 students
- 60 residents without children currently in school
- 10 alumni
- 6 elected officials (not necessarily school board members)

It should be noted that this survey was not a scientific stratified random sampling. The term of art is "survey of convenience," which means that individuals could take it if and when they choose. Also, respondents could only complete the survey once from one device but could take it from another device. We analyzed responses to screen for duplicate responses and found no instances of attempts to "game" the system by filling out multiple surveys.

In the discussion of the results that follow, responses marked "No Opinion" were dropped from the particular question and not used in any of the percentage calculations for the quantitative results.

Quantitative Results

Part 2 of the online survey asked respondents to select up to the three top priorities for the next superintendent from a list of these eighteen choices.

1. Improving overall district financial strength and stability.
2. Ensuring timely completion of the facility plan.
3. Addressing students' and staff members' social emotional and mental health issues.
4. Advancing academic performance.
5. Improving programs and services for students with special needs.
6. Ensuring that underperforming, under-represented, and low economic students are supported and succeeding.
7. Seeking stakeholder input.
8. Developing new educational opportunities to prepare students for future success.
9. Improving professional development, training, and support for staff.
10. Retaining and recruiting excellent staff.
11. Improving INTERNAL communication to and from staff and students.
12. Improving EXTERNAL communication to and from parents and the community.
13. Fostering a trusting, respectful culture and climate between school and community.
14. Ensuring student and staff safety.
15. Ensuring a sense of student and staff connectedness and belonging.

16. Making continued progress on the Strategic Plan.

17. Becoming an active, approachable presence in the schools and community.

18. Being an active advocate for high quality public education.

The choices were in randomized order for every survey.

Table 1 shows the top three choices (numbers 1, 2, and 3) for each stakeholder group as well as the percentage of all respondents in the Composite Column choosing one of the choices in their top three. For example, parents, students, and "others" ranked "Student and staff safety" as the top priority (1) while teachers (including other certified staff but not administrators) and classified staff ranked "Recruiting and retaining excellent staff" as their top priority. Turning to the composite column, the top two priorities in terms of items receiving the highest number of top three choices were "Student and staff safety" and "Recruiting and retaining excellent staff." Interestingly, two items both ranked third with 25% of respondents selecting them: "Addressing students' and staff members' social emotional and mental health issues" and "Developing new educational opportunities to prepare students for future success." Both of these were included in students' top three priorities.

Table 1: Ranking and Percentage of Respondents Selecting Priority in Their Top Three (disaggregated by role)

	Stakeholder Group									
	Parent	Teacher	Admin	Classified Staff	Student	Elected Official	Taxpayer	Alum	Other Stakeholder	COMPOSITE PERCENTAGE SELECTING
	n=1004	n=416	n=44	n=55	n=139	n=6	n=23	n=10	n=37	n=1734
Answer Choices										
Improving overall district financial strength and stability.			1	3		2	1		2	14%
Ensuring timely completion of the facility plan										6%
Addressing students' and staff members' social emotional and mental health issues.		2			2					25%
Advancing academic performance.						1	3	1		22%
Improving programs and services for students with special needs								3		12%
Ensuring support & success for underperforming, under-represented students						2				17%
Seeking stakeholder input										3%
Developing new educational opportunities to prepare students for future success.	3				3			1		25%
Improving professional development, training, and support for staff.										12%
Retaining and recruiting excellent staff.	2	1		1			3		3	32%
Improving INTERNAL communication to and from staff and students.										6%
Improving EXTERNAL communication to and from parents and the community.										5%
Fostering a trusting, respectful culture and climate between school and community.			2						3	20%
Ensuring student and staff safety.	1	3		2	1		3		1	35%
Ensuring a sense of student and staff connectedness and belonging.			2							16%
Making continued progress on the Strategic Plan										6%
Becoming an active, approachable presence in the schools and community										15%
Being an active advocate for high quality public education							2	3		22%

A most notable finding is the difference among most groups in their top rankings with "financial strength and stability" being important to administrators and those stakeholders generally without children in the schools. The exception is the Classified Staff who in every district are most at risk of job cuts if finances decline. Likewise, "Advancing academic performance" mattered more to those groups less likely to have students in the schools. From reading the comments of these groups, we speculate that as is the case in most districts, residents see their home values tied to the success of the schools.

To summarize, the next leader should clearly focus on being resourceful in ensuring students and staff are safe not only in terms of building security but also in terms of ensuring every social emotional health and that every school is welcoming, that bullying is reduced or eliminated, and that a culture of acceptance prevails. The individual will also need to strive to retain and recruit the highest quality of staff especially given the potential for a significant number of retirements on the horizon, and also continue to encourage and support innovative opportunities to prepare students for a future success in their educational trajectory and in pursuing jobs and careers - many of which probably do not even exist yet!

In reviewing the percentages of items selected as top three priorities in the Composite column, we were both surprised and impressed that "Seeking stakeholder input," "Improving INTERNAL communication to and from staff and students," and "Improving EXTERNAL communication to and from parents and the community" were given such low priority rankings. In fact, oftentimes, these are some of the highest priorities for school districts and while it is not our job to judge, it appears that IPSD 204 has been extremely successful in communicating with all stakeholders as well as listening to them and the Board and staff should be commended for their efforts. Also, as is the case with most districts, stakeholders do not put a high priority on achieving the strategic plan or completing facility plans. We cannot determine whether these items are low on stakeholders' priority list because they do not know much about them or because they just assume the staff and Board are moving ahead with them as business as usual. In any case, it would behoove the new leader to ensure that stakeholders are aware of both the strategic and facility plans' goals and progress are regularly communicated.

The results in Table 1 indicate that applicants should be able to both articulate and show how they have successfully retained teachers, succeeded in hiring excellent staff in these times of increasing teacher shortages, and produce both numbers and narratives as evidence of improving academic performance, developing new opportunities for student success,and ensuring campus safety as well as supporting student and staff mental health and wellness.

Turning to leadership qualifications and experience, respondents were asked to rank the following as: “Extremely important; Important; Somewhat important; Not so important; Not important at all.”

Q6. Leadership experience in a similar community and district characterized by academic, athletic, and artistic excellence?

Q7. Hold themselves and other leaders accountable for student success?

Q8. Proven ability to manage conflict and change with confidence and equanimity?

Q9. Expertise in school district finance?

Q10. Proven success in implementing new and innovative opportunities for retaining excellent staff?

Q11. Worked with legislators to pursue legislative priorities of the district?

Q12. Created new opportunities for community engagement and collaboration?

Q13. Ensured high standards of academic excellence for ALL students?

Q14. Explored and incorporated best practices from other top public and private schools?

Q15. A comprehensive knowledge of leading educational research and best practices?

Q16. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent INTERNAL communication to students and staff?

Q17. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent EXTERNAL communication to parents and the community?

Q18. Successfully addressed the needs of a diverse student population?

Q19. A record as an effective operational manager?

Q20. Earned a reputation as a visible and immersive presence in the community and schools?

Q21. Ensured a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff?

Q22. Successfully articulated a compelling vision for their district's future and has moved the district toward fulfilling it?

Q23. Experience and expertise in managing the upgrading of district wide facilities?

Q24. The proven ability to Inspire and motivate all stakeholders?

Q25. Experience as a superintendent?

Q26. An earned doctorate degree?

Q27. Leadership experience in a field other than education (e.g. business, military, non-profits)?

Knowing there is some truth in the adage, “if everything is important, nothing is important,” we used “Extremely important” as the indicator of a necessary qualification and/or experience. Overall the three leading “extremely important” qualifications/experiences were:

- Holding themselves and other leaders accountable for student success
- Ensuring high standards of academic excellence for ALL students
- Having the proven ability to manage conflict and change with confidence and equanimity

While all of these are important, we recommend that during the selection process the board note how the staff and data (the columns labeled teachers, administrators, classified staff, and students) differ in what they rank as extremely important attributes for the next leader. These three items were generally ranked as extremely important by these internal stakeholders:

- Providing [or continuing to provide] consistent, proactive, and transparent internal communication to students and staff

- Successfully addressing the needs of a diverse student population (as an aside this is the only attribute in which parents of students receiving special education students differed significantly from other parents with 50% of the former ranking this attribute as "extremely important" v 39% of the other parents.)

- Ensuring a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff

With these data in mind both HYA and the board will be pursuing work products, results, and other evidence of applicants both having these six bulleted attributes and demonstrating results relevant to each of them.

It is also important to note those attributes in which less than 50% of any group ranked as "extremely important." While these are all important, we assume that items like "expertise in financial management" and effectiveness as an "operational manager" are attributes that the superintendent will need in their staff. Other items like an "earned doctorate" or "leadership in a field other than education" may not matter all that much, and certainly not nearly as much as the attributes bulleted above.

Table 2: Percentage Ranking a Characteristic, Qualification, or Experience as Extremely Important (disaggregated by stakeholder group)

	Stakeholder Group									
	Parent	Teacher	Admin	Classified Staff	Student	Elected Official	Taxpayer	Alum	Other Valued Stakeholder	COMPOSITE
	n=1004	n=416	n=44	n=55	n=139	n=6	n=23	n=10	n=37	n=1734
Q6. Leadership experience in a similar community & district	40	38	50	33	33	80	48	44	36	39
Q7. Hold themselves and other leaders accountability for student success.	62	44	50	44	47	40	62	80	52	56
Q8. Proven ability to manage conflict and change with confidence and equanimity?	51	48	45	48	52	60	38	40	38	49
Q9. Expertise in school district finance?	30	29	10	29	29	0	36	10	35	29
Q10. Proven success implementing innovative opportunities for retaining excellent staff?	43	49	33	52	38	20	38	40	35	44
Q11. Worked with legislators to pursue legislative priorities of district?	19	19	13	27	25	0	15	30	18	19
Q12. Created new opportunities for community engagement and collaboration?	16	12	20	22	36	25	14	33	15	17
Q13. Ensured high standards of academic excellence for ALL students?	58	41	45	50	59	100	52	80	53	53
Q14. Explored and incorporated best practices from other top public and private schools?	34	19	30	17	38	25	14	33	15	30
Q15. A comprehensive knowledge of leading educational research and best practices?	34	28	28	21	38	60	19	30	26	32
Q16. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent INTERNAL communication?	39	57	63	71	47	40	68	89	35	46
Q17. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent EXTERNAL communication?	44	41	45	54	48	20	45	80	35	44
Q18. Successfully addressed the needs of a diverse student population?	40	50	48	52	48	40	24	40	35	43
Q19. A record as an effective operational manager?	26	24	23	30	27	20	24	10	21	25
Q20. Earned a reputation as a visible and immersive presence in the community & schools	26	38	50	43	31	60	21	40	32	31
Q21. Ensured a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff?	44	50	68	56	50	60	33	60	32	47
Q22. Successfully articulated a compelling vision for their district and delivered results.	35	32	50	36	43	60	24	30	32	35
Q23. Experience and expertise in managing the upgrading of district wide facilities.	22	24	10	31	33	0	14	20	15	23
Q24. The proven ability to Inspire and motivate all stakeholders?	23	25	33	27	23	40	19	30	27	24
Q25. Experience as a superintendent?	27	27	23	42	26	80	38	30	32	28
Q26. An earned doctorate degree?	15	20	15	17	20	50	24	30	15	17
Q27. Leadership experience in a field other than education?	10	4	0	9	25	0	19	20	6	9

Qualitative Results

In addition to the multiple choice prompts, participants were invited to provide open-ended responses to priorities for the next leader and personal attributes they would like to see.

Regarding "Please share any other priorities you think the new superintendent should have" 681 respondents made comments. Here are the top 5 disaggregated by groups:

Parents

1. Academic excellence & high expectations
Refocus on core academics (reading/writing/math/critical thinking), raise performance and accountability for all learners (special needs, "middle," gifted), and use evidence-based instruction with less busy testing.

2. Student safety, discipline & well-being
Tighten bullying/behavior enforcement, ensure transparent safety practices (lockdowns, weather/e-learning calls), consider limits on phones/tech misuse, and support balanced mental health without eclipsing academics.

3. Clear, two-way communication & visible leadership
Be approachable and present in schools; communicate early and transparently with parents, students, and staff; listen and close loops on concerns (IEP/504, policies, incidents).

4. Inclusive, respectful, politically neutral learning environment
Ensure schools are welcoming and fair to all students and families, and uphold unbiased, high-quality curriculum (amid differing views on DEI).

5. Smart resource stewardship aligned to classrooms
Be fiscally responsible while directing dollars to what families feel most: strong teachers and staffing, smaller class sizes, updated facilities (academics & athletics), and sensible boundaries/enrollment management.

Teachers and other certificated staff

1. Equity and Support for All Students
A clear priority is ensuring that underperforming, underrepresented, multilingual, special education, and low-income students are truly supported. This includes equitable access to mental health services, timely special education placements, and a superintendent who leads with an equity lens and ensures resources are distributed fairly across schools.

2. Being Approachable, Visible, and Authentic
Stakeholders want a leader who is approachable, visible in schools, down-to-earth, and connected to teachers, students, and parents. The superintendent should listen deeply, build trust, and demonstrate care for staff and students alike.

3. Staff Support, Retention, and Respect
There is strong concern about potential teacher and staff turnover and burn out.. The next superintendent must advocate for competitive pay, manageable workloads, professional development, and supportive conditions so educators can thrive and stay in the district.

4. Class Size, Staffing, and Resource Allocation
Reducing class sizes (especially at the elementary level), ensuring adequate staffing in counseling, special education, and support services, and addressing overcrowding are repeated priorities.

5. **Communication and Coherence Across the System**
There are serious concerns about inconsistent practices across schools, communication from the central office, and competing priorities between buildings and district leadership. The next superintendent should align departments and strive to create consistent expectations and practices across all schools.

Administrators

1. Equity, Inclusion, and Elevating Diverse Voices
There is a strong call to make the district more inclusive, transparent, and equitable—ensuring that the voices of historically underrepresented communities are elevated and valued rather than forced to conform to a “white suburbia” model.

2. Approachability, Visibility, and Authentic Relationships
Stakeholders want a leader who is approachable, non-partisan, and genuinely present in schools and the community. This includes spending time in buildings, listening, being transparent, and building trust with teachers, staff, students, and families.

3. Collaboration and Internal Alignment
Improving communication and collaboration across central office departments and breaking down silos is a clear priority. Stakeholders expect an organizational structure and routines that foster cross-departmental support and accountability, so schools feel consistently backed by the district office.

4. Commitment to Existing Strategic Work
The superintendent should bring continuity by advancing and completing major ongoing initiatives such as the Portrait of a Graduate, Culturally Responsive Instruction, Portrait of an Educator, and Restorative Practices—rather than abandoning or restarting them.

5. Balanced Student Growth: Academic and Social-Emotional
Stakeholders emphasize ensuring access to rigorous instruction, expanding SEL opportunities, and nurturing strong teaching staff. The expectation is for a superintendent who maintains a balanced focus on academics, social-emotional learning, and student well-being.

<u>Classified Staff</u>

1. Equity, Inclusion, and Diverse Voices
The superintendent must advance equity, transparency, and inclusion, while elevating the voices of historically underrepresented communities and ensuring all students have rigorous instruction and opportunities to succeed.

2. Approachability, Visibility, and Respectful Leadership
Stakeholders want an approachable, non-partisan leader who is visible in schools and the community, treats all people with dignity and respect, and builds authentic connections with staff, students, and families.

3. Collaboration and Internal Alignment
There is a strong call for improved communication, collaboration, and accountability within the district office and across departments—breaking down silos and ensuring consistent support for schools and the visibility of cabinet members and district leaders in the schools.

4. Commitment to Existing Initiatives and Strategic Work
The superintendent should carry forward and complete important ongoing initiatives (Portrait of a Graduate, Culturally Responsive Instruction, Restorative Practices, etc.) while maintaining stability and continuity in district priorities.

5. Balanced Focus on Academics and Social-Emotional Growth
Stakeholders expect a leader who can foster both academic rigor and social-emotional learning, nurturing strong teaching staff, expanding SEL opportunities, and creating supportive environments for students.

Students

1. Student Health, Safety, and Well-Being
A repeated theme is that student safety must be the superintendent's top priority. This includes clear, student-centered decisions around snow days and extreme weather, attention to bullying, emotional safety, and equitable health supports.

2. Equity, Inclusion, and Advocacy for Marginalized Students
Respondents want a superintendent who advocates strongly for minority and marginalized groups, ensures special needs services are improved, and makes every community feel welcome and respected.

3. Approachability and Strong Communication
Stakeholders stress the need for a leader with good judgment, insight, and personality — someone approachable, considerate, open-minded, and actively communicating with students, staff, parents, and the broader community.

4. Staff Support and Retention
Ensuring "top-tier" staff is maintained is seen as essential. Priorities include recruiting and retaining excellent educators, supporting staff social and emotional health, and improving professional development opportunities.

5. Balanced Focus on Academic, Arts, and Extracurricular Excellence
Alongside student safety and equity, respondents want continued commitment to academic achievement, equal recognition of academics and athletics, robust support for music and fine arts, and improved programs for students with special needs.

Elected officials, Taxpayers without students in schools, Alumni, and Others

1. Fiscal Responsibility and Reducing Spending
Community members strongly emphasized cutting costs, reducing administrative overhead, balancing salaries and benefits, and easing the tax burden on homeowners while still maintaining quality education.

2. Academic Excellence and High Standards
There is a strong call to return focus to academics and behavioral expectations — raising student performance, strengthening core subjects (math, science, language), and supporting both high- and average-achieving students.

3. Keep Schools Unbiased and Non-Political
Stakeholders want unbiased educational opportunities free from political or ideological agendas, with clear boundaries between academics and parenting roles.

4. Approachability, Visibility, and Transparent Communication
The superintendent should be approachable, present in schools, open in communication, and willing to engage transparently with parents, staff, students, and taxpayers.

5. Strategic Planning: Boundaries, Facilities, and Workforce Preparation
There is concern about overcrowding, boundary decisions, and facilities upkeep. At the same time, stakeholders want investment in skilled labor training and programs that prepare students for diverse postsecondary paths.

While there is commonality among some of the top priorities in both the qualitative and quantitative data such as student and staff safety, retaining academic excellence, and retaining and supporting staff, a couple important new themes rose to the top of the priority list. The first one is how important it is for staff and students to have a leader who makes approachability, visibility, and developing authentic relationships with stakeholders a top priority. Likewise, parents and other stakeholders place a high priority on "visibility." Clearly, the next superintendent will need to demonstrate how they will ensure that they have more than just an "open door policy," but get out through that open door to be an authentic, immersive presence in the schools. Additionally, student and staff stakeholders want the superintendent to make equity and inclusion a top priority and value diverse voices thus making all groups feel welcome, respected, and connected to their schools.

Turning to personal attributes, question 28 asked participants to "please list the most important PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES you believe are essential traits for the next superintendent to have. (For example, integrity, empathy ...)." A total of 995 respondents provided feedback. The answers to this question showed a remarkable uniformity among the five major stakeholder groups. The top five traits for each group are listed in frequency of mention with brief definitions for the first mention of each attribute.

Parents

1. Integrity and ethics
Parents expect and need the new superintendent to be honest, transparent, trustworthy, accountable; leads with a moral compass.

2. Empathy and approachability
They desire a leader who listens respectfully, is visible and personable, builds real relationships.

3. Excellent communicator
The new leader should be an excellent speaker, able to write with clarity and conviction, be readily transparent and responsive, and ensure everyone in the community receives important critical communications in a timely manner.

4. Student-centered and inclusive
Parents want the superintendent to prioritize all students' success and safety and value equity and diverse perspectives, including special education.

5. Visionary, decisive leadership
They need a leader who articulates a clear academic focus, makes tough calls, solves problems collaboratively, and shows prudent stewardship of resources.

Teachers and other certificated staff

1. Integrity and Honesty
Teachers overwhelmingly emphasize integrity, transparency, and fairness — a leader who is trustworthy and trusting, ethical, and consistently acts with honesty in all decisions.

2. Empathy and Compassion
They want someone approachable, kind, and humane who understands the challenges teachers and students face, and who genuinely cares about the well-being of all stakeholders.

3. Strong Communicator and Active Listener
Clear, open, and two-way communication is critical. Teachers want to be heard, respected, and included in decision-making, with a superintendent who explains the "why" behind actions.

4. Student-Centered and Equity-Driven
Teachers value a leader who prioritizes student success, safety, and belonging while ensuring equity across schools, programs, and populations — from special education to high achievers.

5. Visionary and Collaborative
They seek a superintendent with courage and creativity who can set a clear vision, inspire confidence, and work collaboratively while being grounded in classroom realities.

Administrators

1. Integrity and Honesty
Administrators stressed the importance of a superintendent who is ethical, transparent, trustworthy, and consistent — someone who leads with a moral compass and models accountability.

2. Approachability and Visibility
They want a leader who is approachable, personable, present in schools, and genuinely engaged with staff, students, and the broader community.

3. Empathy and Compassion
A superintendent who listens, understands, relates to staff and students, and responds with fairness, humility, and humanity is a clear priority.

4. Student-Centered and Equity-Focused
Leaders should place students at the heart of every decision, ensuring equity, fairness, and access for all while maintaining a strong focus on academic and social-emotional growth.

5. Visionary and Collaborative
Administrators want someone with a clear vision, resilience, and creativity, who communicates effectively, collaborates across teams, manages challenges skillfully, and inspires people to follow.

Classified Staff

1. Integrity and Honesty
Staff emphasized the need for a leader who is ethical, trustworthy, transparent, and consistent — someone who leads with a moral compass and holds themselves and others accountable.

2. Approachability and Visibility
They want a superintendent who is present in schools, approachable on a personal level, down-to-earth, and genuinely connected with staff, students, and the community.

3. Empathy and Compassion
A compassionate leader who listens, understands the realities of staff and students, and relates in a supportive, humane way is seen as essential.

4. Student-Centered and Equity-Focused
Respondents want someone who keeps students at the heart of every decision, advocates for equity, and ensures all students' needs — academic, social, and emotional — are prioritized.

5. Visionary and Collaborative
Staff desire a superintendent with a clear vision who communicates it well, works collaboratively across teams, and brings optimism, creativity, and problem-solving to difficult challenges.

Students

1. Understand our needs
Students want health, safety, and emotional security prioritized — from bullying prevention to safe facilities, equitable treatment, and clear decisions during hazardous weather.

2. Advocate for us
Student respondents emphasize being heard and having their needs considered by a superintendent who advocates for all students, especially marginalized groups, and ensures fairness across communities.

3. Support and recognition
Students want strong academic programs, equal recognition of academic and extracurricular achievements, better support for struggling learners, and improved special needs and enrichment opportunities.

4. Approachability
They value a superintendent who is approachable, visible, confident, considerate, and communicates directly with students as well as parents and staff. They are seeking a meaningful connection with the superintendent.

5. Respectful and positive
Students want a leader who exemplifies and models respect, positivity and kindness.

<u>Elected officials, Taxpayers without students in schools, Alumni, and Others</u>

1. Integrity and Honesty
A superintendent who is transparent, dependable, accountable, and ethical — someone who consistently demonstrates integrity and earns the trust of the greater community.

2. Empathy and Approachability
Parents want a leader who is kind, humble, caring, and approachable, with the ability to listen actively and understand diverse perspectives.

3. Strong Communication and Leadership
Effective communication, collaboration, and visibility in the community are essential. The superintendent should lead by example, engage openly, and foster trust with staff, students, and families.

4. Focus on Academics and Innovation
Stakeholders want a leader who prioritizes academic excellence, is open to new ideas, and prepares students for future opportunities in evolving and emerging job markets.

5. Fiscal Responsibility and Balanced Decision-Making
The superintendent must be financially competent, thoughtful with taxpayer resources, and able to make difficult financial decisions while keeping student success at the center.

To summarize, the key personal attributes the next superintendent must possess are:

- **Impeccable Integrity and Honesty**
- **Authentic Approachability, Immersive Visibility, and Genuine Empathy**,
- **Excellent Communication Skills**
- **Collaborative Leadership**
- **Student Centered and Equity Focused**

In closing, we found most participants to be thoughtful and engaged respondents. While some survey comments were lighthearted and humorous, there were also a few inflammatory and derogatory ones; however, here are some thoughtful comments from respondents to provide balanced, verbatim advice to the Board as they pursue the critically important task of selecting the next superintendent:

<u>Parents</u>

Empathy, and the courage to stand up to external pressures that may not benefit a diverse student body. We recognize that a focus on test scores, rankings, and appearances does not come out of nowhere—leaders are under immense pressure to deliver these things. We need a leader who has the courage and integrity to prioritize an inclusive support of all students, regardless of other pressures and conflicting definitions of success

Personal commitment to the district and community. Lives within the community (or willing to relocate). Listens without judgement. Empathetic and kind. Has a deep sense of integrity. Is a servant leader. Is approachable and personable. Is accessible to all stakeholders.

Humility, compassion, just, honesty, empathy, integrity, personable, visionary, and patient
I believe a personal attribute that is an essential trait is being a positive motivator. Our next Superintendent needs to be to be able to motivate, inspire, encourage and empower others below her or him to work at their optimal performance level. There's nothing like workers who want to work hard and do their best because they are motivated to do so and don't want to let their leader down because they appreciate and respect them. Leaders who can motivate their workers to work hard will always get the best results.

Grit, courage be inclusive, humility, visionary, altruistic, competent, open confortable with different cultures, empathy and integrity. Not in it for the pension or the money.

I want a superintendent that will be comfortable meeting and socializing at any event or program district wide. Whether an elementary school musical, middle school band concert, high school robotics competition, or dance team DVC meet - he/she should be comfortable and engaging with parents, students, and community members. I want a superintendent that believes in the community and wants to be a part of it.

I believe it's extremely important for our superintendent to be passionate about children, kindhearted, and able to see the bigger picture. Their decisions should reflect what's best for teachers and students, not just a business standpoint—which I think often gets lost. We need someone who is willing to truly listen to teachers, parents, and students, and who stays actively involved in our schools rather than being shut away in an office

Staff Members

A successful superintendent must lead with integrity, communicate clearly and transparently, and demonstrate a strong commitment to equity and student success. They should be empathetic, approachable, and collaborative, fostering trust and respectful relationships across the district. Visionary yet grounded, they must be able to make courageous, informed decisions while remaining open to feedback and continuous improvement.
integrity, approachable, knowledgeable

The person has to be authentic, approachable, decisive, and willing to listen to those who are on the front lines of educating the children and who have to implement everything from safety protocols to curricular changes, to increasing student needs, to adjustments in standards

Acts honestly, fairly, and transparently; is a visionary thinker with strong communication skills; being confident and decisive: empathetic to all - learners, staff, and families; handles criticism, setbacks, and crises with a positive attitude; will be able to navigate school board dynamics, local politics, and community to build a strong, positive relationship; collaborative and committed to equity

The next Superintendent must be an "effectual reasoner," a leader who turns vision into reality by leveraging existing resources, forging strategic partnerships, and finding innovative solutions

within current system constraints. An effectual reasoner sees potential where others may see limitations. This leadership quality is especially vital in today's educational funding landscape, where adaptability and creativity are essential to drive sustainable change without overreliance on local funding streams. This attribute is critical to maintaining the culture of innovation and continuous improvement that we have. The next Superintendent should not only set a compelling vision but also execute with strategic precision by aligning people, programs, and partnerships around a clear, actionable plan.

Rather than waiting for ideal conditions, the next Superintendent as an entrepreneurial leader would identify what is available now (people, relationships, infrastructure) and use those assets to build, iterate, and scale impactful initiatives. The next Superintendent must have a demonstrated ability to mobilize stakeholders around a shared vision and produce measurable results through strategic execution

Students

I think a good superintendent needs to make sure their students' health and safety is one of their number 1 priority; make sure every community feels safe and welcome at school.

Always make sure that the student body has their needs heard.

Our new superintendent must be an advocate for minority and marginalized groups. It is a scary time in America right now, and we need someone in office who makes students feel safe attending school because they know their superintendent has their back.

Community Member

[The leader must be] responsible, respectful and honest. These are the most important characters we wish the students have. So the superintendent needs to have them!

Frequently Noted Themes

The data contained in this report were gathered from Board-identified or self-selected stakeholder respondents as outlined earlier in this report. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the data are not from a purely scientific sampling. However, in almost all cases the data were prioritized by the individuals and members of the groups from which they were gathered. In addition, prior to drawing any conclusions about consistent themes or recurring ideas, the consultants reviewed the occurrence of the indicators or Strengths, Challenges, Priorities and Leadership Qualities within and among the reference groups chosen to participate in this study. So, it can be safely said that there is certainly a rigorous method for bringing these conclusions to your attention and consideration, when selecting the desired characteristics for the next Superintendent for Indian Prairie CUSD 204. Items are included from the interviews, focus groups, community forums and/or survey, if, in the HYA Associates' judgment, they were repeated with sufficient frequency thus indicating a pattern and/or warranting the Board's attention.

Strengths of the District

The Indian Prairie 204 school district possesses several key strengths, including:

- **Strong Academic Programs & High Achievement:** The district consistently demonstrates high academic outcomes, with students well-prepared for college. There is a focus on academic excellence, and the district is recognized at the state and national level for its achievements.
- **Diverse and Inclusive Community:** The district values and celebrates diversity, providing an inclusive environment for all students and families, including support for students from other countries and multicultural initiatives.
- **Robust Community & Parental Support:** There is significant community support and active parental involvement, with open lines of communication and a welcoming environment for parent engagement.
- **Comprehensive Programs & Resources:** IPSD 204 offers a wide variety of options for students, including strong athletics, arts programs, extracurricular activities, special education, gifted programs, and mental health services. Resources are made available for teachers and students.
- **Dedicated and Highly Qualified Staff:** The district boasts phenomenal and highly qualified teachers and staff at all levels who are committed to student needs and

development. Staff longevity and a "grow our own" program contribute to a positive culture.

- **Prudent Fiscal Management:** The district is known for being resourceful and doing "a lot with less," demonstrating good stewardship of its funds and operating in a lean manner while still providing quality education.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

The top challenges facing the Indian Prairie 204 school district include:

- **Fiscal and Budgetary Constraints:** The district operates leanly and needs to be realistic about its financial situation, with concerns about funding, rising costs of projects, and the need to evaluate expenditures.
- **Managing Growth and Demographic Shifts:** The district is still growing and experiencing evolving enrollment, which brings challenges related to diverse student populations, boundary reviews, and potentially large class sizes.
- **Communication and Transparency:** There are challenges with timely, consistent, and clear communication from the district level to parents, staff, and within the various schools, and a desire for more transparency in decision-making.
- **Staffing and Retention:** The district faces a challenge with a high number of teachers retiring, maintaining staff wellness, recruiting diverse staff, and ensuring adequate staffing levels (e.g., bus drivers, special services staff, teacher assistants).
- **Addressing Achievement Gaps and Student Support:** There are concerns about achievement gaps, particularly among students of color and ELL students, and a need for improved support for struggling students at all levels, mental health services, and updated curriculum and literacy programs.
- **External Influences and Macro Issues:** The district navigates politically charged topics, state and national issues (e.g., DEIB, school safety, transgender issues), and the impact of social media, all of which can influence local control and decision-making.

Immediate and Future Priorities

Based on the focus group discussions, the immediate and future priorities are:

- **Student Well-being and Support:** This encompasses addressing post-COVID mental health issues, ensuring student safety, providing comprehensive mental health programs and services, and supporting students' overall social-emotional development.

- **Effective Communication and Transparency:** A strong emphasis is placed on improving timely, consistent, and clear communication from the district level to all stakeholders (parents, staff, and community), as well as enhancing transparency in decision-making and clearly communicating long-term visions and plans.
- **Fiscal Planning and Resource Management:** Priorities include long-term financial planning, managing referendum funds and construction projects effectively and on budget, evaluating expenditures, being realistic about the district's financial situation, and ensuring adequate resources for all programs and schools.
- **Addressing Achievement Gaps and Academic Improvement:** A key focus is on closing achievement gaps, particularly for students of color, ELL students, and those with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This also involves updating curriculum (e.g., literacy programs), strengthening intervention supports, and ensuring high academic achievement across all schools.
- **Staffing, Retention, and Professional Development:** Priorities include addressing teacher retirements, recruiting and retaining diverse and highly qualified staff (including teacher assistants and special services staff), supporting staff wellness, and providing ongoing professional development.
- **Managing Growth, Demographics, and Facilities:** The district needs to manage evolving enrollment and demographic shifts, consider potential boundary adjustments, and ensure the successful completion of facility upgrades resulting from the referendum. This also includes evaluating class sizes.
- **Community Engagement and Stakeholder Relationships:** Continuously building relationships with all stakeholder groups (students, parents, staff, intergovernmental boards, business leaders, and community partners) is crucial, including conducting listening tours and fostering a sense of belonging.
- **Strategic Planning and Innovation:** Priorities involve continuing to honor the strategic plan, establishing a shared vision for the near future (3-5 years), and exploring innovative approaches, such as leveraging AI in education and operations, and rethinking school day structures.

Desired Superintendent Qualifications and Attributes

The desired personal and professional qualifications and attributes for the next superintendent of the Indian Prairie 204 school district include:

- **Strong Leadership and Decision-Making:** The ideal candidate should be a strong, confident, and decisive leader who is not afraid to make tough choices and stand by them, even in the face of strong opinions or conflict. They need to be proactive with an entrepreneurial spirt, reflective, objective, and accountable for their decisions.

- **Effective Communication and Transparency:** Excellent communication skills are paramount, including the ability to communicate clearly, timely, consistently, and transparently with all stakeholders (students, parents, staff, board, and community). This involves being a good listener, providing clear goals and expectations, and explaining the "why" behind decisions.
- **Visionary and Strategic Thinker:** The superintendent should be forward-thinking, innovative, and adaptive, with the ability to establish and communicate a clear vision for the district's future (3-5 years) and strategically lead change. This includes leveraging new technologies like AI and rethinking traditional structures.
- **Deep Understanding of Education and District Operations:** The successful candidate should have a background in education, including classroom and building-level leadership experience (K-12). They need to understand the complexities of a large, diverse unit district, including fiscal responsibility, legal requirements, human resources (staffing, retention, professional development), curriculum updates (e.g., literacy), and special education programming.
- **Relationship Builder and Collaborator:** A key attribute is the ability to build strong, trusting relationships with all stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, community partners, and intergovernmental boards. They should be approachable, personable, empathetic, and capable of fostering a collaborative environment, empowering staff, and uniting the diverse elements of the district.
- **Visible and Engaged in the Community:** The next superintendent is expected to have a strong, visible presence within the schools and the broader community, attending events, interacting informally with students and parents, and genuinely understanding the unique needs of each school and community within the district.
- **Cultural Competence and Inclusivity:** Given the district's diversity, the superintendent must be culturally well-versed, adaptable, and respectful of different cultures and families. They should be a strong advocate for diverse, Special Education, and English Language Learner (ELL) populations, and committed to addressing achievement gaps and promoting equity.
- **Fiscal Acumen and Resourcefulness:** The individual needs strong budget management skills, an understanding of various revenue sources, and the ability to manage construction projects resulting from referendums effectively and on budget. They should be resourceful and look for additional funding sources.
- **Humility and Authenticity:** Desired personal traits include humility, authenticity, a servant leader mindset, a genuine love for children and families, and a focus on making children better individuals rather than personal recognition.

The above summary of qualifications and attributes as well as challenges and priorities obtained from interviews, focus groups, and forums as well as all of the survey data provide an ample basis for interview questions, deep screening, and scenarios for candidates' presentations and immediate responses during the selection process.

CONCLUSION

We trust this Leadership Profile Report will provide the Board with a deep understanding of the strengths of the district that the next superintendent will need to sustain and perhaps enhance; with stakeholders' perceptions of both long and short term challenges the district will fact and new leader will need to address; with a sense of the top priorities for the superintendent's first weeks and months of leadership; and especially of the qualifications and attributes stakeholders desire the next leader to possess. With this wealth of information to aid HYA in the initial screening process and to support the Board in their multiple rounds of interviews, reference checks, and due diligence, we believe that the final candidate the Board selects will be the perfect fit to lead Indian Prairie CUSD 204 well into the future.

The HYA Associates would like to thank all the stakeholders who participated in the interviews, focus groups and community forums as well as all of those who completed the online survey, for their insights and candor. We offer a special note of thanks and commendation to Lisa Barry, the Executive Director of Communications, and all IPSD staff members who assisted in facilitating our work in gathering this data through extensive outreach, and for their extra efforts in handling the necessary arrangements for our virtual meetings, community forums, and follow-up on any issues of concern or clarification.

In closing, HYA is committed to recruiting and screening candidates who fit the leadership profile and will provide Indian Prairie CUSD 204 the high quality of successful leadership it desires. The next Superintendent needs to sustain all that is special about the schools, programs, and personnel and provide the vision, hard work, commitment and collaboration that will engage all stakeholders in moving the District forward to meet the expectations of long term success.