



TAHOMA
Future Ready Students

The logo features the word "TAHOMA" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is replaced by a blue graduation cap with a yellow tassel. Above the cap is a large yellow arrow pointing upwards. Below "TAHOMA" is the phrase "Future Ready Students" in a blue, sans-serif font.

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

December 12, 2023

Executive Summary

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

The survey, interviews, focus groups and forums were structured to gather information to assist the Tahoma 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 and some of the challenges that it is currently facing and will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

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

Group	Personal interviews, focus groups, forums & survey
Students	627
Family Members	268
Community	42
Certificated Staff	132
Classified Staff	71
Administrators/ Supervisors	26
Total	1,166

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 Tahoma School District during the sessions.

It should be emphasized that the data from focus group 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 consultant's professional judgment, they warranted the board's attention.

The survey results are based on research related to superintendent leadership standards. The survey addressed both district performance and desired characteristics of the superintendent in relation to the following areas: Vision and Values; Teaching and Learning; Community Engagement; and Management.

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:

Students first – belief & support
Great staff – caring & committed
Supportive families and community
Positive culture and climate – relationships
Sense of family and belonging
Focus on Teaching & Learning/Innovative/Integrated Technology
Options available for students
Facilities are well maintained
Great return on investment
Partnerships

Most all feedback began by acknowledging the high quality/caring staff at the school level. There was pervasive recognition that all staff put students first, do whatever it takes to help each child reach their potential, and truly believe that these are “all our kids.” There was great pride expressed in how staff at the school level are supporting students.

Many shared the belief that students were the highest priority of the district and should remain so going forward. Knowing each child's name, strengths and needs and making decisions in what is best for students is a high priority.

In describing the Tahoma School District, people frequently described the community as supportive and actively engaged in schools and the district. There is long-standing District and Community Pride. It was mentioned multiple times that the community supports the schools and the schools support the community. The strengths of partnerships were a common theme across multiple stakeholder groups. There is a strong sense of family and belonging.

There was a strong sense of the District being fiscally responsible and that when cost per student is measured against student outcomes, the District has an excellent return on investment (ROI).

Most expressed a strong sense of optimism regarding the future of the district.

The following five themes emerged from the survey as strengths of the district: Technology is integrated into the classrooms; Facilities are well maintained; the district employs effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools; district schools are safe; and, the district has high performance standards for all students.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

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

- Impact of sex abuse case - reduced trust**
- Growth management - school size, financial challenges**
- Central office leadership turnover - less experience**
- Hiring practices - process, priorities**
- Uniting Community with Divergent Views - Political, Urban vs. Rural**
- Decision Making - Lack of Transparency**
- Pupil Safety - Behavior, Drugs, Bullying, and Mental Health**
- Pupil Supports K-12 - Social/Emotional, Early Intervention, Struggling Students**

While there remains a strong sense that the Tahoma Schools provide a high quality education, a recent sex abuse investigation has fueled the perception that some in building and central office leadership positions have not been responsive to concerns brought forward by students, staff and/or parents. There is a call for accountability and healing that comes from assurance that student, parent and staff input will be taken seriously to assure future student safety.

The Tahoma School District is unique, having regained pupil enrollment that matches pre-pandemic numbers. While neighboring districts are closing buildings and facing financial

shortfalls, Tahoma is currently on solid financial footing. School buildings at all levels are large with the high school among the largest in the state. Large schools are financially efficient and provide opportunities for a wide variety of innovative programs. Large school populations also make it challenging to meet the needs of every student. With the community continuing to grow, there are difficult decisions on the horizon balancing financial efficiency and facility planning with the best interest of every student. Concerns were expressed that the arts and innovative programs may not survive future financial “belt tightening.”

Many of the central office program directors have assumed their roles in recent years replacing predecessors with long careers in the district. That level of turnover results in a loss of institutional knowledge and history. It also provides an opportunity for fresh perspectives and innovation. There is a need, and an opportunity, for the next superintendent to mentor and build the central office leadership team into a cohesive and effective team serving the staff, students and school community. Accountability at all levels of the organization is highly valued.

Tahoma’s reputation for excellence attracts many applicants for teaching and other positions. That reputation provides an opportunity to hire highly qualified staff at all levels. Some recent appointments and central office restructuring have been perceived as unilateral, causing some to question how hiring, promotions and appointment decisions are made. Stakeholders want to be assured that hiring practices and promotions are based on candidate qualifications and not subject to personal relationships, gender or other bias.

The community served by the district is growing and changing, becoming more diverse ethnically, economically and politically. The district service area is both rural and suburban. Some concerns are expressed that students in rural areas have less access and opportunities to some recreation activities than their urban counterparts. While diversity can be a strength, it can also reveal division and mistrust.

In recent years there have been school board director resignations and superintendents that have not finished their terms of employment. Departures of key leaders without explanation contributes to rumor and speculation. Personnel decisions often cannot be shared publicly. Respondents urge that, whenever possible, decision making be collaborative, data-driven, transparent, and thoroughly communicated with opportunities for stakeholder input.

Elementary level programs for social and emotional development are generally appreciated. Like most school districts, Tahoma secondary schools experience issues of student health and safety including drug use, bullying, mental health, and student behavior challenges. Some parents see ubiquitous use of technology and “screen time” as residual from the pandemic and are concerned about that impact on students’ mental health. Parents and students alike report these safety concerns and express a need to acknowledge and address these issues productively.

Parents appreciate district efforts to provide early interventions for a variety of learning challenges to assure that all students are successful. Some concerns are expressed that those

supports may not be as accessible throughout secondary levels. Some students also express difficulty in managing academic expectations of the high school program. While the 8 period day provides students with more options for course selection, it also can result in what they perceive as a challenging workload. The “Power Hour” is helpful in addressing some of these issues.

These challenges are in no way insurmountable. With a strong Board setting the direction; strong leadership throughout the organization; clarity, coherence, and accountability across the system; and continued care and focus on what matters most – the students, the Tahoma School District will be well positioned to thrive.

Desired Characteristics

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

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

Superintendent

Tahoma School District

Foster a positive culture of mutual trust and respect for all

Visible/accessible

Committed to students, staff, families & community

Engaged with the community

Provides clear and transparent communication – good listener

Ability to bring people together

Instructional leader with students first mindset

Leads by example with integrity

Central office leadership experience – mid to large district

Fearless leader - humble

Maintains a culture of high expectations for all - holds everyone accountable

Creative problem solver - strategic thinker

Ability to mentor leadership team

Experience managing growth

Financial management, Bond/Levy experience

We would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings, individual interviews, or participated in the survey as well as staff who did an exceptional job with all the logistics. We are grateful.

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,

Kris & John

Dr. Kristine McDuffy
Mr. John Dekker
HYA Associates

ATTACHMENT: [Survey for Superintendent Search - Report](#)

