Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Glenn “Max” McGee, Ph. D. and Dallas Strawn, Ph.D. of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in December 2019 for the Aspen School District (ASD). The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in individual interviews, focus groups, and both an on-site and virtual community forum as well as from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. Interviews, focus group meetings and surveys were structured to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews, focus groups and forums elicited information about strengths and challenges the District faces in the coming years. The online survey data was found to be consistent with the focus group interview data. It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor necessarily represents the majority opinion of each respective group.

Process

The structure of the individual meetings, forums, and focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other’s comments. Additionally, the online survey was available for stakeholders for fifteen days and provided an additional avenue for stakeholders to participate in the process of determining the next superintendent’s qualifications and characteristics. Those involved in providing input into the selection of the superintendent of schools were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What are the strengths of this district that the next superintendent will need to retain?
2. What are the challenges this District currently faces, what issues will the new leader face in the next three to five years, and what are the most immediate priorities?
3. What are the personal and professional characteristics you and your community expect a superintendent to possess?
Common Themes

In responding to each prompt, participants shared colorful personal narratives as well as big picture overarching themes. Some of the stories referenced positive experiences with former leaders while others expressed various levels of frustration, fear, and anger. All, however, were hopeful that the process would result in identifying a new leader who will immerse oneself in the lives of the school and community as a regular, positive presence, who values teachers and learning, listens to parents, appreciates the culture of the schools and community, and will be an outstanding communicator.

The three top overarching themes that emerged were communication, education, and trust. Stakeholders across the board advocated for more frequent communication, clearer communication, and communication through a variety of media. A leader who honestly shares district challenges as well as regularly celebrates successes and achievements will be welcome. The leader will need to be an inspiring, authentic speaker who treats issues seriously but does not take himself or herself too seriously. Clear writing – especially avoiding “eduspeak” and jargon – is needed for the leader to connect with the community. Finally, listening is a critical component of communication. In nearly every interview and focus group, consultants heard they wanted a good listener and ideally one who, in the words of Steven Covey, “seeks first to understand and then be understood.”

Building upon the high quality of programs to improve the educational experiences of all students is another imperative. Students, staff, parents, and board members all shared some stories of graduates not being as prepared as they should be for the challenges of college. That said, we heard from parents about the need for more advanced learning opportunities but we heard from teachers that the advanced mathematics tracks were not meeting the real needs of the whole child. Teachers were eager to have more meaningful professional development on topics related to their jobs, i.e. teaching and learning, and recognized the importance of balancing autonomy with an aligned curriculum. Along with this one cannot underestimate the importance of being a role model of a learner. In our first focus group a student said, “I hope the next leader is curious.” This comment was later echoed by others who realized that leaders must “walk the talk” of lifelong learning.

The third overarching theme is intertwined with the other two. Restoring a culture of mutual trust, sincere respect, and authentic compassion will require a commitment to communication and collaboration. It will require an individual who is approachable, self-confident, and humble. The leader must be immersed in the schools and community and come to Aspen with a love of the outdoors and mountain culture. Restoring trust is not only about being trustworthy but also about being trusting. The leader must attend to the SAC and DAC, must engage student and staff voice, and must communicate regularly with
all Board members. A key component of trust is connection. The leader will need to reconnect the district office to the schools, to connect the schools – from the Cottage to the high school – to one another, and the generous donors of time, treasure, and talent to the difference their contributions make. “We need a leader who is a unifier,” was a frequent comment and speaks to the need to cultivate and connect all stakeholders.

**Frequently Noted**

In pursuing the three prompts, several participants offered comments and made remarks that were similar. These are listed below:

**Strengths of the District:**

- Strong, engaged, supportive community willing to share their time and money
- Campus configuration and district size provides for PK-12 collaboration
- High achieving school district
- Kids are ready and eager to learn; our students are great
- Strong financial support from Education Foundation
- School/Community partnerships
- Outdoor Education programs at all levels
- Excellent, passionate teaching staff
- Curricular offerings are flexible in order to meet the needs of students

**Challenges and Issues Facing the District (immediate priorities are italicized):**

- The quality, frequency, and transparency of both internal and external communication
- Need for a clear, compelling, shared vision and direction
- Rebuild/restore the ASD culture of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect
- Value the work of the teachers and potential of the students, and engage their voices in important decisions
- Assure consistent discipline policy and enforcement
- A community that is not only supportive, positive, and intelligent but also one that demands excellence and insists on personal attention of its school leaders
- Better connect the district office personnel and their work to the needs of schools and community
- Continued development of a Strategic Plan in developing an authentic, aspirational mission and actionable strategies, not just a list of tactics
- Ensure equity in all areas for all children
- Yet untapped community resources and partnerships
- Financial transparency throughout district
- Curricular alignment to address Colorado and 21st Century Standards
- Teacher retention, recruitment and housing needs
Desired Professional and Personal Characteristics of the new superintendent:

- Background of demonstrated success and experience including successful classroom teaching and building and system leadership
- Embraces opportunities to collaborate and engage stakeholders in addressing challenging issues
- Can make a decision and follow through while creating buy-in and support through collaboration
- A commitment to academic excellence and success for each and every student
- Curious, courageous and able to prioritize difficult decisions to promote positive student growth
- Trustworthy and trusting, demonstrating integrity, honesty, humility, compassion
- A clear communicator and thoughtful listener
- Experienced and comfortable in public speaking and in communicating through various media
- Evidence of engaging and authentically valuing teacher and student voice
- Ability to sustain and strengthen current relationships with community partners as well as identify and engage other community resources and partnerships
- A transparent, visible, personable approachable leader who is frequently in schools, comfortable and supportive in visiting classrooms, and regularly attends school events
- Embraces the Aspen environment, understands and appreciates the uniqueness of the Aspen lifestyle and fits into the community
- Thorough understanding of the value of Aspen’s entire PK-12 array of programs and services, especially those that provide students with opportunities beyond those found in the classroom
- Promotes meaningful professional growth opportunities for both classified and certificated employees
- Shows the desire for and capacity to be a learner
- Has a background and proven experience in improving academic achievement
- Can define, use, and share multiple measures for determining the success of ASD’s schools
- Diplomatic and willing to own his or her mistakes
- Leadership in educational curricular change using high IQ and EQ abilities

Online Survey

As for the quantitative data, we were surprised we only received 88 completed surveys including just 15 from parents and 1 from a student. Almost half of the respondents (41) were certified staff/faculty and 14 were administrators and 15 were classified staff. Two community members participated.
Regarding the State of the District, the following statements were perceived to be district strengths with Teaching and Learning (TL) being the strongest overarching area:

- The district employs effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools. (M)
- Technology is integrated into the classroom. (TL)
- Students are on track to be college and career ready. (TL)
- The district has high standards for student performance. (VV)
- District schools are safe. (TL)

The top-rated leadership profile characteristics constituents desire in a new superintendent are:

- Foster a positive, professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators (CE)
- Recruit, employ, and retain effective personnel throughout the District and its schools (M)
- Provide transparent communication (CE)
- Be visible throughout the District and actively engaged in community life (CE)
- Provide a clear, compelling vision for the future (VV)

These data indicate that community engagement (CE) is a key priority.

Despite the limited responses, survey results parallel what consultants heard. Basically, stakeholders are looking for a leader who:

1. Fosters a positive, professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators
2. Is visible throughout the district and actively engaged in community life
3. Will provide a clear and compelling vision for the future
4. Recruits and retains effective personnel
5. Provides transparent communication

One of the positive highlights of the survey was the rating of the quality of the schools. Of the 86 individuals answering this question, 74 (86%) rated the schools good or excellent, 11 (13%) average and just one poor. Most districts consider a 66% rating good, and very few exceed 85%.
Also, we did some additional analysis of the ratio of positive (agree/strongly agree) to negative (disagree/strongly disagree) responses for each question. In other words, we eliminated the “neither agree or disagree” responses. Generally, we consider it a strength for any ratio of 2:1 or more and a red flag for a ratio of less than 1:1. Any ratio higher than 4:1, i.e. 80% positive to 20% negative, is especially impressive.

The only red flag was “The District engages with diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic groups.” This was a 0.4 ratio (17 positive to 39 negative). Also, the ratio for the questions regarding “fiscal responsibility” and the district providing “a clear, compelling vision” as well as “transparent communication” were approximately 1:1 (i.e. 1.0). These areas merit attention.

These statements all had ratios greater than 4:1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employs effective faculty and staff</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High standards for student performance</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students on track for career and college</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology integrated into the classroom</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District heading in right direction</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging the community as partners</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools are safe</td>
<td>5.4</td>
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**Summary**

Having sought the input from students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and Aspen Community School stakeholders via focus groups, interviews, community forums (on site and virtual) and surveys, the Aspen School District Board of Education has a clear picture of the desired characteristics and qualifications for the district’s next **Superintendent of Schools**. The Board seeks a leader who will work collaboratively with the Board, school and district leadership team and advisory councils, and community partners in maintaining Aspen School District’s (ASD) excellent programs and services and further strengthening and improving the high quality of education.
The new superintendent will lead the development and implementation of a compelling, aspirational vision and execution and evaluation of ASD’s strategic plan. Guided by an authentic commitment to the students and their families; faculty and staff; and community partners and the Aspen environment, the new superintendent must be able to demonstrate evidence of being an excellent two-way communicator, successful collaborator, a regular and visible presence, and a role model for thoughtful self-evaluation and growth. A proven commitment to academic excellence and demonstrated leadership ability are essential. Additionally, the selected individual should thrive in the outdoors and immerses oneself in, and contribute to, the culture of the greater Aspen community. This leader will demonstrate a combination of excellent leadership skills and emotional intelligence traits and be a learner of the district and community’s unique culture.

The superintendent candidate must have documented evidence of belief and experience in promoting and demonstrating the following Aspen School District’s Executive Level dispositions: growth oriented, collaborative, innovative, analytical, ethical, perseverant, system focused, reflective, and equity minded.

HYA is committed to recruiting and screening candidates who fit the leadership profile and will provide ASD the high quality of stable and successful leadership needed to sustain all that is special about the schools, programs, and personnel and provide the vision, hard work, and collaboration that will engage all stakeholders in moving the district on a trajectory from great to greater.

*The consultants thank all the participants who attended focus groups, personal interview meetings, forums, and/or completed the online survey. Also, we thank all of the Aspen School District staff members who assisted with our meetings and particularly Executive Assistant Angela Rittenhouse for her efforts in facilitating our time in the District.*