



LEADERSHIP PROFILE

Willingboro, New Jersey School District

HYA | HAZARD
YOUNG
ATTEA
ASSOCIATES

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in September 2019 for the new superintendent of the Willingboro, New Jersey school district. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group and the two methods of data gathering are listed below:

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	5	
Building level administrators	7	14
Central office administrators	9	
Faculty	3	71
Community*	25*	113
Support Staff	13	5
Parents	*	87
Students	*	5
Total	62	295

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report.

*Included

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.

Strengths of the District

Willingboro is a suburban community of Philadelphia with a deep sense of pride. The community embraces its neighborhood schools and desires a resurgence of the pride and reputation of its middle and high school. Athletics and athletic programs have been a source of that pride with Carl Lewis being one of its esteemed champions and name sake of the high school stadium. Although challenged in some cases by circumstances beyond individual control, Willingboro residents value education and the majority of parents and guardians actively contribute to and support education especially in their neighborhood elementary schools. The recent launch of Willingboro's preschool program is also a testimony to the community's and district's commitment to education.

Furthermore, the community and business partnerships, which allow for experiential learning and apprenticeships, also testify to the community's desire to provide educational opportunities to all students.

Despite its challenges, Willingboro has numerous foundational pillars on which to grow including perception of well-maintained and safe facilities, small group of committed middle level leadership, parent & guardian advocates, a number of involved faith-based institutions and overall desire to reestablish the district as the source of pride of the community.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

Regardless of the genesis, the result of Willingboro's challenges has been diminishing student and teacher retention. Although Willingboro has boasted of an increase in graduation rates, academic scores and achievement remain low, and therefore, contribute to a low morale and absenteeism of staff and lack of motivation within students. Additionally, inconsistencies in teacher and leadership evaluations, accountability, student discipline and district-wide communication contribute to a district culture of discouragement which will need to be addressed.

The changing demographics of the community which includes a new immigrant population, group homes and preponderance of foreclosures, test the district's ability to unify under the lack of a clearly defined vision, mission and plan.

Lastly, addressing the special interests of groups and individuals and moving toward a more inclusive, transparent, community-involved leadership and communication style will greatly benefit the district, community and most importantly the children.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the district. The search team will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Willingboro Board and district stakeholders to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and communities.

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and the Willingboro School District staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Mr. Kelvin Smith who organized the search team's time in the district.

Summary of Comments from Focus Group Meetings, Individual Interviews and Community Forum

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do stakeholders value regarding the schools? What strengths do they desire to retain and build upon?
- What are the issues this District currently faces, and, will face in the next three to five years?
- What personal and professional characteristics are expected in a new Superintendent?

Individual interviews were conducted in the same manner for eligible members of the Board of Education and for members of the cabinet/central office staff. The same format was utilized for the community meeting.

Group Name: Board of Education

September 3, 2019, 5 Participants

The Board of Education consist of nine members. Three members were identified as being conflicted and one was considered likely conflicted. An opportunity to schedule an individual interview was offered to the six potentially eligible members. Five non-conflicted members accepted the invitation and were interviewed on September 3, 2019. The following reflect the collective responses from the individual interviews.

Strengths:

- Transparency and involvement
- Open public communication
- Community wants to be part of the experience
- Alumni and alumni involvement
- Legacy and passion for the town as a community
- Schools are neighborhood schools
- Preschool program
- Athletics
- Number of quality staff who have a passion for the community and to raise the level of education school district

Concerns/Challenges/Issues:

- Community-education-what's to see test scores go up
- Some staff are complacent
- Need for accountability at all levels
- Need to stem/stop the exodus of students leaving the district for other educational options by making Willingboro a more viable option
- Culture of complacency
- Silos within the district
- Consistency in the application and implementation of the curriculum and educational programs.
- Financial challenges and priorities centered on needs vs wants.
- Can the system maintain itself?
- Negativity of community toward the schools.
- Staff retention.
- Impact students leaving the district on program options, extracurricular activities and test scores.
- Need for a vision and implementation plan with measurable accountability components.
- Need for expanded educational and extracurricular options to retain students.

Desired Characteristics:

- Highest level of integrity.
- Passionate about education, teaching and learning
- High level of energy focused on a student first philosophy.
- Proven success in motivating and holding staff accountable at all levels.
- Success in bringing stakeholders together to develop a vision, with implementation. plans and accountability measures for achievement.
- Fortitude and courage to stay focused and to move the agenda forward.
- A visible educational leader who becomes an integral part of the Willingboro community.
- Experience in working in a diverse complex community.
- Proven track record in closing achievement gaps and improving academic achievement.
- Ability to effectively communicate the vision and mission and garner support from both internal and external stakeholder groups.
- Clear communicator.
- Ability to change a culture of complacency.

Comments:

Board members interviewed were also requested on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest rate the effectiveness of the Board of Education in achieving educational goals for Willingboro and its children.

The average score was a seven. Most of the interviewees believe that the Board is focused on the children of the district. Concern was voiced, however, that this focus is sometimes lost due to what is considered personal expertise and/or personal interest. It is noted that the composition of the Board is changing and that this may have an impact on the dynamics of the Board going forward. Finally, with these changes, a considerable amount of institutional knowledge will be lost.

Group Name: Cabinet/Central Office Leadership Team

September 3, 4 & 5 2019; 9 Participants

Nine members of the Willingboro cabinet/central office leadership team were interviewed between September 3 and September 5, 2019. Interviewees included leadership representing business, finance, facilities, personnel, transportation, technology and the instructional team.

Strengths:

- Parental and community involvement.
- Customer service.
- Functionality of facilities.
- Reputation of athletic programs.
- Pride in past achievements in the school district.
- Core of staff who are committed to the mission and want to see improvement.
- Expectation of safe schools.
- Expectation for student success and achievement.
- Preschool program.
- Alternative program.
- Athletics.
- Sense of community/neighborhood schools.

Challenges/Concerns/Issues

- Need to look at every parent and student as customer.
- Chronic staff and student absence.
- Need for vision and implementation plan that will garner staff and community buy-in.
- Addressing the culture some students bring into the schools.

- Demographic changes in the community.
- Exodus of students from the district at both the middle school and high school levels.
- Retention of students.
- Staffing challenges.
- Staff retention.
- Student culture at the high school.
- Organizational structure designed to meet the vision and mission
- Test scores and student achievement.
- Housing issues within the community i.e. increase in foreclosures and group homes.
- Need for a structure that is consistent, fair, but with accountability that yields results
- Special interest groups - both internal and external.
- Need to move from nostalgia to realistic solutions to current needs based on today's conditions.
- Understanding and dealing with the culture.

Desired Characteristics:

- Servant leader.
- Leader by example.
- Courageous - have a backbone to do what is right regardless of the politics.
- Personable.
- Strong and clear communicator.
- Willing to bring the team to the table.
- Listen before making decisions.
- History of success.
- Be seen be visible and approachable.
- Goal oriented, but not with blinders.
- Someone willing to become vested in the community.
- Professional demeanor.
- Confidence builder.
- Hands-on.
- Hold people accountable.
- Demonstrate a level of integrity that will foster respect and trust.
- Transformative and transitional balance.
- Have a knowledge or be willing to gain an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the community and its schools.
- Ability to network and identify alternate resources to support instructional programs and support student services.
- Strong, fair and consistent.
- Respects and recognizes the skills of staff; lets staff do their job with parameters, but with accountability.
- Promotes and recognizes success.

- Develop a game plan and be willing to stick to it.
- Visionary.
- Ability to brand and change the perception.
- Strong acumen for great talent acquisition and retention.

Group Name: Non-Certificated Support Staff

September 5, 13 Participants

Strengths:

- Good school system allows property values to stay high.
- Qualified teachers
- Buildings are well maintained.
- Good education – Community as a whole values education
- Community Partnerships with school district – private track clubs.
- Business partnership: These partnerships offer students opportunity to have hands on experience.
- Athletics – strong programs at high school level

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Discipline. There is no consistent discipline within and across schools. At the high school level, compared to BCIT, Willingboro does not have consequences or enforced consequences for bad behavior. BCIT can ask a student to leave the school if they do not comply to rules and regulations. Willingboro must take all students.
- Willingboro gets the kids that can't make it in other schools ... they come back after October 15. Charter at middle school take huge amount of money away from budget.
- Competition: BCIT has more programs to offer for out of school career field.
- Community is changing. People from foster parents, diversity, people from Philly, illegal immigrants, 25 group homes.
- Holding people accountable. People must come to work and teach. We need to hold adults accountable. When teachers do not come to work kids pick up on it. Then, they don't want to come to do their "work."
- Consequence for not coming to work. And sometimes gets increase in pay or promotion.
- Establishing structure. Kids need structure.
- ABSENTEEISM: Both Adults and children
- Morale is challenging. People do not want to come to work.
- Transparency from administration.

- Communication in general.
- Uniformity and consistency between schools and across grades.
- Understaffed departments in maintenance and other departments. When someone leaves, they are not replaced.
- Defer maintenance updates. School building are tired. They need refreshing.

Desired Characteristics:

- Familiar with community – people, students.
- BE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY - Open to learn the community – be a part of the community.
- Visible:
 - Be seen in the community and see what really goes on in the community. Go to Kennedy Center at after school ... that's where the kids are. See what's going on with children in the community.
 - Be visible in the schools ... have the kids know who the superintendent is. Go to the basketball and football games. Attend games when kids are winning AND loosing!!!
 - Visible in the buildings. Visibility keeps people in check.
- Experience ... knowing what to do.
- Live in the district or near the district.
- Strong Character: Do what is right no matter what ... no side deals for special interests or with special interest groups.

Comments: The non-certificated support staff group was open and eager to share their thoughts and comments. This group, in particular, expressed their appreciation for the sharing information about the superintendent search process and the timeline. It was clear from their comments that information does not necessarily flow down through the organization and that at times, there seems to be a strategic effort to hide information that could be helpful to employees. They believe that sharing information that is pertinent to the school community and information that will assist getting jobs done, will avoid the need for information moving through alternative means such as the grapevine.

Group Name: Principals & Assistant Principals

September 5, 2019; 7 Participants

Strengths:

- Parents appreciate the consistency that has occurred over time in Hawthorne.
- Value education: Regardless of background the community values education.
- Value low tax rate on property taxes - especially the seniors. Unfortunately, this does not allow the district to offer the best for kids.
- People want it back the way it used to be – school used to be the anchor.

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Time: Need time to allow programs to incubate the programs that have been initiated.
- Group needs to feel elite – so go to other schools. Some community members believe that new schools – especially charters are better just because they are new.
- A lower socio-academic come to the school – not the anchor. Because Willingboro must take all children, the district does not get to pick and chose the children that come into the schools. BCIT and charters can be more selective.
- Trying to build something that is relevant to today's children but is challenging because things keep changing.
- Lack of consistency.
- Lack of long-term strategic plan.
- Lack of Professional Learning Communities: Need to build PLCs that will assist with the consistency challenge across schools.
- Reputation of district. Need to address/change the negative perception. The competition has a better reputation – but it's just perception.
- Culture – teachers union is part of issue but not entirely.
 - Hiring practices were poor ... need to raise the hiring bar/standards.
 - People were hired who would never be hired anywhere else.
 - People are allowed to hide in a chaotic environment.
- Ability to learn the district and community's history and then pull the pieces apart to look at the big picture.
- COMMUNICATION: KEEPING THE ADMINISTRATORS – PRINCIPALS IN THE LOOP.
- LACK OF VISIBILITY: VISIT THE BUILDINGS.

Desired Characteristics:

- Someone who places a priority on changing perception as a long-term goal.
- Someone who can establish consistency and stick to the long-term goal of consistency.
- INNOVATOR – something that doesn't exist.
- Entrepreneurial spirit.
- Pragmatic and progressive approach.
- Someone who is willing to Invest in the schools.
- Visionary with pragmatism – maximize budget.
- Courage to deal with pressure:
 - Not yield to whim of Board
 - Not yield to dinosaurs in community
 - Not yield to nepotism.
- Stubbornly consistent. Organize within a vision – step by step.
- Someone who is visible.
- Someone who can groom leadership from within.

Comments: Similar to the non-certificated support staff, the principal and assistant principal group were eager and excited to share thoughts and comments. Many in the group have found success in their schools due to what they believe was their own self initiative. They admitted that the district suffers from inconsistency depending upon the quality of leadership and faculty. They also believe that lack of communication contributes heavily to the inconsistency in that schools are left to their own decision making and/or lack of decision making and ability to execute. There is clearly innovative ideas being implemented in some schools and not in others. The high school is in need of updates and the group believes that both faculty and students are discouraged due to the condition of the school and lack of resources to address facilities and grounds updates. Likewise, the group believes that, in part, the decrease in enrollment is due to the physical condition of the buildings. The decrease in enrollment in the high school is also due to the stripping of programs over the years. The competition offers more relevant programs in modern attractive buildings. It's a "no brainer" as to why the high school has lost enrollment to BCIT. However, the group did offer solutions as simple as implementing a ROTC program, coding or other experiential programs to the high school offerings.

Group Name: Community Public Forum

September 5, 2019; 25 Participants

Strengths:

- NJ Recognized Asst. Principal, Principal and Teacher of the Year
- Music and Arts Program in County – historically
- Community Neighborhood Schools
- Parents care about their children and their children’s education
- Willingboro young adults want to come back to raise their children.
- Strong faith-based institutions.
- Entrepreneurs that are open to partner with district and students to offer opportunities
- PTA – strength in numbers – strong network

Challenges/Concerns/Issues

- Willingboro needs teachers that want to teach and are willing to do what it takes to educate the children – no excuses.
- Successor Superintendent will need assistance cannot do it himself
- Support teachers – they are disenchanted. Teachers do not feel supported and taken for granted.
- Bring back vocational programs – we have nothing for kids to pursue except athletics.
- Lack of Competitive Pay: Substitutes can be paid more in communities around the community – they go there. Best teachers are going where they can be paid more.
- Teacher retention: We lose great people. They move on quickly. Need to retain teachers.
 - Figure out what motivates teachers to stay. Offer tax break?
 - Kids sit in classrooms with no teachers. This is criminal.
- Lack of visibility: District is small --- need to visit all schools.
- Student retention: Students are leaving ... need to be more competitive. Funds go with students.
- Need to offer different opportunities across the spectrum – tech to honors to compete and retain children.
- Classroom size: Classroom size too big for some teachers.
- Discipline.
- This is a military town—need ROTC program.

Desired Characteristics:

- Strong superintendent: previous superintendent didn't want help.
- Someone not heavy on administration – money back in the classrooms.
- Visible: Someone in the community – someone who is visible.
- Strong leadership.
- Someone who is vested in the community.
 - Become part of the community.
 - Understand, work and embrace the community
 - Understand and relate to the Willingboro children
- Listener – especially to teachers.
- People skills
- Visionary – have **strategic plan** and know how to implement the plan.
 - Determine where we are and where the district needs to go with input from community and district staff
- Problem solver.
- Experienced: Ability to lead and manage a building.
- Follow-through: Receives accurate feedback, reflects on it, then adjusts accordingly.
- COMMUNICATION: Communicate where we are going and communicate progress.
- High expectations.
- Audit the system – not just set-up system. Assess the system.
- Teacher advocate: Fight for teachers to get better pay so that they stay in the district.
- Think outside the box – to get to where our goals.
- Political partnerships – gel with township to work out incentives for employees.
 - Work together with town governance to implement solutions to address district issues such as teacher retention.
- Accountable: The ability to hold people accountable.

Comments: The public forum was considered a success in that despite the number of attendees the conversation was spirited and on point. Attendees included parents, students, and concerned citizens. There is an overwhelming pride in the community, and therefore, the residents in attendance radiated a desire to see the district turned around. They admitted that the turn-around will take time, however, they believe there are some immediate solutions that would address the HUGE issue of teacher and student retention. One of these immediate remedies would be to offer programs in the high school such as ROTC and coding. Another immediate solution was to work with the Willingboro governance to offer incentives to new teachers to stay. A suggestion offered was a tax break. The majority of attendees also desired for the next superintendent to be VISIBLE in the community. Understanding and embracing the community, in addition to being seen, are high priorities for community members. A superintendent who actively takes part in the students' lives both in and out of the school building is viewed as a committed, devoted, and effective leader. The community

realizes that there are many challenges, however, they are willing to support the district leader if leadership develops and communicates a plan with assessments/measurements to all stakeholders. After visibility, communication and follow-through are essential toward turning the district around and combating the negative perception.

Group Name: Teachers

September 4, 2019; 3 Participants

Strengths:

- Community-based schools
- Athletics
- Well-maintained facilities
- Elementary schools are family oriented
- Strong staff despite culture
- Preschool program

Challenges/Concerns/Issues:

- Constant change before we know whether a program or intervention is successful
- Consistent implementation of discipline policies with consequences
- Consistency in implementation of policies and practices in between schools
- Need to get administrators on the same page
- Grade level configuration and its impact on parents, students and staffing
- Need to listen to all stakeholders but to act with one voice
- Listening consider stakeholder input before making decisions or change course

Desired Characteristics:

- Instructional leader
- Have a vision, a plan and stick with the plan
- Hold administrators accountable
- Communicate effectively with staff, parents and the community
- Long-term plan with goals
- Reestablish trust between parents, staff and the community
- Delegate with accountability
- Understand demographics of community
- Clearly define and make sure everyone understands goals and is on board
- Consistent implementation of the evaluation process across the district
- Be visible and lead

Comments:

Although there were only three teachers present for the focus group the session provided an opportunity for an open and frank discussion with representation from the elementary middle and secondary schools. The input session took place on September 4, 2019. It is noted that the meeting took place late in the afternoon during the preparations for the opening of school the following day.