

Garfield RE-2 Leadership Profile Report

With the advent of Covid-19, HYA was unable to complete face-to-face interviews and focus groups. However, we have been able to interview three board members and examine documents related to the district's current financial condition. Also, we have read the Interim Director of Finance's weekly reports and had two conversations with him.



From this information we have developed this profile which summarizes perceptions of the district's strengths and challenges as well as the ideal qualifications and characteristics of the permanent Director of Finance.

Strengths

People are definitely the strength of school system! This includes a dedicated professional staff, supportive community, and the students. The interim (and now permanent) superintendent and building principals were commended as were several teachers. Board members also cited the region itself. The small town sense of community, safety for kids, the outdoor activities, and ready accessibility from I-70m to other scenic, outdoor locations and experiences in the region.

The education students receive provides a strong foundation for later success and graduation rates have been trending upwards. Student achievement is getting better but can still improve.

Immediate Challenges

"Address the audit findings and get our books back in order" was the clarion call of all who were interviewed. Participants noted how essential this was to restore the community's trust in and support of the district.

Lack of leadership from the former superintendent and the shortcomings of the finance department. It is of paramount importance to hire a new Superintendent and Director of Finance of the highest quality as both positions will play a critical role in the ongoing success of the district. These roles will need to be collaborative and cohesive. Getting the books in order and triaging the problems is immediate but there are also some longer lasting effects of the messes created by the former superintendent that have financial ramifications.

We heard about the need to look at systems. Board members are concerned about systemic approaches to facility upgrades, financial transparency, and for upgrading education to include experiential learning and innovative practices. To this end, it may be necessary to add staff to support the business function.

Looking in the longer term, the perception is that the district needs to do better serving our most needy low income students and ELL population. This is especially challenging given our lack of financial resources, and it is now clear that state funding is going to be worse. Also, the competition from charter schools may be a threat to the district by taking good students and reducing the enrollment and some state funding support.

While teachers are loyal to the district, it is a challenge to recruit and retain the very best because of our financial situation and the future of state funding. A compounding problem is that other districts can outspend us for staff salaries and for programs. That said, culture matters at least as much if not more than money. The district needs to step back and understand why teachers leave. Step 1 is to listen to teachers in order to deeply understand the issues. Some think teachers leave because they have been recruited from Midwest and then leave to go back. Board members noted the need to get serious about recruiting the very best teachers and retaining them for 10 to 20 years by making the community more attractive to early career teachers, providing meaningful incentives and considering more innovative programming for students in trades, for STEM. There is a sense of need for a Career Tech Ed (CTE) Center and Family Resource Center.

Characteristics and Qualifications

When interviewed, Board and staff shared a long list of both professional and personal characteristics and qualifications, and there were many commonalities. Here is their list.

Professional

Strong budgeting and accounting background with experience in the public forum (hopefully with a strong background in school finance).

Has a clear understanding of and appreciation for the Board's role in providing financial oversight.

Ability to direct a team and manage the day to day operations and well as long term planning and goal setting.

Someone who understands the idea that if we "mind the pennies the dollars will take care of themselves.

A mindset focused on attention to detail and proven transparency.

The candidate MUST understand that the monies we have are "public funds" and that I believe that we owe the public an extremely transparent accounting of all funds we are entrusted to manage.

Strong leadership, team contributor, and skilled manager.

We need to have someone with school experience and is well versed in it.

Someone with strong understanding of CO finance – it is a beast.

Will be able to identify, recruit, and retain outstanding individuals to support the business operations.

Personal

Trustworthy; an individual of the highest integrity.

Someone who is comfortable with and eager to directly engage with the Board for long term visionary planning.

Energetic with the desire to keep learning.

A good fit into our community culture including embracing the outdoors.

Is willing to say no.

Relates well to people and visibly enjoys spends time in schools with staff to understand the wholeness our our enterprise.

Displays both common sense and professional competence.

Visionary who is beyond just a really good accountant.

Conclusion

This Leadership Profile and the leadership criteria in it have been used to recruit and screen candidates. We trust that the Board will find this document a valuable reference when interviewing and selecting the Director of Finance.