



# Bellflower Unified School District

## Superintendent Search LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT September 15, 2022

### Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) Valerie Pitts and Micah Ali in August 2022 for the new superintendent of the Bellflower Unified School District. The data contained herein were obtained from the input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups via Zoom or in-person and in either individual interviews or focus group/listening sessions. In addition, we tallied the results of the online surveys completed by students and stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather information to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected feedback regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges it will face in the coming years.

### Participation

The total number of participants in focus groups was approximately 320. The participants included K-12 teachers, parents, community members, citizen advisory groups, district advisory groups, district office management, principals, cabinet, district office staff, classified and certificated union leadership, maintenance and tech support staff, board members, and student leadership groups. The online survey may also represent other groups.

Some family members participated as community members in focus groups – similarly, some members of groups contributed as both teachers and parents.

As a reminder, the data from focus groups are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily represent the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if they warrant the Board's attention in the consultants' judgment.

## Summary of Stakeholder Input

### Introduction

The focus group sessions were conducted between August 18 and September 1, 2022. Fifteen sessions were conducted, predominantly remotely and in English and Spanish. Board members, cabinet leaders, and Personnel Commission members were interviewed. The online stakeholder survey timeline was August 15 - September 1, 2022. Participation was voluntary. All discussions were respectful, insightful, and helpful. The HYA associates conducting the focus groups and interviews would like to thank the participants for giving freely of their time and for the depth of the discussions regarding the Bellflower Unified School district during the listening sessions.

Qualitative: We talked with more than 320 stakeholders in 15 interviews, focus groups, small groups, and individual interviews, all highly interactive.

Quantitative: 306 respondents to the online survey. Of these, 722 responded to the English survey and 18 to the Spanish survey (21 respondents checked two categories).

By group, the survey tally was:

- 157 parents
- 72 teachers and certificated staff members
- 23 support staff
- 10 administrators
- 4 students
- 32 taxpayers without children currently in school
- 8 teachers who are also parents

Respondents made several individual written comments.

***The survey report is attached to this Leadership Profile Report.***

Diversity was a word often shared during stakeholder focus groups. Many saw *diversity* in the District as a significant strength, some saw the associated challenges, and others commented on how it is both a strength and a challenge. Diversity means many things to the community of

Bellflower School District. It was used in racial, ethnic, religious, geographic, and socio-economic terms. Occasionally, the term referred to differences in political perspectives, community interests, neighborhoods, and size/populations, including variations between school communities, schools, and program alternatives. Some referred to diversity among the academic needs of students. Others focused the term on staff demographics. Some cited the term referring to DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

While "diversity" may have been a frequent term used during the focus meetings, the implications were broad. While cited often, it was about many of the themes listed below. This report does not use diversity as a separate concept or theme. Many of the topic areas listed below incorporate diversity.

### Strengths of the District

While hundreds of comments were made regarding the strengths of the District, the following significant themes often surfaced across multiple stakeholder groups.

#### **Size of the District and diversity of the school communities**

Stakeholders valued the diversity and distinct character of each community comprising BUSD while finding unity with a clear and collective commitment to supporting all students and families, e.g., parent and family support within the three communities. Staff and community praised school programs and individual school goals that served the diverse needs of students. Stakeholders value the mission of the District and believe a shared commitment is crucial to meeting the varied needs of students. They see the strategic plan and LCAP as critical elements for celebrating the multifaceted diversity across the District. Some stakeholders shared that the District has made strides in creating high expectations for all children and wants to ensure students are supported in achieving their potential. The development and implementation of the dual immersion programs were seen as a strength.

#### **Strong and Dedicated Teaching Staff**

Most focus groups commended the teaching staff's high caliber, commitment, and longevity. Teachers and paraprofessionals are caring, responsive, and skilled at their jobs. Many are active members of their communities – students value seeing them outside the classroom. Specifically, concerning teachers, students and their families felt teachers were generous with their time and dedication to student learning. Staff appreciated the wisdom and skills of experienced teachers with significant longevity in the District. Teachers and classified staff are active, willing participants in advisory groups at the site and district levels.

#### **Supportive Community and Local Engagement**

Respondents were complimentary of the communities that make up BUSD. They felt the communities generally supported the school district and wished to grow that support. Some indicated that local engagement was strong and that community members and parents were loyal and dedicated to the community – active support at the campus level. The BUSD is part of

the overall community, and people consider the District a partner with community priorities and issues as they arise. Multiple viewpoints from the school neighborhoods were also considered a strength. Families respect the schools and staff. The staff and community are committed to seeing students succeed. There is a feeling of cultural belonging around being part of the District and a desire to grow and strengthen that culture of belonging.

### **Fiscally Solvent**

The fact that the District carries a large reserve is seen as a *strength (this asset is also one of the most frequently mentioned issues and challenges (see below).*

## **Challenges and Issues Facing the District**

### **COVID-Recovery and Support for Students and Staff**

A consistent challenge identified by stakeholders is the need to support students and staff as the District continues its work to recover from the COVID pandemic. While some individuals prioritized academics and stated that attention should be focused on helping students recover from learning loss, others gave greater weight to the need for mental health and social-emotional support for both students and staff. Community, families, students, and staff shared awareness of the tremendous pressure on staff due to the remediation and attention to learning gaps, as well as continuing to manage health protocols and attendance issues. They frequently mentioned compassion fatigue and workload increases for school-level staff as challenges. Several people shared that staff burnout and turnover have increased over the past year. Some mentioned the need to hire additional staff to lower the student-to-staff ratio and combat staff fatigue and attrition. Stakeholders were sympathetic to the reality that COVID-recovery will be ongoing and require significant leadership attention moving forward.

### **Student Achievement**

Some stakeholders desired more accountability for student academic achievement. There was a consistent request from these stakeholders for more data and communication regarding student academic performance and growth. Graduation rates were improving prior to Covid, but some report that other data points concerning how well students are doing academically in grades K-12 are less often shared. Some community members felt families did not move into the District due to low achievement rates, program offerings, and curriculum. There was an expressed need for more training, professional development, and new staff support.

### **Trust, Culture, and Communication**

Stakeholders mentioned a lack of trust, culture of belonging, and unity, as well as poor communication contributing to low morale among staff and parents in the District. Those with deep roots in the District and community remember times of collegiality and camaraderie and a sense that everyone was rowing in the same direction. There is concern regarding transparency around decision-making at the board and district levels. There were few opportunities for input, a lack of meaningful and timely communication from the District, low responsiveness, and general confusion about how to get questions answered. Participants seemed eager to give more input

and appreciated that which they had now but felt there was little follow-through with what happened with the input. The culture of belonging that longtime staff remembers from over a decade ago has decayed.

### **Financial Management & Planning**

Sufficient funding to support our schools is an age-old problem. Looming for BUSD, as in other CA districts, is a declining student enrollment trend that reduces per pupil revenue. Compounding a reduction in financial resources is an expiration of supplemental funding from the federal government to help districts address COVID-related costs. Current district leaders confirmed that resources have been managed responsibly and will help prevent some short-term reductions. However, they also acknowledged that planning for lost revenue and utilizing district reserves will be a necessary initiative for the next superintendent and school board to address.

Perhaps the most frequently mentioned challenge was the ongoing issues related to budgeting and spending. Participants mentioned a lack of communication, rationale, and justification for the overall annual spending plan and carryover. For instance, allocations and programs were not implemented as stated in the LCAP priorities and goals. Many focus group participants stated that "transparency" around the budget was an issue.

Many stakeholders also questioned the level of reserves in the budget carried by the District. The percentage is well above the state's requirement. Although there is a need to plan for declining enrollment, many felt the dollars could be spent on needed resources – salary increases (salaries are not competitive for the area), program enhancements, technology, etc. A repeated phrase was "*spend this year's funding on this year's students.*" Some felt the structure, roles, and the number of district office administrators and central office staff could be adjusted. Despite a need to plan for funding reductions, many stakeholders indicated a need for additional spending for more staffing, expanded programming, and other identified needs.

Several people mentioned that BUSD's current facilities improvement bond did not include needed work at all of the schools and that this creates inequity for students, staff, and families. This investment in facilities is essential in securing building safety for students and staff, connections for students, and ensuring fairness and equitable investment in learning environments across BUSD's neighborhoods and schools.

Many parents and staff expressed grave concerns regarding the structure of *special education* funding, decisions, legal directions, and lack of resources to recruit and retain highly qualified Special Education staff. Many positions were unfilled – both certificated and classified. A significant need is special education experience in leadership at the district level.

### **Balancing Innovation and System Capacity**

While there is a sense of pride in the District's development of program initiatives such as dual immersion, a challenge shared by teachers and principals is for consistency of new programs

and curriculum initiatives/changes determined by the District. Leadership for curriculum and instructional practices supported by research and improvements in student achievement is desired. It was shared that sometimes directions planned for via district advisories (LCAP) were not implemented or exceeded the capacity school staff possess in the context of existing program responsibilities. Participants mentioned a lack of accountability for program recommendations – for example, combination classes. There is support for changes that will improve outcomes for all students. School-level staff desire consistent opportunities to discuss the merits of proposed changes and ensure training and supports for practical implementation is made available. Many stakeholders mentioned a need for efficient and effective processes to support a high-performing educational system.

### Leadership Competencies: Desired Superintendent Characteristics, Skills, and Experiences

Focus group participants were asked to name the desired characteristics of the next Bellflower Unified School District Superintendent. The following summary of personal characteristics and attributes, skills, and experiences includes an analysis of input gathered during listening sessions and responses to open-ended items on the stakeholder survey. They are consistent with the formal stakeholder survey results appended to this report.

#### **Dedicated Advocate for Children and Excellence in Education**

BUSD is proud of its unique and rich diversity. As such, stakeholders expressed a desire for their next superintendent to have experience working in diverse communities and creating and implementing programs that meet students' varied academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs. They want the next superintendent to believe that all students can succeed. The superintendent is committed to a "students first" focus with longevity enough to know students and see them as they grow and matriculate through the K-12 system. As a dedicated advocate for children committed to excellence, the next superintendent should be a leader who:

- Champions the importance of equity throughout the school system; with high standards for all
- Understands how to diversify programs to serve more students
- Listens to and values the student, staff, and family voice in decision making
- Prioritizes the safety of and sense of security for students
- Builds partnerships with local businesses, community nonprofits, and governmental organizations to enhance opportunities for children;
- Builds a strong governance team with the Board
- Wants to make a long-term commitment to BUSD's success; is genuinely connected and vested in the community
- Has a proven track record for inspiring a culture of excellence, is innovative and visionary; *someone who promotes our good qualities and moves us forward*

### **Empathy and a Highly Effective Communicator; a Sincere Relationship Builder who regularly Engages Stakeholders**

Organizational trust is essential to accomplish meaningful strategic work, and the new superintendent will need to establish and nurture mutually respectful relationships with internal stakeholder groups and external partners. Consistent and transparent two-way communication will play a critical role in establishing these relationships. Sincere collaboration and stakeholder engagement will be necessary to sustain and expand the partnerships established in the BUSD community. Most importantly, the superintendent will need to listen with a desire to understand, demonstrate empathy, make decisions after gathering and considering input, and communicate effectively and with transparency regarding their rationale for their decisions. Participants in focus groups value a leader who is easily accessible and approachable, can meet and interact with students and families, has a strong community presence, and is down to earth. Additionally, the superintendent must be able to navigate the complexities among the three municipalities and be comfortable in varied socio-economic and cultural settings. As an effective communicator and relationship builder, constituents asked that the next superintendent be a leader who:

- Is highly accessible and approachable to people throughout the District
- Interacts with all employee groups by seeking broad-based input, engaging in two-way dialogue, and making decisions that balance the interests of all stakeholders impacted by those decisions
- Communicates regularly and transparently with the larger community to understand their perspectives and foster support for a high-quality school system
- Advocates for the needs of BUSD at the regional, state, and federal levels in order to secure the necessary resources for student success
- Is a servant leader and life-long learner with the humility to consider different ideas and own mistakes

### **Knowledgeable Instructional and Competent Fiscal Leader**

The next superintendent shall possess the courage to systematically express bold and innovative ideas and the knowledge to advance them throughout the District. Many stakeholders asked for a superintendent willing and able to ensure accountability for progress toward district student achievement goals, a track record for closing gaps in student opportunities and outcomes, and managing, directing, and monitoring fiscal resources supporting district goals. As a competent instructional and fiscal leader, the next superintendent should be a CEO who:

- In response to COVID recovery, brings all stakeholder groups together around instructional priorities, best practices, performance measures, and the social-emotional needs of students, student families, and staff
- Is cognizant that the world is changing rapidly and that BUSD must prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of both today and tomorrow



- Understands the importance of differentiating instruction and support programs and distributing resources equitably to meet the unique and diverse needs of varying groups of learners within BUSD
- Can balance the tension between bold and innovative leadership and the need for curriculum consistency, program stability, and staff capacity
- Drives the District to create and support equal access and multiple paths for success in both career and college options
- Demonstrates knowledge of and successful implementation of dual language and student bi-literacy programs
- Prioritizes equity in budgets and spending around student needs
- Recruits and retains effective, high-quality staff

### **Thoughtful and Equitable Systems Thinker**

BUSD is unified around a shared vision and core values, a robust foundation for ongoing improvement efforts moving forward. The new superintendent needs to have a deep understanding of internal organizational operations. They will need to ensure the District's support functions, personnel, and processes align with school-level needs and equitably distribute available resources (personnel, dollars, and time) consistent with the District's priorities. Creating accountability measures and a timeline to evaluate school and system effectiveness is imperative. This work will require significant internal focus on budgets, operations, supervision, communications, and decision-making protocols. As a thoughtful systems thinker, the next superintendent should be a leader who:

- Collaborates to develop a robust, cooperative Board/Superintendent team to guide the District forward
- Holds leaders at all levels within the organization accountable for mutually agreed upon measures of success
- Ensures that BUSD's support functions and personnel align with school-level needs
- Facilitates responsible financial planning aligned with system priorities and available capacity; ethically manages funds and equally distributes budget throughout the District
- Enhances needed programs for disadvantaged, emerging bilinguals and students with other special needs

***In summary, the next BUSD superintendent will demonstrate equity, empathy, excellence, and engagement with the entire school community.***



The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus group meetings or completed the online survey. We are incredibly grateful for the assistance, support, and collaboration provided by Sulema Holguin. We also thank and appreciate all the BUSD staff members who assisted behind the scenes with our meetings and survey logistics.

Respectfully submitted by:

Valerie Pitts, Ed.D.  
HYA Senior Associate

Micah Ali  
HYA Senior Associate