



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

HISTORY/BACKGROUND

The City of Syracuse is located within the beautiful Finger Lakes region of New York. Syracuse has a population of approximately 150,000 residents and boasts all of the arts, cultural, business, and recreational opportunities associated with urban life while surrounded by some of the most beautiful outdoor spaces in the State of New York. Downtown Syracuse is experiencing a transformation. In the past decade, \$779 million in capital improvements were completed; ranging from residential and commercial projects to hospitality, infrastructure, and public art. Plans for 2022 include 22 projects totaling \$180 million which will create 312 new housing units, at least six new corporate headquarters, and enhanced arts and cultural facilities.

The Syracuse City School District educates more than 21,000 students each day, from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade in 6 high schools, 12 middle/pre-K-8 schools, and 13 elementary schools. The vision of the District is to prepare and inspire all students to innovate locally and contribute globally while embracing the challenge of providing all students with a vibrant education with new urgency. The mission is to build, support, and sustain school communities that provide students with a high-quality education that prepares them to graduate as responsible, active citizens who are ready for success in college and careers and prepared to compete in a global economy.

This report presents the findings of the data collection for the *Leadership Profile* conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in July and August of 2022 in support of the search for the new superintendent of the Syracuse City School District. The data contained herein were obtained from input received by HYA Vice President, Dr. William H. Adams and Senior Associates, Mr. Edward McCormick and Dr. Monica Browne, after meeting with 74 individuals in either an interview setting or focus group settings in the time period spanning July 26 to August 19, 2022 and from the results of the online survey begun or completed by 751 stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board of Education Commissioners in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups provided information regarding the strengths of the district and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Strengths of the District:

Among the most frequent strengths perceived and discussed by focus group participants and during interviews, as well as reflected in the survey, is the rich diversity of the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) and how it is embraced by all stakeholders. While Syracuse is one of the Big 5 school districts in the state of New York, there exists a strong sense of community pride in which perspectives from various groups are respected and traditions from a wide variety of cultures are celebrated. There exists strong support from a caring, humble, and dedicated community who have strong traditions and recognize the value of education for the students in the district.

Partnerships with non-profit institutions and universities support the students in educational endeavors and with wrap around services. The dedicated faculty, staff, and administrators are adaptable, committed, professional, resilient, and have the best interests of the students in mind. Many staff members grew up in Syracuse, attended the public schools, and now dedicate themselves professionally and emotionally to the children of the district.

The wide variety of educational opportunities offered to the students in SCSD is another strength that is commonly acknowledged by stakeholders. Specifically, the outstanding educational offerings available to high school students, such as STEAM and CTE programs, allow for SCSD students to participate in their home district in programs that are typically only offered at the county level. Industry certifications, as well as specialized programs for students with advanced intellectual capacity and learning disabilities are offered throughout the district. The resulting pockets of significant learning growth and academic excellence are celebrated throughout the district.

Despite the challenges presented in the following section, the SCSD has significant foundational pillars on which to continually improve. These foundational pillars include a fiscally sound organization, a strong variety of educational offerings, and a commitment to addressing the issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the schools, as well as an overall desire to propel SCSD to improve student achievement in a post-pandemic society.

Challenges of the District:

The successor superintendent will need to build trusting relationships with stakeholders in order to develop a clear vision for engaging the entire community in the process of improving the schools, communicate that vision with all stakeholders, and hold everyone accountable for measurable progress toward achieving the commonly understood goals. Working alongside the caring community that is represented by a committed Board of Education Commissioners,

improving the situation of students living in poverty, meeting the needs of children for which English is not their first language, building a positive and safe environment for learning, and improving student achievement will be areas on which the superintendent will need to focus.

During interviews, focus groups, and expressed in the survey, the desire to build a healthy climate for teaching and learning was evident. Staff members expressed a desire to feel valued for their work. The differences in initiatives in each of the schools coupled with a lack of focus at the district level to articulate a common vision for SCSD have resulted in many staff members feeling disconnected from the overall work of the organization. Many described a desire to engage with the superintendent in setting a vision for the district and to have a clear understanding of the role they can play in making the vision a reality.

Syracuse is a city with many distinct neighborhoods, a large number of community-based organizations, and an extremely diverse population who speak over 80 languages. The new superintendent will need to build trusting and productive relationships with the Board of Education Commissioners, the staff, a variety of municipal and community groups, as well as citizens in general. Listening to concerns and engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue around improving the schools will be important first steps for the new superintendent. Successfully communicating in a transparent manner with all stakeholders on behalf of the students of SCSD and rallying a variety of supporting civic agencies around a common vision for improving the schools will be essential functions that the superintendent will need to perform.

Finally, there is a collective desire for the new superintendent to be an experienced, engaging, and innovative educational leader who can inspire others, build trusting relationships, manage the changing state of educational funding, support students who have a wide range of needs, and unify stakeholders towards making sure all learners succeed. It is essential that all members of the community, regardless of their backgrounds or socioeconomic status, feel that they have a voice in the process of improving the schools. The superintendent will lead the SCSD to address the aforementioned challenges in order to serve the students and meet the potential of the organization.

Conclusion

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 successor superintendent who can work with the SCSD Board of Education Commissioners and stakeholders to provide the leadership needed to unify the staff and community around supporting the needs of students, raising academic standards and student performance, while providing an equitable system for education.

The search team thanks all the participants who were interviewed, attended focus groups meetings and/or completed the online survey and the SCSD staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Eileen Steinhardt who organized the Focus Group meetings.

Participation

The number of participants by stakeholder groups and the two methods of data gathering are listed below. *(Note: Not all focus groups were disaggregated for the online survey.)*

Personal Interviews or Focus Groups	Participants	Online Survey*
Board of Education Commissioners	7	
Chiefs and Interim Superintendent	8	
Directors/Executive Directors	15	
Supervisors/Coordinators	3	
Principals/Vice Principals	10	
Bargaining Unit Leaders	2	
Certified Staff	3	105
Non-Certified Staff	5	83
Parents/Guardians Current Students	0	66
Community Members	21	29
Students	5	7
Administrators		25
Survey (w/o indication of stakeholder group &/or incomplete)		436
Subtotal	74	751
Grand Total =	825	

The results of the Community Survey are provided to the Board as a separate document. This additional document is meant to be a stand-alone complementary piece to the Leadership Profile Report. The basis for formulation of the draft Desired Leadership Characteristics is from the review and analysis of these two documents. Below is a summary of the findings from the electronic survey:

Survey Summary

A summary of the survey results is presented as follows. A full report of the survey results will be provided to the Board of Education Commissioners under a separate cover. The Syracuse City School District Superintendent Search Survey was begun by 751 and fully completed by 315 stakeholders. Of those who fully completed the survey once it was started, the largest stakeholder group were certificated staff. Certificated staff represented 33.3 percent of all respondents. Over a quarter of respondents were support staff (non-certificated). They made up the second most populous stakeholder group at 26.3 percent of all respondents. The third largest participant group were parents/guardians of current student(s) at 21.0 percent of all respondents.

Regarding the State of the District, the following statements were perceived to be District strengths:

- The District engages with diverse racial, cultural and socio-economic groups.
- Technology is integrated into the classroom.
- Teachers personalize instructional strategies to address individual learning needs.
- The District employs effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools.
- The District is working to close achievement and opportunity gaps.

Regarding the State of the District, the following statements were perceived as the greatest challenges facing the District:

- Students are on track to be ready for the next grade and ultimately college and career ready.
- There is transparent communication from the District.
- District schools are safe.
- The social and emotional needs of students are being addressed.
- The District has high performance standards for all students.

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
- Establish a culture of high expectations for all students and personnel

- Provide transparent communication
- Recruit, employ, and retain effective personnel throughout the District and its schools
- Understand and be sensitive to the needs of a diverse student population

Summary of Comments from Focus Group Meetings, Individual Interviews and Public 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 you consider the greatest current strengths of the district and what strengths do you wish to see maintained and/or expanded?
- What do you consider the greatest current challenges faced by the district and what do you consider the greatest challenges over the next 3-5 years?
- What are the 3 - 5 most desired characteristics that you believe the next superintendent will need to possess in order to succeed and to take the district to the next level of success?

Individual interviews were conducted in the same manner for members of the Board of Directors and for members of the cabinet/central office staff. To conclude each session, the HYA consultant asked if the participant(s) have any recommendations for specific candidates who should be notified of the process.

The results of the interviews and group meetings are compiled into a single document based on the interviewer's interpretation of the responses. These results will be presented to the Board of Education Commissioners and then utilized for recruiting and candidate evaluation purposes. Given that permission was not overtly granted, the names of individuals recommended as a potential executive leader of interest will not be shared in this document. The HYA consultants will contact those suggested and notify each about the process.

The summaries from community forums, focus group meetings, and individual interviews are reported at the end of this document and are provided to assist the Board in its deliberations regarding the desired characteristics of the successor superintendent.

Focus Groups/Interviews:

It should be emphasized that the data reported in the summaries of the focus groups 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.

CONCLUSION OF PUBLIC DOCUMENT
