



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Tomorrow River School District
Amherst WI
October 24, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in September - October 2022 for the new superintendent of the Tomorrow River School District. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultant received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings, both in person and also on ZOOM. The 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.

The Tomorrow River School District is currently administering a district wide survey by *School Perceptions*. The HYA survey was therefore not administered as it was believed to be duplication and a repeat burden on stakeholders. At the time of this report, the data from the *School Perceptions* survey was not complete. It will be used as a compliment to this report at a later time.

Participation

121 people participated in the engagement phase. The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the all methods of data gathering are listed below:

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups
Board	5 individual interviews
Administrative Team	5 in group
District Office Staff	7 in group
School Staff/All Employees	42 in 2 groups
Charter School Staff	9 in group
Community Stakeholders by Invitation	6 in group
Jensen Center and Amherst Village Board	6 in group
Parents/Community	16 in 2 groups
High School Students	25 in group

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. The report describes common themes across groups. Individual items are also included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Board's attention.

Description of the District

The Tomorrow River School District in Amherst, Wisconsin district serves approximately 1100 students in grades 4K-12 with one elementary, one middle, one high school and a community charter school. Tomorrow River prides itself as a quality, student-centered school district with personalized service to students and families. Strategic goals focus on high quality staff, academics and learning, college and career readiness, social/emotional supportive environments, and community relationships. Tomorrow River welcomes students as part of their extended family!

District pride is demonstrated by the following highlights:

- AP pass rates above the state and global average
- 2022 ACT scores above the state average in every subject
- District Report Cards Meet and Exceed Expectations
- Various Dual Credit offerings for students
- Over 400 students Open Enrolled into the District
- Strong partnership with community mental health providers
- Strong partnerships with local businesses/leaders
- Strong co-curricular programs
- Many activities and clubs for students

The community recently passed a 26-million-dollar referendum, which includes a new 38,000 square foot, two-story STEAM addition, office and secure entry addition, and middle school, food science and library remodeling. Design planning is in progress with construction to begin as early as March 2023 and completed by September of 2024.

The district spans approximately 100 square miles in Portage County. Amherst offers a small-town atmosphere with big city possibilities and the commitment to nurturing the arts and the outdoors. Located in central Wisconsin, the community is east of Stevens Point and west of the Fox Valley. A strong rural heritage is the backbone of the community and is a continued

source of pride. Additionally, the location along beautiful waterways continues to be an invitation waiting to be accepted.

District Demographics: Total Student Third Friday Count – 1139 (2021)

- 0.1% American Indian
- 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- 0.3 % Asian
- 0.6 % Black or African American
- 2.5 % Hispanic/Latina
- 94.4 % White
- 2.1% Two or More Ethnicities
- 10.4% Students with Disabilities
- 31.8% Economically Disadvantaged
- 0 % English Language Learners

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Overall, the stakeholder feedback received during the engagement process was abundantly positive with very few negative comments or concerns. The discussion on challenges, overall, focused on areas of preferred improvement , not necessarily deficiencies or problems.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

When asked about the strengths of the Tomorrow River School District, all groups noted that the community is a wonderful area in which to live and that the District highly contributes to the quality of life because of programs, staff, resources, and facilities. The Tomorrow River School District is justifiably proud of the extensive support provided to the school district from parents and community members. In particular the community and parents demonstrate a strong commitment to their schools and for all students. They devote time, resources, and money to the District and show support and pride by actively attending school functions. Amherst was described as a wonderful place to live, especially because of the natural beauty and outdoor activities. The proximity to neighboring Appleton and Stevens Point enhances the Amherst lifestyle and families are attracted to the area because of the schools and the community. The community is described as friendly, welcoming, close-knit, supportive and an overall great place to live and raise a family. One comment sums it up.....*Amherst is a small town with a very big heart!*"

Families and stakeholders in the Tomorrow River School District value their schools. The Board of Education greatly appreciates their trust and support as evidenced by the recent referendum passage for the construction of a STEAM Center and expansion of office space for the district office. The project is scheduled to begin in spring 2023. Additionally, the construction of the football stadium with a turf field was financed all by community support and donations. An active scholarship committee provides financial support for many students pursuing post-high school options. School pride is evident as is the financial support necessary for enhancing the school district and the children of Amherst.

An appreciation for staff was mentioned in all groups. Staff are described as loyal, motivated, caring, willing to go “above and beyond” to help students, and highly dedicated. Students spoke of their teachers as caring individuals who help them. Many parents stated the reason they moved to the area was the school district, its reputation, and the staff. The District is viewed as being attentive to the needs of all students. Of particular note, was the mention and appreciation for a Charter school option and also for the school based mental-emotional services and support. Staff and support services are valued and appreciated.

The district’s commitment to academics, the arts and athletics is evident. The district “campus” was described as an asset. The community views the campus as the center of the community, and the physical and program connection to the Jensen Community Center is greatly appreciated. Students have numerous opportunities in a variety of program offerings and extracurricular activities and athletics. Local business support for tech ed and student apprenticeships and dual credit opportunities were also mentioned as strengths.

Many comments also highlighted the school culture in Tomorrow River. Stakeholders, especially parents, feel that their kids are “known” and known as individuals. They mentioned that kids aren't lost in Tomorrow River as may have been the case in other schools. The strong, close, caring environment is believed to support kids in their development. The environment is certainly healthy and nurturing.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

No specific large issues or challenges emerged in the groups. Instead of problems, the comments focused on areas of preferred attention or improvement.

Numerous comments could be categorized in the area of instructional improvement. While Tomorrow River offers many options for students, stakeholders called for a focus on a deeper

understanding of what graduates will need to be successful, especially outside of Amherst. Long term instructional goals and outcomes for students need focus and clarity. Curriculum alignment, staff development, and consistent expectations were noted as areas in need of attention. The comments are not to be viewed as a criticism of current curriculum and instruction leadership. Instead, additional time for curriculum development and staff development was described as necessary.

Technology needs of the district for instruction, as well as district operations, also need additional support. Technology policies and plans should be developed to ensure efficient, effective and equitable use of technology. This will require thoughtful planning, coordination, and budgeting rather than what is currently perceived as a reactionary approach.

The need for a regular full time superintendent was echoed across most groups. Again, not to be seen as a personal criticism of the current interim superintendent, all groups are anxious for the next permanent leader in Tomorrow River. They specifically look for someone who is genuinely engaged, highly skilled at the tasks they must manage, and a courageous confident leader. Stakeholders look forward to having someone become part of the Amherst community, hopefully with longevity.

State funding, an unknown financial future, increasing demands and rising costs were also mentioned as future challenges. This is not unique to Amherst, but a concern of most school districts. Staff compensation, benefits, technology costs, rising prices etc were noted as concerns. Amherst like many districts will have to be creative in doing more with less. The conservative nature and demonstrated fiscal responsibility of the Amherst board and leadership is viewed as a plus, especially in future challenging financial times. Staff also mentioned a need for a better more inclusive budgeting process, aligned with goals and preferred outcomes. Transparency and engagement is preferred.

District space across buildings will also need to be monitored. It is perceived that the charter school may be at capacity and additional dedicated gymnasium space is also needed.

Desired Characteristics of the Next Superintendent Leader

The list of characteristics required for impactful leadership is naturally lengthy, however several essential characteristics were noted.

First and foremost, the next leader must be highly engaged and visible in the schools and the community. People expect a leader who will be well known, visible, friendly, approachable and above all, genuine. The leader will need to know and support the district staff and motivate

them to do their best work. The leader will foster consistency and when necessary, balanced with flexibility needed in specific situations. The leader is expected to be an active community member but will also need to balance community engagement with the time required to run the school district. Some view the district as a “business” and expect a leader to be knowledgeable in finance, personnel, communication and operations.

The next leader must be focused on instruction and highly skilled in school finance and budgeting. The leader may not coordinate instruction specifically, but must have an instructional lens and the skills and understanding necessary for directing improvement. Strong financial skills and management are essential, especially since the superintendent will assume the oversight of district finance with support from the district business official.

As with all new positions, the superintendent will need to work with the board to nurture and maintain healthy governance. Roles and expectations will need to be clearly defined.

Last but not least, the Tomorrow River School District constituents are not interested in a top down micro-manager who will bring too many directives and new initiatives. A genuine, courageous, caring, collaborative leader who develops relationships and seeks input from all stakeholders, is preferred.

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 associate will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Tomorrow River Board 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 the community.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

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 challenges 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?

Strengths: (* items were strong in all groups)

- Great kids *
- Strong staff *
- Strong family support *
- Strong community interest and support *
- Small town USA feeling, small town with big heart *
- Many environmental opportunities, beautiful natural area
- Kids are know, many connections
- Prepare kids for their future with multiple options and offerings
- Dual credit options
- Campus arrangement and location is very good
- Staff retention
- Collegial supportive staff
- Open enrollment strong
- Athletic achievement high *
- Strong mental health services, school based
- Youth apprentice program
- Supportive scholarship committee and generous donors
- Staff is valued and respected
- Caring, family like atmosphere *
- Growing and thriving, people come here for community and schools *
- Meeting needs of every child
- Supportive referendums and community donors for facilities
- Strong community spirit, school is center of community *
- Everyone pulls together
- Charter school, strong and respected
- Pride and spirit *
- Trusting environment
- Appropriate class sizes
- Parents have voice, highly engaged and respected
- Fiscal responsibility
- New facilities coming soon-STEAM center
- Quality reputation
- High turnout at school events
- Tech Ed and technology supported by local business
- Community believes in and trusts district
- Welcoming community
- Leadership training for administrative team is underway
- District commitment to academics, arts and athletics
- Positive communication between charter school and district

Challenges/Concerns/Issues: (* items were strong in all groups)

- Need instructional support and leadership *
- Instructional needs should be planned for and budgeted for
- Need collaboration time for staff
- Charter school may be at capacity
- Urgent need for technology support, coordination, staff development and consistency *
- Lack of housing in community may challenge those wanting to move here *
- State funding formula and future impact
- Funding for technology needs to increase
- Expand advanced courses for high school students
- Staff morale is somewhat stressed, staff is stretched
- Communication can always improve *
- Gym space needed
- Create better budget planning process, consider needs from all departments
- Budget should be goal driven and not just reactive
- New strategic plan is needed
- Increase focus on diversity and inclusion, policy and mindset for inclusion needs attention *
- Fairly new building principals-professional development required
- Clearly define what students will need in order to be successful outside of Amherst *
- Decision making process needs to be articulated and communicated
- Ongoing challenge of doing more with less, being fiscally responsible but focus on needs
- Rising costs of health insurance-consider options and plans
- Superintendent will need to be present and actively engaged
- Healing after Covid needs to be understood, support kids and staff
- Maintaining and recruiting staff

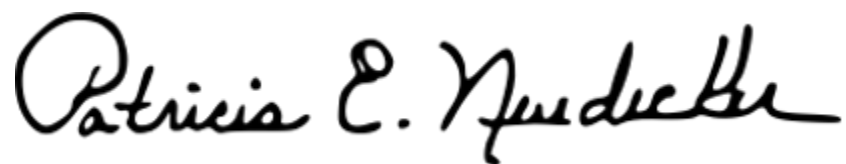
Desired Characteristics:

- Be visible *
- Actively engaged with staff, students and community *
- Support the staff *
- Be a “worker”, roll up sleeves and get involved
- Be forward thinking
- A strong communicator
- Genuine
- Call it and tell it like it is
- Have good follow through-get back to people
- A good listener-seeks input before decisions are made
- Friendly but not here to be everyone’s friend *
- Not top down *
- Understand board and superintendent role, help develop effective governance

- Continue leadership development for staff
- Process oriented
- Commit to be one of us and stay with us-longevity
- Strong understanding of finance and budget process *
- Balance leadership, innovation and operations
- Build trust *
- Delegate as needed
- Be solution oriented, understand systems
- Don't manage
- Run the district like a business and do the job
- Be efficient and effective
- Motivate others
- Treat all with fairness and equity
- Strong and courageous
- Share a vision for what's possible *
- Make decision based on what's best for kids
- Help us grow and improve
- Grow consistency across building leadership
- Be a salesperson for future referendum needs and an ambassador for the district
- Hold staff accountable
- Skills for managing construction project
- Strong board/superintendent relationships
- Have a strong backbone-stand for what is right and good for kids
- Create a new strategic plan
- Don't be influenced by loudest voices
- Open minded
- Investigate staff pay options-scales and structures need updating
- No surprises for board and community-communicate well
- Balance community engagement with work required of running the district *
- Trustworthy
- Hold everyone accountable, set expectations and be consistent
- Be a polished presenter
- Strong writing skills
- Communicate and update everyone on the construction progress
- Experienced with grant writing and creative funding opportunities

The search associate would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or participated in individual interviews and the Tomorrow River staff members who assisted with meetings, particularly part-time Superintendent Mike Richie and District Staff Marilyn Orsund, Rebecca Galvin and Samantha Srnka who coordinated the search associates time in the district.

Respectfully submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia E. Neudecker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping underline.

Patricia Neudecker PhD

HYA Search Senior Associate

October 24, 2022

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