



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

NEWTON, MA

12/1/2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Newton Public School District serves nearly 12,000 students across a preschool, 15 elementary, four middle schools, two high schools, and an Educational Center and transition programming for students aged 18-22, with an operational budget in excess of \$262 million. The Newton Public Schools motto, “*Equity & Excellence*,” is manifested through a culturally and racially diverse community, a reputation as one of the top school districts in the state, and high levels of student performance that consistently exceed the state averages on every standardized measure.

Newton’s close proximity to Boston, and several of the world’s most prestigious universities, attract residents who are leaders in academia, finance, biotechnology, and many other highly specialized industries. Generally speaking, Newton residents are highly educated, financially successful in their own right, and maintain very high expectations for the performance of students and educators in Newton Public Schools. It is also worth noting that Newton does include socioeconomic diversity with several schools being eligible for Title I funding.

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in November 2022 to recruit a superintendent of the Newton Public Schools. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants (Dr. Aresta Johnson and Dr. Jeff Melendez) 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 School Committee 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

In an effort to obtain input from as many stakeholders as possible, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to engage members of the Newton Public Schools and the broader community resulting in over 2,535 responses. In-person and online individual and focus group interviews were offered by the HYA associates from November 4th-20th, capturing responses from 336 participants. As needed, professional translation services were made available by the School Committee in Chinese, Portuguese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese. Below is a table representing the groups that were interviewed:

Individual & Focus Group Participants	<i>n</i>
Search Committee	17
School Committee (<i>Excludes Chairs of Search Committee</i>)	7
Families (<i>SEPAC, Academic Rigor, METCO, HS Students</i>)	236
Staff (<i>Newton Teachers' Association President, Assistant Superintendents, Directors, Curriculum Coordinators, Student Services Staff, Principals, NNHS & NSHS VPs, Deans, & Department Heads, Elementary & Middle School APs, Secondary Staff, PK-Elementary Staff</i>)	35
Community Members (<i>FORJ, City Council, NCBR</i>)	46
Total N	341

In addition, a survey was made accessible for all members of the Newton Community between November 7th-21st and was professionally translated into Chinese, Portuguese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese. Below is a table representing the groups that were surveyed:

Survey Participants	<i>n</i>
NPS Administrators	45
NPS Teaching Staff	276
NPS Non-Teaching Staff	49
Community Members	158
Parents / Guardians	1,562
Students	104
Total N	2,194

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone, yet complementary, pieces to this Leadership Profile Report. 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 School Committee's attention.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Interviews with various stakeholders throughout the community revealed a number of strengths and opportunities within the Newton Public Schools. First and foremost is the district's long-time commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Virtually all stakeholders interviewed expressed pride in the large, diverse and tight-knit community and the opportunities offered. Toward this goal, Newton has invested significant resources into creating an ethos that is not just tolerant of differences, but one that aspires to promote social justice, be anti-racist, and provide culturally responsive teaching and curricula.

Another significant strength in the Newton Public Schools can be found in the quality of the faculty and staff who were regularly described as an asset in Newton by various stakeholder groups. Educators were touted as being experts in their fields who are creative, caring and dedicated to their work. Many teachers are regarded as “master teachers.” In addition, many stakeholders described various student offerings and opportunities to be engaged.

Because a large number of families and other Newton community members hold positions at prestigious institutions across academia and industry, there is a sense of enthusiasm and passion for preparing students to enter college and the workforce. Many of those interviewed expressed their desire to be more involved in the schools, contributing their wealth of knowledge and resources to make the Newton schools as strong and innovative as possible. The value that is placed on education by all of those who were interviewed cannot be overlooked and is truly an asset.

Perhaps the most significant strength of the Newton Public Schools is the ripe opportunity that this organization presents to an inspiring leader. The next superintendent has the opportunity to capitalize on the amazing strengths of this district, which include an absolute commitment to their high performing schools with education as a core value.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Individual and group interviews revealed district-wide challenges related to: (a) developing and administering a budget that is responsive to increasing costs amidst declining student enrollment; (b) building trust between the schools and community, (c) improving communication; and (d) increasing the school district's efforts to create a culture that promotes equity and rigorous academic standards for all students.

Although Newton is a well-resourced school district, concerns about the pending tax override vote to give additional funds to the district, unsettled contract negotiations, and the selection of a scientifically-based reading program were cited as concerns that will need to be addressed immediately. In addition, a large portion of those interviewed noted concerns around the lack of trust between the governing bodies, district leadership and community members – with many

of these relationship strains being exacerbated by the pandemic. A strategic plan for communications was identified as a challenge that needs to be addressed by the next superintendent given Newton's large community as well as those members of the district who reside outside of Newton but attend the Newton Public Schools through the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO).

The largest issue and the one most frequently identified by those who were interviewed surrounded perceptions of academic excellence and equity. Positions within this issue tended to fall into one of two categories: (a) those who feel academic excellence has been lost at the expense of equity - meaning that previously held high standards and expectations for students have been compromised to ensure all students can succeed; and (b) those who believe that academic excellence cannot truly exist in the absence of educational equity for all students - meaning that equity is a core belief of the Newton community and is therefore intrinsic to all aspects of work and progress. While HYA does not take a position on these issues, we urge the School Committee to select a leader who can help the community reach a broadly shared and clearly articulated commitment toward both equity and excellence for Newton.

Another challenge is the discrepancy in academic performance achieved by students of various socio-economic and racial groups, and the particularly low performance exhibited by students of color. There is a sense of urgency to improve these data by lifting all group performance and promises of support toward this goal.

Additional challenges that were raised across many groups included the need for continued social-emotional support for students, recruitment of excellent faculty, fuller integration of students with special needs in the schools, and greater transparency around decision making.

CONCLUSION

HYA and the School Committee intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses 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 Newton School Committee 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.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

The search team would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and the Newton Public Schools staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Julie McDonough, Lisa Mazzola, and Carolyn Campo who were instrumental in organizing our time with members of the community.

The setup of the focus groups was structured to be open and engaging, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Efforts were taken to ensure that everyone who wished to speak was given the opportunity. All participants in the interview and focus groups were asked to respond to the following questions.

- *What do you consider the greatest immediate challenges and what do you consider to be the greatest challenges over the next three years?*
- *What do you consider the greatest current strengths of the district and what strengths do you wish to see maintained and/or expanded?*
- *What are the 3 to 5 most desired characteristics that you believe the next Newton Public Schools Superintendent will need to succeed and to take the district to the next level of success?*
- *Is there anything else you would like to add that would assist the HYA team in developing and preparing the Leadership Profile for consideration?*

To conclude each session, HYA consultants invited participants to recommend specific candidates who they believed should be notified of this vacancy as well as details concerning the process for applying to the position should they be interested. A total of 45 potential candidates were identified. Given that permission was not overtly granted, the names of individuals recommended for consideration will not be shared in this document. The HYA consultants will contact those suggested and notify each about the process.

The results of the interviews and focus group meetings are compiled into a single document based on the interviewer's interpretation of the responses. These results will be presented to the School Committee and then used for recruiting and candidate evaluation purposes.