



# LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

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Ocean Springs, Mississippi



## HISTORY/BACKGROUND

Ocean Springs, Mississippi, lies at the heart of the beautiful Mississippi Gulf Coast on the eastern shore of Biloxi Bay. It's known as the City of Discovery in recognition of the French establishment of a settlement in 1699. Long before the French arrived, however, the area was appreciated for its beauty and natural resources by Native Americans. The attributes that brought these early residents have attracted a diverse stream of people during the past 300 years. Ocean Springs has been flavored by many influences during its rich history, and now in the 21st century, it has a unique character attracting more than 18,000 people to call it home.\*

Nestled along the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, the City of Ocean Springs is a vibrant and eclectic arts community. The community features a pedestrian-friendly downtown that is home to numerous galleries, artist studios, and over 100 restaurants and is home to one of the nation's largest art festivals, taking place each November. With relatively affordable housing, schools that are among the best in the State of Mississippi, premier healthcare facilities, and a unique beauty found all over town, it is easy to understand why Ocean Springs is a popular place to live and work.\*

The Ocean Springs School District (OSSD) is home to a beautiful, involved, and welcoming community composed of academic scholars, award-winning teachers, and standard-setting schools, including one of the top-ranked high schools and districts in the state of Mississippi. OSSD serves 6,000 students and operates three elementary schools (grades k-3), one upper elementary school (grades 4-6), one middle school (grades 7-8), one high school (grades 9-12), one Career & Technical School, and one Alternative Education Center. Some notable statistics for the District include ranking in the top 10 in Mississippi for "Best School District", "Best Teachers", and "Best Places to Teach".\*\* With such an eclectic and well-rounded community, OSSD's motto has remained "Academics. Arts. Athletics." to promote excelling not only academically, but in the arts and on the field.

The mission of the OSSD is to teach the students essential content and strategies, which will enable them to apply knowledge beyond their school experience and to have a positive impact on society. The vision is to educate and inspire all students to their highest levels of achievement.\*\*\*

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in February 2023 for the purpose of recruiting a new superintendent of the OSSD. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants 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 OSSD Board of Trustees in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups provided information regarding the strengths of the OSSD and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

\* [Ocean Springs Municipal Website](#)

\*\* [Rankings](#)

\*\*\* [District Website](#)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It should be stated 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. This caution is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the input that was provided by each stakeholder, but rather to put all of the data points into perspective.

The draft of the desired characteristics is provided under separate cover.

### 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 strong academic performance and reputation of the school district. Additional strengths of the OSSD include the enthusiastic and well-prepared students, the highly dedicated staff, the comprehensive and exemplary curricular and extracurricular opportunities for students, a professional and supportive Board of Trustees, and the efforts made by all stakeholders to sustain a culture of excellence for the schools.

Ocean Springs is beautifully situated on the Gulf of Mexico on the eastern shores of the Biloxi Bay. The charming town is inhabited by a well-educated and highly engaged citizenry who appreciate the value of and demonstrate strong support for the schools. Traditional family values that are the norm in the community are reflected in all aspects of the school district. Ocean Springs is a vibrant walking community in which art galleries, restaurants, art studios, and a famous art festival are evidence of the general commitment the residents have to furthering the arts in the lives of all. Participants in the focus groups consistently mentioned the great reputation of the schools as the reason to move to and remain in Ocean Springs. Keeping this robust commitment to student success and a strong sense of community will be priorities for the new superintendent.

The OSSD has dedicated and hard-working personnel, including outstanding teachers, administrators, and members of the support staff. The principals are described as highly qualified, caring, and willing to work to remove any obstacle that hinders teacher and student success. While each school has its own personality, teachers and staff across the OSSD work to provide a high-quality education and the tools for academic success balanced with a commitment to the well-being of each student. The collegial manner in which teachers and administrators in the district work together result in an excellent culture of learning for the students.

Academics, arts and athletics are the three areas that all stakeholders agree are the driving forces behind the schools in Ocean Springs. It is expected that the new superintendent will strive for continuous improvement in academics, arts and athletics through the implementation of innovative programming that empowers staff to meet agreed upon goals while inspiring the students to meet their potential. It is expected that the new superintendent will lead by example and with compassion. He/she will need to

inspire the faculty and staff to serve the students by demonstrating care and understanding in every interaction.

Despite the challenges presented in the following section, the OSSD has significant foundational pillars on which to continually improve. These include a history of academic excellence including a wide variety of programming, dedicated and supportive staff, robust programs for students in athletics/extracurricular activities, and an engaged and supportive student body and community. It was evident during the focus group sessions and in the results of the survey that the stakeholders have an overall desire to enhance the already positive reputation of OSSD while continuing to equip and inspire g students to be academically and socially prepared for the future.

## CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Given the historically high levels of student achievement, continuing to focus on ongoing improvements in order to provide an innovative instructional program for all students was mentioned during focus group sessions and indicated in the survey as something that is necessary to keep the reputation of the district strong. The staff, community, and students will welcome a new superintendent who has the courage to recommend and implement innovative programs that are rooted in research and best practices in order to improve the overall performance of the students. In addition, continuing to collect and analyze student data to identify and address learning gaps for all demographic groups is an expectation for all professionals in the district. Working to ensure that all students, including those with special learning needs, are provided with appropriate and challenging programs in a caring and warm environment will be an area of significant focus for the new superintendent.

It was noted during individual interviews and focus group sessions that the community members have high expectations for their children and the professionals who make up the school community. Energizing and engaging the faculty and staff to improve the educational experiences for the students will be a focus for the new superintendent. Transparent communications, the ability to balance competing interests, and demonstrating the courage to do what is right for students in the face of criticism will be areas on which the new superintendent will need to focus. Finding common ground between individuals and groups by addressing specific concerns expressed by stakeholders while keeping the focus on moving the district forward for the betterment of the students are challenges that the new superintendent will face.

While the population is growing and community support for the schools is strong, planning for a strong financial future for the district will require the new superintendent to balance suggested spending increases with a realization that the citizens of Ocean Springs directly fund the majority of programs. Maintaining and improving the district without overburdening the taxpayers will be an ongoing challenge.

## 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 OSSD. The search team will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Ocean Springs Board of Trustees and stakeholders to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its students.

## VIRTUAL FOCUS GROUP/COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

The Ocean Springs Community Feedback Survey was completed by 564 stakeholders electronically by Sunday, February 26, 2023. The largest stakeholder group represented in the survey were Parents of Current Students with 386 (68.4%) of the responses. Staff members and Community members (without children in the schools) made up the next most populous stakeholder groups with 185 (32.8%) and 61 (10.8%) respondents, respectively. Finally, 1 Student responded to the survey (.2%).

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of potential challenges facing the district, the one that is most important for the new superintendent to address. The four highest priority challenges identified by respondents are as follows:

- Energizing and Engaging the Faculty and Staff to Improve the Educational Experiences for the Students (42.6%)
- Continuing to focus on Improving Student Achievement for All Demographic Groups (30.9%)
- Planning for a Strong Financial Future for the District (8.2%)
- Enhancing Communication between District & Community (7.6%)

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of strengths of the district, the one that needs to be the primary focus for the new superintendent. The four highest priority strengths identified by respondents are as follows:

- Highly Qualified, Professional & Dedicated Staff (35.5%)
- Strong Academic Performance of Students (19.5%)
- Robust Funding that results in Strong Programming & Modern Facilities (17.9%)
- Comprehensive, Exemplary Curricular & Extra Curricular Offerings (12.8%)

Respondents were asked to choose the one characteristic they would most like to see in a new superintendent. The four characteristics that were most commonly identified were:

- Student-Centered Leader who is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environment for all stakeholders (24.1%)
- Inspirational Leader who values and empowers professionals in order to achieve goals (17.4%)
- Instructional Leader who values the process of continuous improvement, sets high expectations for everyone involved in the schools, and understands the teaching and learning process (15.2%)

- Experienced & Confident Educational Leader who will bring a passion for education and innovative ideas to the District (13.5%)

## SUMMARY OF STRUCTURE OF FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS, INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS, & 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 immediate challenges for the district and what do you consider the greatest challenges over the next three 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 Trustees. 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.

It should be emphasized again 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 Board of Trustees' attention. This caution is in no way intended to diminish the importance of the input that was provided by each stakeholder, but rather to put all of the data points into perspective. To achieve this, raw data is provided in an unfiltered manner.

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 Trustees and then utilized for recruiting and candidate evaluation purposes. Given that permission was not overtly granted, quotations from the interviews and focus groups, as well as the names of individuals recommended as an executive leader of possible interest will not be shared in this document. The HYA consultants will try to contact those suggested and notify each about the process.

The summaries from community forums, focus group meetings, and individual interviews are reported to the Board and will be used to assist in its deliberations regarding the desired characteristics of the successor superintendent.

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