



# LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

**Wisconsin Heights School District**

**November 13, 2023**

## SELECTION PROCESS

The Wisconsin Heights School Board has retained the services of HYA to assist the Board with the hiring of the next superintendent. The consultant will screen applications and recommend candidates to the Board for interviews and further consideration. Any questions regarding the application process, selection process, and/or this Leadership Profile Report should be directed to: Mike Richie - email: [mikerichie@hyasearch.com](mailto:mikerichie@hyasearch.com).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) during the months of September and October of 2023 for the new superintendent of the Wisconsin Heights School District. The data contained herein was obtained from input the HYA consultant received when he met with individuals and groups in either interviews or focus group settings. 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 organization and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years. It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor does it necessarily represent the majority opinion of each respective group.

All current School Board members were interviewed by HYA Associate, Mike Richie. In addition, HYA conducted 11 focus groups. A total of 65 stakeholders, including high school students participated in the focus groups. Eight (8) individuals also replied via email responses to the questions asked. A total 78 individuals participated in either focus groups, individual interviews or email responses.

The same questions were asked during each interview, focus group, and email response and were as follows:

1. What are the strengths of the Wisconsin Heights School District that the next superintendent can build upon?
2. What are the challenges facing the Wisconsin Heights School District that the next superintendent should be aware of, or you would like to see be addressed?
3. What characteristics or traits are you looking for in your new superintendent?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with us or that we should know about the Wisconsin Heights School District.

Through the information gathered common themes were generated by the respondents. In this summary report, We will highlight for the Board what those common themes were.

### Process

The structure of the individual meetings, forums, and focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. All of those involved in providing input in the selection of the next Wisconsin Heights Superintendent were asked to respond to the questions above.

## Participation

The total number of individuals interviewed or participating within an interview/focus group/email responses was 78. The HYA consultant held five (5) interviews and hosted ten (11) focus groups.

Interviews / Focus Group
School Board Members
Administrative Team
Administrative Assistants
Support Staff
Certified Staff
Library Staff
Coaches / Advisors
Business and Community Leaders
High School Students
Parent and Community
Staff Zoom
Parent and Community via ZOOM

## Description of the District

Wisconsin Heights is located 20 minutes west of Madison in the beautiful Driftless Area. The district encompasses approximately 100 square miles in the Black Earth and Mazomanie areas. The area provides multiple recreational activities and includes the Black Earth Creek, recognized as a premier trout destination and regionally significant and unique resource. The history here is deep and dynamic.

Wisconsin Heights is a school district of approximately 780 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade with an operating budget of \$17.5 million. In the fall of 2022, the One Campus vision came to fruition. An elementary wing was added to the middle/high school, enabling all students and staff to be at one location.

The goal as a district is to help all children reach their potential every day, every year, in every class, in every activity. To achieve this goal, 131 dedicated staff members make a daily commitment to students, families, and the district. Of these 131, about 50% live in the district. As a result, WHSD knows their children not only as neighbors, but also through scout troops, youth sports, church groups, and other community activities. Whether teacher or secretary, cook or custodian, aide or assistant, these hometown connections help Wisconsin Heights educators meet the needs of their students.

A deeply-ingrained trademark of WHSD schools is the personal attention that comes through small class sizes. A typical class size is 15-22, whether in kindergarten, sixth-grade science, or junior year American Literature. Smaller classes are offered to help ensure student success in special areas such as Advanced Placement classes and upper-level foreign languages. As a result of caring educators, committed students, and small class sizes, the district has a record of high levels

of academic achievement as demonstrated by above-average standardized test scores. WHSD also recognizes that a fundamental part of a student's life is what happens outside the classroom. WHSD offers a wide variety of extra-curricular programs for children of all ages.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison is located 20 miles from Mazomanie. UW-Madison is a public land-grant research university and serves as the official state university of Wisconsin and the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin System, while also earning recognition as a "Public Ivy". The 933-acre main campus, located on the shores of Lake Mendota, includes four National Historic Landmarks. Its academic programs include 136 undergraduate majors, 148 master's degree programs, and 120 doctoral programs. A major contributor to Wisconsin's economy, the university is the largest employer in the state, with over 24,232 faculty and staff.

Visit the Wisconsin Heights School District website for more information: [wisheights.k12.wi.us](https://wisheights.k12.wi.us)

## **STRENGTHS OF THE WISCONSIN HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT** **Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

### **Location, Size of District and Community:**

Numerous comments were made about Black Earth / Mazomanie / Wisconsin Heights School District being a great place to live. It was mentioned that there are alumni owned businesses in and around the district and they are very supportive of the school district and communities. It is a safe, close knit community. The geographic location is an asset, it may be a small town but it is surrounded by large cities, great shopping and the airport is close by. The Wisconsin Heights School District is considered to be a more personal school district in southern Wisconsin, with amazing students, staff and community pride with a reputation of success. The district is just the right size and class sizes are small to allow for more personalized learning opportunities. Current enrollment numbers indicate that the district has a total enrollment of 780. Open enrollment data (2022-2023 school year) from the Department of Public Instruction website shows that 74 students are open enrolled into the Wisconsin Heights School District and 89 students are open enrolled out of the Wisconsin Heights School District, indicating a net loss of 15 students. The positive impact of having a small caring school district and community came up in all focus groups.

### **Dedicated / Quality Staff / Students are Valued:**

Overall the staff/employees really care about all students and know the students and families very well. The staff is passionate about the work they do and how they go about educating all students in the Wisconsin Heights School District. Staff goes above and beyond to help every student. They are connected to all students and want the best for them. The small school feel makes the Wisconsin Heights School District feel very comfortable and homey, like a family. With being a smaller school district, everyone gets to know the students well. Not just the teachers but all employees are dedicated to the school district. It's more than just a job, it's a lifestyle. Team players and all employees will pitch in where needed. Amazing staff, committed and dedicated, was a repeated theme. It was also a repeated theme that the support staff is phenomenal. An excellent staff supports students on their path to success. Students have numerous opportunities for learning and extracurricular activities. Parents have easy access to teachers. A response that summed up the district was ***we are small but mighty!***

### **Academic Achievement, Class Offerings and Programming:**

A common theme was that the academic achievement level is high across the district. This statement is backed up by looking at the State Report Card Scores (2021-2022 school year) from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website, it shows that the Wisconsin Heights School District has a District score of 77 which Exceeds Expectations. Students have the opportunity to participate in advanced and college classes. FFA, Youth Apprenticeship, Tech Ed and drama were mentioned as being very strong. It was stated that there is a value placed on the trades. Excellent Special Education programming across the district was mentioned as a strength. The district has a strong curriculum with regular updates and a focus on literacy. It was also mentioned that resources are provided, and devoting time for Professional Learning communities is important. Students are able to play two sports per season if desired and there is a no cut policy. The district is academic and child focused and it was mentioned that administration values learning and growth. Someone summed it up best when they said, ***“continuity and focus is strong, we are not chasing bright shiny objects every year, we are focused on literacy.”***

### **Great Facilities with One Campus:**

With the passing of the \$27 million referendum in 2020 for the elementary school and upgrades to the middle school and high school, this created the One Campus vision for the Wisconsin Heights School District. It was mentioned many times the One Campus concept has been a great benefit in many ways for students, staff parents and community. The district has outstanding facilities now and well into the future. This was a big change for the district and it can be difficult to let go of old traditions, the community support is strong and this new concept has many advantages. It was mentioned in all focus groups (as well as the student focus group) the One Campus structure will enable the Wisconsin Heights School District to thrive.

### **Grow Your Own Scholarship:**

College Seniors in the Education Field that are student teaching are eligible to apply for a GROW scholarship. The GROW Cooperative is a partnership of four school districts in South Central Wisconsin - Cambridge, Lodi, Sauk Prairie, and Wisconsin Heights. It offers seven (7) \$10,000 scholarships to seniors who are student teaching or graduating in the spring semester. Students who are awarded these scholarships will sign an agreement with the GROW Cooperative to apply, interview, and, if offered, accept a teaching position within one of the GROW districts (Cambridge, Lodi, Sauk Prairie, or Wisconsin Heights). Once hired, the teacher agrees to teach in that district for three (3) years.

With a focus on recruiting and retaining staff the Grow your Own program is a great way to encourage local graduates to come home to teach, work and live. This is a great opportunity and strength for the Wisconsin Heights School District.

## **CHALLENGES FACING THE WISCONSIN HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT** **Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

### **Lack of Housing Across District:**

It was mentioned in most focus groups that housing within the school district boundaries is limited and expensive. It is very difficult for a new hire to find affordable housing in the district and this forces many new employees to live outside of the Wisconsin Heights School District. Staff would

love to live within the district but many do not have this option and this can make it difficult to recruit staff.

### **Pay and Benefits to Employees:**

The ability to attract and retain staff was mentioned as a challenge in most focus groups. The Wisconsin Heights School District is forced to compete with larger area schools (Madison, Middleton and Verona were mentioned), in pay and benefits for all staff members. The feeling within the focus groups is that Wisconsin Heights pay and benefits seem to be much lower when compared to other area schools and in a time that the supply of staff members is limited the district needs to better compete to not only attract new staff but also keep existing staff members. There is an even larger gap in pay when looking at the support staff. To complicate the support staff situation even more, there are many non-educational jobs in the surrounding area that pay a higher hourly rate in which any support staff member could choose to leave the district for.

### **Passing Operation Referendums:**

Community support for the district was listed as a strength, and the district will be forced to pass operational referendums because of the way the school funding works in Wisconsin. In 2019, a 5-year non-recurring operational referendum was passed by a 1,299 yes vote to 583 no. This has allowed the district to exceed the revenue limits by \$2.2 million for each year through the 2023-24 school year. A similar referendum will be placed on the ballots in April of 2024 as the 2019 referendum money will expire on June 30, 2024. It will be critical for this new operational referendum to pass so the district can maintain staffing and programming.

### **Diversity:**

It was mentioned that the district does serve a diverse population in terms of family socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. However, the district is lacking social cultural awareness and diversity. Individuals stated that the district needs to progress on social cultural awareness and diversity. It was reported that there are currently no staff members of color and the district has lost a lot of students of color because of a lack of diversity. Stakeholders stated they would like to see more diversity within the staff and student body. The district needs to focus on creating a culture that welcomes and is inclusive of families and students from all backgrounds. The district has an opportunity to go in a new direction and not be stuck in the past. It was stated that the district needs to have more than just an understanding of diversity, and need representation, so the district can grow in a new direction, and have more opportunities.

### **Communication, Transparency and School Culture:**

Effective communication and transparency is essential throughout the district. the community must stay informed. Team building will also be important to build upon. It will be a must that the new superintendent builds relationships, is open, honest and transparent. It was also mentioned that the district needs to improve in the area of school culture and staff morale. The district is in need of a new strategic vision. Other items that were mentioned in this area are as follows:

- School culture needs to be looked at, use to have strong co-curricular prior to COVID, feel there is a decline in quality of all co-curricular activities
- Unprofessional talk in the HS/MS office talking about students and parents
- Lack of confidentiality in HS/MS office
- Lack of support from high school office
- Limited privacy for medical situations and medications for students
- Favoritism

### **School Board Governance:**

It is important that School Board members focus on Board Policy and Board Governance. Board members must also understand the roles and responsibilities of the Board as a whole and the roles and responsibilities of individual Board members. It was mentioned that the Board is made up of good people, are supportive and work hard for the district but sometimes forget perspectives of running a district. The Board has the students best interest in mind when making decisions. However, comments were made in the focus groups that the school Board is very athletic focused and have some personal agendas that supersede the good of the district. It was stated that at times the Board struggles with the chain of command by taking phone calls, saying they will take care of it rather than passing it on to the superintendent to deal with and resolve the problem. There seems to be a struggle with just being a policy/governance board. The Board tends to get more involved in the operations of the district and certain programs, especially athletics. The new superintendent will need to build relationships with Board members and help develop the Board as a whole. The new superintendent and Board will want to develop a Board Governance model with a clear vision and expectations to help the Board stay on task.

### **DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEXT SUPERINTENDENT**

Many of the discussions pertaining to strengths and challenges for the Wisconsin Heights School District flow into the expectations/characteristics for the next superintendent. Several of the characteristics that are present in the profile for the next superintendent build on the current strengths of the organization in addition to addressing the challenges ahead. The search team will seek a new superintendent who will understand issues facing the district. It will be important for the new superintendent to constantly foster positive energy, and build and improve relationships. The new superintendent must be a good listener, be genuine, be trusted, have integrity, and build relationships that will be the driving force to all of the work in the Wisconsin Heights School District.

The new leader will be one that is balanced and can advocate for the Wisconsin Heights School District in a challenging climate. The person will be able to articulate a systemic communication plan that is transparent, open, and builds trust through respectful and collaborative relationships within the school and across the community. The new superintendent will also need to be a great Board facilitator, have Board governance skills, make difficult decisions and must be able to put things in simple terms when explaining things. The ideal candidate will have educational administrative leadership experience, be a strong instructional leader, have experience with school finance and be a people person.

### **Wisconsin Heights School District Superintendent Desired Candidate Profile**

The Wisconsin Heights School District seeks a superintendent who in collaboration with the Board, staff, students and community will focus the district on shared goals and vision. After seeking input from Board members, staff, parents and community members via individual and group interviews and focus groups the Wisconsin Heights School District seeks a strong, visionary superintendent who possesses the following characteristics:

#### **A visionary, inspirational leader who:**

- Builds strong relationships with all stakeholders
- Builds strong School Board and superintendent relationships with a clear understanding of governance and the development of governance skills

- Develops and implements a collaborative vision with the Board, community, faculty, staff, students, and administrators
- Listens to and effectively represents the interests and concerns of students, staff, parents, and administrators
- Inspires, motivates, supports, and empowers the staff/principals to lead change with transparency.
- Attracts, leads, evaluates, and retains an effective team of administrators and staff
- Places the students at the center of every decision
- Collaborates by seeking input prior to making decisions and communicates the rationale behind each decision
- Fosters an open and safe environment that is focused on student and staff well being
- Promotes a vision of excellence, innovation, and equity to the students, staff, Board, and community
- Understands and is skilled in a continuous improvement model

**An exceptional communicator and consensus builder who:**

- Communicates regularly, clearly and concisely in a way that engages and values stakeholders
- Seeks and sustains professional and collaborative relationships with Board Members based upon commonly agreed goals
- Demonstrates courage in the face of challenges and the ability to navigate complex situations with confidence and empathy
- Is visible throughout the school building and community and is actively engaged in building and sustaining positive relationships with all students, staff and stakeholders
- Is able to create a positive and collaborative working relationship with the staff, city and community
- Fosters trust and respect among the Board, staff, and community by listening, being decisive and courageous
- Has the ability to resolve conflict effectively
- Is open and honest, dedicated, visible and energetic
- Possesses public relations skills, is technologically literate and collaborative

**An experienced educational leader who:**

- Is laser focused on student success
- Can successfully enhance the district's reputation for excellence in academics, programs, activities, athletics and the arts
- Understands the importance of using data to skillfully implement the existing strategic plan
- Is confident, decisive, and resilient
- Is a talented facilitator who can motivate and engage all stakeholders
- Is fiscally responsible, has knowledge of school finance and aligns budgets, long-range plans and operational procedures with the organization's vision, mission, and goals
- Effectively plans and manages the long-term financial health and growth of the organization
- Exhibits integrity and a high level of emotional intelligence
- Has the ability to work with and develop relationships with all school district employees and the Board that are targeted to student success
- Is accountable and holds others accountable

**A successful candidate will:**

- Have exemplary, executive-level, K-12 educational leadership experience
- Have a track record of authentic leadership
- Be a team player and in the trenches with staff and lead by example
- Have an awareness and understanding of Federal, State and local policy

**Desired Characteristics of the Next Wisconsin Heights Superintendent as per Stakeholder Comments**

Works well with staff	Good communicator	Consequences for negative behavior
Strong on anti-bullying	Collaborator	Decisive and lead district forward
Team player	Experienced person	Not use district as stepping stone
Politically savvy	Visible and attend events	Strong financial background experience
Dynamic	Assume different roles	Leadership skills and approachable
Think big picture - five year and ten year plan	Involved in the community	Able to have those difficult conversations
Welcoming	Level of directness, confident	Hard worker, wear many hats, broad minded
Fearless	Hold people accountable	Must be able to read the room
Face of the district	Not afraid to voice opinion	Need a new strategic vision
Vision	Personable	Experience with similar districts
Make the most of what we have	Lead district in right way	Put things in simple terms when explaining things to people
History of working in a small rural school district	Open to change and improvements	Manage change and handle crisis that comes along
Involvement in special education programming	Fresh eyes, fresh look superintendent	Listen to people, hear what they are saying/resolve things
People person	Good PR skills	Understands small rural school politics
Stick by decisions	Strong leadership skills	If newbie need to be attached to mentors
Great attitude	Easy to talk to	Great communication skills verbal and written
Recognize teacher accomplishments	Bring back three minute Board recap following Board meetings	Work with staff and not throw them under the bus
Open door policy, approachable	Supportive to staff/students	Honesty even if hard conversation
Involved	Students first	Shared growing and learning mentality

Open communication	Some coaching background	Function authentically, leave politics out of the mix
Tech savvy	Community based	Clone current interim superintendent
In the trenches	Be present and involved	Pull the administrative team together
Classroom experience	Go getter	Make sure all employees are valued
Carry on the vision	Level of adaptability	Discipline for students is followed up on
Prioritize trends	Boost staff morale	Get feedback from all stakeholders
Appreciation for a rural lifestyle	Make difficult decisions and explain why	Advocate to the community, get out in the community
Ability to listen to other people's ideas	Aware of legislative changes, state and local politics	Don't pester the teachers, let them do their job

### **Desired Characteristics of the Next Wisconsin Heights Superintendent as per Stakeholder Comments**

Strong with academics but need to make other things fun, field trips/assemblies something different besides sitting in the classroom five days a week.
Promote and continue to build positive culture throughout the district.
Someone that will listen to the teachers because of their expertise but still needs to hold them accountable.
Willing to ask questions and not just make assumptions, listen to answers.
Visible - attend events, pop into classrooms and let students know who they are.
Must be well aware that we need to invest in teachers, we have to boost student growth, and teachers should be coached for professional development.
Values small school values - don't bring big town values/ideas to our small town/school district.
Live in the community and support community events and school events.
We need someone who is honest, open, transparent, committed, dedicated, and is going to work hard for this school district. We don't need someone to come in looking to pad their resume and then disappear.
Someone who CARES ABOUT OUR CHILDREN.
Someone who LOOKS AHEAD and sees the BIG PICTURE but also listens to the concerns and voices of parents in the community.
Someone who wants OPEN communication with teachers, parents, and students.
Someone who has MORALS, who believes in America, and the pledge of allegiance.

Someone who understands children, parents and BUSINESS.
Someone who is compassionate and empathetic and has a VESTED interest.
Effectively connect and communicate with all members of the community, both the working-class, blue collar, and high level professionals, people with wide-ranging levels of education, people on both sides of the political dichotomy.
Important to support a wide range of educational and extra-curricular offerings and experiences even if the students accessing them are few.
Unable to attract more young families to the district if they don't find a range of opportunities for their children such as foreign language, fine arts, sports, AP offerings, etc.
This person should be familiar with the local two-year community/technical college system and seek ways to partner with them. Having students take advantage of the many opportunities offered through that educational pathway, in addition to the four-year college system. The early college and dual credit offerings for high school students expands opportunities for this small, rural community. The superintendent should seek ways to expand the world-view of students by recruiting diverse faculty/staff, welcoming international exchange students. Also engaging the students in content that helps them better understand and appreciate the diversity of the population within the U.S. as well as that abroad.
They don't necessarily have to have children, but they should have family in this area or live here so it directly affects them.

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT INPUT AND DATA

Overall the high school group of students were very friendly but quiet and reserved. It was difficult to get them to open up about their school and school district.

### **Strengths of the Wisconsin Heights School District Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

#### **Welcoming and Safe School**

The students spoke very highly of the staff and their dedication to helping all students meet their educational needs. In particular, staff was mentioned as welcoming and had a good handle on the mental health needs of the students. The students also stated that they felt safe in school and are well prepared for any type of school emergency/crisis.

#### **Strong Academics**

The students felt that the school has a strong academic program supported by teachers that make students feel comfortable in their classrooms. Students specifically mentioned that they like how classes are taught, and thought that lessons are well presented. Test scores are very high across the district as indicated by the results shown on the DPI State Report Card, where the Wisconsin Heights School District ***Exceeds Expectations***.

#### **Easy to Reach out to Teachers**

The students felt it was very easy to reach out to the teachers. Teachers are here to help students in any way possible. Students also felt that it was easy to talk to the teachers and feel they really care about their academic success and their personal interests.

### **Like the Eight Period Day (Nine with Lunch)**

Students like the daily class schedule and were adamant that this schedule should not change. They feel they perform well academically and this has a positive influence on them in school as a result of a schedule they like.

### **One Campus is Good and can Help Younger Students**

Students like the One Campus learning environment. It is easy for students to transition from one grade level to the next with having all students on one campus. It is easy for parents and students that drive to be able to help transport siblings to and from school. The One Campus structure also allows for older students to help younger students and/or teachers.

## **Challenges and Issues Facing the Wisconsin Heights School District Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

### **Improved Communication / Student Contacts**

Students feel communication could be better throughout the district and specifically mentioned the high school office. It was said that if a student goes to the office to ask for something and they are too busy to deal with a situation they (office staff) tell you we will find you but they never do; or say I will deal with it later and never do.

### **More Custodians Needed**

The students feel that more custodian help is needed throughout the district for both indoors and outdoors (grounds). When I asked what they meant by this the students commented just look at the fields outside, they are terrible.

### **If Students Speak Up, They Feel Not Heard**

Students feel if they speak up they are not listened to. They would like more of a voice in the schools. They believe they have some great ideas and insights on how to make the district better but they are upset that they are not listened to. A few items that were specifically mentioned were as follows:

- Could have better food/choices for lunch
- More class options would be better (world language was specifically mentioned)
- Unable to do what helps us focus in class (example - listening to music)
- Need to get more students involved in activities/district offerings
- Bussing is either early or late

### **Do more with Bullying and Ways to Prevent It, Consequences for Those that are Bullying**

The students felt very strongly that they need more anti-bullying prevention discussions, presentations and awareness. They believe there is bullying going on across the school district and the consequences need to be enforced and be more strict for students that are bullies.

### **Co-Curricular Programming**

The students stated that there are some concerns in the way the overall athletic programs are run. They specifically mentioned that some sports are favored and that heavy emphasis is put on certain sports while others are left in the background. Students also mentioned that the sports

programs in general are favored over the other extra-curricular activities and that the sports programs can be improved.

### **Desired Characteristics of the Next Wisconsin Heights Superintendent Student Comments**

Good bond with students	Common sense	Show up at activities
Build connection with students	Friendly/supportive of students	Take the student's needs into consideration and do something with it
Balance everything and promote the entire district	Good communication skills	Sit down with the students so they can get to know the new superintendent
Positive energy	Give reasons why things are done	Survey the students
Good leader	Visible	Not favor people or activities
Personable	Experiences	Be strict when needed
Don't target anyone	Enjoyable to be around	Understanding, can come up with compromises

Thank you for the opportunity to work with your school district, we look forward to finding your next leader that fits the criteria of your stakeholders. In addition to this Leadership Profile Report, the Wisconsin Heights School District also completed a School Perceptions Survey in October of 2023. Students, parents and community members were given an opportunity to participate in an extensive survey and those results are available in a separate document provided by the district. The information collected in the School Perceptions survey, along with the HYA Leadership Profile Report will be of great value to the new Wisconsin Heights School District Superintendent.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mike Richie, HYA Vice President

## DATA SUMMARY

The individual and group interviews of stakeholders generated the following responses. Comments have been summarized, and careful attention has been made to accurately convey the message. They are listed with no attempt to prioritize them.

### **Strengths and Points of Pride: School District Stakeholder Comments**

#### **Other Comments that were Recorded during the Focus Groups**

- Academically doing very well
- Small class sizes
- All kids participate - do not cut
- Facilities are in great shape - new elementary school plus updates
- Solar project will start soon
- Strong Board and work well together, can professionally work through differences of opinions
- Respect of the community
- Dedicated teachers and strong core of veteran teachers
- Strong academics without all the bells and whistles like Middleton or Verona
- Can't pay teachers as much but they are very happy teaching in Wisconsin Heights
- Ability to participate in numerous activities/sports - being on the team
- Community has strong sense of value of a good school district
- Good school spirit
- Lots of opportunity for students
- Community, very involved and vested
- Location, close to Madison
- Size of district
- For a small school we have a plethora of activities
- Great Board
- Devoting time for PLC's
- Curriculum is a strength, spend a lot of time updating it
- Great class offerings to students
- Small rural school
- Personalized education
- Staff has sense of community
- Students able to play two sports per season if desired
- Passed a referendum
- Alumni that own businesses in and around district
- Staff team players, help each other out
- Community comes together, connections
- Community and support - families, Board, tradition
- Academic and child focused
- Fiscally responsible
- Administration values learning and growth
- Focus on literacy
- Professional learning communities
- Continuity and focus is strong, not chasing bright shiny objects every year, focus on literacy
- Great students, minimal discipline issues

- Not afraid to rest on what district does well and always looking for ways to improve and make changes, like to grow and learn
- One campus is helpful
- Involved and caring staff
- Having alumni work in the district is a strength
- Involvement of community members
- Veteran staff makes sure new staff is comfortable and help make them successful and feel comfortable
- Cooperative staff help each other out
- Supportive administrative team
- Lots of problem solving going on in the district
- Good balance of new and veteran teachers
- Collaboration, open and fluid
- Teachers really know and understand the students. not just a number but an individual
- Money is spent on education and not sports
- Lots of opportunities - music, choir, band
- District does a nice job connecting with taxpayers with transparency on how money is spent
- People, students, staff, families
- Will find classes online if needed
- Amount of support by administrators
- Achievement of quality, we do good work
- Recognize we are all learners and will make mistakes
- Students' needs are met and they go on to be very successful
- Big fan of school
- Close knit community
- Great special education parents
- Good technology tools in place
- Great offerings - if we don't offer it, we find it!
- We do what we need to do for students
- Safe school
- Great drama programs
- Strong leadership
- Grow Your Own Scholarship
- A new culture being developed in the elementary school, we LOVE the changes we are seeing
- New teachers
- More families are moving in from outside of the district
- The elementary is completely different from what it was when our son went through elementary school
- Teachers are encouraged to communicate with parents and the administrators in the elementary communicate incredibly well with parents
- Wisconsin Heights handled COVID education well
- The district came up with a working plan shockingly fast and proved that they are more capable of utilizing technology
- It's a small community with a lot of heart

- We have a lot of community support/sponsorships/donations in the area which helps us afford things like a nice track, new equipment, uniforms, the new elementary school, etc. which helps relieve a lot of burden on smaller working families
- They are always looking to improve and they genuinely care about their students, know them by name, and acknowledge them in public
- It's almost like a big extended family when you see people out of the classroom
- Wisconsin Heights is a small, rural school district with a diverse population in regards to conservative and progressive values
- The communities value a good education and have been quite supportive in our endeavors in the past five years
- Our school problems/issues are quite minor compared to the larger settings
- Rural setting but with close proximity to conveniences and culture that Madison offers
- Teachers/staff who know the children well and can individually tailor support
- Centralized school system allowing older students/grade-levels to provide classroom/extra-curricular support of the younger students (mutually beneficial learning experience for all)

## Future Challenges: School District Stakeholder Comments

### Other Comments that were Recorded during the Focus Groups

- Getting all staff, retaining that staff
- Facing a problem with any pupil growth, not meeting the projections
- Lack of housing across district, difficult to find and is very expensive
- School culture needs to be looked at, use to have strong co-curricular prior to COVID, feel there is a decline in quality of all co-curricular activities
- Need a new strategic vision
- Always on a tighter budget, not a large tax base
- Hard to keep up with the Jones' when it comes to athletic facilities, want them but can't afford it, must balance
- Small town politics can be a challenge, people will stick their nose in a situation
- Board can micromanage at times
- People may stay until they retire, need to find ways to motivate them to stay engaged
- Administrator will need to hit the ground running
- Small district can be difficult to draw, may be the smallest school district in Dane County
- Growing needs of students in the social emotional and behavioral needs
- Reaching students with disabilities to meet the growth of their academics
- Programming can be difficult because of the small district and resources available
- Economic situation has changed with compensation and teacher shortage. Need to compete with Verona and Middleton. When going to one facility it was mentioned cost savings - may not be the case, this may be an issue going forward.
- Need to be competitive in retaining support staff
- Administrative team has dual roles, may need to look at down the road, they are stretched thin
- High school office is toxic, unprofessional
- Lack of leadership at high school level
- No privacy for medical situations and medications for students
- No support from high school office

- Unprofessional talk in the HS/MS office talking about students and parents
- No privacy, talk in front of kids
- Lots of favoritism, shady stuff going on
- Not enough staff, retaining staff, getting staff
- Communication
- Lack of subs
- Bussing lack of communication and shortage of drivers, subs don't know the routes, lack of communication with bus company
- Lack of training and onboarding for staff
- Student behavior is a challenge
- Need a full time nurse
- Board listens to the community and gets too involved in community gossip, starting to take a toll on staff
- Lack of teamwork amongst the administrative team, not cohesive
- Need to support each other and act as a team, One Campus needs to be unified, need to do some all-district stuff
- Recruiting and retaining staff, losing them to neighboring districts, shrinking pool of candidates
- Harder for newer students to fit in because of small school and close knit groups already established
- Need to close achievement gap
- Need to support kids who don't fit the norm
- Have urban problems dealing with it in a rural way, "boys will be boys"
- Need to look at equity or harassment issues, need to look at real world consequences
- Student behaviors are becoming more difficult, how to meet their needs
- Need an alternative option
- Mental health issues continue to grow
- Communities need to continue to grow, if not growing they're dying
- Lose some students to larger district for more programming and opportunities
- Pool of money, school finance is an issue
- Referendum is a worry
- Full day 4K, five days per week hurt the prep time of other teachers, culture thing
- Before and after school programming is an issue with having two dedicated rooms not being used all day
- Collaborative time needs to be built into the elementary schedule
- Bussing is a challenge, timing and routes
- Small can be a detriment
- Never enough gyms
- The fine arts feels left out
- School funding is an issue, need to pass operational referendums
- Staff turnover, especially EAs (educational assistants)
- Bullying that occurs in the elementary, needs to have more consequences
- Make things more welcoming to families
- Must wear many different hats
- Lack of subs
- The transition of being One Campus and must connect as an entire staff
- Teacher shortage
- Student achievement gap

- Lack of parental involvement, hard to get them engaged, lack of diversity
- Mental health needs is an issue
- Communication, or lack thereof is huge, there are signs of improvement with more frequent emails home to parents
- The school's social media information needs to be more timely
- Retention, WHY ARE ALL OF THE TALENTED TEACHERS LEAVING THIS DISTRICT? You need to get to the bottom of it and stop the revolving door
- Discipline needs to be more consistent, some administrators need to learn that it's not their job to be friends with the students and that they might need to lay down the hammer
- Whatever transpired this fall with the sports teams is interesting... I'm still unclear why all teams had to be reminded of the sportsmanship policy when it was clear that one or two teams were responsible for the issue at hand maybe a one game suspension would've sent a better message
- The district could actually adhere to its anti-bullying policy
- This district needs an actual mental health professional or professionals to deal with a range of issues
- As a former student of WHSD, I feel we have fewer opportunities than larger schools (obviously). Particularly as far as programs such as athletics, drama/theater, foreign languages (besides only Spanish/German), and larger/longer field trips to other cities or countries.
- Funding
- Competitive compensation, and professional retention are the major hurdles we have faced since and before my arrival. I would say each issue has multiplied a couple times in my time here.
- Smaller population makes it harder for students to access a wide range of extra-curricular activities, struggling to find enough students and coaches for teams/fundraisers/clubs/etc.
- Accessing the school from the busy highway has gotten better, but is still dangerous, developing a bike/walking path from Black Earth similar to the path from Mazomanie would be beneficial as well as other points of access to the campus
- Bus driver shortage and rural routes make for long rides and delays for some kids

## STUDENT DATA SUMMARY

The focus groups with students generated the following responses. Comments have been summarized, and careful attention has been made to accurately convey the message. They are listed with no attempt to prioritize them.

### **Strengths and Points of Pride: High School Students' Comments**

#### **Other Comments that were Recorded during the Focus Groups**

- Good teachers
- How classes are taught, lessons are good
- Prepare well for tests
- Like the size of district and class size
- Like the eight period day, nine with lunch
- How the district plans for school safety is good, well prepared

- Easy to reach out to teachers
- One Campus is good and can help elementary students
- Understanding staff

## **Future Challenges: High School Students' Comments**

### **Other Comments that were Recorded during the Focus Groups**

- Could use more help in the office
- Want more snow days, other district are out, but not Heights
- Better job budgeting
- Pay teachers more
- Do more with bullying and ways to prevent bullying, also need consequences for people that are the bullies
- Students mentioned it must be a red flag because they cannot come up with more strengths
- Not much lead way if you get in trouble, if your get in trouble once you get a bad rap
- Need more custodians for indoors and better groundskeepers outdoors (they mentioned just take a look at the fields)
- Would like to see open campus and to be able to go outside for lunch
- If students speak up they are not listend to
- Administrative turnover
- More training for principals - not sure what the principal does, students don't see the principal very often

### ***Is there anything else you would like to add or that we should know?***

- Board does not have huge disagreements, a very consensus board, may need more help with the bigger, challenging decisions
- From the outside looking in, may look glamorous but there is a lot more work to do
- Need to indentify what is missing
- Would like to see classes mingle together more
- Student discipline is an issue, can be disrespectful and need to be held accountable with consequences
- Administrative team is more introverted and more comfortable in the academic arena, need to be more personable
- Need to regain school spirit
- District seems to be in a lull, lost superintendent, business manager, employee issues
- Seeing some staff turnover
- Staff feels pushed aside, need to make sure all are valued
- Special Education staff is neglected
- Need leaders that want to stay
- Love of tradition from the community but kids need to forge their own path, it's not the 90's
- Proud of school report card, how do we get the soft skills back and relationships back, positive culture
- District is in a good spot
- Proud to be part of the school district
- Overall family feel and positive

- As a district, we have been focused on PLC for the last seven years. A number of staff have gone to Solution Tree's PLC institutes. I think the superintendent for our district should support the PLC process and should be trained or be willing to be trained through Solution Tree.
- The other thing I would like our superintendent to be is supportive of a RTI/MTSS intervention program in our middle and high schools. Currently, we have a robust elementary intervention program, but very minimal support for our 6-12 students.
- Needs to have a strong belief and consideration for what a rural Wisconsin district is about. What we have, what we can offer and most importantly that the individual is approachable and involved! Seeing that individual out and about in the community is a vital piece of establishing a successful relationship with the community members.
- The former superintendent (JS) was the best district administrator I ever had the pleasure of working with in my career. He understood teaching (not just the educational field) and what a day in the life of a teacher was like. He understood what a day in the life of a student (of all levels) was like. He understood what a day in the life of a parent was like. He displayed a consistent balance of all facets of the position, including personnel, business, professional development, health and student services, facilities, **he was an exceptional leader!** Never took anything personal, never let his ego step in front, would genuinely listen and provide empathetic feedback. His vision was very clear and concise and was strong in follow through.