



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Millburn Township Public Schools June 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in June 2024 for the new superintendent of the Millburn Township Public Schools. 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 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. Given the end of year school activities, it was reported that stakeholders, certificated, and non-certificated staff found it challenging to participate in the scheduled focus groups. Parents/guardians, students, and certificated staff participated in the online survey. Parents/guardians participation represented 57.7% of survey respondents while students composed 18.2% of respondents and 16.3% of respondents were certificated staff members.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below: *Not all focus groups were a group that was disaggregated for the on-line survey.*

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	9	
Building level administrators (Supervisors & Principals)	14	
Central office administrators	9	
Counselors	9	
Administrators		14
Bargaining Unit Leaders	13	
Certificated Staff	7	111
Community (Parents)	94	
Parents/Guardians		394
Community/Business Members		27
Gov't, Community & Faith-based Leaders	5	

Non-certificated Staff	2	13
Students	13	124
Total	175	683

The community survey report and a draft of the desired characteristics are provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the 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 Board’s attention.

STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

Among the most frequent strengths perceived and discussed by focus group participants and during interviews, as well as identified in the survey, is the reputation, growing diversity, and achievements of the Millburn Township Public Schools. This includes community-wide support of education, highly dedicated and motivated staff, and an involved, high achieving parent community.

Millburn Township Public Schools (MTPS) is a dynamic school system with a plethora of opportunities for all students. MTPS offers numerous and varied programs and courses to meet the interests of its students. The district values the breadth of students’ interests and provides an abundance of programs in athletics, arts, music, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, known for its strong and robust advanced placement programs, MTPS has a sound and proven curriculum that delivers students prepared for the next grade, college or career. Many of the engaged parents expressed a desire to keep Millburn at the top of the list of the New Jersey and nationally ranked districts. Most stakeholders reported an enormous amount of pride in their educational accomplishments, especially the historically high college placement at elite universities. Millburn Township’s legacy as a “go to” district for Ivy League placement precedes itself.

MTPS staff, including administrators, teachers and support staff are hardworking, dedicated, experienced, and passionate professionals. Students and parents indicated that relationships with teachers and teacher quality are instrumental in the success of students. Although there are increasingly varied viewpoints on the method and definition of student success, most

stakeholders acknowledge that the highly qualified, highly trained teaching staff is one of the difference makers in the Millburn Township educational experience.

As noted in the survey, technology and the technology infrastructure are considered a strength that is effectively integrated into the classroom. Schools are considered safe as reflected on the survey.

The MTPS community is extremely supportive of their schools and places a high value on education. It is a multigenerational, diverse, and active community. There is a high level of community support at school and student events. Parents and community members, including faith-based groups, contribute time, finances, and resources to support students and schools. There is acknowledgment of the changing demographics and a desire to address the needs of all students whether it is increasing the availability of advanced placement courses, addressing staff recruitment and retention challenges, or the creation of multiple pathways to student success and to ensure equitable resources for all students. Meeting the needs of all students while maintaining the highest academic standard possible is a supported priority.

The geographical locale of Millburn Township is considered highly desirable due to its proximity to Manhattan and the reputation of the school district. Changing demographics have increased the number and diversity of the community and student population and is regarded as a strength by most. There appears to be a general desire to accept the increasingly diverse population across racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, family makeup, cognition, languages, and individual interests. Further, the methods to implement full acceptance and provide equitable student experiences is under considerable discussion.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

Concern was expressed during focus groups and individual interviews around the growth, changing demographics, and increasing complexity of the district community. Of note, across most focus group sessions, both the concern for the district to continue its legacy as a premier, high-achieving district with elite college placements, while meeting the needs of all students with a changing student demographic was voiced. The varied and numerous voices on the methodology to address student success for all has caused at the very least tension amongst community members and at worst division in the community. Specifically, some parent frustration was expressed due to the number or access to advanced placement courses. Conversely, other parents and stakeholders expressed frustration and concern due to the over emphasis of highly competitive academics and the perceived lack of a well-rounded, holistic approach to each students' educational journey. Further amplifying the need for a unified vision,

rather than division, students' survey responses indicate that the district is not heading in the right direction (17% of 124 student responses believe the district is heading in the right direction).

The lack of a unified vision was further expressed through the varying and divergent comments from staff and administrators. Given the success of what was referred to as "the Millburn way," staff, administrators, parents, and community members, indicated that the success of Millburn is also a concern. The challenge of finding and implementing a path toward continued success, utilizing the foundation, expertise and historical achievement while also moving the district community toward successful achievement for graduates of 2030 and beyond. Lack of trust, transparent communication, increasing stress levels, fear of failure, and minimal collaboration were some of the factors contributing to the divisiveness and tension amongst district community members.

Contributing to this division is the perception that schools and departments tend to operate in silos or as a collection of schools rather than as a unified system of schools. Although elementary schools were often perceived as family-oriented and promoting unity, this was noted as a missing attribute from a district-wide perspective.

Students and some stakeholders cited frustration with what they considered easily remedied issues by emphasizing the positives of the entire district and celebrating, promoting, and supporting all potential opportunities available to students. There is serious concern of a possible change of the district community climate and culture if stress levels and district issues are not addressed. Of note, students expressed concern about their stress levels and stress levels of their peers. They also expressed lack of time to experience all aspects of their growing and maturing years. In some cases, students and families have already transferred to private school alternatives to address their concerns.

Given the growth and changing demographics, it was indicated that the voice of some stakeholder groups did not fully express or represent the needs of all stakeholder groups. The ability to meet those needs of all stakeholder groups while also maintaining the highest academic performance possible was listed as a complex challenge for the successor superintendent. Balancing district resources in an increasingly diverse socio-economic community, while also recruiting and retaining high quality staff, was considered a factor in this complex challenge. Forming positive, trustful relationships with and amongst internal and external stakeholders was viewed as something that needs to be prioritized to address the increasing tensions and varying viewpoints.

The district's ability to address the complexity and conflicting challenges will be the determining factor in the successor superintendent's ability to move the district forward. The most significant issue is the district's ability to respectfully address the district's legacy of success while incorporating the changing and diverse perspectives of the new demographics. These challenges have had an impact on academic, social, emotional and mental health of students, parents/guardians, and staff. Stakeholders amplified these dynamic and complex challenges and the district's ability to keep up with the changes throughout the focus groups.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the district. The search team will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Millburn Township Public Schools Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to maintain and raise academic standards and student performance, while meeting the unique needs of each of its students, schools and communities.

The search team thanks all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey and the Millburn Township Public Schools staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Cheryl Schneider, who organized the search team's time in the district.

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 issues 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?