



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT



**NEW
TRIER**
TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT 203

September 16, 2024

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Dr. Brian Harris, Dr. Constance Collins and Dr. Max McGee of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in August and September 2024 for the new superintendent of New Trier Township High School District 203 to replace Dr. Paul Sally upon his retirement at the end of the 2024-25 school year. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews, focus group settings, community forums, and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, community forums 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, community forums 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 and the immediate and future priorities that the new Superintendent will need to address.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

New Trier Township High School District 203 (NTHS) is a comprehensive four-year high school located in Northeast Illinois along the shore of Lake Michigan. Freshmen are housed on the Northfield Campus; sophomores, juniors, and seniors are housed on the Winnetka Campus.

Governed by a seven-member Board, the district serves six sender public school districts as well as local independent and parochial schools. The affluent north suburban Chicago communities served by the district have proudly demonstrated support for the outstanding academic and cultural achievements for which New Trier is traditionally associated. The district's educational priorities are reflected in New Trier 2030, the strategic plan adopted by the Board in 2019 following a school- and community-wide effort involving parents, students, faculty, staff, alumni, and New Trier Township residents.

As evidence of its motto, "to commit minds to inquiry, hearts to compassion, and lives to the service of humanity," New Trier offers students numerous opportunities for learning and engagement both inside and outside of the classroom. Recognized throughout its history as a lighthouse district, New Trier's innovative and expansive curricular offerings are illustrated in the school's [Program of Studies](#), while the overall academic accomplishments of New Trier students are reflected in the Post-High School Counseling Department's [School Profile](#).

Additionally, students are encouraged to explore and develop their interests through a variety of extracurricular pursuits which include:

- More than 150 clubs and other student activities, including an extensive social service component;
- 35 interscholastic sports (winning more athletic state championships than any high school in Illinois interscholastic history) as well as an extensive intramural program; and
- Fine and performing arts programs, including a Grammy-award winning music department.

Beyond its rich and rigorous educational program, New Trier boasts a nationally recognized student advisory program that creates a small-school atmosphere within a large school; a successful, proven compensation structure that provides for merit pay and promotes a highly professional culture; and an exemplary level of trust and respect among staff, administration, Board and community grounded in a shared commitment to cultivating a culture of belonging in which every student can thrive.

Summary

Through collaboration, innovation and partnerships fostered with an outstanding administration, faculty, and staff, the District has created a long tradition of student success.

PROCESS

During August and September 2024, the HYA Associates conducted focus groups, interviews, and community forums. Over 25 focus groups were scheduled, 8 individual interviews completed, and 3 open community forums were provided for the community. In all, we had 166 stakeholders attend the focus group sessions and community forums. Additionally, 999 stakeholders responded to the online survey. The online survey was available to stakeholders from August 26 - September 6 and provided an additional avenue for stakeholders to participate in the process of determining key attributes of the district and the desired qualifications and characteristics for the next Superintendent.

Here is a summary of the key stakeholders who participated in the focus groups/interviews:

Interviews and Focus Groups

- Board Members/Superintendent
- Central office Leadership Team
- Civic Leaders and Community Partners

- Parent Leaders (PTO/Boosters)
- Local Sender Districts' Superintendents
- Local Sender Districts' Board Members
- Former Board Members and Caucus Members
- Village Managers and Board Presidents
- Community Members with No Current Connection to New Trier
- Parents of Students with IEPs/504s
- Education Foundation and Alumni
- Teachers/Certified Staff
- Support Staff
- Union representatives
- Administrators/Instructional Leaders/ Asst. Principals
- Students

The structure of the focus groups and community forums was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. The focus group sessions were conducted in person and virtually via Zoom. Those involved in providing input into the selection of the Superintendent were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are the strengths of the district and community?
- What are the challenges facing the district?
- What are the immediate and future priorities for the next Superintendent?
- What are the personal and professional qualifications and attributes that you desire in the next Superintendent?
- Do you know any candidates that you believe would be a great fit for this position?

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.

SURVEY

Quantitative Results

The District provided all stakeholders with ample notifications regarding the opportunity to participate in the online survey between August 21st and September 9th, and staff are to be commended for their concerted outreach. As a result, 1,152 stakeholders responded to the

survey and 999 of these respondents completed it. This number is in line with our initial target of 1000 participants based on HYA surveys with districts of similar size, achievement, and demographics. The total number of 1,043 comments also were within our expectations and speaks well to the community's interest and engagement in the search process.

By group, the final tally was:

- 330 parents/guardians of current students
- 159 teachers and certificated staff members
- 35 support staff members
- 20 administrators
- 207 students
- 227 residents without children currently in school
- 165 alumni

It should be noted that in this survey participants were allowed to check one or more boxes of the categories above. For example, of the 165 selecting the alumni category, 35 also checked the parent category and 53 also checked the residents without children currently in school. Additionally, this survey was not a scientific stratified random sampling. The term of art is "survey of convenience," which means that individuals could take it if and when they choose. Also, respondents could only complete the survey once from one device but could take it from another device. We analyzed responses to screen for duplicate responses and found fewer than 3 instances of attempts to "game" the system by filling out multiple surveys.

In the discussion of the results that follow, responses marked "No Opinion" were dropped from the particular question and not used in any of the percentage calculations for the quantitative results.

Quantitative Results

Part 3 of the online survey asked respondents to select up to the five top priorities for the next superintendent from a list of these twenty choices.

1. Retaining and recruiting excellent staff.
2. Advancing academic performance.
3. Ensuring student and staff safety.
4. Developing new educational opportunities to prepare students for future success.
5. Ensuring a sense of student and staff connectedness and belonging.

6. Fostering a trusting, respectful culture and climate between school and community.
7. Maximizing students' college admissions success
8. Evaluating curriculum content and effectiveness.
9. Being an advocate for high quality public education
10. Addressing students' and staff members' social emotional and mental health issues.
11. Becoming an active, approachable presence in the schools and community
12. Sustaining overall district financial strength and stability.
13. Improving instructional practices in the classroom.
14. Making continued progress on the New Trier 2030 Strategic Plan
15. Improving professional development, training, and support for staff.
16. Improving programs and services for students with special needs
17. Improving INTERNAL communication to and from staff and students.
18. Upgrading district facilities
19. Improving EXTERNAL communication to and from parents and the community.
20. Seeking stakeholder input.
21. Other (please specify)

The choices were in randomized order for every survey.

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who selected a listed priority in their top five choices and rank (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) of that priority among the thirteen. For example, 58% of the 935 parents responding had “Maximizing opportunities for increasing staff compensation in support of the retention and recruitment of top-quality teachers” in their top five priorities. This was the highest percentage, hence the number one ranking for parents.

“Improving academic performance” is a close second, in fact statistically close enough to also be considered the top priority. Related to academic performance were the next three parent priorities. In order they are “Evaluating curriculum content and effectiveness,” “Improving instructional practices in the classroom,” and “Improving academic rigor.” The table contains rankings and percentages of the other groups.

Table 1: Ranking and Percentage of Respondents Selecting Priority in Their Top Five (disaggregated by role)

Priorities	Community				
	Parents <i>n=330</i>	Staff <i>n=214</i>	Students <i>n=207</i>	Members <i>n=227</i>	Alumni <i>n=165</i>
Retaining and recruiting excellent staff.	1 (62)	1 (56)	4 (34)	1 (54)	1 (56)
Advancing academic performance.	2 (43)		2 (39)	2 (40)	2 (43)
Ensuring student and staff safety.	5 (35)	5 (33)	2 (39)		
Developing new educational opportunities to prepare students for future success.	4 (39)		5 (30)	4 (35)	3 (37)
Ensuring a sense of student and staff connectedness and belonging.		2 (50)		4 (35)	
Fostering a trusting, respectful culture and climate between school and community.		4 (47)		3 (36)	5 (33)
Maximizing students' college admissions success	3 (42)		1 (53)		
Evaluating curriculum content and effectiveness.	5 (35)				5 (33)
Being an advocate for high quality public education					
Addressing students' and staff members' social emotional and mental health issues.					
Becoming an active, approachable presence in the schools and community		3 (49)			
Sustaining overall district financial strength and stability.					4 (34)
Improving instructional practices in the classroom.					
Making continued progress on the New Trier 2030 Strategic Plan					
Improving professional development, training, and support for staff.					
Improving programs and services for students with special needs					
Improving INTERNAL communication to and from staff and students.					
Upgrading district facilities					
Improving EXTERNAL communication to and from parents and the community.					
Seeking stakeholder input.					
Other (please specify)					

A most notable finding is the consistency among most groups in their top rankings. The next leader should clearly focus on being resourceful in retaining and recruiting the highest quality of staff and continuing to improve academic performance, arguably by simultaneously developing new opportunities to prepare students for future success. It should be noted that the primary driver behind the need to recruit and retain excellent staff is due to the numbers of teachers who will be retiring during the tenure of the next superintendent. Thus, it behooves the Board members to find a future leader with demonstrated success in sustaining an excellent staff and also in filling vacancies created by retirements with top quality staff.

Given that the staff ranked “Fostering a trusting, respectful culture and climate between school and community,” was also ranked as a high priority, the new leader will need to begin building relationships with staff and community from day one and would be well advised to schedule regular visits to classrooms, community service clubs, sender districts, and municipalities. Also, the consultants found it particularly valuable to engage with former board members and caucus

members and advise the new leader to do the same. Their experience and wisdom will provide an important context for a smooth and productive transition.

It is also noteworthy that “student and staff safety” was rated as a high priority. While this survey was open for responses, a mass shooting at a school in Georgia, and thus we inferred that protecting students and staff rose to a top priority despite the fact that the campuses appear to be well secured.

While the table does not include the lowest rankings, the consultants were surprised that none of the groups ranked “Addressing students’ and staff members’ social emotional and mental health issues” as one of the top five priorities. This and similar prompts are nearly always in the top three of districts we survey. While student and staff well-being are important, it appears that New Trier is doing an overall commendable job of supporting both students and staff social emotional health. While this matter may not be a top immediate priority, it will remain important to sustain the successful support.

The results in Table 1 indicate that applicants should be able to both articulate and show how they have successfully retained teachers, succeeded in hiring excellent staff in these times of increasing teacher shortages, and produce both numbers and narratives as evidence of improving academic performance, developing new opportunities for student success, ensuring campus safety, and strengthening a climate of trust and respect.

Turning to leadership qualifications and experience, respondents were asked to rank the following as: “Extremely important; Important; Somewhat important; Not so important; Not important at all.”

- Q9. High school teaching experience or demonstrated understanding of it?
- Q10. Proven ability to manage conflict & change with confidence & equanimity?
- Q11. Leadership experience in a similar community and district
- Q12. Expertise in school district finance?
- Q13. Proven success in implementing new, innovative opportunities for retaining staff?
- Q14. Worked with legislators to pursue legislative priorities of the district?
- Q15. Created new opportunities for community engagement and collaboration?
- Q16. Ensured high standards of academic excellence for ALL students?
- Q17. Explored and incorporated best practices from other top public & private schools?
- Q18. A comprehensive knowledge of leading educational research and best practices?

- Q19. Led regular evaluation of instructional and extra-curricular programs?
- Q20. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent INTERNAL communication?
- Q21. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent EXTERNAL communication?
- Q22. Successfully addressed the needs of a diverse student population?
- Q23. A record as an effective operational manager?
- Q24. Distinction as a visible and immersive presence in the community and schools?
- Q25. Ensured a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff?
- Q26. Articulated a compelling vision for the district's future & moved the district toward fulfilling it?
- Q27. Experience and expertise in managing the upgrading of district wide facilities.
- Q28. The proven ability to Inspire and motivate all stakeholders?
- Q29. Experience as a superintendent?
- Q30. An earned doctorate degree?
- Q31. Leadership experience in a field other than education?

Knowing there is some truth in the adage, “if everything is important, nothing is important,” we used “Extremely important” as the indicator of a necessary qualification and/or experience. The three leading qualifications/experiences were:

- High school teaching experience or demonstrated understanding of it.
- Ensuring academic excellence for all students
- Proven ability to manage conflict & change with confidence & equanimity

Disaggregating the data by role (Table 2), we found more similarities than differences among groups. For example, for all groups – with the exception of students – “High school teaching experience or demonstrated understanding of it” and “Proven ability to manage conflict & change with confidence and equanimity” were ranked “Extremely Important” by at least 47% of respondents.

However, one distinguishing difference and area of attention through the selection process is other areas that staff ranked as Extremely Important, with 61% noting that it is extremely important that the next leader has ensured– and will continue to ensure– “a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff.” Likewise, the fact that 58% of staff indicated that “Providing consistent, proactive, and transparent INTERNAL communication” was “Extremely Important: tells us that it is both a critical qualification and an area of attention for the new leader.

Other key findings are that more than 40% of the staff thought it Extremely Important to address the needs of a diverse population. Our assumption is that the equity initiatives of the district matter to staff and should matter to the next superintendent. However, other groups may have thought it important but not as “Extremely Important.” Likewise, more than 40% of parents and alumni thought “Leadership experience in a similar community and district” was Extremely Important. However, fewer than 30% of students and staff gave this same rating. While we can only speculate as to the “why” of these ranking disparities, we recommend that even if upwards of 40% of just one group considers a qualification Extremely Important, it should be a consideration during the interviewing and screening process. Additionally, we can encourage the new superintendent and Trustees to engage with staff to understand these differences.

Table 2: Percentage Ranking a Characteristic, Qualification, or Experience as Extremely Important (disaggregated by role)

QUALIFICATION/EXPERIENCE	PERCENTAGE RESPONDING EXTREMELY IMPORTANT				
	PARENTS	STAFF	STUDENTS	TAXPAYERS	ALUMS
	n=330	n=214	n=207	n=227	n=165
Q9. High school teaching experience or demonstrated understanding of it?	47	66	36	59	54
Q10. Proven ability to manage conflict & change with confidence & equanimity?	55	63	31	55	49
Q11. Leadership experience in a similar community and district	48	27	29	37	42
Q12. Expertise in school district finance?	20	14	16	23	31
Q13. Proven success in implementing new, innovative opportunities for retaining staff?	35	32	31	27	29
Q14. Worked with legislators to pursue legislative priorities of district?	6	6	11	4	6
Q15. Created new opportunities for community engagement and collaboration?	7	8	20	9	12
Q16. Ensured high standards of academic excellence for ALL students?	54	44	46	53	58
Q17. Explored and incorporated best practices from other top public & private schools?	37	17	26	31	28
Q18. A comprehensive knowledge of leading educational research and best practices?	30	25	26	27	29
Q19. Led regular evaluation of instructional and extra-curricular programs?	14	8	18	14	11
Q20. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent INTERNAL communication?	25	58	31	29	30
Q21. Provided consistent, proactive, and transparent EXTERNAL communication?	31	35	27	34	32
Q22. Successfully addressed the needs of a diverse student population?	26	43	33	27	26
Q23. A record as an effective operational manager?	23	18	18	27	28
Q24. Distinction as a visible and immersive presence in the community and schools?	19	30	19	14	19
Q25. Ensured a culture of belonging and connection for all students and staff?	37	61	39	37	35
Q26. Articulated a compelling vision for district's future & moved district toward fulfilling it?	31	31	28	30	31
Q27. Experience and expertise in managing the upgrading of district wide facilities.	8	9	20	7	8
Q28. The proven ability to Inspire and motivate all stakeholders?	24	34	19	21	21
Q29. Experience as a superintendent?	28	10	23	22	22
Q30. An earned doctorate degree?	15	11	17	13	20
Q31. Leadership experience in a field other than education?	9	2	19	9	9
KEY:					
Green Shading = More than 50% marked extremely important					
Yellow Shading = More than 40% but less than 50% marked extremely important					

Qualitative Results

In addition to the multiple choice prompts, participants were invited to provide open ended responses to priorities for the next leader, professional qualifications and experiences, and personal attributes.

Regarding “Priorities,” 147 respondents made comments. Three common themes emerged from these:

- Creating a safe and welcoming environment for all students, including students of color, LGBTQ students, and those from marginalized groups, while addressing issues like bullying and divisive rhetoric that harm the school community.
- Reducing or eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and instead focusing on academic merit, college readiness, and preparing students for leadership roles through balanced, unbiased, apolitical education.
- Continued or expanded support for the fine arts and extra-curriculars for students

In addition, there were a few mentions of prioritizing academic rankings, focusing on the needs of “the average student” as well as students with IEPs and 504 plans. A few had a broader view of priorities, such as this verbatim one which reflected sentiments heard from some focus groups:

“I also hope the next superintendent prioritizes creating future leaders in society and to give students the tools to have healthy and constructive dialogue with people who hold different viewpoints. Given the polarization in society today, that is clearly lacking and hopefully our students can change that going forward as they become adults in society. I also think NT should emphasize the importance of service to others and the community and in giving back.”

Additionally, question 8 gave participants the opportunity to provide additional comments regarding priorities for the next superintendent. Of the 279 responses, these were three most common themes.

Mental Health and Social-Emotional Support

There is recognition of the need for supporting students’ emotional and social well-being. Issues like reducing pressure, increasing access to mental health services, addressing bullying, and building a supportive environment are raised, along with concerns about technology use (e.g., limiting phones).

Faculty and Staff Input: There is a deep desire for the new superintendent to ensure a culture where faculty input is valued, the number of initiatives are reduced, that leadership will not be top down and that the leader listens, empowers, and supports the teaching staff.

Mixed Views on Culture of Inclusion and Equity: There are varying views on DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). Some call for a continued focus on inclusivity, combating discrimination, , promoting diversity in the school culture, hiring process, and student body and ensuring every student feels like they belong. Others express concern over what they perceive as political overreach, asking for a politically neutral approach that focuses on merit and fairness and eliminating any DEI initiatives.

While we could quote many of the comments, this one embraced the common themes with a “big picture” lens:

Make it a priority to reflect on what has made NT so successful in the past, yet look to continue its excellence in the future and continue to make it a "relevant" trailblazer in the public education sector. To do so, requires ensuring top notch faculty/staff as well as offering/valuing opportunities for students of variety of interest/abilities, i.e. fine arts programs equal support and respect as athletics. While large, it is imperative that New Trier allow chances for each student to find their niche.

In addition to priorities, several respondents used this section to elaborate on important qualifications. These primary themes were:

Strong Leadership and Decision-Making:

A superintendent with strong leadership skills who is transparent, courageous, and wise. They need the ability to listen to all sides, seek expert opinions, and make principled decisions, even in a divided environment. Someone who can critically address complex issues and maintain integrity is essential.

Superintendent Leadership and Communication

There is a desire for the superintendent to communicate openly, solicit feedback, be visible in the school, and make informed decisions that reflect staff, student, and community input. Leadership qualities like integrity, listening, and openness to re-evaluating current practices were highlighted, reflecting the need for a balanced, inclusive, open leader.

Long-Term Leadership Commitment: Respondents stress the need for a superintendent who is committed to the role for the long term (10+ years). They want a leader who can

provide stability and who will not act as a temporary placeholder, but rather someone invested in the district's future.

Collaborative and Visible Leadership: Several respondents ask for a superintendent who is approachable and visible within the school. They want a leader who interacts directly with students, staff, and parents, and who communicates

Again, from a “big picture” perspective, this comment aligned with what we heard from several focus groups:

“It is imperative that the district have someone who can take a curious, inquisitive, thoughtful approach to the numerous complex issues that arise in a school district. Someone who can listen to both sides of an argument, someone who will seek outside expert opinion on various matters when necessary, someone who will communicate exactly why they are making the decision they are making and give supporting reasons as to how they came to that decision. We live in a divided country in many ways at this time and we need someone who will think critically about every issue that comes before them, seek information and opinion from both sides of an issue, then use this information plus their principles to find solutions. We need someone with a strong backbone, and someone who feels comfortable working with a community who is fortunate enough to be a privileged one, as opposed to someone who may resent the community because of its privilege. Lastly, we need a strong advocate for kids with special services. These kids have so many gifts and they deserve nothing but the absolute best.”

Turning to personal attributes, question 32 asked participants to “please list the most important PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES you believe are essential traits for the next superintendent to have. (For example, integrity, empathy ...).” As noted above there was evidence of polarization regarding priorities, the answers to this question showed a remarkable uniformity among the five major stakeholder groups. The top ten traits for each group are listed in frequency of mention with brief definitions for the first mention of each attribute.

Parents

1. **Integrity** – A strong moral compass, honesty, and consistency in actions and principles.
2. **Empathy** – Ability to understand and share the feelings of others, essential for connection and leadership.
3. **Communication Skills** – Effectiveness in conveying decisions especially in sensitive or complex situations; clear, transparent, and effective both in listening and conveying ideas
4. **Leadership** – Strong capability to lead and inspire, with an emphasis on servant leadership.

5. **Fairness** – Commitment to being just, impartial, and equitable in decision-making.
6. **Collaborative** – Works well with others, encourages teamwork, and values diverse perspectives.
7. **Good Listener** – Actively listens to others, respects differing viewpoints, and fosters open communication.
8. **Emotional Intelligence** – Awareness of one’s own emotions and those of others, facilitating better interactions and decisions.
9. **Work Ethic** – Dedication to hard work, persistence, and excellence in achieving goals.
10. **Open-minded** – Willingness to consider different ideas, viewpoints, and approaches, fostering innovation and inclusivity.

Staff

1. **Empathy**
2. **Integrity**
3. **Honesty** – Leaders who are transparent and truthful in their actions and communication.
4. **Trustworthy** – Reliable, responsible, dependable
5. **Open-minded**
6. **Wisdom** – The ability to make informed, thoughtful decisions with experience and foresight.
7. **Approachability** – Leaders who are visible, accessible, and willing to engage with staff and students.
8. **Compassion** – Kindness and a genuine care for others, including staff and students' well-being.
9. **Confidence** – Having self-assurance without arrogance, and the ability to make decisive choices.
10. **Sense of Humor** – The ability to lighten the mood and engage in sincere, lighthearted conversations.

Students

1. **Empathy**
2. **Integrity**
3. **Kindness**
4. **Leadership**
5. **Intelligence** – Being knowledgeable, advanced in thinking, and smart.
6. **Honesty**
7. **Compassion**
8. **Trustworthy**
9. **Open-minded**

10. Confidence

Community Members

1. **Integrity**
2. **Empathy**
3. **Communication Skills**
4. **Leadership**
5. **Open-minded**
6. **Collaborative** – The ability to work well with others, building strong relationships and fostering teamwork across different stakeholders.
7. **Humility** – Being grounded, approachable, and respectful, while remaining firm in one's goals and decisions.
8. **Visionary** – A forward-thinking mindset, with the ability to develop and execute long-term goals for academic and community success.
9. **Accountability** – A leader who takes responsibility for their actions and decisions, ensuring transparency and trust.
10. **Emotional Intelligence**

Alumni

1. **Integrity**
2. **Empathy**
3. **Communication Skills**
4. **Leadership**
5. **Listening Skills** – Being an active listener and open to feedback from various stakeholders, including faculty, parents, and students.
6. **Approachability**
7. **Visionary**
8. **Open minded**
9. **Humility**
10. **Decisiveness** – The ability to make difficult decisions confidently and act in the best interest of the students and school community was frequently noted.

To summarize, the key personal attributes the next superintendent must possess are:

- **Impeccable Integrity**, which includes honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness
- **Authentic Empathy**, demonstrating with a high level of emotional intelligence and is compassionate, kind, and approachable

- **Excellent Communication Skills**, including presenting clearly and transparently as well as being a careful, active listener with a good sense of humor
- **Exemplary Leadership**, encompassing decisiveness, vision, collaboration, confidence, humility, and a visible work ethic.
- **Wise**, meaning the leader is open-minded, intelligent, thoughtful and fair and holds oneself accountable.

In closing, we found most participants to be thoughtful and engaged respondents. In addition to the survey, we also received a few emails asking that the new leader prioritize sustainability, demonstrate strong support for minority students, and “have the vision and knowledge to make an institution like New Trier more humane.” While some survey comments were lighthearted and humorous, there were also a few inflammatory and derogatory ones; however, we have chosen a comment or two from each set of respondents to provide balanced, verbatim advice to the Board as they pursue the critically important task of selecting the next superintendent:

Parent

[Find someone who exhibits] Honesty; strength of character, intellectual curiosity, integrity, someone who is true to their principles, someone with a strong backbone. Someone who can see nuance and can hear both sides of arguments and appreciates complexity as they make difficult decisions. A critical thinker. Someone who is open to hearing different viewpoints.

...

Integrity, able to relate to students, staff, parents, etc., of varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, warm, approachable, sincere, confident, genuine, good listener, caring, passionate about student needs and the student experience, down-to-earth, a visionary, excellent communicator

Staff Member

Our next superintendent needs to understand the everyday challenges of teachers in classrooms and needs to be deeply familiar with adolescents and their needs. The ability to articulate and defend a liberal arts education is also key. Perhaps most important, the superintendent needs to help us to slow down and focus - we have been doing too many things and the pace of change is exhausting us. Let's identify just a few areas of focus and lead changes that can be sustained and are supported.

...

Shows humanity, empathy, common sense, transparent to faculty, get out and about and not be secluded from knowing staff, treats people as professionals and not subordinates, speaks to staff respectfully, shows humility and empathy, understands the needs of teachers

Student

The most important skills for the next superintendent are the ability to find and maintain top-level staff and facilitate communication between said staff, students, and admin. If we have high-quality teachers who have clear communication on priorities, strategy, etc. other factors will take care of themselves.

...

I think the next superintendent needs to focus on being a trusted leader at this school that students feel comfortable going to as well as being a support to students! They should be trusted enough that students can come up and talk to them if they feel unsafe or need support!

Community Member

"It is always critical for leaders at the top to be excellent recruiters of top talent & set the tone for the culture of the company. If they surround themselves with experts in areas like project management, finance, etc., they should be able to compensate for shortcomings. But, DNA of a leader is to be someone everyone respects, trusts, who has exceptional IQ. Charisma is always helpful too, but some great leaders aren't necessarily fully charismatic. In a school district, you have a ton of different stakeholders & so being able to navigate building relationships with students, teachers, parents, administrators, the community etc. is critical. Being an exceptional listener is critical. Not afraid to make tough decisions. And, of course, a proven track record of success in areas important to the hiring committee. Many hiring failures happen because someone sounds great on paper, but they actually haven't done a lot of what they have OR they don't fit personality wise. So being mindful of all you're prioritizing and checking to ensure someone has demonstrated success and a growth mindset are key. Many hire the person they love but fail to dig deeper. You're not hiring a bff. You're hiring a top leader. Think through what Dr. Sally has that you love and also what you'd wish he'd had as helpful guides in creating your scorecard of what's most important."

...

A person with integrity, open and engaging-a willingness to learn and listen to the needs of parents, students, teachers, thus building trust and community. A forward thinking individual who anticipates educational goals/best practices and can guide the school and community toward them.

Alumni

Empathy, integrity, compassion, effective and appropriate communicator, ability to plan at both the macro and micro level, interest in integrating into the school community

...

[Find someone who] 1. Genuinely enjoys the company of teen-agers and teachers. 2. Analytical talent (acute intelligence & broad knowledge) 3. Trustworthy 4. Sense of proportion (healthy priorities) 5. Patience and Persistence 6. Joyfulness (maybe even playfulness) 7. Empathy and compassion. 8. Varied life experiences.

FOCUS GROUPS/INTERVIEWS/SURVEY

Frequently Noted Themes

The data contained in this report were gathered from Board-identified or self-selected stakeholder respondents as outlined earlier in this report. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the data are not from a purely scientific sampling. However, in almost all cases the data were prioritized by the individuals and members of the groups from which they were gathered. In addition, prior to drawing any conclusions about consistent themes or recurring ideas, the consultants reviewed the occurrence of the indicators or Strengths, Challenges, Priorities and Leadership Qualities within and among the reference groups chosen to participate in this study. So, it can be safely said that there is certainly a rigorous method for bringing these conclusions to your attention and consideration, when selecting the desired characteristics for the next Superintendent for New Trier Township High School District 203. Items are included from the interviews, focus groups, community forums and/or survey, if, in the HYA Associates' judgment, they were repeated with sufficient frequency thus indicating a pattern and/or warranting the Board's attention.

Strengths of the District

1. **High Academic Standards and College Preparation:** The district is known for its rigorous academic curriculum, helping students succeed in college and beyond. Many students are admitted to their first-choice colleges.
2. **Strong Community Involvement:** The district enjoys high levels of parental and community engagement, with significant support for volunteering, participation in clubs, and extracurricular activities.
3. **Well-Resourced and Financially Stable:** The district is well-funded, providing ample resources for both students and staff, ensuring students have access to high-quality education, extracurricular activities, and modern facilities.
4. **Dedicated and Highly Qualified Staff:** Teachers and administrators are committed to student success, with a collaborative relationship among faculty, administration, and the school board. Many staff members are veterans who stay long-term.

5. **Comprehensive Support Systems:** Students benefit from robust support systems such as advisory programs, counseling, and a variety of extracurricular activities, helping meet their social, emotional, and academic needs.
6. **Inclusive and Welcoming Environment:** The district fosters an inclusive atmosphere where all students feel welcome, regardless of their background or abilities. There is strong support for diversity, including LGBTQ+ and special education populations.
7. **Strong Arts, Athletics, and Extracurricular Programs:** In addition to academics, the district excels in arts, sports, and other extracurriculars, ensuring students have well-rounded opportunities to explore various interests.
8. **Collaborative Leadership and Governance:** The district values collaboration between teachers, administrators, and the school board, allowing for shared decision-making and professional trust.
9. **Connection to the Community and Generational Continuity:** Many families have multi-generational ties to the district, creating a strong sense of pride and connection between the school and the broader community.
10. **Focus on Personalization and Small-School Feel:** Despite its size, the district succeeds in creating a personalized experience for students, ensuring that each one feels seen and supported, particularly through the advisory system and student-centered decision-making.

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

1. **High Expectations and Pressure:** There is significant pressure to maintain excellence, with parents expecting perfection, especially with AP classes and competitive extracurriculars. This creates stress for both students and staff.
2. **Mental Health of Students:** The intense academic and social pressures contribute to mental health challenges. There is a need for more wellness support, as well as concerns about balancing AP courses and extracurricular activities.
3. **Diversity and Equity Issues:** Lack of socioeconomic and racial diversity among students and staff remains a challenge. The district must work toward greater inclusion, especially in the face of DEI-related controversies.
4. **Communication Challenges:** Building and maintaining effective communication within the community, staff, and between campuses is crucial. The district struggles with consistency in communication and engagement, both internally and externally.
5. **Parental Pressure:** Parents in the affluent community often have very high expectations, at times acting like educators, which complicates decision-making and adds pressure to school administration.
6. **Financial Pressure:** The burden of real estate taxes and the need to balance maintaining quality education while protecting residents' pocketbooks is an ongoing challenge.
7. **Staff Recruitment and Retention:** Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, especially staff of color, is a growing concern. Teacher turnover due to retirements also present significant issues.

8. **Social Media Impact:** The district must navigate the challenges posed by social media, which amplifies issues related to student behavior, mental health, and community controversies.
9. **Adaptation to Change:** The district faces challenges adapting to post-COVID shifts, including changing student needs, evolving technologies, and the impact of AI on academic integrity.
10. **Inclusivity for Special Education:** Supporting students with IEPs/504s and ensuring accommodations without sacrificing academic rigor is a critical challenge. There are concerns about consistency in how these students are supported.

Immediate and Future Priorities

1. Build Strong Relationships and Listen

- a. Prioritize building relationships with all stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, feeder schools, municipalities, and the Board of Education.
- b. Spend time listening to all viewpoints, especially minority and frustrated voices.
- c. Get to know key leaders (e.g., top 15 contacts) to understand the community's values, concerns, and expectations.

2. Focus on Mental Health, Safety, and Student Well-being

- a. Address the rising concerns around student anxiety, mental health, and community safety. Be proactive in joint agency training and community preparedness.
- b. Engage in thoughtful initiatives around social media's impact on student well-being, technology use in classrooms, and student mental health.

3. Align with the Strategic Plan and Educational Excellence

- a. Review and align with the district's strategic plan, particularly focusing on the 2030 vision and its adaptation to new educational challenges.
- b. Ensure the district maintains its academic rigor while also fostering balance in student lives (e.g., vocational opportunities, block scheduling).

4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- a. Reassure the community of a commitment to addressing DEI issues, including making sure all minority voices are heard and supported.
- b. Focus on recruiting and retaining a more diverse staff, and strengthen inclusion efforts in both student life and faculty representation.

5. Visibility and Communication

- a. Be visible and available to students, staff, and parents by attending key events, student activities, and maintaining a presence at both campuses.
- b. Establish clear, open lines of communication to ensure all voices are heard and foster trust within the community.

Desired Superintendent Qualifications and Attributes

1. **Community Engagement and Relationship Building:** The superintendent should be approachable, visible, and actively present at community events, prioritizing building relationships with all levels of staff, students, and the broader community.
2. **Excellent Communication Skills:** A strong communicator who listens, engages with all stakeholders, and delivers clear, transparent messages, even in challenging situations. The ability to navigate difficult conversations with poise is essential.
3. **Integrity and Transparency:** The superintendent must demonstrate honesty, integrity, and transparency in decision-making and communication, ensuring accountability and fostering trust among staff, students, parents, and the community.
4. **Student-Centered Focus:** A deep, genuine care for students, ensuring decisions are made with their well-being, safety, and success in mind. The superintendent must be committed to understanding the unique needs of all students.
5. **Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** A leader who listens empathetically, demonstrates humility, and shows emotional intelligence in handling diverse viewpoints and needs while maintaining composure under pressure.
6. **Collaborative Leadership:** Encouraging shared leadership, empowering staff, and fostering collaboration across the district. The superintendent should value teamwork and build consensus without micromanaging.
7. **Visionary and Strategic Thinking:** The superintendent should be proactive and forward-thinking, capable of guiding the district with a clear vision that balances tradition with innovation, especially in education trends and technology.
8. **Courage and Decisiveness:** The ability to make difficult decisions and stand firm on key issues, even when faced with opposition, while being willing to admit mistakes and adjust course when necessary.
9. **Commitment to Equity and Inclusion:** The superintendent must prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly underrepresented groups, and addressing issues such as microaggressions and student safety.
10. **Teaching and Educational and Leadership Expertise:** A strong background in education, particularly in high-achieving environments, with experience in managing staff, navigating complex academic systems, and handling the evolving needs of students and teachers

The above summary of qualifications and attributes as well as challenges and priorities and all of the survey data provide an ample basis for interview questions, deep screening, and scenarios for candidates' presentations and immediate responses during the selection process. We also think it is important to add the following nuance from focus groups and forums to the attributes for Board members' consideration.

Community Partners and Civic Leaders desire a leader who will reach out and be a regular and contributing partner. One who is a true presence with both commanding confidence and the realization and authentic humility to realize they have an abundance of community resources and expertise to tap and will need to engage with “sharp advisors.” They encouraged the Board to find a forward thinking leader to work with an exceptional character and work ethic who realizes that “relationships are THE key to successful leadership in the district.”

Students are hungry for a superintendent who will know them, listen to them, and respond promptly to their concerns. They advise the leader to follow through with a cell phone policy, figure out the role of Artificial Intelligence, and understand the pressures they face both in and outside of school. They want a leader who will take responsibility and both be accountable and hold others accountable as well as ensure their physical and social emotional safety.

Staff are seeking a leader who is both trustworthy and trusting. They indicated it is imperative for the new leader to learn, listen, and understand and not to come in with an agenda or new ideas to implement immediately. They advised the leader to remember he or she will not will not be the smartest person in the room and must continually build consensus. To a person they require that the superintendent put students first and ideally have actual classroom teaching experience.

School and District Leadership Teams reinforced the importance of trust and emphasized that the new leader has to be comfortable and competent with the district’s distributed, inclusive leadership model. They want someone with the interpersonal skills to lead while having people see them as “just one of them.” A people-person who connects with staff, knows their names, and prioritizes being present would be most welcome. They noted that a change agent is not needed but a clear vision is essential and that prior to any changes, implementation and evaluation plans should be in place.

Sending District Superintendents noted that the new leader must be an equal partner with them and continue the culture of collaboration and collegiality. They made it clear that the new superintendent would need to have a deep understanding of the greater community’s expectations prior to day one and be able to make tough decisions. This group noted that exceptional political savvy will be required given that she or he will be stepping into the job during the height of national and state campaigning and elections which undoubtedly add to emerging local polarization.

Parents desire a leader who takes time to listen before making decisions, is more proactive than reactive, and is one who reaches folks who are frustrated in addition to those who are happy. It is important that the new superintendent be collaborative and have the capacity to handle all viewpoints and needs. Parents also desire a leader who is politically neutral, leads by example, knows him/herself and has a caring and genuine love for kids.

CONCLUSION

We trust this Leadership Profile Report will provide the Board with a deep understanding of the strengths of the district that the next superintendent will need to sustain and perhaps enhance; with stakeholders' perceptions of both long and short term challenges the district will face and new leader will need to address; with a sense of the top priorities for the superintendent's first weeks and months of leadership; and especially of the qualifications and attributes stakeholders desire the next leader to possess. With this wealth of information to aid HYA in the initial screening process and to support the Board in their multiple rounds of interviews, reference checks, and due diligence, we believe that the final candidate the Board selects will be the perfect fit to lead New Trier Township High School District 203 well into the future.

The HYA Associates would like to thank all the stakeholders, who participated in the interviews, focus groups and community forums or who completed the online survey, for their insights and candor. A note of thanks to all staff members who assisted in facilitating our work in gathering this data, and for their extra efforts in handling the necessary arrangements for our virtual meetings, community forums, and follow-up on any issues of concern or clarification.

In closing, HYA is committed to recruiting and screening candidates who fit the leadership profile and will provide New Trier Township High School District 203 the high quality of successful leadership it desires. The next Superintendent needs to sustain all that is special about the schools, programs, and personnel and provide the vision, hard work, commitment and collaboration that will engage all stakeholders in moving the District forward to meet the expectations of long term success.