



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

School District of Neillsville

January 20, 2025

SELECTION PROCESS

The Neillsville 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:
Scott Winch - email: scottwinch@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 December, 2024 and January, 2025 for the new superintendent of the School District of Neillsville. The data contained herein was obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either interviews or focus group settings and from an online survey. The interviews, focus group meetings and survey 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.

Five current School Board members were interviewed by HYA Associate, Scott Winch. In addition, HYA conducted ten focus groups. A total of 64 stakeholders, including students, participated in the focus groups.

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

1. What are the strengths of the School District of Neillsville that the next superintendent can build upon?
2. What are the challenges facing the School District of Neillsville 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 School District of Neillsville.

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 Neillsville Superintendent were asked to respond to the questions above.

Participation

The total number of individuals interviewed or participating within an interview/focus group was 172. The HYA consultant held six (6) interviews and hosted ten (10) focus groups. The numbers also include the 115 responses to our Google survey.

Interviews / Focus Group	Number of Participants
School Board Members	5
Administrative Team	8
Staff Members	36
Students	15
Parent and Community: Focus Groups and Survey	118
	TOTAL: 172

Description of the District

Neillsville is a charming small town nestled in the rolling hills of Central Wisconsin, which serves as the county seat of Clark County. The community offers a unique blend of natural beauty and historic significance, with an economic base rooted in manufacturing and agriculture. A recent milestone was the construction of a full-service hospital and clinic, which was completed in 2020, and includes a YMCA with 24-hour access. The Neillsville area is known for its outstanding outdoor recreation. Of the 9 Clark County parks and campgrounds, 6 are located within a 15-minute drive of Neillsville. The Black River and numerous lakes offer warm weather opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, kayaking, and canoeing, as well as ice fishing in the winter. The various trail networks throughout the county provide opportunities for hiking, biking, ATVing, motorcycling, horseback riding, and snowmobiling. Bruce Mound is the local winter destination with its ski/snowboarding slopes and tubing runs. Area points of interest include Highground Veterans Memorial Park, Reed School national historic site, and the 1964 New York World’s Fair Pavilion with Chatty Belle the world’s largest talking cow; a popular photo opportunity. The town boasts of numerous active community organizations, a cultural art center, and a theater group, who sponsor many events throughout the year.

The School District of Neillsville is a 4K-12 district, which is made up of elementary, middle, and high schools, all located in one building, with a student enrollment of approximately 873 and a student-teacher ratio of 12:1. The District serves 13 municipalities, including the City of Neillsville, and covers 300 square miles. The District employs 135 teachers and support staff members, with an operational budget of \$12.4M in Fund 10 and \$21.7M in all funds. In 2022, the District passed a \$12M referendum to address aging infrastructure and renovate the facility. The upgrades are in progress and slated for completion in 2025. The District is administered by a five member school board and operates with pupil costs that are below state average.

The School District of Neillsville prides itself on offering excellent educational and professional development opportunities, with a culture born of small-town values and a desire to work together to thoughtfully plan for the future. The School District of Neillsville has a strong, extended school community with overwhelming pride and a committed staff who share a passion for teaching and learning. The District, in an active partnership with families and the community, prepares all students for academic achievement and lifetime success. The School District of Neillsville offers a comprehensive program of studies for their students, which includes support and enrichment services for every level of student need. A wide range of co-curricular and after-school activities is also offered, including summer school.

Visit the School District of Neillsville Website for more information:

<https://www.neillsville.k12.wi.us/>

STRENGTHS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEILLSVILLE **Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

Financial Stability and Stability in Leadership:

The school district is well positioned financially now and for the future. Fund 73 is fully funded, Fund 46 has \$4.6 million and the district also has a strong fund balance in Fund 10. The district also has had stability in leadership; the school board has had little turnover (all board members have served at least two terms). The ability to pass referendums is a credit to the district having a strong connection with the community and has developed a trust with the community due to the continuity.

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 School District of Neillsville. 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 School District of Neillsville feel very comfortable and homey, like a family. With being a smaller school district staff, everyone gets to know the students well. Not just the teachers but all employees are dedicated to the school district. Team players and all employees will pitch in where needed. Amazing staff, committed and dedicated, is a repeated theme. An excellent staff supports students on their path to success. Students have numerous opportunities for learning and extracurricular activities.

Curriculum and Class Offerings:

The curriculum is a strength and there is a value placed on the trades. Parents particularly mentioned the number of opportunities provided for students. The number of dual enrollment courses and college level courses were mentioned as well as the number of activities offered for the students to be involved in. The test scores in the elementary school are strong and the hope is that this will lead to improvement in the other schools.

Opportunities for Students / Strong Athletic and Co-curricular:

For a smaller school district, Neillsville offers a great variety of opportunities for students. Athletics, clubs and activities were mentioned as a strength multiple times. A repeating theme was that students have ample opportunities to participate in anything they want.

Facilities/Technology are up to date:

The school district has been successful in passing referendums which have provided facilities that are current and up to date. The facilities are also well maintained and cared for. Technology updates were also mentioned as a strength of the district, providing the resources needed for staff and students to do their work.

CHALLENGES FACING THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEILLSVILLE **Based on the Data Analysis Collected**

Communication, Transparency and School Culture:

Effective communication and transparency, inside and outside the district, was mentioned by focus groups as a challenge. The district must keep the community informed. One perception is that there needs to be a vision or strategic plan for the district and that initiatives need to be followed through on. Team building will also be important to build upon. It was also mentioned that over the past few years there have been administrative changes (principals in particular), which can be hard on staff morale. It will be a must that the new superintendent builds relationships, is open, honest and transparent.

Staff Challenges:

Like many school districts across the nation, it is difficult to recruit and retain quality staff and school district employees. Neillsville is no different and this can be more difficult in smaller school districts. It was mentioned that as staff leave the district it can be difficult to attract quality applicants. If there are quality applicants then there is a concern about the housing availability which proves to be challenging for anyone moving to the area. There is also a sense that staff is stressed and the students feel that stress in the building. Finally it was mentioned that staff are being put into areas that they may not be licensed to teach because of the low applicant pool. Interoffice communication was also mentioned as a challenge to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Wage Scales:

As competition for staff continues to grow, the district needs to look at its pay scale for teachers and support staff to remain competitive in the local market. New staff members are brought in at a higher rate than veteran staff which can cause friction within the buildings and district. Staff would like to see more incentives for continuing education and see adjustments to PTO for full and part time staff.

Accountability:

Accountability was mentioned several times as a challenge moving forward for staff and students. The perception seems to be that the district is too lenient on staff and students and that people need to be more accountable for their actions. The general consensus is that everyone should be

treated the same no matter their role in the district. Job descriptions were also mentioned as needing to be updated so everyone knows who is responsible for what.

Curriculum Alignment:

The curriculum was mentioned as needed to be aligned to improve instruction and secondary test scores. As mentioned, the elementary test scores are very good. With some alignment to the curriculum, the feeling is that the district will see improvement at the secondary level. With the alignment staff would also like to see an increase in professional development opportunities for teachers and support staff.

DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

Many of the discussions pertaining to strengths and challenges for the School District of Neillsville 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, and can improve the overall culture and the perception of the school 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 School District of Neillsville.

The new leader will be one that is balanced and can advocate for the School District of Neillsville 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, skilled in leading difficult decisions and must be comfortable in changing the culture; be an outside of the box thinker. The ideal candidate will have educational administrative leadership experience, be a strong instructional leader, have experience with school finance and be a people person.

School District of Neillsville Superintendent Desired Candidate Profile

The School District of Neillsville 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 School District of Neillsville 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 and strategic plan with the Board, community, faculty, staff, students, and administrators
- Listens to and effectively represents the interests and concerns of students, staff, parents, and administrators
- Places the students at the center of every decision

- Inspires, motivates, supports, and empowers the staff/principal to lead change with transparency
- 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
- 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 on commonly agreed upon 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

An experienced educational leader who:

- Is laser focused on student success and equity, regardless of background, abilities, or level of proficiency
- Can successfully enhance the district's reputation in academics, programs, activities, athletics and the arts
- Understands the importance of using data to skillfully implement a strategic plan and then stay to see that plan through
- 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, 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 Neillsville Superintendent as per Stakeholder Comments

Accessible	Do what is best for kids	Honest	Advocate for Neillsville/public education
Flexible mindset	Honor time of people	Supportive	Care about kids and families
Fair	Hold people accountable	Kind	Treat staff as trusted professionals
Strong with budget	Firm decision maker	Visible	Supportive and trust staff members
Involved	Knowledge of technology	Efficient	Clear and honest communication
Transparent	Live in the district	Trustworthy	Clear vision and see the vision through
Approachable	Inspire/Motivate staff	Treat all equally	Solid resource but give staff autonomy
Flexible	Streamline processes	Positive leadership	Pulse on the political landscape
Personable	Good business sense	Strategic Plan	Good communicator - school and public
Good listener	Be part of the community	New ideas	Personal touch with students and staff
Firm but fair	Experienced	Energetic	Understand the community
Goal oriented	Stand up for what's right	Develop curriculum	Balance between academics and extras
Well spoken	Fiscally responsible	Community minded	Interact with students and staff
Positive role model	Motivate educators	Be in the schools	Support principals/let them run the buildings

STUDENT INPUT AND DATA

Strengths of the School District of Neillsville Based on the Data Analysis Collected

Welcoming, safe schools and positive culture:

The students spoke very highly of the staff and their dedication to helping all students meet their educational needs. In particular, teachers were mentioned as welcoming and are willing to do what is necessary to help students succeed. The students also stated that they felt safe in school and felt bullying was not an issue in the school. The students felt there was a good community within the school.

Good place to live and go to school:

The students feel the Neillsville area is a good place to live, ideal size of community to live in and go to school. Students also mentioned that the teachers are very welcoming and felt like they could talk to staff members and feel supported in doing so. When the students were asked about recommending the school to prospective students, they recommended the school without hesitation.

Strong clubs and activities:

Students appreciate the opportunities to participate in the various sports, activities and clubs. Because of the small size of the district, students felt that they get more opportunities to participate versus if they were in a larger district. Students are also appreciative of the people they have leading the activities.

Strong academics:

The students felt that the school has a strong academic program supported by teachers that make students feel comfortable in their classrooms. The students appreciate the variety of course offerings, including advanced offerings, and feel there are plenty of opportunities for all student academic interests.

Technology:

Students mentioned their appreciation for the technology being up to date and accessible for the students' use.

Challenges and Issues Facing the School District of Neillsville Based on the Data Analysis Collected

Consistent discipline:

The students feel a major issue was having consistent discipline in the schools and would like to see more follow through in discipline more discipline in the schools

Less priority on sports:

The students would like to see the district have less emphasis on sports and have the district put more emphasis on other co-curricular activities. They did feel sports were important but also value other offerings in the district.

Open campus can be abused:

The students certainly appreciate having open campus but also feel that the privilege can be abused and should be monitored more closely.

Students should have more respect for staff:

The students are appreciative of the efforts of the staff but believe some students don't always respect the staff and their efforts to assist the students. This would also work hand in hand with the more consistent discipline mentioned above.

Desired Characteristics of the Next Neillsville Superintendent as per Student Comments

Engaged with the students	Kind/empathetic	Funny, professional, organized person
Understand students' point of view	Be visible	Have a plan for the school and then make it happen
Be part of the school	Equality	Want to see students succeed
Assertive	Get along with staff	Socialize with students, get to know them
Firm, don't be a pushover	Connected with staff	Be involved at events

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.

Respectfully submitted,
Scott Winch, HYA Associate

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

- Financial stability
- Students are good, rural community values
- Teachers tend to stay if they make it past a few years
- Facilities are up to date, should not need to go to a referendum
- Financially sound
- Very good staff
- Principals should be set
- Facilities are in good shape
- Stability of the school board
- Fiscally strong, current superintendent has been good
- Excellent relationships with community
- Community feel apart of the school
- Board is very stable
- School climate is positive
- Students feel safe and comfortable with the adults in the building
- One building, allows for networking
- Work as a team for each student
- Facilities are well taken care of
- Variety of course offerings, college to remedial
- Financial stability
- Continuity in leadership
- Financial stability
- Recently passed referendum, building updates are doing well
- Stability of school board, six years is least veteran
- Community support of the district, families and business partners
- Strong special needs program
- Neillsville has good community values
- Teachers are very understanding
- Staff is personable
- Worked well with families, helped with family situations
- Good communication with teachers
- Community support
- Seven referendums passed in 29 years
- Good staff
- Financially strong \$4.6 in fund 46
- 73 fully funded
- Strong fund balance
- Industrial park is strong, large employment
- Continuity in leadership

- Fiscally strong district
- Continuity in leadership
- Community trusts the district
- School is the community hub
- Strong leadership, fiscal/legal expertise
- Many opportunities for kids
- Do what is best for kids
- PD opportunities have been good for staff
- Partnership with the community
- Good teaching staff
- Infrastructure is solid
- Foodservice
- Technology is good
- Debt free since 2013, now referendum
- Strong budget
- Informed staff - changes to pay, benefits
- People tend to stay, particularly in high school
- Financially sound
- Good hard working staff
- People serve many roles, helping out with extras
- One building K-12, strong relations between the building
- Strong co-curriculars
- Updated technology
- Stability in leadership
- Former students come back to teach/work
- Small class sizes
- Community based, rec dept
- Financially stable
- One building for all students
- Strong staff
- Lots of involvement in extras, staff and students
- Updated technology
- Updated buildings
- Opportunities for older students, courses and extras
- Appreciate having the opportunity to voice their thoughts
- Staff is good
- Lunch department is great
- Upgrades to the facilities
- Financially strong
- Good staff camaraderie
- Good that everything is in one building
- Facility upgrades
- Good relationships with school board

Future Challenges: School District Stakeholder Comments

Other Comments that were Recorded during the Focus Groups

- Staff pay
- Attract more candidates for open positions
- Staff being involved, co-curriculars
- Some students are socio-economically disadvantaged
- Declining enrollment
- Keep staff, look at pay scale
- Staff retention
- Reading and math scores are concerning
- Academic progress
- More strategic planning with board involvement
- Housing in community can be challenging
- Respect for teachers
- Declining enrolment
- Hard to attract and retain staff
- Unfunded mandates
- State funding formula
- Change can be hard
- Compensation model, retain and attract staff
- Bullying can be an issue
- Too much screen time
- Sports programs, participation dwindling
- Retaining teachers
- Town not growing, getting older
- Enrollment decline, but leveling
- Property value is increasing
- Declining enrollment
- Attract and retain staff
- Secondary academic scores (elementary scores are strong)
- Salaries to keep and get staff
- Staff is skeletal, could use more staff
- Needs of students are on the rise
- Micromanage, let us make decisions
- Staff and community understand chain of command
- Replace staff, try not to go with attrition if there is a need
- Separate administration from athletics
- Transparency, keep everyone informed
- Transparency between office staff
- Upgrade to furnishings
- Low pay - comparatively
- Communication
- Staff turnover
- Lenient on staff, hold accountable

- Fairness, treat everyone the same
- New people get more pay than experienced staff
- Communication can improve at all levels
- Wage scale
- Accountability
- Student discipline, consistency
- Declining enrollment
- Majority of support staff feel unappreciated
- Lack of benefits for support staff
- Short of staff, language arts, business ed
- Accurate job descriptions, who is responsible for what
- Clearer expectations of staff
- More school pride on display (include a mascot)
- More welcoming at entrances, etc...
- Vertical alignment in all subject areas
- Lack of subs
- Incentives for teachers to go on to school
- STEP - tax incentives for seniors to help out?
- Get input from correct stakeholders
- Streamlining processes, be more efficient
- Nepotism
- Pay scales
- Set standards and have people follow them
- Staffing challenges
- Large class sizes
- Better communication in the building
- Having enough staff in all areas
- Competitive wages/benefits
- Structure of PTO, full vs part time
- Staff compensation
- Training staff on new curriculum
- Train classroom assistants
- Filling open positions
- Assigning tasks to other staff when positions are not filled
- Like to see board in the school more often
- Equitable compensation for extra duties that are assigned