



**HYA** Executive Search  
Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates

## **Santa Clara Unified School District**

### **Superintendent Search**

### **Leadership Profile Report**

**March 13, 2025**

#### **Executive Summary**

Before the California Gold Rush, the Santa Clara Valley was undoubtedly one of the most naturally beautiful regions of California. Grasslands and oak groves dotted the valley floor and small streams wound their way to the San Francisco Bay. It was here that the Santa Clara Grammar School was established in 1867, and five years later, Santa Clara High School opened on the same property. The mild climate and fertile soil of the Santa Clara Valley created an area rich in resources, and for many years the Santa Clara Valley was best known for its fruit orchards. By the 1950's, the orchards began to disappear, replaced by housing developments, highways and new industry. Unification of the Santa Clara Union High School District and the Santa Clara Elementary School District was approved by voters in 1965.

Today, Santa Clara Unified School District operates 30 sites and serves over 15,300 K-12 students with an additional 6,000 students in preschool and adult school. The district is quite diverse with 50 home languages other than English. Student demographics include 33% economically disadvantaged, 22% English learners and 59% ethnically diverse. Neighborhoods in the cities of Santa Clara, Sunnyvale, San Jose, and Cupertino comprise Santa Clara Unified School District's 56 square-mile attendance area. In June 2014, SCUSD purchased 59.4 acres of the former Agnews Developmental Center to build their newest educational campus.

The district employs 3,104 people and prides itself on recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers, classified employees, administrators and managers. This team of collaborative professionals, prioritize each student's well-being and academic preparation which are long-standing values of the district. Families are proud of the community's diversity and the district's focus on equity and inclusion.

Classrooms throughout SCUSD are rich in resources, and along with a comprehensive curriculum, students participate in visual and performing arts, world languages, a variety of career technical classes, as well as extracurricular sports and clubs. Students with special needs are supported by special education classes, the Migrant Education program and English Learner programs.

SCUSD offers a spectrum of mental health and wellness programs which includes licensed clinicians at each school site, wellness centers at secondary schools, substance abuse counseling, and ongoing parent/guardian outreach events. These resources are augmented by partnerships with community-based agencies, collaboration with county and state agencies and engagement with our school communities.

### **About the Leadership Profile Report**

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in February and March 2025 in Santa Clara Unified School District. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with focus groups and conducted individual interviews. The interviews and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board of Trustees in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new superintendent.

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.

The online Stakeholder Survey is attached as an addendum to this report and closely aligns with the information summarized from focus groups.

### **Stakeholder Input**

As part of the Engage Phase of the Superintendent Search, HYA Associates use an inclusive approach that seeks first to understand what students, staff, parents, Board and community members need and desire from their school district and Superintendent. The Associates engaged both internal and external stakeholders using virtual and face to face interviews, focus groups, forums, and surveys. The goal was to gather information from all stakeholders to identify the strengths of the district, the district's current and foreseeable challenges, and the preferred characteristics of the next

superintendent. The summary of this information is presented as Cross Cutting Themes.

## **Participation**

Approximately 2500 stakeholders participated in focus groups, interviews and/or completed a survey providing information on the strengths, challenges and preferred characteristics of the next superintendent.

<b>Santa Clara Unified School District Groups</b>	<b>Focus Groups (21) and Individual Interviews (34)</b>	<b>Online Survey</b>
Board	8	8
Management	110	55
Certificated	41	387
Classified	10	192
Families	720	716
Nonparent	15	35
Students	45	156
Total	949	1,541

## **Cross Cutting Themes**

### **Strengths of the District**

Focus group and survey participants spoke proudly of the Santa Clara Unified School District and identified many strengths. Top strengths include:

- A strong and vibrant sense of community
- Bright and amazing students
- Positive labor relations
- Dedicated and talented staff
- Diverse and inclusive environment
- Financially stable, fiscally responsible
- Strong parent and community engagement
- Comprehensive academic student services and extra-curricular programs

These strengths highlight SCUSD's commitment to fostering a supportive, inclusive and academically enriching environment for all students. This diverse student population of 20,000+, reflects a learning community that fosters a family-like atmosphere where students, staff and families feel connected and supported. District staff and the school board are immensely proud of the Labor Management Partnership they have formed which has resulted in a unique collaboration among the employee groups and district administration and contributes to a cooperative working environment. District core values include Students First, Integrity, Empathy, and Respect and Collaboration are but a few values exemplified across the schools and SCUSD community.

### **Challenges and Issues Facing the District**

When asked about current and potential future challenges, participants were thoughtful and respectful in identifying the following opportunities for growth.

- Achievement and opportunity gaps persist among student groups
- Declining enrollment
- Inconsistencies in communication
- Staffing – ability to recruit and retain classified staff is a challenge
- Board training
- Political and social tensions
- Alignment and articulation across schools and grade levels

While declining enrollment in a community funded school district may not necessarily affect the district's funding, it could contribute to increasing the already present achievement and opportunity gaps within the district's schools. Perceived inconsistent communication between departments, schools and families result in mixed messaging and inefficiencies. The Board is recognized for their leadership role in the district and is encouraged to continue governance team training to clarify roles and improve trust. These challenges and issues highlight areas where SCUSD could focus on improving or creating new systems that would contribute to a more unified and effective district.

### **Desired Characteristics**

After seeking input from its Board members, parents, staff, students, and community via focus groups, interviews, and surveys, the HYA Associates compiled a comprehensive list of desirable leadership traits for its next superintendent. The Board of Trustees seeks a strong educational leader who possesses well-defined leadership qualities and models and reflects:

- Visionary Leadership - establishes a clear and dynamic vision for student success, district improvement and long-term educational goals
- Strong interpersonal skills - friendly, approachable, kind and respectful.

- Responsive communication - highly visible both on sites and out in the community. Actively listens and follows up on concerns.
- A student-centered approach - prioritizes student voice and equity, student well-being, academic success, and values individualized learning styles. Creates and maintains a safe, inclusive learning environment.
- Instructional leadership - possesses a deep understanding of TK-12 curriculum, instruction and best practices with a focus on articulation and alignment throughout the district.
- Empathy and compassion - genuinely cares about people, builds strong relationships and prioritizes students, staff, parents and community. A person of integrity.
- Community engagement - builds trust through open, consistent communication with students, parents, families and the broader community
- Strong decision-making - uses data and research to make informed and strategic decisions. Holds self and others accountable.
- Collaborative leadership - Authentically engages with the Labor and Management Partnership. Values and supports all staff.

**A proven leader with the ability to:**

- Be resilient and crisis ready - able to handle crisis and navigate local and national political issues. Makes organizational decisions with confidence.
- Participate as integral member on the Governance team - committed to developing and facilitating a high performing governance team
- Be fiscally responsible - has working knowledge of district budgets and organizational structure. Plans for a fiscally stable future.

**Regarding leadership experience and accomplishments, the ideal candidate will have:**

- A strong educational background in instructional leadership, educational research, emerging best practices, human resources and organizational management.
- Experience as a teacher or support staff, principal and district office administrator.
- Experience in a similar, complex and diverse district.
- An understanding of California laws and the California Education Code.
- Doctorate and bilingual preferred.

## **Appreciations**

HYA and the Board of Trustees 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 Santa Clara Unified School Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and communities. The search team would like to thank all the stakeholders who completed the online survey and the SCUSD staff members who assisted with communications, setting up the survey, and providing support to the consultants, notably Jean Burrell, Executive Assistant, Jennifer Dericco, Director of Communications, and Oscar Cazares, Human Resources.