



# LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

**Ripon Area School District  
March 13, 2025**

## SELECTION PROCESS

The Ripon Area School District (RASD) has retained the services of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) to assist the Board with the hiring of the next superintendent. The consultants will screen applications and recommend candidates to the Board for interviews and further consideration. Any questions regarding the application process, selection process, and/or this Leadership Profile Report should be directed to: Mike Richie, HYA Vice President, or Scott Winch, HYA Senior Associate. [mikerichie@hyasearch.com](mailto:mikerichie@hyasearch.com) / [scottwinch@hyasearch.com](mailto:scottwinch@hyasearch.com)

## PURPOSE

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by HYA during the month of February 2025 for the new superintendent of Ripon Area School District. The data contained herein was obtained from the 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.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses the skills and character traits required to meet the district's needs. The search team will focus its recruitment on candidates who possess leadership qualities congruent with the profile.

The search team would like to thank the Ripon Area School District for the opportunity to find your next leader that fits the criteria of your stakeholders. HYA would like to thank all of the participants who attended focus group meetings or completed the online survey and the RASD staff who helped coordinate the schedules, invitations, dates and arrangements which supported the data collection for this report.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dr. Mike Richie, HYA Consultant  
Scott Winch, HYA Senior Consultant

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The City of Ripon is a family-oriented, historic, rural community located in Fond du Lac County in east-central Wisconsin, just 20 miles west of Oshkosh and Fond du Lac. The Ripon area boasts affordable housing, low crime, and easy access to jobs, shopping, and recreation destinations.

Ripon Area School District is an innovative, fiscally strong, high-achieving district with an annual operating budget of \$31 million. The District encompasses 117 square miles with a PK-12 enrollment of over 1,700 students, positive open enrollment, a professional staff of 144, a support staff of 78, and a 13-member administrative team. The district has a full-day 4K program, 3 elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, an alternative high school program, and a 4K-12 virtual school. Ripon aims to empower learners, engage the community, and enrich the world through the Core Values of Integrity, Excellence, Commitment, Collaboration, Innovation and Kindness.

Ripon High School, Ripon Middle School, Murray Park Elementary School and Quest Elementary Charter School received the Best of Schools national distinction from US News and World Report. Ripon has also been chosen repeatedly as a Best Community for Music Education and was named a District of Distinction by Project Lead The Way for its K-12 engineering program.

Graduates of Ripon are prepared for success after high school with over 58% of graduating seniors earning college credit, 50 student apprenticeships through partnerships with local businesses, and 72 earning industry certifications. Students in the Ripon Area School District are building their future through the support of dedicated, professional staff, passionate about education, and striving for excellence.

The City of Ripon with 7,792 citizens is known as the “Birthplace of the Republican Party” and the home of the Little White School House. The family-oriented community is close to larger metropolitan areas, yet offers the peacefulness and safety of small-town Wisconsin. *Budget Travel* magazine named Ripon one of the “Coolest Small Towns in America” in 2011.

The city of Ripon offers cultural and educational opportunities as the home of Ripon College and its 810 students. The friendly community offers an abundance of natural beauty, historic neighborhoods, and sites, with an energized downtown offering charming shops, tasty cuisine, and historic character. The Village Green at the heart of the city is a gathering place for free concerts in the summer on the lawn and evening ice skating under white lights in the winter.

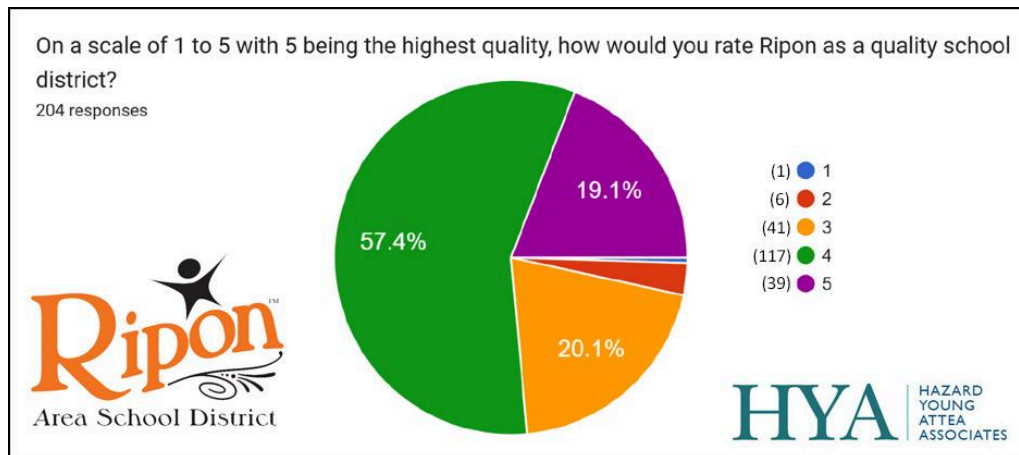
Nearby Green Lake is a quaint lake resort town and a top destination for outdoor enthusiasts. A recently completed paved bike trail connects the two communities, providing easy access to recreation such as fishing, swimming, kayaking, boating, golf, hiking, an art gallery, and a fruit orchard. The Thrasher Opera House is a historically restored venue offering music, theater, opera, and dance.

**Visit the Ripon Area School District website  
for more information:**  
[www.ripon.k12.wi.us](http://www.ripon.k12.wi.us)

**Ripon Area School District Strategic Plan:**  
[Ripon Area School District - Ripon Area  
School District Strategic Plan](#)

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

From February 17 to 27, 2025, an online survey was conducted for all stakeholders. The Ripon Area School District received a notably high response rate for a district of its size, with 205 participants. Of those, a total of 156 respondents (76.5%) rated the district a 4 or 5 out of 5, reflecting a strong level of satisfaction.



To shape the search for a new superintendent, the HYA Associates gathered valuable insights through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. These efforts aimed to identify the key qualities desired in the next leader while also highlighting RASD's strengths and challenges ahead. Common themes voiced by multiple groups were used to build a well-rounded leadership profile, ensuring the selected candidate aligns with the district's needs and vision. It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor does it necessarily represent the majority opinion of each respective group.

The HYA Associates conducted individual interviews with all nine (9) current School Board members, along with fourteen (14) focus groups (both in-district and virtual), ensuring that a broad range of perspectives are considered in the superintendent search.

### The following questions were asked during each interview and focus group:

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

Through the information gathered, common themes were generated by the respondents. In this report, we will highlight what those themes were as identified by the following groups:

- School Board
- Community/Parents
- Staff
- Students

## PROCESS

The structure of the individual meetings and focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. All of those involved in providing input were asked to respond to the questions on page 4.

## PARTICIPATION

Responses were gathered from individual interviews and focus groups. The HYA consultants conducted five individual interviews and hosted 14 focus groups.

<b>Ripon Area School District Focus Groups/Interviews</b>
School Board (9 individual interviews)
Focus Group 1: High School Students (Grades 9 - 10)
Focus Group 2: District Office Staff
Focus Group 3: Administrative Team
Focus Group 4: All Staff / All Employees
Focus Group 5: Parents and Community Members
Focus Group 6: Open to All (Virtual)
Focus Group 7: High School Students (Grades 11 - 12)
Focus Group 8: Chief of Police / City Administrator / Mayor
Focus Group 9: Ripon College Vice President, Dean of Students
Focus Group 10: Ripon Education Foundation Current President and President Elect
Focus Group 11: Senior Group
Focus Group 12: Chamber of Commerce / Civic Groups / Boys & Girls Club / Public Library
Focus Group 13: All Staff / All Employees
Focus Group 14: Parents and Community Members

## PROFILE DEVELOPMENT & QUALITATIVE DATA

Perceived Strengths • Perceived Challenges • Desired Characteristics

### Strengths of the Ripon Area School District as identified by BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### High Academic Success

- High academic achievement with strong standards.
- Recognized as one of the top districts in the area.
- Quest Elementary, Murray Park Elementary, and Ripon Middle School (RMS) named "Best Schools" by *U.S. News & World Report* (2023-2024).
- Ripon High School ranked a *Best High School* nationally and statewide for the sixth consecutive year (2024), placing 156 out of 462 schools in Wisconsin.
- Data driven decision making to support student success.
- Project-based learning in Charter Schools enhances real world skills.

#### Community Support and Student Enrichment

- Strong community support for academic excellence.
- Partnership with Ripon College provides students with early exposure to higher education.
- Small, close-knit district fostering strong relationships.
- Free enrichment programs (BRAVE & Camp BRAVE) for 4K-5th grade, funded by the Nita Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant.
- Successful referendum showcasing community investment.
- Collaborative and supportive district-community partnerships.
- Recognizing and honoring outstanding contributions with annual *Distinguished Alumni Award* and *Friend of Public School Award*.

#### Dedicated Staff & Leadership

- Progressive and strategic administrative team.
- Committed staff with opportunities for professional growth.
- Forward thinking strategic planning focused on long term success.
- Adaptable and innovative educational approaches.

#### Innovative and Future-Focused

- Welcoming, student centered culture.
- Strong mental health support for students.
- Clear and effective communication, with ongoing improvement efforts.
- Adaptable and innovative district.

#### Strong Fiscal Management and Infrastructure

- Proactive financial planning to balance growth while maintaining low tax rates.
- High achieving district with efficient spending.
- Grants secured to support Charter School development.
- Strong infrastructure to enhance learning and student success.

## Challenges of the Ripon Area School District as identified by BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### Board Direction and Vision

- Need for a stronger communication channel between the Board and the community to foster partnership and transparency.
- Leadership dynamics create challenges; the Board should have a more active role in decision making rather than feeling subordinate to the superintendent.
- The superintendent should involve the Board more in key discussions and decisions.
- A top-down leadership approach can discourage stakeholder engagement.
- Unease or discomfort when Board members question the superintendent.
- Lack of board committees, infrequent meetings, and limited committee work hinder effective governance.

### In-School Challenges

- Cultural issues highlight the need for a stronger focus on diversity and inclusion.
- Achievement gaps must be addressed to ensure all students succeed.
- More professional development opportunities are needed for educators.
- Additional support is required for lower elementary teachers.
- The middle and high school music program faces declining participation, partly due to scheduling conflicts (Zero Hour).

### State Mandates and Budget Constraints

- The district must proactively prepare for upcoming state mandates and unfunded requirements.
- Loss of ESSER funding creates financial strain.

### Enrollment Concerns

- Declining enrollment negatively impacts the district’s budget and long term sustainability.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Ripon Superintendent as identified by SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Leadership - Collaborator</b>	<b>Clear and Concise Communicator</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The superintendent should be a strong, collaborative leader who listens, incorporates input, and follows through on plans. They should unite, not divide, embrace innovation, and have the vision and organizational skills to advance the district. Empowering others and fostering confidence in their abilities is essential.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The superintendent must maintain open, transparent communication and keep the Board fully informed of all aspects of the district. They should recognize that the Board is their supervisor, not the other way around. The superintendent should collaborate with the Board to develop shared goals and strategic plans.</li> </ul>

Experience - Instruction and Finance	Community Minded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent must have a strong background in education and curriculum, be academically focused, politically savvy, and possess firsthand knowledge of school finance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent should be highly visible in school and at community and civic events, serving as the district's face. They must be genuinely invested in Ripon and its best interests.</li> </ul>
Interpersonal Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent must have strong interpersonal skills - being approachable, creative, flexible, level headed, and compassionate - while maintaining a clear vision for advancing the district.</li> </ul>	

**Strengths of the Ripon Area School District as identified by  
PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

**Student Opportunities and Academic Excellence**

- Well balanced academics, arts, activities, and athletics.
- Strong college partnerships with dual credit options.
- Diverse resources, learning strategies, and rich programming.
- Valuable youth apprenticeship program.

**Community Focus and Partnerships**

- Strong district-community and city collaboration.
- Ripon College as a key asset.
- Engaged staff and administrators living locally.
- Prime location with outdoor activities.

**Tradition of Excellence**

- Progressive, innovative education approaches.
- Extensive student opportunities.
- Strong, communicative staff.
- Support for all student needs, including before and after school care.

**Safe and Supportive School Culture**

- Dedicated, passionate educators.
- Secure environment with safety plans, a committee, and police involvement.
- Two school resource officers.
- Strong support for special needs and mental health.

**Ripon: A Great Town**

- Small town charm with industrial opportunities.
- Bedroom community for Oshkosh and Fond du Lac.
- Vibrant downtown, outdoor activities, and a great location.



## Challenges of the Ripon Area School District as identified by **PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **School Board Leadership**

- The Board must oversee the superintendent, not vice versa.
- Concerns about staff treatment and division overshadow the superintendent's strengths.
- Opportunity for change with a new superintendent.
- Greater transparency and accountability needed.
- Bridge the gap between decision makers and staff for a more collaborative environment.
- A vision exists, but a concrete plan is needed.

### **Staff Retention and Compensation**

- Need to retain staff with competitive salaries.
- Fair compensation for teachers and support staff, not just administrators.
- Difficulty replacing experienced teachers.

### **Teacher Support**

- Teachers need more support beyond instruction.
- Schools face increasing societal challenges.
- Newer teachers lack adequate support.
- Administrators should be more present in schools and classrooms.

### **Relationship Building**

- Strengthen connections with parents, the community, and between schools.
- Enhance partnerships with Ripon College and local businesses.
- Administrators hesitate to make decisions due to fear of consequences.
- Cultural change is necessary to foster unity.

### **Declining Enrollment and Other Challenges**

- Clear expectations and accountability needed for students and teachers.
- Fiscal responsibility required after ESSER funds loss.
- High Special Ed enrollment strains elementary resources.
- The political climate presents challenges.
- Excessive student options can reduce participation.
- Athletic programs and equipment need improvement.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Ripon Superintendent as identified by PARENTS and COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Relationship Builder</b>	<b>Student and Staff Focused</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent must be present in schools, building rapport with students and staff. They should foster strong relationships with Ripon College, the City of Ripon, and other community organizations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent must understand the needs of staff and students, be cooperative, and prioritize safety and mental health.</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional - Leadership Experience</b>	<b>Effective Communicator</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent should possess strong leadership qualities, advocate for schools and public education, and have a solid fiscal background with significant teaching experience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As the district's spokesperson, the superintendent must clearly communicate a vision, be transparent, and lead through direct engagement, not just email.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Engagement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The superintendent must be an active part of the community, accessible and engaged in events, civic groups, and the city.</li> </ul>	

**Strengths of the Ripon Area School District as identified by STAFF**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

**Commitment to Student Well-Being**

- Dedicated staff who care deeply about students and the district.
- Strong and supportive administrative team.
- Effective academic support systems in place.

**Academic Standards and Strong Programming**

- Virtual school (Odyssey) offers flexibility.
- Growing Agriculture program.
- Strong FBLA program.
- Strong literacy initiatives.
- Dual credit opportunities for students.
- Comprehensive curriculum.
- Opportunities for families with before and after school programming.
- Six week in-depth summer school program.
- Strong Youth Apprenticeship program.
- Effective ELL support at the high school level.

### **Welcoming School Environment**

- Friendly and inviting schools.
- Small district appeal with strong community connections.
- Manageable class sizes benefit students.
- Positive student culture in academics and behavior.
- Well maintained facilities.

### **Supportive Administration and Community**

- Community support for referendum.
- Approachable and cohesive administrative team.
- Innovative and forward-thinking district leadership.
- RASD has a strong positive presence within the community.

### **Professional Development and Teacher Compensation**

- Competitive and equitable pay scale.
- Board commitment to maintaining fair compensation.
- Strong support for professional development and career advancement opportunities.
- Dedicated staff committed to growth and improvement.

## **Challenges of the Ripon Area School District as identified by STAFF**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **Financial Challenges**

- With ESSER funds ending, difficult budget decisions lie ahead.
- The upcoming operational referendum will impact future funding.

### **Staffing Concerns**

- The shrinking teacher applicant pool requires stronger recruitment efforts.
- Declining number of substitutes and aides.
- Need to offer competitive wages to attract and retain talent.

### **Long-Term Planning**

- Declining enrollment requires strategic action.
- Facilities need a long term improvement plan.
- Change must be a collaborative effort involving the superintendent, principals, board, staff, and community.

### **Instructional and Program Needs**

- Broader course offerings needed.
- Rising Special Education enrollment increases compliance demands.
- Athletic participation could improve.
- Growing poverty rates impact student achievement.

### Uncertainty and Future Considerations

- Integration of Boys & Girls Club with BRAVE program raises questions.
- Uncertainty regarding future policies and regulations from the Department of Education.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Ripon Superintendent as identified by SCHOOL DISTRICT STAFF</b>	
<b>Approachable - Personable</b>	<b>Collaborative Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The superintendent must be someone who has a positive energy, is trustworthy and has integrity. This includes being approachable and a good listener with an open door policy. They should be a “people person” encouraging friendly, open communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The superintendent should have a clear, consistent approach, be articulate, and trust the professionalism of others. They must listen to all voices equally, be proactive rather than reactive, and remain open to improvements and ideas.</li> </ul>
<b>Effective Communicator and Listener</b>	<b>Educator Focused</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The superintendent must actively listen and learn to understand what’s happening in the district. They should be open to new ideas and able to clearly explain their actions and rationale.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The superintendent must be a team builder, educator-friendly, and focused on supporting teacher and staff success. They should know how to motivate staff and be transparent, explaining actions and decisions as much as possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Community - Student Centered Relationship Builder</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally, the superintendent would live in Ripon, be actively involved in the community, and remain visible in buildings and classrooms. They should be committed to raising student standards and ensuring students have the tools they need to succeed.</li> </ul>	

### Strengths of the Ripon Area School District as identified by HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### Variety of Opportunities – Academic and Extracurricular

- Wide range of classes, arts, clubs, and activities.
- Club sponsored trips provide enriching experiences.
- Zero hour classes expand scheduling options.
- Dual enrollment courses allow students to earn college credit.
- Free virtual class options.
- Counselors actively support Academic Career Planning (ACP).
- Advanced classes available, also offered to 9th and 10th graders.
- Strong summer school program.
- Youth Apprenticeship opportunities.
- Strong Tech Ed department.

### **Supportive RASD Staff**

- Teachers are caring, supportive, and go above and beyond.
- Open and approachable staff is willing to help students.
- After school homework help is valuable.
- Friendly and dedicated custodial staff keeps buildings clean.
- Office staff is welcoming and helpful.
- Respected and well liked school resource officer, contributes to a safe environment.

### **Strong Community Support**

- Alumni provide generous financial support.
- Fun homecoming activities foster alumni connections.
- Strong partnerships with local businesses.
- A small, tight-knit school community allows for a wide range of student involvement.

### **Welcoming School Culture**

- Breakout spaces provide flexible learning outside of the classroom.
- Calming rooms offer a positive space for students.
- Updated athletic and weight room equipment show value in athletics.

### **Student Connections and Leadership**

- Most events are student run and organized, encouraging leadership and involvement.
- Connection with the younger students through a mentor program, involving activities that introduce sportsmanship and the importance of good grades.
- Student Council provides opportunities to support EL students.

## **Challenges of the Ripon Area School District as identified by HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **Student Voices**

- Students feel heard at the high school level but not at the district level.
- Lack of visible action on student feedback.
- Club meeting times during Advisory don't work for all students.
- Communication with students could be improved.

### **Academic and Extracurricular Improvements**

- More trade related class offerings needed.
- Funding should be more balanced between sports and clubs (music).
- More remedial programs, such as general math, would benefit students.
- Need better substitute teachers with subject knowledge.

### **School Lunches**

- More food variety and healthier options needed.
- Expanded à la carte choices.
- High school doesn't have an oven or stove, food is brought from the middle school.

### Facility Needs

- Some bathrooms need repairs and updates.
- High school water fountains have poor taste and some aren't working.
- Baseball and softball fields need upgrades, including field maintenance and a batting cage.

### Student Parking

- Parking issues need better communication and clearer expectations.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Ripon Superintendent as identified by RIPON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS</b>	
<b>Student Centered and Compassionate</b>	<b>Visible and Involved Leadership</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The superintendent must prioritize the well-being and success of all students, being a listener and relationship builder.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being present in schools, the community, and the city is essential. The superintendent should attend events and actively engage with students.</li></ul>
<b>Action Oriented and Results Driven</b>	<b>Strong Communicator</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A superintendent who develops plans and follows through with action is crucial, someone committed to driving improvements forward.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transparency and effective communication are essential. The superintendent must engage with clarity and actively listen to student input. They must listen to students' concerns and opinions, making them feel heard and valued.</li></ul>

## FINDINGS / THEMES

Many of the discussions pertaining to strengths and challenges for the Ripon Area School District flow into the expectations 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.

When the data from interviews and focus groups were combined, common themes emerged. Notably, there was more agreement across groups than differences. Strengths were widely shared, while challenges varied more among groups. The desired characteristics for the next superintendent were also aligned. This consistency is seen as a positive aspect of the search and will provide clarity and focus for both the board and the new superintendent.

The following themes are supported by the combined data.

## STRENGTHS

### High Academic and Student Success

Ripon Area School District (RASD) stands out for its strong academic achievement with strong standards. It is recognized as one of the top districts in the area, Quest Elementary, Murray Park Elementary, and Ripon Middle School (RMS) named "Best Schools" by *U.S. News & World Report* (2023-2024), and Ripon High School ranked a *Best High School* nationally and statewide for the sixth consecutive year (2024), placing 156 out of 462 schools in Wisconsin.

RASD has strong college partnerships allowing students to earn dual credit, diverse resources, learning strategies, and rich programming. The district offers a wide range of classes, arts, clubs, and activities. School staff is actively involved in student learning and counselors actively support Academic Career Planning (ACP).

### Caring Dedicated Staff

All groups highlighted the dedication and compassion of RASD staff. Respondents expressed that staff genuinely care for their students, fostering a welcoming and supportive environment. Respondents also noted that the district has a progressive and strategic administrative team with forward-thinking strategic planning focused on long-term student success.

Staff members feel that they have effective academic support systems in place, which leads to student success. Several groups described RASD as having dedicated, passionate educators. In addition, there is strong support for special needs and mental health.

### Strong Community Support

Groups consistently emphasized the district's strong community support and partnership with Ripon College which provides students with early exposure to high education. RASD benefits from a 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant that funds BRAVE and CAMP BRAVE for students in 4K-5th grade.

There are many collaborative and supportive district-community partnerships and a recent successful referendum showcases community investment. Ripon is a vibrant community in a prime location where administrators and staff live locally.

### Commitment to Student Success and School Culture

RASD is innovative and future-focused, with a welcoming student centered culture. It has a small district appeal with strong community connections. It is an adaptable and innovative district with strong mental health supports for students. The schools have manageable class sizes and are filled with dedicated, passionate educators. In the high school breakout spaces provide flexible learning and other positive spaces are offered for students.

## CHALLENGES

### Board Direction and Vision

Community support remains a core value, but board communication and leadership need improvement. A stronger communication channel between the board and the community is essential to build trust, transparency, and accountability.

Respondents believe the board should take a more active role in decision-making rather than feeling subordinate to the superintendent. The new superintendent should engage the board in key discussions and decisions. Additionally, board committees should be re-established and meet regularly.

### Long Term Planning, Staffing and Enrollment

Limited state funding impacts multiple areas, particularly staff retention and recruitment of certified, support, and substitute staff. The shrinking teacher applicant pool calls for targeted recruitment efforts. Additionally, declining enrollment affects the district's budget and long-term sustainability, requiring a strategic plan. Facilities also need a long-term improvement plan.

### Funding and Financial Stability

State mandates and budget constraints challenge district operations. Proactive planning is needed for upcoming mandates and unfunded requirements. The loss of ESSER funds and declining enrollment add financial strain, requiring difficult budget decisions ahead.

### Program Needs and Teacher Support

Community engagement revealed several key challenges. Educators need more professional development, and lower elementary teachers require additional support. As schools handle increasing societal challenges, teachers need assistance beyond instruction.

Broader course offerings are needed, while rising Special Education enrollment adds compliance demands. Additionally, participation in the middle and high school music program is declining, and athletic involvement could improve.

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

### Visible and Collaborative Leadership

The superintendent must be a visible leader who fosters transparent communication across the district. They should listen, incorporate input, and follow through on plans. Active community involvement is essential, ideally with residency in Ripon. Presence in schools and collaboration with the City of Ripon are key. As an advocate for the district, they must have the vision and organizational skills to drive progress, listen to all voices equally, be proactive rather than reactive, and remain open to improvement and new ideas.



## **Effective Communicator, Personable and Approachable**

The superintendent must be approachable and implement a strong communication model to effectively lead the district. This includes active listening, an open-door policy, and the ability to communicate clearly with all stakeholders. They should value input, foster teamwork, and take a forward-thinking approach. Key qualities include positive energy, compassion, and integrity, ensuring concerns and opinions are heard and valued.

## **Community Minded Relationship Builder**

The superintendent should be a highly visible leader, actively engaged in schools, community, and civic events. As an effective communicator, they must earn trust through integrity and active listening. Clear, transparent communication with all stakeholders is essential, ensuring involvement in decision-making and its outcomes. They should also build strong relationships with Ripon College, the City of Ripon, and other organizations, demonstrating a genuine investment in the community's best interests.

## **Student and Educator Focused**

The superintendent must be an experienced leader dedicated to educator and student success, ensuring RASD maintains high performance across all grade levels. They should understand staff and student needs, foster cooperation, and prioritize safety and mental health.

As a team builder, they must be educator-friendly, support staff success, and lead by example. Transparency, motivation, and relationship-building are key, with a strong commitment to student well-being and achievement.

## **RIPON SUPERINTENDENT DESIRED CANDIDATE PROFILE**

The Ripon Area School District seeks a superintendent who in collaboration with the board, staff, students, parents and community, will focus the district on shared goals and vision. After seeking input from stakeholders through individual and group interviews, focus groups, and a survey, the Ripon Area School District seeks an engaged, visionary superintendent who possesses the following characteristics:

### **Involved Community Member**

- Actively participates in school, activities, and community events to strengthen relationships.
- Partners with local businesses, nonprofits, Ripon College and civic groups to strengthen community ties and support mutual goals.
- Actively promotes an environment where everyone feels valued and involved, ensuring all voices are heard.

### **Cultivator of Growth and Continuous Improvement**

- Welcomes innovation, is a good listener and is open to new ideas, willing to explore different approaches for growth.
- Open to learning, adapting, and improving continually.
- Ability to focus on clear objectives and set measurable goals.
- Embraces modern changes and innovative methods, recognizing that change is necessary for progress.

### **Visionary Leadership**

- Takes direction while partnering with the School Board to move the district forward in a collaborative effort.
- Earns confidence through integrity, consistency, and reliability.
- Empowers staff by delegating responsibility and showing confidence in their abilities.
- Takes courageous actions while being empathetic and understanding toward others.
- Leads by example, inspires others, and fosters a collaborative environment.
- Builds relationships with community members with transparent, concise communication.

### **Approachable, Personable and Compassionate**

- Actively promotes an environment where everyone feels valued and involved, ensuring all voices are heard.
- Engaging as a member of the community and in the schools, an approachable listener with an open door policy.
- Consider the perspectives of all RASD members, encouraging friendly, open communication making others feel heard and valued.

## BULLETED NOTES FROM ALL GROUPS

The interviews and focus groups of stakeholders generated the following responses. Careful attention has been made to accurately convey the message. The comments listed below emerged from statements made by stakeholders and they are to be considered personal opinions of the individual making the comments regarding the Ripon Area School District.

### Board Members

#### What are the strengths of the Ripon Area School District?

- Great buildings
- High academic achievement
- Great outdoor facility, football stadium is old but in good shape, seats 3,800
- Good strategic planning, always keeping eye on strategies and outcomes
- Data is important
- Strong administrative team
- Strong relationship with (Ripon) college
- Board longevity, one member has served on the board for 41 years
- Great staff, fairly rigorous process, encourage growth within the district
- Successful referendum in the past
- Good communication, may need to improve in communicating in different ways
- Good fiscal managers, good job anticipating what is coming up
- Try to keep tax rate down
- Welcoming and kind district
- Forward vision
- Reputation for being one of the best school districts in the area
- Dedicated staff members
- Progressive administrative team, grants to start up charter schools
- Forward thinking group of people
- Community support
- Administrative team is headed in the right direction
- Referendum support
- Got through COVID in good shape
- Community with strong academic standards, college in town is very helpful - students can experience what higher education looks like, elevated place for young people
- Schools are highly ranked
- Project based learning from charter schools was and is a good thing
- Charter schools had a very positive influence on the district, online school will be the only charter in district, had four to five charter schools operating at one time
- Harmonious working groups in the district
- Nice small district
- Adaptable and innovative
- Good relationship with city and college
- Most people work well together
- Overall progress and direction of the district is good
- High achieving and low spending district

- Great work with mental health
- BRAVE (before and after school programming)
- Camp BRAVE (when teachers that have an inservice or staff development)
- Distinguished Alumni Award every year, and Friend of Public School Award
- District has been recognized by US News and World Report
- Well managed financially
- A lot of support for the district from the community
- Schools do well when it comes to ratings, but dropping slightly
- Great infrastructure

### **What are the challenges of the Ripon Area School District?**

- Superintendent needs to involve the board more - insurance, facilities curriculum
- Music program at the middle school and high school are weak, low participation and numbers keep dropping (scheduling can be an issue - zero hour)
- Used to have four board committees now there is only a finance committee, but that has not met in three years
- Leadership at Barlow Park Elementary is weak
- Budget
- Need to anticipate what is coming down the pike from the state
- Unfounded mandates
- Teachers at lower elementary aren't receiving enough support
- Cultural issue
- Top down leadership approach, this really discourages the stakeholders
- Need to see a shift in approachability of administration
- Need to promote diversity
- Funding
- ESSER money is gone
- Need to close the achievement gaps
- Maybe the board can reach out to the community a little more, the community might feel better if they had a better communication channel - don't want to micro-manage or step on the current superintendent's toes
- Everything is filtered through the superintendent so not really sure what is going on in all of the buildings
- There are times when the board is unaware of what is going on
- ELL should be looked at to make sure the district is doing a good job
- More professional development opportunities
- Feels like the board is rubber stamping things
- Board feels that the superintendent is the boss of the Board versus the Board being the superintendent's boss
- Superintendent does not like when teachers go to board members or when the board questions the superintendent
- Budget issues
- Declining enrollment
- Not the wealthiest district around
- Working with less privileged students and community members

- Might want to consider a board retreat so board members can get to know each other better
- BRAVE - people would like to see it start earlier in the morning
- Some bullying issues
- Feel the current superintendent is unapproachable
- Some things are done behind the boards' back
- Board members have not been allowed to go into the buildings unless attending games, concerts or programs

### **What characteristics are you looking for in your next superintendent?**

- Someone that keeps the board informed, we've read things in the newspaper before the board knows
- More discussion with the board on decision making
- Would like see the new superintendent live in the community, present and engaged
- Attend co-curricular events
- Not a micro-manager
- Good communicator with the board
- Good communicator and collaborative
- Community focused
- Vision
- Willing to try new things
- Listen to staff
- Must be able to draw the line
- Must have a human side
- Work with legislators
- Must be able to communicate with the board
- Approachable
- Teacher centered
- Courageous
- Creative
- Flexible
- Level headed
- Work with the principles on continuous quality improvement
- Compassionate
- Figure out how to keep the board informed and what's going on in the buildings
- Strong leadership characteristics
- Transparent philosophy
- Manage professional development programming
- No surprises, don't want to see something in the newspaper first, this has happened in the past
- Political saavy
- Understands curriculum
- Engaged part of the community
- Good common sense
- Open and transparent communication
- Team player

- Not a divider
- Visible at community events and not just school events
- Remembers that the board is their supervisor and not the other way around
- Finances will become a challenge
- Demographics of district has changed and will continue to change, large percentage of free and reduced lunch
- Increase behavior problems
- Special Education staff is overwhelmed
- Significant teaching experience
- Collaborative
- Establish good relationships
- Not a stepping stone, over the last 60 years RASD has had four superintendents

## Parents and Community Members

### What are the strengths of the Ripon Area School District?

- A lot of opportunities
- Solid foundation, a lot going on in Ripon
- Many resources available
- Ripon College
- Location and outdoor activities
- Relationship between the district and community is strong
- Many staff and administration live in the community and are engaged
- The City of Ripon and school district have a solid relationship with two school resource officers
- Good safety committee in place and the Chief of Police is involved
- Safe learning environment
- Blend of a small town, industry and bedroom community for Oshkosh and Fond du Lac
- Nice downtown
- Relationship with city and Ripon College is getting stronger
- One thing that can sink a community is a bad school district, it impacts everything from economics to growth and we have a great school district
- Teaching staff
- Plenty of opportunities for students in courses and extracurricular activities
- Safe environment
- School is community focused
- Community partnerships
- Youth apprenticeship
- Community support of the school
- Drills for safety, plan in place
- Communication from the district is timely and appropriate
- Communication from the teachers is good
- Good people in the community
- College in the city is a plus
- Ripon has been a draw for people to come to school and we want to keep it that way

- Easier for Ripon College to recruit staff because of the strong reputation of the Ripon School District
- Quality of teachers strong the the district
- Look at innovative ways to educate students
- Many Ripon College staff members have served on the Ripon School Board
- Historically the relationship has been solid with some tension lately because of the field situation, the upgrades were going to cost the college a lot of money so Ripon College built their own facilities - the relationship is not as positive as it was in the past, a little tense when you talk about facilities
- Good relationship with high school students taking college credits
- Progressive and innovative district
- Rich programing
- Strong supportive community
- Long standing tradition of excellence
- Strong balance of classes, arts, activities and athletics
- Ability to change, make shifts when needed
- Beating the national average when it comes to retaining the superintendent
- Really good at keeping kids from slipping through the cracks
- Efforts to meet all needs at all levels, before and after school care
- More opportunities for students
- Can try new things
- Great success all across the school district, a lot of good things
- Great robotics
- Great partnerships with community groups
- Fact that they are holding these meetings is a good thing
- Innovation and creativity
- Willingness to access things, let go of things that are not working but take the good things that the district learned
- District does a nice job dealing with mental health issues
- Passionate educators
- Dedicated and passionate teachers
- Community is very invested in the school
- Schools work together to support schools
- Great staff teams in place
- Good job compensating staff for days worked in the summer
- Good virtual/remote learning, during COVID Ripon was amongst the leaders with remote learning
- Special needs services is a strong point
- Fiscally repsonible
- Different learning strategies and offerings to students

### **What are the challenges of the Ripon Area School District?**

- All societal issues come through the schools and the schools deal with a lot
- Teacher requirements, how do we replace good veteran teachers
- Pay administrators good salaries, need to pay teachers and support staff good salaries also

- Need to retain staff
- Current superintendent can be controlling and stand offish, this is a good opportunity to pivot
- Relationship rebuilding needs to happen
- Some administrators are afraid to make decisions because of the consequences they will take from current superintendent
- Hard to get city recreation calendar put out by district because it may conflict with district activities or summer school
- Level of fear
- School has a vision with no plan
- Current superintendent has some great qualities but they are overshadowed by how people are treated and the tension, this can cause a divide
- The school board is the superintendent's boss, not the other way around
- The school board is not running the district
- Better communication and relationships with business partners and community stakeholders
- Someone needs to come in and change the culture
- Accountability in study halls, kids are allowed to sleep
- Students allowed to eat in class, is distracting and dangerous with food allergies
- Hold staff accountable
- Challenge gifted students more
- SPED students need to get what they are required to get, teachers need more support
- Make sure all voices are heard
- Fiscal accountability, we just passed a referendum and now we are told that we are broke
- Scandals around the school, people need to be held accountable
- Athletic programs are a disaster
- Nepotism
- Change is needed, no rubber stamp
- Overlap in administration
- Equipment lacking for athletics
- More collaboration with the college
- Teachers could use more support from administration
- We need to see administration in the buildings more
- More unity between the schools
- Teachers need support, they are doing more than just educating the students
- We are all here for what is best for all students
- Stay focused on the goal of educating kids
- Have school expectations and standards
- More shared events between the college and the school district
- Shared relationships with teachers and staff
- Financial challenges
- Need a stronger relationship with Ripon College, the stronger the better
- Political environment is a challenge
- Make sure all students feel welcome, support for all students



- Invisible amount of poverty across the district and the superintendent needs to be aware of this, the community does not realize this
- Declining enrollment
- Too many opportunities can lead to lower participation because of the many options students have
- How to choose what technology to use, how much of it to use and in what ways
- ESSER funds added positions, now what do you do without ESSER funds
- Hard to find a place to live in Ripon
- A lack of face to face connections with communication
- School safety issues have made it harder to get into the schools
- What do students really need to know and what are we actually teaching them
- Hard to get students to come back to Ripon after they go off to college
- Look at class sizes at the elementary level
- Listened to and valued as professionals
- Respecting the knowledge that teachers are professionals
- Charter school brings in money for the district every year and it seems like charter is on the chopping block every year, staffing needs
- High Special Ed numbers at the elementary level and resources are dwindling
- Behavior issues and educational issues, it's hard to get someone qualified for services, a lot of steps and hoops to go through
- District is too focused on closing the reading achievement gap instead of looking at both math and reading
- Too many administrators in the district, top heavy and they make a lot of money
- More transparency, bridging the gap with the decision makers and the rest of the staff
- Lots of summer training, this can be difficult for staff
- District staff need to be more involved in the community
- Just because something is a tradition doesn't mean it can't be changed for the better
- Ripon can be viewed as a stepping stone
- Need to work better with Ripon College
- The pick up at Barlow Park needs to be improved, road in the park is closed, cars are now lined up in the street
- Lots of silos across the district, single vision
- Many experienced teachers left after COVID, how do we get that experience back?
- Lacking of support in some areas and for the newer teachers
- Disconnect with parents, parents can't enter the building when dropping off children, it feels more like a prison than a school
- Improve mental health issues

### **What characteristics are you looking for in your next superintendent?**

- Incorporate parents within the schools
- Communication is critical
- Continue to recognize safety, mental health and strong relationships with the city
- Intangible leadership traits
- Do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons
- Make the tough decisions and communicate why you make the decisions
- Accountability

- Indepth look and be part of the community
- Accessible to the community
- Support the kids
- No email leadership
- Be in the buildings and activities in all of the buildings
- Transparency
- Know the staff and their needs
- Approachable
- Understand the needs of staff and students
- Understand federal, state and local policies
- Strong fiscally
- Have to be integrated into the community
- College is open to establishing a positive relationship, hope new superintendent wants a positive lasting relationship with the college
- Critical that the college president, superintendent and the AD's develop a strong relationship
- Educational department needs a strong relationship with the school
- Firm commitment to the arts
- Cooperation
- Advocate for schools and advocate for Foundation
- Allow the Foundation to be an asset to the district
- Strong fiscal background
- Vision
- Firm and solid value to public education
- Cooperate with other organizations in the community
- Not a stepping stone
- Educator friendly, teacher and support staff success
- Community builder with school, community and civic groups
- Team builder
- Someone that can explain clearly what they are doing and why they are doing it
- Show investment in the community and make Ripon their home
- Recognize own biases, able to step back, listen to all of the people and treat them equally
- Clear vision of what they want district to be known as, and communicate that message
- Outreach to community
- Connected
- Forward thinking
- Make sure students have the tools needed to succeed
- Strong collaborator
- Promote innovation
- Be able to motivate staff
- Fiscally responsible
- Positive energy
- Not surveying but thriving
- Invested in educators

- Delicate and trust the person under the superintendent to make the decisions
- Someone that can work with the Charter School and Governance Board
- Open to new ideas
- Trustworthy
- Articulate
- Passionate
- Acceptance of diversity and inclusive, all students are welcomed
- Hands on, more presence
- Need someone to come in and jolt the system
- May not have all the experiences but someone that is personable and can fix problems through collaboration
- Open to ideas and improvements, take others' ideas, a good listener
- Don't need to reinvent the wheel
- Understand taxes and tax impact

## **School District Staff**

### **What are the strengths of the Ripon Area School District?**

- Staff that care about the district
- Staff cares about the students
- District office works well together
- Retain staff, not a large turnover
- Pay scale is reasonable
- Board is supportive of keeping pay rates equitable
- Class sizes are good for the students
- Youth Apprenticeship is strong
- Strong administrative team
- Supportive community, supported referendums in the past
- District has its own virtual school - Odyssey
- Ag Department is growing
- FBLA is strong
- Literacy
- High standards for families, students
- Progressive, try to stay ahead of the game
- Innovative
- Small district appeal
- Supportive administrative team
- Plenty of options for families with curriculum, and before and after school
- In depth summer school program, six weeks
- Play based, project based learning
- Facilities are up to date
- Dedicated staff with opportunity to advance
- Supportive community
- Support of students academically, strong support systems in place
- Strong culture, student support team
- Team culture strong
- Kids are great, good culture of academics and behavior

- Good variety of course offerings
- Dual credit opportunities
- ELL support in high school is strong
- Positive presence in the community
- Strong community support of the school
- Administration is very approachable
- Referendums have been supported
- Good PD (Professional Development) for teachers, we have support and follow through with the PD

### **What are the challenges of the Ripon Area School District?**

- Operational referendum will be coming up
- Need a better variety of course offerings
- Athletics, participation could be better, could recruit more
- Signage on display for the schools
- Boys & Girls Club coming to the district, partnering with the BRAVE program - how will that work?
- Lunch debt
- What does the future hold - Department of Education
- Could be a fairly new school board
- ESSER funds ending, tough decisions ahead
- Increase in poverty that affects achievement
- Two referendums coming up, operational in Fall of 2026
- 10 year facility plan, \$7 to \$8 million may be needed
- Behaviors can be a concern and high needs continue to increase
- SPED numbers continue to rise
- Compliance piece of SPED numbers
- Act 20, personal reading plans
- Applicant pool, need to recruit people to teach here
- Competitive salary with other districts
- Substitute teacher and aide shortage
- A medium or lower level math option needed for high school students
- Enrollment is going down, can cause staffing issues
- The changes that are needed must come from the superintendent, principals, school board, staff and community

### **What characteristics are you looking for in your next superintendent?**

- Hold people accountable but be human about it
- Give change time
- Ask for input before making changes
- Approachable
- Listen and learn
- Live in the community and be involved
- Be in the schools more
- Collaborative
- Open door policy

- Strong communicator
- Sense of humor
- High sense of integrity
- Collaborate with other entities such City of Ripon and Ripon College
- Student centered
- Visionary
- Approachable
- Down to earth
- Collaborative
- Trustworthy
- Trust professionalism of others
- Boots on the ground
- Visible in the buildings
- Pulse on what is going on in all areas
- Autonomy to do jobs but there to support if needed
- Intelligence
- Kindness
- Driven to raise student standards
- Family first approach
- Systems approach
- Transparency with staff, what is happening and why (cuts being made)
- Effective communication
- Proactive rather than reactive
- Have a clear process, consistent
- Do what is best for students
- Transparent
- Easy to talk to
- Strong background in core subjects
- Engaged
- Right balance of being an administrator and doing what is best for students
- Get the lay of the land before you do things
- Has a vision but also listens to what we need or what we have done
- See what we have done, have a plan and see it through
- Genuine investment in community, both the school and city
- Can't keep up salary wise with Fox Valley but how can we compete for staff
- Best interest of Ripon
- Wants to be here

## High School Students

### What are the strengths of the Ripon Area School District?

- Good variety of clubs
- ACT schools are the highest in the conference
- Good curriculum
- Good athletic offerings, with a good staff
- Teachers are good, appreciate the help they offer
- Good support for extra help with classes, after school tutoring

- Variety of classes that are offered
- Zero hour classes provide more opportunities for students
- Dual enrollment courses, earn college credit
- Virtual classes are free to students
- Summer school offerings
- Trips that clubs offer
- A very financially supportive alumni group
- Stem Wing added in 2016
- New weight room, turf added, upgraded equipment
- Athletic equipment has been updated
- Opportunities to work with EL students through Student Council
- Counselors working with students with ACP (Academic Career Planning)
- YA (Youth Apprenticeship) opportunities are appreciated
- Strong teaching staff
- Teachers are supportive of students, and we can talk to staff
- Calming rooms are a positive
- Great break out spaces and being able to work outside of the classroom
- Opportunity for dual credit at Ripon College and UW-Oshkosh
- Youth apprenticeship program can help with career planning
- Mentor program connects high school students with younger students, introducing sportsmanship and the importance of getting good grades
- Supportive staff
- Many choices of advanced classes - CAP (College Achievement Program) and AP (Advanced Placement), ninth and tenth grade can participate
- Good opportunity to use weight room especially in the summer
- Small school and you can be involved in a lot of things
- Good business partners and support
- Good homecoming activities, working with alumni
- Most events are student run and organized
- Strong arts program
- After-school homework help is big
- A lot of the teachers say they care and you can see it, they go above and beyond for the students
- Vaping situation is getting better and improving, school is cracking down
- Tech Ed department
- Custodial staff is a strength, they are friendly and building is clean
- Office staff is friendly, kind and willing to help people
- A very good and active school resource officer, is well liked by students

### **What are the challenges of the Ripon Area School District?**

- Student transportation
- School lunches could be better, healthier options, expand ala carte offerings
- Bathrooms could be updated, some need repair
- Parking can be an issue
- Upgrade baseball and softball fields, field care and batting cages
- Students voice could be heard more

- Better meeting times for clubs, some can't meet during Advisory
- Funding can be more equal, sports vs. clubs (music)
- More remedial programs for students (general math)
- Don't cut teachers' budgets
- More classes offered in the trades
- More funding for student activities
- Bubblers in the high school stink, the water tastes bad and they don't work well
- Could use better quality subs (subject knowledge)
- Can do a better job with communication
- Middle school and high school kids are sometimes in the wrong area/space and this can lead to problems
- Students feel they are listened to, but do not see actions; we feel a good voice in the high school, but not with the district
- Parking situation can be rough, need to do a better job communicating this and what the expectations are
- No oven or stove in the high school, food comes from the middle school, would like to see more food options

### **What characteristics are you looking for in your next superintendent?**

- Prioritize student health
- Involved and be at events
- Get cancellations out earlier so students can plan
- Willing to try to get the improvements moving forward
- Be involved with the city more, field maintenance
- Willing to take action
- Accountability
- Show up to school activities
- Good communicator
- Students would like more of a voice
- Students feel they are listened to, but do not see actions, students feel a good voice in the high school but not at the district level
- Be more understanding with snow and cold weather days