

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District

February 1, 2022



HYA Executive Search
Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates



Process

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in January, 2022 for the new Superintendent of the Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA consultants received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new Superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups collected information regarding the strengths of the District and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

Participation

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

Groups	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board of Education Members	7	NA
Superintendent	1	NA
Administrators	13	8
Faculty	12	83
Support Staff	7	14
Students	11	23
Parents/Community members	86	453
Total	137	581

A draft of the desired characteristics can be found at the end of this report. The community survey report is presented as a separate document.

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 HYA consultants interviewed approximately 137 district and community constituents. Each of the individuals and groups were asked to share their thoughts regarding three questions:

- 1) How would you describe the strengths of the District?
- 2) What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the District in the next few years?
- 3) What characteristics and areas of expertise would you like to see in the next Superintendent?

What follows is a summary of the responses shared by the above persons. The first section provides a summary of the consistent responses. The second section provides response summaries from the various categories of individuals interviewed.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the District. The consultants will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Dobbs Ferry Board of Education 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 the expectations of the community.

The consultants would like to thank all the participants who attended focus group meetings or completed the online survey and the Dobbs Ferry School District staff members who assisted with our meetings. In particular, Loretta Tularzko, Secretary to the Superintendent, was especially helpful in organizing and scheduling focused group meetings and assuring that the consultants' time in the District went smoothly.

Respectfully submitted:

Dr. Susan Guiney

Deborah Raizes

February 1, 2022

Section 1: Summary of Responses from Interviews and Focus Group Meetings

Consistent Themes from the Focus Groups

The following CONSISTENT comments were heard by the vast majority of participants with whom the consultants met. The comments are listed in alphabetical order.

Strengths of the District

CONSISTENT THEMES – STRENGTHS

The input from the various constituent groups suggest that the Dobbs Ferry School District is characterized by:

- Academic excellence
- IB at the Middle School and High School
- Caring, committed faculty, staff
- Communication - especially during pandemic
- District encourages innovation - ahead of the curve
- Excellent relations with unions, police, village, fire department
- Great students
- Pride in the schools and the community
- Size of the District - close knit community - supportive, caring - schools focal point of village

Challenges and Issues Facing the District

The following are some key themes concerning the challenges facing the Dobbs Ferry School District that emerged from the focus groups.

CONSISTENT THEMES – CHALLENGES, ISSUES, CONCERNS

- Cultural disagreements/debate around implementation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives (DEI)
- Following a superintendent who has been incredibly accessible and admired for her ability to build relationships
- Increasing enrollment/capital project
- Social, emotional wellness of staff and students - need more supports

Desired Characteristics of the New Superintendent of Schools

CONSISTENT THEMES – DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

- Accessible, responsive
- Builds trust
- Collaborative
- Encourages innovation, risk taking
- Good communicator
- Good listener – will be open to hear diverse perspectives – provides opportunities to engage with parents
- People person, builds relationships - can bring people together
- Visible and approachable

SECTION 2: Summary of Comments from Focus Group and Individual Meetings

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do stakeholders see as the strengths of the District?
- What are the issues the District will be facing in the next several years? What should the Superintendent's focus be?
- What characteristics and areas of expertise would you like to see in the new Superintendent?

The responses are listed in alphabetical order. The CONSISTENT RESPONSES that are listed above are NOT repeated again in these groups. This is not a scientific sampling, nor should the comments be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. The items below are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Board's attention.

BOARD OF EDUCATION (7)

Strengths

Articulation of programs across schools

Board has a collaborative relationship with the Superintendent and administrators

Breadth of educational offerings

Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Reputation for a well-run district with a high functioning Board

Stability of Board - understands its role Technology

Challenges/Issues/Concerns

Administrative turnovers

Fiscal uncertainties

How to support and provide opportunities for ALL students All students appropriately challenged

Possible bond for new construction/off cycle

Desired Characteristics

Bold- not afraid to make tough decisions

Bridge builder

Business acumen

Calm

Can acknowledge concerns and put them in perspective

Charismatic

Commitment to academic excellence for all students

Commitment to DEI
Commitment to green agenda
Doctorate and superintendent experience preferred
Intelligent/thoughtful
Innovative, forward thinking
Knowledgeable about construction
Looking at data to inform decisions
Open-minded
Responsive
Salesperson for the District
Strong leader
Straight talker
Take time to learn about the District and community before making any changes
Uses data to make informed decisions

Administrators (13)

Strengths

Core team - dedicated to our students
Experienced administrative team
Diversity
Inclusive, co-teaching model
Instructional program, technology, special education
Supportive Board - collaborative partnership
Trust one another - can take risks - administrators supportive of teachers

Challenges/Issues/Concerns

Facilities - "busting at the seams"
Large part of the community does not have children in the public schools
Maintaining excellent relationships with the unions
Not a lot of backups for Special Ed, Finances
Role of remote learning in the future
Special education looked at as separate entity instead of part of the curricula team

Desired Characteristics

Approachable - can think through issues with you
Build good relationship with the Board
Can deal with political dynamics in the community - connects with all stakeholders
Current, forward thinking
Empowers staff
Flexible thinker
High social, emotional intelligence

Involved enough without micromanaging - aware when things are not as they seem in touch with pulse of the community

In touch with student voice

Knowledgeable in the areas of finance and special education

Macromanager

Media trained - understands the value of social media

Open door

Proactive - addresses issues before they become problems

Realistic in solving problems

Responsive

Sense of humor

FACULTY (12)

Strengths

Adequate resources – the District provides what is needed and is supportive of staff development

Committed to ALL students succeeding

Not one size fits all - room to personalize curriculum and instruction

Positive, collaborative relationship with the Board and the Superintendent

Progressive, cutting edge - staff thinks outside the box

Supportive administration

Technology

Challenges/Issues/Concerns

A lot of push back from segments of the community

IB is problematic for Special Education students - need additional levels of instruction

Bridge instructional gaps caused by pandemic

Cannot be complacent with what we have

Communication with staff when making decisions - need more focus groups with small groups of teachers and administrators

DEI has divided the community - good intentions - teachers need more training

Digital age - overwhelmed by all the initiatives happening simultaneously - need to prioritize listening to staff

Holding everyone accountable - staff, students, community members

Middle Years Program - how it is implemented in other classes

New Central Office administrators have to build trust

Parents do not follow chain of command

Springhurst does not have a lot of facetime with Central Office

Springhurst curriculum needs to be reviewed - no written curriculum for ELA - so many initiatives - perhaps need to slow down a bit

With tax cap and inflation - can building needs be addressed

Desired Characteristics

Develops an informal atmosphere - open door - knows people's names - responsive
Does not take things personally
Forward thinker, looks at data
Further what is here
Good understanding of curriculum
Leadership in technology
Makes teachers feel appreciated
Multilevel of experience, including teaching (elementary), administrator
Not intimidated by community negativity
Politically savvy - decisive - will stand up for what is good for the students
Professional, caring consistent, compassionate, empathetic
Understanding of and commitment to DEI
Will admit mistakes

SUPPORT STAFF (7)

Strengths

People are happy to be here
Because of the small size, the District can be nimble in terms of making decisions, adjusting to COVID - can handle things on a case-by-case basis
Technology

Challenges/Issues/ Concerns

A lot of retirements - people won't know the history and the processes
All contracts up in 2023
Budget - additional expenses
COVID - rules changing all the time
Need to improve communication between buildings

Desired Characteristics

Develop a good relationship with the Board
Genuine
Helpful if familiar with NYS laws education
Keeps us informed
Knows everyone's name
Open door policy - wanting to be in the mix
Strong on HR

STUDENTS (11)

Strengths

Administration - strong, hard working
Connection between students and teachers
 Easy to be in contact with teachers and principals
EVERYONE wants students to succeed - strong support system
Flexibility - can make changes based on the needs of students and families
Good communication between the three buildings
Handled COVID well
Opportunities to explore your interests
Resources - technology, IB - one class connects with all
Sense of community - have known everyone a long time
Students advocate for issues outside of school
Teachers - caring, thoughtful, understanding

Challenges/Issues/Concerns

DEI - majority very supportive but there is opposition - at Board meetings - public comments
people say students are indoctrinated - trying to see what is appropriate - need a common
language shared by the community
 DEI should be infused throughout the curricula, not just in English and Social
 Studies Students need the school to talk about “areas of discomfort” - teachers need
 help discussing these topics in their classrooms - professional development
 Homophobia, racism, gender issues
Finding a safe place - microaggressions - improvements need to be made
 Confidential conversations - who should students go to
 Discussion with students without upsetting parents
Implementation of other classes to explore outside core subjects, i.e., journalism
Social, Emotional learning - need more than just mindfulness - not always best approach
 Not just during midterms
 Students in the Middle School and High School dealing with emotional issues - teachers
 need professional development
 Teachers stressed, too - students internalize teachers’ stress

Desired Characteristics

Assertive
Calm under pressure
Cares about students
Confident in decisions
Easy going, caring
Needs to be ready for opposition
Open to change
Progressive

Respects the staff
Will work closely with teachers

PARENTS/COMMUNITY (86)

Strengths

Collaborative-open to working with the community, police, village, fire dept. -good communications
District is responsive
Each child can excel - many opportunities offered - students' needs are addressed
Emphasis on learning - healthy competition
Focus, vision of the District is to do what is best for kids
Generations have gone through the Dobbs Ferry Schools
Openness to creating public/private partnerships
Small class sizes
Staff, teachers, administrators - low turnover - part of community, approachable, relatable

Challenges/Issues/Concerns

Administrative transitions
Advocating for all students - academic gap widening - students with social-emotional needs marginalized
Balance community expectations with what they are willing/can afford
Build relationships with parents - keep parents well informed
Children's Village residents want to feel part of the community - opportunities to engage with other families
Communication - rather than afterthought - how to get the message out to all the families
Current political environment - strong divisions - need to bridge divisions, so all can co-exist
District has made strides in Social, Emotional Learning (SEL) but a lot more work to be done
Diversity challenges
How to make changes without alienating parts of the community
Need more diverse staff in the schools
Schools should not be distracted by ideologies - stay focused on educational excellence - stay away from politics
Staff needs training on mental health issues
Stay focused on creating independent thinkers, not imparting opinions on students - politics replacing parental responsibilities in the schools
Vested in what's here - IB program - make changes slowly
Will there be the resources to meet the demands of the District as it grows?
With COVID and the need for security, parents are not allowed in the schools to volunteer, hope to return to allowing parents to be involved

Desired Characteristics

Aware of mental health issues

Can bridge the gap - hear diverse opinions - bring people together

Can make decisions based on what is good for kids

Demonstrated experience in hiring a diverse staff

Experience with achievement and socio-economic gaps

Experience with DEI and SEL

Former teacher, administrator

Has “heart,” is caring and compassionate toward children

Innovative thinker, up to date on latest trends

Knows how to make tough decisions - courageous in face of dissension

Open door to parents

Supporting parents to support their children

Transparent - the parents and community need to understand what went into making the decision

Understands the dynamic in the village around DEI

Understands the importance of parental involvement, especially in the elementary school Values the arts

Willing to keep dialogue with community organizations

Will work with all sides to come to consensus

DRAFT FOR BOARD DISCUSSION

Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

Superintendent of Schools

After seeking input from its Board members, parents, staff, students and the community via focus groups, interviews, and an online survey, the Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District Board of Education seeks a strong educational leader with the following characteristics.

All the groups consistently spoke of the importance of the next Superintendent having the skills to **build relationships**, which will in time allow the staff, students, parents and community members to trust the Superintendent and the decisions that the Superintendent makes.

In order to build relationships and gain trust, the Superintendent must be:

- accessible and responsive;
- a proactive communicator;
- a good listener who will be open to diverse perspectives and provide opportunities to engage with staff, students, parents and community members;
- be visible in the schools and the community;
- be approachable, have an open door, and
- have the skills to bring a divided community together.

Other characteristics needed to be successful as the Superintendent in Dobbs Ferry are:

- a strong educational leader with a focus on academics who has high expectations for all students;
- a macromanager, and
- an innovator and risk-taker.

The successful candidate will:

- be certified as a superintendent, or capable of gaining certification, in NYS, and
- have a long-term commitment to the District.