



# LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

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St. Charles CUSD #303

February 28, 2022

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Max McGee, Ph.D. and Brian Harris, Ed.D. of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in January and February 2022 for the new superintendent of St. Charles CUSD #303. The data contained herein were obtained from input the HYA Associates received when they met with individuals and groups in either individual interviews or focus group and community forum settings and from the results of the online survey completed by stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, focus group meetings, and community forums were structured to gather input to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new Superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and community forums collected information regarding the strengths of the District, some of the challenges that they will be facing in the coming years and the immediate and future priorities that the new Superintendent will need to address.

## DESCRIPTION OF DISTRICT

Located in Kane County and encompassing approximately 54 square miles, St. Charles CUSD #303 serves more than 11,000 students and employs approximately 2400 staff members. The District includes:

- One Early Childhood Center
- Nine elementary schools
- One K-2 grade center
- One 3-5 grade intermediate building
- Two middle schools
- Two high schools
- Compass Academy competency based program for students in grades 9-12

St. Charles CUSD #303 currently uses four strategic commitments to guide our continuous improvement efforts both at the School Board and district level, and in our schools--innovative learning, quality staff, responsible stewardship, and community relations.

Experienced educators provide a strong foundation upon which our students can experience success with both competencies and content. They are proud to have 91 National Board Certified educators in our district. When students have access to highly-qualified staff members who are passionate about their learning, students benefit greatly.

Through their determination to be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, St. Charles CUSD #303 ranks first among Kane County School Districts in its fiscal management. They are the only Kane County school district to earn the highest rating of 4.0 in the state-designated financial "Recognition" category. They plan to continue responsible stewardship to ensure our students have access to the resources they need to be successful

School districts cannot do it alone. St. Charles CUSD #303 has strong partnerships with our parents, businesses, intergovernmental agencies, and community members that enhance the ways in which we educate our students.

## PROCESS

The structure of the individual meetings, focus groups and community forums was open dialogue, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a majority of the sessions were conducted via Zoom. One of the focus groups was in person. Additionally, the online survey was available to stakeholders from February 1 through February 20 and provided an additional avenue for stakeholders to participate in the process of determining the next Superintendent's qualifications and characteristics. They also included Strategic planning questions which will also inform that process as well. Those involved in providing input into the selection of the Superintendent were asked to respond to the following questions:

- What are your expectations for students graduating from your school system?
- What are some current district strengths?
- What are the one or two most significant issues you would like your district to address in the next three years?
- What are the personal and professional characteristics you and your community expect a superintendent to possess?
- What is the most important, pressing issue for the new leader to tackle *right away*?
- Visualize 5 or 10 years into the future; visualize the various areas of success for the district. What is that vision, your preferred picture of the District's future?

In responding to each question asked by the HYA Associates, participants shared personal thoughts as well as big picture overarching themes. Some of the narrative referenced positive and complimentary experiences with the School Districts' leadership while others expressed varied levels of dissatisfaction of the leadership. A high majority of the respondents were appreciative of the opportunity to provide feedback to the process. The stakeholders were hopeful that the process would assist the Board and the HYA Associates in identifying a new superintendent who would be an experienced, courageous, inspirational, and team building leader who could demonstrate sincere community engagement and transparency built upon trust, honesty and integrity. Furthermore, the next Superintendent would be a confident, visible, approachable, thoughtful and active listener. Additionally, this person needs to be an exceptional communicator, and demonstrate proven skills in working with the Board to build a governance model that reflects an excellent working relationship with each other, the staff, parents and the broader community.

## COMMON THEMES

The top overarching themes that emerged were the new Superintendent must:

- Ensure all students have acceptable levels of basics, that they are well prepared for college, and are real world ready.
- Instill trust, restore relationships, rebuild a sense of community and mutual respect among all stakeholder voices.

- Authentically and meaningfully engage with all stakeholders; communicate frequently, clearly, thoughtfully; and listen and observe actively and deeply.
- Create conditions to attract, recruit and retain an excellent teaching staff.
- Lead with confidence, courage, clarity, and presence.

District resources and financial stability allow the District to implement initiatives, maintain and enhance facilities, attract an excellent workforce, integrate robust technology and provide a multitude of opportunities to meet the needs of all students. Having economic stability is an asset that enhances the desirability of St. Charles CUSD #303 for potential superintendent candidates.

St. Charles CUSD #303 has a long history of academic excellence and is consistently considered to be a destination school district for families and employees. Many families specifically moved to the community for their schools. In addition to the multitude of course offerings, students grow through participation in a multitude of extracurricular activities and enrichment programs. There were, however, several participants who were not satisfied with the academic achievement scores as compared to other comparable districts. Critical to this tradition of excellence is the quality of the teaching staff and most stakeholder groups remarked on the expertise and education levels of the teachers and several groups commented on the dedicated and talented support staff and building administration.

Almost every focus group commented on the need for improving communication, access to timely information, and consistent messaging directly from the Superintendent. Stakeholders stressed a need for clear, transparent, and direct district-led communication and protocols. This must be a priority for the new Superintendent.

Several groups highlighted the need for governance training and developing strategies for a more unified and productive Board of Education. Participants also spoke of what they perceived as political and ideological divisions within the community that are now spilling over into the School Board but are hopeful that this process of seeking a new superintendent will help to bring the Board closer together as an effective governing body focused on policy and what is in the best interests of the students. Transitioning a new Board to a functioning team, gaining knowledge about district operations and how they work together during the superintendent search and selection process represents a challenge. Strong and experienced leadership from the Superintendent will greatly assist the Board in developing a sound leadership – governance framework. Assisting the Board in policy development and tools for decision-making will enrich the functions of both leadership and Board governance. HYA Associates would concur that with the Superintendent and recent Board of Education changes, it would be prudent for the Board and the new Superintendent to work together to define roles and responsibilities. The new Superintendent will need to be a leader for all and be a strong team member with the Board of Education and provide them with development opportunities, clear governance and communication protocols, straightforward and thorough information, and ready access to them for answering questions and addressing issues they raise.

Highlighted by many focus groups was the need to provide a clear vision of a post pandemic strategy for the school district. There remains a lot of concern on this topic and will be a major challenge for the new Superintendent.

## **PARTICIPATION**

During February 2022, the HYA Associates conducted focus groups, interviews, and community forums. Over 40 focus groups were scheduled, which included 2 open forums. Individual interviews were held with all Board members. Additionally, 851 stakeholders responded to the online survey.

### **Interviews and Focus Groups**

- Board Members
- Senior Leadership Team
- Intergovernmental and Community/Business Partners
- PTO Presidents
- Teachers/Certified Staff
- Support Staff
- Union representatives
- Administrators/Instructional Leaders
- All School Principals
- High School Students
- Parent/Staff forums at every school
- District office / Peck Road staff
- Citizen Advisory Committee

The community survey report is provided under separate cover and are meant to be stand-alone complementary pieces to the Leadership Profile Report. 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.

## **ONLINE SURVEY**

The online survey was completed by 851 stakeholders. The survey was translated into Spanish. Respondents were asked how they self-identify. 72% of respondents answered "white" and 18% "preferred not to respond. See the breakdown of the stakeholder group responses to the survey.

### Stakeholder Group Responses to Survey

	Frequency
Administrator/Supervisor	31
Parent of Student Attending School	463
Students/Recent Graduates	7
Support Staff	62
Taxpayers Without Children in District	20
Teacher	268
Total	851

This survey is being used for two purposes per the Board of Education request. The development of the Leadership Profile for the purpose of hiring a new Superintendent and also to inform the development of a strategic plan for the district. A comprehensive report of the online survey is provided in a separate document titled: **State of the District Survey Report**.

The data contained in this report were gathered from Board-identified or self-selected stakeholder respondents as outlined on page 5 of this report. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the data are not from a purely scientific sampling. However, in almost all cases the data were prioritized by the individuals and members of the groups from which they were gathered. In addition, prior to drawing any conclusions about consistent themes or recurring ideas, the consultants reviewed the occurrence of the indicators or Strengths, Challenges and Leadership Qualities within and among the seven reference groups chosen to participate in this study. So, it can be safely said that there is certainly a rigorous method for bringing these conclusions to your attention and consideration, when selecting the desired characteristics for the next Superintendent for St. Charles CUSD #303. Items are included from the interviews, focus groups, community forums and/or survey, if, in the HYA Associates' judgment, they were repeated with sufficient frequency thus indicating a pattern and/or warranting the Board's attention.

### FREQUENTLY NOTED

In responding to the six questions included in this report, several participants offered comments and made remarks that were similar. Those receiving multiple mentions are listed below:

#### Strengths of the District

- The exceptional caliber of the teaching staff; they are caring, responsive, skilled and great at their jobs.
- High level of parent engagement, passion, support, and expertise.
- Extraordinary curricular and extra curricular opportunities for students.

- The “bookends” of the district’s early childhood and transitions programs
- Community resources and supports
- Staff has access to the most current professional development
- Attracts families who value a high quality of education for their children
- Community exhibits great pride in the school system and provides strong local financial
- Educational excellence
- Financial and economic stability
- Great sense of pride in the district
- Incredibly talented and committed teachers, administrators and support staff
- Outstanding opportunities for students in academics, athletics, arts, clubs
- The district employs effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools.
- Facilities are well maintained.
- District schools are safe.
- District technology infrastructure is sufficient to support use of technology in the classroom.
- Technology is integrated into the classroom.
- Social emotional supports and programs

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

- Need for better communication: variable quality, uneven frequency, and lack of transparency have created trust and credibility issues for district leadership.
- Retaining high quality teachers.
- Declining test scores and the perception that the district has shown a lack of focus and effectiveness in responding to and reversing this trend.
- Communicating the rationale for new initiatives and engaging staff and parents in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of all new initiatives – including equity.
- Addressing the emotional debates and disputes around “D.E.I.” and leading the community to a productive resolution and path forward.
- Authentic engagement of staff in committee work.
- Restoring governance; Board members are stepping in to fill staff leadership vacuum which has an upside in responsiveness but a downside in micromanagement fears.
- Rebuilding productive, collegial working relationships between and among board/district office/staff.
- Addressing the plethora of what is perceived as too many top down initiatives and lack of sustained support for seeing them through.
- Managing the “loudest voices” and social media.
- Lack of clear vision and understanding of “what we stand for.”
- Addressing the increasing social emotional needs of students
- Board training in good governance
- Communications-internally and externally timely and succinct
- Community engagement and trust
- Divided community
- Identifying, understanding, and addressing student and staff post-Covid needs
- Impact of COVID on education

- Lack of transparency
- Lack of trust between the various groups in the organization, including the Board and Administration
- Political dynamics internally and externally
- The quality, frequency, and transparency of internal and external communication

#### **Immediate and Future Priorities**

- Hiring and retaining quality teachers and administrators
- Preparing students to be ready for the next grade and ultimately college and career ready
- Addressing students' social and emotional needs
- Providing a safe environment for students and employees
- Ensuring a well-rounded experience for all students
- Addressing academic gaps influenced by the pandemic and supporting the social emotional needs of staff and students
- Equity work
- Board Governance practices
- Improving communication
- Improving the overall quality of education in the district
- Instilling trust at all levels
- Implement the Master facility plan
- Provide transparent communication internally and externally
- Strategic planning for the future

#### **Desired Superintendent Qualifications and Attributes**

- Demonstrate leadership with the Board, staff, and community that is dynamic, principled, respected, and trusted.
- An extraordinary communicator who will communicate with, listen to, authentically engage, and inspire the full array of stakeholders.
- Be data savvy and focused. Evaluate new programs and services, share data transparently, query data thoughtfully, and use it productively.
- Adept at working with the Board as a team member and being proactive in maintaining members' focus on district goals and governance roles and parameters.
- Will effectively rebuild and continuously cultivate productive board/admin/teacher/staff relationships.
- Skilled positive manager who serves and leads collaboratively to identify, lead, manage, and sustain necessary changes.
- Visible, approachable, and relatable through involvement, being an active presence in schools and an immersive, outgoing presence in the community.
- Be the public face of the schools and advocate for teachers and students.
- Articulate a clear vision that puts students at the center of the district's work and will connect and unify disparate voices to achieve our mission.



- Politically savvy without being a politician.

Additional Comments:

- Ability to thoughtfully engage all voices in important decisions
- Devoted to students' academic and personal growth and success
- Establishes a culture of high expectations for all students and personnel
- Fosters a positive, professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff and administrators
- Genuinely likes people, is deeply caring, authentically passionate about students
- Instructional leader who can guide the system in development of more rigorous and relevant instruction for all students
- Strong and confident enough to deal with conflict and make difficult decisions
- Trustworthy leader who demonstrates integrity, honesty, humility, compassion and a sense of humor
- Visible and approachable throughout the district and actively engaged in the community

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

In closing, HYA is committed to recruiting and screening candidates who fit the leadership profile and will provide District 303 the high quality of stable and successful leadership needed to sustain all that is special about the schools, programs, and personnel and provide the vision, hard work, commitment and collaboration that will engage all stakeholders in moving the District on a trajectory that will meet the expectations of the learning community.