

PLAINVIEW-OLD BETHPAGE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Plainview, New York
LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT
January 9, 2012
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in December, 2011 for the new superintendent in the Plainview-Old Bethpage Central School District (POBCSD). 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. Additional information was collected during stakeholder interviews and focus groups regarding the strengths of the District as well as future challenges.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below:

Group	Personal interviews or focus groups	Online Survey
Board	7	-
Administrators	13	11
Teachers	6	29
Community member	2	16
Support Staff	5	10
Parents	10	145
Total	43	211

Note: Each School Board member was individually interviewed by the consultants.

The responses provided by the individuals and focus groups during the interviews are listed in “Consistent Themes,” later in the report. They are listed alphabetically with no attempt to prioritize them.

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.

Strengths of the District

Plainview-Old Bethpage was described by all groups as a close knit community with a family-like dynamic in the way that it relates to the students and to each other. The mantra for the Plainview-Old Bethpage School District, indeed for the entire community, is “we are child-centered.” This community, more than virtually any other, is defined by its schools. It is a district without a town center, where the Board of Education is the most significant elected body. One is very quickly impressed that most conversations in this part of Long Island begin and end with a reference to the school district and its students. The child-centered focus is what drives the curriculum which in turn drives the activities of the school district. High expectations and confidence in the curriculum to produce outstanding graduation results and outstanding graduates are a defining norm.

Support for the school district is consistently strong as indicated by a long history of approved budgets. Competent financial decisions driven by sound policies are seen as crucial to developing and maintaining community confidence. That confidence is high.

The quality of the curriculum and the professional staff are generally acknowledged to be excellent. Instructional leadership from the central office administrators through the building administrators and department supervisors to the individual teachers and support staff all contribute to a culture of high expectations and academic success. That success extends to a special education and academic support program for all students with any kind of academic need. Those involved in any way in the instructional program strive to exceed already high expectations. The diversity of curricular and co-curricular offerings is remarkable. As parents and students are quick to point out, “There is something here for everyone.” Student participation in after school activities is very high. John F. Kennedy High School is a very busy place long after the end of a typical academic day.

Participation is not limited to the student body. Plainview-Old Bethpage is an involved community. The PTA is very active at every level. Advisory committees are part of the transparent decision making processes throughout. Participation is a watch word. As with academics, “There is something here for everyone.”

For the right leader, one who thrives on high expectations and is eager to exceed those expectations, the Plainview-Old Bethpage School District represents an outstanding opportunity.

Challenges/Concerns/Issues Facing the District

Life, however, in Plainview-Old Bethpage while idyllic in many ways is not without challenges. As might be expected in an environment where demands are high and a great many people are very much involved, opportunities for improvement are always present.

When asked to describe challenges, the need for improved communication is generally the first thing mentioned by parents and staff. Communication needs to be frequent, varied in approach, transparent, and based upon a unifying vision for success. Communication needs to reflect a long term plan for achieving the highest academic results in an atmosphere characterized by caring and responsibility. Expectations are high. Commitment is deep.

There is a pervasive child-centered culture but there are different perspectives on how to achieve excellence within that culture. The Plainview Council of Teachers and the Parent Teacher Association are important factors in this dynamic. Unsettled contracts and sometimes tenuous even contentious relationships with union leadership are seen as issues which inhibit progress in achieving greater success. Anything less than full collaboration undermines the ability of the district to move forward.

The Plainview-Old Bethpage School District is seen as needing to aspire to be a “top tier” school district. Test scores at the middle school and elementary school are cited as needing to be improved. Greater rigor and higher performance levels are often mentioned as important goals. Technology and its use as both an instructional tool and a management asset is frequently specified as an area in need of improvement. State Education Department regulations and mandates are seen as potential burdensome pressures from outside the district, which will have significant impact on internal operations. Perennial financial challenges are expected to continue.

These and other pressures will only be exacerbated by any dissonance or lack of cohesion among the constituents. Overcoming that dissonance and bringing cohesion may be the biggest challenge facing the new superintendent in a district facing the already challenging environment of American public education.

Desired Characteristics

Across-the-board, participants in focus groups and interviews stated that the next superintendent needs to be a person of unquestioned integrity - ethical and honest. This person needs to exude an air of solidity and grounded calmness. People from several groups reported that current Superintendent Gerard Dempsey has exemplified these very qualities during his time in Plainview-Old Bethpage. They express appreciation for his

stewardship and link it to reinforcing the “family” culture which needs to be continued and even enhanced.

The new superintendent will need to be a good manager of both school district affairs and people. Plainview-Old Bethpage will need the leadership skills of one who can support and further develop an already effective team of administrators and staff leaders, and encourage and mentor team members to higher levels of professional accomplishment. Teamwork must be valued implicitly and explicitly. The new leader needs to foster a positive professional climate among faculty, staff, and administrators. This demands strong yet compassionate leadership, a “go to person” in a highly demanding environment.

The next superintendent will need to work effectively with the Board of Education. Among other things, this means keeping the Board informed and up-to-date on local, state, and national matters that impact education. It is imperative that the superintendent share information with the Board in a timely way to avoid the Board being surprised or caught off-guard. Though the district currently benefits from solid business oversight, as evidenced by its AAA rating, expectations are for continued solid financial management skills in the next superintendent to ensure the long term fiscal health of the district.

The new leader must have a demonstrated capacity for building trust among stakeholders and maintaining good relationships with all constituent groups. Input from others will need to be actively sought and then considered. People need to believe they have been heard. All constituents need to be invited to be part of the mix. Strong personalities and groups must be listened to and acknowledged as they are given invitations to become allies and partners in the district’s shared vision. At the same time, it is vitally important that the new superintendent have strength of character. The new leader must be able to attend to various perspectives, have the courage of his or her own convictions, and make a clear decision without being overly influenced by any particular agenda or group.

Participants from many groups highlighted the importance of being a good communicator. Essential to leadership success in the Plainview-Old Bethpage School District are excellent communication skills utilizing an array of media to develop and support a shared vision for the schools and community. Many groups, very much including the students themselves, conveyed that the new superintendent should be the highly visible representative of the school district in the community.

All key stakeholder groups attach importance to understanding the Plainview-Old Bethpage community and upholding its strongly held values. This means someone who can understand the local culture, and most importantly, become a leader who will maintain the Plainview-Old Bethpage child-centered focus on curriculum-based instruction.

Opinions on desired background and experience are wide ranging. There is commonality that the new superintendent should have experience in the education field and have a proven track record of successful leadership. Many articulated the importance of a leader whose innovative thinking and personal and professional integrity can move the Plainview-Old Bethpage School District to even higher levels of success.

The results of the online survey reinforced many of the themes that emerged in the focus group interviews. There were no responses that were identified as important by the majority of respondents. Rather, respondents identified a variety of characteristics (8) that received virtually equal measure.

The top response that was recognized as important (by 40% of those completing the survey) was, “identify, confront, and resolve issues and concerns and in a timely way.” This item reflects a major theme heard during our interviews – the value of a leader who will process issues collaboratively, who will engage the various stakeholders in an authentic discussion, but will in the end have the courage to make the decision that is best for the greater good.

The next seven items included:

- Be visible throughout the District and actively engaged in community life (CE)
- Hold a deep understanding of the teaching/learning process and of the importance of educational technology (IL)
- Hold a deep appreciation for diversity and the importance of providing safe and caring school environments (VV)
- Effectively plan and manage the long-term financial health of the District (M)
- Align budgets, long-range plans, and operational procedures with the district’s vision, mission and goals (M)
- Promote high expectations for all students and personnel (VV)
- Act in accordance with the district’s mission, vision, and core beliefs (VV)

Each of these responses was selected by at least 30% of those completing the survey. The items were also dispersed across different skill sets that include “Community Engagement”, “Instructional Leadership”, “Values and Vision” and “Management”.

HYA cannot promise to find a candidate who possesses all of the characteristics desired by respondents. However, HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to address the concerns expressed by the constituent groups. We will seek a new superintendent who can work with the Plainview-Old Bethpage Board to provide the leadership needed to continue to raise academic standards and student performance in spite of major financial challenges, while meeting the unique needs of each of its schools and communities.

The consultants would like to thank all the participants who attended focus groups meetings or completed the online survey. Also, we would like to thank all of the Plainview-Old Bethpage staff members who assisted with our meetings, particularly Terry Aiello, Virginia Cipola, Harriet Fischer and Gerard Dempsey for their efforts in facilitating our time in the District.

Respectfully submitted,

John O'Rourke and Florie Wachtenheim

Consistent Themes

Strengths

Close-knit community, very supportive of education
Very curriculum-focused
Financially secure, AAA rating
Great kids
High level of community involvement
Many opportunities for students at all levels and lots of participation
District supports education and programs for students across all levels. Some outstanding programs include Special Education, music and the arts
Good Board of Education, very focused on what's best for POB students
Good levels of resources
Most of faculty is excellent, highly professional
High student achievement – 96% go on to college

Challenges/Concerns/Issues

Communication needs improvement
Financial challenges/how to maintain rich programming/staffing
Lack of long-term planning, Need consistent vision
Improve rigor/performance levels at elementary and Middle School levels. Schools should have more evenness across-the-board
Politics undermines district's ability to move forward – PCT, PTA are factors in this dynamic
No contracts with any of the unions
Aspiring to be top tier
State mandates, changes in education (Common Core, APPR)
Need a unified vision and collaborative team to implement and support it
Parent involvement can be challenging
Very strong union leadership
Technology is behind
Test scores at Middle School and elementary schools could be better

Desired Characteristics

Ability to work with and build relationships with constituent groups
Ability to mentor administrative personnel. Hires only the best
Needs to understand local culture

Personal qualities – highly ethical, has integrity, honest, calm, solid
Able to see the big picture, to see beyond the turf wars, and can move the community ahead for the greater good
Can develop a shared vision, seeking and incorporating input from others.
Capable of building trust among stakeholders and fostering a positive professional climate of mutual trust among faculty, staff and administrators. Encourages and facilitates teamwork
Good communicator between all groups in the community and within the school system. Good oral and written skills. Knows how to make people feel like they were heard
Good manager – can handle powerful groups in town (PCT, PTA) and work with them as partners with strength. Ability to work with the Board and keep them current and informed
Strength of character – won't allow negative interplay with Union. Someone who can really listen, has strength, makes a decision without caving in, explains rationale to community. To lead, to take a position
Child-centered
Collaborative
Consensus builder – able to negotiate with entrenched parties
Curriculum-driven, K-12
Familiar (or can come up to speed quickly) with NYS regulations and requirements
Financial acumen – able to effectively plan and manage long-term financial health of district
Able to move community ahead to next level. Can affect change, even in the face of resistance
Good people person
High academic expectations – will raise the bar
Innovative thinker
Visible in the community
Wants to be in POB over the long-term
Strong, but compassionate leader. “Go to” person
Knowledgeable, possesses intellect
Experienced, good track record

Plainview Old-Bethpage School District Superintendent of Schools Desired Characteristics

Based on input from Board members, parents, staff, students, and community via focus groups, interviews, and an online survey, the Board of Education of Plainview-Old Bethpage seeks a strong, child-centered educational leader who possesses the following characteristics:

- Proven leadership ability in district-wide curriculum and instruction
- Integrity, openness, and honesty as the steward of values and culture of the Plainview-Old Bethpage School District and its community
- Excellent communication as the highly visible representative of every segment of the district and community
- Ability to engender trust among all stakeholders through strength of character and responsible, collaborative decision making
- A clear, well-articulated vision for exemplary student success
- Eagerness to promote high expectations for all in the community
- Ability to hold people accountable
- Capacity to attract, manage and mentor an effective team of administrators and staff
- Skills to insure the long term financial health of the district
- Comfort with technology as an instructional tool and management asset

With regard to leadership experiences and accomplishments, the successful candidate will:

- Be eligible for certification through the New York State Education Department as Superintendent of Schools
- Have a demonstrated record of success as an experienced educator in improving student performance
- Make a long-term commitment to the district
- Believes in the district's vision and values