

**LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT**  
**WHITEWATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**WHITEWATER, WISCONSIN**



**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in February 2020 for the new District Administrator of the Whitewater Unified School District (WUSD). 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. Interview sessions focus group meetings and surveys were structured to assist the Board in determining the primary characteristics desired in the new District Administrator. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups elicited information about strengths and challenges the District faces in the coming years. The online survey data also delineates responses by subgroups as well as an aggregate.

## District and Community Characteristics

The Whitewater Unified School District seeks an outstanding educational leader to serve as the District Administrator. The District serves approximately 2,000 diverse students from the City of Whitewater, WI and parts of eight surrounding municipalities in five schools: Lakeview Elementary School, Lincoln Elementary School, Washington Elementary School, Whitewater Middle School and Whitewater High School. The population includes 43% economically disadvantaged students, 14% ELL learners, 17% students with disabilities and 37% students of color, predominately Hispanic/Latino.

WUSD exceeds expectations on the Wisconsin State Report Card and is proud of the strong curricular programs at all levels, as well as excellent extracurricular programs. More than 82% of Whitewater High School students are engaged in music, arts, and/or athletic programs. The Whitewater community is extremely supportive and involved with the schools. The school district enjoys an excellent relationship with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and benefits from the many student teachers and University educators that are involved with the district. Whitewater has a history of successful referenda. All district schools are recently updated and well maintained. The School Board is stable, long-serving, and committed to providing a quality education for all students.

WUSD is located in south central Wisconsin, approximately 45 minutes from Madison, 50 minutes from Milwaukee and 90 minutes to Chicago. The district includes parts of the

Kettle Moraine State Forest, several lakes across eight municipalities and the city of Whitewater with a beautiful lakefront and community center. This unique and beautiful city offers numerous recreational opportunities for those who love biking (on-road and off-road), golfing, hiking, hang gliding, skiing, swimming, fishing and boating. The area's lakes also offer a great variety of recreation. There are public beaches, picnic areas, boating, and fishing. In the summer, there are ski shows on Whitewater Lake by the Minneiska Ski team and in winter you can find Whitewater Lake scattered with ice shanties for fishing.

Whitewater is home to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater serving more than 13,000 students at the Whitewater and Rock County campuses, offering undergraduate and graduate degrees as well as an education specialist and doctoral degree. A championship tradition extends from NCAA Division III athletics to award-winning American Marketing Association, forensics, media arts and game development teams.

Whitewater is rich in history and tradition. The Whitewater area boasts a proud and colorful history that dates back to 1836 when the first settler carved his initials on a tree next to Whitewater Creek. By July 1, 1960, Whitewater put into effect the first unified school district in the state of Wisconsin. The new-type district set up by a new law reduced the membership of the Board of Education (now called School Board) to seven members, all elected at large, and separated all school business and budget matters from the city council control. A detailed history of Whitewater can be found on the district's web page in the School Board section. The summary validates the continued support throughout the years of the Whitewater citizens for public education.

The greater community along with the University, manufacturing and service industries look forward to what the future has in store. The Whitewater community is known as a friendly, welcoming place to live and work!

## Input and Participation

Over the course of two days (February 18-19, 2020), the HYA team conducted 16 face-to-face group listening sessions. Seven individual board member interviews were also conducted by phone or in person. The unopposed candidate for school board 2020 was also interviewed. Concurrently, an on-line survey was open to all stakeholders from February 10-24, 2020.

The numbers of stakeholder groups, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below:

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>PERSONAL INTERVIEWS or FOCUS GROUPS</b>	<b>ONLINE SURVEY</b>
Board	7+1	NA
Administrators(combined)	1	(combined)
Certified Licensed Staff+WEA	2	(combined)
Support Staff+Central Office	2	COMB. TOTAL EMPLOYEE 140
Community	8	38
Parent	3	158
Student	NA	181
Interim District Administrator	1	(combined)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25 sessions</b>	<b>517</b>

*Description of groups:*

*\*Board members- interviewed individually plus unopposed school board candidate 2020*

*\*Administrators- district office and building level administrators*

*\*Certified Licensed Staff - all professional (not administrative) licensed staff and union leadership*

*\*Support staff - district and building level non-certified staff*

*\*Community- elected officials, community groups, and community at large.*

*\*Parent and Parent Groups -of current WUSD students*

*\*Students- middle and high school level*

*\*Interim District Administrator-current interim*

It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor necessarily represents the majority opinion of each respective group.

# STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

## **Strong Community Relations and Community Support**

When asked about the strengths of the WUSD, every group noted that Whitewater is a small, safe, friendly community in which to live and that the community shows tremendous support for the school district. Numerous community connections and partnerships exist and of particular note is the tremendous support for WUSD referendums. As stated, “we have never failed to pass referendums to meet our operational or capital needs”. A 2016 facilities referendum provided improvements in all schools in areas of safety, instructional space, ADA accessibility, and maintenance and infrastructure upgrades. A 2018 four-year nonrecurring operating referendum helps maintain class sizes, instructional and mental health supports and facilities and infrastructure.

The diverse rural, city, and University areas add to the richness of Whitewater and the connections across all groups have contributed to the WUSD success. Additionally, there is a strong partnership (and frequent, regular meetings) between the University Chancellor, the Whitewater City Administrator and the WUSD District Administrator. The groups continuous focus is on opportunities and improvements for the greater Whitewater community.

The community has deep generational roots with a proud history and tradition. WUSD is justifiably proud of the extensive support provided to the school district from parents, community partners, local businesses and the University. The incoming District Administrator will need to understand, nurture and maintain these relationships.

## **Quality Staff**

The focus groups and interviews highlighted the district’s staff as a strength and asset. The WUSD staff is described as caring and dedicated. Approximately 300 people work in the WUSD. Of 169 certified staff members, 89 have earned advanced degrees. Of particular mention, is the strength and leadership of the WUSD business manager who is highly skilled and respected. This is seen as a tremendous asset for an incoming District Administrator. The administrative team exhibits strengths but may be somewhat fractured as a result of strained past administrative relationships. The administrative team requires strengthening and continued development.

Additionally, some focus groups stressed the continued need for professional learning, especially in preparation for attending to increasing student needs in mental health and special education areas. Some focus groups mentioned the great importance of working in a climate of respect, trust, collaboration, and being valued. Staff groups expressed a genuine concern for students, families, colleagues and the reputation of the school district, which is seen as a positive for WUSD. Teacher retention should be studied so WUSD can maintain its quality staff in addition to recruitment efforts for the future.

## Growth in Diverse Populations

When asked about the strengths of the WUSD, several groups noted that the growing diversity was a strength. The groups expressed a desire to find a leader who values and celebrates diversity. The district is 37% students of color with 14% of the students as English Language Learners. WUSD welcomes the Hispanic/Latino population and embraces the conversation about addressing the needs of a growing, diverse community population. The district staff are aware of the potential of achievement gaps yet their dedication to all students is evident and translates to success in their state report card scores of exceeding expectations. An often-articulated advantage of a diverse population is the increased understanding and appreciation for multiple cultures, customs, traditions, languages and global perspectives. The Hispanic/Latino population is a vibrant part of the Whitewater community.

Additional evidence of the commitment to all is found in the WUSD Inclusion Statement

*The WUSD celebrates and values community. We support and are inclusive of all students, staff, families and community members. All are welcome and safe in our schools. We take seriously our responsibility to provide safe, nondiscriminatory, and inclusive environments for all people. We will continue to staunchly protect the rights of all people. All children will be safe and loved in our schools.... every student, every day, in a unified way!*

## Area Quality of Life

The friendly welcoming nature of the Whitewater community, the beautiful environmental opportunities, the presence of a University and a rural community, and the proximity to Milwaukee, Madison and even Chicago are all seen as strong contributors to the quality

of life in Whitewater. All groups highlighted the Whitewater area as a great place to live, work and recreate.

## Stable Dedicated School Board

The relationship between a school board and a district administrator and the dedication of a school board is paramount. Repeatedly, comments about the strength and dedication of the WUSD school board was shared and viewed as an asset in WUSD. The Board is described as being focused on “the right stuff”. There are no hidden agendas or personalities to get in the way of school progress and district success. Mutual respect and sticking to the work are characteristics of this Board which also appear to be “baked in to” the WUSD culture. In addition to stability and focus, there is also longevity on the school board which contributes to the long-term success of this district.

## Facilities

The management and maintenance of district facilities and related services has tremendous impact on the potential of a school district and the WUSD facilities are seen as a district strength. Buildings and the surrounding properties are well maintained, accessible and desirable. Thanks to operating and facility referendums, students and staff are enjoying modern learning spaces and school sites. Additionally, the school community benefits from the shared partnership which created the Whitewater Aquatic Center. In 2000, the Whitewater Unified School District provided the land adjacent to the high school, the City of Whitewater provided over 2 million dollars in capital support, and the community fundraised over 6 million dollars for the construction of the facility. Students and community members benefit from this modern facility especially with the proximity of the facility to the high school. A noted challenge for the future was described as attention to needed improvements to outdoor athletic fields. While maintained well, they are not perceived as adequate.

## Survey

The Whitewater Unified School District Administrator Search Survey was completed by 517 stakeholders. The largest stakeholder group responses were students. Students represented 35.0 percent of all respondents. Almost a third of respondents were parents of students attending school. They made up the second most populous stakeholder group

at 30.6 percent of all respondents. The third largest participant group were employees at 27.1 percent of all respondents.

**Survey Results (top 5 district strengths out of 12 possible response choices)**

- Technology is integrated into the classroom.
- Facilities are well maintained.
- District schools are safe.
- The district employs effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools.
- District technology infrastructure is sufficient to support 21st century learning.

While the interview methodology generated more details of district strengths, it is believed that the survey findings and the interview findings are consistent. Technology was the only topic mentioned more frequently in survey data than interview data.



# CHALLENGES, CONCERNS, ISSUES FACING THE DISTRICT

## **Communication and Creating a Unified Identity**

Focus groups identified communication as a continuing challenge. Sharing accurate information in a timely manner is an important goal of any organization as is seeking to hear the input of the school community. This challenge is not unique, in fact it is usually cited as an area needing improvement in most school districts. The many challenges of communicating clearly include internal and external messaging, listening carefully, and engaging with the diverse populations in the Whitewater community. It was suggested that the district needs to create a central communication port where parents (especially) can look for information. There is concern that communication coming from each individual school is not coordinated across the district and therefore parents have to create their own interpretation of multiple messages. Other communication challenges can be attributed to the need to balance print and social media in addition to understanding how communication methods impact different stakeholders in the community.

While only cited once, the suggestion to create a Whitewater district identity is worth mentioning. It was suggested that Whitewater attempts to “brand” itself as many school districts are doing. The WUSD is a good school district with excellent opportunities for kids but if the district is interested in growing it may need to create better messaging about the district and what it is known for. The Whitewater story needs to be precise and shared.

## **Mental Health and Special Education Needs**

Similar in many school districts, Whitewater interviews illuminated a growing concern about the increasing mental health needs of students. An increase in special education needs, both in numbers and severity, was also expressed. Whitewater is doing a commendable job at addressing these issues, however continued attention is needed as the population and needs grow. Especially noted was the need to better prepare staff, including para- professionals working with students with challenges. The continuation of

collaborative work and service across the community to address these needs was also stressed.

Additionally, increasing enrollment of students with challenges can impact the overall budget of a school district as services may come with increased costs. This is an overall concern of all school districts but careful monitoring of WUSD enrollment is needed if the SPED populations continue to grow.

## Changing Demographic Needs including Poverty and Homelessness

All groups interviewed welcomed the changing demographics of Whitewater and noted that the community is also supportive and responsive when families are in need. These comments, however, did not attempt to overshadow the need to address the growing challenges associated with poverty and homelessness. This of course is a huge societal issue, one that schools alone cannot address. WUSD is focused on meeting the needs of students, but community attention is also needed. It was mentioned frequently that the community is very responsive when made aware of individual family needs, however, a task force approach will be needed to address the larger issues. Some work is underway, and it needs to be strengthened as the population continues to change. The new District Administrator will play a vital role in working with the community to address these challenges.

WUSD is to be commended for the achievement growth in special populations yet continued attention and support from the community will be needed to address challenges which are not the direct control or responsibility of the school district.

## Local Housing Shortage

The community wide issue of the local housing shortage was cited as a challenge impacting the school district. While not created by the WUSD, the impact on the school district calls for attention. It was explained that growth in the University population has created somewhat of a “sprawling impact”, as what once were single family houses are converted to multiple tenant housing for student rentals. Affordable housing for middle income, young professionals, and families is greatly lacking in Whitewater. The impact on the school district can be documented by the number of new teachers who are unable to find housing in Whitewater although there is a desire to live there and become part of

the community. Of 44 new WUSD hires with less than 3 years of district experience, only 6 live in the district. Staff certainly make housing decisions based on multiple personal factors, but the Whitewater community will need to address this issue to support those who desire to locate in Whitewater.

Additionally, lack of housing may contribute to the inability to attract families and increase enrollment in WUSD. The WUSD has a desire to attract new families but simply stated “if there is nowhere for families to live, they can’t come here”.

## Enrollment Challenges

Open enrollment and pending decisions to dissolve a neighboring school district significantly impact the WUSD. The district continues to experience a net loss with open enrollment students which translates to revenue loss. The district needs to address the open enrollment issue, especially in light of limited growth in the WUSD.

Additionally, Whitewater is a neighboring school district to the Palmyra-Eagle school district. At its July 1, 2019 regularly scheduled school board meeting, the Palmyra-Eagle Area School District (PEASD) school board adopted a resolution ordering the dissolution of the district. This decision came after a failed operational referendum vote on April 2, 2019, which would have provided funds sufficient to operate the district. In September, the appointed Wisconsin School District Boundary Appeal Board voted against the dissolution. If the issue is appealed, there could be ramifications for WUSD as the neighboring district most likely to adsorb students. This is not a current challenge but an issue to watch.

# DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

## **Relationship Builder**

- Builds strong relationships with all stakeholders and the greater WUSD community.
- Develops relationships with staff and students
- Is present in community and classrooms
- Is visible and engaged in schools and community
- Able to maximize established networks and coalitions
- Skilled in brokering community resources
- Able to recognize personnel strength while also developing staff capacity and growth

## **Strong Communicator**

- Fosters trust and respect internally and externally
- Uses an honest, factful, genuine approach when communicating
- Possesses public relations and marketing skills
- Models effective use of technology
- Has strong listening skills
- Is the positive face of the district
- Is genuine in every connection
- Visionary with an ability to communicate and motivate the vision

## **Celebrates Diversity**

- Respects and celebrates cultures
- Models inclusive practices and approaches in all work
- Insists on representation of diverse populations and ideas
- Sees diversity and changing demographics as a positive
- Helps lead community in understanding and valuing diversity
- Understands changing diverse cultures
- Bi-Lingual would be a strength

### **Trustworthy and Open Minded**

- Is an active listener
- Realizes that the district administrator is not always the expert and has the ability to identify and engage those who are the experts in addressing relevant matters
- Seeks first to understand before being understood; realizes that the need to seek out facts and information before making important decisions
- Honest and dependable
- Ability to admit when wrong and to own mistakes
- Is accountable and holds others accountable
- Demonstrates high integrity
- Shows up and does what they say they will do

### **Fosters Community Engagement**

- Maintains and expands existing community partnerships
- Committed to developing a strong presence and involvement in the community, with business, civic organizations and local government entities
- Works collaboratively with school board, staff and community members
- Participates in community events
- Brings groups together around key issues
- Develops networks and coalitions to benefit the district
- Solicits and demonstrates good stewardship of resources
- Is politically savvy and can bring groups together

### **Visible and Accessible**

- Be present at multiple events in the district and community
- Approachable
- Genuine
- Has a sense of humor and high energy
- Interacts with confidence

### **Sets High Expectations**

- Clearly communicates a vision
- Sets high expectations for students and staff
- Holds self and others accountable
- Develops others, recognizes individual strengths
- Maintain, develop and attract high quality staff

### Survey Results (top five desired strengths of 20 possible responses)

- Foster a positive, professional climate of mutual trust and respect among faculty, staff, and administrators
- Be visible throughout the District and actively engaged in community life
- Recruit, employ, and retain effective personnel throughout the District and its schools
- Understand and be sensitive to the needs of a diverse student population
- Establish a culture of high expectations for all students and personnel

HYA is committed to seek candidates who possess these characteristics and who fit the profile of the WUSD.

The consultants thank all the participants who attended focus groups, personal interview meetings or completed the online survey. Also, we thank all of the Whitewater Unified School District staff members who assisted with our meetings and particularly Administrative to the District Administrator and School Board Secretary Jaclyn Tueting, for her efforts in facilitating our time in the District.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Neudecker. Ph.D., HYA Associate

Mike Richie Ed.D., HYA Associate

Presented to School Board March 2, 2020