



Superintendent Leadership Profile Report

San Dieguito Union High School District

March 23, 2023

Introduction

This report represents the findings of the *Stakeholder Engagement Process* conducted by Education Support Services (ESS) from February 28 to March 15, 2023. Information in this report was collected from stakeholder group meetings, individual interviews, community forums, and online survey.

Data from the engagement phase of the Superintendent Search process has been used in the development of the following Leadership Profile. This profile will guide the search advisers and Board of Education in the recruitment, screening, and selection of SDUHSD’s next superintendent.

Stakeholder Engagement

A cross-section of students, employees, parents, and community members provided input to inform the search process. Conversations in all settings focused on the district’s strengths, challenges/needs, and desired characteristics of the incoming superintendent.

Individual/Small Group Interviews	Frequency	Percentage
Students Leaders	9	12.6%
Trustees/Senior Cabinet	9	12.6%
District Office Management Team	13	18.3%
District Office Classified Team	13	18.3%
Principals	12	17.1%
SDFA & CSEA Association Leaders	6	8.5%
PTSA & Foundation Presidents	9	12.6%
DELAC & Special Ed Parent Forum		
Bond Oversight Committee		
	71	100%

Community Forums	82
Combined Total	153

Strengths of the District

Across the organization, stakeholders were consistent in describing the strengths of San Dieguito Union High School District. The things that attract people to the district fell into four general categories:

Array of Programs, Course Offerings, and Learning Environments

Schools across the district are known to have their own unique ‘vibe.’ An array of academic programs, services, schedules, and co-curricular options afford students access to varied learning environments – especially at the high school level. Be it career academies, International Baccalaureate, the arts, athletics, AVID, electives, clubs, or support services there are numerous avenues for learners to find their niche. As a choice district, students and parents shared that they appreciate the ability to select the campus that best suits their own interests and needs. A sense of pride and belonging is woven into the fabric of each school’s culture.

Caring Teachers, Administrators, and Support Staff

Among the vast majority of stakeholders, San Dieguito’s workforce was described as a talented, dedicated, and caring group of people who put students first. Strong collegial relationships and collaboration have been a cornerstone of SDUHSD for decades. For employees, the district feels like a family. A ‘spirit of all kids’ is at the center of staff’s work. From principals to teachers to counselors to classified staff, employees were described as demonstrating genuine care/concern for student safety, well-being, and academic success.

Extraordinary Parent and Community Support

Parents throughout the district are heavily invested in the education of their children. They willingly ‘lean in’ whenever and wherever asked. Site PTAs and foundations are known to go above and beyond with time and financial support to ensure students have the resources they need to excel. The commitment and engagement of SDUHSD families was described as ‘off the charts’, far surpassing other districts in the region. One stakeholder noted, “We have wonderful, involved parents who are constantly looking for ways to support us.”

Remarkable Reputation/Beautiful Location

Stakeholders are drawn to San Dieguito for its remarkable reputation, bounty of resources, top-ranked schools, and quality of life. Across the state and nation, SDUHSD is known for its focus on academics, college-going culture, and high performing schools. Limitless educational opportunities are a major draw locally as well as internationally. Alumni often return to the area to live, work, and raise a family. Stories of the district’s rich history, supportive communities, and beautiful location were highlighted among all groups.

Challenges/Issues

When asked to describe the major challenges or issues a new superintendent will encounter upon taking the job in San Dieguito Union High School District, three themes emerged.

Communication

Within every setting, ‘improved communication’ emerged as an immediate need/challenge. Communication across the district was described as disjointed and reactionary. For example, some principals and site staffs may receive information about a particular topic, while others do not.

Stakeholders seek information that is streamlined, understandable, and timely. Targeted communication (rather than one size fits all) is necessary to ensure messages get to the right people (parents and/or staff) at the right time in the right dosage. There is also an interest to have 'good things' shared more often so that people can hear/see the successes of students and their schools. Concerns were expressed that without a strategic communication plan the district runs the 'reputational risk' of losing what it's known for (or wants to be known for). People worry that an ongoing cycle of negative news stories will impact attempts to pass future bonds, recruit/retain high quality employees, and/or attract new families to the area.

Culture of Mistrust and Strained Relationships

SDUHSD has been navigating an unprecedented set of disruptions that have led to strained relationships and a culture of mistrust among/between parents, staff, community members, and trustees. People described conflicts as 'polarized' and 'divisive.' Stakeholders also reported that board meetings are often contentious places where students and others don't feel safe to attend. Underscoring these divisions are curriculum issues, DEI, unionism, and 'woke agendas.' A lack of trust between groups with opposing points of view has made it difficult for the district to remain grounded in the work of teaching and learning.

Lack of Direction/Strategic Planning

With three new trustees joining the board in November 2022 and a seventh superintendent about to be hired within the span of six years, San Dieguito has experienced unprecedented changes that have affected organizational stability and forward momentum. Stakeholders indicated there is no universal focus or strategic plan to anchor the board or staff's work. This has led to a 'yo-yo effect' of shifting priorities based on problems of the day. As a result, site and district leaders spend a disproportionate amount of time responding to scattered or 'urgent' demands that may or may not be related to the collective goals of the board. Stakeholders would like to see a renewed emphasis on 'students first' through the development of a long-range strategic plan with clear goals and objectives that everyone is working toward.

Desired Characteristics of the Incoming Superintendent

Stakeholders want a new superintendent who will listen, build trust, and unify the district as a community. They seek an exceptional communicator who 'can be the mayor of San Dieguito.' They are asking for a leader who:

- Has a heart, humility and courage.
- Understands public relations and the importance of effective messaging.
- Can navigate differing points of view and any missteps (is politically savvy).
- Is responsive rather than reactive.
- Is thoughtful, yet decisive; able to make tough decisions.
- Is a champion for all students.
- Sees all stakeholders as partners in some way.
- Develops a shared vision/mission and long-range strategic plan.
- Can work effectively with the governing board.

Online Survey Participation:

Role	Frequency	Percentage
Administrator	7	0.9%
Certificated Staff	73	9.0%
Classified Staff	31	3.8%
Parent	532	65.2%
Student	88	10.8%
Community Member	73	9.0%
Parent + Certificated Staff	1	0.1%
Parent + Classified Staff	2	0.2%
Retired Teacher	2	0.2%
Feeder District School Administrator	1	0.1%
Other	6	0.7%
Total Participants	816	100%

Table 1: Most Important Leadership Skills (Top 5)

Online survey respondents identified the following *Leadership Skills* as most important for SDUHSD’s incoming superintendent to possess:

Leadership Skills	Frequency	Percentage
1. Fosters a climate of trust and mutual respect.	531	68%
2. Is knowledgeable about best practices around teaching and learning.	517	66%
3. Maintains a culture of high expectations for students and employees.	416	53%
4. Is a forward thinker and open to new ideas.	368	45%
5. Is sensitive to and understands the needs of diverse learners.	341	43%
Ensures the district remains fiscally solvent.	341	43%

Table 2: Personal Attribute Rankings (Top 4)

Online survey respondents identified the following *Personal Attributes* as deserving the most attention by the Board when assessing candidates:

Personal Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
1. Honest and ethical	690	85%
2. Strong communicator	511	63%
3. Problem solver	509	62%
4. Good listener	366	45%

Table 3: Expertise and Experience

Online survey respondents rated the following areas of *Expertise and Experience* by scale of importance:

Area of Expertise/Experience	Critically Important	Mildly Important	Not Important
Teaching and Learning	720	64	24
Experience as a Site Principal	390	335	73
Understands School/Community Culture	611	167	22
Negotiations/Labor Relations	377	363	61
Fiscal Management	519	261	24
Facilities Management	353	407	43
Board Governance	264	361	63
Public Relations	460	294	46

Table 5: State of the District

Online survey respondents rated the overall quality of teaching and learning in the district.

EXCELLENT		ABOVE AVERAGE		AVERAGE		BELOW AVERAGE		POOR	
Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
210	26.3%	396	49.6%	160	20.1%	24	3.0%	8	1.0%

In this next series of questions, respondents selected their level of agreement with each statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1. The district provides a compelling vision for the future.	8.8%	39.6%	33.4%	6.6%	11.6%
2. The district maintains high expectations for student performance.	24.8%	56.7%	12.9%	2.4%	3.3%
3. The district is working to close achievement gaps.	10.0%	41.6%	20.1%	6.6%	21.7%
4. The district provides adequate resources to support student learning.	16.3%	51.3%	20.8%	5.8%	5.8%
5. Schools in our district are safe.	19.5%	60.2%	14.2%	3.0%	3.1%
6. District facilities are clean and well maintained.	16.5%	54.1%	18.6%	6.6%	4.1%
7. The district engages the community as a partner to improve the system.	10.8%	43.1%	27.1%	11.1%	7.9%

8. Communication from the District is transparent and effective.	10.5%	39.3%	31.7%	11.5%	7.0%
9. The district embraces diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic groups.	17.0%	48.1%	19.3%	8.0%	7.5%
10. The district is heading in the right direction.	9.2%	36.6%	27.7%	11.1%	15.4%

Table 6: Additional Considerations

Online survey respondents identified the path/strategy they would like to see the Board of Education take in choosing San Dieguito’s next superintendent:

	Frequency	Percentage
Path or Strategy		
Find a candidate who will stay the course of the previous administration.	68	9%
Find a candidate with the same general leadership style, but is able to make some necessary changes.	381	49%
Find a candidate who is ready to take the district in different direction.	327	42%

Concluding Remarks

The search advisers would like to thank all the participants who attended meetings and completed the online survey. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Executive Assistant, Shannon Martinez who worked side-by-side with us to schedule meetings, secure translators, and ensure the stakeholder engagement process was seamless for all involved.

The ESS search advisers, in partnership with the Governing Board, intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses the experience, skills, and attributes to successfully lead San Dieguito Union High School District into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Suzette Lovely

Dr. Gary Rutherford

