



LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

March 9, 2023

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in February 2023 for the new Director of Aldo Leopold Charter School. The data contained herein was obtained from input the HYA consultant received from internal and external stakeholders of the community through listening sessions, input forms, and a parent survey.

The survey and listening sessions were structured to gather information to assist the Governing Council in determining the primary characteristics desired and needed in the new director. Additionally, the HYA consultant collected feedback regarding the strengths of the school along with present and future challenges facing the school.

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed in the following chart through March 6, 2023.

Group	# of participants
Governing Council Members	6
Students	6
Parents/Guardians	23
Community	1
School Staff	16
Totals	52

It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor should it necessarily be viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which it is attributed. Items are included if, in the associate's judgment, they warranted the Council's attention.

Summary of Stakeholder Input

Introduction

Listening sessions were conducted between February 17, 2023 and March 6, 2023. A total of 23 listening sessions were conducted. The online stakeholder survey timeline was February 24, 2023 through March 3, 2023 with a total of 17 parent participants.

All discussions were respectful, insightful and helpful. The HYA associate thanks all participants for giving so freely of their time and for the depth of the discussions regarding the school and community during listening sessions and in survey responses received.

Strengths of the School

While many comments were made regarding the strengths of the school and community, the following themes surfaced often and across multiple stakeholder groups.

Dedication to the School's Mission & Vision

In describing the strengths of the school, the vast majority of participants mentioned a long standing commitment to the mission and vision of this public charter school, particularly the focus on experiential learning and outdoor education. Nearly all participants mentioned this as a shared commitment among leaders, staff, parents, students and community partners since the

school was created. Many described experiential learning in the structure of the weekly school schedule with a special emphasis on Friday activities and experiences off campus. In addition, several community-based learning experiences, extended hiking trips, environmental studies, and community service projects were also shared as long standing examples of the school remaining true to the mission and vision for students over the years. I also learned that many students leave the internship component of the program inspired to pursue a career direction.

Aldo Leopold Charter School Mission

At Aldo Leopold Charter School, the human and natural environments serve as text and lab for learning through direct experience, inquiry, and stewardship.

Aldo Leopold Charter School Vision

Aldo Leopold Charter School graduates will use the skills, perspectives, and information they gain at school to enhance their own lives and to advance social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

“Learning by doing” was a phrase shared by some when describing what the mission and vision of the school means for students on a daily basis.

Dedicated Staff

Most participants identified a dedicated group of teachers and staff among the greatest strengths of the school. Students and parents appreciate small class sizes providing more individual attention to students. All stakeholders shared that the school has been and continues to be a successful experience for students who have struggled for various reasons in their prior school placements, often in traditional public school settings. Some staff mentioned that they “meet each student where they’re at” in developing positive supportive relationships. Staff with many years of service at the school mentioned their strong commitment to the mission and vision of the school among the reasons they have served for an extended period of time. They also felt strongly that this must remain a top priority for all school staff and leaders.

School Facility

The school’s current location on the campus of Western New Mexico University (WNMU) was identified as a strength of the school with many contrasting this location with the former facility in downtown Silver City which was not ideal for experiential learning needs. The former school director, Wayne Sherwood, was credited for his leadership in forging a relationship with the President of WNMU who partnered with him to make the current location a reality. In addition to the school facility, access to the campus library and recreational facilities were among the benefits to students, and many shared the need for ongoing communication and collaboration with WNMU leaders to maintain this strong working relationship.

Effective Interim Leadership

The leadership of Dr. Anthony Smith as the Interim School Director was mentioned several times as a current strength of the program. His responsive approach and follow-through in addressing emerging issues/questions as well as his communication skills and strategies were identified as particular strengths. Appreciation was expressed for his work in addressing current operational and strategic challenges, including efforts to increase clarity and consistency regarding school policies, protocols, and expectations. This work emerged as a result of Dr.

Smith's transition work, including meetings with Governing Council Members, staff, parents, students, and community partners beginning in January 2023. His findings from these visits were shared with HYA to help inform the development of this report.

Challenges and Issues Facing the School

School Funding

The vast majority of people, including students, identified the need for increased and stable funding for the school from the state. The loss of small schools funding was identified by many as a significant challenge, one that unfairly impacts Aldo Leopold compared to charter schools within larger school district populations who are not facing this reduction. Lack of ample funding since the school began was noted as a historic issue with supplemental grant funding and community partnerships identified as a much needed part of overall funding enabling the school to operate. Some shared that charter schools in New Mexico face political resistance from teachers union leaders and lawmakers who believe charters take funding away from traditional public schools. Advocating for charter school funding at the state level among students and staff this year has occurred, and many indicated the importance of this for school leadership in the future. Some identified this challenge as the greatest threat to the future survival of the school. There is awareness of anticipated funding reductions for the 2023-24 school year among stakeholders, and concern was shared regarding possible program and/or staffing reductions that may be necessary to balance the school's budget. Revenue generating strategies including new grant writing initiatives, ongoing legislative advocacy, and increasing student enrollment were also mentioned as possible strategies to address this challenge. Ongoing engagement and communication with stakeholders regarding budget planning and decision-making was identified as a priority.

Instructional Consistency: Academic Rigor and Experiential Education

While many described a core group of dedicated staff as a strength of the educational program, many parents and students shared that the level of academic rigor expected of students across classrooms has been inconsistent. Some parents shared this concern noting the impact this can have on post high school plans, including college admissions. The need for greater consistency with instructional expectations was also shared by several teachers who indicated the need for an effective onboarding process to support new teachers in understanding experiential education design expectations. Teachers shared mixed opinions regarding the current level of collaboration among instructional staff with most identifying this as essential to greater consistency across classrooms for students. Some stakeholders suggested that increased professional development for instructional staff and the use of a robust staff evaluation model should be part of efforts to address consistency concerns.

While some staff shared a desire for expanded program options and more experiential learning opportunities for students, they also acknowledged school funding challenges directly impacting the ability to consider any new program costs at this time.

Risk Management

The high risk nature of experiential education and outdoor education experiences for students was mentioned as a past and present challenge and a long standing priority for the school. Stakeholders sharing this concern identified the need for greater consistency and clarity among school staff in planning to ensure sufficient supervision and related protocols to ensure student safety at all times and in all settings. While no recent risk incidents were shared, a tragic plane crash in 2014 resulting in the death of three students from the school was mentioned as a compelling event in the history of the school which put risk management in the spotlight. Many shared their belief that a collective commitment to student safety exists and believe progress has been made in recent years to address risk management practices. Most people sharing this concern believe ongoing attention must be given to risk management practices by all staff involved in planning and supervising experiences for students.

Desired Characteristics

Participants were asked to name the desired leadership characteristics for the next School Director. The following summary of personal characteristics, attributes, skills, and experiences reflects input gathered during listening sessions and survey results.

- Familiar with and committed to supporting and promoting the mission and vision of ALCS internally and externally;
- Collaborates to develop a powerful, cooperative Governing Council/Director team that together will develop and guide strategic goals for the school;
- Strong interpersonal skills, including transparent and respectful interactions with students, staff, families, governing council, and community members;
- Exemplary communication skills in listening, speaking, and writing with all stakeholders;
- Community-minded, visible, accessible, and approachable to people throughout the school, and actively engaged in community life;
- Willing and able to make accountability decisions to reinforce student expectations and ensure all staff carry out professional responsibilities;
- Committed to ensuring a safe and orderly school environment and high quality instruction across all classrooms;
- Ensures a proactive and consistent approach to effective risk management practices;
- Commitment to advocating for policies and funding supporting charter schools at the local, state and national levels;
- Utilizes data and gathers stakeholder input in making decisions regarding instructional priorities and/or changes to the instructional program;
- Networks with local leaders, districts and organizations to develop awareness and support for the school's mission, vision and contributions to local youth and the community;
- Experience with organizational management in budget development/monitoring, facilities/maintenance, human resources, school safety, and strategic planning;

- Experience with grant writing and other strategies to generate supplemental school funding.

HYA thanks all the participants who attended listening sessions, submitted written input, or completed the online parent survey. I am especially grateful for the assistance, support and collaboration provided by Dr. Smith who assisted with valuable information and logistics planning in preparation for listening sessions with students, staff and parents. Special thanks to Hannah Wecks for her assistance in creating and updating the school website, communication to families regarding the parent survey, and advertising assistance.

Respectfully submitted by,

John Bash
HYA Associate