



- A – Request decision – closure required
- B – Update/status report
- C – Discussion and input – final decision at a subsequent meeting

**Special School Board Meeting for Superintendent Search Selection Process**  
**Monday, May 11, 2026**  
**AGENDA**

1. **Call to Order (1 minute)**
2. **Approve Board Agenda (1 minute)**
3. **Employee Services (50 minutes)**
  - 3.A. Superintendent Search Selection Process (40 minutes) - **B**
    - Mike Richie, HYA Vice President
    - Appendix A 2
    - Appendix B 3
    - Appendix C 13
  - 3.B. Superintendent Search Semi-Finalists Selection (10 minutes) - **A**
    - Mike Richie, HYA Vice President
4. **Adjourn**



# Anoka-Hennepin School Board

## Briefing Notes

**DATE:** 5/11/2026

**CLASSIFICATION:** Report

**AUTHOR:** Dr. Jennifer Cherry, Chief Human Resources Officer

**SUBJECT:** Superintendent Search update

**PURPOSE:**

The special meeting will allow the School Board to review community and staff feedback as shared in the Anoka-Hennepin Schools District Leadership Profile report and determine next steps in the Superintendent search process.

Mike Richie, vice president from Hazzard, Young and Attea, will present the report.

JC

# ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS

## Superintendent Leadership Profile Report May 11, 2026



**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

**Thank you to all invested community members for their engagement and coordination of this process.**

**Thank you to District staff members who helped coordinate the schedules, invitations, dates, and arrangements.**

Dr. Mike Richie  
HYA Vice President

**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

# TOTAL PARTICIPATION 1,252

## QUALITATIVE DATA • Over 150 Respondents

- 6 Board Interviews
- 11 Focus Groups In-person and Virtual
- Themes by Board, Parents/Community, Staff, and Students

## QUANTITATIVE DATA • 1,102 Responses

- Online Survey
- Survey open April 20 - May 1, 2026
- Responses by Community, Students, Administration, Parents, Certified Staff, and Support Staff



# ANOKA-HENNEPIN CULTURE AND CLIMATE

## CULTURE

**Mission:** To effectively educate each student for success.

**Vision:** To be a public school system of excellence, featuring high-quality staff, programs, and successful graduates.

**Equity Commitment:** The district is dedicated to creating equitable learning environments that provide access, representation, meaningful participation, and positive outcomes for all students.

## CLIMATE

Anoka-Hennepin Schools  
Current  
“Weather Report”

What did the findings say?

## PROCESS

# Seeking Engagement from All Invested Community Members

What is positive about Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

What are the challenges?

What are the key characteristics of your next superintendent?

## STRENGTHS

### Strengths as identified by the Board:

- Large School District with Intentional Personalization
- Abundant Resources Together with Strategic Capacity
- High Quality Talent and Leadership at All Levels
- Strong Community Trust, Engagement, and Partnership
- Commitment to Innovation, Equity, and Continuous Improvement

### Strengths as identified by Parents & Community :

- Comprehensive and Diverse Programming for Student Success
- High Quality Staff and Strong Professional Culture
- Strong Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Student Support
- Effective Communication and Community Engagement
- Strategic Use of Size and Infrastructure for Long-Term Strength

## STRENGTHS

### Strengths as Identified by the Staff:

- Highly Dedicated, Experienced, and Talented Workforce
- Strong Organizational Systems, Fiscal Responsibility, and Stability
- Comprehensive and Inclusive Programming for Diverse Student Needs
- Adaptability, Collaboration, and Problem-Solving Culture
- Strong Communication, Community Engagement, and District Pride

### Strengths as Identified by the Students:

- Comprehensive and Diverse Academic Programming
- Strong Career Pathways and Real-World Learning Opportunities
- Robust Co-Curricular and Enrichment Opportunities
- Student Centered Culture and Strong Relationships
- Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Student Support Systems

## CHALLENGES

### Challenges as identified by the Board:

- Governance Fragmentation and Political Polarization
- Erosion of Trust, Stability, and Organizational Coherence
- Rising Student Needs and Increasing Complexity of the Educational Environment
- Financial Pressures and Resource Allocation Challenges
- System Scale, Operational Complexity, and Untapped Opportunities

### Challenges as identified by the Parents & Community:

- Governance Instability and School Board Dysfunction
- Structural Complexity and Organizational Silos
- Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation Pressures
- Workforce Challenges and Declining Staff Capacity
- Strategic Drift and Misalignment of Priorities

## CHALLENGES

### Challenges as Identified by the Staff:

- School Board Governance, Alignment, and Trust
- Financial Constraints and Competitive Disadvantage
- Staffing Shortages, Workforce Strain, and Retention
- Organizational Complexity, Communication Gaps, and Silos
- Strategic Focus, Change Management, and Competing Priorities

### Challenges as Identified by the Students:

- Budget Constraints and Staffing Reductions Impact Instruction
- Governance Considerations and School Board Functioning
- Inconsistent Academic Programming and Equity Gaps
- Student Voice, Engagement, and Support Systems
- Academic Achievement Concerns and System Alignment

## STRENGTHS COMBINED DATA OF ALL GROUPS

### Strengths:

The common themes of the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools, as identified across the Board of Education, Parents and Community Members, Staff, and High School Students, are:

1. Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Student Support Systems
2. High Quality Staff and Talent
3. Comprehensive and Diverse Programming
4. Strong Community Trust and Engagement
5. Strategic Use of Size and Intentional Personalization

## CHALLENGES COMBINED DATA OF ALL GROUPS

### Challenges:

The common challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools identified across the Board of Education, Parents & Community Members, Staff, and Students are:

1. School Board Governance and Dysfunction
2. Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation
3. Workforce Strain and Capacity
4. Organizational Complexity and Lack of System Alignment
5. Erosion of Trust and Strategic Clarity

## DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

The desired characteristics for the next Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent, identified across all four groups (School Board, Parents & Community Members, Staff, and Students), focus on the following consolidated themes:

1. Strong, Courageous, and Decisive Leadership
2. Strategic Vision and Systems Orientation
3. Relationship Building, Collaboration, and Unification
4. Visibility, Engagement, and Exceptional Communication
5. Prioritizing and Advocating for Students

## DESIRED CANDIDATE PROFILE OF THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools seeks a superintendent who will focus the district on strengthening its core mission, restoring coherence, and advancing student success. Based on extensive stakeholder input gathered through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the following profile reflects the qualities, skills, and leadership attributes most essential for the district's next leader. ***A Leader Who Builds on Strengths and Confronts Challenges.***

1. A Strong, Courageous, and Decisive Leader
2. A Strategic Thinker with a Systems Orientation
3. A Relationship Builder Who Unifies and Collaborates
4. A Visible, Engaged, and Exceptional Communicator
5. A Student-Centered Advocate for Equity and Excellence

## SUMMARY STATEMENT

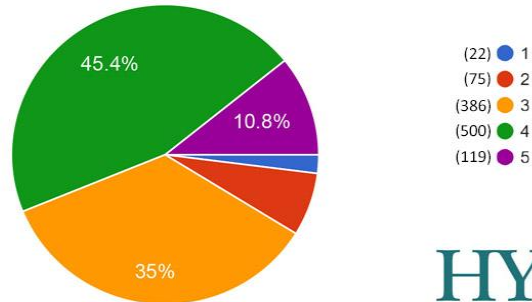
The Anoka-Hennepin Schools seeks a superintendent who is **strategic, courageous, unifying, and deeply student-centered**. This leader will build on the district's considerable strengths, its talented staff, diverse students, comprehensive programming, and strong community support, while addressing the significant challenges that threaten stability, trust, and coherence.

***The ideal candidate will bring clarity of vision, strength of character, and a collaborative spirit that unites the district around a shared purpose: ensuring every student thrives.***

## TOTAL SURVEY PARTICIPATION 1,102

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest quality, how would you rate the quality of education in Anoka-Hennepin?

1,102 responses



**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

## TOTAL SURVEY PARTICIPATION 1,102

### What are the Anoka-Hennepin Schools' strengths that the next superintendent can build upon?

1. Dedicated and High-Quality Staff
2. Commitment to Core Academics and Student Success
3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
4. Comprehensive Programming and Opportunities
5. Strong Leadership and Visibility

### What are the challenges facing the Anoka-Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent should be aware of, or you would like to see addressed?

1. Divided School Board & Political Conflict
2. Funding and Financial Challenges
3. Student Behavior & Safety
4. Academic Rigor and Core Focus
5. Staff Morale and Retention

**HYA** | HAZARD  
YOUNG  
ATTEA  
ASSOCIATES

# TOTAL SURVEY PARTICIPATION 1,102

## What key opportunities lie ahead for Anoka -Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent should recognize and build upon?

1. Funding and Financial Management
2. Staffing, Support, and Retention
3. Academic Rigor and Curriculum
4. Safety, Discipline, and School Environment
5. Community and Board Relations

## What are the characteristics or traits that you think an effective Superintendent should possess in order to best lead the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

1. Student and Staff Advocacy & Support
2. Strong Communication & Visibility
3. Leadership, Integrity, and Resilience
4. Conflict Resolution & Collaboration
5. Financial & Operational Understanding



## SEARCH TIMELINE

May 11, 2026	Presentation of <i>District Leadership Profile Report</i>
May 11, 2026	Presentation of slate to the Board and interview procedures
May 13, 2026	Board first round interviews Board meets to identify finalists
May 19, 2026 (all day)	Finalists Day in the District
May 20, 2026	Board conducts final interview(s)
May 21, 2026	Special Meeting, If needed Select Finalist; Deliberation continued
By Late May	Superintendent's hiring approved and announced
July 1, 2026	Superintendent contract formally begins



## THE FULL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT INCLUDES:

- 42 Pages
- Focus Group Schedule
- Summary of Responses
- Summary Survey Report
- Bulleted Notes from Focus Groups and Interviews
- Stakeholder Survey Summary



**Thank you!**

May 11, 2026

# ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS

## Superintendent Leadership Profile Report



Prepared By :

## SELECTION PROCESS

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools has retained the services of Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) to assist the Board with the hiring of the next superintendent. The consultants will screen applications and recommend candidates to the Board for interviews and further consideration. Any questions regarding the application process, selection process, and/or this Leadership Profile Report should be directed to: Mike Richie, HYA Vice President, HYA Senior Associate [mikerichie@hyasearch.com](mailto:mikerichie@hyasearch.com).

## PURPOSE

This report presents the findings of the Leadership Profile Assessment conducted by HYA during the months of April and May 2026 for the new superintendent of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools. The data contained herein was obtained from the 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.

HYA and the Board intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses the skills and character traits required to meet the district's needs. The search team will focus its recruitment on candidates who possess leadership qualities congruent with the profile.

The search team would like to thank the Anoka-Hennepin Schools for the opportunity to find your next leader who fits the criteria of your stakeholders. HYA would like to thank all of the participants who attended focus group meetings or completed the online survey, and the District staff who helped coordinate the schedules, invitations, dates, and arrangements which supported the data collection for this report.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dr. Mike Richie, HYA Vice President

## DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools is seeking a Superintendent beginning on July 1, 2026. Anoka-Hennepin Schools is a great place to live, work, and learn. Our communities work together to provide residents with safe and friendly neighborhoods, a wide range of business and economic opportunities, beautiful parks and abundant recreational activities and high-quality schools.

The Anoka-Hennepin School District is Minnesota's largest, serving a diverse population of approximately 37,000 students, 7,150 staff members and 253,000 residents. Anoka-Hennepin has 25 elementary schools, six middle schools and five high schools, plus early learning, alternative, magnet, specialty schools and Community Education programs to serve all the needs of our learners.

Anoka-Hennepin Schools staff play a critical role in preparing students for life. The district is known for offering a wide range of academic and co-curricular opportunities, including Advanced Placement courses, career and technical education pathways, and extensive athletics and activities. The district has received the "best communities for music education" designation for 11 years in a row. Overall, student performance on standardized tests tends to be above state averages in both reading and math, and the district maintains a graduation rate above the state average, making it a strong academic option among large suburban systems.

Spread out across 172 square miles, the school district is comprised of 13 suburban communities north of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul: Andover, Anoka, Blaine, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Coon Rapids, Dayton, Fridley, Ham Lake, Nowthen, Oak Grove and Ramsey.

The Anoka-Hennepin School District utilizes a continuous improvement model to align its governance, resource allocation, and operations with its mission to effectively educate each student for success.

**Mission:** To effectively educate each student for success.

**Vision:** To be a public school system of excellence, featuring high-quality staff, programs, and successful graduates.

**Equity Commitment:** The district is dedicated to creating equitable learning environments that provide access, representation, meaningful participation, and positive outcomes for all students.

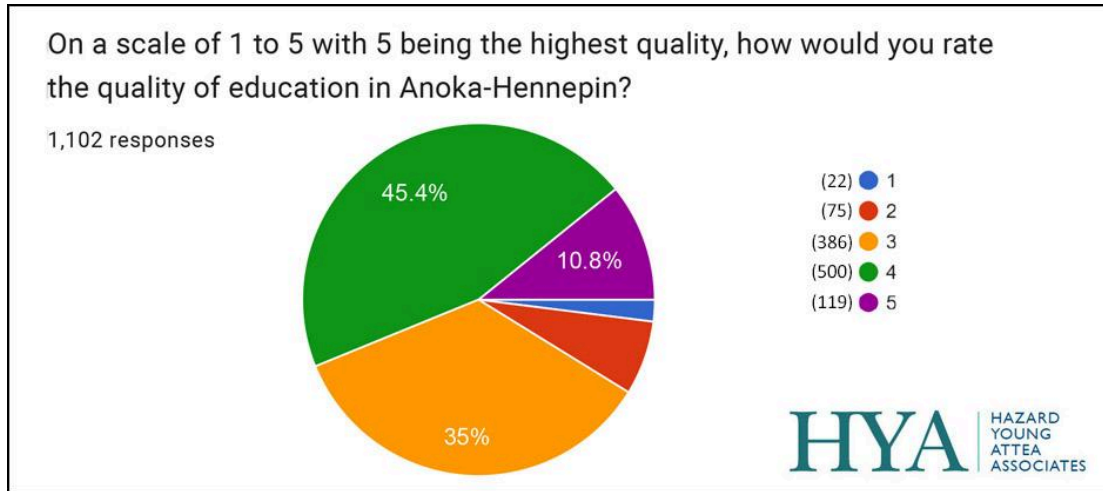
Visit the Anoka-Hennepin Schools Website: [Anoka-Hennepin Schools Website](#)

Visit the Anoka-Hennepin Schools: [Strategic Priorities](#)

Visit the Anoka-Hennepin Schools: [Comprehensive Achievement & Civic Readiness Report](#)

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

From April 20 through May 1, 2026, an online survey was conducted for all stakeholders. A total of 1,105 responses were submitted, with parents and guardians accounting for 792 responses (72%). Among the 1,102 respondents who rated the district, 619 (56.2%) gave Anoka-Hennepin Schools a 4 or 5, reflecting a strong level of overall satisfaction.



To shape the search for a new superintendent, the HYA Associates gathered valuable insights through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. These efforts aimed to identify the key qualities desired in the next leader while also highlighting the District's strengths and challenges ahead. Common themes voiced by multiple groups were used to build a well-rounded leadership profile, ensuring the selected candidate aligns with the district's needs and vision. It should be emphasized that the data is not a scientific sampling, nor does it necessarily represent the majority opinion of each respective group.

The HYA Associates conducted individual interviews with all six current School Board members, along with 11 focus groups (both in-district and virtual), ensuring that a broad range of perspectives are considered in the superintendent search.

### The following questions were asked during each interview and focus group:

1. What are the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent can build upon?
2. What are the challenges facing the Anoka-Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent should be aware of, or that you would like to see addressed?
3. What characteristics or traits are you looking for in your new superintendent?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with us or that we should know about the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

Through the information gathered, common themes were generated by the respondents. In this report, we will highlight what those themes were as identified by the following groups:

- School Board
- Community/Parents
- Staff
- Students

## PROCESS

The structure of the individual meetings and focus groups was open, allowing participants to build upon each other's comments. All of those involved in providing input were asked to respond to the questions on page 3.

## PARTICIPATION

Responses were gathered from individual interviews and focus groups. The HYA consultants conducted 6 individual interviews and hosted eight (11) focus groups.

<b>Anoka-Hennepin Schools Interviews and Focus Groups</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>In person or Virtual</b>
April 2026	Board Interviews (6)	Virtual
Wednesday, April 22	Parents and Community	Virtual
Sunday, April 26	Parents and Community	Virtual
Monday, April 27	Parents and Community	In person
Monday, April 27	Employees	Virtual
Monday, April 27	Employees	Virtual
Monday, April 27	Parents and Community	In person
Monday, April 27	District Department Staff	In person
Monday, April 27	Senior Leadership/Executive Directors	In person
Monday, April 27	Student Representatives 2 student reps from each HS	Virtual
Tuesday, April 28	Elementary Principals	Virtual
Wednesday, April 29	Secondary Principals	Virtual

## PROFILE DEVELOPMENT & QUALITATIVE DATA

Perceived Strengths • Perceived Challenges • Desired Characteristics

### Strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by BOARD OF EDUCATION

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### 1. Large School District with Intentional Personalization

Despite being a large, complex district with significant size and reach, there is a consistent emphasis on maintaining a personalized experience for students, staff, and families. Systems and structures are intentionally designed to “make a big district feel small,” ensuring individuals feel known, valued, and supported. This balance between scale and personalization is a defining strength and contributes to both internal cohesion and external perception.

#### 2. Abundant Resources Together with Strategic Capacity

The district benefits from extensive resources including strong facilities, in-kind contributions, and community investment. More importantly, it has the internal expertise and operational knowledge to leverage these resources effectively. The ability to “do a lot internally,” combined with strong processes and leadership capacity, positions the district to sustain innovation and respond proactively to emerging needs.

#### 3. High Quality Talent and Leadership at All Levels

A clear theme is the depth and strength of people across the organization. From dedicated teachers and principals to legacy staff and nationally recognized leaders, the district has cultivated a high performing workforce. Strong relationships between staff and leadership, along with a shared commitment to excellence, create a stable and collaborative professional culture that supports student success.

#### 4. Strong Community Trust, Engagement, and Partnership

The district is deeply embedded in a thriving, supportive community. High levels of parent engagement, strong partnerships, and a willingness of stakeholders to invest, financially and otherwise, reflect a high degree of trust and shared ownership. This community alignment enhances opportunities for students and reinforces the district's positive reputation locally and throughout the region.

#### 5. Commitment to Innovation, Equity, and Continuous Improvement

There is a longstanding focus on academic achievement combined with a forward thinking mindset. Programs such as STEP and magnet schools highlight a commitment to innovation and expanding opportunities for all learners. The district's diverse population strengthens this work, driving inclusive practices and global perspectives. A sustained history of continuous improvement ensures that success is not static but evolving.

## Challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by BOARD OF EDUCATION

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### 1. Governance Fragmentation and Political Polarization

A key theme is how political division is undermining effective governance. The Board is not just experiencing disagreement, it is consistently split along ideological lines, resulting in repeated deadlocks (e.g., 3–3 votes) that stalls decision-making and slows district progress. This creates a pattern of gridlock that limits the Board’s ability to provide clear direction on critical issues like budget, curriculum, and long-term strategy.

The impact extends beyond the Board itself. Ongoing division weakens leadership credibility, creates confusion for district administrators, and contributes to lower staff morale by signaling instability and lack of alignment. It also fuels external political pressures, particularly during elections, which intensify divisions and shift focus away from student centered priorities.

Addressing this challenge requires stronger governance norms and a renewed commitment to the district mission and vision. The Board will need to move beyond ideology driven decision making and reestablish expectations around collaboration, respect, and collective responsibility, ensuring that once decisions are made, members act in alignment to support the district’s direction.

### 2. Erosion of Trust, Stability, and Organizational Coherence

There is a strong sense that the district has “drifted” from its core mission, particularly in maintaining focus on classroom excellence. Trust and confidence, both internally and externally, have weakened. The lack of alignment at the Board level contributes to instability, making it difficult to sustain consistent direction. This theme highlights the need to restore trust, reestablish clear structures, and build a unified vision that reinforces stability, coherence, and a commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.

### 3. Rising Student Needs and Increasing Complexity of the Educational Environment

The district is experiencing a shift in student needs, including more significant behavioral challenges and mental health concerns, which directly impact classroom environments and instructional effectiveness. Safety concerns, inconsistent behavioral expectations, and weakened classroom structures complicate teaching and learning. This theme underscores the importance of strengthening systems of support, ensuring safe and orderly environments, and equipping staff to meet increasingly complex student needs while maintaining high academic expectations.

### 4. Financial Pressures and Resource Allocation Challenges

Budget constraints are a critical issue, with an \$800M budget that is large but strained by rising costs, inflation, and insufficient funding growth. Difficult financial decisions, including deep cuts, have created gaps in services and increased tension among leadership. The scale of the district adds complexity to financial management, making it harder to prioritize effectively. This theme points to the need for strategic, transparent budgeting processes that align resources with priorities, maintain essential services, and clearly communicate trade-offs to stakeholders.

## 5. System Scale, Operational Complexity, and Untapped Opportunities

While the size of the district offers significant opportunities, it also presents operational challenges, including inefficiencies, communication breakdowns, and difficulty maintaining cohesion across a large system. This complexity can lead to dysfunction and limits the district's ability to fully leverage its strengths. At the same time, there is recognition of underutilized opportunities, particularly in partnerships with businesses and community organizations, including in areas like mental health. This theme emphasizes the need to streamline systems, improve coordination, and more effectively leverage the district size as an asset rather than a liability.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent as identified by SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Transformational, Results Driven Leadership</b>	<b>Strategic Vision and Systems Thinking</b>
The next superintendent must be a decisive change agent who can lead a meaningful turnaround and measurably improve student outcomes. This requires confidence, courage, and the ability to make difficult decisions grounded in what is proven to work, even in the face of resistance.	The superintendent must be a big-picture thinker who can align short and long-term priorities into a coherent, sustainable plan focused on academic success. This includes understanding what works, leveraging data and cognitive science, and ensuring all efforts across the system are aligned to a clear vision.
<b>Relationship Building and Collaborative Leadership</b>	<b>Communication, Transparency and Visibility</b>
Success depends on the ability to build strong, trusting relationships with the Board, staff, and broader community while fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. The superintendent must communicate the "why," empower others, and cultivate leadership capacity throughout the organization.	Clear, proactive, and transparent communication is non-negotiable to ensure alignment and trust across all stakeholders. The superintendent must be highly visible, present, and intentional in engaging diverse voices while keeping the district focused, informed, and moving forward together.
<b>Integrity, Accountability, and Courageous Decision Making</b>	
A strong moral compass is essential, someone who leads with honesty, owns mistakes, and consistently prioritizes students over politics or personal interest. This leader must act with courage and clarity, making tough calls while maintaining trust and credibility across the district	

## **Strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **1. Comprehensive and Diverse Programming for Student Success**

A defining strength of the district is the breadth and depth of programming available to students. From magnet schools and gifted and talented programming to strong arts, science, and robotics opportunities (such as the Blaine robotics team), students are given access to a wide array of pathways that support both academic and personal interests. The continued inclusion of programs like Driver's Education and extensive field trip opportunities reflects a commitment to educating the "whole child," not just focusing narrowly on core academics.

This diversity of programming is further strengthened by the district's ability to leverage its size. A large district can offer specialized programs that smaller systems often cannot sustain, allowing students to explore career interests, advanced coursework, and enrichment opportunities. The result is a system where students are more likely to find meaningful engagement, which contributes to stronger outcomes and a more personalized educational experience despite the district's scale.

### **2. High Quality Staff and Strong Professional Culture**

The district benefits significantly from the quality, stability, and engagement of its staff. Teachers are described as highly involved, with a workforce that is both committed and invested in the district's direction. High staff retention reinforces this, indicating a positive professional environment where educators feel supported and valued.

The district prioritizes staff development and internal mobility. The ability for staff to transfer within the district provides career growth opportunities without losing talent to other systems. This internal pipeline, combined with a strong administrative team and a deep institutional knowledge base, creates continuity and strengthens overall organizational effectiveness. It also enables the district to replicate success by leveraging high performing schools and leaders as models for others.

### **3. Strong Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Student Support**

Anoka-Hennepin Schools demonstrate a clear commitment to meeting the needs of a diverse student population. The diversity of the student body is recognized as a strength, and the district's intentional efforts to promote equity ensure that all students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed. This includes both academic and social-emotional supports, creating a more inclusive and responsive system.

A particularly notable strength is the district's special education programming, including its highly regarded 18–22 transition program. Alongside this, the district's focus on literacy and early intervention shows a proactive approach to addressing learning gaps before they widen. These efforts collectively reflect a system that prioritizes individualized support and works to ensure that every student regardless of background or need, has a pathway to success.

#### **4. Effective Communication and Community Engagement**

The district has established strong communication practices that help keep families, staff, and the broader community informed and connected. Through newsletters, posts, and other outreach efforts, stakeholders are consistently updated on district initiatives, achievements, and opportunities. This transparency builds trust and fosters a sense of shared purpose across the community.

Beyond simply sharing information, the district's communication approach supports engagement. By actively highlighting programs, successes, and student experiences, the district reinforces its identity and strengthens community pride. This is especially important in a large district, where maintaining a sense of connection can be challenging. Effective communication helps bridge that gap and ensures stakeholders feel informed, involved, and invested.

#### **5. Strategic Use of Size and Infrastructure for Long-Term Strength**

While large size can present challenges, Anoka-Hennepin Schools effectively leverage it as a strategic advantage. The district's scale allows for extensive programming, resource allocation, and internal expertise that smaller districts may not be able to match. This includes a wide variety of classes, strong extracurricular offerings, and the ability to sustain specialized programs across multiple schools.

The district demonstrates strong long-term planning and operational stability. The long-range building plan and proactive approach to maintenance and repairs reflect responsible stewardship of facilities and resources. This forward thinking mindset ensures that infrastructure supports educational goals, not hinders them. When combined with the district's depth of knowledge and strong leadership, this creates a stable foundation for continued growth and innovation.

### **Challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### **1. Governance Instability and School Board Dysfunction**

A dominant and recurring challenge centers on the instability and dysfunction of the School Board. Multiple concerns point to a lack of professionalism, ideological division, and unclear understanding of governance roles. Rather than functioning as a cohesive body focused on student outcomes, the Board is often described as fragmented, reactive, and influenced by political agendas. This has led to stalled initiatives, delayed decision making, and an environment where advancing critical work, particularly around curriculum and student learning, becomes increasingly difficult.

The impact of this dysfunction extends beyond governance into the daily experience of staff. Employees report feeling undermined or even publicly criticized during board meetings, eroding trust and morale. Additionally, the Board's perceived reluctance to trust district expertise or align around shared priorities contributes to a broader sense of organizational drift. Without clarity in roles and a commitment to collaborative governance, the district struggles to move forward with coherence and purpose.

## **2. Structural Complexity and Organizational Silos**

The size and complexity of the district present significant operational challenges. While scale can be an asset, it also creates barriers to alignment, communication, and consistency. Stakeholders note that initiatives that should be implemented district-wide often lose momentum or become unevenly applied due to difficulties in coordinating across schools and departments. Decision making can be slow, and communication frequently breaks down, particularly between central office leadership and school level staff.

Compounding this issue is a lack of a collaborative organizational structure. Silos exist between departments, and even between elementary and secondary leadership, limiting the district's ability to function as a unified system. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies, duplicated efforts, and missed opportunities for shared learning. In such an environment, even well-intentioned initiatives can struggle to gain traction or achieve meaningful impact.

## **3. Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation Pressures**

Financial strain is a central and persistent challenge. The district faces ongoing budget cuts, limited staffing, and increasing demands, all while operating within a system heavily dependent on property taxes. The School Board's reluctance to pursue a levy or referendum further exacerbates these constraints, limiting the district's ability to remain competitive in salaries and benefits compared to neighboring districts.

These financial pressures have tangible consequences for both staff and students. Reductions in funding have led to cuts that directly impact student learning and support services. At the same time, compensation challenges are driving staff to seek opportunities elsewhere, contributing to turnover and instability. The district is forced into a reactive posture (budget cuts) —continually managing scarcity rather than strategically investing in long-term priorities.

## **4. Workforce Challenges and Declining Staff Capacity**

The district is experiencing significant workforce related challenges, including difficulty filling open positions, shortages of substitute teachers, and declining staff morale. Changes such as new leave policies, combined with lower relative pay and benefits, have made recruitment and retention increasingly difficult. Paraprofessionals and other support staff, in particular, face affordability challenges with benefits, further complicating staffing efforts.

At the same time, internal dynamics are shifting in ways that reduce staff empowerment. Evolving administrative structures, along with reductions in positions, have created a perception among teachers and staff that their voice and influence have decreased. Coupled with the emotional toll of budget cuts and contentious board interactions, this has created a work environment where burnout and disengagement are real risks. Over time, these factors weaken the district's overall capacity to deliver high quality education.

## **5. Strategic Drift and Misalignment of Priorities**

A final major challenge is the district's struggle to maintain a clear, aligned strategic focus. There are concerns that senior leadership is overly focused on operations rather than teaching and learning, and that the district has lost touch with its core values or foundational purpose. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to prioritize initiatives, particularly when new demands arise without corresponding reductions in existing responsibilities.

The influence of Board dynamics contributes to this misalignment. Competing priorities, ideological debates, and a tendency to block or delay initiatives create an environment where progress feels stalled. Staff express a need to see meaningful accomplishments and forward momentum, but instead often experience frustration and uncertainty. Without a strong, shared vision, and the structures to support it, the district risks continued fragmentation and diminished impact on student outcomes.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Anoka-Hennepin Superintendent as identified by ANOKA HENNEPIN SCHOOLS PARENTS and COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Visible, Engaged and Community Focused Leadership</b>	<b>Skilled Relationship Builder and Trust Developer</b>
<p>This leader should be highly visible and engaged in the life of the district, regularly attending events, celebrating student success, and connecting with the community. They must also serve as an effective spokesperson and advocate for public education at the local and state levels.</p>	<p>A strong emphasis must be placed on building trust with staff, students, families, and the school board through transparency, consistency, and active listening. This leader should inspire confidence, foster collaboration, and create a culture where teachers and students feel valued and supported.</p>
<b>Deep Understanding and Cultural Competence</b>	<b>Courageous and Decisive Leadership</b>
<p>The superintendent should have a strong understanding of the district's history, community dynamics, and the broader political and social landscape, ideally with direct experience in similar environments. They must demonstrate a genuine commitment to equity by recognizing and responding to the diverse needs of students, including race, gender identity, and special education.</p>	<p>The next superintendent must be willing to confront difficult issues head-on, make tough decisions, and stand firmly behind them even in the face of conflict or political pressure. They should balance understanding multiple perspectives with the ability to act decisively to establish a clear direction for the district.</p>
<b>Strategic Team Builder and Systems Leader</b>	
<p>Recognizing that no one person can do it all, the superintendent must build and empower a strong leadership team while leveraging the expertise of others. They should be a proactive problem-solver who sets a clear vision, aligns resources to improve academic outcomes, and effectively navigates board dynamics to move the district forward.</p>	

## **Strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by STAFF**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **1. Highly Dedicated, Experienced, and Talented Workforce**

A defining strength of Anoka-Hennepin Schools is the depth of its employees. Across the district, there is a consistent theme of hardworking, intelligent, and deeply committed staff who are focused on supporting students. This includes not only teachers, but also support staff, administrators, and specialists who collectively create a culture centered on student success. The presence of many highly educated educators, combined with strong content knowledge and in-house expertise, ensures that students receive high-quality instruction and support.

Equally important is the longevity and stability of the workforce. Many staff members choose to remain in the district long-term, contributing to institutional knowledge, consistency in programming, and strong relationships with students and families. This continuity fosters trust and allows the district to build on proven practices over time. Leadership is also mission driven, with individuals who are committed to being in the district and invested in its success, further strengthening organizational coherence.

### **2. Strong Organizational Systems, Fiscal Responsibility, and Stability**

Anoka-Hennepin demonstrates strength in its well established procedures, financial stewardship, and operational stability. The district is recognized as fiscally responsible, with strong finance staff and positive audit results reinforcing confidence in how resources are managed. Even in times of budget constraints, there is a clear commitment to minimizing the impact on students, reflecting a disciplined and student centered approach to decision making.

This stability is further enhanced by structured systems and processes that guide operations across such a large district. Established procedures create consistency while still allowing flexibility when needed. The ability to “do a lot with a lean model” highlights efficiency and strategic resource allocation. Together, these elements position the district as a well managed organization capable of sustaining quality programming despite financial pressures.

### **3. Comprehensive and Inclusive Programming for Diverse Student Needs**

The district's ability to meet a wide range of student needs is another key strength. With a robust Special Education program, strong wraparound early learning and adult education services, and comprehensive in-house specialties, Anoka-Hennepin is able to serve students without needing to outsource services. This not only benefits families but also strengthens continuity and alignment across programs.

Additionally, the district offers a broad array of academic, extracurricular, and enrichment opportunities, ensuring students have access to a well-rounded education. From specialized programs to diverse learning pathways, students are given multiple avenues to explore their interests and succeed. This comprehensive approach is particularly important given the district's large and diverse student population, allowing it to respond effectively to varied backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations.

#### **4. Adaptability, Collaboration, and Problem-Solving Culture**

A notable emerging strength is the district's culture of adaptability and collaboration. Staff are described as flexible, solution oriented, and capable of pivoting in response to changing needs. This mindset is critical in today's educational environment, where districts must continuously adjust to new challenges, from academic needs to student well-being and safety concerns.

Collaboration among staff further amplifies this strength. Teams work together to share expertise, develop solutions, and support one another, creating a collective approach to problem solving. Initiatives such as the safety committee demonstrate a proactive stance, bringing stakeholders together to identify concerns and design responsive programs. This culture of innovation and teamwork positions the district to not only respond to challenges but also proactively improve systems and outcomes.

#### **5. Strong Communication, Community Engagement, and District Pride**

Communication has improved significantly in recent years, becoming more consistent and transparent through newsletters, weekly messages, and coordinated outreach. This enhanced communication strengthens trust with staff, families, and the broader community, ensuring stakeholders feel informed and connected to the district's work. A strong public relations team supports this effort, helping to highlight successes and maintain a positive public image.

There is also a deep sense of pride and community within the district. With approximately 38,000 diverse students and families, Anoka-Hennepin has cultivated a rich and inclusive school community. Open enrollment strength, community use of school facilities, and sustained engagement reflect a district that is seen as a valuable community asset. This pride, combined with strong relationships and communication, reinforces stakeholder investment and contributes to a supportive environment for students and staff alike.

### **Challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by**

#### **STAFF**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### **1. School Board Governance, Alignment, and Trust**

A dominant and recurring challenge centers on the functioning, composition, and direction of the school board. There is a clear perception among staff that governance issues, ranging from lack of professionalism to ideological divisions, are impeding the district's ability to move forward effectively. Tensions at the board level, including public conflict, second guessing of staff, and politicization of decision making, have created an environment that can feel volatile rather than collaborative.

This dynamic has downstream effects across the organization. Staff report feeling discouraged or even "berated" during board interactions, which erodes trust and morale. Decision making becomes slowed or stalled when alignment is lacking, particularly around critical areas such as curriculum, budgeting, and strategic priorities. Clarifying the role of the board, rebuilding trust between governance and administration, and establishing a shared vision will be essential to restoring organizational momentum and confidence.

## **2. Financial Constraints and Competitive Disadvantage**

Persistent budget challenges represent a significant structural barrier for the district. Decisions not to pursue referendums or levy increases have limited available resources, making it difficult to remain competitive in employee compensation and benefits compared to neighboring districts. This has real implications for recruitment and retention, particularly as staff begin to explore opportunities elsewhere offering better pay and support.

The financial strain also directly impacts students. Ongoing budget cuts have reduced staffing and resources, increasing workloads for remaining employees and affecting service delivery. While the district has worked to minimize the impact on students, the cumulative effect of repeated reductions is becoming more visible in areas such as class sizes, program offerings, and overall support. Long-term financial sustainability, including community engagement around funding, will be critical to maintaining quality.

## **3. Staffing Shortages, Workforce Strain, and Retention**

The district is facing growing challenges in attracting and retaining staff across multiple roles. Difficulty filling open positions, a shortage of substitute teachers (exacerbated by policy changes such as Minnesota leave laws), and reduced competitiveness in pay and benefits are contributing to workforce instability. Paraprofessionals, in particular, face affordability challenges with benefits, further complicating retention efforts.

At the same time, existing staff are being asked to do more with fewer resources. A “lean” district office and reductions in staffing have increased workloads, slowed response times, and strained customer service. This environment can lead to burnout and decreased morale, especially when combined with external pressures such as board dynamics. Sustaining a strong workforce will require intentional strategies around compensation, support, and working conditions.

## **4. Organizational Complexity, Communication Gaps, and Silos**

The size of the district, while offering advantages, also creates significant operational challenges. Coordinating efforts across numerous schools, departments, and leadership levels can lead to inconsistencies in implementation and difficulty aligning around district-wide initiatives. Communication breakdowns, particularly at the senior leadership level, can result in delays, confusion, and missed opportunities for cohesion.

Internal silos further complicate this issue. Divides between elementary and secondary leadership, as well as between departments, can hinder collaboration and create competing priorities. Staff report that decision making can feel “bogged down,” especially when navigating complex organizational structures or trying to connect with the right individuals. Strengthening communication systems, clarifying structures, and fostering cross-functional collaboration will be key to improving effectiveness.

## **5. Strategic Focus, Change Management, and Competing Priorities**

Another emerging challenge lies in maintaining a clear and consistent strategic focus amid competing demands. The district is navigating multiple pressures—academic priorities, operational needs, budget constraints, and community expectations—often without a unified approach. There is concern that leadership has become more reactive than proactive, with insufficient clarity around core values and long-term direction.

Implementing new initiatives is particularly difficult in this context. Staff are questioning what should be paused or discontinued in order to make space for new priorities, highlighting a lack of systemic alignment in change management. Additionally, there are tensions around the curriculum. The approval of the social studies curriculum by the Board is both necessary and long overdue. Moving this forward is critical to ensuring students receive a consistent, high-quality educational experience aligned with current standards and instructional expectations. Delaying approval any further creates unnecessary uncertainty for staff, limits long-term planning, and impacts the district's ability to effectively support teaching and learning in the classroom. The differing viewpoints at the board level further complicate progress. To move forward effectively, the district will need to establish clear priorities, align resources accordingly, and create conditions that support meaningful, sustained implementation.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent as identified by ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS STAFF</b>	
<b>Unifying, Relationship Driven Leader</b>	<b>Politically Savvy, Board Savvy Leadership</b>
The next superintendent must be a strong relationship builder who can unite staff, leadership, the board, and the community around a shared purpose. They must be visible, approachable, and willing to listen and engage authentically, even in challenging situations.	The superintendent must skillfully navigate a complex and divided board while maintaining neutrality and professionalism. They should be able to manage up, balance competing perspectives, and move the district's priorities forward without becoming politicized.
<b>Exceptional Communicator and Public Advocate</b>	<b>Courageous, Student Centered Decision Maker</b>
The superintendent must be a highly effective communicator who can clearly articulate the district's vision, direction, and work. They should also serve as a strong public advocate, building trust and support with the community, legislature, and stakeholders.	This leader must consistently prioritize what is best for students, even when decisions are difficult or unpopular. They should demonstrate courage by standing firm, correcting misinformation, and clearly communicating the "why" behind decisions.
<b>Strategic, Systems Oriented Leader with Operational Expertise</b>	
This individual must bring strong strategic thinking, with the ability to align resources, implement systems, and measure success. They should empower others through effective delegation while maintaining focus on continuous improvement and organizational clarity.	

## **Strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

### **1. Comprehensive and Diverse Academic Programming**

A defining strength of Anoka-Hennepin Schools is the depth of academic programming available across its high schools. Students have access to a wide array of pathways, including STEAM, science, arts, industry-focused courses, and professional studies, allowing them to explore interests and align learning with future aspirations. Programs like AVID further strengthen college readiness by equipping students with critical academic and organizational skills, particularly supporting those who need structured guidance to reach postsecondary goals.

This diversity extends into advanced opportunities such as middle school students taking high school courses and elective offerings like computer programming. Together, these options create a flexible and personalized learning environment where students are not confined to a single pathway. Instead, they can accelerate, explore, and refine their interests in meaningful ways, which increases engagement and prepares them for a wide range of postsecondary experiences.

### **2. Strong Career Pathways and Real-World Learning Opportunities**

The district excels in connecting classroom learning to real-world applications through internships, career focused programming, and hands-on experiences. Programs like STEP (focused on CNA, nursing, business, and IT) provide students with tangible skills and certifications that can lead directly to employment or further education. These opportunities demonstrate a clear commitment to preparing students not just for college, but for careers and life beyond graduation.

The emphasis on internships and career counseling ensures that students are supported in exploring and planning their futures. Counselors and career advisors play a critical role in helping students navigate these opportunities, making the system feel intentional and student centered. This alignment between academics and career readiness is a major strength that enhances both student motivation and long-term success.

### **3. Robust Co-Curricular and Enrichment Opportunities**

Anoka-Hennepin Schools offer an impressive range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities that contribute significantly to student development. Strong music programs, numerous clubs, after-school programming, and diverse activities allow students to engage beyond the classroom and develop talents, leadership skills, and social connections. These opportunities foster a sense of belonging and help students build well-rounded identities.

The district's commitment to providing "a lot of student options" ensures that nearly every student can find a niche where they feel connected and valued. Participation in these programs is often linked to improved academic outcomes and stronger school engagement, making this an important strength that supports both achievement and student well-being.

#### **4. Student Centered Culture and Strong Relationships**

A key strength lies in the positive relationships between students and staff, which form the foundation of a supportive and inclusive school culture. Students report strong connections with teachers, counselors, and staff, which enhances trust, communication, and overall engagement. Programs like student advisory and Youth Teaching Youth reinforce this culture by prioritizing mentorship, peer support, and student voice.

This relational strength is complemented by the district's emphasis on listening to and elevating student perspectives. When students feel heard and supported, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning and contribute positively to the school environment. This culture not only improves day-to-day experiences but also creates a strong sense of community across schools.

#### **5. Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Student Support Systems**

The district demonstrates a strong commitment to meeting the diverse needs of its student population. Diversity among both students and staff enhances cultural understanding and prepares students for a global society. At the same time, targeted programs like Bridge to Read and a wide array of student supports ensure that learners at all levels receive the help they need to succeed academically and socially.

This commitment is reflected in the availability of strong counseling services and layered support systems that address academic, emotional, and career needs. The district's ability to combine high expectations (e.g., strong test scores) with meaningful supports creates an environment where all students have the opportunity to thrive. This balance between rigor and support is a critical strength that contributes to overall district success.

### **Challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools as identified by**

#### **STUDENTS**

(Based on interviews and personal statements)

#### **1. Budget Constraints and Staffing Reductions Impact Instruction**

Ongoing budget cuts have led to reductions in staff positions, which in turn are increasing class sizes across the district. Larger class sizes limit teachers' ability to provide individualized attention, differentiate instruction, and build strong relationships with students. This is particularly concerning for students who require additional academic or emotional support, as the capacity to meet diverse needs diminishes when educators are stretched thin.

Decreased staffing is contributing to significant staff overload. Teachers and support staff are taking on additional responsibilities, leading to burnout and reduced morale. Over time, this can impact retention, making it more difficult for the district to maintain a stable and experienced workforce. The cumulative effect is a system under strain, where both student outcomes and staff well-being are at risk.

## **2. Governance Considerations and School Board Functioning**

A recurring concern is the level of disagreement and political tension within the School Board. When board members are unable to collaborate effectively, it can stall decision making and create a perception that “nothing gets done” at the district level. This dysfunction undermines trust among staff, families, and the broader community, and can slow progress on critical initiatives.

There is a growing belief that the Board is not sufficiently focused on student centered decision making. Calls for student representation highlight a desire for more inclusive governance and a stronger connection to student needs. Students are calling for student representation on the school board to ensure their voices are directly included in decisions about their education and district leadership.

## **3. Inconsistent Academic Programming and Equity Gaps**

There are notable inconsistencies in academic offerings across the high schools, particularly with Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Some schools emphasize one program over the other, which can create inequities in access and limit student choice depending on where they attend. The cancellation of AP courses due to low enrollment, sometimes after students have already signed up, undermines trust and disrupts academic planning. These disparities raise concerns about equitable access to rigorous coursework. Students across the district should have consistent opportunities to pursue advanced academics, regardless of their school. Students would like to see a more coordinated approach.

## **4. Student Voice, Engagement, and Support Systems**

There is a clear call for stronger student voice within the district, particularly at the governance level. The absence of student representatives on the School Board and limited channels for incorporating student feedback contribute to a sense that student perspectives are undervalued. Engaging students more intentionally could lead to better informed decisions and stronger alignment with their needs.

At the same time, rising mental health concerns and gaps in support systems present significant challenges. Students are facing increased stress and emotional needs, yet staffing reductions may limit access to counselors and support personnel. Programs like AVID also have structural limitations, such as restricted entry points, which can prevent students from accessing valuable support later in their academic journey.

## **5. Academic Achievement Concerns and System Alignment**

Literacy challenges are emerging as a critical issue, signaling the need for stronger foundational instruction and intervention strategies. Students struggle across all subject areas, compounding achievement gaps over time. Addressing literacy requires both resources and alignment across grade levels.

There are concerns about system coherence, particularly in transitions between middle school and high school. While increased alignment is seen as a goal, inconsistencies in programming and expectations can create confusion for students. Suggestions such as combining classes across high schools to preserve course offerings reflect a need for more flexible, district-wide solutions to maintain academic opportunities in the face of declining resources.

<b>Top Five Desired Characteristics of the next Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent as identified by ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS STUDENTS</b>	
<b>A Superintendent that Listens and Centers Student Voice</b>	<b>Strong Leadership with a Clear Vision and the Ability to Get Things Done</b>
<p>Students want a leader who is genuinely open to hearing everyone out and takes student perspectives seriously when making decisions. This includes creating consistent, meaningful opportunities for student voice rather than occasional input. They should demonstrate that student experiences directly shape district priorities and actions</p>	<p>A superintendent should have a clear vision for where the district is headed and the leadership skills to turn that vision into action. Students want someone who doesn't just plan but follows through and delivers results. Being decisive and effective in addressing challenges is seen as essential.</p>
<b>Highly Visible and Engaged in Schools</b>	<b>An Advocate for ALL Students, Teachers, Staff and Schools</b>
<p>Students emphasize the importance of a superintendent who is regularly present in schools, not just in central offices. Visiting classrooms and interacting with students and staff helps them understand real conditions and needs. Without this engagement, students feel it's difficult for leadership to make informed improvements.</p>	<p>Students want a superintendent who stands up for every school in the district and ensures no building or group is overlooked. This includes actively advocating for teachers and staff so they feel supported and valued. Strong advocacy also means pushing for resources and policies that benefit all schools equitably.</p>
<b>Strong Interpersonal Skills, Openness and Focus on Safety and Encouragement</b>	
<p>Soft skills such as open-mindedness, communication, and approachability are highly valued by students. They want a leader who encourages students, fosters a positive environment, and prioritizes success and safety in all schools. Teaching experience is also seen as helpful because it builds credibility and understanding of classroom realities.</p>	

## FINDINGS / THEMES

Many of the discussions pertaining to strengths and challenges for the Anoka-Hennepin Schools flow into the expectations for the next superintendent. Several of the characteristics that are present in the profile for the next superintendent build on the current strengths of the organization in addition to addressing the challenges ahead. The search team will seek a new superintendent who will understand issues facing the district.

When the data from interviews and focus groups were combined, themes emerged. It should be noted that there was more similarity across groups than there were differences. In general, strengths and challenging issues were almost unanimous across groups. Additionally, the characteristics desired in the next superintendent were also closely aligned across groups. This congruence is viewed as a positive characteristic of this search and will bring clarity in focus for the Board and the new superintendent.

**The following themes are supported by the combined data.**

## STRENGTHS

The common themes of the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools, as identified across the Board of Education, Parents and Community Members, Staff, and High School Students, are:

### **Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Student Support Systems**

All groups acknowledge the district's dedication to meeting the diverse needs of its student population. Strengths in this area include intentional efforts to promote equity, comprehensive and inclusive programming for diverse needs, a robust Special Education program (including the 18–22 transition program), and layered support systems (academic, emotional, and career needs). The district's diverse population is seen as strengthening this work, driving inclusive practices.

### **High Quality Staff and Talent**

There is a universal theme of depth and strength in the workforce. Staff are described as highly dedicated, experienced, and talented, with strong content knowledge. This includes high quality talent and leadership at all levels. The resulting positive relationships between staff and students form the foundation of a supportive and inclusive school culture.

### **Comprehensive and Diverse Programming**

The district's breadth and depth of programming are consistently highlighted, allowing students to explore interests and align learning with future aspirations. This includes a wide array of specialized academic pathways (like STEAM and magnet schools), gifted and talented programming, and robust co-curricular and enrichment opportunities (such as arts, science, and robotics).

### **Strong Community Trust and Engagement**

The district is recognized for being deeply embedded in a supportive community with high levels of parent engagement, strong partnerships, and a high degree of trust. Enhanced communication practices strengthen this trust, ensuring stakeholders feel informed and connected. This alignment and investment from stakeholders contribute to a positive reputation.

### **Strategic Use of Size and Intentional Personalization**

While a large district, Anoka-Hennepin is consistently praised for leveraging its scale as a strategic advantage to offer extensive resources and specialized programs that smaller districts cannot match. Systems are intentionally designed to “make a big district feel small,” ensuring a personalized experience for students, staff, and families.

## **CHALLENGES**

The common challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools identified across the Board of Education, Parents and Community Members, Staff, and Students are:

### **School Board Governance and Dysfunction**

All groups report significant issues with the School Board's functioning, citing political polarization, ideological division, and fragmentation. This instability leads to repeated deadlocks, stalled decision-making, and creates an environment of uncertainty that weakens leadership credibility and erodes staff morale.

### **Financial Constraints and Resource Allocation**

Budget constraints are a central, persistent challenge for the district. Ongoing budget cuts, rising costs, and a perceived reluctance to pursue levies or referendums limit available resources, strain the budget, and reduce the district's competitiveness in employee compensation and benefits. This financial strain directly impacts students through staffing reductions, increased class sizes, and cuts to support services.

### **Workforce Strain and Capacity**

The district is facing growing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff across multiple roles, including shortages of substitute teachers and paraprofessionals. Increased workloads, reduced resources, and lower compensation contribute to staff overload, burnout, and declining morale.

### **Organizational Complexity and Lack of System Alignment**

The district's large scale presents operational challenges such as inefficiencies, communication breakdowns, and structural silos between departments and levels (e.g., elementary and secondary leadership). This complexity leads to inconsistencies in program

implementation (like Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate offerings) and hinders the ability to function as a unified system.

### **Erosion of Trust and Strategic Clarity**

There is a strong sense that the district has "drifted" from its core mission, particularly in maintaining a focus on classroom excellence. This challenge is characterized by a lack of clear, aligned strategic focus, competing priorities, and a weakening of internal and external trust and organizational coherence.

## **DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEXT SUPERINTENDENT**

The desired characteristics for the next Anoka-Hennepin Schools Superintendent, identified across all four groups (School Board, Parents and Community Members, Staff, and Students), focus on the following consolidated themes:

### **Strong, Courageous, and Decisive Leadership**

The superintendent must be a leader capable of making difficult decisions, acting decisively, and demonstrating courage. This includes being a decisive change agent, confronting difficult issues head-on, and standing firmly behind those tough calls.

### **Strategic Vision and Systems Orientation**

All groups emphasize the need for a leader who can think strategically and align efforts system-wide. This means having a clear vision for the district's direction, aligning resources to improve academic outcomes, and translating that vision into measurable results and action.

### **Relationship Building, Collaboration, and Unification**

Success is tied to the ability to build strong, trusting relationships with the Board, staff, students, and the broader community. This leader must be unifying, approachable, foster collaboration, and cultivate an inclusive environment.

### **Visibility, Engagement, and Exceptional Communication**

The superintendent must be highly visible, present, and engaged in schools and the life of the district, rather than remaining in central offices. They must be an exceptional communicator, ensuring alignment and trust through clear, proactive, and transparent communication, and serve as an effective spokesperson and public advocate for the district.

### **Prioritizing and Advocating for Students**

The leader must consistently prioritize what is best for students above politics or personal interest. This includes demonstrating a commitment to equity by recognizing and responding to the diverse needs of all students, and actively advocating for them, their teachers, and staff. Students also specifically desire a leader who listens and centers student voice in decision-making.

## THE ANOKA-HENNEPIN SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT DESIRED CANDIDATE PROFILE

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools seeks a superintendent who will focus the district on strengthening its core mission, restoring coherence, and advancing student success. Based on extensive stakeholder input gathered through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the following profile reflects the qualities, skills, and leadership attributes most essential for the district's next leader.

### A Leader Who Builds on Strengths and Confronts Challenges

Stakeholders across all groups expressed strong alignment regarding the district's strengths, challenges, and expectations for the next superintendent. The district benefits from a diverse student population, high-quality staff, comprehensive programming, strong community engagement, and the strategic advantages of its size. At the same time, Anoka-Hennepin faces significant challenges, including Board governance issues, financial constraints, workforce strain, organizational complexity, and erosion of trust and strategic clarity.

#### 1. A Strong, Courageous, and Decisive Leader

The district needs a superintendent who leads with courage and conviction, someone who makes difficult, student-centered decisions and acts decisively even in politically charged or uncertain conditions. This leader must provide a steady, confident presence that rebuilds trust in district leadership while skillfully navigating a polarized governance environment. Above all, the superintendent should serve as a strong change agent who confronts challenges directly and stands firmly behind their decisions.

#### 2. A Strategic Thinker with a Systems Orientation

Given the district's size and complexity, the next superintendent must bring strategic clarity and coherence to a large, complex system; someone who can articulate a compelling vision, align people and resources to improve academic outcomes, and ensure consistent implementation across departments and schools. This leader must use data to drive decisions, monitor progress, and strengthen accountability. The superintendent must restore focus and direction to a system stakeholders feel has drifted from its core mission.

#### 3. A Relationship Builder Who Unifies and Collaborates

Anoka-Hennepin needs a superintendent who builds strong, trusting relationships across the Board, staff, families, and community, and who is approachable, visible, and genuinely engaged with students and employees. This leader must foster collaboration and shared ownership throughout the system, bringing people together across differences to create unity and a common sense of purpose. The superintendent must strengthen internal culture and rebuild trust across the organization.

#### 4. A Visible, Engaged, and Exceptional Communicator

The district needs a superintendent who is highly visible, accessible, and engaged in schools and the community, and who communicates with clarity, transparency, and consistency. This leader must strengthen communication systems, ensure stakeholders feel informed and connected, and serve as a strong public advocate for the district. Stakeholders are seeking a superintendent who is present, proactive, is highly visible, and not confined to central offices.

## 5. A Student-Centered Advocate for Equity and Excellence

Above all, Anoka-Hennepin needs a superintendent who consistently centers students in every decision and demonstrates a deep commitment to equity and inclusion. This leader must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of all learners, advocate for students, teachers, and staff, especially during financial challenges, and elevate student voices so they feel heard and valued. The superintendent must champion the district's commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for every student.

### SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools seeks a superintendent who is **strategic, courageous, unifying, and deeply student-centered**. This leader will build on the district's considerable strengths, its talented staff, diverse students, comprehensive programming, and strong community support, while addressing the significant challenges that threaten stability, trust, and coherence.

The ideal candidate will bring clarity of vision, strength of character, and a collaborative spirit that unites the district around a shared purpose: ensuring every student thrives.

## BULLETED NOTES FROM ALL GROUPS

The interviews and focus groups of stakeholders generated the following responses. Careful attention has been made to accurately convey the message. The comments listed below emerged from statements made by stakeholders and they are to be considered personal opinions of the individual making the comments regarding the Anoka-Hennepin Schools.

### Board Members

#### What are the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Size and scale, there is a lot to work with
- Many resources
- Can do a lot internally
- Great facilities
- Can influence things at a broader picture - seat at the table
- Good reputation in Minnesota
- Good teachers and staff
- Good job of making a big district small
- Identity is strong
- District does a great job of making it personal
- A lot of knowledge - operational knowledge
- Many strong leaders
- Great relationships with teacher core
- Amazing staff, teachers, and principals
- Great opportunities for all
- Diverse population
- Great programming and opportunities
- Legacy staff, national leaders
- People are willing to invest if the need is clear
- Great in-kind monetary donations, resources and financial support
- Great community partnerships
- Parent engagement is at a high level
- Thriving community
- Strong school leaders, very powerful and a benefit to the district
- Dedicated staff
- STEP program (leveraging innovation)
- Resources throughout the different communities
- Global area
- Great people in-district
- Strong process
- Large district with successful programs in place, such as STEP and Magnet Schools
- Long history of continuous improvement
- Focus on academic achievement

### What are the challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Change of student needs
- More student challenges
- Education has become polarized
- Wrestling with political things, which causes a split board
- Curriculum deserves focus
- Size and scale can also be a liability
- Can be difficult to work with the scope of the district which causes some dysfunction amongst the Board
- Budget deficit, \$800M is a lot of money
- Academics need to be the focus
- Budget can be very challenging
- Board can be split on difficult decisions 3 to 3
- Need to get back to restoring trust, confidence, and dependence - get back to excellence
- Have taken the eye off the goal in the classroom, drifted from this
- Structure has fallen - safety and classroom procedures
- Need to make sure that we have a safe environment
- Be strong to ensure that all students are safe
- Behavior issues make it difficult for teachers, and for students to learn
- Academic performance for students
- Political ideology has divided the Board, and candidates running for the Board
- Dysfunction not so much within the Board but around board politics
- Municipalities need to be unified
- Complex district
- The Board gets in the mud when they do not need to
- Must unify around collective values and vision, shared coherence
- Must appreciate and value the staff
- We have so much more here that we could be doing, business partners as an example
- Must leverage partnerships, mental health area as an example
- Board is split on the vision of public education
- Board relationships
- Budgeting is difficult, will leave gaps, have had to make deep cuts
- Staff morale is effected because the Board is split
- Need to create staff and workplace balance
- Cost of providing an education has increased
- Ability to maintain services
- Funding has not kept up with inflation
- Self reflection is really important, the Board is not aligned with one another and this is a big challenge
- The District is really struggling at this time

### What qualities should define the next superintendent's leadership?

- Find a person that can lead, turnaround, and improve school performance
- Make a name for yourself, and turn the side of public education in Minnesota
- A true leader, someone that understands leadership

- Understand the makeup of the the Board and landscape of the District
- Courage
- Be honest
- Make difficult decisions, make the call
- Work for the students
- Confidence
- Integrity
- Own mistakes
- Here to get things done right
- Knowledge
- Know what works and what does not work
- Game changer, a change agent
- Make recommendations based on science and research, and things proven to work for students
- Wants to do his/her job
- Work within the boundaries of what the Board will support
- Leave his/her politics and beliefs out of the equation
- Strong leader
- Create an amicable work environment
- Not threatening or intimidating
- Must be willing to work with the Board and explain the WHY
- Clear strategic vision
- Keep students at the center
- Inspirational
- Address changes directly
- Needs to be a big thinker, a systems thinker
- Partnership
- Sustainability
- Alignment
- Communication is a MUST
- Transparency
- Build capital internally and externally
- Someone that can pivot
- Must move the district vision forward
- Inspire people
- Courageous
- Integrity
- Open minded
- Rally around the students and community
- Educator
- Can build up other leaders and empower the team
- Academic focus
- Highly visible and presence
- Expand the voices and the cabinet
- Long term plan
- Create positive work environment

- Out of the box thinker
- Communication needs to be a high priority
- Lead the staff
- Create/maintain relationships and connection
  - with all board members individually
  - with all staff
  - with community
  - with legislators/educational leaders/organizations
- Highly and meaningfully visible
  - in the district office
  - in our schools
  - in our communities
- Communication as a priority
  - proactive, transparent, clear
  - focus on messaging that will keep our entire district working in the same direction and keep everyone up to date with district information
- Prioritize multiple voices
  - potential to expand cabinet and have direct access to leaders and experts
- Strategic thinking
  - short and long term planning
  - outside of the educational traditional box ideas/pilots
- Staff and workplace focus and priority
  - As AH may not be able to pay top salaries, and our insurance pool results in high premium costs, how can AH become the workplace that people want and will stay at:
    - Work and life balance
    - Flexibility for staff
    - Building and district leaders should be reviewed on how they prioritize staff and be given specific direction from the superintendent on what AH believes and requires
- Proven experience creating educational (academic, safety, school learning environment) solutions
- Board relationship
  - Work to create relationship with each individual board member
  - Understand individual positions and anticipate questions and concerns bringing forward answers and information proactively
  - Understand that district management/work continues unless four board members are in agreement (also understanding and messaging to staff that there is always risk of the full board not approving)
  - Board transparency - always provide the good, bad, and ugly for all topics and issues
  - Not weighing one, two or three board members voice(s) over others, even chair/co-chair personal direction
- All individual members need to know that there is transparency and fairness for all voices and the final will of the board will be the direction taken, and that recommendations

brought forward are what is deemed best for students and our district (even if those recommendations do not gain full board support)

## Parents and Community Members

### What are the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Students
- Robotics team (Blaine)
- The size allows staff the ability to transfer to other positions within the district
- Kids get kids the resources they need
- Diversity of student body
- Efforts to promote equity
- Variety of programs (i.e., magnet schools, variety in the schools)
- Variety of communication from the district (i.e., newsletters, posts)
- Teachers and their involvement
- Teachers union (90% involvement)
- Staff retention
- Staff development
- The district does its due diligence in keeping up with modern technologies and curriculum
- Commitment to literacy and early intervention
- Consistency with curriculum
- Arts and science programs
- Monroe elementary has won many awards, we should be using our good programs and leaders to tap into their working knowledge to support other parts of the district
- Size can be a strength
- A lot of programming
- Ability to offer many programs
- Strong special education
- Provides a deep knowledge base
- Quality of staff is excellent
- Great administrative team
- Wide variety of classes
- The district still offers Drivers Ed.
- Special education is strong, 18 to 22 year program is outstanding
- Gifted and Talented programming
- Long range building plan is in good shape, proactive with maintenance and repairs
- Easy for staff to transfer if they want a different opportunity
- Field trips
- Magnet school opportunities
- District does a good job letting people know what is going on

### What are the challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Budget constraints
- Board
  - Split
  - Conflict

- Ship without a captain headed in two different directions
- The split board is impacting graduates, curriculum needs to be approved and it can't because of the split board
- Economically disadvantaged students need support
- Teacher contracts (pay, health care)
- Funding and support for SPED students
- Half of the population is conservative, half are liberal (we are purple)
- Board division
- Teacher retention issues
- The needs of Andover are very different from the needs of Hennepin county, the different geographic areas are very different from each other
- The Board needs to represent the district at large, not just the people in their neighborhood
- Extreme size of the district
- Six person board is a problem
- A lot of micromanaging from the Board (choosing curriculum, professional development), trust the teachers - they are the experts
- Teachers feel under-appreciated
- Understanding that different schools need different resources and attention is difficult
- District does not tap into the knowledge base like it should
- Teachers do not feel support from the district or the families they serve
- Board is completely ineffective
- Public and families in the district are losing faith in the district and board of education
- Members of the Board are hostile to public education
- Board needs to held accountable
- Stalemate is good for no one!
- Even number of board members is a roadblock, need to figure out how to get to an odd number
- Finances, contracts and negotiations
- Communication from the district can be improved, explain challenges like funding and budget deficit
- Divided board
- Money and budget are a challenge
- Student behaviors
- Academic expectations are sometimes too low

### What qualities should define the next superintendent's leadership?

- Good moderator
- Is not afraid of conflict
- Willing to get involved, show up to events, highlight student successes
- In tune with diversity of needs (race, gender identify, SPED)
- Creative solutions for improving academic performance
- Be a spokesperson for education, advocacy at the Capital
- Someone who knows the context and history of the district
- Have the skills to build the team around you, one person can't do it all, have humility and lean on the experts around you
- Effectively manage conflict

- Understanding the district's unique political and demographic landscape
- Needs to focus on trust building
- Someone who has passion and diplomacy skills
- Someone who knows what they are getting into and is prepared for this
- High level of leadership and the ability to stand on their own decisions
- They need to understand both sides but be decisive so the district can have a clear vision
- Someone who knows Minnesota and everything that has happened here, I would want someone who has lived through everything (protests, riots, ICE walking down our streets), not someone from out of state
- Someone with demonstrated experience working in a diverse community
- Good conflict management skills.
- Someone who can inspire the teachers and build trust
- Someone who can manage the dysfunction in the board
- Strong leader of teachers and students and make that known to the school board everyday, teachers and students are the reason they are there everyday
- Can't be someone who is on the fence
- Someone up for the challenge that has passion for what they do
- Proactive in guiding the Board
- Superintendent needs to advocate to the state for more money
- Experience
- Big problem solver (magical problem solver who listens)
- Not afraid of people, must be engaged
- Visible
- Sees diversity as a strength
- If the superintendent has children, it would be nice to have them attend public education in this district
- Values all experiences of students and staff
- Build strong teams around you
- Understands that schools today are not just about grades
- Good listener
- Lead with integrity, set vision

## School District Staff

### What are the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- There are hard working intelligent people dedicated to supporting our kids
- Experience
- Communication has improved in the last few years, more consistent, newsletters, weekly messages
- Safety committee was put together to address new needs, looking to start new programs to address concerns, look to find a solution
- Size of the district, benefits to attract staff
- Established procedures
- Robust Special Ed program
- Well resourced considering the funding
- Diversity of the students and families is a strength

- Strong and experienced staff
- Great opportunities
- Collaboration amongst staff
- Great content knowledge
- In-house specialties and programs are a value
- We do a lot with a lean model
- Positive dedicated staff
- Flexible staff
- Ability to pivot, and be adaptable
- People are our biggest strength
- Leadership is here because they want to be
- 38,00 awesome and diverse students
- Many opportunities for students and staff, growth
- Good at creating and finding solutions, opportunities
- Fiscally responsible
- When cuts are made, we try to have the least amount of impact on students
- A lot of pride
- Diversity
- Strong building leaders
- Great expertise to drive success
- Robust staff development
- Able to meet students' needs, we don't need to send kids out of the district
- Support teacher growth
- Many highly educated educators
- Longevity of staff
- Outperform other large districts
- Wrap around early learning and adult programs are very strong
- Rent out school facilities to the public
- Fiscally responsible
- Strong finance staff
- Open enrollment is strong
- Comprehensive, well-rounded opportunities for students
- Large network of student diversity
- A lot of talent across the district
- Many leaders
- Great support
- Staff tend to stay in the district
- Great public relations team in place
- Great audit results
- Learning outcome of students is good
- Stability, see as home products of the organization with a vested interest
- Rich, diverse school community
- Size of the district is both a strength and challenge
- Numerous opportunities
- A lot of resources and help available
- Dedicated staff

### What are the challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Makeup of the school board is a glaring issue, some are not there for reasons that typical school board members should be
- As the number of administrators and supervisor positions have been increasing, the teachers are less empowered
- We are at a disadvantage because the school board has chosen not to go out to a levy, this makes it hard to be competitive in pay and benefits
- There are things that should happen district-wide but because of the size it is hard to get everyone going in the same direction, communication gets lost
- Not being able to fill open positions, having the new Minnesota Leave, it's hard to find subs
- We have great insurance if you can afford it (paraprofessionals)
- The school board is not willing to ask the community if they would be interested in going to a referendum
- Size can make it difficult to get things going, change can be slower
- Money is an issue
- Cuts that impact student learning
- Difficult board
- Communication
- The School Board is one of the biggest challenges to our district right now
- The School Board
- Competing priorities with limited resources
- Things can be volatile
- Budget challenges
- Turn around time takes longer because of reduced staffing, customer service
- Can have silos within
- When new things come out, if we want to implement something new; what can we stop so we have the time and resources to implement the new ideas
- Organizational structure can be a challenge
- Lean district office staff, a lot of cuts have been made in the DO
- Can be hard to communicate with top administrators
- Communication is difficult at the top level
- Decisions are delayed if you don't connect with the right people
- Not a collaborative structure in place
- A lot of stakeholders
- Senior leadership is more operations focused versus teaching and learning
- Lack of professionalism at the board level
- Being reactive rather than proactive
- Lost our foundation, core values
- Must define the roll of the school board
- A lot of change in leadership
- Role of the Board impacts what staff is directed to do
- Difficult to move forward with curriculum because of the split Board
- Get caught up in ideological debates (political arena)

- Moving important work forward with support of the school board, the district is stalling, the staff needs to see things accomplished
- Strong communication, transparency, and trust must be in place
- We need to get the board to understand that curriculum is more than just reading
- Drain on colleagues is difficult to watch because of the Board (get beat up while presenting at the board level)
- Board needs to trust what is presented
- Open enrollment can be a challenge because of the students coming in
- Turnover in district leadership
- Decision making gets bogged down
- Property tax dependent
- Board has dipped heavily into management
- Huge divide amongst elementary and secondary leadership, been that way for a long time, restructuring has something to do with it
- Loss of support with all of the budget cuts
- Size of the district, with many schools with different needs
- Work harder for less pay becomes more difficult, not pulling in the same direction because of the Board
- A lot of money spent on the Board elections, with political agendas
- Actions don't align with *Educate Every Child*
- Shift in the Board
- Working with the Board will be difficult
- District has cut millions of dollars from the budget, staff is starting to look around at other districts for better pay and benefits
- The district needs to go to a referendum
- Board needs to be innovative, we are in the same cereal box as before COVID
- Board focus seems to be blocking agenda items
- Staff berated by Board at board meetings
- Lower pay than in neighboring districts
- Demographics and diversity can be a challenge when leading to support everyone
- Buildings don't reflect who we represent, lack of diverse applicants for district jobs
- Levels pivot against each other, this is more noticeable with all of the budget cuts

#### What qualities should define the next superintendent's leadership?

- Icebreaker person, face for the public, paving the way so everyone else can do their job with students
- Be able to correct misinformation, do what is best for the kids, what makes the most sense
- Someone that can work in a politically charged climate and move people forward
- We need a force to bring everyone together at all levels
- Someone approachable, open to listening
- Someone who wants to work with the bargaining units
- Someone who will stand up for what we are required to do, not putting employees in an awkward position
- Able to get in with legislature, fight for our issues and bring awareness to them
- Communication is key
- Need courage in leadership

- Excellent communication skills
- Bring stakeholders together
- Navigate difficult conversations
- Effective delegation
- Here for the long haul
- Visible
- Continue to engage even when it's difficult
- Stand up for the teachers
- Advocate
- Focus on creating a culture of great things
- Student centered
- Manage leadership and the Board
- Ability to manage up
- Experience in teaching and learning
- Someone that will risk their popularity
- Understands finance
- Don't micro-manage
- Strong communication, both verbal and written
- Be constructive with feedback
- More visible and present
- Define the WHY of major changes
- Someone that will push and take risks
- Bring balance with the Board
- Student learning at the top
- Leader that understands what each department does
- Clear vision
- Clearly articulate the work that is happening today and direction of where we are going
- Engage with the current team in place
- Have an awareness of what is going on
- Bring back continuous improvement structure
- Bring structure back
- Know how improvement is made, how it is measured, how to gauge success
- Don't align with one side of the Board
- A strong leader that can work with the Board
- Publicly advocate for things needed, squelch misconceptions from the Board
- K-12 experience
- Be present in the buildings
- Charismatic, someone people believe in and will follow
- Can sell a referendum
- Experience
- Bridge builder
- Optimist
- Navigate different personalities
- Relationship builder
- Manage the Board and protect the schools
- Work with a divided Board

- Trust and transparency
- Looking for some outside ideas, new ideas
- Connection to schools, in the buildings, feel the energy
- Not a stepping stone

## High School Students

### What are the strengths of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools ?

- Great programs at all high schools - STEAM, science, arts, industry, and professional
- Internships
- Strong music departments and programs
- College prep - AVID (AVID is an elective course that provides students with academic, social, and emotional support to help them succeed in school. The program is aimed at students who have the desire and willingness to work for academic success, but may not have the skills they need to flourish scholastically)
- Student advisory program is good
- Diversity
- Class electives, computer programming
- After school programming
- Good teachers
- Diverse staff
- A lot of student options
- Bridge to Read program
- Strong co-curriculars
- Student voice
- Youth Teaching Youth
- Good test scores
- student/staff relationships are really good
- Many club opportunities
- Great counselors and career counselors
- Many supports in place for students
- STEP program - CNA, nursing, business, and IT
- Middle school students can take high school classes

### What are the challenges of the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

- Positions have been cut which is raising student class sizes
- Middle school is more inclusive with high school, better transition
- International Baccalaureate (IB) verses AP - schools may push one over the other
- Listen to teachers
- Budget cuts
- Mental health problems
- Literacy is a problem
- Decrease in staffing and staff overloads
- The School Board disagrees a lot
- There should be student reps on the Board
- Student voices need to be heard

- Not the same for AP programming at all of the schools
- Combine high school classes with different high schools to be able to offer certain classes rather than cutting the class
- Don't cancel AP classes once students sign up
- The only time to join AVID is going from 8th to 9th grade, or 9th to 10th grade
- Nothing gets done at the district level because the Board does not get along
- Too many politics at the board level
- The School Board should be working for the students

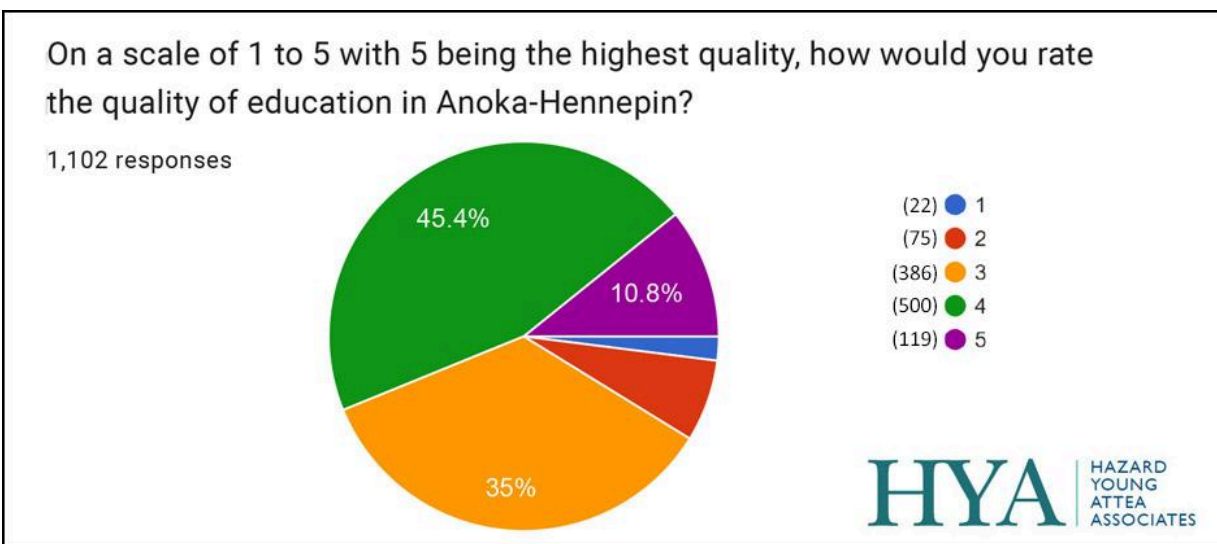
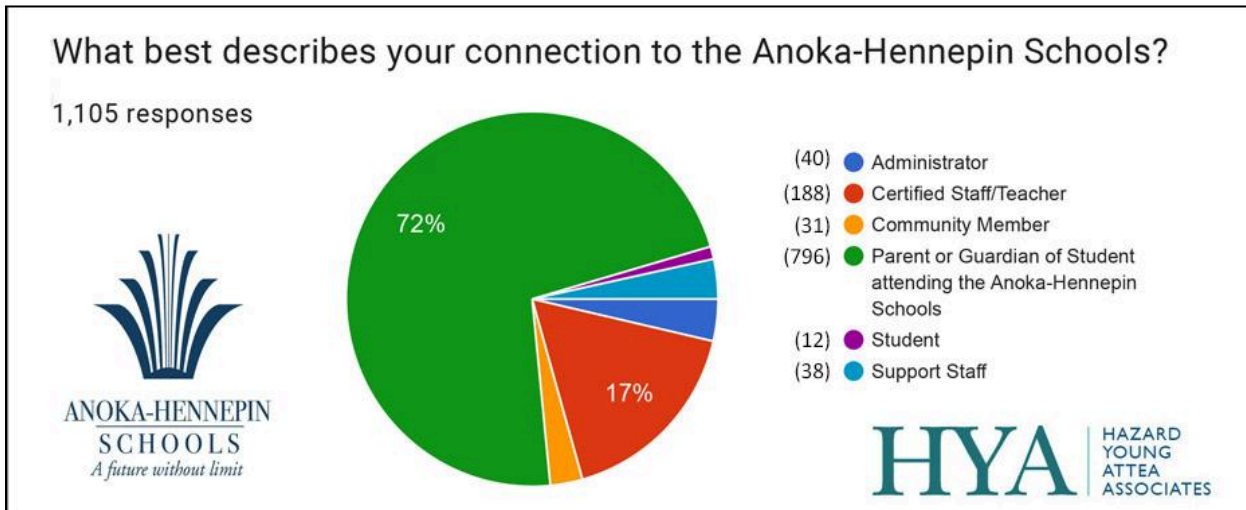
#### **What qualities should define the next superintendent's leadership?**

- Open to hear everyone out
- Visit the schools more
- Teaching experience
- Great soft skills
- Open minded
- Student voice
- Stand up for all schools
- Advocate for the teachers, staff, and schools
- Must have a vision
- Be engaged - if you're not in the schools, how will you make it better
- Get things done
- Success and safety
- Encourage students
- Leadership skills

# Stakeholder Survey Summary

The Anoka-Hennepin Schools Board of Education is conducting a national superintendent search in partnership with HYA. As part of the engagement process, stakeholders were invited to complete an online survey open from April 20–May 1, 2026. A total of 1,105 responses were submitted, with parents and guardians accounting for 792 responses (72%). Among the 1,102 respondents who rated the district, 619 (56.2%) gave Anoka-Hennepin Schools a 4 or 5, reflecting a strong level of overall satisfaction.

The charts below provide a visual summary of the multiple choice questions. A narrative summary of the open-ended questions and responses follows.



## 1. What are the Anoka-Hennepin Schools' strengths that the next superintendent can build upon?

### Response Summary:

- **Dedicated and High-Quality Staff:** The greatest strength identified is the dedicated, caring, and professional staff, including teachers, paras, and building leaders, who are committed to student success. A key priority is supporting, retaining, and fairly compensating these educators, viewing them as experts, and giving them voice and necessary resources.
- **Commitment to Core Academics and Student Success:** The new superintendent should build upon academic excellence by focusing on core subjects (reading/literacy, math, science, and history), implementing evidence-based curriculum (like the MN READ Act), and providing rigorous and challenging coursework, including advanced programs (AP, IB, PSEO, STEP).
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** The district's diverse student population is a major strength that the next leader should celebrate, embrace, and continue to build upon, ensuring inclusiveness and equitable support for all students regardless of background, identity, or learning needs (including Special Education).
- **Comprehensive Programming and Opportunities:** Strengths include a wide array of educational programs and offerings, such as Career and Technical Education (CTE), specialized schools, electives, arts, music, and extracurricular activities that cater to varied student interests and needs, preparing them for post-secondary life.
- **Strong Leadership and Visibility:** The next superintendent must be a visible, connected, and strong leader who can effectively communicate, maintain fiscal responsibility, and advocate for students and staff, particularly by standing up to or unifying the school board and removing political agendas from the classroom.

## 1. What are the challenges facing the Anoka-Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent should be aware of, or you would like to see addressed?

### Response Summary:

- **Divided School Board & Political Conflict:** The most frequent and critical challenge cited is the highly politicized and divided School Board, often resulting in a 3-3 deadlock. This factionalism, attributed by many to a few conservative members pushing personal or outside agendas, is seen as obstructing progress on vital decisions like curriculum adoption, budget approval, and levy votes, leading to staff burnout and a lack of support for public education, inclusion, and diversity initiatives.

- **Funding and Financial Challenges:** Significant concerns revolve around budget shortfalls, rising costs (especially health insurance for staff), and the need for new revenue, including putting a levy or referendum up for a community vote. This financial strain is leading to position cuts (particularly social workers, mental health staff, and support personnel), increased class sizes, and decreased staff morale.
- **Student Behavior & Safety:** There is a widespread perception of a behavioral crisis, characterized by disruptive, disrespectful, and sometimes violent student behavior (including fighting, bullying, and destruction of property) with insufficient accountability or consistent consequences from administration. This impacts the learning environment for all students and is a major factor in high teacher turnover.
- **Academic Rigor and Core Focus:** Many respondents want the new superintendent to refocus on academic basics (reading, writing, and math literacy) to address low proficiency and test scores. Related issues include concerns about low expectations, the impact of excessive technology/screen time in classrooms, and the perception that social/political agendas or "woke ideology" are distracting from core instruction.
- **Staff Morale and Retention:** Teachers and support staff feel overworked, underappreciated, and undervalued, citing non-competitive salaries, rising insurance costs, and increased workloads due to staff cuts and difficult student behaviors. Recruiting and retaining high-quality educators is seen as a key challenge.

### 3. What key opportunities lie ahead for Anoka-Hennepin Schools that the next superintendent should recognize and build upon?

#### Response Summary:

- **Funding and Financial Management:** A major opportunity is securing additional resources, primarily by advocating for and supporting a school funding levy or referendum, which many respondents believe the community is willing to support. This involves addressing current budget shortfalls, making strategic financial decisions with transparency, and optimizing resource allocation to fully fund schools and restore programs lost due to cuts, thereby improving financial stability.
- **Staffing, Support, and Retention:** The next superintendent should prioritize recruiting, retaining, and supporting high-quality staff, including teachers and paraprofessionals, by ensuring competitive pay, fair contracts, and better benefits. Improving staff morale, showing appreciation, and reducing workload/stress are critical, as is valuing the expertise of classroom teachers in curriculum and decision-making.
- **Academic Rigor and Curriculum:** Opportunities exist to significantly increase academic standards and rigor, focusing on core fundamentals like literacy (especially through evidence-based instruction like the READ Act and phonics) and math. This also includes strengthening specialized programs (e.g., STEAM/STEM, Career &

Technical Education, arts), providing more challenges for higher-achieving students, and continuing the process of approving new curriculum, such as social studies.

- **Safety, Discipline, and School Environment:** The leader can improve the learning environment by addressing the lack of discipline, implementing consistent consequences for misbehavior, and enforcing strict cell phone/technology policies in classrooms. There is also an opportunity to strengthen mental health support systems (social workers, counselors) and create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students and families, while keeping personal politics out of the classroom.
- **Community and Board Relations:** The new superintendent has the opportunity to unify a divided school board, foster transparent communication, and build stronger partnerships with parents and the broader community, ensuring their voices are heard and involved in supporting student success and school direction.

#### 4. What are the characteristics or traits that you think an effective Superintendent should possess in order to best lead the Anoka-Hennepin Schools?

##### Response Summary:

- **Student and Staff Advocacy & Support:** An effective Superintendent must put students first, prioritizing their academic success, safety, and well-being, while also being a fierce advocate for teachers and staff. This includes supporting educators in the classroom, valuing their expertise, building trust, and ensuring they have the necessary resources and support, including fair compensation and manageable workloads.
- **Strong Communication & Visibility:** Key traits include being a strong, transparent, and effective communicator, listener, and diplomat. The Superintendent should be highly visible and present in schools and the community, engaging directly with teachers, students, and parents (not just administrators) to understand the daily realities and diverse needs of the district.
- **Leadership, Integrity, and Resilience:** The ideal candidate needs strong leadership skills, integrity, honesty, and a clear vision for the district's future. They must possess a "backbone" and moral courage to stand up to political pressure from the Board, special interest groups, or parents, and make difficult, data-driven decisions that are in the best interest of all students.
- **Conflict Resolution & Collaboration:** Given the divided school board and ideologically diverse community, the Superintendent must be adept at conflict resolution, negotiation, and building consensus. They should be politically unbiased or non-partisan, focusing on collaboration and finding common ground to unite stakeholders toward shared educational goals.

- **Financial & Operational Acumen:** Essential skills include fiscal responsibility, financial management experience, and the ability to operate within a large budget. The Superintendent needs to be strategic in resource allocation, prioritize funding for the classroom, and reduce inefficiency and waste. Many respondents also noted the importance of an experienced educator, preferably with a teaching background.