



STATE OF MARYLAND

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MSDE)

LEADERSHIP PROFILE REPORT

Maryland State Superintendent

BACKGROUND*

Maryland has over 1,400 public schools, 24 local education agencies (LEAs), and over 7,000 childcare providers serving all of the state's 23 counties plus Baltimore City. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) works collaboratively with the State Board of Education and stakeholders to ensure the promise of an excellent and equitable education for all students, especially those who have been historically underserved. Led by the State Superintendent, the MSDE is a dedicated team of educators, specialists, and administrators joined together by a single vision: to be a system of world-class schools where students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, career, and life.

The Mission of the MSDE is to ensure a rigorous and world-class educational experience for every Maryland student, in every neighborhood, that prepares each to be college and career ready, through:

- strategic direction and leadership;
- policy making and resource allocation; and
- engagement and advocacy.

Fulfilling the mission of the MSDE requires bold action implemented with a sense of urgency. Seizing this once-in-generation opportunity to transform Maryland education to ensure that every Maryland student has access to excellent and equitable educational opportunities to realize their full potential. MSDE is implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's Future that provides the policy and investment needed to realize the mission. Through a new multiyear strategic plan, the State Board of Education and MSDE anchors the Blueprint in order to operationalize best-in-class practices with the full participation of all stakeholders. Learn more about the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) .

The Values of the MSDE are:

- Engagement: Partner and engage with diverse stakeholders and decision makers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of our policies, programs, and actions.
- Equity: Do whatever it takes to eliminate barriers to success and provide the necessary resources and supports to ensure that every Maryland student achieves at the highest level.
- Excellence: Ensure a rigorous and engaging educational environment for all students defined by high expectations, research-based instructional practices, and highly effective, culturally responsive educators.
- Transformation: Pursue best-in-class outcomes through bold, impactful actions to ensure that every student has the tools, resources, support, and opportunities they need to thrive.

The Maryland State Board of Education is looking for an innovative educator who will lead the MSDE and work tirelessly with the LEAs to implement the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future.

This report presents the findings of the data collection for the *Leadership Profile* conducted by Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA) in January of 2024 in support of the search for the new Maryland State Superintendent. The data contained herein were obtained from input received by HYA Associates, Dr. Jack Smith and Dr. Monica Browne, after meeting with individuals in either an interview setting or focus group settings in the time period spanning January 2 - 19, 2024 and from the results of the online survey completed by 353 stakeholders. The surveys, interviews, and focus group meetings were structured to gather input to assist the Maryland State Board of Education determine the primary characteristics desired in the new Superintendent. Additionally, the stakeholder interviews and focus groups provided information regarding the strengths of the district and some of the challenges that it will be facing in the coming years.

*Source: [MSDE Website](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Participation

The numbers of participants, by stakeholder group, in the two methods of data gathering are listed below: Not all focus groups were disaggregated for the on-line survey.

Group	Personal Interviews or Focus groups	Survey
Board	12	
Deputy Superintendents	3	
Governor’s Office	5	
MD Assoc. of Counties (MACO)	6	
Public School Supt. Assoc. (PSSAM)	19	
House of Delegates	5	
Senate	1	
Early Childhood Advisory	14	
Accountability Implementation Board (AIB)	4	
Strong Schools Maryland	12	
Teachers of the Year	23	
Baltimore Teachers Union	8	
Town Halls	11	

MD Assoc. of Boards of Ed (MABE)	20	
MD Assoc. of Student Councils (MASC)	19	
Free State PTA	18	
MD Assoc. of Elementary Principals (MAESP)	18	
MD Assoc. of Secondary Schol Prins. (MASSP)	10	
MD State Education Assoc.	3	
Community		60
Parents		130
Staff		137
Students		26
Subtotal	211	353
TOTAL	564	

Strengths of the MSDE and Public Schools in Maryland:

Among the most frequent strengths perceived and discussed by focus group participants and during interviews, as well as reflected in the survey, are the favorable conditions for educational reform in the state of Maryland as evidenced by the commitment to transforming education through legislation and funding, a robust and diverse State Board that works well together, proximity to federal and state leaders for advocacy, and a strong Department of Education with passionate staff.

Maryland is a diverse and equitably-minded state with a history of prioritizing public education. The Blueprint legislation provides an exciting opportunity for educators to improve the lives of all students. The Blueprint for Maryland’s Future was passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2021 to transform public education in the state into a world-class education system. The Blueprint increases education funding by \$3.8 billion each year over a 10 year span to enrich student experiences and accelerate student outcomes, as well as improve the quality of education for all children in Maryland, especially those who have been historically underserved.

The collaboration between the State Board, MSDE, and other stakeholders is another strength that was consistently highlighted during interviews and focus group sessions. This collaboration provides a focus on student achievement and a foundation for successful reforms. The State Board is recognized as being engaged and working well with MSDE staff. The Board sets the direction and tone in the implementation of the Blueprint, contributing to the positive momentum. The Board and staff at MSDE recognize the strong, talented

workforce across the state. In addition, there exists a positive relationship between labor and education authorities for the benefit of students.

The MSDE is a strong organization made up of passionate individuals who are working to improve the educational program for all children in Maryland. The individuals who collectively make up the MSDE are viewed as experts in their respective fields and are considered a strength for the state public education system. Recent efforts of the MSDE toward greater collaboration with the State Board, LEAs, and other stakeholders are appreciated. During interviews and focus groups, a recognition of improved responsiveness from the MSDE was a general theme. This includes the MSDE providing more data to the LEAs and other stakeholders and fostering positive interactions between local board members, the State Board, and Associations. The State Superintendent appointed in 2024 will be expected to continue the work toward greater collaboration with all stakeholders in order to achieve the lofty goals of the organization.

The overall sentiment as expressed during interviews, focus groups, and in the survey, is one of optimism and commitment to continuing the positive momentum in Maryland's education system, leveraging the Blueprint and other initiatives to enhance the quality of education in the state. With strong support from the Governor's Office and General Assembly, including a historic amount of funding for education, the future for Maryland's public schools is bright and the State Superintendent appointed in 2024 will enjoy a positive climate for continuing the work to transform public education.

Despite the challenges presented in the following section, the MSDE has significant foundational pillars on which to continually improve. These foundational pillars include a dedicated staff, a high functioning State Board of Education, as well as a general commitment to implementing the Blueprint for Maryland's future across stakeholder groups.

Challenges facing the MSDE and Maryland Public Schools:

The State of Maryland is geographically, politically, economically, and racially diverse. The MSDE is expected to work with all of the LEAs to ensure an equitable educational experience for all students. The challenges to this mission that were highlighted during interviews, focus groups, and in the survey include affordability and implementation issues related to the Blueprint, transparency and communication issues from MSDE, rebuilding relationships with law makers and stakeholders, enhancing the culture in and the reputation of the MSDE, as well as ensuring equitable experiences for students throughout the state including for those who learn best in non-traditional settings.

The new state superintendent will need to come into the role fully committed to the Blueprint and the purposeful thinking that drove the legislation. The superintendent will need to be part of a broad based collaborative team working toward full implementation and positive outcomes.

The State Superintendent works with both the State Board of Education and the Accountability Implementation Board (AIB) to work to achieve the goals of the Blueprint for Maryland's future. The AIB was created by the Legislature to hold the State and local

education agencies accountable for Blueprint implementation. While working with two Boards is a challenge, both entities are united in purpose to ensure that the public schools in Maryland are offering a world-class education to every child. Working with both Boards to ensure that the significant investment in education provided by the Blueprint is spent in an efficient and effective manner is a challenge that the new superintendent will face.

Transparency between the State Superintendent and all stakeholder groups was mentioned in interviews and focus groups as a significant challenge that developed under the previous administration. As a result of the perceived lack of transparency, the level of trust between the MSDE and the State Board, law makers, LEAs, and the general public eroded. While there has been positive momentum in recent months, the challenge to continue to provide transparent communications in order to rebuild trust with stakeholder groups is something on which the new superintendent will need to focus.

In order to successfully implement the Blueprint, the MSDE needs buy-in from the leaders of the LEAs. The relationships between the MSDE leaders and those in the LEAs have proven difficult to manage. To address this challenge, the MSDE has begun the transition from a compliance-focused agency to one that serves as a proactive and consultative entity; one that is trusted by local leaders. This shift will need to continue as issues of implementation of the Blueprint develop. The new Superintendent will need to consider the diverse situations around the state and work with the MSDE leaders to provide customized guidance and support to all LEAs as they work to meet the requirements of the Blueprint. The importance of adapting to the diverse nature of Maryland's districts to address achievement declines and provide for an equitable education for all students was emphasized during many interviews and focus group meetings. The State Superintendent will be expected to visit the 24 LEAs extensively in order to know what's happening around the state and champion the goals of the Blueprint.

In addition to working to enhance the reputation of the MSDE with stakeholders around the state, the new State Superintendent will face the challenge of improving morale within the MSDE itself. Achieving the long-term goals of improving curriculum, closing the achievement gap, improving teacher recruitment and retention, and addressing equity issues across the state cannot be accomplished without a team that feels valued and empowered to do the difficult work necessary to meet the lofty goals of the Blueprint. The new State Superintendent will need to recognize and rely upon the experts in the MSDE to achieve goals while attending to the improvement of the culture of the organization.

Finally, there is a collective desire for the new Maryland State Superintendent to be an experienced, engaging, and innovative educational leader who can inspire others, emphasize a clear vision and leadership for Blueprint goals, support students who have a wide range of needs, and unify stakeholders towards making sure all learners succeed. The new superintendent is expected to navigate political complexities, collaborate with LEAs, improve communication between MSDE and local school systems in order to foster collaboration, and keep all stakeholders informed on progress in the areas specified in the Blueprint. The new Maryland State Superintendent will need to focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion by understanding the unique characteristics of each jurisdiction, and addressing the disparities. The importance of communication and meeting the challenges associated with implementing the Blueprint initiative within a defined time frame are of

utmost importance.

Conclusion

HYA and the State Board of Education intend to meet the challenge of finding an individual who possesses most of the skills and character traits required to meet the needs of the children in Maryland. The search team will seek a successor Superintendent who can work with all stakeholders to provide the leadership needed to champion the goals of the Blueprint and unify stakeholders around supporting the needs of students, raising academic standards and student performance, while providing an equitable system for education.

The search team thanks all the participants who were interviewed, attended focus groups meetings, and/or completed the online survey and the MSDE staff members who assisted with organizing our meetings. Specifically, the efforts of Zachary Hands and Charlene Necessary to organize all of the interviews and focus groups are truly appreciated.

The results of the Community Survey are provided as a separate document. This additional document is meant to be a stand-alone complementary piece to the Leadership Profile Report. The basis for formulation of the Desired Leadership Characteristics is from the review and analysis of these two documents. Below is a summary of the findings from the electronic survey:

Survey Summary

A summary of the survey results is presented as follows. A full report of the survey results will be provided to the Maryland State Board of Education under a separate cover. The Maryland State Superintendent Search Survey was completed by 353 stakeholders. Of those who completed the survey, the largest stakeholder group surveyed were staff members (currently working in a public school district in Maryland). Staff members (currently working in a public school district in Maryland) represented 38.8% of all respondents. Parents (child currently enrolled in a Maryland public school) made up the second most populous stakeholder group at 36.8% of all respondents. The third largest participant group were residents (no children currently enrolled in any Maryland public school) at 17.0% of all respondents.

Regarding the State of the MSDE and Public Schools in Maryland, the following statements were perceived to be strengths:

- Technology is integrated into the classroom in Maryland's public schools. (TL)
- Maryland's public schools employ effective teachers, administrators and support staff in its schools. (M)
- MSDE engages with diverse racial, cultural and socio-economic groups. (CE)
- MSDE has high performance standards for all students. (VV)
- MSDE employees are held accountable to high standards. (M)

The top-rated leadership profile characteristics constituents desire in a new Maryland State Superintendent are:

- Foster a positive, professional climate of mutual trust and respect among all stakeholders. (CE)
- Understand and be sensitive to the needs of a diverse student population (TL)
- Provide transparent communication (CE)
- Recruit, employ, and retain effective personnel throughout the MSDE. (M)
- Demonstrate a deep understanding of educational research and emerging best practices and implement strategies (VV)

Summary of Comments from Focus Group Meetings, Individual Interviews and Public Forum

The structure of the focus groups was open, allowing for participants to build upon each other's comments. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions.

- What do you consider the greatest current strengths of the MSDE and what strengths do you wish to see maintained and/or expanded?
- What do you consider the greatest current challenges faced by the Maryland State Superintendent and what do you consider the greatest challenges over the next 3-5 years?
- What are the 3 - 5 most desired characteristics that you believe the next Maryland State Superintendent will need to possess in order to succeed and to take the state to the next level of success?

Individual interviews were conducted in the same manner for members of the State Board of Education. To conclude each session, the HYA consultant asked if the participant(s) have any recommendations for specific candidates who should be notified of the process.

The results of the interviews and group meetings were compiled into a single document based on the interviewer's interpretation of the responses. ChatGPT was utilized to determine the level of support for various themes across groups. These results will be presented to the State Board of Education and then utilized for recruiting and candidate evaluation purposes. Given that permission was not overtly granted, the names of individuals recommended as a potential executive leader of interest will not be shared in this document. The HYA consultants will contact those suggested and notify each about the process.

Focus Groups/Interviews: It should be emphasized that the data reported in the summaries of the focus groups are not a scientific sampling, nor should they necessarily be

viewed as representing the majority opinion of the respective groups to which they are attributed. Items are included if, in the consultants' judgment, they warranted the Search Committee's attention.

End of Public Report
