



HOWARD LAKE • WAVERLY • WINSTED

NATE WALBRUCH, SUPERINTENDENT

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Board Members,

Please accept the following as my report from the [Entry Plan](#).

Thank you for providing me with the time and opportunity to roll out a measured, strategic approach to beginning my tenure at Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Schools. As presented during the Entry Plan, this report will be organized by the Essential Questions posed from the beginning and used to guide my orientation work. By way of reminder, the Essential Questions are as follows:

- What is the current level of student achievement? What is the expected level?
- Who is connected to the school? To what extent are decisions and leadership distributed across the district?
- How can we work to improve relationships and working conditions?
- How well is the strategic direction known and understood?
- What are the district's strengths and weaknesses?
- What does it mean to be a Laker? (i.e. what is the culture of Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools?)

What is the current level of student achievement? What is the expected level?

Student achievement can be measured using a wide array of assessments. Academic achievement is traditionally measured through standardized tests, graduation rates, attendance percentages.

HLWW's graduation and attendance rates are above state averages, in some cases significantly! In other measures of student achievement our district performs at/around the state average.

In regards to the expected level of performance, anecdotally, there is a feeling amongst staff/community members the district's performance could be better. COVID consequences, increased distracting behaviors, overwhelming workloads, staffing issues, increasing mental health concerns, and a changed culture towards education are identified as barriers to improved performance.

Who is connected to the school? To what extent are decisions and leadership distributed across the district?

As is the case in most rural school districts, the school forms a central part of the community. As one of the larger employers, HLWW's economic impact on the district is an important consideration. While many employees live outside of the district, a fair number live in-district and help support the local economy. While community leaders lament and wish for all employees to be citizens of the district, our community leaders respect the school and support the school. Their degree of support appears to range from enthusiastic advocacy to passive support.

HLWW finds itself in competition with other education service providers in the area. Open enrollment to neighboring schools, online offers and post-secondary options create some challenges for the district as numerous resident families choose another provider for their education. Families that attend HLWW appear to be satisfied with the service and most take advantage of the various activities and related services.

The School Board appears well-respected across the community and amongst the staff members. Board members take active roles in meetings. Board leadership and advocacy was crucial during the recent levy campaign. The Board's efforts provided a boost of morale and confidence across the district. The School Board appears to have struck an appropriate balance between being active and involved in the district versus micromanaging the day-to-day operations of the school.

One of the consistent themes from staff conversations involved increasing involvement of staff when making decisions. Many staff felt promoting collaborative, input-driven decision-making would improve the school's culture. While there are a number of committees and opportunities for leadership, numerous staff feel these token gestures.

How can we work to improve relationships and working conditions?

Perhaps the most consistent theme from the Entry Plan work was the need to improve transparency and communication across the district. Staff are looking for an increase in open, honest information about the difficult issues our school and community is facing. As mentioned previously, staff are eager to be more involved in decision making processes and feel their voice could specifically create better professional development outcomes in the future. Finally, like many districts, staff members are feeling overwhelmed by the needs of the community, the residual "heat of the spotlight" from the

extra attention received during the pandemic and the increased workloads driven by students with more diverse needs and difficulty the district faces in recruiting and hiring for all of our open positions.

How well is the strategic direction known and understood?

There are many posters with the district's mission and goals listed. These displays also appear on the district's website, in take-home folders and in some district publications. In conversation, most staff are not able to recall the district's specific goals nor the mission of the school.

Individual school buildings establish goals based on state directives (World's Best WorkForce, Read Well By Third Grade, etc.). Leadership has set yearly goals, provides some time during staff meetings and PLCs for work towards the goals; however, most staff have a perfunctory commitment to the overall mission/direction of the school and district.

What are the district's strengths and weaknesses?

Most people currently consider our facilities to be a point of pride for the district. All of our facilities are generally accessible, clean and safe. Many of our extra-curricular programs are managed well and mostly staffed by school staff which provides continuity of expectations and deepening connections between school and students. Our FFA program remains a point of pride as our chapter consistently ranks high in the state and participates in the national conference/competitions. Furthermore, the FFA group provides a lot of community exposure for the district through fundraising, service and bringing awareness to agriculture associated topics. Most attending families share a belief in education and the importance of attending consistently, supporting the work of the school at home and appear to be pleased with the district's service overall.

Although the community approved an operating levy, the district's financial position remains perilous throughout the next couple of years. Careful management of the budget through this transition should see an improved outlook in the future. A lack of direction and goal for the district results in a lack of coordinated efforts across the schools. Our lack of consistent, systematic assessments and interventions either avoids or provides an incongruent response to struggling students, creating frustration among students and staff; thus contributing to staff burnout.

What does it mean to be a Laker? (i.e. what is the culture of Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools?)

This was the most difficult question for people to answer. In part, the “idea of a Laker” has not been defined simply, communicated nor emphasized. Naturally, the previous school years’ disruptions and distortions have made it difficult to fully embed a culture across the district.

Specifically for staff, it does feel they are eager and ready for a direction to move towards. Efforts to create a strategic plan are well-received thus far. Furthermore, they are ready to be empowered to prioritize their instruction, provide additional, systemic support and work as a team for the improvement of our schools.