



Creating a Strategic Plan for the Montclair Public Schools

Mission Statement

The Montclair Public School District is dedicated to creating a culture of learning and continuous improvement that provides every child with a high quality, creative, innovative, and challenging education, through a magnet system of integrated schools in which every school represents a strong, diverse, and vibrant community of learners.

Session 1 of 3 - What are the Strengths and Challenges/Opportunities of the Montclair Public Schools

On November 13, 2023 Montclair Public Schools administrators, staff, students, Board members, parents, and community members came together to initiate strategic planning. The first evening's topic focused on the strengths and challenges/opportunities of the Montclair Public Schools to help inform the question of where the district is now.

The meeting began with welcoming remarks by Allison Silverstein, Board President. Superintendent Dr. Jonathan C. Ponds provided an informative overview of the district. Charlene Peterson, New Jersey School Boards Association, introduced the strategic planning process.

The participants gathered into nine mixed stakeholder groups to brainstorm the strengths and challenges/opportunities of the Montclair Public Schools. After discussion, each group came to a consensus on up to the top 10 strengths and top 10 challenges/opportunities and presented those to the full group of meeting participants.

The next strategic planning sessions are scheduled for: Wednesday, November 29 and Monday, December 11. During the November 29th meeting, using a similar brainstorming process, we will identify our visions for the district five years from now. The final meeting will involve writing goal statements using the input from the two previous sessions. Everyone is welcome, even if you were not able to attend the first meeting.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. All consensus points will be posted on the district's website.

Work of the Small Groups:

Note: there are missing/gaps in group numbers 1-10 due to shifting from small groups meeting in classrooms to everyone remaining in the cafeteria.

Group 3	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Bond for infrastructure passed	Tech misuse in school – personal/academic (IXL Learning site)
Magnet program	More mental health support
Shift to elected Board of Education	Middle school sports equity
Parent involvement (MFEE, Bilingual PAC, etc.)	Music & arts across schools
Wide arts program	Addressing various achievement levels
Wide STEM program	Lack of consistency
Wide athletics/extracurriculars	(Over)(Mis) communication
Fantastic teachers and staff	Standardizing K-8 math
Variety of opportunities	Need for college guidance (all levels)
Diversity, equity, inclusion	Revolving door issues

Group 6	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Teachers' commitment	Inconsistent quality with instruction, building relationships
Bussing – safety outlook	Support for staff (to improve skills)
Desire to be inclusive	Actualizing equity of opportunity for students – the giving of greater support to those in need
Diverse range of instructional opportunities	District prioritizing consistent offerings of support to families
Variety of extracurricular activities available (at some schools)	Align school start times with scientific findings
Strong parental involvement/PTA	Align attendance policy with reality of infectious diseases
Creative programs	Create stronger programming for Sp. Ed.
Increased emphasis on social-emotional wellness	More diverse leadership in school organizations (SATp/PTA)
Increased attention to outcome data	Oversight by building administration (inconsistent occurrence and quality)

Group 11	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Diversity of community (staff & students)	Addressing achievement/opportunity gap
Location and access	Follow through with initiatives (sustainability)
Active parents	Funding for growth & initiatives
Dedicated staff	Infrastructure
Community partnerships	Open & honest dialogue. Some voices are silenced or amplified
Strong curriculum	Need shared vision for district and community engagement
Variety of extra-curricular and sports	Articulation and communication between schools
Equity is priority	Evaluation and accountability
Comprehensive SpEd	Budget
Progressive and forward-thinking values	

Group 12	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Amazing staff	To renovate all buildings/schools – bond referendum
Diversity of faculty & students	COMMUNICATION
Magnet theme/Arts/SVPA program	Extend the school day
High School class offerings – elective choices	Understaffed and budget
District history	Lack of transparency!!! – Communication of decision making/rationales
Sports opportunities	Middle school after-school activities
High School Continuing Education opportunities – senior option	Utilizing the community
Community engagement	Community engagement - scheduling
	Science of Reading implementation plan – (long-term plan)
	Meaningful professional development
	Central office org chart – leadership/roles/responsibilities
	Academic Science HS – no labs. Need to improve learning (hands-on)
	Providing consistent services for special needs – OT, PT., etc.

Group 13	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Communications - external	Lack of communication to diverse group of stakeholders (who are not “hand-picked”)
Enrollment reports and projections	Lack of responsiveness and accountability
Many course offerings and opportunities at all levels	Need to clarify the process for communication
	Need for a comprehensive review of the magnet system: themes, start times, specialty courses, overall placement
	Policy – including updated Census data for educational zone balance
	Need a better mixture of all course offerings
	More organization in study hall courses
	Why are there so many free periods (MHS)?
	Provide study skills options for all students (with/without IEP). How to manage “items of distraction” (e.g. cell phones)

Group 14	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Many exceptional teachers	Broader parent/community engagement
Culturally responsive teaching	Baseline from prior strategic plan
Strong PTA/parent communities	Hiring/staffing challenge – extended vacancies & reliance on subs, esp. World Languages
Cares/SEL emphasized at all K-5 schools	Communication around staff challenges/transparency
Diversity of people and programs	Consistency of instruction across K-8 schools
Strong SpEd execution in K-5	Transition to 6-8 Sp.Ed
	Consistent communications across classrooms/schools: teacher-family, principal-family, district-family
	More cross-school collaboration
	Start times not aligned to students needs
	Opportunity gaps - remediation
	Clarify and drive consistency in use of technology for communication, instruction, and assessment.

Group 15	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Special Ed programs – ABA, LRE, MAP	Staffing/budget for full inclusion program
Restorative justice programs - SEL	More opportunity to provide feedback to Spec Ed staff – especially therapists
High School course offerings	Communication about student progress at middle school and high school
Magnet system – great choices, promotes agency	Need more focus on math/ELA/reading instruction and training for teachers
Diversity by design	Magnet system – review algorithm and strength of individual programs/themes
Passing of bond referendum	Opportunity – capitalize on staff knowledge/seek out input
Great community partners and opportunity to give input	Need more metrics
1:1 device program	Non-renewals/staffing – impact on morale of staff and community
Prepare students for life after high school	Climate change standards need to be implemented – cross curricular
Great extracurricular opportunities	Sustainability – all systems in each school

Group 17	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
Pre-kindergarten	Opportunity gap
Data K-12	Communication
Professional Development	Budget restriction – 2%
Bond referendum	Middle school – test scores
CTE pathways	Registration
Dual enrollment	Tech dependent instruction
OG/IMSE (Orton Gillingham/Institute for Multi-Sensory Education)	Changing start times
Focus on excellence	
Tutoring & mentoring	

Group 16	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES
RJ (restorative justice) and PD (Professional development) for staff to ensure full inclusivity	Disparity of achievement for particular demographic groupings
High achievement for some demographic groupings/growth in the demographic groupings	Learning loss due to COVID and meeting pre-pandemic academic levels
Parent advocacy/community involvement and parent stakeholder groups	Lack of advancement for Black families and children/anti-black culture
Dedicated and high-quality teaching staff	Marketing of differentiation between the schools to promote the Magnet system
Cultural diversity	Staff turnover with paraeducators/supporting stability of staffing
Expansion of pathways for students at the secondary level	Creating more opportunities for students with IEP/assistive technology
Wide range of exploration for students	Lack of middle school sports
Magnet system/exposure to programming/arts/sports	Vertical articulation between grade bands
Number of extracurricular activities	Dollar-for-dollar match for tutors
	Need measurable goals for specific growth for all demographic groupings on NJSLA
	Need to find more innovative ways for children to be included
	Lack of advancing equity for black families or families of different cultures
	Criminalization of black boys, girls, and their parents
	Criminalization of parents of other races who are parents of black children
	There is not a true equity system
	Relevant preparation for African American and other children post-high school
	Lack of accountability for HIB specifically when it comes to black children/upholding HIB law
	Clearly defining equity versus equality and policies that truly support equity
	A clear understanding of the inclusion of special needs across the district
	Communication between BOE and the community
	More community-based instruction for special needs students