



Creating a Strategic Plan for the Hackensack Public Schools

Mission Statement

The mission of the Hackensack Public School District is to challenge all students to excel along their own personal learning continuum and become responsible, civic-minded global citizens of the 21st Century. We inspire and challenge students to be active learners who can think critically, engage in complex problem-solving, communicate effectively, take pride in the work they produce and contribute to making a positive difference in the world around them.

Our schools strive to personalize learning to meet the needs of each student. In partnership with parents and the community, our schools will maximize academic achievement and develop confident students who are accountable for their ongoing learning, value initiative and diversity, and who are able to contribute meaningfully to the ever-changing global society.

We believe:

Our students will be effective communicators, quality producers, self-directed lifelong learners, community contributors, collaborative workers and complex thinkers;

All students are entitled to opportunities to maximize their talents and abilities;

Our ethnic and cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and prepares students for success in a global society;

Setting high expectations for students, teachers and administrators ensures that our students successfully meet or exceed New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

Parents are essential partners in the education of their children;

Maintaining a strong partnership with the Hackensack community is integral to student success;

Understanding, implementing and responding to current trends in digital learning is intrinsic to success in a global 21st century;

In ensuring that the district has a well-trained, highly qualified and competent staff;

In maintaining a safe and secure learning environment.

The underlying values and principles that drive our mission and vision are personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, collaboration, respect for others, honesty, integrity and the firm belief that every child can learn.

Hackensack Public School Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Session 1 of 3 - What are the Strengths/Achievements and Challenges/Opportunities of the Hackensack Public Schools?

On Thursday, January 21, 2021 Hackensack Public School District administrators, staff, Board members, parents, students and community members came together to initiate strategic planning. The first evening's topic focused on the Strengths/Achievements, and Challenges/Opportunities of the Hackensack Public Schools. The meeting began with welcoming remarks by Robert Sanchez, Superintendent, who then provided an informative overview of the district. Facilitator Matt Lee from the New Jersey School Boards Association introduced the strategic planning methodology and assisted throughout the process.

More than 80 community, parent and staff participants gathered in 10 randomly assigned groups, including two groups dedicated to Spanish-speaking attendees to identify the Strengths/Achievements and Challenges/Opportunities of the Hackensack Public Schools through brainstorming and the sharing of ideas. After discussion, each group came to a consensus on its top 10 Strengths/Achievements and top 10 Challenges/Opportunities and presented those to the full group of meeting participants.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. All consensus points are recorded and posted on the district's website (<https://www.Hackensackschools.com/>) to share the group work during the course of the strategic planning process.

Group Consensus: Strengths/Achievements & Challenges/Opportunities

Group 1:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Amount of offerings we have as per programs due to size of district - not true in small districts (certainly at High School)	Numbers - Crowded in the buildings especially during transitions
Special Education - Offerings are abundant - students are not stuck in one track (ICR/ICS/RCR) - LRE - Least Restrictive Environment	Lack of opportunity for students to have their voices heard - or are often ignored - most of the time they're not even addressed
Communication between Principals and the Parents (Elementary Schools especially)	Students not receiving much information therefore students are left out of making decisions that affect their lives
Staff Commitment to our students - Teachers, Coaches, and other Personnel - Staff well prepared....	Lack of diversity in staff - students have not seen a teacher who looks like them.
Low teacher turnover - strong leadership and staff must be treated because they stay in district	Lack of diversity in curriculum - (Example - first thing an African American child hears about is slavery)
Recognizing diversity and caring about student backgrounds and lived experiences of our students - one really doesn't understand how important it is until you leave the district.....our students benefit from this experience	Special Education - students are often left out of certain opportunities and experiences.
Strongly prepared for college and post graduate career pathways.	Course offerings at MS - no RCR
Community Engagement - many students and alumni attend these events	MS - not many sports and activities

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Spanish language/cultural instruction in Elementary schools - Real World (Respecting Cultures)	ECDC Facilities - no outdoor space
We make sure that students get what they need - all of our children	Classroom space in a majority of schools. Dividers separate classrooms which is not ideal
	G & T opportunities not offered equally at each school from Elementary through Middle School
	Funding Issues - construction and curriculum - exposed/exacerbated by COVID

Group 2:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Strong, Supportive Community	Communication with families and community, seek input, and use it to make informed decisions
Providing 1:1 Technology	Programs to Support Parents in Helping Children At Home (technology specifically mentioned as something we can support parents with)
Teachers are Supportive, Flexible and Patient	Access to Quality Substitute Teachers for students
Curriculum Strides (proactive and constructive)	Communication with staff and parents, timeliness of communication with staff
Teachers rise to the occasion	Decision making without community input (Maywood, Uniform, Hiring)
Where we are strong we have a lot of strength (Strong areas are strong)	Lack of Inviting Culture
	Vary communication to parents and teachers so it is clear and explained well
	Capitalize on the organizations in the community to support and participate in schools
	Facilities challenge (new construction and what will happen as students move in)
	School appearance - outer appearance being remodeled
	Facilities improvements needed
	More Ways to Involve Community and Support our Students (Especially Middle and High School)
	Career Planning for Students
	Opportunities for Community to be involved in the schools
	Creating an Inviting Culture so the community is able to engage with the schools
	Internet access for students at home
	Mentorship opportunities for students
	Structured Partnerships
	Long Term Goal - No Longer Being Considered a Title I District

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Group 3:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Teachers are amazing, knowledgeable, patient and creative. They are making a big difference in children’s lives.	Related Services - lacking a little at the elementary level.
Our student population is diverse. Our students grow up and have the opportunity to see kids of all types, we have a mixture of real world diversity that helps students assimilate into the real world. Teachers acknowledge diversity, LGBTQ, etc. It has had a tremendous impact on childrens’ lives while they are in school and after they graduate.	Hackensack is poorly regarded in the county, reputation of a tough and difficult place. Don’t think we do enough to share and put out positive information to the public. The Record is often not positive. We must take a proactive approach to show the great community we have and how great our school system is. We need more positive publicity to show off our schools’ successes. (From a realtor’s perspective, we have to do a better job to get the word out about our community and other communities.)
HHS has a lot of clubs that students can join. Very inclusive. LGBTQ and clubs for everyone.	Teachers need to be more diverse to match the diversity of the student population.
Partnerships should be celebrated. The collaboration to look outside of the district to find community partnerships and to find resources outside of the district is commendable. EX: YMCA. Administrators always take the time to collaborate with organizations such as the YMCA.	Not enough crossing guards - students have risks crossing streets
Diversity of teachers and administrators and creative ways to overcome issues. What can we put in place is asked by administrators and teachers to solve problems. Administrators show true care and concern. At the beginning of the pandemic, the schools prepared and came up with a plan for students to continue learning (materials, Chromebooks, technology training for teachers, etc.)	We need more after-school clubs in elementary schools and HMS to expose kids to more things that they may like
Band starting in 4th grade, continues in HMS and HHS. Music is a wonderful foundation for our kids.	We need more cohesivness amongst elementary schools so that we are doing the same things
Diversity of SROs and SLEOs in our schools. Positive relationships between students, SROs and SLEOs	Teachers need more training to provide intervention strategies
Crossing Guards are friendly. First people that students see before they come to school. Have to deal with “crazy” drivers and have to stop cars to protect our students.	We have started in the district but we need to ramp up our cultural competency curriculum
Technology - 1 to 1 Chromebook initiative in Kindergarten - Grade 12.	We need more parent input to come up with more creative solutions to involve parents especially those who don’t speak English or the same language as others
Relatively small class sizes at elementary schools	There is not a BOE member attending the Main Street Business Alliance (MSBA) meetings. They would like to have the schools a part of the conversation as it will affect the BOE eventually. The BOE is welcome to join the conversation. The MSBA would like a strategic partnership with the district.
The district provides food for students even when we are not in school	We need to bridge the gap between the community and the schools.

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Board Resolution - the district has acknowledged the need for inclusivity and is encouraged from the BOE resolution.	The school system doesn't get sufficient funding from the city.
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Group 4:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Teachers (caring, willingness, patience)	No sports in the MS
Commitment to professional development	Difficulty with Chromebooks/wifi (hotspot/at home)
Technology	Lack of District owned dedicated preschool building to accommodate all preschool children in the district
Phenomenal District IT Team/ Support for the technology	Lack of diversity among staff in some buildings
Resources (including staff)	Lack of space throughout the district schools / overcrowding
Activities / Programs	Lack of Resources that depict our population
We Celebrate Diversity--staff and students!	Need a more diverse and inclusive curriculum in all subjects and grade levels
We engage in challenging conversations	Buildings / facilities are outdated and may not be able to be updated
Longevity / low turnover of staff	Need for a dedicated district wide RTI (Response to Intervention) program
Collaboration	Communication
Course offerings	
Libraries in all schools	

Group 5: (Group members reassigned to other groups; no report)

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities

Group 6:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Diversity	Difficulty communicating with Spanish speaking parents
6 Schools with 6 Librarians	Lack of diversity among staff
Strong sense of community	Curriculum/book updates needed to represent our population - culturally relevant
Technology - 1-1 - STEM	Lack of communication
Numerous electives at the HS	Crowded facilities
Connections to the community	Lack of early childhood school
Many staff live in area	Technology issues with chromebooks at early childhood classes
Extensive Special Education Services	Large increase in referrals and not enough staff (SE/CST/Counselors)to accommodate
Smooth Transition to Virtual Platform/Flexibility	Constant turnover in Central Office Administration
Great Leadership/Support System	Lack of a sustainable plan for the district
Students are positive, resilient and have a global lens	

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Group 7:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Quality of staff	Do not promote ourselves within the district and to community
Collaboration and support between staff as well staff and administrators	Teaching staff need to reflect student population; need diverse, qualified staff
Like family, sense of community in each school	More mental health services
Diversity	Capacity issues; MS, pre-K in elementary; 5th graders should be at elementary level
Technology - what is available, training and support	Need for more after-school programs such as clubs and recreational activities
AP and college courses	Lacking an 18-21 program for students with significant disabilities
Commitment to cultural proficiency	Mentoring or tutoring program for extra help; some elementary it is by lottery
Technology offerings to students, STEM, TV Studio, virtual reality	Parent support groups; need to do a better job of engaging parents; breakdown in communication between parents and district
Programs that offer academic support and enrichment	Making school more inviting (vibrancy), appearance of bathrooms and hallways
Can see growth of students throughout schooling, achieving progressing, articulate	Disconnect between teachers and administrators; understanding what teachers are dealing with; not feeling heard

Group 8:

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Teachers - through the pandemic, love, attention and dedication	Resources that teachers need- more teacher input is needed
Resources - endless supply, we are able to get everything that we need	Curriculum - diversity is needed
Opportunities that students have - multiple diverse programs - HS opportunities - pre-college, trades, BCC, half day students and partner with Bergen Tech	Ageing facilities - look at building needs - best use of facilities - 2021 students and staff deserve the best buildings
Students - resilient- especially during the pandemic	Need for space- growing city, within each school
Technology- one device per student, one-to-one district	Professional development - needs to be differentiated
Financial resources - State aid and federal aid	Same parents - need more parents to support the school
Curriculum- looking at what our students get regarding science and math	Reach out to parents - what else can we do to get more community support
Professional development - often receive training, daily PD during the pandemic	Is the PTA still relevant?
Diverse community - community members come to the school to help out and speak to students	How to bring the school community together - virtually?
PTA- supporting the school	Meet language needs of all of our populations - Arabic students
Communication is also presented in Spanish	Concern about HMS and leadership
GREAT administration	Politics- school/community/union

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Untapped resources from community members	Untapped resources from community members
Excellent paraeducators	Clear path to stabilization at HMS
	Ways to communicate with parents - sign up.com - provide ways to be able to hear from parents and make sure that their voices are heard
	Special Education - moving students out of the district and spend 11 million on out of district placement - need more diversity within the school
	Ms Winter - community based instruction - self-care and wash clothing, etc... but then Covid occurred, individualized software
	Sports at HMS such as field hockey
	Theater programs for HMS
	Building relationships between buildings (ELEM, MS, HS) with students
	Building relationships between buildings (ELEM, MS, HS) with staff
	Keeping the ZOOM "Mentality" once Covid ends
	Paraeducators - professional development

Group 1 – Spanish (w/ English translations):

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Nuestra diversidad/Our diversity	Algo que nos falta creo que es mejor propaganda acerca de los programas adicionales que ofrecen las escuelas y motivar a los estudiantes a participar en esas actividades, por ejemplo los clubs. Mi hija fue una estudiante nueva en su Junior year y no tuvo conocimiento de los clubs que existian./ Better communication/advertisement of clubs and activities for students to get involved.
Great student experience very welcomed by all staff and school community/ todos son muy queridos y los reciben muy bien	Los niños necesitan estar en la escuela, no tienen la misma calificaciones como tuvo cuando estaban en la escuela/ Students need to be in school, they are struggling in virtual learning.
No discrimination at the high school/ no hay discriminacion	Los alumnos no estan haciendo ejercicio cuando estudian en la casa. No es saludable/ Lack of exercise when students are home in virtual learning, not healthy.
La tecnología en el distrito especialmente durante la pandemia/Technology especially during the pandemic	Por ejemplo, me gustaría ver un apoyo académico adicional para preparar a los estudiantes que deseen obtener un mejor puntaje en el caso de PSAT Y SAT./More academic support such as PSAT and SAT programs.
La comunicación de la escuela/School communication	Communication for clubs, sports, forms should be in Spanish. The main communication is in English and it is hard to follow.

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Reuniones están en español ahora/Meetings are held in Spanish	Cameras should be on during Zoom or Google lessons. Las cámaras deben de estar puesta
Los maestros que no estaban fuerte en la tecnología se adaptaron muy rápido y se esforzaron en doble/Teachers that were weak in technology adapted to it and a new method of teaching	The dividers look like they are caged in the classrooms from photos.
Creatividad de todos en el sentido de colaboracion y comunicacion realmente que nos hace entender lo que estamos haciendo/ Communication and collaboration with families	
Diana Bermudez and the parent-liaison office and parental support that it has provided.	
Los maestros están pendiente a los alumnos y nos han contactado por email y teléfono si mis niños no están haciendo lo que necesitan hacer durante que yo estoy trabajando / Teachers monitor students and contact us via email and phone and any way possible which is helpful because we are not home and working	

Group 2 – Spanish (w/ English translations):

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Proud that her son learned Spanish. Her son is at the HMS. Only in the country for four years and her son speaks English already. He likes investigations and reading. More thought provoking assignments as opposed to just recall.	But the following year after-school tutoring was not available.
My child had a great experience going through HPS. He earned great grades and did well. He received honors classes. We moved his senior year of high school to another town and my son only lasted there 1 month before we had to transfer back because he said the academics were not good in Montclair and there was no student diversity.	HMS should offer more after-school programs.
STEM in HMS was excellent. My daughter loved the class, the use of the computer, connecting globally, very important for her future. TV production is excellent too.	Teachers have told my daughter that she should be in a more advanced class. It's been a year since she arrived.
AP options are diverse and many for our HS students. Biliteracy education.	Foreign language for bilingual students.
The pandemic has limited our schools. At Hillers my son did not speak too much English. He had after-school programs in which teachers helped my son with his HW and with his English.	No hay suficientes programas para los adultos.
All my teachers at JAS have supported us and been very honest.	Falta de programas de enriquecimiento o deportes en la Middle School. Como incentivos para los niños, como lo tienen en la High School.
Speech therapy should continue.	All teachers need to understand how to teach bilingual students who are not in the bilingual program. Use their bilingual abilities as a positive that we must

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	celebrate and not look at as a negative or deficit. The language we use to describe bilingual learners and emergent bilingual learners must shift so we view bilingualism as an asset. Address racio-linguistics in our district.
The schools are good. I moved her recently from NYC. The time they have been here has been great. HMS and HHS.	There are too few community programs after-school with few spots. Not just sports. We want more opportunities for art programs, crafts, cooking, to learn something new, something they are not taught during the day.
I am struggling with my children but I can say that	The need for more activities in the schools as well besides sports like coding and STEM.
Diverse administrators and teachers for our students that reflect the demographic of Hackensack. Spanish speaking administrators that can communicate with the community. It is important for students to see Latino/a Principals and administrators.	More Art Programs and things such as instrumental music. More access to instrumental music.
Technology provided to students to work at home.	Create afterschool programs in the Middle School. More continuity with the afterschool programs just as they do in the elementary schools.
Providing the community meals during the pandemic.	

**The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:
Thursday, February 25, 2021 from 6:30 – 8:00 pm via Zoom.**

During the February 25 meeting, using a similar brainstorming process, we will identify our visions for the Hackensack Public School five years from now.

The final meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 24 and possibly Thursday, March 25 at 6:30 pm to write goal statements using the input from the two previous sessions.

Please join us. We look forward to seeing you!