



Creating a Strategic Plan for the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District

Mission Statement

The Scotch Plains – Fanwood School District educates and empowers our community of individual learners to be successful citizens of the world.

Session 1

What are the Strengths, Achievements and Challenges of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District?

On September 28, 2021, Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District administrators, Board of Education members, staff, and 138 students, parents, and community members, came together to initiate strategic planning. The first evening focused on the strengths, achievements, and challenges of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District. The meeting began with a welcome and introduction by Board President, Ms. Karen Kulikowski. Dr. Joan Mast, Superintendent, presented the current “State of the Schools” report. Facilitator Gwen Thornton, from New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), was introduced and provided an introduction to the strategic planning process.

We reviewed the consensus process utilized in strategic planning. The topic for the evening focused on identifying district strengths and challenges. Participants gathered in randomly assigned groups, eighteen (18) groups in total, and engaged in brainstorming the district’s strengths and challenges. After group discussion, each group identified their consensus points, “Top 10” strengths and challenges, and the outcomes were presented in a gallery walk for all meeting participants. “Common Themes” are highlighted later in this document.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. As discussed with the meeting participants, all consensus points are recorded and posted on the district website to share the group work during the course of the strategic planning process.

Group Consensus: Strengths & Challenges

Room 150

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Terrific to have counselors at elementary Social emotional Student Leadership opportunities Critical Thinking Curriculum Extensive variety of clubs IEP Support Positive encouraging relationships with teachers Transition from MS to HS Forward thinking HS students who create innovative ways of learning</p>	<p>Need to continue to grow in this area Counselor student relationship in the high school How do we make this large district seem smaller - building camaraderie? Need for facilities to accommodate the size of the district Finding a way to capture all students' voices/perspectives Teacher Training and accountability when teachers are not meeting standards Heighten focus on non-academic skills Overall communication and DOSS communication is challenging Support for families needing childcare</p>

Room 151

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Adapting to the pandemic 1:1 Safety during Covid - masks Curriculum (elementary) seems to be advanced, and students are learning more than what we previously thought they could (e.g., math) Great teachers all around, classrooms, specials, principals Improved communication Improved attention to diversity</p>	<p>Would like more snack outside for safety Keep things positive from COVID, like children spending more time outside More consistency in celebrating diversity, should not depend on teacher Keep more virtual options for parents and students who might be homebound Diversity instruction can be deeper not just a month Diversity in staff Highlight - integrate more diversity, intersectionality Broaden definition of diversity e.g., people with disabilities More opportunities for students to develop and showcase their talents e.g., performances, art forms etc., STEM - besides sports</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 152

Strengths	Challenges
Keeping students focused during pandemic, supporting students academically while they were at home	Communication --budget --initiatives --ease of access to communication (digital board meetings) --grants
Technology, pivoting to virtual learning without missing too much. Google Classroom/Google tools	Curriculum--diversity and inclusion being inclusive--disabilities, religions, race, gender, etc. Real life applications of issues in diversity
Honors/Accelerated students--helping them to prepare for college	Tangible metrics of progress
IEP students, supporting those students. ESS and out of district placements--great supports in place. Supporting students with "alternative needs"	Accessibility (facilities)--bathrooms, stages, etc. Considering needs of parents and students
Move to Teachers College curriculum; teachers jumped right in	accommodate increase in students--expansion of facilities, transportations, needs, etc. (In house transportation)
Strong extracurriculars and sports, arts, extensive	STEAM--opportunities for STEAM as permanent part of the curriculum, not just as extracurriculars
Counselors at elementary, SEL component within the classroom	Supporting students in technological skills, making those skills match the technology students have
Math explorations, real life Math applications and opportunities to learn things like Sheets and metacognition and explanation of thought-processes	Supporting students' development of life skills, social skills, interpersonal skills
Faculty are genuinely invested in students' well-being--guidance counselors, working with parents and children one on one	Kids "in the middle" --supporting academic students. Continuing to foster differentiated instruction
Fiscal responsibility--capital projects without having to go to bonds. Projects that have been planned out well; long-term planning (shared collaborative approach to understanding what large capital projects will be with township officials)	
Commitment to student-centered approaches--student responsibility, student decision-making, etc.	

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 153

Strengths	Challenges
Engagement of the teachers and focus on student wellness Strategic Planning sessions Willingness to listen From the student - good communication with the leadership	Facilities - Air Conditioning/Climate Control Facilities - Roof Leaking Hot Lunches - cafeteria quality for students Stronger curriculum offerings for arts Artistic extra-curricular activities Support for non-four-year college acceptance and choices Transportation solutions Targeted resources to help with diversity training Safety, sexual harassment training for students - starting in Middle School, comfort for students to understand appropriate behavior Transparency with within the entire curriculum Communication from the BOE

Room 154

Strengths	Challenges
Administration - Responsive Block Scheduling Transitioning from Middle School to High School Teaching staff are supportive of the student population Athletics Technology	More space / more classrooms Class sizes (student count) - Growing town size Air Conditioning Diversity curriculum makes its way into lesson plans classroom activities consistently Scheduling flexibility for Frosh and Soph Achievement gap - Selection process for AP and Honors courses -transparency and communication More arts, both individual classes and incorporated in classroom curriculum

Room 155

Strengths	Challenges
Students Assistance An inclusive district Internet Technology 1:1 initiative Many options for students Student Resource Officer is a great asset Dedicated teachers and staff Many clubs at both levels	The challenges of Covid-19 Out outdated math program-everyday math Differing expectations among teachers Athletic Offering @ high school/Lack of Middle School Athletics- puts varsity at disadvantage Uniting the school community can be challenging

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 156

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Good hiring, experience of having really good teachers. Talented and caring educators Teachers comfort level with administration. Support of administration and the focus on meeting student needs Focus on and the care for hearing student voices Supportive community environment in our schools, the ability to come in and share concerns and build a sense of belonging Great, supportive PTA Communication and the willingness to want to help</p>	<p>Identifying where students truly are and allowing it to lead instruction. How are we really assessing our students? Social emotional needs of our students following the pandemic and how we will meet these needs. How are teachers being trained to assess the social emotional needs of our students. Feeling it is okay to incorporate SEL into a teachers' day while still trying to meet the needs of our curriculum. Adding more PD in this area. Expanded student population and the impact on our buildings Increasing and expanding AC throughout the schools Communication across all stakeholders and the ability to communicate amongst different departments Diversity in hiring</p>

Room 157

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Technological preparedness in response to the pandemic - 1:1 initiative.</p>	<p>What can be done to identify what has been lost? (When and how will learning loss resulting from the pandemic and virtual instruction be evaluated and what steps will be taken to fill gaps?) Online tools for education; Digital citizenship; Moderation and age appropriate (Balancing the technological tools and resources post pandemic to expand breadth and depth of instruction in an age and time appropriate manner) Diversity of thought, race, ideology, LGBTQ and disability (Creating an environment where all "differences are supported and respected.)</p>

Room 175

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Staying focused on Education through the past year Strong rapport with teachers Safety minded Technology Support Communication Diversity of staff Logistics Focus on diversity Special education team PTA Keeping students voices in central planning</p>	<p>Communication, subject lines being date instead of content We need to include special education more with their peers, they are not included (in lunch bunches) Not a lot of community involvement- kids doing things for the community School wide social events - specifically in the middle schools We shouldn't end homework in kindergarten</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

	<p>Block scheduling at the middle school, since it has been so successful at the high school. Going back to short schedule has been hard.</p> <p>Vision goal to address systemic racism.</p> <p>HS: Counselor caseloads are too large; students get less specific attention. It would be nice for them to get more attention. Increase staffing</p> <p>Are we asking teachers/supporting to look at diverse point of view?</p> <p>Trainings for teachers who are able to answer questions about diversity.</p> <p>We should start these conversations earlier</p> <p>Before and after care programs should be returned, working parents are struggling.</p> <p>Student run after care (for pay)</p> <p>Diversity should be reflected in AP courses</p> <p>Opportunity/ path for art careers</p> <p>Career development not college</p> <p>Handwriting skills cursive</p> <p>Library lit can be more diverse</p>
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Room 158

Strengths	Challenges
<p>SEL Support/Mental Health at the elementary level</p> <p>Teachers are willing to help outside the classroom and more concerned with students' mental health</p> <p>Technology advances</p> <p>District is willing to listen, more open and concerned re: parent concerns</p> <p>Increased more diversity in the text</p> <p>Peer led Professional Development</p> <p>Diversity in community</p> <p>Block scheduling</p> <p>SPF Scholarship Foundation helps to build community</p> <p>Extra-curricular activities (sports, theater, arts)</p>	<p>Improvement in recycling and waste management procedures</p> <p>Consider our place as global citizens, keep an open mind to other cultures</p> <p>Teachers need more training on cultural sensitivity</p> <p>Support students who come from diverse backgrounds and teach other students to be more culturally sensitive</p> <p>More texts from other cultures incorporated in curriculum</p> <p>More curriculum transparency for parents. Parents don't have textbooks coming home to see what their children are learning.</p> <p>Technology to not replace teacher instruction</p> <p>Talk about bias in younger grades</p> <p>Critical thinking and opportunities to ask questions</p> <p>Block schedules at MS and go home for lunch</p> <p>Co-curricular and study hall bumped up against lunch</p> <p>Allow clubs to meet during lunch</p> <p>Livestream BOE meetings</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 164

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Technology - lucky to have access and knew how to use it</p> <p>Quality education even when things were going poorly! Live instruction during pandemic showed care and commitment</p> <p>Teachers - care, concern, response and knowledge. On rare occasions i have issues, great response from teachers</p> <p>Administration - principals build camaraderie and the team. They set the tone.</p> <p>Course selection (HS) - lots of choices and selection and very courses are very accessible</p> <p>Commitment to more diverse options for post-HS (i.e., not everyone will go to 4 year)</p> <p>Extra-curricular availability (sports, arts, academics, creative, volunteering, etc.) and great support of those activities</p> <p>Incredible commitment to the arts</p> <p>Upkeep of facilities - things are working, safe, clean</p> <p>Everyday Math program and Math Expo program</p>	<p>Does vo-tech option need more attention? Especially with debt from college being what it is</p> <p>Way to take one class there without being full time student?</p> <p>Wonder about the efficacy of some programs - TC?</p> <p>More opportunities for real life experiences - cooking, budgeting...separate from academics</p> <p>Connections with military like ROTC programs</p> <p>How much do parents understand standards-based grading? How aligned are our assessments with those standards and do they translate to middle school grading?</p> <p>Universal air conditioning!</p> <p>How can we keep our home values up and taxes down and keep education great?</p> <p>How can we maximize federal funding and grant opportunities for long term facilities and improvements?</p> <p>HS - Double periods or daily class options for AP classes, band and chorus</p>

Room 165

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Athletics brings kids together - connection between SPFHS and community.</p> <p>Teachers</p> <p>Supportive and Responsive Principals</p> <p>Inclusion/Acceptance of LGBTQ community</p> <p>Kindness Focused</p> <p>There is continuity in Initiatives such as</p> <p>Antibullying</p> <p>Arts Programming in the middle school</p>	<p>Role of Special Education as part of the Strategic Plan - How does the plan address the needs of Special Education and 504 students?</p> <p>Enrollment</p> <p>Redistricting</p> <p>Inclusion in activities</p> <p>Screening for Mental Health Needs</p> <p>After the pandemic, what are our blind spots?</p> <p>Consistency of Experiences across schools.</p> <p>Choices</p> <p>Gluten Free should be an option</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 171 and 172

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Full day kindergarten Implementation of block scheduling Being able to implement 1:1 technology during pandemic Many extracurricular activities at the high school and that it is expanding at the middle school level Teachers supplement outdated/one-sided texts High percentage of students who do go to 2- or 4-year colleges</p>	<p>Implementation of universal pre-k Balancing course load of AB schedules (block schedule) Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA compliance with technology • Maintenance of technology • Matching device to grade level iPads are difficult to multitask with and not necessarily what they are going to be using in the "real world" Mental health issues Communication- too much, too little, too long didn't read Life skills curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills for students with disabilities • No mention in the presentation of life skills opportunities, successes Textbooks that are more inclusive of multi-cultural perspectives- equality/equity in textbooks Equal access to celebrating special education successes What about the other types of successes for students who are going to vocational schools and not college bound? Thinking about vocation trajectory The idea of dual certification with high school and college credit- sounds like a challenge but worth exploring 62% of staff are certificated. Is that number standard, going up or going down? Are more or less staff being allocated to working directly with students</p>

Room 173

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Extracurricular activities (music, art, art integration) Fiscal responsibilities - for example, projects handled in house for savings Transparency of the business office Making investments which support students Addressing need for improvement and working to Improve communication Academics - high quality offerings, focus on student success Dedication of Teachers Security</p>	<p>Communication - has been progressing but still has a way to go; Continuing to communicate after initiative isn't new; providing status updates Communicating BOE process & procedures Communication of data to get buy-in for example on block scheduling Space constraints while expanding programs; for example, universal preschool Enrichment programs in After Care Consistency of the interface with parent/child interactions for efficiencies Differentiation for all students at all ability levels Facility maintenance / aesthetic challenges; access to water bottle refills stations</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

	Universal AC Global Citizenship across schools Dual Enrollment offerings Diversity in books, learning Planning and communicating return on investment for taxpayers
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Room 174

Strengths	Challenges
Diversity of student body	Learning Loss
Parental engagement	Diversity in Hiring
Homework assistance	Faculty / Staff Pay (Retention of)
High college success rate	Transparency & Communication- Info on where tax money goes; better advertising of programs; access to information on how to get involved in decision-making
Music program - elementary to high school	Facilities (safety, space, energy conservation)
Availability of technology	Healthier food options
Facilities & Friday Night Lights	Program Expansion - aftercare programs in the schools; PreK expansion
Teachers & SAS at elementary	Not enough homework
Block scheduling at HS	Other than college options / vocational training
Special Services - Community-Based Mental Health Support; Counseling service	Optimizing technology

Room 176

Strengths	Challenges
<p>School staff (administrators, teachers, and support staff) are caring and supportive of our students.</p> <p>Community and parental involvement and investment in student success and wellness.</p> <p>Priority of social emotional wellbeing of students is prioritized.</p> <p>Overall use, implementation and support of technology use in the district.</p> <p>School district's attention to diversity, equity and inclusion through candid conversations.</p> <p>Student commitment to take ownership of learning.</p> <p>Community involvement by school and district staff.</p> <p>Scotch Plains Fanwood School District is highly ranked.</p> <p>Maintaining student and teacher welfare at the forefront of decision making</p> <p>SPF offers real world curriculum</p>	<p>See more diverse staff including more males at the elementary level.</p> <p>Diversity initiatives - consistency in implementation of programming.</p> <p>Consistency among elementary schools in score and sequence and practices, QUEST program</p> <p>Increased pathways for non-college bound or vocational students.</p> <p>Increased STEM opportunities for students and better integration of technology</p> <p>Transitional supports for students between buildings.</p> <p>Transportation supports and communication, after and before care, and full day preschool.</p> <p>Focus on proactive mental health and covid-19 resiliency.</p> <p>Increased/continued PD supports surrounding technology, mental health, and diversity initiatives.</p> <p>Sustainability and going green efforts across the district.</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

Room 177

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Technology - access, 1:1, outreach, even before the pandemic we were ready to move to 1:1</p> <p>Peer-to-peer professional development. Example of Google Certified Educators helping their colleagues, classroom observations, book clubs</p> <p>Parent involvement</p> <p>Staff that are genuinely concerned about the whole student. Teachers know to reach out for social and emotional supports for students</p> <p>Arts integration</p> <p>SEL staff in the elementary schools</p> <p>Implementation of block scheduling at the high school</p>	<p>Expand the arts program to enhance academic learning. In particular: no theater classes, no dance classes, strings. Perhaps develop opportunities in the arts that aren't competitive, opportunities to just "tinker around"</p> <p>Preparation for real life...financial literacy, budgeting, conversational/communication skills</p> <p>Air Conditioning</p> <p>Not enough discussion with or training of non-college bound students</p> <p>Academic and learning loss during the last year and a half. How do we make up for that and keep our kids competitive with other districts, states and the world?</p> <p>Lunch options that are more culturally representative</p> <p>Making technology more relevant</p>

Room 178

Strengths	Challenges
<p>We are actively pursuing issues regarding equity and diversifying our staff.</p> <p>Technology</p> <p>Managed 20/21 during the pandemic really well. I knew the kids were learning and interacting with teachers.</p> <p>Progressive view of buzzwords in education.</p> <p>Equity and technology are huge. District is looking to stay relevant and plan for the modern world.</p> <p>Has done a great job at hiring really good administrators, teachers and staff that really care.</p> <p>Great kick off meeting on strategic planning.</p>	<p>Improving the options for lunches while being healthy.</p> <p>Communication between parents and Pomptonian Communication as a whole. Need newsletters, better website, ease of use. Keep the website updated. Information is not always current. School level sites are not always updated.</p> <p>More communication on the great things happening in the district. Not consistently communicated throughout the district. Highlights of what is happening in the schools. Put it out there ahead of time. People don't know so they speak negatively. Leverage the PTA pages of each school. PTA information is clear. Academically we need more communication as to what is happening. We don't know what is going on at other schools. District calendar should have more specifics as to location and location within the school. Information is buried sometimes. Too many clicks.</p> <p>Family engagement when making decisions. More parent engagement to incorporate community resources.</p> <p>Transparency report as to what is happening in the district.</p>

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

	<p>Communication about efforts regarding diversity and equity in the curriculum. We need a strings program in the district. Dance studio not being used at the HS. Offer Dance and drama classes. Town newspaper is not publicizing the music programs. Diversity of the student population is misrepresented. Computer system does not count "other" properly. Multiracial category is needed. Defaults kids as white. Surveys distributed by district are not created/designed properly so data can be collected accurately. Needs to be improved. Need Data Analytics and other classes needed in the real world at the HS. Teachers need more training on how to communicate with parents in a professional manner.</p>
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The following **common themes** emerged from the groups

Strengths	Challenges
<p>Technology Honoring Cultural Differences Dedicated Teachers and Staff Block Scheduling Social and Emotional Learning Hearing Student Voices Diversity in the Community Supportive PTA Parent Involvement</p>	<p>Options for non-college bound and classes in real world skills Diversity Communication Air Conditioning Instructional Space Before and After Care Lunches Special Education Transportation Environmental/Green Initiatives Diversity in Hiring Dual Enrollment Student Achievement Benchmark Testing</p>

The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:

Tuesday, October 19, 2021, at 7:00 pm, at the Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School Auditorium.

Sign-in begins at 6:30 pm.

Meetings are scheduled for 1.5 hours. Meetings start and end promptly.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District Strategic Planning Meeting #1 Outcomes

During the October 19th meeting we will create a shared vision together for the future of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood School District . . . we will talk about our aspirations and expectations for our students and school district.

Please join us. We look forward to seeing you!

Preregistration is mandatory.

If you have not registered for the October 19th session, please call the Superintendent's office
(908)- 232-6161 ext. 41102 or ext. 41103

No walk-ins permitted.