

# Cultivating Excellence



STRATEGIC PLAN  
2021-2026



# LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Greetings,

We are excited about our new 2021-26 **Marion County District Strategic Plan: Cultivating Excellence!** When we embarked upon this strategic planning process our goal was to create a plan that would serve as our roadmap for us to cultivate excellence for each of our students. This strategic plan is different from ones we've done in the past. It's not about compliance. It's about implementing multi- year initiatives that push us forward, helping us move closer to our goal of "world class."



We were fortunate to have many internal and external stakeholders to provide input to help craft our **Strategic Plan**. The plan consists of 6 priority areas or "drivers" that guide our day-to-day work. For each priority there are clearly identified goals or desired outcomes. Another essential component of the plan is the district's focus on educational equity, specifically the work that is being done to increase educational access and opportunities that lead to the elimination of barriers and build the district's capacity to provide innovative, effective and relevant services to its students, staff, and families.

Though the pandemic presented very unique challenges it also created the opportunity for us to rethink education and the way we do business and we are excited about the work ahead! Working together and using this strategic plan as our guide to ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction, we will realize our vision and mission!

Marion County School District is committed to **Cultivating Excellence** for students and becoming a world-class system.

With gratitude,

*Kandace Bethea*

Dr. Kandace Bethea  
Superintendent

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## OUR VISION:

Educating,  
preparing, and  
inspiring tomorrow's  
citizens and leaders.

## MISSION

Marion County School District prepares young people to choose the future they dream about, whatever that dream may be.

We are a learning organization that is constantly seeking ways to make its workplace and learning environment better for adults and students throughout the county. Through dynamic partnerships with students, families, and the community we harness the power of our collective assets to inspire innovation through collaboration.

## OUR CORE VALUES

EMBRACE DIVERSITY

BE STUDENT-CENTERED

DEVELOP ACADEMIC  
EXCELLENCE

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY

MODEL A GROWTH MINDSET

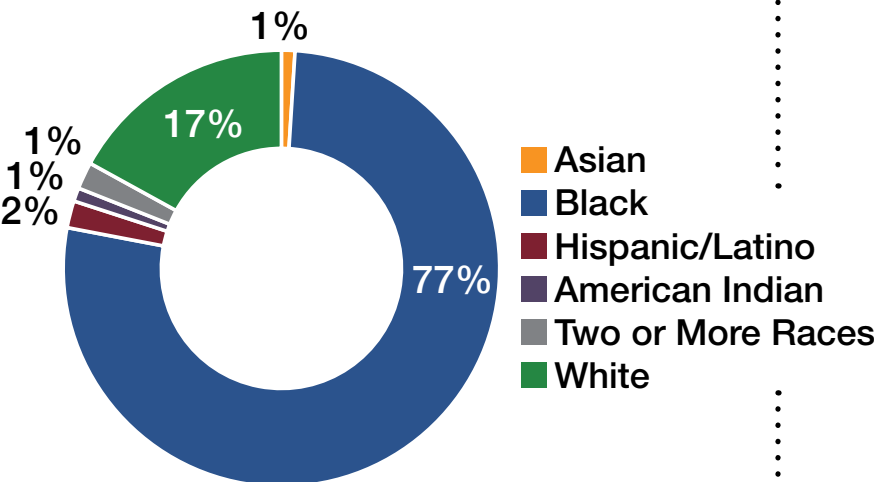
# DEMOGRAPHICS & FACILITIES

 **4,100+**  
**STUDENTS**

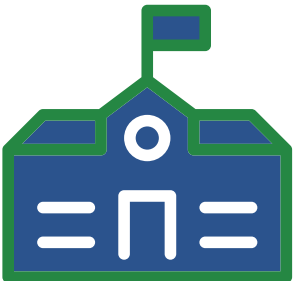
 **100%**

**free and reduced  
lunch rate**

as a member of the Community Eligibility  
Provision (CEP).



**9** **core campuses  
and 3 programs in  
separate buildings**



## NINE CORE SCHOOLS

- Creek Bridge STEM Academy
- North Mullins Primary
- McCormick Elementary
- Palmetto Middle School
- Mullins High School
- Easterling Primary
- Marion Intermediate
- Johnakin Middle School
- Marion High School

## SIX SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS

- Academy for Careers & Technology
- Academy of Early Learning
- Early College
- Marion Virtual Academy
- Montessori
- Success Academy

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The development of Marion County School District's (MCSD) 2021-2026 5-year strategic plan, **Cultivating Excellence**, has been a detailed process which began in December 2019. The intent of the strategic plan task force was to ensure that this new strategic plan would be a living document that would serve to guide the district in achieving academic excellence over the next five years as well as align the district's initiatives with those of the Marion County community.

Between December 2019 and June 2021, MCSD gathered together a cross-functional task force composed of district and school leaders with the purpose of developing an authentic and innovative 5-year strategic plan. The team and Board of Education refined the district's mission statement, vision statement, core values, and developed the Marion County Profile of a Graduate. The task force then set out to develop goals, indicators, benchmarks, and innovative strategies that would support the district in achieving its goals.

Although our strategic planning efforts began in January 2020, unfortunately due to COVID-19 and the unprecedented challenges and adaptations we had to make, the planning efforts were paused and the district focused on ending the 2019-2020 school year positively and geared up for a successful school opening in August 2020.

In December 2020, we restarted the planning effort and recalibrated the process based on where we left off. As part of the development process, the team gathered input from the MCSD board members and conducted several focus groups with

parents, students, teachers, administrators, and members of the business community. The purpose of these focus groups was to solicit the reaction of stakeholders to MCSD's strategic plan. The team set out to ensure that the information was clear and concise for multiple audiences. Finally, the focus groups also provided additional feedback on what they wanted to see reflected in the plan. Based on the feedback, information was shared with the district team members who then worked in the priority groups to further define the benchmarks for the goals identified. The teams worked on the completion of these goals from April 2021 – June 2021.

Another intentional aspect of developing the MCSD strategic plan was to align the school district's plan with the Marion County Economic Development Commission's Education and Workforce plan. Recognizing that being able to attract, develop, and maintain workforce talent is critical for the retention and recruitment of business and industry, the MCSD strategic plan leverages innovative strategies to support attracting, developing, and retaining the workforce needed in the county now and in the future.

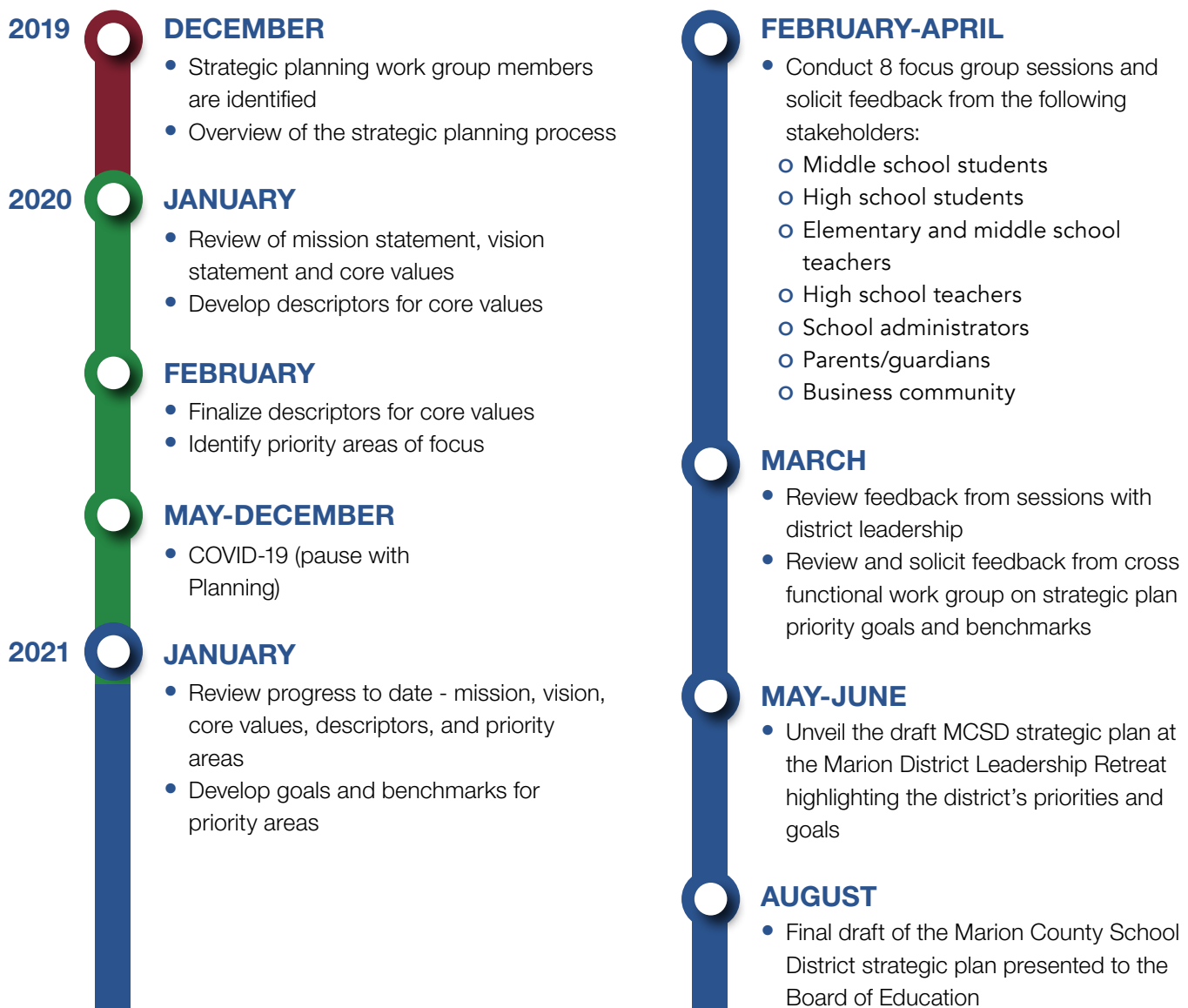


While the strategic planning process took longer than originally anticipated, we wanted to be sure we hit the mark. Our intentional approach took into account the current stresses facing our district as well as staff and students adapting to virtual learning. Based on the lessons learned from the onset of the pandemic, we devised a coherent strategy on

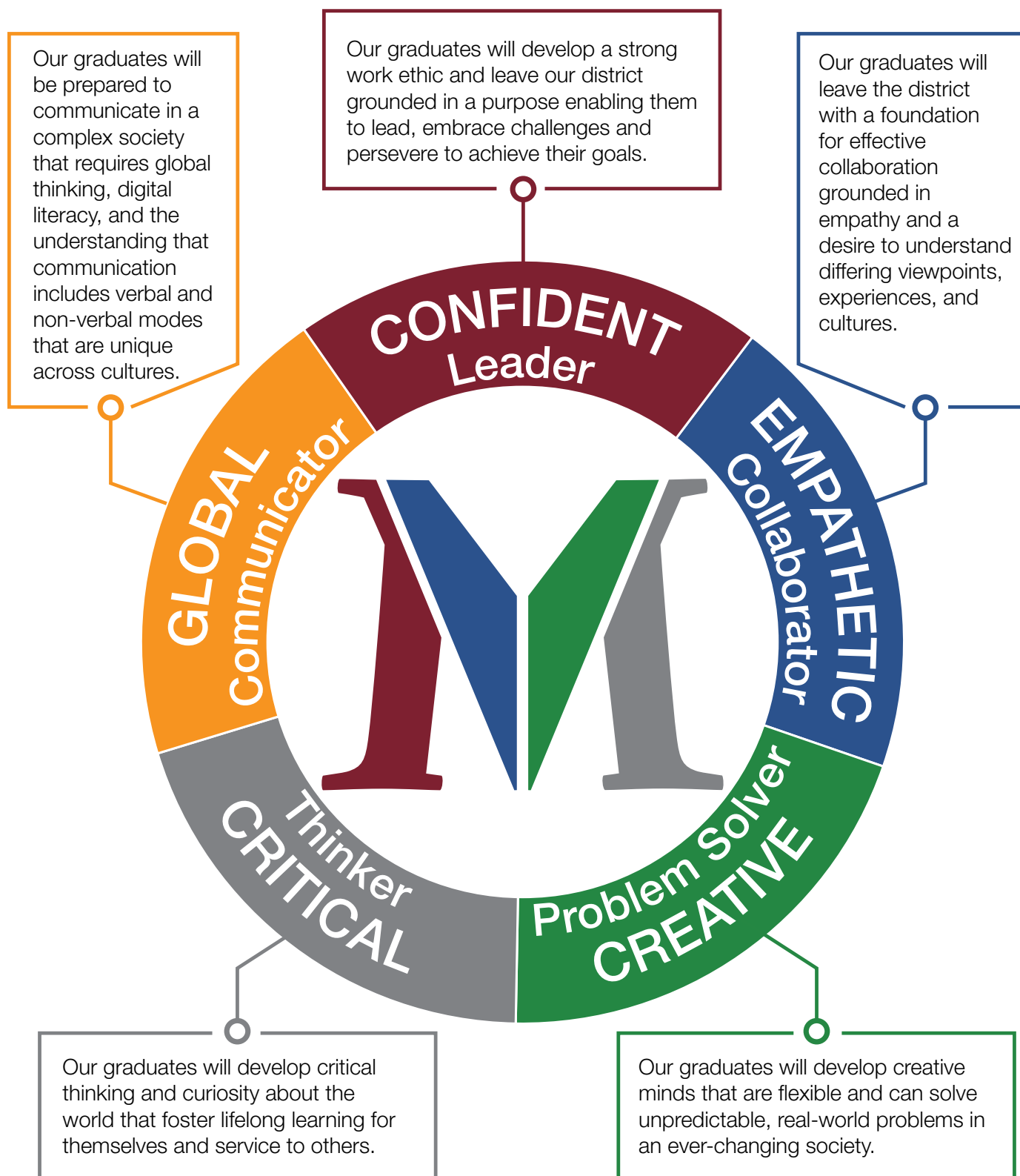
how to move MCSD forward and incorporated the perspectives of our stakeholders. This time allowed us to come together as a district and community to focus on how we best equip and support our students to have the confidence and critical thinking skills to pursue their dreams and passions.

Presented below is an overview of our 2019-2021 strategic planning process.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING TIMELINE



# PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE



# OUR VALUES



## **EMBRACE DIVERSITY**

We work proactively to eliminate the opportunity gap.

## **BE STUDENT-CENTERED**

We put our students' needs at the forefront of all we do.

## **DEVELOP ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

We aspire for high quality instruction every day for every student.

## **STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY**

We view education as a partnership among students, parents, families, and community.

## **MODEL A GROWTH MINDSET**

We are asset-based and believe we can and we will. We believe in us and will create positive change in ourselves, our students, our community, and our world.





## PRIORITY 1 EMPOWERING EXCELLENT STUDENT LEARNING



Student success refers to every student meeting individual growth goals and accountability. Our passion for the success of our students motivates us to do what is needed to accomplish our goals by providing support for all.

### GOALS

Expand and improve K-12 offerings for academic programs of choice that promote college and career readiness.

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Deliver high quality curriculum, instruction, and interventions that meet the needs of students.

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Expand and improve K-12 offerings for academic programs of choice that promote college and career readiness.

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## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

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### **Excellence for Every Student**

- High-quality curriculum
- Student-centered standards-based instruction
- Multi-tiered Systems of Support
- Social-emotional learning
- Data systems to inform instruction

### **Equitable Access to High Quality Instruction**

- Enhanced educator clarity around standards-based instruction
- Continuous and individualized coaching and support for school leaders and teachers
- Building level instructional leadership teams
- Professional learning communities
- Aligned common planning processes and protocols
- Common assessment tools
- Strategic and aligned professional learning opportunities for all educators
- Instructional Rounds

### **Innovative Learning Choices**

- Dual credit learning opportunities
- Montessori learning opportunities
- Expanded STEM academy learning opportunities
- Expanded community partnerships to support work-based learning opportunities



## PRIORITY 2 CULTIVATING TALENTED AND EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES



Our staff are a valuable asset. We work hard to retain talented staff while recruiting year-round for new talent. Everything we do is an opportunity to recruit or retain new Marion County School District team members.

### GOALS

**Recruit** a highly effective staff that proactively engages students for success. Deliver high quality curriculum, instruction, and interventions that meet the needs of students.

**Retain** a diverse and high-quality staff that is representative of our student demographic.

**Create** a career pathway to inspire retention and advancement.





## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

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### Culture of Educator Support

- Continuous and individualized coaching support
- Adult social-emotional supports
- Surveys and feedback
- Teacher voice
  - Advisory committees
  - Participation on key district-level task forces
- Instructional leadership teams

### Diverse Workforce

- Innovative teacher recruitment system
  - Social media campaigns
  - Virtual and live recruiting events
- Diversity in hiring practices
- On-boarding teams
- Retention practices to support diversity
  - Career ladder to support professional advancement
  - Recognition/Celebration strategies
  - Salary study to refine MCSD salary scale
  - Leadership Academies
- Career Pathways to support professional advancement



## PRIORITY 3 SUPPORTING THE WHOLE CHILD



We believe it is paramount to establish safe and supportive learning environments that promote social and emotional competencies of staff and students.

### GOALS

Effectively implement research-based strategies and curriculum that support social-emotional learning to create a positive learning environment.

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Communicate, provide and utilize resources to support the social-emotional needs of students and staff in the district.

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Staff and students will demonstrate and model the SEL competencies: self-awareness and social awareness.

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## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

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### **Resilient and Compassionate Schools**

- Culturally responsive practices
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support/Social-emotional Learning Task Force
- SEL bootcamps and implementation of SEL practices
- Recognition programs for SEL implementation
- Professional learning communities focused on SEL
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Flexible learning models

### **SEL Resources and Support**

- Intentional collaboration with outside agencies
- Parent university
- SEL resource development
- Differentiated outreach and support for families and staff

### **Learning Opportunities Focused on SEL for Educators, Students, and Parents**

- Integrate SEL with student and parent outreach
- Student and parent recognition opportunities based on personal growth





## PRIORITY 4 CONNECTED AND ENGAGED STAKEHOLDERS



Effective communication creates opportunities for authentic dialogue and build stronger working relationships. We strive to create a system where students are engaged, parents are participating in school and at home, and there is frequent collaboration between the district and our community partners.

### GOALS

Enhance the supports for parent and family connectedness to the district through established communication structures.

Improve the ongoing engagement of students, staff, families and community.

Proactively promote the district's successes.



## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

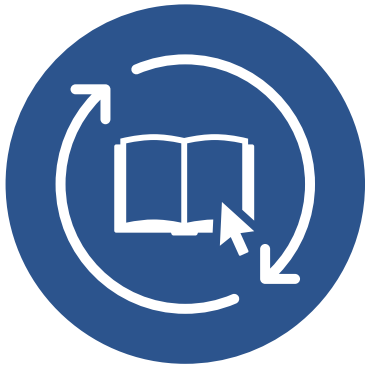
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### Effective Structures for Communication

- Systems and protocols for district and school website updates/refresh
- Standardized teacher web page expectations
- Professional development for school-based webmasters
- Social media presence for all schools
- Streaming media to increase communication

### Stakeholder Engagement

- District outreach efforts with community organizations, business partners and other external stakeholders
- Partners in Education program
- Semi-annual Business Partners' Breakfast
- iImagine Works shadowing program
- Quarterly newsletters
- Communications Advisory Team
- Living Room sessions with the superintendent
- Actively engage with local state and federal legislative delegation, local civic organizations, chambers of commerce and downtown revitalization organizations
- Engage families in their children's education by offering communications in English and Spanish



## PRIORITY 5

### ANYTIME, ANYWHERE, ANY PACE STUDENT LEARNING



We commit to transforming how we stimulate the teaching and learning experiences for students through evolving technologies and innovative instructional practices.

## GOALS

Students' technological resources will be aligned to support diverse learning environments.

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Engage teachers in ongoing instructional technology coaching and professional development to inspire classroom innovation.

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Improve access to technology and use it to accelerate personalized learning for all students

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## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

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### **Equitable Access and Opportunity to Learning**

- Expand student learning opportunities beyond brick and mortar
- All-inclusive on-line course catalog
- Effective synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities
- Digital citizenship supports
- Technology taskforce
- Virtual learning environment for staff professional development
- Technology showcase events
- Community classes designed to improve technology skills

### **Technological Infrastructure**

- Personalized learning opportunities with 1:1 devices
- Updated technologies to enhance student learning
- Technology system and support upgrades
- Device refresh systems and protocols

### **Technology Supports**

- Annual satisfaction surveys
- Additional technology support specialists
- IHE partnerships
- Student IT internal internships



## PRIORITY 6 EQUITABLE RESOURCE ALLOCATION



We strive to equalize the access and flow of resources to remove barriers and yield positive outcomes for all students.

### GOALS

Improve educational opportunities for all students.

Align system wide resources and operations with district priorities.

Decrease achievement gaps between student sub-groups.



## STRATEGIES AND HIGHLIGHTED ACTIONS

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### Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Strategic bus driver recruitment plan
- Diversified and quality nutritional meals
- Preventative maintenance plan designed to maximize district's resources
- Equipment and facility systems and protocols
- Facilities study
- Safety systems to ensure all coaches are CPR/First -Aid certified
- Monthly safety audits
- Fund allocation systems that support equitable distribution of funds to all schools
- Five-year capital improvements plan to sustain district buildings and systems/infrastructure

### Operational Initiatives

- Monthly budget review process
- Proactive systems for establishing clear and stable funding resources
- Annual fiscal audits



# GLOSSARY

**Achievement Gap:** The “achievement gap” in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures.

**Common Assessment Tools:** A set of tools that standardize the method of evaluating student learning, progress and knowledge retention, ultimately acting as a tool that provides prompt feedback on the effectiveness of specific teaching content, formats and styles.

**Core Values:** The fundamental beliefs of MCSD. These guiding principles dictate behavior and can help people make decisions for the district.

**Data Systems:** Collect, store and manage vast amounts of data about students, teachers and schools — data that can be used to improve educational outcomes.

**Educational Equity:** Educational disparities based on race, economics and other dimensions of difference are reduced and eliminated. Positive school outcomes are distributed equitably and proportionally across all demographic and identity groups. Negative outcomes and disproportionality are reduced for all groups.

**Educational Excellence:** We keep the bar high in all we do. We educate students for life and for reflective citizenship. We empower students and employees in the preservation of their identity and culture. Substance, depth, and critical thinking are more important than compliance or test scores.

**Equity:** When race, economics and learning disabilities do not determine quality of life, opportunities, and outcomes.

**Highlighted Actions:** These priority projects within each strategy specify actions aimed at helping to achieve each measurable goal. These highlighted actions are aligned with those of school and department improvement plans, which also identify implementation processes and measures.

**Instructional Leadership Team:** The campus ILT consists of the campus principal and key campus leaders responsible for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the targeted improvement plan, monitoring student performance, and determination of student interventions and support services.

**Measures:** Ways in which MCSD will determine the extent to which goals are being implemented.

**Mission:** A brief description of MCSD’s fundamental purpose both for those in the educational setting and for the community. It answers the question, “Why do we exist?”

**Portrait of a Graduate:** A shared vision that communicates a community’s aspirations for all students

**Professional Learning Community:** A group of educators who decide to come together regularly to learn with and from each other on needs they have identified. They talk about the value of collaboration and how this community has helped them stay connected and supported.

**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support:** A framework utilized by schools to provide targeted support for students

**Social-Emotional Learning (SEL):** An integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

**Strategies:** High-level actions for how the district plans to achieve each goal. Identified within each strategy are highlighted actions, which are specific priority projects that help achieve each measurable goal.

**Vision:** A clear statement that describes what MCSD is working to achieve in the future.



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