

ALL FORWARD

Strategic Pathways for Lower Merion School District

Approved by the Lower Merion Board of School Directors
November 17, 2014

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November 2014

Dear Lower Merion School District Community,

I am pleased to present to you our new strategic plan, *All Forward: Strategic Pathways for Lower Merion School District*. A draft of this plan had been posted for a one-month public review and comment period beginning October 17, 2014. Public comments and questions were submitted via email to communitycomments@lmsd.org or by mail to LMSD Strategic Plan, 301 E. Montgomery Ave., Ardmore, PA 19003. A final version was submitted to the Board of School Directors for formal approval on November 17, 2014.

Our new plan is the result of many months of information gathering, analysis, and careful thought and planning. It incorporates feedback from thousands of community members, including students, teachers, alumni, parents, and local residents. To all those who played a role in this process, your contributions are deeply appreciated. Special thanks to our dedicated steering committee, a diverse and talented group of 70 community volunteers that devoted significant time, energy, and enthusiasm to develop the core principles of the plan.

When we began our planning process, we had asked stakeholders to think big, to be bold, and to share their greatest hopes and aspirations for our schools. The school community certainly answered the call. *All Forward* differs greatly from previous LMSD strategic plans, both in content and structure. Rather than a tactical guide with step-by-step instructions, the plan serves as a strategic compass for the next five years and beyond. We designed it to be actionable, inspirational, and accessible to all members of our school community.

Five “bold statements of strategic intent” provide the framework of our plan. These statements, crafted by our steering committee, represent where we want to be as a school community and indicate a shift from where we are today in how we define student success, develop curriculum, support professional learning, engage students, and partner with our community. It is important to note that the intent of the plan is not to solve a problem or fix a failure. Rather, it serves as a necessary next step forward in our evolution as one of the finest public school systems in the United States.

We, as a community, will transform this strategy into action. We will build on current practices and programs in our schools that reflect the direction of the plan and will encourage the development of innovative prototypes to stimulate progress and growth. Systemic change will not happen overnight. These efforts will take time, reflection, and revision. They will also require extensive communication. Much of the first year of implementation will be dedicated to providing opportunities for community members to learn about, discuss, and, ultimately, take ownership of the plan. As the plan evolves, we will continue to provide updates and ongoing opportunities for feedback.

Collaboration, innovation and celebration are consistent themes throughout the plan and characterize the community's work in developing this document. Our plan embraces a collective, intentional, positive approach to change. It is driven by our belief in continuous improvement and an unyielding passion for high-quality public education. It represents our commitment to the children of Lower Merion and Narberth now and forever.

Thank you for your support of our schools. We welcome your feedback and partnership as we implement our new strategic plan.

All Forward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wagner Marseille', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Wagner Marseille, Ed.D.
Acting Superintendent of Schools
Lower Merion School District

Our mission is our central purpose, and it is what drives our actions. This mission statement, developed by previous strategic planning teams, continues to define our work and remains unchanged. All Forward reflects this enduring mission.

MISSION

Committed to excellence and continuous improvement, the Lower Merion School District strives to ensure that all students achieve their highest level of critical thinking and creativity, that they value themselves and the diversity of others, and that they are knowledgeable, contributing citizens capable of excelling in a rapidly changing world.

This is accomplished by individuals engaging in innovative, active experiences tailored to myriad ways of learning and in partnership with our community.

Our past and more recent history provide context for this strategic plan. We believe having a sense of our shared narrative is critical in planning for our future success. What follows is drawn from material compiled by the Lower Merion Historical Society. We are grateful for our partnership with this important community organization.

LMSD THEN AND NOW

The extraordinary legacy of Lower Merion’s public schools began at the turn of the 19th century with the generosity and vision of one of the community’s earliest residents. Jacob Jones, a Quaker farmer and landowner in Bala Cynwyd, spent much of his later years pursuing a dream of providing free, quality education to all children in Lower Merion. Jones saved money, set aside land, and established a trust in his 1807 will to transform his dream into reality. Though he wouldn’t live to see the school completed, the trustees of his will fulfilled his wishes by opening the Lower Merion Academy in 1813. The new school would provide a free education to “poor and orphan children” of both sexes, regardless of religion and race, who lived in Lower Merion Township.

The school was a bold idea, and an enormous, unprecedented undertaking. It was also a remarkable success. The Lower Merion Academy became the first “public” school open to children throughout the community and attracted students from every neighborhood. It became the center of Lower Merion’s academic life, complete with a community library and a host of educational programs for residents.

In 1834, Pennsylvania enacted a law to “establish a general system of education by common schools.” Lower Merion became one of the first communities in the Commonwealth to embrace the legislation and by 1835, six schools, including the Academy, formally joined together to form the Lower Merion School District. The new Board of School Directors built their first schoolhouse, “Wynne Wood” by 1836. With the community’s population growing, the directors built additional schools and expanded existing facilities over the next few decades.

The arrival of regular train service transformed Lower Merion dramatically during the late 19th century from an agrarian community and summer resort for wealthy Philadelphians into a thriving middle-class suburb. New homes and commercial developments were clustered near stations along the Main Line, providing an attractive, accessible alternative to city living. A 1913 Pennsylvania Railroad brochure promoted the opportunity for families to escape Philadelphia for “the charm of suburban life, with its pure air, pure water and healthful surroundings, combined with the educational advantages provided, churches, stores and excellent transit facilities to and from the city.” Though the language might be revised slightly for today’s audience, many of the same qualities continue to attract families to Lower Merion in 2014.

A growing, educated population demanded a system of high-quality public schools, complete with superior facilities, top-notch teachers and a first rate curriculum.

During the early part of the 20th century, the District launched a school construction boom that saw seven new schools built between 1910 and 1930 in all corners of the community. Curricular offerings expanded and an increasing number of students sought to obtain a high school diploma. The first Lower Merion High School students attended classes at the former Ardmore Avenue School from 1894-1910 before LMHS found its permanent home on Montgomery Avenue. Dedicated on December 2, 1911, "Lower Merion Senior High School" was an impressive granite and stone edifice considered to be one of the finest new educational facilities in the country. The 17-acre property came complete with three stone-arch entrances, landscaped grounds and a football stadium.

The new school was the centerpiece of a District that had gone from educating several hundred students just a few decades earlier into one that now served thousands. LMHS was a source of immense community pride and school spirit soared.

By the middle of the 20th century, the District had developed a national reputation for preparing students for post-secondary success. Students received a well-rounded, liberal arts education complete with an enviable array of co-curricular opportunities at all levels. High school graduates attended the finest colleges, served with honor in the armed forces, and transitioned directly into the workforce, skilled in a variety of trades. Enrollment surged by more than 3,000 students between 1950 and 1960, prompting the opening of four new schools in the western part of the Township, including Harriton High School in 1957. The new schools were designed to be at the forefront of educational innovation. Harriton's open, "California-style campus" reflected an effort to support student wellbeing and foster greater connections between students and staff.

As the schools grew, there were increasing demands from community members to better address the needs of all students. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s brought to light educational inequities and de facto segregation in Lower Merion schools. At the time, the majority of African American elementary school students attended the Ardmore Avenue School, which had fallen into disrepair and was inferior compared to other schools in the District. Most white students in Lower Merion did not attend schools with an African American peer until they arrived at junior high school. In 1963, the Board voted to close Ardmore Avenue and send its students to several other elementary schools, marking the beginning of desegregation at the primary level in Lower Merion.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the District explored new educational methods, opening an alternative school for high school students and piloting the "open classroom" model at the elementary level. A declining birth rate eventually led to the shuttering of several schools, including Ardmore Junior High School on the Lower Merion campus. By 1990, District enrollment was at its lowest level since the 1930s, with fewer than 5,200 students.

The next two decades marked an extraordinary time of change for LMSD. The District embarked on an extensive capital improvement program that led to the modernization of every school in the District capped by the construction of two new high schools to replace the existing Harriton and Lower Merion. The District reopened a renovated Belmont Hills Elementary School in response to a new baby boom. Technology became an integral part of the student experience; computers and the Internet transformed learning, and the District became one of the first in the nation to build a wireless infrastructure. World language instruction was added at the elementary levels in an effort to better prepare students for an emerging global economy. The District introduced a variety of interdisciplinary, team-taught offerings in the middle schools as well as the International Baccalaureate diploma program at Harriton. For the first time, the District's strategic plan focused on eliminating historic achievement gaps and supporting the holistic needs of students.

The District's commitment to eliminating achievement gaps was, in large part, the result of a partnership forged with a group of African-American parents in 1997. This partnership evolved into the Committee Addressing Race in Education, and as it grew to include more voices, focused collective efforts on learning about the influence of culture, and in particular race, in education and institutionalizing common language about the essential elements and guiding principles of cultural proficiency. This work has guided curriculum and instruction practices across the District, impacting all students.

Today, more than ever, Lower Merion's public schools distinguish our community. The District remains a beacon of opportunity and destination of choice in an increasingly volatile landscape of public education. In a recent survey, residents cited the community's convenient location and high-quality public schools as the two "best things about living in Lower Merion." Our schools are points of pride and connection. They provide vital services, programs and employment. They produce graduates who go on to do great things around the world and who frequently return home so they can educate their own children in Lower Merion. In an era of rising costs, declining revenues, and unfunded mandates that have devastated school systems across the country, this community has held sacred its commitment to preserving the qualities that define the Lower Merion experience.

Not surprisingly, more and more people want access to this experience. District enrollment is surging once again. In 2014, enrollment surpassed 8,000 students for the first time since 1975. Recent classroom expansion projects have been completed at several schools with more on the horizon.

LMSD has the resources and the expertise to harness the opportunities of today, overcome challenges, and ensure continued success. The new strategic plan points the way.

In many ways, our strengths and challenges distinguish us from other school systems. They represent unique opportunities for growth and change that require careful focus and attention.

STRENGTHS and CHALLENGES

Among our many **strengths**, we are:

- a community with a longstanding commitment to high-quality public education, admired for providing students exceptional curricular and co-curricular opportunities;
- well-known locally and nationally for high levels of student achievement and faculty excellence;
- supported by a healthy tax base, with stable revenues and a strong bond rating;
- in close proximity to Philadelphia, with access to numerous cultural institutions, universities and recreational amenities;
- committed to safe, supportive learning environments in our schools;
- fortunate to have excellent, recently-modernized facilities;
- strengthened by an engaged parent community;
- proud of our commitment to sustainability;
- engaged in serving the community, locally and abroad;
- small enough to facilitate consistency and collaboration among and between buildings, but big enough that each school has its own identity and unique culture;
- the destination of choice for families seeking top-notch special education services in the Philadelphia region;
- able to attract top talent at all levels and positions.

We have **challenges** as well. For example, we are:

- planning for the impacts of continuing enrollment growth;
- seeking to eliminate historic achievement gaps;
- developing strategies to serve increasing numbers of students with more complex needs;
- seeking to maintain and build upon current programs with strategic budgetary decisions and alternative revenue sources;
- balancing District requirements with state and federal obligations;
- promoting innovation while navigating legal considerations and policy requirements;
- adapting to educational trends and staying ahead of the curve;
- seeking to nurture alumni and community support of schools in new and more productive ways.

Planning is a community effort. Our new plan is the result of an extensive stakeholder engagement process and its success requires ongoing community contributions.

CONVENING THE LMSD COMMUNITY

Lower Merion School District launched an ambitious, year-long comprehensive planning process in the fall of 2013 to provide direction for public education in our community for the next five years and beyond. In recent years, strategic planning in LMSD had been driven largely by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's strategic planning requirements, and plans were developed to address specific issues and perceived weaknesses. The 2014 LMSD planning process was designed to be more expansive in scope and significantly more inclusive of our diverse, dynamic community. Thousands of stakeholders contributed to the 2014 plan, sharing their thoughts, ideas, and dreams for our schools through community surveys, community forums, focus groups, and public meetings.

This extensive community feedback provided the foundation for the work of the District's strategic planning steering committee, a team of 70 community volunteers representing a variety of constituent groups. Participants included administrators, parents, staff, students, Board members, alumni and other community members. Over the course of multiple planning days, the team engaged in thoughtful, honest, and purposeful dialogue to develop the core principles of this plan. Highlights of the team's work included a series of learning journeys in the Delaware Valley to explore themes and concepts of interest at innovative organizations, schools, and businesses as well as daylong immersions in LMSD schools to get a better understanding of current strengths and challenges in the District. The team also did an extensive amount of homework, reviewing written materials and videos, and engaging in online discussion.

Throughout the process, team members developed an enormous sense of camaraderie and pride. The experience affirmed the importance of developing a forward-thinking plan that represents the entire community.

During the summer of 2014, the District convened an administrative leadership team and smaller group of steering committee members to transform the work of the committee into an accessible, written plan. This document is the result of that work. The steering committee reviewed and affirmed a final draft prior to its presentation to the LMSD Board of School Directors.

It should be noted that the District's strategic plan runs parallel to the "LMSD Comprehensive Plan." The Pennsylvania Department of Education requires that school districts submit a "comprehensive plan" every five years via an online system. This system is essentially a fill-in-the-blanks exercise with rigid structural limitations. As the LMSD steering committee developed the 2014 strategic plan, a group of District staff simultaneously crafted language drawing upon this plan for input in the state's "comprehensive plan" web tool. Content submitted by school districts can be reviewed by the public, but the format is not particularly user-friendly. Moving forward, the

District will refer to the strategic plan and not the comprehensive plan for strategic direction.

The District's strategic planning process was skillfully facilitated by Insyte Partners, a strategy, change, and leadership consulting firm. Insyte provided structure for community engagement and created the conditions for deep exploration, honest conversation, and progressive action. The District also drew upon a visit by administrators to Harvard Graduate School of Education's Strategy in Action program for inspiration around planning frameworks and outcomes.

Successful implementation of the plan will require ongoing participation from community members and extensive communications efforts. The District will maintain an active community engagement strategy and reconvene steering committee members at various times over the next several years to monitor, review, and refine the plan.

READING THE BOLD STATEMENTS OF STRATEGIC INTENT

What follows are five bold statements of strategic intent, which are the result of tremendous teamwork and months of deliberation. Each statement is presented in seven parts:

- Each bold statement represents an ideal for which we are striving.
- A big idea follows each bold statement and describes changes that need to happen in order for ideals to become reality.
- Background information provides further justification for why change needs to occur.
- Strategies to achieve change provide a broad design for how we will move forward.
- Metrics to assess change provide a broad design for how we will measure progress.
- The Superintendent spearheads the leadership cascade for change.
- Success indicators highlight what our experience will be when we move in the direction of change.

A glossary is provided afterwards to help readers better understand key terms.

BOLD STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT 1: REDEFINING SUCCESS

LMSD's definition of success incorporates creativity, critical thinking, love of learning, and innovation for each and every child to encourage globally aware and engaged students. We reach far beyond standardized test scores, embracing and celebrating the many ways in which students demonstrate individual growth.

What is the big idea?

We will transform how we define, measure, and report student achievement with a focus on each student's individualized growth and mastery in areas that extend beyond traditional academic indicators.

Why do we need to do this?

Lower Merion School District has a long legacy of graduating successful students who go on to do great things in the world. The District is also committed to supporting the needs of every child and eliminating achievement gaps that have persisted for too long. For those who have lived the LMSD experience, we know that success has always been more than an answer on a test, a number on a chart. While there is value in measuring academic growth through standardized assessments, there are important outcomes worth measuring that state assessments aren't designed or intended to reveal. We believe there is a need to develop a holistic system of assessments aligned to our values and goals. What's most important – what we want to ensure – is that we have kids who are happy, who feel safe and supported and inspired, and who are prepared to overcome challenges, lead, and change the world.

It's time to redefine success. This is our obligation and responsibility to our children.

How will we do this?

- Create protocols that measure development (i.e. social, emotional and physical wellness), creativity, critical thinking, love of learning and innovation so that growth is more broadly measured
- Re-examine how student growth is reported so that it is more comprehensive (i.e. narrative)
- Expand use of assessment protocols (e.g. portfolios) so that assessment practices are balanced; include more self-reflection, embedded formative assessment, criterion-based measurement (e.g. rubrics), performance-based measures (e.g. create presentations, complete projects) into curriculum
- Transform graduation requirements and the distribution of courses and experiences
- Provide professional learning opportunities

How will we measure progress?

- A full range of measurement protocols that align with our expanding definitions of success, including:
 - Protocols that measure development (i.e. social, emotional and physical wellness), creativity, critical thinking, love of learning, and innovation
 - Student self-reflection of growth based on essential learning targets
 - Student surveys and exit interviews at each level
 - Traditional indicators of success, such as standardized assessments
- Assessment calendar that balances students' well-being, the need to measure growth and allows professionals to collaboratively and promptly provide feedback
- Evaluations of professional learning

Who will be responsible?

Superintendent and Superintendent's designees

How will we know we have moved the District forward?

- Reduced standardized testing
- Closed achievement, equity, access and opportunity gaps
- Strong academic performance of students as measured by traditional indicators
- Student reports of higher levels of social, emotional, and physical well-being and of feeling empowered to take academic risks
- Multiple paths to success, before and after graduation, valued and celebrated by students, faculty and the community

BOLD STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT 2: TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULUM

LMSD offers a transformative interdisciplinary curriculum that is student-driven and fosters innovation and positive risk-taking. It transcends Standards, is inquiry-based, and connects the classroom to the world. Our curriculum encompasses diverse perspectives, promotes global awareness, and makes use of culturally responsive teaching and learning practices. This dynamic, adaptable curriculum provides vertically and horizontally aligned curricular experiences, ensuring every student learns from the connections across subject areas and receives a comprehensive and balanced education. Subject material is relevant to the world our children will enter in college and as adults. Innovation is the rule and not the exception.

What is the big idea?

We will shift from content area silos to a connected curriculum that prepares students to transfer knowledge and thinking strategies across disciplines. Our commitment to this will drive scheduling at elementary and secondary levels. We will shift traditional structures in the school day and school year to flexible and fluid time periods that allow students to explore relevant content and interests without the barriers of class periods, walls or buildings.

Why do we need to do this?

For learning to be relevant and reflective of the world we live in today, we need to draw upon – and maximize the opportunities that the world affords. Instead of rigid standards, we should be talking about limitless possibilities. Instead of individual, isolated subjects, we should be thinking about interconnected systems. The next great advances – and the solutions to our most pressing challenges – won't come from a textbook, they'll come from a generation that understands the people, places and systems around them and thoughtfully, passionately embraces the pursuit of knowledge.

How will we do this?

- Expand curricular experiences outside of the school building and the school day
- Embed an inquiry-based/thinking process approach across curriculum; thinking within one discipline (e.g. historians or scientists) transfers to others
- Infuse literacy, science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics across the curriculum in all grade levels
- Apply a social justice lens to themes in the curriculum
- Apply culturally proficient teaching and learning practices that help students to gain different types of capital
- Create incremental service learning opportunities for students leading to a year-long capstone project

- Create opportunities for all LMSD students to engage in learning with students from other cultures
- Develop flexible, fluid scheduling and calendars
- Provide professional learning opportunities

How will we measure progress?

- A system of curriculum review that embeds incremental service learning opportunities, contextualizes why content matters in the community and world and incorporates use of external experts and resources
- Educators' observable and documented growth in the classroom environment and instruction domains
- Student self-reflection of growth
- Student surveys and exit interviews at each level
- A system to increase opportunities for LMSD students to learn with students from other cultures
- A system of schedule review to determine how the schedule supports the goals of this plan
- Evaluations of professional learning

Who will be responsible?

Superintendent and Superintendent's designees

How will we know we have moved the District forward?

- A revised and expanded curriculum that is vertically and horizontally aligned and a schedule that supports this
- Expanded curricular experiences outside of the school building and the school day
- Students with well-developed skills
- Excellent global awareness and cultural competency for each student
- Strong teamwork and complex problem-solving skills for each student; students' transfer of knowledge to novel situations.

BOLD STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT 3: COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LMSD is a community that values educators and the critical role they play in ensuring our students' success. We trust our professionals and seek to support their perpetual growth and development through collaborative professional learning opportunities rooted in self-reflection and inquiry. We believe in providing resources to staff that encourage a culture of engagement, innovation, and exploration.

What is the big idea?

We will transform our approach to professional learning from a top-down model to one that honors and harnesses our educators' collective wisdom. We will provide venues across disciplines and buildings for professionals to collaborate, explore, and innovate in order to sustain their continual growth and support the intended outcomes of this plan.

Why do we need to do this?

The power and beauty of teaching is rooted in the relationship between student and teacher. The best teachers learn with and from their students. They constantly adjust and adapt their practice to foster deeper connections and understanding. They remain connected to and cognizant of the community and the greater world. As we prepare the next generation for success, we must create a system and an environment that ensures the growth and development of our teachers. This requires time and resources, communication and collaboration, and a culture that values personal reflection, individuality, and innovation. Above all, it requires trust. The future is not cookie-cutter classrooms; it's laboratories of learning, guided by professionals empowered to model the qualities and skills we want to see in our students.

How will we do this?

- Develop a coordinated professional learning plan that includes more collaboration (e.g. to reflect, to inquire, to research, to implement, to evaluate, to determine implications for future practice) and is more educator-directed
- Embed professional learning opportunities during the school day
- Build the capacity of educator-leaders
- Revise the professional learning calendar and its scheduling
- Provide opportunities for educators and parents and guardians to learn together to ensure positive outcomes for each student

How will we measure progress?

- A professional learning calendar that makes more effective collaboration possible
- Professional learning opportunities provided
- Professional Learning Community (PLC) rubrics
- Protocols for embedded professional learning and peer review
- Teacher satisfaction surveys (and self-reflections if shared)
- Opportunities provided for educators and parents and guardians to learn together

Who will be responsible?

Superintendent and Superintendent's designees

How will we know we have moved the District forward?

- Strong professional growth results
- High educator engagement and trust
- High student achievement and well-being data

BOLD STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT 4: STUDENT-DRIVEN SCHOOLS

LMSD students engage in navigating their own learning and growth in close partnership with our professionals. We create an environment where students value self-reflection and inquiry and play a central role in identifying their passions and achieving their goals. We nurture and celebrate the individual strengths of our students and help them to develop competencies that ensure their success beyond the LMSD experience.

What is the big idea?

We will adjust our system from one characterized by heavily-prescribed requirements to one that affords more self-directed goal setting and positive risk taking within safe learning environments across the K-12 continuum.

Why do we need to do this?

Students must be active agents in the learning process in developmentally-appropriate ways. The research is clear: when students are intrinsically-motivated, they are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges; their growth will be more lasting and they are more likely to transfer learned competencies to novel contexts. We seek to ensure that each student is fully engaged in personal goal setting and reflection in developmentally appropriate ways throughout their learning journeys. We must commit to shaping classroom cultures that make it safe for students to make themselves vulnerable to one another and to be receptive to feedback from teachers and peers. We must commit to providing the space for students to find personally meaningful purpose and to develop a genuine sense of agency. Doing so will require our district to be forward-thinking enough to shift the locus of control where appropriate in order to prepare our students for the future.

How will we do this?

- Foster a growth mindset at every level
- Develop a protocol for student goal-setting and self-reflection
- Provide students with developmentally-appropriate opportunities to pursue differentiated areas of interest within the structured framework of a given lesson or subject
- Provide opportunities for more student voices to be heard across the District (School Board) and in the classroom
- Expand enrichment opportunities for students to pursue curricular interests (summer institutes [e.g. Write On creative writing])
- Create schedules that increase opportunities for students to be flexibly grouped
- Provide professional learning opportunities

How will we measure progress?

- Protocols to measure students' self-reflection, self-confidence, resilience, and progress toward personal goals
- Student surveys and exit interviews at each level
- Opportunities for student voices to be heard
- Opportunities for students to pursue personal interests
- A system of schedule review to determine how to flexibly group students
- Evaluations of professional learning

Who will be responsible?

Superintendent and Superintendent's designees

How will we know we have moved the District forward?

- Strong student self-reflection, self-confidence, and resilience
- Strong student satisfaction and outcomes
- Variety of valued and celebrated student post-graduate pathways (e.g. college, work and travel)

BOLD STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT 5: SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

LMSD takes pride in being a central part of the community. We value the diverse, dynamic talents of every member of our community and their enduring support for public education. We honor this spirit through consistent outreach and the creation of meaningful relationships to promote experiential learning, ongoing service, and engagement that will strengthen and support the student experience during the LMSD years and beyond.

What is the big idea?

We will transform our approach to community outreach from one that is less coordinated to one that strategically leverages and maximizes community resources to strengthen our schools.

Why do we need to do this?

Lower Merion is characterized by a deep sense of civic pride and involvement and a passion for public education. Our community deeply values what we do and the ability of our schools to transform lives, develop life-long learners, and affect positive change in the world. Yet, there has often been a disconnect between our schools and the diverse community that surrounds us—both in making best use of the myriad resources we share and in the ways we communicate and build trust. In an era of public education where maintaining programs and preserving the status quo is seen as a significant achievement, we see an opportunity to grow, innovate, and lead as never before—but only if we learn to harness the power and spirit of community. This effort will require a comprehensive system of partnership and engagement with alumni, parents, residents, businesses, research institutions, and stakeholders near and far. Together, we can ensure the long-range success of our students and schools and move Lower Merion School District forward as a standard-bearer of global K-12 education.

How will we do this?

We will:

- Build reciprocal school-community partnerships that maximize and value the resources of our diverse community
- Create a strategic alumni development program (student, parent, teacher, administrator) to maintain and maximize life-long connections
- Leverage our expertise and the expertise of partners to create learning opportunities and experiences for graduates, parents, and community members
- Launch business-development role to explore alternative revenue sources for District and identify and maximize strategic partnerships
- Audit our current communication practices and identify opportunities to strengthen practices moving forward

- Create opportunities for students, families and community members to successfully transition into our schools
- Engage a broader audience for District events and activities

How will we measure progress?

- Community surveys
- Communications audit
- Communication protocols
- System to measure Return On Investment (ROI) for business development initiatives

Who will be responsible?

Superintendent and Superintendent's designees

How will we know we have moved the District forward?

- Meaningful internship, service or community exploration experience for all students
- Community that highly values LMSD schools
- High alumni engagement (e.g. giving, social media participation, volunteerism) and growth of alumni network
- Increase in business partnerships aligned to District's mission and new revenues from these sources
- Increase revenues via alternative sources (i.e. non-tax revenues)

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE: LMSD 2020

A vision of what LMSD will be after successfully implementing the strategic plan.

Lower Merion School District moved the needle. Public education has changed a great deal in America in recent years, and Lower Merion is an important reason for it. With our bold strategic plan, we took a calculated risk – shaking up a system known for excellence and positioning it for something even better.

We proved that redefining success is worth the effort. There's minimal talk of test scores and extensive focus on student engagement. Students are learning, they are asking questions and they are exploring side-by-side with peers, guided by skilled educators. Knowledge is valued and pursued. Each student has a clear set of goals and teachers are focused on helping students meet and surpass them. Success isn't measured on a bell curve, but through more meaningful accomplishments – learning to code, launching a business, writing a novel, performing a song, presenting research on the impact of an invasive species on the local ecosystem. Colleges and employers are taking note – LMSD grads are better prepared for post-secondary work, equipped with skills needed to contribute and lead in the 21st century.

Students who wish to more deeply explore a subject area or who are struggling with material find educators who are supportive in their learning journeys. The faculty dedicates time to come together to strategize, debrief, discuss, and review their work. They take great pride in knowing their students and understanding their unique needs and interests. Teachers are more than colleagues; they are teammates. They constantly seek opportunities to improve their craft. They have the license and desire to innovate without red tape. Faculty members annually develop and propose prototype programs to colleagues; the best ideas become reality at the start of the next school year.

Lower Merion has transformed the idea of a traditional school day. Learning takes place 24/7, 365 days per year in a variety of settings. Classroom learning is supplemented by online learning experiences, providing a global network of experts representing multiple disciplines and fields. Students and staff regularly collaborate with people around the world, sharing learning experiences across borders, cultures, and perspectives. Every student participates in at least one local service program and a workplace internship by the time they complete high school. Students have the opportunity to study abroad as part of their development as global citizens.

Educators from around the country and the world are frequent visitors to our schools. They've come to explore how we've closed the achievement gap through a deep commitment to student engagement and culturally-responsive curriculum. They've met with our teachers about creating schools without fear, where students are willing to take risks, where they learn that the process is often more important than the outcome, where they support one another socially and emotionally as well

as academically. Additionally, our staff and students are anticipated speakers on the national circuit and have produced popular, viral videos borne from their experiences in a positive, innovative school culture.

Change has been possible in part through our willingness to think anew about school funding. Unprecedented levels of alumni engagement, dedicated and strategic outreach to partners, and the development of revenue generating summer and online learning programs have provided the means for a host of new opportunities. Our community partners are continually sharing ideas and committing resources that help support student learning and staff innovation. A recent partnership with a major technology company, for example, has enabled students to explore and create applications for augmented reality in video gaming.

Our schools are an extraordinary source of pride to the community. More than ever before, community members are on campus, enjoying concerts and events, participating in our acclaimed alumni speaker series, volunteering their time, and asking how they can support programs. The schools have even inspired new investment in Lower Merion Township and Narberth linked to collaborative workspaces, innovation laboratories, and global learning programs. People want to be near us, with us, and for us. Our schools are not just a draw for families with children but an essential resource for the entire community.

Change has taken time and commitment. Patience, a virtue often missing in public education, has proven its worth here. Transforming our schools has not been an overnight process driven by a handful of independent initiatives or innovative programs. Instead change has been systemic. It has taken clear vision and sustained effort. We made a choice at a critical time in history and today our students are reaping the benefits and changing the world.

These working definitions are intended to help readers better understand key terms in this plan. They are not absolute; rather, these definitions reflect the thinking around these terms at the time of the plan's development.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Achievement, Equity, Access, and Opportunity Gaps: Significant and persistent disparities in educational outcomes between different groups of students

Collaboration: Educators in school and in the community sharing responsibility for students and partnering together to achieve desired results

Creativity: Thinking or doing something differently

Critical thinking: A complex combination of reasoning skills whose application helps students to more fully engage in their learning

Cultural proficiency: An approach to preparing for and responding to issues that emerge in diverse environments

Culturally responsive: An instructional approach that values and builds from students' cultural diversity and that connects content to this diversity in order to more effectively engage and motivate students

Curriculum: The combination of content, instructional strategies, and assessments

Educators: School staff who interact with students

Engagement: The degree of attention, curiosity, and interest observed while students are learning and which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn

Flexible grouping: An umbrella term that encompasses a variety of fluid ways to group students during instruction

Globally aware: Knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions to act in an informed manner, demonstrate empathy, effectively communicate, and build community across social, cultural, political, environmental, geographic, and economic boundaries

Horizontally-aligned curricular experiences: A core set of essential content, skills, and practices that are consistent across a grade level or subject areas

Individual growth: Progress in identified areas over time

Innovation: A new idea

Inquiry: Seeking information by questioning

Inquiry-based: A framework for learning driven by questions; this approach in which students and educators partner to seek resolutions to questions is based on the premise that inquiry is engaging and this engagement leads not only to better understanding but also to further questioning

Interdisciplinary curriculum: An approach that combines knowledge, skills, values, processes, and language from more than one discipline

Mindset: The belief a person has about basic abilities; mindsets can be fixed or growth oriented

Professional Learning Community (PLC): A model of ongoing collaboration among educators in recurring cycles of inquiry and action research to achieve better results for students

Professionals: Staff who interact with students in school buildings, particularly in the roles of administrator, teacher, school counselor, etc...

Risk-taking: An action that involves uncertainty

Self-reflection: Self-examination and introspection

Stakeholders: A group of people with a common interest

Standards: Common learning outcomes by the end of a grade or course

Student-driven: The active engagement of students in navigating their learning

Transformative curriculum: A progressive approach to teaching and learning

Vertically-aligned curricular experiences: What students learn in one course or grade level prepares them for the next course or grade level; teaching is purposefully structured and logically sequenced so that students are learning the knowledge and skills that will progressively prepare them for more challenging, higher-level work

This vision statement is a product of previous strategic planning teams and illustrates what we want to achieve for the future of our District. This vision statement will be updated as part of the implementation of our new strategic plan.

VISION

Students are our reason for being. We create an environment designed to fulfill the individual learning needs and aspirations of each student. LMSD develops active partnerships at all levels of our learning community and values the individual contribution of each member.

We view learning as a dynamic, innovative collaboration. Individuals learn best when their hearts, minds, and spirits are intimately engaged in the learning process.

Enter to learn. Go forth to serve.

Our values are shared truths. These enduring beliefs shape our thinking about the bold statements of strategic intent and the future implementation of this plan. The values below have been developed over multiple strategic planning processes and may be updated as part of the implementation of this plan.

VALUES

We believe that:

- All people have equal intrinsic worth.
- People learn in different ways and at different rates.
- Each person bears responsibility for the well-being of society and the quality of the environment.
- Learning occurs everywhere and is a life-long pursuit of knowledge, truth, and wisdom.
- High quality public education directly benefits the entire community and is essential for a democratic society.
- The responsibility for learning rests primarily with the individual; however, education is the shared responsibility of the student, home, and family, school and the entire community.
- Individuals learn best when actively engaged in the learning process.
- Excellence demands sustained effort.
- All individuals can be successful learners.
- High expectations yield high results.
- Society benefits when individual rights are balanced with social responsibility.
- Ethical conduct is essential to the quality of life.
- Sustainability requires fiscal responsibility.

We sincerely thank members of the Steering Committee for their service.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

| Name | Role |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Beth Aikens | Middle School Teacher - Special Education |
| Eric Almonte | Parent |
| Liz Alperin Solms | Consultant - Insyte Partners |
| Danielle Arnold-Schwartz | Middle School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Jordan Askey | Student |
| Garrett Baker | Community Representative |
| Nick Bell | Elementary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Amy Boutselis | Student |
| Becky Bowlby | Ed Specialist - School Counselor |
| Anne Brletich | Middle School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Candace Brown | Ed Specialist - School Counselor |
| Kim Cipolla | Elementary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Brian Cote | Administrator |
| Shannon Davis | Secondary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Katherine Demaray | Secondary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| James DiDio | Community Representative |
| Scott Eveslage | Administrator |
| Andrea Fina | Ed Specialist - School Psychologist |
| Geraldine Fitzpatrick-Doria | Administrator |
| Sherry Fletcher | Elementary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Karin Fox | Parent |
| Melissa Gilbert | Board Member |
| Penny Glackman | Elementary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Jen Goldberg | Ed Specialist - Instructional Technology |
| Kimberly Goyette | Community Representative |
| Patrick Guinnane | Administrator |
| Christopher Hall | Administrator |
| Joni Helton | Community Representative |
| Mark Hoffman | Parent |
| Erin Hughes | Parent |
| Dan Imaizumi | Secondary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Joel Johnson | Community Representative |
| Stephanie Levin | Parent |

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|--------------------------|---|
| Gael Levin-Simon | Parent |
| Russ Loue | Secondary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Wagner Marseille | Administrator |
| Daniel Martino | Administrator |
| Marie McCormick | Consultant - Insyte Partners |
| Justin McFadden | Student |
| Kiki McKendrick | Parent |
| Sara McMaster | Elementary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Harry Mobley | Parent |
| Katy Morris | Middle School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Joseph Mudd | Elementary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Gwen Nartowicz | Ed Specialist - Other |
| Rachel Nichols | Middle School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Christopher Oakes | Elementary School Teacher- Regular Education |
| Lynne Partridge | Administrator |
| Victoria Peetros | Parent |
| Maria Perna-Elias | Elementary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| JoAnn Perrotti | Bucks County Intermediate Unit External Facilitator |
| Leslie Pratt | Secondary School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Terry Quinlan | Administrator |
| Barbara Ranson | Secondary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Jayne Rauenzahn | Elementary Gifted Education Teacher |
| Gabby Richardson | Student |
| Subha Robinson | Board Member |
| Deb Rocco | Parent |
| Patty Roessner | Secondary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Wagner Santoi | Parent |
| ShaVon Savage | Administrator |
| Liz Scott | Business Representative |
| Cheynell Scott | Parent |
| Megan Shafer | Administrator |
| Jim Speer | Business Representative |
| Andy Thomas | Middle School Teacher - Regular Education |
| Robin Vann Lynch | Board Member |
| Muneera Walker | Parent |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Robbie Warshaw | Student |
| Joanna Wexler | Administrator |
| Andrea Wilson-Harvey | Secondary School Teacher - Special Education |
| Douglas Young | Administrator |

PLANNING DOCUMENTS

[Presentations to Community & Board](#)

<https://www.lmsd.org/strategic-planning/documents/index.aspx>

[Community Feedback](#)

<https://www.lmsd.org/strategic-planning/feedback-archive/index.aspx>

- [Focus Groups](#)
- [Student Surveys](#)
- [Parent Surveys](#)
- [Faculty Surveys](#)
- [Community Forums](#)
- [Community Surveys](#)

[Steering Committee Meeting Minutes](#)

<http://www.lmsd.org/strategic-planning/committee/index.aspx>