



Strategic Planning
Stakeholder Engagement Report
Fridley Public Schools

November 30, 2022

prepared by Susan Brott, APR,
Senior Strategist, CESO Communications

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01 | Background •

In May 2022, CESO Communications (CESO) contracted with Fridley Public Schools (FPS) to facilitate a strategic planning process that will guide the district over the next five years.

Following initial conversations with the district over the summer, an interview with the superintendent in September 2022, as well as a review of the district's previous strategic plan, progress reports and additional district data, CESO conducted a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process — including students, staff, parents and community members — in September and October 2022.

The goal of this phase of the strategic planning process was to provide a wide variety of engagement activities that allowed individuals to share their input. A combination of in-person and virtual engagements were used to solicit insight from stakeholders, which allowed participants to share their thoughts at times and in ways that were most convenient for them. There was also an effort to intentionally include student voices in the process in order to create a strategic plan that represents the true mission and vision of the school system.

Insights from these engagements have been included in this report. This report, along with other district reports, strategic initiatives and data will inform the work of the Core Planning Team in February as they develop a draft strategic plan.

02 | Engagement Process & Activities •

In September and October 2022, the district held several in-person engagements that included personal interviews with School Board members, focus groups and collaborative workshops with current students, staff, parents/families, alumni, business representatives and community members, and additional input opportunities for high school and middle school students. An online conversation was also available for all stakeholders to weigh in with their thoughts and insights.

In an effort to keep participants focused on the future and not on current topics or concerns, the district set out to answer the following key question:

**What do Fridley Public Schools students need to feel
PREPARED for their next step and HOPEFUL for their future?**

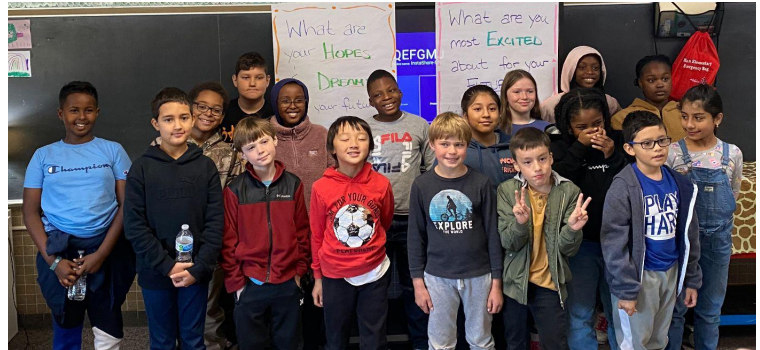
Engagement Formats & Participation

STUDENTS

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups with a broad representation of students were held with elementary, middle school and high school students. In all, the voices of nearly 50 students, spanning grades three through 12, were included in the focus groups.

Discussions included a standard series of questions about their current experiences in Fridley Public Schools, hopes and dreams for the future, current concerns and ideas for improvement, as well as how prepared they feel for their next step. The facilitated conversation also allowed for dialogue and sharing that probed more deeply the responses they provided.



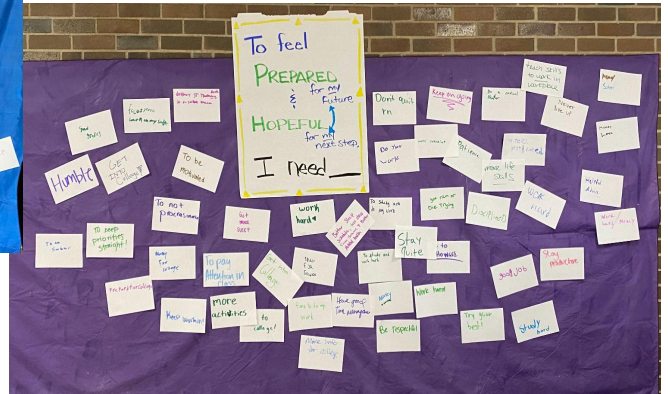
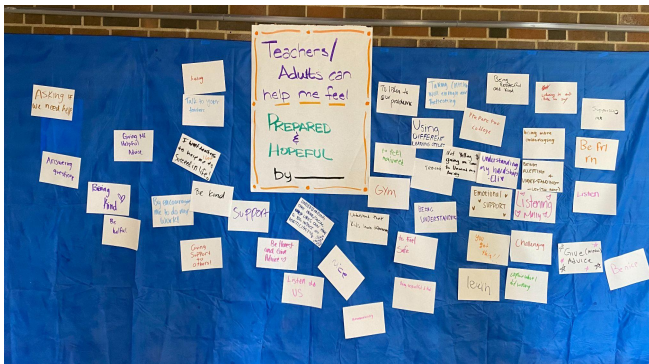
- **Elementary** - 17 third and fourth grade students from both Hayes and Stevenson elementaries were brought together for a discussion on Tuesday, September 27.
- **Middle School** - A focus group of 13 students representing fifth through eighth grade was held on Friday, September 30.
- **High School** - A focus group of 16 high school students was held on Thursday, September 29.

OPEN INPUTS SESSIONS

- **Middle School** - All Fridley Middle School students had the opportunity to respond to four general questions via an online survey in late November.
 - **Questions** - The following questions asked of students in the online survey:
 - What do you think you will be doing after graduation / five years from now?
 - How prepared do you feel for high school?
 - How would you describe your school's atmosphere?
 - What advice would you give to younger students that will attend FMS in the future?

- **Participation** - Participation was voluntary and responses were confidential. In all, 271 middle school students participated in the survey. Participation varied by grade:
 - 5th grade - 44
 - 6th grade - 136
 - 7th grade - 20
 - 8th grade - 71
- **High School** - On Monday, October 10, an open input session for all Fridley High School students was held during the lunch period. Two sticky walls were hung on the wall in the cafeteria/commons area and students had the opportunity to respond to prompt statements by writing their responses on paper and attaching it to the wall.
 - **Prompts** - Students were asked to respond to the following statements:
 - To feel prepared and hopeful for my future, I NEED _____.
 - TEACHERS/ADULTS can help me feel hopeful and prepared by _____.
 - **Participation** - Although participation was voluntary, many students provided thoughtful responses to one or both of the prompt statements.

*** A summary of student themes and responses is included below.*



STAFF

FOCUS GROUP (Leadership Team)

Prior to the start of the 2022-2023 school year, a focus group was conducted with the FPS leadership team. The discussion included questions about their current program and service offerings, what skills students will need to be successful after graduation, hopes and dreams for future students, how prepared they feel students are for their next step, and ideas to enhance and/or improve the student learning experience at all levels. The facilitated conversation also allowed for dialogue and sharing that probed the responses provided more deeply.

OPEN INPUTS SESSIONS (All Staff)

All staff were invited to participate in one of four engagement sessions. The sessions were held at various times and locations to ensure Fridley Public Schools employees had a chance to be involved. Each session was structured as a facilitated consensus workshop, providing opportunity for participants to provide their insights through individual brainstorming as well as small and large group discussions.



At the conclusion of the workshop, staff were able to group all of their ideas into key categories in response to the following workshop question:

**What do Fridley Public Schools students need to feel
PREPARED for their next step and HOPEFUL for their future?**

*** A summary of the insights from the four staff sessions is included below. See the appendix for specific categories and ideas by session.*

PARENTS/FAMILIES & COMMUNITY MEMBERS

OPEN INPUTS SESSIONS

All Fridley Public Schools families and community members were invited to participate in one of two in-person engagement sessions. Each session was structured as a facilitated consensus workshop, providing opportunity for participants to provide their insights through individual brainstorming as well as small and large group discussions. While participation was modest, participants in the workshops were very engaged and offered several ideas about the direction of Fridley Public Schools.





Similar to the staff workshops, participants categorized their ideas in response to the following workshop question:

**What do Fridley Public Schools students need to feel
PREPARED for their next step and HOPEFUL for their future?**

In addition, participants also engaged in a second workshop question focused on the experience of parents and families:

**What do parents/families need to feel WELCOMED, VALUED and
MOTIVATED to be involved in Fridley Public Schools?**

*** An analysis of the insights from the two open sessions is included below. See the appendix for specific categories and ideas by session.*

SCHOOL BOARD

In late August, CESO Communications conducted personal interviews with each member of the Fridley School Board. Interview questions were similar to the questions asked in other focus groups, with an additional focus on leadership of the district and their visions for the future.

*** Key findings from these interviews are included below.*

ALL STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to the in-person stakeholder engagements above, all members of the Fridley Public Schools community were invited to participate in an **online conversation** via an idea-sourcing platform called Crowdcity. The conversation was open to all Fridley Public Schools stakeholders. After answering a couple demographic questions and registering on the platform using a valid email address, they were able to participate in three different forums (called “challenges”). Each challenge allowed participants to offer a response to the prompt question as well as vote on the ideas proposed by other participants and engage in a conversation thread.

*** An analysis of the ideas shared in the Crowdcity online conversation is included below as part of the key themes by audience. See the appendix for additional insights.*

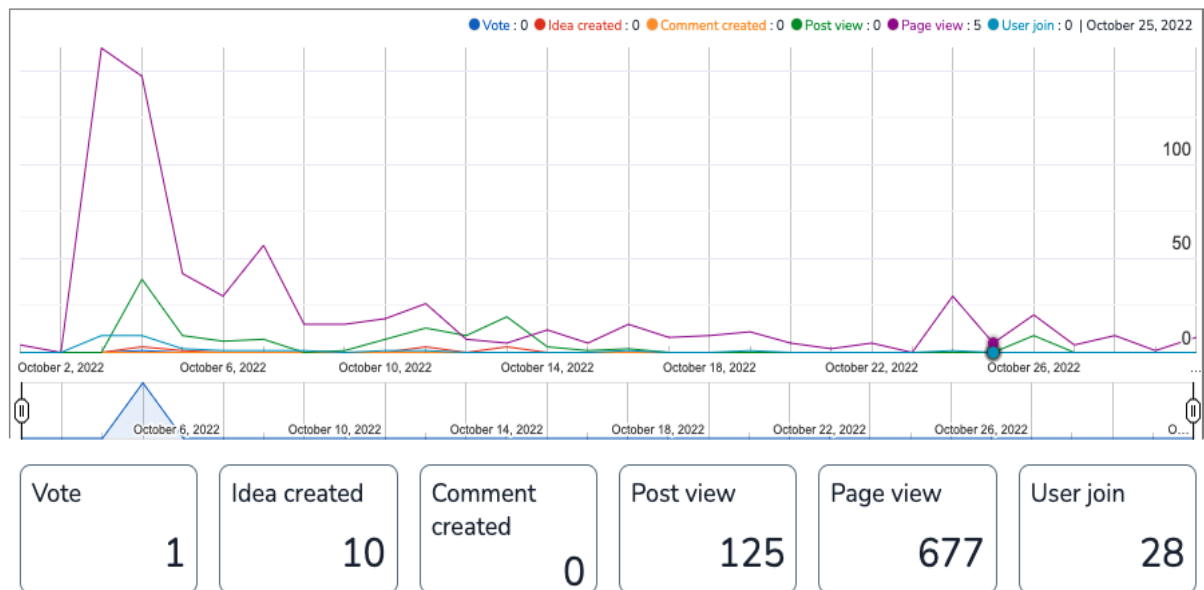
- **Questions** - The following questions, or “challenges” were posed for Fridley stakeholders:

Q1. What do Fridley students need to feel PREPARED for their next step and HOPEFUL for their future?

Q2. What do Fridley students need to THRIVE academically, socially and emotionally?

Q3. What do students and families need to feel WELCOMED and a sense of BELONGING in Fridley Public Schools?

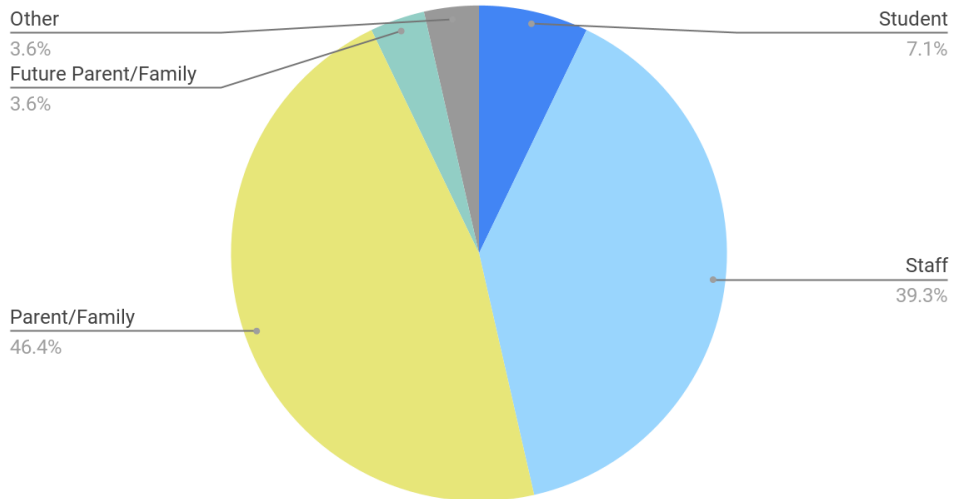
- **Participation** - As with the broader parent/community engagement sessions, participation in the virtual discussion was again modest. The online platform included 28 users who posted 10 ideas to the platform. Below is an overall look at participation in the online platform.



The following charts indicate a breakdown of participant demographics.

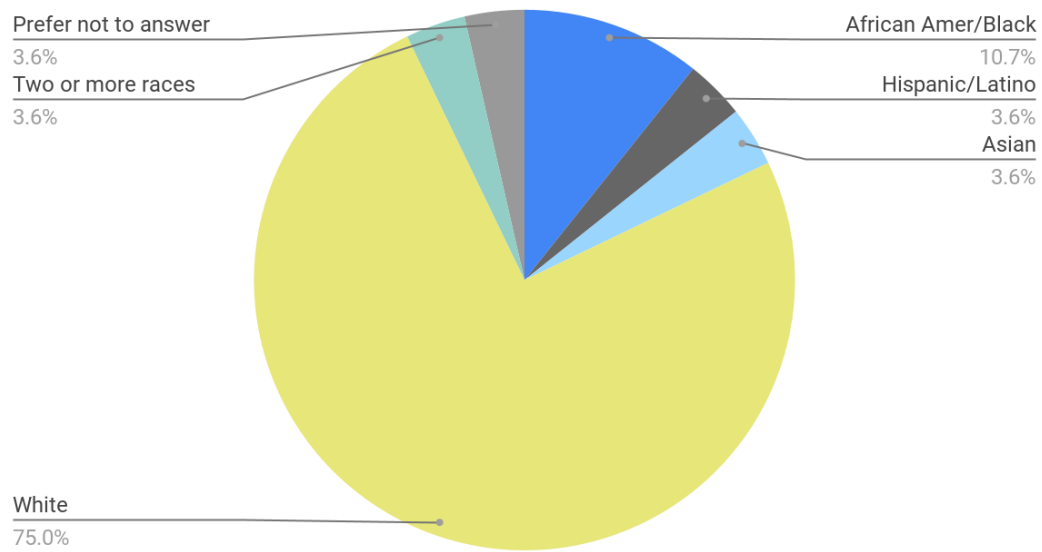
First, upon registration, participants were asked which role best described their *primary* relationship with Fridley Public Schools. The majority of participants were current FPS parents, followed by current staff.

Primary relationship with FPS



Participants were then asked to self-identify their race/ethnicity. Here the vast majority of participants identified as white, followed by African American/Black.

Race/ethnicity



03 | Key Themes •

In reviewing the feedback from the different stakeholder engagements, the following themes emerged. As noted above, additional insights and data from students, staff and parents are included in the Appendix.

Overall

While key themes and topics varied by audience, there were a few areas in which there was common agreement.

- **Expanded course offerings**, particularly in areas considered to be life skills. Financial literacy was raised as a need by all groups, as was the need to know how to operate in professional settings. Most groups also noted the desire for more world language options.
- Almost all groups reinforced the need for strong **communication, collaboration and critical thinking** skills.
- While IB was not specifically named by all stakeholder groups, the notion of FPS students having a strong sense of **civic engagement and global citizenship** was shared by members of each group. Many cited the type of learning environment and curriculum available in Fridley Public Schools, as well as the demographics of the school community in general, as key contributors to such mindsets.

It should also be noted that in every group participants held conversations related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Many talked about this being a leverage point for Fridley Public Schools. Students experiencing a variety of cultures, backgrounds and perspectives among their peers was talked of as an asset of FPS. Among staff and administration there was a clear commitment to ensuring all students and families get what they need, regardless of their background, and that barriers are removed to allow everyone access district programs and services.

Key Themes by Audience

STUDENTS

- **Academic Offerings** - Students had several suggestions for courses they would like to see added that would better prepare them for the “real world” and/or offer them ways to learn standards through different content.
 - **Additional Course offerings** – Students had many suggestions for additional classes they would like to see at the secondary level, including more world

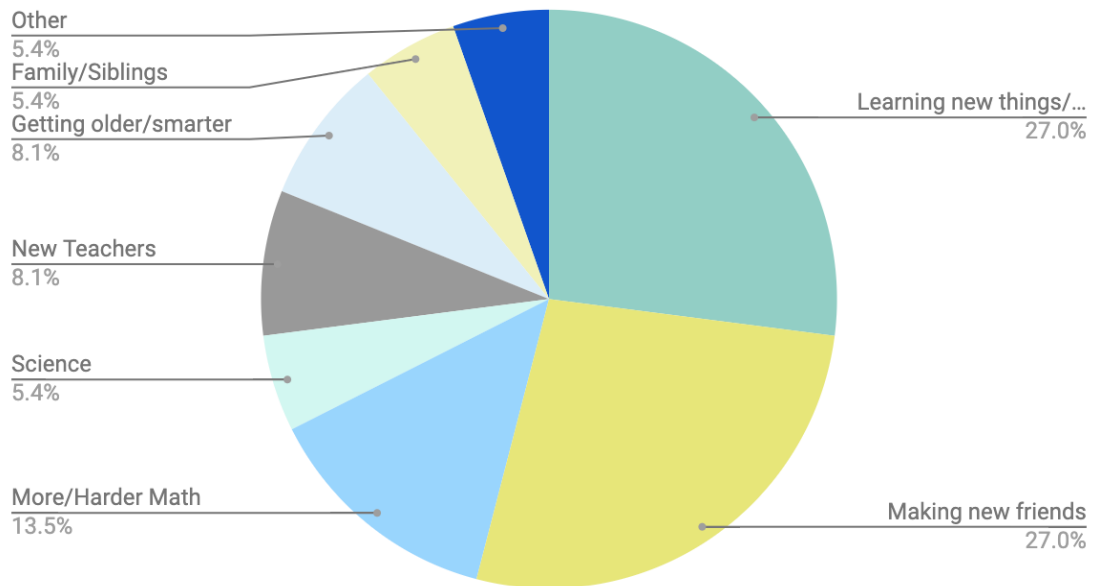
language options (i.e., ASL, Arabic, Chinese, French, Japanese, Somali), African-American history and heritage, a class on world religions, sexual health (at middle school and high school), and self-defense.

- **Applied Learning opportunities** – Students suggested that they would like to see more opportunities to earn job certification or licensure (e.g. CNA) while in high school, as well as internship/apprenticeship opportunities in the trades and other career exploration experiences.
- **Life Skills** – Many students cited the need and desire for financial literacy as a requirement for all students (i.e., managing budget, taxes, mortgage, loans, etc.) time management, mental health and stress management, what to expect in college or career, and a class like AVID that is available to all students.
- **Academic Support** - Responses in this category focused on ways staff, in particular teachers, could be more supportive. Students noted the desire for more individual attention from teachers and wanting teachers to take the time to help them understand the concepts being taught.
 - **Elementary** – Students talked about having more opportunities to be challenged when they have completed their work; and especially noted the desire to have more projects and hands-on learning experiences.
 - **Middle School** – Students talked about wanting teachers to check in with them to help them understand concepts when they are struggling. If they miss class because of illness, don't just tell them to "catch up" or give them the presentation. Meet with them to help them learn and understand. They suggested more tutoring help either during the day or online so they could get help outside of school (e.g. older students helping younger students). Some students also noted the need for more challenging academic opportunities.
 - **High School** – Students here talked about wanting opportunities to meet more with college and career counselors. (Many cited a great appreciation for the current career counselor, but recognize that he is only one person and gets stretched thin.). They also shared that they would like more regular "check-ins" (e.g. monthly) with their guidance counselors so that they don't feel like they are falling behind.
- **Mental Health** - Students talked about the need for support around mental health, anxiety and stress. Comments included concerns about the amount of homework, the stress of preparing for college or life after graduation, and being able to balance school with home and family life. Additionally, suggestions were made about the need for

more check-ins with counselors about mental health (not just academics) and training for staff on how to support the mental health needs of students.

- **Preparation for Next Step** - Students had many ideas about how prepared they feel for their next step. Generally, younger students expressed more readiness than older students, which is likely attributed to the unknowns of the “real world.”
 - **Elementary** - Most elementary students said that they felt prepared and excited for middle school, and especially look forward to having more teachers, content and classes, sports and activities, and meeting new people. Many also said they are looking forward to “more challenging math.”

What most excites you about going to middle school?



- **Middle School** - When middle school students were asked if they felt prepared for high school, responses were mixed. Several were anxious about the increased workload and whether they had the right skill sets to be successful. Others wish they had more time in middle school to meet with counselors to plan for high school and beyond.
- **High School** – Students at the high school felt that they had good academic preparation for life after graduation, but many cited the desire for more electives and options as well as real-world or life skills classes and learning experiences.

- **Relationships** - Middle and high school students talked about the impact the relationship with their teachers has on their achievement and involvement in class. Many were favorable toward the teachers at their school, but some asked for teachers to be more understanding and supportive, and to “really listen” to them about what they need. The importance of teachers to be understanding of individual student situations (e.g., personal, home/family, mental health, academic load, jobs, etc.) was a common discussion. Students also want teachers to push them to be their best and to focus on their individual interests and needs. Some also commented about how teacher attitudes and interactions influence their own engagement and attitudes toward school.
- **Student Voice** - Students noted the desire to be more involved in school decisions, especially about course offerings and choices at the middle and high school. High school students also wanted to see more opportunities for students to meet with school leaders on decisions that impact them.

STAFF

- **Connections and Relationships** - Responses highlighted the importance of strong connections and relationships for students, to include among students, students and teachers/staff, and school to home. Many talked about the shared responsibility between school and families, and the need to work together in the best interest of the student.
- **Enhanced Learning Options** - Here responses focused on the need to personalize instruction for each student, and ensure students have access to engaging curriculum and learning experiences. There was discussion about the need for more opportunities to apply their learning in the real world (e.g. internships, job shadowing, business partnerships, etc.), and for non-traditional pathways for students – for example, how they demonstrate their learning, credits earned, or pathways for post-secondary options. Discussion also focused on various age-appropriate learning needs and supports, from preschool through high school. In addition, several participants noted the need for more diverse and varied learning experiences, activities and opportunities to help students develop their love of learning and increase engagement with their school.
- **Equitable Learning Environments** – Staff here noted the need to ensure that student opportunities are accessible to all and that staffing is equitable across the district with respect to student needs. Additionally, many commented on the need for FPS staff to be more representative of the students they serve.
- **Life Skills** - Responses in this theme noted the need to provide life skills learning experiences for students (e.g., personal finance, interviews), especially at middle and

high school, as well as opportunities to explore and identify a plan for life after high school.

- **Social-Emotional Learning** - Responses here focused on the need to support the whole person, especially in regard to student mental health, social-emotional well-being and behavior. Comments also identified the need for physically and emotionally safe learning environments for both students and staff.
- **Student Voice/Agency** - Ideas in this category centered around the importance of student voice in decision-making and helping students take ownership of their learning. To do that it was noted that FPS (administration, teachers, support staff) need to be clear about learning outcomes and expectations.
- **System Support** – Teachers identified the desire for a supportive learning and work environment for both students and staff. Whether that be physical supports (e.g., classroom temperatures, technology, wifi stability) or curriculum/instructional supports (e.g., relevant and responsive curriculum, data-informed instructional decisions, multi-lingual support, etc.), teachers felt their voice and expertise should always be considered and included in site and district decision-making.

PARENTS/FAMILIES & COMMUNITY

- **Academic Offerings & Career Explorations** - Families want to continue seeing diverse course offerings and connections with future careers. Comments were made about the need to ensure students have access to, and can explore, a variety of options earlier in their school career (middle and elementary school) in order to be better prepared for high school and life after graduation.
- **Communication & Engagement** – Parents are looking for clear and concise communication from their child’s school and teachers. Many cited the various platforms used by different teachers for communication, and the different levels of communication between teachers and schools. Parents would like consistent communication models and methods, especially those families with students at more than one school, so that they can easily engage with and be true partners in their child’s education. In addition, parents are looking for more opportunities to be involved in their student’s school, especially coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic where so much was remote and they felt distanced from their child’s school.
- **Leadership Skills & Mindset** - Responses focused on making sure all students have opportunities to learn and exhibit leadership skills, to include critical thinking, collaboration and communication. They want students to understand that they need to

take ownership and responsibility for their future, and that they have a keen understanding that they are part of the local and global communities .

- **Life Skills** - Here responses noted the need to provide learning experiences focused on life skills (e.g., personal finance, interviewing, resume building), as well as opportunities for students to learn how to navigate the bigger world.
- **Safe and Supportive Learning Environment** - Responses here highlighted the desire for student-focused teaching and learning; instruction that is personalized to each student's individual needs and provides diverse course offerings. In addition, there was an appreciation for continuing the holistic approach to learning offered in FPS, including mental health, and social and emotional learning. In the end, parents want to see their children developing a strong sense of self, the confidence that they can achieve, and a genuine hope for their future.

LEADERSHIP/ADMINISTRATION

- **Enhanced Learning Experiences** - While many in leadership felt that teachers and staff are doing a good job in terms of academic learning and opportunities for students, they acknowledge that there is always more that can be done.
 - **More hands-on learning** – project-based learning, internships, applied learning, real-world opportunities
 - **More personalized learning and instruction** – meeting students where they are (challenge those wanting more, support those who are struggling), clearly articulated learning outcomes, student choice in how and what they learn, student interest to drive course offerings
 - **More electives/languages/arts** – diverse music and art opportunities outside of the traditional arts curriculum, increased options for world language courses such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Somali, as well as heritage language credits
 - **More extracurricular activities** – additional opportunities for students to be involved and engaged with school outside of class, especially at the middle school level; more “on ramps” for students to participate no matter their experience or age
- **Essential Skills for Success** - There were common ideas among district leaders about what essential skills and competencies students need to be prepared for their next step. Leaders noted that many of these are included in the [IB Learner Profile](#), although they added that FPS needs to continue leading the way when it comes to implementing and evolving IB.
 - **Critical thinking** – how to think, deciphering and distilling information, problem-solving, understanding and working through complex situations and concepts
 - **Communication** – interpersonal, face-to-face, professional

- **Adaptive & Global Mindset** – understanding perspectives different than your own, adapting to change, creativity, challenging the status quo, natural curiosity about the world around you, understanding the larger community and world
 - **Collaboration** – working in groups, teamwork, active listening
 - **Life Skills** – financial literacy (paying bills, budgeting, taxes, mortgage. etc.), self-confidence, taking risks, learning from mistakes, resilience, grit
 - **Mental Health** – understanding self care, life balance and paying attention to social and emotional needs
- **Family Engagement** – Many leaders reinforced the importance of strengthening partnerships among families and Fridley Public Schools in order to best support each student’s unique needs.
 - **Effective communication** – consistent, effective communications between school and home, especially at the classroom/teacher level
 - **Enhanced parent involvement** – increased opportunities for parents to be involved, particularly at the secondary level; encouraging and supporting family engagement in age-appropriate ways that adapt to growing independence of students as they mature and advance through system
 - **Listening for understanding** – Many noted the need for everyone (teachers, staff, administration, parents) to be focused on listening to students and to each other about what is best for each individual learner.
 - **Teacher Agency** – Several conversations identified the need to continue supporting teachers to adapt to the changing needs of students through individualized instruction, and by encouraging teachers to take risks in order to better support and engage students (e.g., trying new instructional methods, exploring new content, incorporating strategies that make learning more joyful and fun).

SCHOOL BOARD

- **Community Connections** – Several Board members identified the need to continue exploring more connections and partnerships with businesses and community leaders, to include the City of Fridley and local businesses, even if they are not located within FPS boundaries. Help community members see how Fridley has changed. The schools exemplify the demographic shifts in the community, but people who have lived in the community for a long time don’t necessarily appreciate the changes. Through these stronger connections, FPS will be better able to provide real-world learning experiences and opportunities for students (e.g. internships, career explorations, mentorships, etc.).
- **Essential Skills for Success** - School Board members shared several ideas about what they believe students need to be successful after graduation.

- **Critical thinking** – logical thinking, problem-solving, understanding and working through complex situations and concepts
- **Communication** – interpersonal communication, conflict resolution
- **Collaboration** – teamwork, working with others, understanding the impact of your actions on others
- **Open mindedness** – understanding perspectives different than your own, understanding the larger community and world; it was noted that IB presents a unique leverage point for FPS in helping students connect to the global community.
- **Life Skills** – financial literacy (paying bills, budgeting, taxes, mortgage. etc.), self-confidence, workplace expectations
- **New Learning Experiences** - Board members felt that the district was doing a pretty good job in terms of academics, but that it needed to also consider additional learning options and classes to meet students' needs.
 - **More hands-on learning** – internships/externships, applied learning, real-world opportunities
 - **More personalized learning and instruction** – meeting students where they are and helping them grow, more accelerated/gifted learning options, better articulated learning outcomes (e.g. syllabus, learning plans, expectations), more one-on-one or small group instruction
 - **More music and art** – diverse music and art opportunities outside of the traditional arts curriculum,
 - **More extracurricular activities** – additional opportunities for students to be involved and engaged with school outside of class, more “on ramps” for students to participate
- **Parent Involvement & Engagement** – Some Board members noted the need for leaders to continue listening to parents in the community and not assume that questions and concerns voices are coming from a place of negativity.
 - **Effective communication** – consistent, effective communications between school and home, especially at the classroom/teacher level, clarity around what IB means and why it is good for student learning
 - **Expanded parent involvement** – increased opportunities for parents to be involved, particularly at the middle and high schools.
- **Safe and Supportive Learning Environments** – Some Board members said that the district can do a better job of removing distractions from the classroom, including technology/phones as well as students who misbehave. Concerns were also raised about the negative perception of Fridley Middle School. Multiple Board members also noted the need to ensure students and families know who to contact for help and support.



04 | Next Steps •

Next Steps

The comprehensive engagement data report will be presented to the School Board on December 6, 2022. The purpose of this presentation is to review the key themes and highlights of what was heard during the fall engagements. No action by the Board is necessary.

In February 2023, a core planning team composed of students, staff, parents/families and community members will convene for two days to review this report as well as other district data as part of a workshop. The purpose of the workshop will be to develop draft strategic directions that will be part of a larger district strategic plan.

Following that, the draft directions will be shared with the community to gather feedback and identify gaps. The team will then reconvene following this engagement period to review the insights collected and make recommendations for changes. The recommendations will then go to district administration for review and refinement, from which a more comprehensive strategic roadmap will be developed.

Once this roadmap is developed, members of the core planning team and district leaders will present the draft strategic plan to the School Board in the spring for review and approval.