

# Executive Summary

A result of the small group work activity

## Community Engagement Sessions (CES) #1 • Jan. 25 & 26\*, 2022

(\*virtual session via Zoom)

An estimated 155 participants attended the **Vision Forward** community engagement session on Jan. 25, 2022. Another 13 individuals attended an online virtual session on Jan. 26.

The topic for the first **Vision Forward** community engagement program was *“State of the District - An Overview of the St. Joseph School District.”* Participants heard a presentation by Superintendent Dr. Doug Van Zyl that featured several key factors about the school district including academics, staffing, enrollment and finances.

To view the presentation, visit [VisionForwardsjsd.com](http://VisionForwardsjsd.com). Following the presentation, participants worked in 27 small groups to complete the tasks discussed below. Following is a summary of the responses from the groups. Verbatim responses can be found at [VisionForwardsjsd.com](http://VisionForwardsjsd.com).

**Task #1:** Based on the information provided in tonight’s presentation, what most surprised you? What concerned you most?

Presented below are the most common responses given across the 27 tables (virtual and in-person responses combined) completing work activities:

Information Most Surprising	Number of times mentioned
Dropout and graduation rates	12
Facilities (capacity, number of empty seats, number of current schools)	10
Languages spoken	8
Attendance	6

Enrollment (decline, rate of decline etc.)	5
Teacher retention, recruitment, compensation and professional development	4
Student Teacher ratio in classrooms	3
Free and Reduced number of students	3
ACT scores	3
Academic performance	1
Program opportunities available	1
Inequities by school	1

<b>Information Most Concerning</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Teacher retention, recruitment, compensation and professional development	10
Attendance	7
Dropout and graduation rates	5
Enrollment (decline, rate of decline etc.)	5
Academic achievement	4
Facilities (capacity, number of empty seats, number of current schools)	3
Middle school models, inequities	2
Languages spoken	1
Community support and engagement	1
Lack of funding for capital improvements; deferred maintenance	1
Realignment	1
Funding for behaviour interventionist and support	1

Socioeconomics	1
Meals for students	1
Student safety (do students feel safe)	1
Community partnerships	1
Program opportunities available	1
Lack of tax base	1

**Task #2:** What topics would you like to learn more about as we continue our *VisionForward* process?

**Suggested High Priority Topics:**

Recruiting and Retaining Quality Staff

More than any other topic, the issue of recruiting and retaining quality teachers and other employees was the most common topic listed by attendees. Responses tended to mirror the most common response to Task #1 including — how do we recruit and retain staff, how can salaries be increased, are there other incentives to retain staff, how do we grow and develop teachers, and what is learned from exit interviews.

Facility Capacity and Empty Seats

The topic of school capacity and empty seats was also listed as a top priority for further discussion. The most common response in this category was the question of why there are so many empty seats in classrooms and if facilities are being used as efficiently as possible.

Other facility use responses included comments about the impact of boundaries on open seats in schools, what are the optimal number of students and size of buildings to provide the best learning opportunities, the best ways to optimize facilities, equity throughout the district and middle school disparity.

Enrollment and Attendance

Attendees listed several key questions related to student enrollment and attendance. Topics included - what was attendance prior to COVID, how does the district compare to other similar districts, efforts to address the dropout rate, what are underlying reasons for low attendance and how to motivate students to attend.

## Academics

Several of the groups listed various topics related to student learning and achievement. Questions included more information about graduation rates, preparing students for college, military or trade school, preschool education, 21st-century curriculum and skills, middle school alignment, retaining students, ACT scores and best practices to improve achievement.

## Other Topics

Other topics mentioned included information about student behavior, plans to improve school facilities, boundary lines, finances and district resources and community support.

### **CONSENSUS POINTS**

#### **Points of general agreement from the work activity**

- At the start of the process, **Vision Forward** participants had a variety of suggestions to serve as the basis for developing the district's next Action Plan. Topics relating to recruitment, retention and professional development of a diverse staff and facility usage/capacity were the most commonly mentioned topic areas.
- More than any other topic, **Vision Forward** participants would like more information about District efforts to ensure high quality teachers are in every St. Joseph School District classroom.
- Other topics recommended to be addressed through the **Vision Forward** process are:
  - Student attendance and enrollment including dropout rate.
  - Facility inequalities and efficient usage, especially middle school and high schools.
  - Student achievement.

**For a complete listing of all responses  
see the CES #1 Verbatim Response Document**