



Mass insight
education & research

Harrisburg School District District Diagnostic

Presentation to the Harrisburg School Board
February 28, 2023

Objectives of the District Diagnostic

- 1 To gather information about the district's current status and to identify key strengths and areas of growth.
- 2 To prompt reflective conversations about the district's current performance relative to its desired state.
- 3 To identify opportunities to improve performance by providing recommendations designed to promote organizational effectiveness, and efficiency, while maintaining an unwavering focus on student achievement.

District Diagnostic Elements

- 1 Vision, strategy, and culture
- 2 Organizational clarity and collaboration
- 3 Focus on the instruction
- 4 School management
- 5 Central services and operations
- 6 Finance
- 7 Talent management
- 8 Stakeholder engagement and communications
- 9 Data
- 10 Focus on equity

Overview: process to create report

Step 1: Data Collection & School Visits

Mass Insight collected data from a variety of sources and engaged stakeholders to evaluate district systems and processes. This included performance data, HR data, existing reports and documents, feedback gathered in interviews and focus groups, and surveys collected from school staff, central office staff, students, and families. Mass Insight also conducted school visits at six schools to observe classrooms and common spaces.

Step 2: Review & Synthesis

Then, Mass Insight analyzed all information gathered by looking across evidence gathered in each of the ten elements in order to identify organizational strengths and areas for growth and improvement.

Step 3: Recommendations

Mass Insight developed recommendations based on diagnostic findings. Recommendations are high-level and intended to inform conversation and a planning process.

Data Collection & School Visits



Data and Document Review

Includes assessment results, organizational charts, current and prior strategic plans and financial data.



Survey Results

Includes school leaders, school staff, students, and families. Surveys were available to students and families in English and Spanish.



Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews with central office leadership, central office department directors and staff, school principals and assistant principals, union representatives, and school staff.



Classroom walk-throughs

Classroom walk-throughs in six schools: two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools.

6 school visits

37 classroom visits

20 school staff voices represented across focus groups

22 interviews with central office administrators

465 school staff survey responses

1,292 student survey responses

106 family survey responses

District Diagnostic Elements

1 Vision, strategy, and culture: Clear vision, strategy and manageable set of priorities for the district that recognize the local environment (e.g. regulations, statues, contracts, funding, politics, governance) and district's capacity for change while promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for all.

2 Organizational clarity and collaboration: Clear central office structures, processes, and policies that work together to support school and student success.

3 Focus on the instruction: Curriculum, materials, tools and supports that help school leaders, teachers and other school staff constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.

4 School management: Policies, structures, and systems that create the conditions needed for school success, maintain accountability for results, and enable effective school leaders.

5 Central services and operations: Effective delivery of services to schools, allowing school-based educators to focus on teaching and learning.

6 Finance: Alignment of financial resources with district needs and priorities.

7 Talent Management: Systems and processes to recruit, place, develop, and retain talented staff.

8 Stakeholder engagement and communications: Intentional systems and processes to maintain open lines of communication with staff, family and community stakeholders.

9 Data: Data is available and informs decision-making at all levels of the district and in schools.

10 Focus on equity: Policies, structures, systems, and resources ensure equitable, high quality education for all students, including students with exceptional needs.

Progress: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

Clear vision, strategy and manageable set of priorities for the district that recognize the local environment (e.g. regulations, statues, contracts, funding, politics, governance) and district's capacity for change while promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for all.

Strengths

- Mission, vision, shared values, and core beliefs are student-centered, inclusive, and reflective of a community that strives to provide a high-quality educational experience to all students.
- The district is making concerted efforts to exit receivership.
- The recovery plan reflects data-informed priorities to address the district's improvement areas of academics, administration and governance, operations, financial management, revenue, and workforce.

Evidence of Improvement

- Board members are receiving training by the receiver about their governance roles.
- New central office leaders are developing personal and collective leadership.
- New central office leaders are also developing trust and collaborating to create systems, structures, and processes to support district operations.

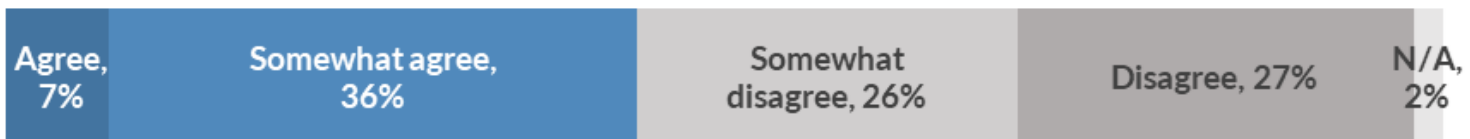
Evidence: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

What staff shared about the district's vision and plan...

The district has a clear and compelling vision.



The district has a plan to achieve that vision that has been clearly articulated to all employees.



While a majority of staff are aware of the district's vision, less than half feel a clear plan is in place to bring that vision to life.

Evidence: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

What staff shared about district priorities...

“We have all these great ideas, and we try to do all of these things all at the same time, and it... gets everything bogged down... I think we need to focus.”

“The district is going after too many things at once.”

“The vision and what’s being done are different things right now.”

“There are a lot of goals that we have been notified of, but there are not clear ways we are going to get there. There is a lot of talk but no action.”

“First steps are taken, great ideas shared, but then everything stops. There is no accountability or real push to follow through.”

“We have a recovery plan, but no one talks about the internal steps to achieve it.”

District priorities for improvement are clearly laid out in the Recovery Plan and drive toward exiting receivership; however the steps, process, and those responsible for ensuring its implementation and impact are unclear even to district staff who should be leading key priorities.

Evidence: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

What staff shared about the district's current culture...

The district has a strong culture of excellence and high expectations for all.



Words and phrases used to describe the current district culture include:

- “Progressing”
- “Going backwards”
- “Uncomfortable”
- “More focused on instruction now”
- “Divided based on positions”
- “Toxic”
- “Distrustful”
- “Disjointed”
- “Compliance-based”

The current district culture is strained, compounded by staff turnover, negative past experiences, and a perceived lack of district leadership investment in relationships and school-based needs.

Evidence: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

What staff shared about the district's current culture...

"Staff does not feel supported; only attacked. Staff is doing all they can possibly do as educators, yet are being asked to do more than is humanly possible."

"We still have a lot of work to do with rebuilding the culture in Harrisburg. Support is given to few. [The] District seems reactive instead of proactive."

"Our morale is low because it seems like no one cares."

"We need to start doing what we say we're gonna do in a timely manner."

"Harrisburg SD needs to have high expectations for our students to be successful. We need to set the bar high. Excellence needs to be our culture."

"There's so much transition and so much change that I don't even know that I can say we have a cohesive culture."

School and team or department cultures were more positively described than the overall district culture. Leadership transitions and past issues in the district were named as contributing factors to the current district culture, as were tensions and mistrust between the district, community, and city.

Opportunity: Vision, Strategy, and Culture

Clear vision, strategy and manageable set of priorities for the district that recognize the local environment (e.g. regulations, statues, contracts, funding, politics, governance) and district's capacity for change while promoting a culture of excellence and high expectations for all.

Opportunities to Improve

- The receiver and chief recovery officer are monitoring the recovery plan implementation, yet the administration is not actively monitoring recovery plan implementation or impact.
- It is unclear to district-and school-level staff what the district's priorities are and how they are working collectively to drive priorities forward.
- The lack of clear district-wide priorities results in reactionary responses, which leaders describe as focusing on fires.
- The district's shared values and core beliefs are not currently experienced by stakeholders, driving district priorities, or positively impacting the district's culture.
- There are examples of some intentional efforts to build relationships between the central office and other stakeholders, yet many stakeholder describe the current district culture as distrustful and toxic.

Progress: Organizational Clarity and Collaboration

Clear central office structures, processes, and policies that work together to support school and student success.

Strengths

- New central office leaders are in place, replacing most MCIU staff. New leaders are developing systems, structures, and processes to support greater district function and organization.
- Leadership structures—such as the cabinet, Act 141 committee, and school board—are functioning.
- A weekly bulletin goes out from the Office of Academics to school leaders with district department information.

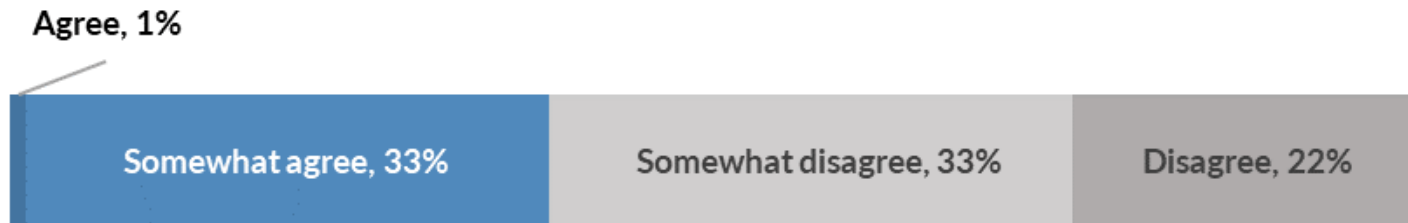
Evidence of Improvement

- Department leadership positions are filled with qualified and engaged leaders committed to creating structures, systems, and process.
- There are structures that support and examples of cross-department collaboration.
- There are efforts to provide key information and clarity in district communications to school leaders.

Progress: Organizational Clarity and Collaboration

What staff shared about organizational clarity...

Central office staffing is organized to support school and student success.



Recent district leadership hires are qualified and well equipped to support the district's forward movement in developing structures, processes, and policies that work together to support schools and student success.

Without a current central office organizational chart and the recent release of a staff directory, district and school staff are not only unclear about their roles and responsibilities, but also who to contact to address needs. Staff describe the current district organizational structure as “muddy” and “jumbled.”

The lack of organizational structure has created unclear roles, responsibilities, and support for staff at all levels.

Evidence: Organizational Clarity and Collaboration

What district staff shared about central office communication, collaboration, and decision making...

- District staff feel internal communication is “disjointed,” particularly around decisions and ownership of priorities so people are aware of their responsibilities.
- The district has contracted a communications consultant from the MCIU to support the development of a communications plan and high-level district communications.
- District staff noted the critical need for district communication to be right the first time, given the district’s location in the state capital, as well as community desire for transparency.
- Many district leaders described a mutual “team philosophy” that supports departmental collaboration. And others recognized the need for greater collaboration and transparency.
- Communication and collaboration efforts have not yet resulted in a clear decision-making process. There is broad agreement that issues or problems are brought to the cabinet by members and discussions about the pros, cons, and consequences of decisions take place. Many mentioned that decisions often happen in isolation, and decisions are not always relayed through clear and consistent modes or structures.

District staff report an increase in staff collaboration, and an ongoing need to clarify and improve decision making processes and resulting communication.

Opportunity: Organizational Clarity and Collaboration

Clear central office structures, processes, and policies that work together to support school and student success.

Opportunities to Improve

- The organizational structure of the central office is unclear. How decisions are made in the central office, as well as roles and responsibilities, remain unclear for district and school staff.
- There is a lack of clear and timely communication from the central office to staff and families.
- School staff perceive a lack of partnership or relationships with the central office and feel the district has reverted to a top-down approach that is not collaborative.
- Structures, processes, and policies do not yet streamline the focus of district or school staff on student success.
- There is a continued need for greater collaboration and communication among central office departments, particularly in support of school and student success.

Progress: Focus on Instruction

Curriculum, materials, tools and supports that help school leaders, teachers and other school staff constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.

Strengths

- There are strong academic performance tasks in the Amended Recovery Plan.
- The district has implemented initiatives to address student mental health needs.
- The district has adopted the Station Rotation instructional delivery model.

Evidence of Improvement

- The district has an instructional vision.
- The district has adopted and has a plan for implementing the Station Rotation Instructional Model.
- There are some curricular resources.
- All schools have a reading specialist, math interventionist, and an instructional coach.
- There is an opportunity to better understand and replicate effective instructional practices throughout the district that are leading to positive student outcomes and growth.

Evidence: Focus on Instruction

From classroom observations...

Mass Insight conducted classroom walkthroughs of six schools and 37 classrooms.

- Observations of classroom materials, resources, and practices indicate that some classroom environments reflected, affirmed, and/or honored student identities and made connections to students' cultural schema.
- In 57% of observed classrooms, there was evidence of positive student-teacher interactions, such as teachers providing individualized support, showing connections with students, and genuine interest in teaching the material and providing feedback to students.
- During observations, students were learning and working:
 - independently in 36% of classrooms, primarily on laptops,
 - as a whole group in 42% of classrooms, and
 - in small groups in 22% of classrooms.
- The learning objective was presented to students in 70% of classrooms..
- During Mi classroom observations, in 97% of the classes visited, the standards aligned to the lessons being taught were not posted or visible in the classroom on the board.
- In many middle and high school classrooms, students used cell phones during class to watch movies or other non-learning related activities, as well as other off-task behavior.

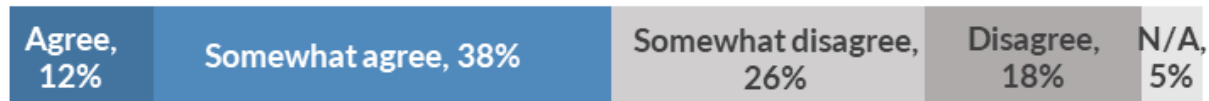
Evidence: Focus on Instruction

Curricular resources, instructional models, and assessments...

Based on the K-12 Academic Programming 2021-22 school year:

- The K-2 science curriculum has random resources, and the 9-12 science curriculum is inconsistent across the district
- The K-8 social studies curriculum was updated in the 2008-09 school year, and the 9-12 social studies curriculum was updated in the 2017-18 school year.
- The ELA curriculum was also updated, and includes a district-written curriculum for grades 9-12
- The 6-8 math curriculum (Eureka Math) was updated in the 2020-21 school year, and 9-12 curriculum (enVision) was updated in the 2021-22 school year.

The district provides sufficient, aligned, standards-based curricular resources to schools.



The district has elected to adopt the Station Rotation Instructional Model with a gradual roll-out over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years. There are plans to update the curricular resources with a particular focus on Social Studies. In addition the district Assessment Map will remain in place with certain assessments fulfilling both Diagnostic and Benchmark functions.

Opportunity: Focus on Instruction

Curriculum, materials, tools and supports that help school leaders, teachers and other school staff constantly improve and refine standards-based instructional practice.

Opportunities to Improve

- Some principals do not have the opportunity to be instructional leaders due to staff turnover and the instructional and management support new teachers need.
- Tier 1 instruction is not yet a first line of intervention.
- Some professional learning is not targeted, especially for teachers that are non-certified.
- There was observed cell phone use by students in schools and classrooms resulting in loss of time on task and learning.
- There is no universal use of standards-aligned curriculum. Some schools indicate that they do not have a solid curriculum and materials to support instruction.
- The district has not yet operationalized its instructional vision and clearly conveyed to staff their roles and responsibilities in bringing it to life.
- Observations indicate that there are more individualized computer-based learning activities as compared to whole group and/or small group instruction and facilitation.

Progress: Talent Management

Systems and processes to recruit, place, develop, and retain talented staff.

Strengths

- Efforts to bring in instructional staff (non-certified staff) and support their onboarding/development process are helping staffing shortcomings.
- Plans to support an earlier recruitment/hiring process moving forward are in place.

Evidence of Improvement

- A system for building a pipeline for staff through local partnerships is present.
- The district's onboarding process for new teachers persists and still incorporates human resource policies and processes.
- The district uses the Applitrack system for managing open positions and applicant tracking.

Evidence: Talent Management

Current staff vacancies...

As of December 2022, there are 162 vacancies (FTEs) across the district, including:

- 22 central office-based staff, including nine school psychologists
- 36 classroom teachers
- 11 behavior specialists
- 9 special education instructors and instructional aides
- 5 school counselors
- 4 school-level administrators (principals, assistant and associate principals)
- 4 ESL teachers
- The remaining positions include school-level support positions like reading specialists, school nurses, speech therapists and instructional coaches.

While staffing needs are dispersed across all schools and all levels, the schools currently with the most staffing vacancies are:

- Camp Curtin with 25 open positions
- Harrisburg HS: John Harris Campus with 23 open positions (CSI school)
- Ben Franklin with 22 open positions
- Rowland with 20 positions (CSI school)

Staff vacancies in the schools and central office impact systems and outcomes throughout the district but most importantly, the student learning experience.

Evidence: Talent Management

Staff responses about ongoing support and retention efforts...

The district and schools work to retain talented staff.



“There are teachers leaving and getting \$10,000 just to go to a neighboring district, and it’s not that the behaviors are going to be so much better. They just may have better systems in place.”

“We support teachers their first year and then they’re left to handle things on their own. We do not do enough to retain teachers and make them feel supported.”

Perceived inconsistent retention strategies are leaving gaps in which experienced teachers are finding reasons to leave the district.

Opportunity: Talent Management

Systems and processes to recruit, place, develop, and retain talented staff.

Opportunities to Improve

- Onboarding and management supports for new principals and assistant principals are not present.
- Limited partnerships with local colleges and universities to attract and hire new staff hampers recruitment efforts.
- A reactive recruitment and retention strategy and a lower salary schedule than surrounding districts negatively impacts recruitment and hiring success.
- There is no evidence that the district is prioritizing the recruitment or hiring of teachers of color or Spanish-speaking staff.
- Issues with payroll and lower payscale when compared to surrounding districts undermines staff recruitment and retention efforts.
- District-sponsored instructional professional development is not meeting the needs of schools with high numbers of non-veteran staff nor sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of veteran staff.

Progress: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Intentional systems and processes to maintain open lines of communication with staff, family and community stakeholders.

Strengths

- The district has invested in the creation and staffing of a family engagement coordinator and family engagement specialists at all schools.
- The district leverages multiple systems and modes of accessible communication to effectively disseminate information to stakeholders.
- Families who completed the survey indicated that they feel comfortable and respected in their interactions with schools and central office.

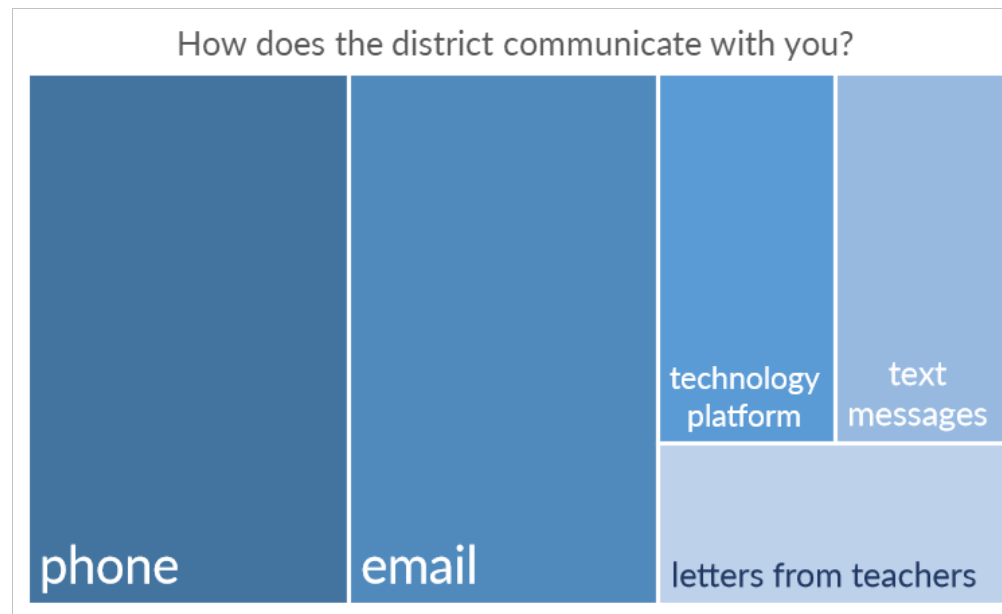
Evidence of Improvement

- The majority of staff agree that the district fosters frequent and meaningful engagement opportunities for stakeholders which addresses families' expressed interest in more frequent engagement with the district.
- In the past, most parents indicated that word-of-mouth was the primary means of communication with schools and the district. The district now utilizes a variety of methods to reach families and stakeholders.
- A majority of staff agree that there is a "system to communicate with district stakeholders."

Evidence: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Family survey responses about district communication...

District and school communication is accessible to me.



The district uses a variety of tools and methods to communicate and make information accessible to stakeholders.

Evidence: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Staff survey responses about district communication with families...

The district fosters frequent and meaningful engagement opportunities for community members.



Stakeholder perspectives inform district decisions.

Agree, 4%



While nearly half (47%) of staff agreed that “the district fosters frequent and meaningful engagement opportunities,” only 24% of staff agreed that “stakeholder perspectives inform district decision making.”

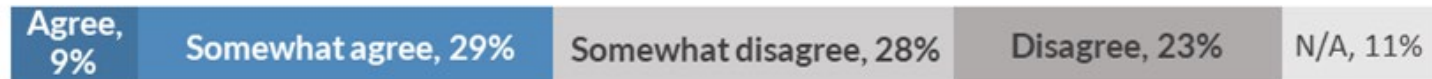
Evidence: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Staff survey responses about communication...

There is a system to communicate with district stakeholders (staff, families, community).



Communication modes reach all stakeholders.



Central office communicates effectively with school staff to keep them fully informed on matters affecting them.



While a majority of staff agree that there are communication systems in place, only 38% agree that communication reaches all stakeholders and 41% agree that central office communicates effectively with school staff. Many comments about communication indicated staff are not notified of important information in a timely manner.

Opportunity: Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Intentional systems and processes to maintain open lines of communication with staff, family and community stakeholders.

Opportunities to Improve

- The district is not yet communicating with stakeholders about district and school priorities or progress made on Recovery Plan key action items.
- District leaders need to find ways to communicate the ways in which stakeholder input informed their decision making - including feedback from staff, families, students, and community members.
- There is an opportunity to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of central office's communication to staff.

Progress: Focus on Equity

Policies, structures, systems, and resources ensure equitable, high quality education for all students, including students with exceptional needs.

Strengths

- English language development (ELD) teachers use data to inform student instruction and goals.
- English language learner goals are included in the MTSS framework.
- On the student survey, 54% of students agree or somewhat agree that they participate in extracurricular activities, and many named a desire for additional extracurricular activities.
- The Special Education Manual was recently updated in November, 2022, with all policies and procedures relevant to how the district will fulfill its obligation to students under the IDEA 2004 and PA Chapter 14 & 16 (gifted) regulations.

Evidence of Improvement

- The district now has a Director of Special Education and a Supervisor of ESL.
- The district has made investments in mental health supports for students.
- The district has an SEL curriculum.
- Harrisburg Virtual Learning Academy and Cougar Academy provide virtual/blended learning settings and approaches.

Evidence: Focus on Equity

School safety data indicators...

District	Enrollment	Total Incidents	Incidents per 100 students	Fighting Infractions	Simple Assault on Students	Aggravated Assault on Students	Simple Assault on Staff	Aggravated Assault on Staff
Harrisburg	6,492	497	7.66	154	94	3	31	1

For reports of violent incidents, in the 2021 - 22 SY, Harrisburg ranked 1 out of 17 in Dauphin County (Source: [Future Ready PA Index](#)).

On the student survey, when asked about what could be done to make them feel safer, included and like they belong in school, some students stated:

- “If people weren’t fighting all day long and yelling in the hallways.”
- “Have security guards around the schools halls.”
- “There are many things I think can be done to better the campus, but the most important is to have security guards.”

Likewise, school staff survey responses indicate 28% agree or somewhat agree with the statement “Schools are Safe,” while 72% disagree or somewhat disagree.

Staff and student surveys revealed that there are concerns about safety in schools.

Opportunity: Focus on Equity

Policies, structures, systems, and resources ensure equitable, high quality education for all students, including students with exceptional needs.

Opportunities to Improve

- There are currently four ESL staff vacancies and over 20 special education staff vacancies.
- The district needs additional supports and course options for students in gifted education.
- There was a significant amount of off-task behavior observed in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, which impacts students' access to high-quality educational experiences.
- There are behavior concerns at all levels in the district.
- There are building safety concerns, as well as physical safety concerns for students and staff.
- There is a need for better curriculum and additional support for SPED and ELL students.

1. Implement the Recovery Plan

The Recovery Plan is legally binding and clearly indicates what the district must do to exit receivership. To support the district's next steps to move toward exiting receivership, district leaders must create a plan grounded in Recovery Plan outcomes and the three improvement areas of academic achievement, financial management, and student stability.

- Develop a 2-3 year comprehensive plan of district priorities aligned with the Recovery Plan and data-informed district needs.
- Share the action plan priorities with stakeholders.
- Establish progress monitoring practices and protocols to regularly examine plan implementation and impact.
- Share implementation and impact progress with stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

2. Reground the district’s purpose on students’ educational success and rebuild relationships with staff and the community to support student success.

The district’s tagline of “Empowering Academic Achievers and Lifelong Learners” reflects the purpose of an educational system and ideally focuses all decisions and ongoing efforts to ensure all students have access to a high-quality and empowering educational experience while in the Harrisburg School District, while also preparing them for post-graduation success.

To do so in the current district climate will require intentional relationship building, clear and consistent communication, engagement opportunities, and transparency by the district, particularly with school staff and families.

Additionally, by engaging and leveraging students throughout the process will further demonstrate the district’s priorities and commitment to their educational success.



3. Recruit, develop, and retain instructional and support staff.

To ensure student access, opportunity, and success, the district must recruit, develop, and retain instructional and support staff. Three key areas of opportunity emerged from findings that can support the district with these efforts:

- A) Improve central office functions, services, and client orientation.
- B) Understand then support the development of safe, positive, and welcoming classroom and school cultures.
- C) Creatively and urgently address staffing shortages