Creating a Strategic Plan for the Mahwah Public Schools

Session 1 of 3 - What are the Strengths/Achievements and Challenges/Opportunities of the Mahwah Public Schools?

On Monday, December 16, 2024, Mahwah administrators, staff, Board members, and parents came together to initiate strategic planning. The first evening's topic focused on the Strengths/Achievements, and Challenges/Opportunities of the Mahwah Public Schools. The meeting began with welcoming remarks from Dr. Michael DeTuro, Superintendent, who provided an informative "state of the school" overview for participants. Facilitator Matt Lee from the New Jersey School Boards Association introduced the strategic planning methodology and assisted throughout the process.

Parent, administration, Board of Education, and staff participants gathered in three randomly assigned groups to identify the Strengths/Achievements and Challenges/Opportunities of the Mahwah Public Schools through brainstorming and the sharing of ideas. After discussion, each group came to a consensus on its top 10 Strengths/Achievements and top 10 Challenges/Opportunities and those were then shared with the larger group when group work was completed.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. All consensus points are recorded and posted on the school's website (**https://www.mahwah.k12.nj.us/**) to share the group work during the course of the strategic planning process.

Group Consensus: Strengths/Achievements & Challenges/Opportunities

Group 1

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Community outreach	HS Athletics - Maintaining athletes in district
NJTSS	
Diversity/Programs	Maintaining academic students academies
Parent involvement	Overall communication - Everyday info - Accolades - Methods - Hard copy newsletter
Strength/Staff	K-3 experience - Culture difference - Educational consistency - Bridge 'culture divide'
High standards	Further enhance 3→4 Elementary to JK
Success/Students - HS experience - College	Branding K-6 - Define identity
Competitiveness	Identity
HS high achieving	Branding
Investment HS sports	Communication
Success	Facilities - Lack of Gym/elementary - Lack of updates - RR basketball - Bigger/more – HS auditorium Betsy, GW gym

School safety support - ESS Elementary	RR/JK outside gym spaces
Special Ed Program - Keeping students in-house - Strong programs	HS labs/art rooms
Pathways Program - RR cycle - Choice based - Different	Bathrooms/fixtures
	Guidance - Expand between HS–JK–Elementary - Bridge/robust - 7-year continuum

Group 2

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Updated reading & writing curriculum	Teachers hesitant to take risks - Methodology - Topics - Fear of making mistakes - The need to foster more
Parent involvement (Education Week)	Honoring the Parents' voices
Great schools!	Parent involvement beyond fundraising (HSO)
Excellent teachers!	Being more cognizant of inclusive language
Very high expectations	Student behaviors
Strong SEL Programs (and always improving)	AC & Heating inconsistency in classrooms
	Honoring the Parents' voices

Group 3

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
G & T Program	Evaluate areas for growth in G&T program
Programs available for all (Special Ed; music; athletics; clubs; multi-lingual learners)	Challenge all students, not only those who are in G&T. (Support for all.)
STEM/STEAM Programs	AI/Technology advancement…keeping up with it!
Motivation to keep building and improving; never complacent	Renew/maintain a balance for other areas – such as financial literacy, civics, culture, research
SEL component	Tutoring for academic needs
Student centered/thinking of whole child	Behavior/HIB response
Health program & sharing of info with parents	Cultural competency classes
Parent input sought/welcome	Diversity of staff
Transitions from JK-RR & RR-MHS (student – student interactions)	Parent information about programs @ MHS

Group 4

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Curriculum development	Foster relationships outside of parents to encompass the entire community
SEL programming	Parent volunteers: - As leaders, not just participants - Maintain levels thru grade 12
ESS in-house clinical counseling	Continue expanding digital security inside and outside of the schools

K-3 counselors do broad work	Leverage AI while also protecting students from its threats - Social and academic
@HS: Supplemental programs	We need a people angle - Could streamline forms
Staff really cares!	Attendance: Show up to school and show up to class
Opportunities for student involvement	
We've come far with technology to help with language barriers	
iReady and Data –Driven curriculum enhancements	
Facilities: updated and maintained well	
Technology: upgrades continual, staff help is responsive	

Themes:
- Two-way communications
- Harness People Power
- Technology

Group 5

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
T-bird Partnership	Communicating different programs & requirements (e.g. career pathways vs. guidance vs. graduation requirements)
Externship/Internship	Industrial quality food – not so great
Individualized events by school community	Can we better integrate the many, various communication systems/technologies across the district (sometimes communicating in multiple systems for same info)

Career pathway program & transcript endorsement	Small H.S. gym and auditorium
Guidance department	Betsey Ross & G.W. need cafeteria/auditorium/gym
Community service participation by students	Connections to trade schools & other options aside from college
Facilities are good and maintained	
Freshman advisory	
Good security – not overbearing, but secure	
Curriculum and course offerings	
Acceptance and connectedness between all kinds of students district-wide	

Themes:
- Facilities
- Academic programs
- Community culture

Group 6

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Staff/kids are welcoming	New families: unknown process after intake
Performing arts program	Lunch – process to block snack and pay system
Dedicated staff who know students beyond just academics	New information literacy standards across the district – cohesive plan
Options for sports	How to address the "I never learned that"
Good relationship with Mahwah PD	Promote SEL at upper levels when tech ↑
Sense of school community @ K-5	AI usage, AI & careers
Parents are welcome to come in: secret reader concerts	CAREER pathway
	How do they know what they want to do?

	Building updates - Gyms - Older room tech

Group 7

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Clean/well-maintained buildings	Update outdated spaces (library, art STEAM) – elementary building
Home/school relationship	After-school clubs, extracurricular activities
Staff! ☺	SROs
Internships/externships	3rd grade GW/LM/BR collaboration before JK
Technology	Update outdated spaces (library, art STEAM) – elementary building
Transition support (3→4, 5→6, 8→9)	Tech updates - Promethean boards
Relationship with the Township	
Staff training	

Group 8

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
SE Learning	Cell phones/not in class - Opportunity – away for the day
NJTSS – achievements	Social media/texting - *Teaching students more about internet footprint
Bullying – investigations done well and thoroughly	Equity audit – what is being done? - Dress code - Racial achievement gaps

	- LGBTQ – not safe > Middle school
Facilities – many great spaces	Bullying – preventative training/education
Middle school sports	Add student/student mentoring - Within school - To bridge to next school
Community engagement - Student volunteers	Facilities - Betsy Library - High School >Band room – improved > Gym – more space - * Food service
Game time camps - PE teachers	
Partnership with Mahwah Public Library	

Group 9

Strengths/Achievements	Challenges/Opportunities
Music program	Cell phones
Robotics HS/MS	STEM clubs K-5
Pathways program	Transportation - Bus schedules
SEL focus	Interdisciplinary offerings
Dual enrollment	SEL follow up/assessment of outcomes
	Continued improvement - Math/Science
	International opportunities

The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:
Wednesday, March 12 at 6:00 pm-7:30 pm. at Joyce Kilmer School.

During the March 12, meeting, using a similar brainstorming process, we will identify our visions for the Mahwah Public Schools five years from now.

The final meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 6:00-7:30 pm to write goal statements using the input from the two previous sessions.

Please join us and bring your friends. Your commitment to fully participate is important to the success of this program. We look forward to seeing you!