



Dr. Kimberly Rizzo Saunders <<<<<<

Listen, Learn, Lead

Entry Plan Report

January 2025

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Letter to the Community

Dear Kennett Consolidated School District (KCSD) Community,

It is with great excitement and a deep sense of pride that I share with you the *Listen, Learn, Lead Entry Plan Report*. This document reflects the vibrant spirit and collective efforts of our incredible community.

Over the past several months, we have come together to assess the state of our nearly century-old District, celebrate our many strengths, and identify the opportunities that will guide our growth in the years ahead. This report is not only a snapshot of where we are today, but also a foundation for the bright future we are building together for our students.

Our District has a rich history, rooted in tradition, diversity, and an unwavering commitment to excellence in education. Our educators, families, and community partners have demonstrated extraordinary dedication to the success of our students, and I have been deeply inspired by the stories, aspirations, and ideas you have shared with me. One thing is abundantly clear: we all share a common vision for a district where every student has the opportunity to thrive, every voice is heard, and every potential is realized.

This report captures that vision. It celebrates the strengths that make KCSD unique—our cultural diversity, our passionate staff, and our comprehensive programs. At the same time, it acknowledges the challenges that lie ahead, including ensuring opportunity for all students, improving communication, and developing a strategic approach for continuous growth. More importantly, it outlines recommendations to guide our path forward, grounded in the belief that when we work together, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

Letter to the Community

Now is the time for us to unite as a community and focus on the outcomes that matter most—providing an exceptional education for every child. Achieving this goal will require open dialogue, mutual trust, and a shared commitment to ongoing improvement. Together, we can honor the rich legacy of KCSD while embracing a future that is innovative, inclusive, and defined by excellence.

It is a true honor to serve as your superintendent and to walk alongside you as we embark on this journey. As we move forward, I invite you to join us in creating a brighter, more promising future for all KCSD students. Together, we can ensure that our schools are places where every student feels seen, supported, and empowered to reach their fullest potential.

With deep gratitude and excitement for the journey ahead,

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Kennett Consolidated School District



Executive Summary

Kennett Consolidated School District (KCS D) stands as a thriving educational community deeply rooted in a tradition of excellence, resilience, and civic pride. For nearly a century, KCS D has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to fostering community engagement, promoting diversity, and ensuring fiscal responsibility. On my first day as Superintendent in 2024, I made a commitment to listen to and learn from all stakeholders—parents, students, staff, community members, and leaders alike. This report reflects that commitment, synthesizing the insights gathered over the past months. While listening will remain central to my leadership, this report marks the foundation of a comprehensive action plan aimed at addressing critical needs and driving meaningful outcomes for every student.

The District has long been celebrated for its ability to adapt and thrive, even amid challenges. As we enter a new era, the district faces several urgent challenges—particularly around opportunity, communication, policy alignment, and resource allocation. These challenges arise amidst profound demographic and cultural shifts that demand strategic innovation. Informed by extensive stakeholder interviews, focus groups, financial data, academic assessments, and a careful review of the district's historical context, this report identifies both the district's core strengths and the key obstacles we must overcome. It offers clear recommendations for addressing these challenges and ensuring that KCS D continues to thrive in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

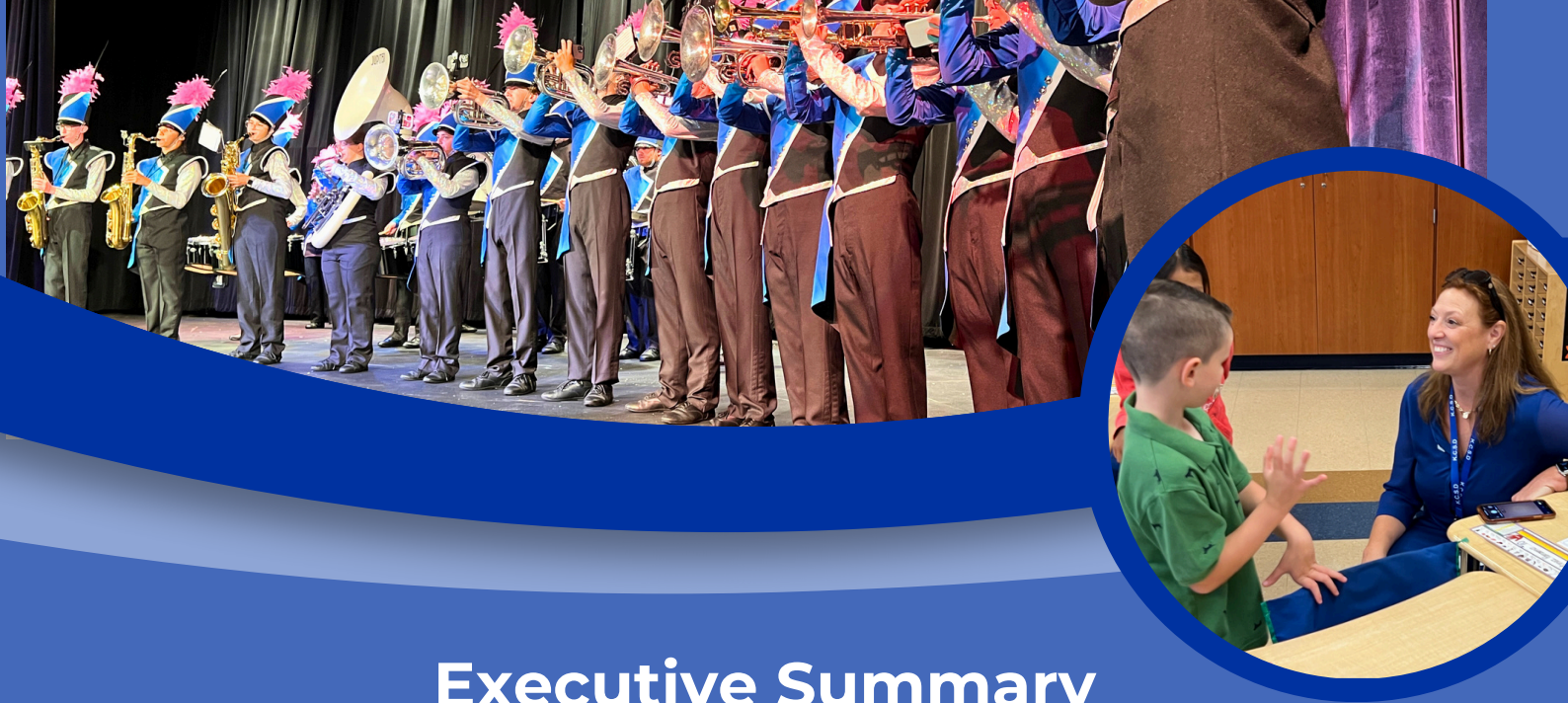


Executive Summary

This report is not just a diagnostic tool but a call to action—a comprehensive guide to help every member of the KCSD community—students, staff, and families—build upon our strong foundation while confronting systemic barriers. By embracing a vision of growth, opportunity, and excellence, we can position KCSD to meet the diverse needs of all students and achieve sustained success for generations to come.

KCSD is well-positioned for growth. Our district benefits from a robust, engaged community, a talented and dedicated staff, and celebrated extracurricular programs that enrich student lives. Moreover, KCSD has taken meaningful steps to prioritize inclusion and innovation, signaling a commitment to meeting the evolving demands of education. Central to our success are the partnerships we have fostered with families, local organizations, and civic leaders, all of which contribute to a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for student success.

Key findings from this report highlight areas in need of immediate attention. Academic performance disparities persist, with economically disadvantaged students and English Language Learners (ELs) facing the greatest challenges. Stakeholders also raised concerns about inconsistent communication and the need for more equitable distribution of resources across the district. These disparities must be addressed head-on to ensure that all students have the support they need to thrive.



Executive Summary

Strategic Recommendations

In response to these findings, this report recommends the development of a comprehensive, data-driven strategic plan, built with input from all stakeholders, that focuses on the following priorities:

- Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Strategic Plan
- Perform an Opportunity Audit
- Develop a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum
- Enhance Equity in Academic Opportunities
- Invest in Consistent Professional Development
- Improve Communication and Transparency
- Strengthen Systems, Policies, and Procedures
- Expand Bilingual and Cultural Immersion Programs
- Address Facilities Disparities
- Enhance Mental Health and Behavioral Support Systems
- Support "Middle-Tier" Students
- Leverage Community Partnerships

KCSD stands at a pivotal crossroads in its history. We have the opportunity to honor our traditions while embracing the innovations necessary to create an inclusive and academically rigorous environment for all students. This report, grounded in the insights captured from our *Listen, Learn, Lead Entry Plan*, provides a clear path forward. By amplifying diverse voices, aligning resources to student needs, and reimagining our policies and structures, KCSD is poised to lead the way into its next century of educational excellence.



Introduction

This comprehensive report evaluates the current state of the Kennett Consolidated School District (KCS D), drawing on data collected through diverse channels, including interviews, focus groups, and surveys, alongside financial, historical and academic data. The primary goals of this analysis are to assess community perceptions, identify recurring themes from stakeholder experiences, and develop actionable strategies tailored to the district's goals and aspirations. Recognizing the district's diverse needs, this report places a strong emphasis on contextualizing challenges within the broader demographic and cultural shifts occurring in KCS D.

The methodology reflects a commitment to inclusivity, ensuring that all voices—parents, students, educators, and administrators—are instrumental in shaping the district's trajectory. Transparency remains central to this process, as strategies are designed to balance immediate needs with sustainable growth. Additionally, the analysis underscores the interconnected nature of community engagement, academic outcomes, and systemic improvements, emphasizing that progress in one area fosters advancement in others.

The report begins with a description of the methodologies and types of information used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the District, highlights the overall areas of strength, growth, and opportunities; then shares findings and analysis of data, outlines recommendations and provides a closing message of the importance of shared decision-making and collaboration both within the District and with the community.

Methodology

Using the framework outlined in *Listen, Learn, Lead*, this report used a mixed-methods approach of both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data included but were not limited to: stakeholder input from over 70 one-to-one interviews, 102 focus group participants, meetings with key constituencies, meetings with the past 4 superintendents, extended school visits in all six buildings, and attendance and observation at a significant number of community and District events. Quantitative data included but were not limited to, over 3000 pages of reports and documents that were keys to understanding academic performance, infrastructure assessments, and the financial health of the District as well as a survey (N=+1000) of stakeholders.

All interviews and focus groups recordings were transcribed and entered into a software called MAXQDA. This software is designed to manage and organize the large amounts of information used for qualitative and mixed methods approaches. It is widely used by professionals across various disciplines, including social sciences, education, business, and healthcare, to analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative data. The information entered was then coded to develop themes across interviews and focus groups as well as to clarify relationships between qualitative and quantitative information.

This provides several benefits: it expands the amount of information that can be reviewed, decreases the amount of time necessary to find comparisons and themes across different types of information, and provides a check and balance system against confirmation bias.

Data Sources included the following:

1. Stakeholder Input:

- **Students:** Focus groups and interviews captured the aspirations and challenges of learners across grade levels.
- **Parents:** Meetings with diverse families revealed shared hopes for an equitable and quality education.
- **Educators:** Teachers emphasized professional development needs and the desire for better communication.
- **Community Leaders:** Discussions with local organizations, faith groups, and businesses enriched the data.

Methodology

2. Quantitative Data:

- **Academic Performance:** Standardized test scores, AP participation rates, and growth metrics provided quantitative insights into disparities.
- **Demographic Information:** Enrollment trends and attendance rates by demographic group.
- **Community Survey:** Perceptions of the community across all aspects of the District
- **Financial Documents:** Priorities and fiscal health of the District
- **Infrastructure Assessments**

3. Historical Analysis:

- ***Listen Learn Lead* Framework:** Balanced scorecard goals, school schedules, student handbooks, policy, systems and structures/procedures and protocols, communications, etc.
- **Historical data:** Prior strategic plans grounded the analysis of KCSD's evolving priorities.

This rigorous approach ensures that the findings and recommendations are not only grounded in data but also deeply resonate with the lived experiences, perspectives, and aspirations of the District community. By incorporating diverse input through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and historical analyses, the process captured the nuances of various stakeholder groups, including students, parents, educators, and community leaders. This inclusivity ensures that the challenges, strengths, and opportunities identified in the report are reflective of the District's multifaceted reality.

Moreover, the approach aligns with KCSD's long-term vision by anchoring recommendations in both the district's historical context and future aspirations. By integrating quantitative metrics with qualitative insights, the plan offers a balanced perspective that highlights actionable strategies to address equity gaps, improve communication, and optimize resources. This ensures that the recommendations are not only data-driven but also culturally and contextually relevant, fostering trust and engagement among stakeholders.

Ultimately, this comprehensive methodology positions KCSD to make meaningful progress by leveraging the collective voice of its community while staying true to its mission.



Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities



The following is a summary of the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that were found through the analysis of the information. While a single quote is shared for each area, all were supported by multiple points of information from focus groups, interviews, observation, documents, and survey outcomes. This input provided a nuanced understanding of KCSD's strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Strengths

Strong traditions, community pride, and celebrated diversity

Events like the Mushroom Festival and High School graduations strengthen community bonds. An alumnus reflected:

“
KCSD traditions are the glue that holds us together.
”



Committed educators and supportive parents

Educators consistently go above and beyond. A parent stated:

“
Our teachers are the heart of this district.
”



Celebrated extracurricular programs, including athletics and the arts.

Programs in arts, athletics, and STEM provide students with diverse opportunities. A community member commented:

“
Kennett is the center of the social life of the town... it's not just football games on Friday nights. The sense of pride in our students, whether it's athletics or arts, is a hallmark of our community.
”

Vibrant partnerships with local organizations.

An administrator reflected:

“The strong sense of community pride includes partnerships with organizations like the YMCA and public library, which enhance the resources available to our students.”



The Kindergarten Center

Serves as a welcoming hub for early education, setting a strong foundation for young learners. A parent explained:

“The Kindergarten Center has a fun-based foundation and creates a strong sense of community among students and staff. It’s a critical first step in their educational journey.”



Fiscal health

Strong fiscal procedures, checks and balances, and adequate operating reserves.

A Board member noted:

“Our financial procedures, supported by long-standing leadership in the business office, have consistently ensured fiscal responsibility and stability.”

Challenges

Equity gaps in academic performance, resource distribution, and program access.

Significant disparities in access to advanced programs, extracurricular activities, and resources persist. A student shared:

“
Sometimes, it feels like only certain kids get the best opportunities.
”



Variability in facilities quality and access to advanced academic opportunities across schools.

Uneven investment creates inequities across schools. A community member emphasized:

“
We need safe, modern buildings for all our kids.
”



Turnover rates among key staff positions.

Turnover that disrupts continuity of programming and specific departments. One teacher stated:

“
The constant turnover in leadership disrupts continuity and trust.
”

Insufficient systemic support for student mental health and behavioral needs.

Lack of a clear behavioral MTSS system. A staff member stated:

“
We lack sufficient resources for behavioral health, leaving teachers without the tools they need to support struggling students.
”



Addressing the needs of the middle.

Students in the middle are often overlooked. A parent commented:

“
Middle-tier students often fall through the cracks because resources and focus are frequently directed toward the highest achievers or those with the greatest needs.
”



Lack of a guaranteed, viable curriculum.

Lack of horizontal and vertical alignment of curriculum. One teacher noted:

“
We need a guaranteed, viable curriculum and improved systems for alignment across grades. Current gaps in structure are affecting outcomes.
”

Outdated policies and lack of procedures, protocols, systems, and structures.

Policies have not been updated in a systematic way. An administrator explained:

“
Kennett is reactive rather than proactive, lacking the documented policies and procedures needed to ensure alignment and efficiency.
”



Communication

Inconsistent updates and unclear messaging erode trust. A parent observed:

“
We're invested in our schools, but it feels like decisions happen without us.
”

Opportunities

Bilingual programs and promoting cultural immersion initiatives.

Enhancing language resources to meet the needs of English Learners. A parent remarked:

“

Bilingual education is a bridge for so many families.

”



Leveraging community partnerships

Collaborating with local organizations to enhance resource availability, program offerings and enrich student experiences.



Strengthening district-wide alignment in policies and professional development.

Investing in the science of reading, enhancing instructional strategies for variety, culturally responsive training, and innovative pedagogy. A staff member explained:

“

Improved literacy instruction and culturally relevant pedagogy are critical areas for development.

”

Investing in equitable upgrades across schools

Addressing disparities, both real and perceived, across schools. A parent commented:

“
Greenwood and other facilities need equitable upgrades to match the resources and morale of better-supported schools.
”



Improving Transparency

Building trust through open communication, accountability, and shared decision-making. A staff member commented:

“
We need stronger communication and accountability to build trust within the community and staff.
”



Strategic Planning

Leveraging the strengths of the District to acknowledge and plan for challenges and improved outcomes in a structured, time-bound, and measured way. An administrator commented:

“
A structured, time-bound approach to district-wide improvement will ensure measurable outcomes and alignment with community values.
”



Findings and Analysis: Strengths

Strong traditions, community pride, and celebrated diversity

Across multiple documents, interviews, and focus groups, one theme was present in almost all aspects of the District: Kennett Consolidated School District (KCS D) exemplifies the principles of strong traditions, community pride, and celebrated diversity.

As a district deeply rooted in academic excellence and inclusive practices, its robust community involvement reflects a collective commitment to fostering environments where students thrive. This commitment is evident in the District's diverse student body, where programs prioritize offering equitable opportunities and support for all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.

The District also upholds a tradition of excellence by maintaining high academic standards and expanding opportunities for innovation in STEM, arts, and early literacy. These values position the district as a leader in cultivating a culturally rich and supportive educational landscape.

The District's dedication to robust community involvement reflects a collective commitment to fostering environments where students thrive. KCS D takes immense pride in its vibrant community, where a shared commitment to educational excellence and mutual support fosters a sense of belonging. Poised to embrace its community, members desire to have integration of a variety of cultural backgrounds, languages, and experiences. This diversity would enrich the educational environment, encouraging students and families to learn from one another and develop a global perspective. Together, these attributes can create a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere that strengthens KCS D's identity and ensures its continued success.

Findings and Analysis: Strengths

Committed educators and supportive parents

The information gathered, particularly in the survey, where many responses addressed educator commitment and parent support, found that a tremendous strength of the District is the educators and staff who are highly committed to both the children and the community.

Parental engagement emerged as a key area, with responses emphasizing the importance of creating welcoming and inclusive environments for families, especially those from diverse cultural backgrounds. While challenges such as language barriers and scheduling were noted as potential obstacles, parents and staff regularly pointed out that parents were supportive of efforts and in most buildings partnered with staff for the benefit of students.

While there were indications that this does not happen consistently across all buildings and grade levels, it was a standout theme. Most parents trust the educators who work with their children and most educators want to partner with parents for the benefit of students. Overall, the data underscores a strong foundation of dedication among educators and a willingness from parents to engage, while also highlighting opportunities to enhance accessibility and inclusivity.

Recognized excellence in extracurricular programs, including athletics and the arts

The information collected on the survey included questions about extracurricular programs, including competitive athletics, arts, and co-curricular activities. Initial observations reveal responses reflecting varying degrees of participation and perceived quality. The analysis of the data highlights varying perceptions of excellence in extracurricular programs, including athletics and the arts.

Participants rated their experiences with these programs across categories like "Excellent," "Above Average," showcasing that most expressed satisfaction with these programs. All sources of data reflect recognition of these programs' value. Overall, the findings suggest an appreciation for extracurricular offerings and that KCSD has demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence in extracurricular programs.

Findings and Analysis: Strengths

Stakeholder feedback highlights these programs as vital components of the District's identity, fostering community connection and student engagement. Families value the availability of diverse extracurricular opportunities, such as performing arts and sports, which not only complement academic development but also contribute to social-emotional growth and a sense of belonging.

Stakeholders frequently highlight the District's achievements in these areas, such as the successful marching band, vibrant performing arts, and athletic programs that provide students with diverse opportunities to excel. Parents and students value the District's ability to integrate these activities into the broader educational experience, enriching students' lives and building a strong sense of identity within the community. These programs are not just activities but are seen as pillars that uphold the District's legacy and its dedication to a well-rounded education.

Vibrant partnerships with local organizations

Respondents overwhelmingly recognize the importance of community partnerships in education, with a strong agreement that schools benefit from collaboration with local service providers for students and staff. Many also believe it is vital for the KCSD to create and sustain these partnerships. This highlights both an acknowledgment of the value of partnerships and a need for strategic approaches to fully leverage these relationships in supporting student and family needs.

The theme of vibrant partnerships with local organizations is consistently reflected throughout the KCSD interviews and focus groups. The District benefits from a strong community spirit and historical connections that have fostered partnerships with local stakeholders such as Longwood Gardens and the agricultural community. These relationships are essential to create opportunities for students, whether through field trips, career exposure, or academic collaboration.

There is also a recognized need to strengthen ties with underrepresented community segments, particularly within the Hispanic population, to ensure equity in access to resources and involvement. The District's efforts to include community voices, such as through initiatives like *Café en Familia*, highlight its dedication to engagement. This focus on partnerships underscores the district's commitment to leveraging its diverse and resource-rich local environment for the benefit of all students and its vision of a cohesive community working together to shape a thriving educational future.

Findings and Analysis: Strengths

Mary D. Lang Kindergarten Center

The Kindergarten Center is consistently described as a nurturing, collaborative, and foundational environment for young learners. This center emphasizes fostering strong relationships among students, staff, and families. Staff members are noted for their dedication and willingness to innovate, setting the stage for students' future success through a fun, community-oriented approach to education.

Key elements include the positive and close-knit relationships between staff and students, the culture of excitement and joy around learning, and the center's pivotal role in establishing strong peer bonds. These aspects are seen as critical in supporting students' social and emotional development, particularly as they transition to other schools within the district. The Kindergarten Center is widely viewed as a model of best practices. Globally its preservation and enhancement is a priority for stakeholders and there is a strong belief of the importance of sustaining it as it is viewed as providing students with a strong early education foundation.

Fiscal health

The Kennett Consolidated School District (KCSD) demonstrates strong fiscal health through a combination of reliable revenue, prudent debt servicing, effective asset management, and disciplined financial controls. The District's consistent sources of revenue provide a stable financial foundation, ensuring it can meet operational needs and long-term obligations. Kennett's ability to service debt is bolstered by a manageable debt load and favorable interest terms, reflecting sound financial planning.

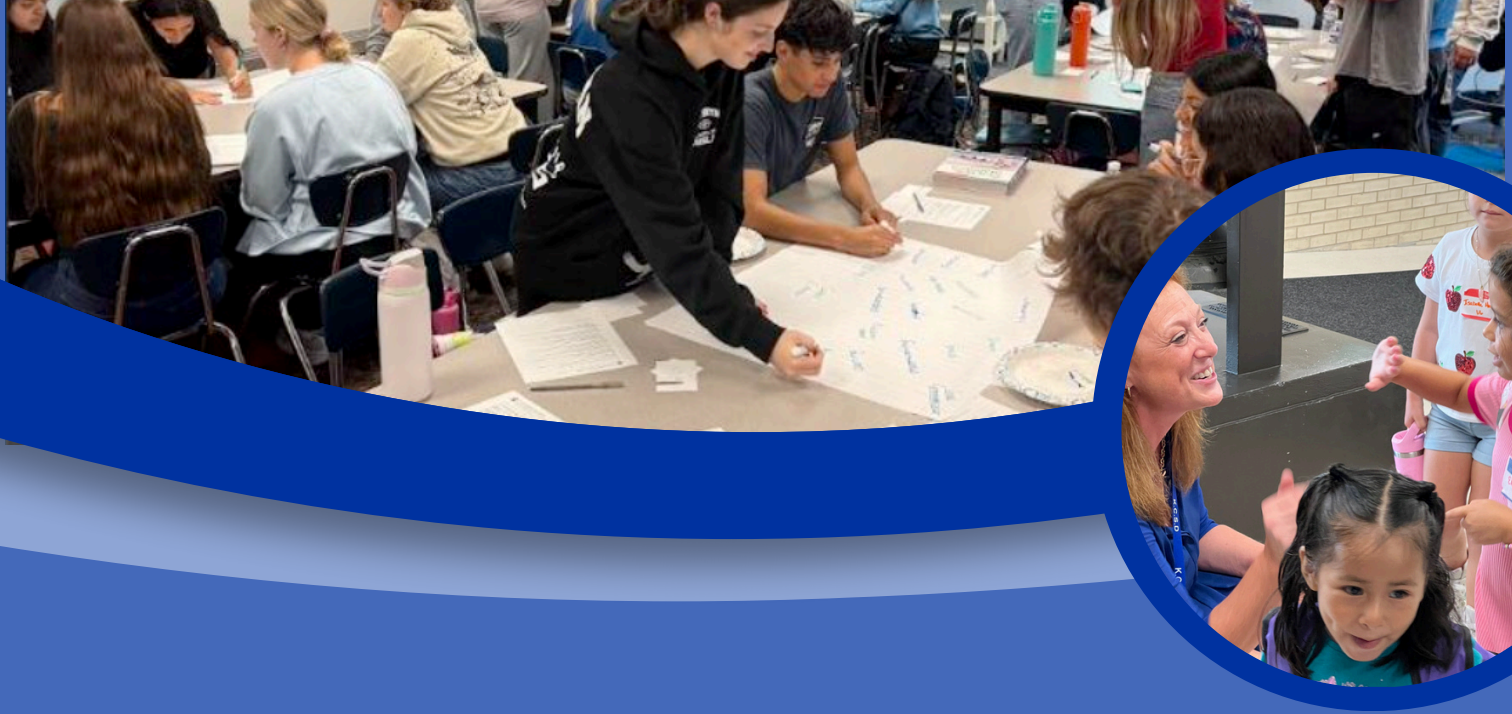
Additionally, the district excels in managing assets, leveraging resources to support educational priorities while maintaining infrastructure. Rigorous controls over purchases and budgeting processes are in place with the goal of minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency. Furthermore, KCSD maintains suitable reserves, providing a critical safety net for unforeseen circumstances and demonstrating a forward-looking approach to fiscal sustainability. Together, these factors position KCSD as a financially robust and responsibly managed institution.

Findings and Analysis: Strengths

Interestingly, in interviews and on the survey, the fiscal health of KCSD emerged as a multifaceted theme across various discussions, reflecting challenges and opportunities. In the areas of fiscal responsibility, financial transparency, and allocation of financial priorities, a majority of stakeholders expressed potential uncertainty or a lack of strong opinions on these matters.

Agreement levels were relatively modest, with some strongly agreeing that the District is fiscally responsible or transparent. Notably, the website was not seen as a source for financial information. These insights suggest opportunities for KCSD to enhance communication and transparency around financial management to build trust and confidence among stakeholders.

Additionally, the community's concerns about perceived inefficiencies and inequities, were related to administrative turnover and the integration of new leadership roles that impact fiscal decision-making and consistency such as program discontinuity, new program adoptions, and resource limitations in special education. Overall, the perceptions of KCSD's fiscal health hinges on its ability to align financial resources with its strategic goals, adapt to evolving demographics, and foster a unified approach to resource adoption and operational planning.



Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Equity gaps in academic performance, resource distribution, and program access

The Kennett Consolidated School District (KCSD) faces challenges in achieving equitable academic outcomes for all students, particularly for economically disadvantaged students and English Learners (ELs). Academic performance data reveals disparities, with only 34% of economically disadvantaged students achieving English Language Arts (ELA) proficiency compared to 82% of their peers. Similarly, ELs struggle with math proficiency rates below 30%, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. Contributing factors include limited access to quality early education, inadequate bilingual instructional resources, and insufficient teacher training to support diverse learners.

While KCSD's attendance rates exceed 90%, engagement challenges persist for subgroups such as economically disadvantaged students and ELs. Barriers like transportation difficulties, health challenges, and economic pressures contribute to inconsistent attendance and participation. Current strategies, including transportation assistance and health screenings, have only partially addressed these issues.

Resource allocation disparities further exacerbate equity challenges. Advanced Placement (AP) program enrollment among economically disadvantaged students is 15% lower than peer districts, and participation in extracurricular activities remains limited for underrepresented groups due to transportation and scheduling conflicts. Moreover, inequities in English Language Development (ELD) programs hinder effective instruction.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Survey and focus group feedback highlight additional concerns, including inequitable access to resources and inconsistent curriculum standards. Notably, parents frequently expressed concerns about inequities in program access and resource allocation. Teachers highlighted the need for targeted professional development, especially on equity and inclusion strategies. While students shared perspectives on varying access to advanced coursework and extracurricular opportunities, addressing these gaps will require targeted investments in staffing, facilities, and program expansion, coupled with systemic efforts to foster inclusivity and equitable resource distribution across schools.

Variability in facilities quality and access to advanced academic opportunities across schools

The District demonstrates notable variability in both the quality of facilities and access to advanced academic opportunities across its schools. Facility conditions and educational resources are inconsistent, with some schools requiring infrastructure improvements and additional support staff, as indicated by special education compliance reviews and enrollment projections.

Key themes highlighted in stakeholder feedback include that older schools, such as Greenwood and New Garden, are described as crowded and outdated, reflecting the clear need for infrastructure improvements that are now happening. While some respondents acknowledge adequate access to technology and enrichment resources, others highlight disparities in academic opportunities for struggling and advanced students. Statements addressing the quality and adequacy of physical and technological resources indicate a mix of satisfaction and concerns about consistency across different schools.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Turnover rates among key staff positions

While turnover in the District is consistent and slightly lower than other PA schools and public education as a whole, analysis of turnover rates among key staff positions reveals challenges that affect the stability and quality of education in the district. Key issues include difficulties in retaining paraeducators and ELD teachers. Additionally, stakeholder interviews and surveys highlight fluctuating job satisfaction.

Turnover among key staff positions in KCSD has had notable impacts on the District's stability and operations. Frequent changes in leadership has created a sense of disrupted continuity. This has placed additional strain on remaining staff, who often bear increased workloads as they attempt to fill gaps left by departing colleagues. The lack of institutionalized succession planning and knowledge transfer further complicates transitions, even as some staff develop personal systems to address these challenges.

Despite the district's diverse demographics and the pressing need for culturally aligned educators and support, personnel recruitment efforts, particularly for bilingual and minority staff, have not been successful. Moreover, turnover at the district leadership level has contributed to inconsistencies in strategic vision and eroded trust among staff and community members. Stability in leadership will be essential to fostering trust and advancing the district's long-term goals.

Insufficient systemic support for student mental health and behavioral needs

Teachers and staff have noted an increase in student behavioral issues, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many feel unprepared to handle these challenges due to inadequate training and resources. While some schools are commended for their structured systems, others struggle with inconsistent support mechanisms. This inconsistency creates uneven experiences for students with mental health and behavioral needs across the district goals.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

While social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have been introduced, stakeholders report a lack of consistency and depth across the district. Observations point to gaps in counselor availability and insufficient professional development to address complex socio-emotional challenges.

Additionally, systemic gaps in the integration of SEL programs have been identified. Some schools have strong support strategies, while others lack cohesive approaches to address students' emotional regulation and peer interactions.

Counselors describe high caseloads and insufficient staffing, which hinder their ability to provide targeted mental health support. While some schools have made progress in creating supportive environments, a unified, district-wide approach is needed to ensure consistency in addressing the mental health and behavioral needs of all students.

Addressing the needs of the middle

Across focus groups addressing the needs of middle-tier students—those performing at average levels—surfaced as a critical challenge. Stakeholder feedback and district performance data highlight opportunities to better serve these students through intentional strategies, systemic alignment, and equitable resource allocation.

Community surveys reveal a strong emphasis on personalized, interest-driven learning pathways and innovative teaching methods as vital to improving educational outcomes. Respondents highlighted the importance of tailoring instruction to individual student needs and adopting evidence-based pedagogies. However, opinions regarding the adequacy of current resources were mixed. While some stakeholders viewed resources for struggling and high-achieving students as sufficient, others expressed concerns about gaps in support for middle-tier learners.

Performance data further underscores the need for targeted interventions. Middle-tier students comprise a significant portion of KCSD's student population. For example, 43.7% of Grade 3 students and 41.1% of Grade 5 students perform in the "average" range on assessments of literacy and reading comprehension. While these students generally demonstrate foundational competencies, they often lack access to enrichment opportunities and targeted skill development. Teachers have also identified inconsistent curriculum delivery and insufficient differentiation as barriers to effectively challenging and engaging middle-tier learners.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Feedback from educators and parents underscores the need for differentiation and innovative instructional approaches. Stakeholders advocated for strategies such as project-based learning, interdisciplinary teaching, and the integration of technology to better engage middle-tier learners. However, disparities in programming, including access to field trips and enrichment activities, remain a concern across schools. Educators also expressed a need for structured professional development to equip them with the tools necessary for implementing effective, differentiated instruction.

Lack of a guaranteed, viable curriculum

The analysis of KCSD data reveals persistent challenges in maintaining a guaranteed, viable curriculum across grade levels and content areas. District-wide assessments and community feedback indicate inconsistencies and gaps in academic rigor. For instance, performance data from early literacy and reading benchmarks (Grades K-5) show significant numbers of students performing below average or at risk of not meeting end-of-year goals. These findings suggest uneven implementation of effective instructional opportunities and highlight the urgent need for a standardized curriculum that provides equitable access to high-quality education.

Teachers and staff frequently report misalignments in the curriculum, particularly during key transitions between elementary and middle school. These gaps negatively impact learning continuity, with foundational skills often being inconsistently addressed. Educators have also expressed concerns about the district's lack of teacher input during program adoption, which has led to low buy-in and challenges in implementation. Many believe that insufficient training and follow-up on new initiatives result in fragmented efforts that fail to improve educational outcomes.

The rigidity of the selected programs further exacerbates these issues. Teachers have noted that it often does not account for diverse student needs, particularly among English Learners (ELs) and students in special education programs. Compounding this is the inconsistent support provided to teachers for adapting materials to meet varied learning paths.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Community feedback reflects a shared frustration with the absence of transparency in curriculum decisions. Stakeholders, including teachers and parents, report that new curricula are often adopted without adequate piloting or justification, leading to a loss of trust. Inadequate professional development further complicates the implementation process, as teachers struggle to navigate curricular changes without what they believe are sufficient training or resources.

Many participants emphasized the importance of providing community members with access to curriculum outlines to enhance understanding of what is being taught. Ensuring the curriculum is both comprehensive and aligned with community expectations remains a key priority.

Outdated policies and lack of procedures, protocols, systems, and structures

The analysis reveals mixed perceptions about the effectiveness of the current systems and the presence of structures supporting operational and educational objectives in the District. Stakeholders highlighted specific areas where existing protocols and systems are perceived as ineffective or insufficient, particularly in fostering positive behavior and creating an inclusive environment. Open-ended responses and optional feedback further emphasized recurring concerns about the adequacy of policy implementation and the clarity of procedures.

A deeper examination of KCSD's systems and practices reveals several critical challenges rooted in outdated policies and fragmented procedures. Data-driven decision-making within KCSD is limited by the absence of consistent systems for monitoring and responding to performance metrics.

The District also faces challenges stemming from a lack of structured procedures and alignment across operations. Staff frequently described KCSD as reactive rather than proactive, with minimal formalized documentation of policies and insufficient training for new hires. Many employees reported being left to navigate systems independently, reflecting broader inefficiencies. Additionally, the absence of centralized procedures has created confusion in areas such as curriculum piloting and decision-making, which were described as inconsistent and unclear.

Findings and Analysis: Challenges

Communication

Communication within the Kennett Consolidated School District (KCS D) has been identified as a critical area of focus. Evidence from community surveys and feedback reveals strengths in maintaining consistent communication via newsletters, email updates, and superintendent messages, which are valued for their frequency and accessibility; though these often add to confusion about where to access information.

Some stakeholders indicated that the communication was too frequent. Challenges persist, including inconsistencies across schools in platform use and parent-teacher interactions, highlighting the need for unified communication practices and clearer expectations.

Communication gaps, both within departments and between the district and external stakeholders, exacerbate these challenges. Communication is recognized as a pivotal element that impacts trust, collaboration, and effectiveness across the district. However, recurring concerns point to inconsistencies in the clarity and follow-through of communication at various levels, from district leadership to individual schools.

For instance, while initiatives like weekly memos and transparent interactions by leadership have been praised, staff and teachers often express frustration over the lack of actionable guidance and disjointed direction regarding professional development. Staff frequently report receiving conflicting messages, leading to confusion and frustration. Furthermore, communication gaps are particularly pronounced for engaging diverse populations, especially Hispanic families, where language barriers and cultural differences exacerbate the issue.



Findings and Analysis: Opportunities

Bilingual programs and promoting cultural immersion initiatives

Stakeholder responses in both the survey and focus group reveal significant opportunities to enhance bilingual programs and promote cultural immersion initiatives. Many participants emphasized the value of such programs in improving student engagement and fostering community inclusion. Suggestions include expanding bilingual resources and integrating cultural activities into the curriculum to create a more inclusive environment. These initiatives could strengthen the district's efforts to celebrate its linguistic and cultural diversity while addressing educational and social gaps. However, challenges such as logistical constraints and the need for increased community awareness were also noted.

KCSD's unique demographic composition, which includes a high percentage of Hispanic students and a notable number of English Learners (ELs), underscores the importance of these efforts. By leveraging its multicultural strengths, KCSD can create programs that not only enhance academic outcomes but also build a sense of belonging and unity among students and families.

Stakeholder feedback highlights a pressing need for more bilingual educators and culturally responsive training for staff to better support ELs. Additionally, cultural immersion programs could help bridge divides between student groups that often segregate along cultural or linguistic lines during unstructured times, such as lunch or field trips. Dual-language classrooms, thematic cultural events, and family engagement initiatives were suggested as strategies to encourage cross-cultural appreciation and interaction. Such efforts would deepen community connections and promote a shared understanding among diverse groups within the district.

Findings and Analysis: Opportunities

To achieve these goals, KCSD would need to make strategic investments. This could involve developing partnerships with local cultural organizations, enhancing curriculum materials with multicultural content, and offering professional development opportunities for culturally responsive teaching. By expanding bilingual education and cultural immersion initiatives, KCSD can capitalize on its linguistic and cultural assets to create a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment. These programs would not only support academic achievement but also foster unity and cross-cultural understanding, benefiting both students and the broader community.

Leveraging community partnerships

KCSD has significant opportunities to deepen collaboration with local stakeholders, enhance inclusivity, and support student success. Themes emerging from the data emphasize the importance of creating and sustaining partnerships, collaborating with local service providers, and fostering family involvement in the school community. This highlights an area where further exploration and stakeholder engagement could yield actionable insights.

KCSD's existing strengths provide a robust foundation for leveraging community partnerships. The district benefits from its diversity, close-knit community ties, and a shared commitment to student achievement. Strong historical relationships with local organizations, such as businesses and nonprofits, position the district as a central hub for collaboration. These partnerships could be further expanded to address academic, social, and emotional needs.

For instance, local businesses and civic organizations could play a pivotal role in enhancing STEM and arts programs, aligning student learning with workforce trends. Similarly, collaborations with mental health services and cultural organizations could provide targeted support for diverse student populations, addressing inequities in resource access and fostering inclusivity.

Schools like the Kindergarten Center are already recognized as vital hubs for engagement, and extending their reach through mentorship programs, internships, and collaborative projects with local industries—such as the region's prominent mushroom farms—could further enrich student experiences while strengthening community ties.

Findings and Analysis: Opportunities

Despite these strengths, challenges persist. Limited bilingual staff, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and gaps in family engagement highlight areas needing targeted efforts. Stakeholders have advocated for revitalizing initiatives like *Café en Familia* and enhancing partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and cultural organizations to improve equity and access for all students.

Strengthening district-wide alignment in policies and professional development

Stakeholders believe that KCSD has significant opportunities to improve district-wide alignment in policies and professional development. Current inconsistencies in curriculum delivery, instructional opportunities, and professional learning hinder equitable learning experiences, particularly for English Learners and special education populations.

Educators expressed a strong desire for teacher-led, collaborative professional learning tailored to the district's specific needs, but outdated systems and a lack of cohesive strategy have impeded these efforts. A unified professional development strategy emphasizing consistent standards, evidence-based teaching, and equity-focused approaches is essential. Embedding social-emotional learning into instruction and increasing training on diversity and cultural responsiveness can further enhance inclusivity and student engagement. Additionally, fostering cross-departmental collaboration, shared accountability, and regular data-driven reviews will ensure systemic progress and alignment.

Investing in equitable upgrades across schools

Equity in resources and facilities remains a pressing concern for KCSD, with disparities in infrastructure, enrichment opportunities, and specialized support programs across schools. Overcrowding, outdated facilities, and inconsistent access to gifted and special education services exacerbate inequities, impacting student outcomes. Addressing these gaps requires a strategic plan for equitable resource allocation, ongoing collaboration among stakeholders, and leveraging internal expertise for cost-effective professional development. By prioritizing alignment, inclusivity, and resource equity, KCSD can build a cohesive educational framework that meets the diverse needs of its students and community.

Findings and Analysis: Opportunities

Improving transparency

Transparency emerged as a central concern in conversations with stakeholders. Participants noted that inconsistent communication and inadequate follow-through on initiatives have negatively impacted trust and engagement within the district. Specific challenges include misaligned messaging between departments, lack of clarity in decision-making, and insufficient communication of district-wide plans. These issues have fostered a perception that stakeholder input is either undervalued or ignored, leading to disengagement among staff and community members. Addressing these shortcomings is critical to fostering a culture of inclusion and collaboration.

Moreover, while student-focused decision-making is a district priority, stakeholders observed that current processes often favor administrative convenience or legacy practices over inclusivity and transparency. These concerns underscore the importance of creating systems that genuinely reflect the voices and needs of the district's diverse community.

The feedback suggests that addressing transparency requires establishing robust two-way communication systems, clear accountability structures, and proactive engagement with staff, students, and families. These measures will foster a culture of openness, build trust, and ensure shared ownership of district goals.

Concerns about communication and trust persist. Inconsistent messaging from leaders and departments has created confusion and hindered trust-building efforts. This lack of cohesion, coupled with the perception of superficial stakeholder engagement, has eroded confidence in the district's ability to effect meaningful change. Stakeholders described this as an "illusion of input," where efforts to gather feedback often feel performative rather than genuine.

Furthermore, the absence of sustained follow-through on initiatives has further diminished confidence in leadership. While KCSD celebrates its diversity, stakeholders noted the need for more inclusive mechanisms to amplify underrepresented voices, particularly within non-English-speaking communities. Current efforts to engage families and staff are often viewed as insufficiently impactful or culturally responsive, leaving some community members feeling excluded.

Findings and Analysis: Opportunities

To address these challenges, KCSD should implement genuine forums for collaboration, such as focus groups or advisory committees, which can facilitate meaningful participation from diverse perspectives. Setting clear benchmarks for district initiatives and regularly publicizing progress will enhance accountability and credibility. Additionally, strengthening culturally responsive outreach efforts and fostering consistent family engagement will promote trust and inclusivity across the district. By prioritizing transparency, KCSD can reinforce its community bonds, rebuild trust among stakeholders, and position itself for long-term success.

Strategic planning

KCSD presents significant opportunities for strategic planning, particularly in addressing academic equity, infrastructure, and data-driven decision-making. Enrollment trends indicate stagnant growth across grade levels, highlighting the need to proactively manage resources to accommodate demographic shifts. Analysis of student performance reveals disparities in literacy and numeracy. Addressing these gaps requires a strategic focus on early interventions, consistent curriculum delivery, and professional development for educators.

Additionally stakeholders believe that equity and inclusion, particularly for underserved communities and in progress infrastructure improvements, are necessary to support modern educational demands. Through collaborative efforts, KCSD can implement a cohesive strategic plan to ensure that its programs are inclusive, effective, and aligned with long-term goals, fostering academic excellence for all learners.

Several key themes pertaining to the District's strategic planning emerged through this analysis. A central strength lies in the district's sense of community pride which many stakeholders value as a unique and enriching characteristic and believe can be leveraged to develop and implement a collaborative strategic plan that will address the challenges of the KCSD. However, challenges such as uneven student engagement, varying teacher effectiveness, and disparities in resources and opportunities across schools present opportunities for strategic planning and improvement.



Recommendations

Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Strategic Plan

- Create a district-wide strategic plan that aligns with KCSD's goals for equity, inclusivity, and academic excellence. This should include input from diverse stakeholders and establish measurable benchmarks for progress in academic achievement, resource allocation, and infrastructure improvements.

Perform an Opportunity Audit

- Conduct a comprehensive opportunity audit to identify disparities in academic outcomes, resource allocation, and access to programs. Use the findings to develop actionable strategies that address systemic inequities and create a more inclusive learning environment.

Develop a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

- Create a horizontally and vertically aligned curriculum to ensure consistency and equity in learning opportunities across all grade levels and schools. Include teacher input in the development process and provide comprehensive training for effective implementation.

Enhance Equity in Academic Opportunities

- Address disparities in advanced academic programs and extracurricular access by increasing resources for underrepresented groups, such as economically disadvantaged and English Learner students. Implement targeted interventions to improve literacy and numeracy for these subgroups.



Invest in Consistent Professional Development

- Offer district-wide, teacher-led professional development focused on equity, the science of reading, cultural responsiveness, and differentiated instruction to support diverse learners effectively.

Improve Communication and Transparency

- Standardize communication practices across all schools and platforms. Establish regular updates on district initiatives, progress reports, and accessible information for non-English-speaking families to build trust and engagement.

Strengthen Systems, Policies, and Procedures

- Update outdated policies and create standardized procedures to improve consistency and efficiency. Establish clear protocols for curriculum adoption, behavioral support systems, and decision-making processes.

Expand Bilingual and Cultural Immersion Programs

- Invest in bilingual education and cultural immersion initiatives to bridge language gaps and promote inclusivity. Recruit bilingual educators and develop programs that celebrate KCSD's cultural diversity.

Address Facilities Disparities

- Prioritize infrastructure improvements to modernize outdated schools and ensure equitable facilities across the district. Include community input to address perceived and real inequities.



Enhance Mental Health and Behavioral Support Systems

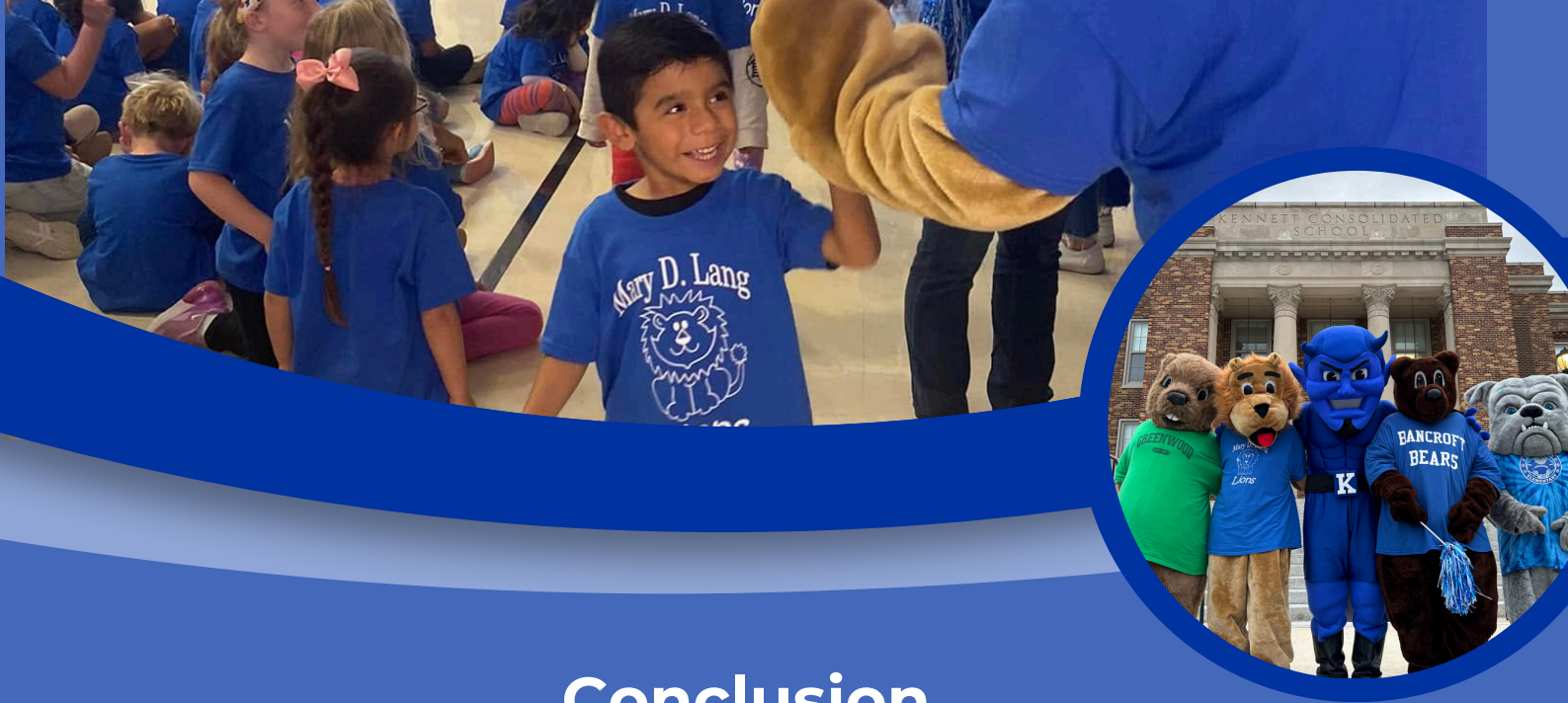
- Implement a district-wide, multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for behavioral health and socio-emotional learning. Increase staffing for counselors and provide professional training on mental health interventions.

Focus on "Middle-Tier" Students

- Develop strategies to engage and support students performing at average levels by offering differentiated instruction, project-based learning opportunities, and personalized learning pathways to prevent them from being overlooked.

Leverage Community Partnerships

- Deepen collaboration with local organizations, businesses, and nonprofits to enhance resources for STEM, arts, and career-readiness programs. Expand partnerships to support underserved student populations and increase community involvement.



Conclusion

Since the beginning of my tenure, I've had the privilege of listening to and learning from the Kennett Consolidated School District (KCS D) community. I've been inspired by your passion and commitment to ensuring that our children not only receive the education they need, but also the resources they require to truly flourish. Together, we have identified the strengths, challenges, and opportunities that will shape the strategic plan for our future.

This report is not just a document, but a roadmap to the educational community we all aspire to build. Achieving this vision will require your continued trust and active participation. We've already taken the first step in recognizing both our areas for improvement and the resources we can leverage to reach the highest standards. I am committed to fostering transparency and open communication throughout this journey, ensuring we collaborate effectively every step of the way.

In the coming weeks and months, you'll have numerous opportunities to contribute. Whether through subcommittees focused on areas such as facilities, human resources, communication, and curriculum, or through surveys and focus groups, your voice will continue to shape the direction of our strategic plan that will be finalized this fall.



Your engagement at the school level is also crucial. I encourage you to support our teachers and administrators by volunteering, joining the PTO, or simply staying involved in your child's educational experience. Every bit of time and effort you contribute brings us closer to overcoming challenges and creating new opportunities for success.

We are now educating those who will graduate in 2032, marking the 100th anniversary of the building that once housed all of our district's students. Just as the graduates of the past helped shape our nation's growth, I look forward to celebrating our collective progress and the continued pursuit of excellence as we move forward. Together, we will ensure that the students of today and tomorrow receive the education and opportunities they deserve.

Enthusiastically,

Kimberly Rizzo Saunders, Ed.D.
Superintendent