

Stillwater Township Board of Education

Strategic Planning Update #2

Recap of the 2nd Community Strategic Planning Session, April 1, 2025

The Stillwater Township Board of Education intends to approve a five-year Strategic Plan this spring, which will guide the Board's and Administration's decisions over the next five years. It is the wish of the Board and Superintendent Dr. William Kochis that the new Strategic Plan be created with community participation, and thus they have planned three evening meetings open to any interested school stakeholders who would like to contribute to the formation of the school's new Strategic Plan.

At the invitation of Dr. Kochis and the Stillwater Board of Education, members of the school community came together on the evening of April 1, 2025 for the second session of Strategic Planning. Strategic Planning Consultant Ms. Kathleen Helewa facilitated the session.

We began the session with a recap of our first meeting, in which Dr. Kochis presented a State of the District report. We then broke into three small groups, and each group created a SWOT analysis (i.e., identifying our school district's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—see Meeting #1 recap for greater detail), utilizing everyone's unique perspectives.

The small-group SWOTs affirmed that the Stillwater Township Elementary School District teachers & staff, administrators and BOE, were unanimously affirmed as District Strengths, which is a testament to the hard work everyone puts into the school and District. Other commonalities in the Strengths category were high student achievement and NJSLA test scores and communication.

Greatest commonalities in the category of school district Weaknesses were funding and fiscal issues, a lower degree of parental involvement than desired, high demands on Stillwater School teachers and staff, and low staffing for the Child Study Team.

Commonalities under Opportunities were shared services among the Kittatinny Regional school districts, the regionalization study which is just beginning in the cluster, more parent and community involvement in the school, and the ability to pursue grants.

The greatest commonalities in the Threats category were funding concerns, and an increase in the mental health needs of students.

The focus for our second session was on defining a vision for our students. For guidance, we reviewed the Stillwater Township Board of Education's Mission Statement and its unofficial motto.



Stillwater Township Board of Education Mission Statement

The Stillwater Township School, a high-achieving, rural school of excellence, works in partnership with students, parents, staff and a caring community to provide every student a progressive and nurturing educational environment designed to maximize individual potential, instill self-esteem, promote citizenship and foster an appreciation for local history and a passion for life-long learning.

District Motto: **Achieving Excellence In Education**

All present had positive view of the above, and believe that the Mission Statement and Motto accurately reflect the guiding principles that define Stillwater School culture.

This was the perfect segueway for our small group work. We split into three small groups. All were asked to define together a vision for the Stillwater Township Elementary School District—to envision what the student experience and school district would look like in five years' time, when our new Strategic Plan (which we are currently building) had matured, and all of the aspirational goals and objectives contained therein were fulfilled. Groups were asked to imagine the outcome of the new Strategic Plan and to complete the following statements, as if we were answering the questions below in 2030, five years from now:

Stillwater students are _____

I.e., What is the everyday school experience like for current Stillwater Elementary students?

Stillwater Elementary School graduates are _____

I.e., How do children who went through the Stillwater elementary school system stand out?

Stillwater Elementary School is _____

I.e., What distinguishes our campus and resources as an optimal place for students to learn?

Because _____

I.e., What did the school district provide / do in the five year span of 2025 to 2030 to make the above a reality?

The following is the small groups' work, in bold, verbatim.

Orange Group

Stillwater students are **well-rounded, engaged, driving, interested, high-achieving, adaptable, critical-thinking**

Stillwater graduates are [i.e., exhibit] **love of learning, accepting other points of view, good citizens, express themselves, integrity**

Stillwater Elementary School is **[boasts a] caring, tight-knit community, sustainable, not satisfied with past successes, moving forward, the center of our community, a caring environment.**



(Orange Group work, continued)

Because

- **Small class sizes**
- **Excellent, caring staff**
- **Parental support and involvement**
- **Financial innovation**

Purple Group

Stillwater students are **well-rounded, academically competent, and inclusive**

Stillwater Elementary School graduates are **independent thinkers and confident**

Stillwater Elementary School is **maintaining the historic charm of the building while still creating contemporary spaces to progress student learning**

Because **Through staying true to our Mission Statement.**

Blue Group

Stillwater students are **happy, eager to go to school, kind, valued in their contributions, stewards of the community, everyone has something to contribute, seamless day, critical thinkers, well-educated, confident**

Stillwater graduates are **kind, involved in community, well-rounded, prepared, polite, independent thinkers, work well with others, willing to learn, high-achieving, willing to help, self-disciplined.**

Stillwater Elementary School is **safe, beautiful, able to keep great educators, a unique and fun place to be**

Because

- **Maintain quality educators**
- **Provide a safe and inclusive environment**
- **Utilize more of our outdoor campus resources**
- **Pursue grants & other funding resources**
- **Evaluate and assess staff to be more creative**
- **Assess tech resources**



The work of the small groups was shared to the larger group. Everyone present appreciated and agreed with the all of the small groups' work.

Our last task for the evening was to begin to determine the Goal Areas for our new Strategic Plan, which would support the visions articulated this evening while recognizing the outcomes of the SWOT exercises. The following Goal Areas were discussed and resonated with the large group:

- 1. Academic Achievement / Curriculum**
- 2. Providing a Strong Elementary Foundation**
- 3. Safe Facilities**
- 4. Fiscal Responsibility – Resources**

The meeting ended with thanks again to the Board and Dr. Kochis for their hospitality and for a productive and meaningful session, and to all the participants who came out that evening to join together in this important work. Our third and last Strategic Planning Meeting shall occur on Monday, April 7, during which we will write draft goal statements and supporting objectives for the Goal Areas we identified.

All interested participants from our school community who were not able to attend our prior meetings are **enthusiastically** invited to join us! The session, which will begin in the cafeteria at 6:30 pm and finish at 8 pm at the Stillwater Elementary School All-Purpose Room

Thanks to all our school stakeholders for your dedication to the Stillwater Township School District! We are looking forward to the final steps of working of our Strategic Plan, together.

**Come join us on Monday, April 7, 6:30—8pm
in the Stillwater School All-Purpose Room
for our final evening of Strategic Planning for our School District!**

We look forward to working with you—Bring a Friend!

