



Strategic Planning
Stakeholder Engagement Report
San Juan Unified School District

January 22, 2024

prepared by CESO Communications

C ●
E ●
S ●
O ●



01 | Background •

In the Fall of 2023, CESO Communications (CESO) contracted with San Juan Unified School District (San Juan Unified) to facilitate a strategic planning process to guide the work of the district over the next five years.

Following initial conversations with the district, as well as a review of the district's previous strategic work, stakeholder surveys and additional district data, CESO conducted a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process that included students, staff, parents and community members in November and December 2023.

The goal of this initial phase of the strategic planning process was to provide a variety of engagement activities that allowed individuals from across stakeholder groups to share their input. A combination of in-person and virtual engagements was used to solicit insight from stakeholders, which allowed participants to share their thoughts at times and in ways that were most convenient for them. There was also an effort to intentionally include student voices in the process to create a strategic plan that represents the true mission and vision of the school system.

Insights from these engagements have been included in this report. This report, along with other district reports, strategic initiatives and data will inform the work of the Core Planning Team and Design Team when they meet in January and February to develop a draft strategic plan.

02 | Engagement Process & Activities •

In November and December 2023, the district held several in-person and virtual engagements that included personal interviews; focus groups and collaborative workshops with current students, staff, parents/families, alumni and community members; and open input opportunities for students and families. An online conversation was also available for all stakeholders to weigh in with their thoughts and insights via ThoughtExchange.

To keep participants focused on the future and not on current topics or concerns, the district set out to answer the following key question:

**What do San Juan Unified students need to be
PREPARED for their next step and HOPEFUL for their future?**

Engagement Formats & Participation

San Juan students, families, staff and community members were invited to participate in a variety of engagements. In-person sessions included focus groups, open insight opportunities, and consensus workshops. Interviews were conducted with school board members, the superintendent and identified community leaders. Virtual conversations included using the district’s ThoughtExchange platform, surveys and Zoom-based focus groups.

** An analysis of the insights from all engagements is included later in this report as part of the key themes and findings.*

Focus Groups

Several in-person and virtual focus groups were held to gather feedback from staff, parents, and community members. In each session, participants were asked to provide their insights about the current reality for students in San Juan Unified, suggestions for improvement, and ideas for further supporting district students and families.

Consensus Workshops

San Juan students, families, staff and community members were invited to participate in facilitated engagements. Each in-person session was structured as a facilitated consensus workshop, providing opportunity for participants to provide their insights through individual brainstorming as well as small and large group discussions.

** An analysis of the ideas from the consensus workshops is incorporated into the key themes later in this report, with the raw data included in the appendix.*

Student Session

The student consensus workshop involved 85 high school students representing all the high schools in the district. Conversations focused on two workshop questions: what do students need to feel prepared and hopeful for their future, and what do students need to feel a sense of belonging in their school.



Open Community Session

Two open community consensus workshops were held for all staff, families and community members. Conversations focused on two questions: what do students need to feel prepared and hopeful for their future, and what do parents/families need to feel welcomed, valued and motivated to be involved in their student’s education.



Open Insight Sessions

The district offered several open insight sessions, including pop-up engagements at K-8 sites to get student insights on hopes & dreams and suggestions for improvement. In addition, the district posted banners at schools for parents/families to offer their insights.





Interviews

CESO Communications also conducted personal interviews with each member of the San Juan Unified School Board and the Superintendent. Interview questions were similar to the questions asked in other focus groups, with an additional focus on leadership of the district, their hopes for the strategic planning process, and their visions for the future.

In addition, the district identified community leaders for personal interviews. Again, the interviews focused on what the district should focus on in the future to better support students and families, with an additional focus on community and civic partnerships.

Surveys

The district also included surveys for identified audiences to ensure wide representation in the engagement phase. Students in middle school and high school were administered a survey in November 2023. Questions were similar to those of the focus groups, seeking insight on how prepared students feel for life after graduation, what skills they feel they need for adulthood, and ideas about what teachers and staff can do to help them feel more prepared and valued in the district.

In total, 438 students participated, 98% of whom took the survey in English, and a small percentage in Russian. Responses were nearly evenly distributed among grade levels:

- Grade 6 - 10%
- Grade 7 - 15%
- Grade 8 - 15%
- Grade 9 - 18%
- Grade 10 - 17%
- Grades 11 - 14%
- Grade 12 - 11%

The district also surveyed community partners. Again, questions focused on what skills students need for adulthood and how the district can support students and families.

Thought Exchange

In addition to the stakeholder engagements outlined above, all members of the San Juan Unified School District community were invited to participate in an **online conversation** via the district's ThoughtExchange platform. The conversation was combined with data gathering for the district's annual LCAP process, focusing on what the district is doing well and what it can do better to support students and families. The exchange was open for participation for six weeks in October and November 2023, and garnered significant input, with more than 600 participants providing nearly 577 thoughts. The majority (94%) of participants in the exchange did so in English. Additional responses were captured in Spanish (2%), Russian (2%) and Persian (1%).



* An analysis of the ideas shared in the ThoughtExchange is incorporated into the key themes later in this report, with a more detailed analysis included in the appendix.

PROCESS

The digital engagement platform ThoughtExchange was used to facilitate the online engagement of San Juan Unified students, staff, parents and community members by providing a virtual environment in which they were able to respond to some brief survey questions and a general prompt question. Participants were also able to rate and respond to the comments of other respondents.

ThoughtExchange operates as both a survey on some baseline questions and an online conversation in which participants generate ideas and feedback and build a sense of consensus on topics. Participation is not only about posting responses but also about sharing reactions, feelings and suggestions about the comments and responses of others.

TIMELINE & COMMUNICATION

The platform was open from October 5 - November 18, 2023. The district shared messaging about the exchange through various channels to invite and encourage participation.

EXCHANGE QUESTION

As for the virtual conversation, participants were asked to engage with the following prompt question:

What are some things our schools are doing well to support students and families, and what are some things our schools should do differently to improve support for students and families?

PARTICIPATION

Of those who participated in the virtual discussion, engagement was strong. The online platform garnered significant input, with over 600 participants providing nearly 600 thoughts.

 **Participants**
608
Last activity: 30+ days ago

 **Thoughts**
577
0.9 thoughts / participant

 **Ratings**
15,629
25.7 ratings / participant

Participation Demographics

While participants could choose more than one affiliation with the district, the exchange included mostly parents/guardians (80%), followed by district staff (17%). A small number of participants identified as community members (2%) and a handful identified as current students. The majority (54%) of parent respondents said they had children at the elementary level, with approximately one-quarter noting association with middle school (26%) or high school (28%).



The racial/ethnic demographics show 61% of respondents identifying as white, 15% as Hispanic or Latino/a/x , 9% noting two or more races, and 5% as African American or Black. Approximately 15% of respondents opted not to identify their race/ethnicity.

Additionally, respondents were asked to identify their relationship with special populations, with 5% noting they had a student with disabilities, 2% each as English learners and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 1% each as homeless and/or foster youth.

Level of Engagement

The exchange also indicated a strong level of engagement, with a ratings ratio of 27. The ratings ratio measures engagement in the exchange topic. A ratings ratio of 15 or higher shows strong engagement.

ADDITIONAL EXCHANGE

An additional ThoughtExchange was conducted with after-school staff, allowing their insights to be included in the research phase of the planning process. Twenty-two staff participated in the exchange, and 25 thoughts were submitted. The majority (71%) of participants identified as Bridges staff, whereas 29% identified with Discovery Club. The vast majority (95%) of participants have worked in the district for more than five years, with the other 5% identifying a district tenure of one to three years.

** An analysis of the ideas shared in the After School Program Staff ThoughtExchange is incorporated into the key themes later in this report, with a more detailed analysis included in the appendix.*



03 | Key Themes & Findings •

In reviewing the feedback from the various stakeholder engagements, the following themes emerged. As noted above, detailed insights and data from students, staff, parents and community members are included in the Appendix.

Executive Summary

While key themes and topics varied by audience, there were a few areas in which there was common agreement about what San Juan Unified students need to be prepared for their next step and hopeful for their future.

- **Life Skills** – All groups agreed on the importance of students learning practical skills important for adulthood, including financial literacy, time management, budgeting, cooking, setting up a home, etc.
- **Communication Skills** – Effective communication, including both in-person and non-verbal communication, was cited as essential to student success at any stage of life.
- **Critical Thinking and Decision-Making** – The ability to read, analyze, and critically evaluate information to make informed decisions was identified by most audiences as critical to future student success.
- **Interpersonal Skills** – Like communication and critical thinking, the ability to effectively interact, communicate and collaborate with others – encompassing qualities such as active listening, empathy, teamwork, conflict resolution, and building positive relationships – are necessary for students to advance into life after graduation.
- **Goal Setting and Self-Advocacy** – Several groups identified the need for all students to help learn the importance of goal setting, planning and self-advocacy skills.
- **College & Career Counseling** – Engagement participants discussed the current college counseling efforts and strategies for improvement. Many respondents indicated a desire for more counselors, noting the difficulty of students being able to meet with their designated counselor. There were also several discussions across audiences that indicated a desire to add in more career exploration and career counseling, highlighting options outside of going to a four-year college.
- **Growth Mindset** – Whether talking about individual student growth, expansion of instructional delivery, or enhancement of family engagement, all engagement participants stressed the need to continue urging and supporting students to achieve their best.



It should also be noted that in every group, participants held conversations about the changing demographics of the district, with special attention paid to newcomer families. While some communities across the country are experiencing strong opposition to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, San Juan Unified remains committed to its **8-point Commitment to Educational Justice**, something that does not go unnoticed to students, parents, staff and community members. The key is to ensure that the district can provide concrete actions of this commitment so that it moves beyond words on paper into standard practice across the system.

In addition, all audiences identified the impact of the diversity of the district, often citing it as an asset for learners. But the growing diversity is also cause for concern in San Juan Unified, with many audiences noting concern about how well the district can address the unique needs of students and families.

Overall, the community's feedback emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive, inclusive and supportive educational environment that addresses academic, social and emotional needs for the success of all students in the San Juan Unified School District. Each of the engagements demonstrate a **strong commitment to learning** throughout San Juan Unified, with a genuine **shared passion for the district and the students and families it serves**.

As the district continues this strategic planning process, it will be imperative that discussions focus on planning for the future and determining the direction and mission of the district in the years to come. Fortunately, all engagement participants highlighted the district's history of **putting students first and at the center of all decisions**. Having this as a foundational approach will serve the district well as it plans for the next five years.

- In terms of **student success**, the community places a strong emphasis on essential skills for high school and post-high school achievements.
 - Key skills include effective time management, organizational abilities, communication skills, a proactive mindset, discipline, and perseverance. This holistic approach aims to establish a foundation for academic achievement, personal development, and positive social experiences.
 - The involvement of teachers and staff is deemed crucial in fostering a hopeful and prepared outlook among students.
 - Addressing students' diverse needs, including physical and mental health issues, and offering support during absences contribute to a caring and supportive environment.
 - Furthermore, there is a call for enhanced guidance in life skills, such as practical subjects like cooking and financial literacy.
 - The community advocates for an inclusive and safe school environment that promotes real-world skills through targeted classes and individualized mentorship, contributing to an optimistic atmosphere.



- In addressing the overall **culture and climate**, the community identifies measures to improve inclusivity, eliminate discrimination, and create a positive environment. Strategies include addressing inappropriate behavior and promoting diversity.
 - Collaborative efforts, effective communication, and a proactive approach are highlighted as essential components for fostering a positive and inclusive school culture.
 - The parent and family data accentuate the diverse perspectives within the community.
 - Parents emphasize the importance of preparing students with essential life skills and fostering hope by providing real-world connections to learning.
 - Academic concerns include the need for more staff, better pay, and smaller group sizes to meet diverse student needs.
 - Additionally, there are calls for improved social-emotional support during transitions and increased communication between teachers and parents. Parents of Special Education students stress the unique challenges their children face, emphasizing the importance of real-world connections and experiential learning.

Key Themes by Audience

STUDENTS

San Juan Unified students had much to share when asked about being prepared for high school and beyond.

Success in High School

To be successful in high school, San Juan Unified students identified a combination of essential skills. Collectively, these skills create a foundation for success in high school, encompassing academic achievement, personal development, and a positive social experience.

Categorically, the following are the prioritized skills students feel they need to excel academically and socially in high school:

- **Time Management and Good Study Habits** – Strong study habits, including effective time management and the ability to focus, are crucial for preparing for exams and maintaining good grades.
- **Effective Communication** – Good communication skills, both with teachers and peers, contribute to a positive learning environment.
- **Organization and planning** – Organizational skills play a significant role in ensuring that assignments are completed on time and tasks are prioritized.
- **Growth Mindset** – Having a proactive and disciplined mindset, along with perseverance, focus and concentration, is vital for overcoming challenges and staying



on track. Students also cited attributes such as self-discipline, motivation, responsibility and accountability as critical to success in high school.

- **Problem-solving** – Being able to approach challenges with a willingness and ability to work through struggles and solve problems, both individually and collaboratively with others, is needed in high school and beyond.

Success after High School

As for what they need to be prepared for after high school, students identified needing a combination of academic and life skills to be successful. The following represent the skills they considered important for success in various post-high school endeavors, including college, careers and independent living.

- **Time Management** – The ability to manage one's time effectively and balance various responsibilities.
- **Financial Literacy** – Understanding financial concepts, including taxes, budgeting, and managing money.
- **Communication Skills** – Being able to communicate effectively with others, both in writing and verbally.
- **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving** – Developing the ability to think critically and solve complex problems.
- **Independence** – Being self-reliant and capable of taking care of oneself.
- **Study Skills** – Learning how to study effectively to succeed in college or career-related pursuits.
- **Social Skills** – Building positive relationships and effectively interacting with others.
- **Planning for the Future** – Setting goals and making plans for further education or career development.
- **Responsibility** – Being accountable for one's actions and fulfilling obligations.
- **Adaptability** – The ability to adapt to new situations and learn new skills as needed.

Role of Teachers and Staff

Teachers and staff can play a crucial role in making students feel hopeful and prepared for the future by addressing various needs and concerns expressed by students. Overall, a combination of understanding, practical education, and mentorship can contribute to students feeling more hopeful and prepared for their future endeavors. The following are suggestions for how teachers and staff can support and help students as they prepare for their future.

- Teach real-world skills such as financial literacy, taxes, and life skills
- Provide career guidance and help students choose suitable career paths
- Be understanding, patient, and respectful towards students
- Offer mentorship and support for academic and personal growth
- Create a positive and inclusive learning environment
- Encourage and motivate students to pursue their goals and aspirations
- Offer guidance on college preparation and scholarship opportunities
- Explain what life will be like after high school and beyond



- Teach time management and study skills
- Provide opportunities for students to explore their interests and passions

In addition, teachers, staff and administrators can improve the culture and climate for all students by implementing a variety of measures. These prioritizations emphasize the immediate need for addressing bullying and promoting inclusivity and diversity, as well as providing mental health support. Students also noted they would like to increase the understanding of teachers and staff about the diversity of needs and learning styles in the district so that they are better able to support the individual needs San Juan Unified students. Additionally, better communication and safety concerns should be prioritized, as well as emotional support, respect, mentorship and motivation.

- Addressing Bullying and Inappropriate Behavior
- Inclusivity and Diversity
- Support for Mental Health
- Better Communication
- Teacher and Staff Attitudes
- Racial and Cultural Sensitivity
- Homework and Academic Support
- Creating Clubs and Activities
- Motivation and Encouragement
- Mentorship and Support

Based on the insights shared, students in San Juan Unified value a positive and supportive school culture. They emphasize the importance of teachers, staff, and administrators being understanding, patient and respectful toward students. Students appreciate the opportunity to work in groups and have a say in certain aspects of their learning environment. Additionally, they express concerns about strict rules, excessive homework, and the impact of such rules on their well-being. The students also highlight the significance of teachers being aware of their diverse backgrounds and providing a welcoming and inclusive environment. Overall, the feedback emphasizes the importance of fostering a positive and supportive school climate that considers the individual needs of each student.

Summary

As such, it is suggested that the district consider several key factors as it plans for San Juan Unified students over the next five to seven years.

- These include a focus on combining academic and emotional competencies, and soft skills for future employment.
- Addressing the issue of bullying is crucial, with an emphasis on proper consequences for consistent problems.
- The mental health of students should be a priority, and efforts should be made to check in on students regularly.



- Recognition and support for teachers, along with considerations for curriculum changes, such as adding classes on life skills and financial education, are also frequently mentioned.
- Additionally, students express the importance of a positive and enjoyable learning environment, the need for more AP classes, and improvements to facilities and resources.

It is clear that student well-being, effective teaching methods, and practical life preparation are key concerns that should be taken into account for future planning.

PARENTS & FAMILIES

The parent and family data for San Juan Unified reflect diverse perspectives on the themes of preparation, hope, academics, advice, and climate and culture. While many parents feel their students are academically prepared, concerns arise about social preparedness, especially during school transitions.

- In terms of preparation, parents from different groups emphasize the importance of essential skills such as discipline, perseverance, and financial sense for students to be successful after high school.
- There is a call for strategic thinking, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to various career paths. While some parents feel their students are well-prepared, others express concerns and suggest that the district should focus on developing strategic thinking and offering mentorship opportunities.
- Hope is seen as crucial in light of recent global challenges. Parents suggest that the district can foster hope by providing real-world connections to learning, exposing students to diverse experiences, and offering mentorship opportunities.
- Alumni engagement, strengthening job skills, and clear visions for multiple possibilities are also mentioned.

Needed Skills for Life Success

As for what students need to be prepared for after high school, parents and families identified several themes. The following represent the skills they considered most important for success in whatever path students choose after graduation.

- **Financial Literacy and Time Management** – The need for students to have clear skills in financial literacy and time management, including budgeting and organizational skills.
- **Career Preparation and Life Skills** – Preparing students for various career paths and teaching practical life skills, recognizing that not everyone will attend college.
- **Critical Thinking and Decision-Making** – The ability to read, analyze, and critically evaluate information to make informed decisions.



- **Communication Skills** – Effective communication, including both in-person and non-verbal communication.
- **Emotional Intelligence and Self-Management** – Teaching students how to manage emotions, adapt to challenges, and be aware of factors beyond their immediate environment.
- **Goal Setting and Self-Advocacy** – Encouraging goal setting, planning, and self-advocacy skills.
- **Interpersonal Skills and Positive Relationships** – Developing positive relationships and understanding what makes good friendships.
- **Adaptability and Problem Solving** – The ability to respond and adapt to future challenges and engage in problem-solving.
- **College and Career Readiness** – Preparing students for college and careers, including collaboration, independence, and real-life skills.

Suggested Improvements

As for suggestions to improve San Juan Unified schools, the following themes emerged from the parent and family engagements:

- **Equity and Access to Resources** – Ensuring equity and access to resources for all students, particularly those facing challenges such as diverse backgrounds, difficult family situations, or economic barriers.
- **Exposure and Exploration of Possibilities** – Exposing students to various paths, options, and careers, allowing them to explore and discover what's possible for their future.
- **Early Implementation of AVID Skills** – Implementing AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) skills for all students, such as note-taking, studying, and test-taking, at an earlier stage in students' education, possibly starting as early as kindergarten.
- **Community Partnerships** – Expanding community partnerships and involving external groups that can contribute to academic support is a top priority.
- **Flexibility and Adaptation** – The need for flexibility and adaptation in response to the rapidly evolving world, with an emphasis on embracing change and not blaming others.
- **Empowering Students for Change** – Empowering students to contribute to change and positively impact the world is seen as a core aspect of the mission statement.
- **Diversity and Collaboration** – A strong belief in and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, with an emphasis on celebrating diversity and different cultures.
- **Structural and Systemic Changes for Equity** – Ensuring that the district's efforts result in true structural and systemic changes towards educational justice and equity.
- **Support for Vulnerable Populations** – Better serving populations with high absence rates and low graduation rates by prioritizing support and strategies to address their needs.
- **Teacher Recruitment and Support** – Focusing on recruiting teachers of diverse backgrounds and providing them with opportunities, training, and mentoring to be successful.



- **Elevating Student Voice** – Continuing to listen to students and incorporating their voices into decision-making processes.

In planning for the future, parents suggest addressing violence at school (as they hear reported from their students), strengthening extracurricular activities, considering the impact of AI on education, providing transportation, and offering classes on practical life skills. Additionally, there are calls for more support for special education parents, bilingual personnel, and opportunities for parent connections.

Special Populations

Special Education Families

Parents from Special Education (SpEd) families highlight unique challenges, emphasizing the need for more support and understanding of the individual learning needs of SpEd students. They stress the importance of real-world connections, experiential learning, and a focus on positive values.

In terms of preparation, there is a concern that students with special needs face more barriers and limited options compared to regular education students. Parents express a need for a clearer understanding of growth mindset and resilience, emphasizing the importance of teaching students how to work through struggles.

The theme of hope centers on providing students with real-world connections to learning, guest speakers, and field trips. Academically, there is a call for the district to better meet the needs of special education students, embracing experiential learning, and addressing concerns about program introductions and removals. Concerns about the district's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion highlight the need for more representation of disabled students and a focus on educational justice.

Looking ahead, the district is urged to focus on universal design for learning, engage in honest conversations with parents, and provide district-wide leadership for systemic issues. Parents of SpEd students stress the importance of keeping them informed about initiatives and involving them as partners in the educational process.

Newcomer Families

The themes presented in the newcomer parent data highlight the importance of strategic planning for the future, particularly in preparing students for success after high school. The essential skills and attributes emphasized include life skills such as financial literacy, basic car maintenance, and understanding different cultures. Newcomer parents also express a need for clearer communication about learning outcomes and expectations, especially in magnet and immersion programs.

Emotional support during transitions is identified as crucial, along with the suggestion of more field trips and clubs for newcomers to help them feel they belong. The themes also touch on



promoting hope and kindness, addressing academic needs through personalized instruction and tutoring support, and fostering a diverse and inclusive climate.

The district's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is recognized positively with newcomer families. Overall, this parent data reflect a desire for a well-rounded, inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Early Childhood Education Families

Early Childhood Education (ECE) parent responses highlight several key themes. In terms of preparation, parents emphasize the importance of practical skills, financial knowledge, and exposure to different career paths for students to be successful after high school.

The discussion on hope underscores the need for students to feel secure and engaged in activities, with a call for more diverse and accessible extracurricular options. Regarding academics, parents stress the importance of multilingual information access and urge the district to support parents in understanding the various programs and services offered by the district.

The climate and culture in San Juan Unified is generally positive, with a sense of acceptance and diversity. The commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is acknowledged positively, but there are suggestions for more information dissemination and continued support for multilingual families.

Looking to the future, ECE parents advocate for assessing preschool enrollment requirements, increasing preschool options, addressing transportation challenges, and focusing on equitable distribution of resources. The feedback also stresses the importance of celebrating diverse cultures and providing clarity on program eligibility.

FACULTY & STAFF

Many teachers and staff members in San Juan Unified identified the evolving and diverse needs they are seeing in their students.

Needed Skills for Life Success

As for what students need to be prepared for after high school, faculty and staff identified themes similar to those identified by parents and families. The following represent the skills they considered most important for post-secondary success.

- **Growth Mindset** – Believing that abilities and intelligence can be developed through effort, learning and resilience. Students with a growth mindset are more likely to embrace challenges, persevere through setbacks, and view failures as opportunities for growth.



- **Interpersonal Skills** – The ability to effectively interact, communicate and collaborate with others, encompassing qualities such as active listening, empathy, teamwork, conflict resolution and building positive relationships.
- **Time Management** – Time management is the skill of efficiently organizing and prioritizing tasks to make the most of one's available time. It involves setting goals, creating schedules and avoiding procrastination to ensure productivity and meet deadlines.
- **Financial Literacy** – Knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and practices, such as budgeting, saving, investing, managing debt and making informed financial decisions to achieve financial well-being.
- **Empathy** – Ability to understand and share the feelings, perspectives and experiences of others, which can lead to more compassionate and supportive relationships.
- **Communication Skills** – Being able to convey ideas, thoughts and information effectively to others. This includes verbal communication, non-verbal cues, active listening and adapting communication styles to various situations and audiences.
- **Problem Solving** – Capacity to identify, analyze and find solutions to challenges and complex issues; requiring critical thinking, creativity and a systematic approach to overcoming obstacles.
- **Self-Regulation** – Ability to manage one's emotions, behaviors and impulses in a way that supports personal goals and social harmony.
- **Cultural Awareness** – Recognition and understanding of different cultures, beliefs, customs and perspectives, involving respecting and valuing diversity, promoting inclusivity, and being culturally sensitive in interactions with others.
- **Critical Thinking** – Capacity to analyze, evaluate and synthesize information and ideas systematically.
- **Basic Life Skills** – A range of essential skills fundamental for independence and self-sufficiency, and necessary for daily living, including personal hygiene, meal preparation, household management, and basic financial responsibilities.

These skills collectively contribute to a student's personal and academic success, as well as their ability to navigate various aspects of life effectively. Developing and honing these skills can empower students to thrive in both educational and real-world settings.

Suggested Improvements

As for suggestions to improve San Juan Unified schools, the following themes emerged from the faculty and staff discussions:

- **Equity and Access** – Staff members express concerns about the varying levels of preparedness among students, often linked to disparities in access to opportunities, resources and support at home. There is a call for equity, setting high expectations for all students, eliminating stigmas, and providing comprehensive support to help students make informed decisions for their future.



- **Academic Success** – Staff members emphasize the need for a forward-thinking approach aligned with the district's mission of empowering students to contribute and thrive in a rapidly evolving world. Recommendations include expanding community partnerships, removing barriers to access learning opportunities, implementing early intervention, and fostering high expectations for all students. They also suggest improving accessibility to hybrid/independent study programs, addressing teacher autonomy challenges, and adopting a more systemic and consistent approach to family engagement.
- **Fostering Hope and Excitement** – Suggestions include celebrating all students consistently, prioritizing staff well-being as an example for students, building on students' identities, and incorporating joy and genius into education. There is an emphasis on viewing every child as an intellectual worthy of rich academic experiences, promoting community, teams, connection and play, and ensuring meaningful and relevant learning opportunities.
- **Climate & Culture** – Staff identify the need for systematic professional learning time within the professional day, as well as ongoing reflection on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. They acknowledge the critical work involved and express their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion while recognizing the challenges and the importance of supporting this work even in the face of opposition.

Overall, faculty and staff suggest the district focus on making true structural and systemic changes toward educational justice and equity. Specifically, they call for the district to adequately address the needs of populations with high absence and low graduation rates, conduct surveys and engagements to inform systemic changes, examine suspension rates, embrace diversity, consider communities as expert partners, and emphasize accountability for systemic change.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The community partner themes revolve around several key areas.

Needed Skills for Life Success

As for what students need to be prepared for after high school, community members identified themes similar to those identified by other audiences. The following represent the skills they considered most important for post-secondary success.

- **Literacy Skills** – Ability to read, write, comprehend and effectively communicate using written language, including not only basic reading and writing but also critical reading, information literacy, and digital literacy in today's technology-driven world.
- **Interpersonal Skills** – People skills or social skills, involving the ability to interact, communicate and build positive relationships with others, encompassing active listening, empathy, effective communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and collaboration.



- **Vocational Partnerships** – Collaborations between the district and businesses or organizations focused on providing students with opportunities for real-world experiences, internships, apprenticeships and career-related education, enhancing their vocational or career development.
- **Life Skills** – A broad range of essential abilities and competencies that individuals need to navigate daily life effectively, including time management, problem-solving, financial literacy, decision-making, goal setting, organization, basic cooking and household management, and other practical skills that contribute to personal independence and well-being.
- **Community Involvement and Partnerships** – Active participation, collaboration and engagement with the local community and external organizations, supporting various initiatives such as community service projects, volunteer opportunities, civic engagement, and mutual support for educational and community goals.

Suggested Improvements

As for suggestions to improve San Juan Unified schools, community partners centered on the the following themes:

- **Equity and Inclusion Implementation** – Community partners noted concerns about the district’s actual implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, with a focus on wanting to see tangible actions and evidence of progress.
- **Transparency in Budget and Resources** – They also noted the need for greater transparency, especially in budget allocation and resource distribution, to ensure fairness and equity across schools.
- **Early Intervention and Learning Support** – Community members advocate more early intervention and support for students, including early testing for learning disabilities and introducing reading at an early age.
- **Community Involvement and Partnerships** – Community members emphasize the importance of community involvement and partnerships, with a focus on building connections and collaborations.
- **Empowerment and Transparency for Teachers** – They also encourage teachers to ask for the resources they need, fostering a culture of transparency and advocating for what they need. Similarly, they encourage teachers to seek and provide mentorship and support among colleagues and students.
- **Community Engagement and Marginalized Voices** – Members want to ensure that district leaders are hearing from all stakeholders, including marginalized populations who may not feel comfortable attending meetings.
- **Adaptation and Flexibility** – Community members encourage the district to be flexible and adaptable in the face of challenges and changes in the world, and the need to adapt resources and strategies accordingly.



Overall, the data highlight the importance of collaboration, transparency and targeted support for diverse student needs as the district plans for the future of San Juan Unified over the next five years.

SCHOOL BOARD

Data from School Board interviews identify a comprehensive approach to preparing students for life after graduation, encompassing academic, practical, social and personal development aspects.

Needed Skills for Life Success

As for what students need to be prepared for after high school, school board members identified themes similar to those identified by other audiences. The following represent the skills they considered most important for post-secondary success.

- **Basic Academic Skills** – This includes proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics and language. These foundational skills are critical for success in further education and the workplace.
- **Critical Thinking** – Developing the ability to think critically, analyze information and solve complex problems is essential for making informed decisions in various life situations.
- **Life Skills** – General life skills, such as personal care, time management, organizational skills, and coping mechanisms, contribute to students' overall independence and well-being.
- **Career and Technical Education (CTE) Skills** – Equipping students with practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to the workforce, ensure they are prepared for a variety of job opportunities.
- **Social and Interpersonal Skills** – Board members note that teaching students how to interact positively with people of diverse backgrounds, practicing empathy, communication, teamwork and leadership skills, is essential to success in life.
- **Technology Skills** – Beyond basic keyboarding, students need to be proficient in using technology for research, information gathering and as a tool for their education and future careers.
- **Financial Literacy** – Understanding personal finance, including budgeting, saving, investing, and managing money, is crucial for financial stability and independence.
- **Career Planning and Strategic Thinking** – Board members encourage helping students create a strategic plan for their education and career, ensuring they have clear goals and a sense of direction beyond high school.
- **Access to Resources and Information** – Teaching students how to access necessary resources for employment, education and other needs, including knowing where to seek help or guidance, will serve them well in adulthood.



- **Empathy and Social Awareness** – Fostering qualities like empathy, kindness, and the ability to initiate positive interactions with others contributes to personal and professional success.

Suggested Improvements

As for suggestions to improve San Juan Unified schools, community partners centered on the the following themes:

- **Holistic Support** – Board members encourage the district to provide holistic support to students, addressing their social, physical and mental needs, including ensuring students have access to meals and support for their well-being.
- **Clear Goals and Structure** – Though creating a consistent and structured environment for learning, board members would like to establish clear educational goals for all students beyond graduation.
- **Communication and Education on Consequences** – Improving communication with students about the consequences of their actions and decisions, with a focus on education rather than discipline will serve students well in adulthood.
- **Access to Advanced Programs** – Several board members would like to see the district offer a variety of advanced programs, including Career Technical Education (CTE) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, to cater to diverse student interests and needs.
- **Social and Emotional Supports** – They would also like to increase social and emotional support for students to help them succeed academically
- **Partnerships and Resources** – Board members encourage the district to collaborate more with external partners and organizations to provide additional resources and support to students.
- **Access to Information and Resources** – Ensuring students and parents have access to essential information, resources, and wraparound services to support their educational journey is critical to student success.
- **Supporting Families and Caregivers** – Providing support to families and caregivers to meet their needs outside of school, as it directly impacts students' ability to learn.

These themes emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to education that includes academic, social, emotional and practical support to prepare students for their next step after graduation.

04 | Next Steps •

Plan Development

On January 29 and 30, a Core Planning Team (CPT) composed of students, staff, parents/families, and community members will convene for two days to review this report and other district data as part of a facilitated workshop. The purpose of the workshop will be to



develop draft strategic focus areas that will be part of a larger district strategic plan. Following this two-day workshop, an internal Design Team (DT) will meet on January 31 and February 1 to review the work of the CPT, and refine the plan as needed so that it aligns with other district initiatives as well as state and federal standards. The Design Team will also explore if updates are needed to the district’s mission, vision and values statements.

CESO Communications will present the engagement data report to the School Board on February 13, 2024, along with a recap of the work of the Core Planning Team and Design Team. The purpose of this presentation is to review the key themes and highlights of what was heard during the fall engagements and answer questions from the School Board. No action by the School Board is necessary at this time.

Community Engagement (Round 2)

The draft focus areas will be shared with the community in the spring to gather feedback and identify gaps. The teams will then reconvene following this community engagement period to review the insights collected and make recommendations for changes. The recommendations will be reviewed by the district administration for refinement, from which a more comprehensive strategic roadmap will be developed. Later this spring, members of the CPT and DT will present the new strategic plan to the School Board for review and approval.