



SUMMARY

Oconee County Schools utilized a process developed by the Georgia School Boards Association (GSBA) to develop a new six-year strategic improvement plan for the school system. This comprehensive process engaged the community and all stakeholder groups to create universal ownership and support for system and school improvement. Highlights of the process include:

- A comprehensive community engagement component to allow stakeholders to have a voice in the strategic improvement planning process
- A diverse planning team that represented stakeholder groups to develop the plan
- A facilitated planning process that assisted the planning and action teams in analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the school district and reviewing the mission, vision, beliefs, goal areas, and elements of the strategic improvement plan
- A facilitated process to work with experts within the district on developing initiatives and action steps to implement the plan

The strategic improvement planning process follows a continuous improvement cycle designed around the five questions listed in the visual. This process begins with a community engagement session and survey of stakeholders.

Phase I:

Community Engagement: In September, 2023, the strategic improvement planning process began with a community engagement session that involved approximately 500 representatives from all stakeholder groups. OCS also provided a stakeholder survey to gather vital input from the community and received 1151 responses to the online survey.

Planning Team: In November, 2023 a group of 51 people representing stakeholder groups from the school board, central office, schools, parents, students, business and other community representatives were assembled to answer the questions: “Who are we?”, “Where are we now?”, and “Where do we want to go?”. Specific outcomes included developing strategic goal areas, performance objectives, and a strategy map for the strategic improvement plan.

Action Teams: In January, 2024 five teams totaling 39 people were assembled to answer the question “How will we know when we have arrived?”. The action teams looked at each proposed strategic goal area and finalized the performance objectives, measures and targets to answer this question. Additionally, the action teams developed the initiatives and action steps to answer the fourth question of the GSBA Strategic Improvement Planning Process, “How do we plan to get there?”.

Phase II:

In April, 2024, the Chief Academic Officer will present the five goal areas, performance objectives, and the strategy map components of the strategic improvement plan to the board as an action item. The Superintendent will recommend that the Board of Education approve the five goal areas, performance objectives, and the strategy map.

Phase III:

Alignment: The plan is aligned to the school improvement plans and the budget on an on-going basis.

Phase IV:

Implementation: Involves the execution, monitoring and reporting of the plan, as well as an on-going process to review and



Alignment



Continuous Improvement

GVPE 1.1 Using recommendations for best practices such as the GVPE, annually review performance data and qualitative data to determine progress on the district's 5-Year Strategic Plan.



Communication

GVPE 2.1 Promote public education as the cornerstone of American democracy by publicizing student and school successes through all available media.



Early Learning and Student Success

GVPE 3.1 | Identify high leverage public and private human service organizations to help create and strengthen local, regional, and state-wide partnerships between early learning providers and K-12 systems.



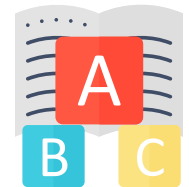
GVPE 3.2 | Create public-private partnerships for the purpose of supporting early childhood initiatives that address healthy child/family development and economic benefits to the community.



GVPE 3.3 | Adopt a statewide awareness and engagement initiative to ensure that high-quality early childhood education is a top priority for the state.



GVPE 3.4 | Provide opportunities for all children from birth to five-years-old to participate in high quality learning experiences that are designed to promote all aspects of a child's development, whether provided by families in the home or through a licensed public or private program.



GVPE 3.5 | Align developmental and academic standards for all children ages birth through 8 years old to provide a continuity of learning experiences and personal growth.

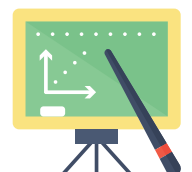


GVPE 3.6. | Ensure adequate financial support for the implementation of quality programs for all young children.



Teaching and Learning

GVPE 4.1 | Ensure that teachers collaborate in professional learning communities (PLC) , share effective teaching practices, and are provided support for their on-going learning in order to provide an environment where students learn best.



Alignment

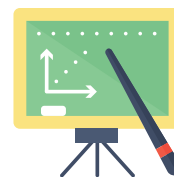


Teaching and Learning (*CONTINUED*)

GVPE 4.2 | In order to provide an environment where students learn best ensure that teachers can access, understand, and effectively use technologies to teach and measure what students know and can do.

GVPE 4.3 | In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers teach challenging and problem-solving lessons that are flexible enough to meet the interests and needs of individual students.

GVPE 4.4 | In order to provide an environment where students learn best, ensure that teachers use varied measures to determine what students know and can do.



Teaching and Learning Resources

GVPE 5.1 | Evaluate and utilize the most effective instructional models and learning supports (i.e., digital, blended, competency, virtual, etc.) implemented by school districts.

GVPE 5.2 | Work to ensure full broadband access and integration of current technology and training into the classroom and into each student's home.

GVPE 5.3 | Continue to develop and maintain a comprehensive data system for monitoring student progress (Pre-K--12) and making decisions to improve educational practice.

GVPE 5.4 | Develop partnerships with businesses, industries, public agencies and the community to promote shared use of resources, services and facilities



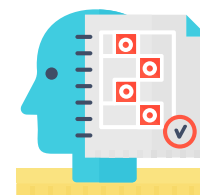
Human and Organizational Capital

GVPE 6.1 | Identify and recruit the most talented candidates into teacher preparation programs.

GVPE 6.2 | Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of teacher and leader preparation programs.

GVPE 6.3 | Collaborate with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the Georgia Department of Education and other credentialing agencies to provide comprehensive strategies to find, grow, and keep the most effective educators.

GVPE 6.4 | Organize personnel, distribute leadership and implement processes that maximize student learning.



Alignment



Governance, Leadership and Accountability

GVPE 7.1 | Develop and implement at the local school district level an accountability system based on local district educational goals that are aligned with state educational goals and state accountability system, and which include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.



GVPE 7.2 | Pursue all local and state options to provide for the equitable, effective and efficient delivery of instruction to all students in Georgia regardless of where they reside.



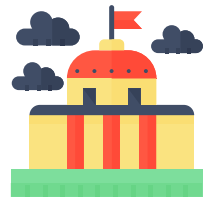
GVPE 7.3 | Continue to improve upon the process by which local school districts obtain flexibility from state mandates, so that it is based on school and district performance expectations outlined in the district's strategic improvement plan and takes into account the needs, resources, and characteristics of the local community.



GVPE 7.4 | Establish and maintain high performing school districts through the development of strong governance teams and local district leadership teams that function and lead ethically according to established best practices.



GVPE 7.5 | Streamline and align the agencies with jurisdiction over components of the education enterprise and to whom local school districts of the state must answer.



Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy

GVPE 8.1 | Develop safe, orderly, supportive learning environments built on respect and encouragement where all individuals believe they can make a positive difference.



GVPE 8.2 | Make each school and school system an inviting, safe, engaging, and accessible place to be for students, parents, staff and the larger community.



GVPE 8.3 | Establish each school as the center or hub of the community in which it exists by engaging families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways. (PSEL)



GVPE 8.4 | Continuously determine all stakeholder perceptions of schools and school districts.



GVPE 8.5 | Develop a culture and climate that fosters innovation.



GVPE 8.6 | Develop school and district cultures that are sensitive and responsive to the cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic make-up of the communities they serve.

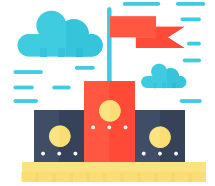


Alignment



Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy (*CONTINUED*)

GVPE 8.7 | Get to know and be willing to actively listen to the students in our schools through the development of systems to foster regular feedback.



Financial Resources

GVPE 9.1 | Identify in state and local budgets for public education sufficient fiscal resources to maintain a comprehensive data and evaluation system and to provide professional development in the utilization of data to improve effectiveness in meeting objectives for enhanced student learning.



GVPE 9.2 | Initiate an ongoing process at the local school district level for systematically evaluating all expenditures to enable the development and adoption of budgets that are focused on the overall well-being of students and on district strategies for maximizing student learning.



GVPE 9.3 | Provide a high level of flexibility to local school districts in decision-making authority about the most effective strategies for the expenditure of funds to enable all students to be successful in school, coupled with appropriate methods for evaluating school and district success and for implementing positive state interventions where they are found to be needed.



GVPE 9.4 | Implement a cohesive and stable mechanism for the financial support of early learning programs and services for children ages 0 to 5 at a level that prepares all of Georgia's youngest citizens for success in their subsequent school years.



GVPE 9.5 | Develop the most optimal partnership between the state and local school districts in sharing the responsibility for financial support of public education, while ensuring that disparity in local fiscal capacity does not impede the implementation of GVPE recommendations in all Georgia districts in order to support student achievement and student success in academics and beyond.



GVPE 9.6 | Provide a continuously sufficient level of state financial support for public education which, when combined with local revenue available to boards of education, makes the attainment of our Vision for Public Education in Georgia a reality and ensures its sustainability.

Oconee County School System Community Engagement

Board of Education Meeting – August 14, 2023

Community Engagement Meeting – September 19, 2023

GSBA Online Survey – September 20, 2023 – October 4, 2023

To assist the Strategic Planning Team with their work, the Oconee County School System engaged its community in a process to assess the thoughts, feelings and perceptions that stakeholders hold regarding the progress that the district has made toward their Goals. This survey data is included in the engagement initiative, designed and implemented by the Georgia School Boards Association, including a SWOT analysis activity with the Board of Education, a community engagement session with Oconee County stakeholders and an online survey in English and Spanish . A genuine effort was made to make the process as inclusive and transparent as possible.

Participants of the community engagement and the online survey responded to the following questions:

1. What do you think are the system's greatest **STRENGTHS**?
2. What **are the greatest needs in improvement or WEAKNESSES** in the Oconee County School System?
3. What areas do you think have the **greatest potential for improving or OPPORTUNITIES** presented for the Oconee County School System?
4. What do you think are the **greatest Challenges or THREATS** to the Oconee County School System?

The intention of this report is to provide a collection of the best thinking of school and community members regarding the four questions presented. The information gathered is qualitative and seeks to focus attention on those areas that generated the most energy. Members of the strategic planning team will use the input of the community to assist them in developing a plan to move the district forward.

Table 1 shows the respondents' relationships to OCS.

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Relationship to OCS¹

Relationship to OCS	Percentage	Number
<i>Parent/Guardian</i>	69.68%	802
<i>Teacher</i>	21.20%	244
<i>School Employee (with children in the district)</i>	10.43%	120
<i>School Employee (no children in the district)</i>	5.21%	60
<i>Community Member</i>	2.95%	34
<i>Other, please specify or provide comments</i>	1.48%	17
<i>Business/Civic Leader</i>	.96%	11
<i>School Administrator</i>	.78%	9
<i>Student</i>	.09%	1

¹ Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple responses were possible.

The Response

Over **500** total parents, board members, community members, staff, district leaders, business leaders and students participated in the community engagement meetings. There were **1151** responses to the GSBA online survey in English, 2 responses to the GSBA online survey in Spanish. The largest percentage of respondents to the GSBA online survey identified themselves as Parent/Guardian (69.68%). The second largest group of participants identified as Teacher (21.20%), and the third largest group was School Employee (with children in the district) (10.43%).

NOTE: *BLUE TEXT = THE ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS.*
BLACK TEXT = THE COMMUNITY MEETING RESULTS.
AN ASTERISKS () MEANS THE RESULTS ARE REFLECTIVE OF BOTH.*

Question 1: When asked, “What do you think are the system’s greatest **STRENGTHS?**,” the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community engagement participants:

- **The level of quality instruction (29.45% 1st choice and 18.46% 2nd choice)**
- **The level of focus on student achievement (26.15% 1st choice and 17.15% 2nd choice)**
- **The level of parental support in the district (14.42% 1st choice and 11.99% 2nd choice)**
- **Teacher Quality/Dedicated teachers***
- **Parental involvement***
- Teacher autonomy in class
- OCS provides a quality education
- Schools are Heart of Community – fostering pride
- Student – teacher ratio
- Extracurricular opportunities at all levels
- Staff- welcoming and kind
- High expectations
- Robust community engagement: mentors, business partners, etc.
- Opportunities for student involvement in many areas – clubs, teams, extracurricular
- Academic rigor
- Out of county employees – free tuition for children
- Engaged and concerned faculty & staff – warmth, caring, etc.
- Connection – relationships
- Small town atmosphere
- Sense of community

Question 2: When asked, “What **are the greatest needs in improvement or WEAKNESSES** in the Oconee County School System?”, the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community engagement participants:

- **Other– (23.72% 1st choice and 23.17% 2nd choice)**
- **Policies to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers – (17.38% 1st choice and 11.03% 2nd choice)**
- **Financial Management – (10.34% 1st choice and 10.01% 2nd choice)**
- **Teacher pay/competitive salary/certified and classified staff pay***
- **Updated technology needed – smart boards, laptops, Chromebooks, etc.***
- **Too much technology ***
- **Diversity of staff***
- **Recruitment and hiring of classified staff***
- **Staff retention(bus drivers, custodians, substitutes, etc.)***
- **Healthy/quality food***
- Students are not aware of ALL the options early on besides 4 year school
- Lack of instructional coaches at the school level
- Kids leaving school with great grades but a lack of practical skills
- Lack of equity in school furniture (elementary)

- More counselors at elementary level and also backups when counselors are out
- Special education – classroom space and teacher support
- Transparency and honesty from board of education
- Mental health support/stress of students
- Better communicate the “ Oconee story “
- Invest in facilities – upgrade theaters, desks, materials, building weather stripping, pest control, student/teacher furniture – to match the quality of our school system
- Improve programs for non-college bound students
- Lack of consequences for student behavior/behavior management policies and procedures
- Communication with the community members/around bus changes, student progress, within staff

Question 3: When asked, What areas do you think have the **greatest potential for improving or OPPORTUNITIES** presented for the Oconee County School System?”, the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community engagement participants:

- **Hiring/Keeping quality teachers and staff – (64.21% 1st choice and 17.73% 2nd choice)**
- **Increased funding (State, Federal) – (12.34% 1st choice and 29.36% 2nd choice)**
- **Getting parents involved with the school system – (5.47% 1st choice and 14.41% 2nd choice)**
- **Raising community support for the school system – (4.08% 1st choice and 14.95% 2nd choice)**
- **Other (please specify) – (9.99% 1st choice and 13.16% 2nd choice)**
- **More CTAE options***
- **Career/Vocational Academy***
- **Competitive pay/salary options/addressing compensation for certified/classified staff**
- **Partnerships with local businesses***
- **Better management of funding***
- **Partnerships with higher ed – teach more critical thinking and problem solving***
- **Meet the needs of all students - More vocational opportunities for students***
- **Expanded CTAE offerings/Growing CTAE partnerships with local businesses***
- **Mental health for anxiety supports/dyslexia/behavioral services/ proper training for educators***
- Tuition assistance for teachers interested in higher education
- Instructional coaches need
- Pay raise for endorsements
- Create/develop a career based campus (technology, construction, business, etc.)
- Create a team to research and write grants for the school system
- Social media/screen time/ how to manage receiving information instantly – curriculum opportunity
- Vertical partnerships and connections among cluster schools
- Financial literacy for high school students
- More visibility and communication/transparency build trust and connection with community – accountability (Board of Education)

Question 4: When asked, “What do you think are the **greatest Challenges or THREATS** to Oconee County School System?”, the following represents the areas of greatest agreement among survey respondents and community engagement participants:

- **Political environment – (33.62% 1st choice and 27.35% 2nd choice)**
- **Constantly changing population – (33.10% 1st choice and 22.79% 2nd choice)**
- **Funding – (12.68% 1st choice and 21.70% 2nd choice)**
- **Other (please specify) – (15.90% 1st choice and 19.23% 2nd choice)**
- **Rapid growth/growing too quickly/losing the small town feel/increasing population***
- **Compensation/competitive teacher salary and benefits***
- **Managing teacher burnout***
- **Teacher retention/Staff leaving to surrounding counties***
- **Transportation issues***
- **Ability to manage/address student mental health (student/counselor ratio, resources)***
- **Safety concerns***
- **Diversity***
- **Aging buildings/facilities***
- **Political agendas***
- **Social media**
- **Holding the line for traditional values**
- **Expectation to sustain success**
- **Balancing digital and non – digital instructional resources**

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