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Dear OCS Community,

As part of my entry plan during my first 90 days, I invited input from both the community and OCS faculty and staff through two separate surveys. In total, I received responses from 433 internal stakeholders and 333 external stakeholders, including parents, grandparents, and local business owners. I also visited every school and classroom in the district and met with student, teacher, and parent advisory groups. The purpose of this work was to listen carefully, establish a shared understanding of current perceptions, and identify both strengths to celebrate and opportunities for growth as we move forward together.

I am especially grateful to the Oconee County Board of Education for their strong support of this listening process. The Board shares a clear commitment to hearing from our community and using that input, along with sound data and thoughtful planning, to help guide decisions that best serve students and strengthen our schools.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share feedback. While individual responses varied in perspective, several clear and consistent themes emerged. These insights provide a valuable snapshot of where we are today and will help guide our priorities as we continue working together to support every student and every school in Oconee County.

Summary of Key Findings

Strengths to Celebrate and Positive Feedback

Both community members and faculty/staff consistently identified the following strengths:

- **High-quality educators and staff**
Strong appreciation for teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and support staff who are described as caring, committed, and student-centered
- **Positive school culture and climate**
Oconee County Schools are viewed as welcoming environments with strong relationships, a sense of belonging, and a focus on student well-being.
- **Academic rigor and expectations**
Confidence in the district's academic foundation and preparation for postsecondary success, particularly for college-bound students
- **Safety and student support**
Positive feedback regarding safety initiatives, including the presence of School Resource Officers and wraparound student supports
- **Special education services**
Praise for IEP teams, individualized supports, and the dedication of special education staff in meeting diverse student needs



Focus Areas for Future Growth and Attention

While overall sentiment was positive, stakeholder feedback identified several priority areas for continued improvement:

- **Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) and workforce pathways**

Across both surveys, there was broad support for expanding Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) and strengthening workforce pathways. Respondents shared interest in earlier exposure to career options, stronger partnerships with technical colleges and local businesses, and increased access to hands-on, real-world learning experiences. Staff also emphasized the importance of aligning any expansion with adequate staffing and updated CTAE lab facilities.

- **Communication and transparency**

Stakeholders expressed a desire for clearer and more consistent system-level communication with both staff and the community. They specifically asked for more explanation behind district-level decisions and improved information flow.

- **Compensation, staffing, and retention**

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of ensuring competitive compensation for teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodial staff, nurses, and front-office personnel. They also shared feedback about workload, vacancies, and the need to strengthen staff retention.

- **Special education capacity and consistency**

While services are deeply valued, respondents noted the need to strengthen capacity and consistency. Feedback included staffing levels, caseloads, additional options to support a continuum of services, and increased communication with families.

- **Facility modernization across campuses**

Stakeholders expressed the desire to see facility modernization across campuses, including updates to aging buildings and improvements to existing facilities. Many of these priorities are addressed through ESPLOST VII, which will focus on renovations and upgrades to strengthen safety, enhance learning environments, and support more consistent facilities across all OCS campuses. Through ESPLOST VII, significant investment will also be made in critical building systems (such as roof and HVAC unit replacements) to proactively address needs and extend the life of district facilities.

- **Operational systems and supports**

Staff feedback pointed to opportunities to strengthen operational systems and supports. Themes included maintenance response times, custodial coverage, consistent discipline practices, and more streamlined internal processes.



Action Plan: Next Steps Informed by Internal and External Survey Feedback

The following action steps respond directly to the themes identified above. **Many of these actions are already underway** and others will continue to be refined through discussion, stakeholder input, and strategic planning. These steps will also guide key priorities for the future.

Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE)

- Conduct a high school team visit to observe several CTAE programs in comparable districts in order to identify best practices and inform next steps for OCS workforce readiness options.
- Complete a districtwide review of current CTAE offerings, including enrollment, access, facilities, staffing, and alignment to workforce needs.
- Develop a phased CTAE improvement and expansion plan with 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year goals, including potential new pathways and program enhancements.
- Establish strategic partnerships with local businesses to support career pathways and align student preparation with local workforce needs.
- Begin participation in the Peach Education Tax Credit program in calendar year 2026 to increase available funding and community partnerships supporting CTAE initiatives. *(CTAE school visits are planned for January to two GA districts, an initial meeting with CTAE teachers to gauge current reality and needs and facilitate open discussion has been conducted, a conference with the state regarding participation in Peach Tax Credit has taken place, and initial plans for 1,3, and 5 year goals are being developed.)*

Community Engagement and Transparency

- Implement local school-based meetings with board members and the superintendent during the 2026–2027 school year to strengthen communication, transparency, and community connection.
- Redesign leadership meetings to foster dialogue and improve transparency in decision-making, empowering building level leaders to communicate the “why” behind district actions with clarity and consistency.
- Add a link for community members to easily connect with the superintendent on the website. *(The new format for leadership meetings and the website link will begin in January 2026)*

Staffing, Compensation, and Operational Capacity

- Conduct an audit of the district allotment process to review staffing equity, workload distribution, and alignment to student needs.
- Complete a comprehensive salary comparison study for each job category in Oconee County Schools relative to surrounding districts to inform future compensation and retention strategies. *(Initial benchmarking and data review are already underway.)*



Special Education/Behavioral Needs Services

- Conduct a review of special education services focusing on staffing capacity, service delivery models, consistency across schools, compliance, and communication with families.
- Explore options to provide more behavioral support for students with complex behavioral and mental health needs. *(This work will build upon existing monitoring, staffing analyses, and service delivery reviews that are already in place.)*

Instructional Support and Leadership Development

- Develop a plan for instructional coaching roles that enhance teacher support, professional learning, and internal leadership development, consistent with practices in similar districts.
- Design and launch an internal leadership academy to support the development of current and future school and district leaders within Oconee County Schools.
(Exploratory planning for instructional coaches and leadership development structures is already underway.)

Facilities Modernization and Long-Range Planning

- Develop a comprehensive facilities master plan, aligned with ESPLOST investments, that prioritizes aging campuses, safety and security improvements, and updated learning environments across all schools. *(This work aligns directly with ESPLOST VII priorities currently in implementation.)*

Together, the feedback gathered through surveys, school visits, classroom walkthroughs, and advisory conversations reflects the many strengths of Oconee County Schools while also providing clear direction for continued growth in facility improvements, staff recruitment and retention, leadership development, transparent communication, special education services, and expanded student pathways.

I appreciate the Board's wholehearted support and commitment to this listening process, as well as the continued partnership of the Oconee County Schools community, as we translate this feedback into thoughtful, responsible, and sustainable action.

Respectfully,

Melissa Butler

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