



MISSION: DELAWARE

**Summary Report of Findings
December 2025**



Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

Background

As Delaware City Schools' new superintendent began his tenure in August 2025, the Board of Education and community stakeholders expressed a clear expectation: build authentic relationships across all constituent groups and gain a deep understanding of the district's culture, strengths, and needs. To address this priority, the superintendent designed and implemented **Mission:Delaware**, a comprehensive listening tour conducted throughout the fall of 2025.

Drawing inspiration from best practices in stakeholder engagement and informed by the district's commitment to transparent, collaborative leadership, Mission:Delaware was conceived as an intentional, structured approach to being visible, accessible, and genuinely engaged with the Delaware City Schools community. The initiative reflected a fundamental belief that effective leadership begins with listening—truly hearing the voices of students, staff, families, and community members who comprise the heart of our district.

Between September and November 2025, the superintendent spent full days at each of Delaware City Schools' seven buildings—Conger, Smith, Woodward, Schultz, and Carlisle Elementary Schools; Dempsey Middle School; Hayes High School; and the Will program—immersing himself in the daily rhythms of school life from arrival through dismissal. These visits included greeting students and families, observing classroom instruction, sharing meals with students in cafeterias, conducting structured focus groups with students and staff, meeting with building leadership teams, and hosting after-school gatherings with educators and parents. Beyond school buildings, the superintendent attended community events, met with business and civic leaders, and connected with various community organizations to understand the broader context in which Delaware City Schools operates.

Throughout Mission:Delaware, the superintendent maintained his commitment to the principle that character is built through daily decisions and responses to adversity—a philosophy embodied in the equation $E + R = O$ (Event plus Response equals Outcome). This leadership framework guided both the design of the listening tour and the approach to processing the valuable feedback received from stakeholders.

Purpose

Mission:Delaware was designed to accomplish three interconnected objectives that would position the district for continued excellence and strategic growth.

First and foremost, Mission:Delaware provided the superintendent with opportunities to build authentic, trusting relationships with stakeholders across the district. By being consistently present and accessible—in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, athletic events, and community

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

gatherings—the superintendent demonstrated a genuine commitment to understanding the experiences, perspectives, and aspirations of those who make Delaware City Schools exceptional.

Second, the listening tour offered invaluable insight into the distinct cultures of each school building and the unique sub-communities within Delaware's larger educational ecosystem. Through sustained presence and observation, the superintendent gained an appreciation for the traditions, strengths, challenges, and opportunities that characterize each learning environment and the ways these individual cultures contribute to the district's collective identity.

Third, through carefully designed guiding questions, Mission:Delaware gathered systematic input on critical topics that would inform both immediate operational decisions and longer-term strategic planning. Specifically, stakeholders were asked to reflect on:

- **District strengths:** What is something you see as a strength of Delaware City Schools?
- **Opportunities for growth:** If you could strengthen one aspect of Delaware City Schools, what would it be?
- **Future preparedness:** Considering that today's kindergarteners will graduate in 2038, what experiences and learning are essential to prepare our students for their future?

These focus areas were intentionally selected to inform the district's immediate work during the 2025-26 school year while simultaneously gathering foundational input for the comprehensive strategic planning process scheduled to launch in January of 2026. Additionally, the insights gained through Mission:Delaware would directly support the district's ongoing facilities master planning process—a critical initiative spanning February 2026 through July 2027 that will include Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) coordination, comprehensive building assessments, and extensive community engagement to address the district's growth and capacity challenges.

The feedback collected through Mission:Delaware represents the authentic voices of Delaware City Schools' stakeholders and will serve as a cornerstone for decision-making, priority-setting, and strategic planning as the district continues its mission to provide exceptional educational experiences for all students.

Participation

Focus groups and an online questionnaire were used to document learnings from the superintendent's stakeholder interactions throughout Mission:Delaware. Focus groups were the preferred tool since they are inherently interactive and in-person, allowing for deeper dialogue and follow-up questions. However, they are also time-intensive and limited to smaller group settings.

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

At each of the seven school buildings—Conger, Smith, Woodward, Schultz, and Carlisle Elementary Schools; Dempsey Middle School; and Hayes High School—five focus groups were conducted: two with staff, two with students, and one with parents. Beyond the traditional school buildings, three focus groups were conducted with the WILL program (two with students and one with staff), and one focus group was held with the Transportation department to ensure their voices were included in understanding the district's strengths and needs. A community forum was also held to engage stakeholders beyond current families and staff.

The online questionnaire was used to gather additional input from those who were unable to participate in focus groups due to scheduling conflicts or other constraints, ensuring broader representation of stakeholder voices. Both focus groups and the questionnaire were made available to adult stakeholders, while focus groups were the primary tool used with students. The superintendent led all focus groups while members of the leadership team documented the discussions.

The same prompts were used for both the focus groups and the questionnaire:

- What is something you see as a strength of Delaware City Schools? [Strengths]
- If you could strengthen one aspect of Delaware City Schools, what would it be? [Changes/Strengthen]
- Considering that today's kindergarteners will graduate in 2038, what experiences and learning are essential to prepare our students for their future? [Preparing for Their Future]

Participants by Subgroup

	Elementary Students K-5	Middle School Students 6-8	High School Students 9-12	Staff	Parents	Community
Focus Group (45 groups, 325)	98	20	18	123	66	18
Questionnaire (392 responses)	0	0	6	129	227	30

Despite the challenge of time, 45 focus groups were conducted over the course of two months. Student voices were engaged formally via focus groups and informally during classroom visits, lunchroom conversations, and during arrival and dismissal (unless they attended a session with their parents). A survey was distributed through email and social media to gather input outside of those able to attend the focus groups. While participation was strong for staff and parents, authentically engaging with community members (outside of parents of current students) remains challenging.

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

Analysis Process

Data analysis of these open-ended responses was first conducted separately by prompt within each subgroup—elementary students, middle school students, high school students, staff, parents, and community members. Within each subgroup, the first round of analysis was also conducted by data source—focus group participants and questionnaire responses. Using emergent thematic analysis, responses were examined and reduced to primary and secondary trends. During the second processing round, data was analyzed within each subgroup area (students, staff, parents, and community members) and synthesized across data sources to develop a more holistic picture of the responses by subgroup to each prompt. The third round of analysis led to the development of the Executive Summary, in which each of the four subgroups' responses to the three prompts were synthesized by prompt area.

Executive Summary

Strengths

What is something you see as a strength of Delaware City Schools?

Across the various subgroups of students, staff, parents, and community members, a number of consistent primary trends emerge when identifying the school district's strengths - **a strong sense of community (often described as family), exceptional teacher and staff quality, caring and supportive relationships, abundant opportunities (pathways, arts, Special Education, academics), and a resource rich community.**

Fostering Community: Staff across all buildings consistently identify community as a defining strength of Delaware City Schools, describing it as a "family-like feel" where colleagues support one another and genuinely care about student well-being. This sentiment is particularly evident at the building level, where staff note the warm, welcoming, and collaborative culture that makes Delaware unique. Many staff members are district alumni who choose to return and invest in the community, creating continuity and deep institutional knowledge. Students echo this appreciation for community, highlighting that teachers and staff create environments where they feel safe, supported, and able to make friends easily. The district's community connections extend beyond school walls, with staff recognizing strong parent engagement through PTOs, partnerships with local organizations, and families who actively support their neighborhood schools.

Exceptional Teacher and Staff Quality: Staff members across all buildings demonstrate remarkable dedication, professionalism, and commitment to student success, consistently described as people who "work their tails off" and "give 100%" for the betterment of children. Teachers are characterized as caring, compassionate, and willing to go "above and beyond" to meet diverse student needs, creating supportive learning environments where students feel

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

genuinely valued. This dedication is reflected in staff stability, with many choosing to remain in Delaware throughout their careers and some even taking pay cuts to join the district because of its positive culture and strong leadership. Students unanimously praise their teachers as "amazing," "phenomenal," and "really nice," noting that teachers not only help them learn but also notice when they are struggling emotionally and provide support accordingly. Staff members value the trust placed in them by administration to be professionals, the opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, and the emphasis on building authentic relationships with students and families. The district benefits from high-quality literacy coaches, strong special education teams, and dedicated support staff who work collaboratively to address student needs.

Caring and Supportive Relationships: Teachers and staff throughout Delaware City Schools demonstrate a profound commitment to building meaningful relationships with students, creating environments where children feel genuinely cared for, listened to, and supported both academically and emotionally. Staff describe their work as centering on authentic relationships, noting that they "wrap around students," "pour into children," and prioritize knowing each student as an individual with unique needs and strengths. Students consistently recognize this care, expressing that teachers ask if they are okay, notice when they are having a bad day, check in on their well-being, and make learning fun while ensuring every child does their best. This relationship-centered approach extends across all grade levels, with elementary students appreciating teachers who help them feel safe and supported, middle school students valuing counselors and staff who truly listen, and high school students identifying trusted adults in the building who set them up for success. Staff members themselves benefit from supportive relationships with colleagues and administration, describing building leaders who prioritize staff well-being, encourage self-care, and foster collaborative problem-solving environments. The emphasis on relationships creates strong trust between families and schools, with parents expressing confidence that staff genuinely understand and advocate for their children's needs.

Abundant Opportunities: Students across all grade levels consistently celebrate the wide variety of opportunities available to them through clubs, sports, extracurricular activities, and diverse academic pathways that allow them to explore interests and develop talents. Elementary students appreciate activities like Party on the Playground, Secret Santa, school dances, fundraisers, and specials including art, music, gym, and orchestra, while middle school students value the freedom to participate in multiple music classes, sports, and clubs that provide more choices than they had in elementary school. High school students particularly highlight the extensive career options, advanced academic opportunities including AP and College Credit Plus (CCP) courses, the House system that builds relationships and school spirit, robust music and theater programs, and the variety of classes and sports that allow them to chart their own pathways. Staff recognize these opportunities as district strengths, noting systems like Academic Options at Hayes, the variety of extracurricular offerings, and programs like Project Search that provide meaningful experiences for diverse learners. Students express excitement about transitions to higher grade levels specifically because of anticipated opportunities—compaction and orchestra visits to Dempsey, marching band and school sports teams at Hayes, and leadership roles that allow them to give back.

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

Resource Rich Community: Staff consistently recognize Delaware as a community with exceptional resources and strong support networks that enable comprehensive wraparound services for students and families. Teachers describe the community as "resource rich" and note that "when I see children struggling we have unmatched" support available to address diverse needs, from mental health services to academic interventions to family assistance programs. The district benefits from robust community partnerships, including collaborations with the YMCA, strong PTO support across buildings, and engaged parents who actively invest in their schools and neighborhoods. Staff appreciate the community's willingness to embrace and support all students, particularly those with significant disabilities, creating an inclusive environment where diverse learners are welcomed and celebrated. The fiscal responsibility of the district is noted as a strength, alongside the availability of literacy coaches, special education teams, and intervention specialists who provide targeted support. Students benefit from programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters, Reset, career exploration opportunities, and connections to local organizations that extend learning beyond the classroom.

Change/Strengthen

If you could change one thing about Delaware City Schools this year that would make us stronger/better, what would it be?

Across the various subgroups of students, staff, parents, and community members, the primary trends consistently emphasize the importance of changing/strengthening - **proactive planning and for growth and facilities needs, behavior and social-emotional needs, student experiences and opportunities, communication and transparency, technology, and professional development.**

Proactive Planning (Growth and Facilities Needs): Staff, parents, and students across all buildings express deep frustration with what they describe as Delaware's reactive approach to district growth and facility needs, characterized by the concerning pattern that "Delaware does it on the cheap" and operates on a "wait and see" mentality rather than strategic planning. Teachers at Schultz Elementary particularly articulate this challenge, noting that despite knowing enrollment would increase based on demographic projections, the district consistently starts "at maximum and doesn't plan," resulting in overcrowded classrooms with 25-28 students, insufficient intervention support, and inequitable resources compared to other buildings. Parents echo these concerns, emphasizing that current kindergartners graduating in 2038 will need adequate facilities and resources throughout their K-12 journey, and they express worry about whether the district is prepared to accommodate continued growth while maintaining the quality education and small-school feel that attracted families to Delaware. Staff emphasize that proactive planning for growth must include reasonable class sizes, additional classroom space to allow students room to learn, scaling of special education services and support staff to match

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

enrollment increases, and strategic redistricting to balance numbers across buildings. The urgent need for facilities planning emerges as a critical theme, with high school students and staff highlighting unsafe and unclean bathrooms, internet reliability issues, temperature control problems, water and mold concerns, overcrowded hallways in older wings, and inadequate athletic and performing arts facilities including an auditorium too small for productions and convocations. Elementary staff identify specific infrastructure needs including building updates to older classrooms, safety improvements like fencing for elopers at Carlisle, improved parking at Hayes for events, and accessible entry points for staff. Parents express concerns about facility adequacy and the need for transparent planning processes that include community input, while students directly experience the consequences of aging infrastructure through bathroom access issues, hallway congestion, and limited space for activities. Staff, parents, and students collectively express concern that without proactive planning, the district's family atmosphere and community strengths will erode under the pressure of overcrowding, while students' learning experiences will be compromised by inadequate facilities that fail to support modern educational needs. The call for proactive planning extends beyond physical infrastructure to include comprehensive workforce planning—anticipating staffing needs before crises emerge, creating pipelines for hard-to-fill positions like substitutes and special educators, and ensuring every building has equitable access to assistant principals, intervention specialists, counselors, and support staff necessary to maintain the caring relationships and individualized attention that define Delaware's identity.

Behavior and Social-Emotional Needs: Staff across all grade levels identify student behavioral and social-emotional needs as one of the most pressing challenges facing the district, describing a significant shift in the intensity and frequency of behavioral issues that fundamentally impacts their ability to teach and maintain safe learning environments. Elementary teachers report being "honed in on behavior" with some staff members having only one academic goal for the year while the rest focus on social-emotional and behavioral foundations, noting that "unless they have that foundation learning is really difficult." Carlisle staff specifically describe managing elopers who require constant supervision, creating safety plans that restrict activities like holding hands during recess, and needing fencing to secure playgrounds, while Schultz teachers report that "behaviors take over so much" time that it prevents them from getting to actual instruction. Staff attribute these challenges to multiple factors and express a desire to address behaviors while working to improve emotional regulation and build skills that could be identified in a "Portrait of a Learner." Parents reinforce these concerns, emphasizing that current kindergartners need to develop grit, stamina, resilience, the understanding that "failure is okay," emotional intelligence, and the ability to handle adversity—skills they observe are declining in recent cohorts. Students themselves recognize behavioral issues as disruptive, requesting better behavior from peers, fewer incidents of bullying and drama, and more consistent consequences for students who don't follow rules. Staff express urgent need for systemic supports including proactive social-emotional curriculum embedded throughout the school day rather than monthly guidance lessons, adequate staffing for recess and transition supervision, mental health resources beyond overwhelmed

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

counselors who "wear 12 hats," educational assistants and classroom aides particularly in K-1 to provide "a second set of eyes or ears to help eliminate small behaviors," early intervention programs starting at the elementary level with consistent transition support into middle school, and parent education initiatives including parenting classes to partner with families in developing foundational social-emotional skills.

Student Experiences and Opportunities: Students, staff, and parents consistently emphasize the need to expand and refine learning experiences to prepare current kindergartners for a rapidly changing world when they graduate in 2038, with particular focus on balancing technology integration with essential human skills and real-world preparation. Staff across all buildings identify critical gaps in student development, noting that the "push for rigor has eliminated some of the soft skills" and expressing concern that students lack stamina, grit, executive functioning abilities, problem-solving skills, and the capacity for productive struggle that previous generations developed more naturally. Parents strongly advocate for enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving instruction, emphasizing that students need to "think outside the box," "decipher information," and develop analytical abilities independent of artificial intelligence rather than relying on technology to do the thinking for them. The need for practical life skills emerges as a dominant theme, with parents requesting financial literacy, budgeting, tax preparation, cooking, career exploration starting earlier in elementary grades, and "how to function when the power goes out," while high school students specifically ask for courses on doing taxes, better organization of CCP options, and college prep classes in junior year. Staff and parents express significant concern about technology balance, articulating that while students must be technologically proficient and understand AI, there is currently too much screen time, over-reliance on computers for learning, and "loss of curiosity" due to technology replacing hands-on exploration and play. Elementary teachers advocate for more manipulatives, tactile learning experiences, dramatic play opportunities, and unstructured time where students can "learn to be bored," while parents request "less computers, more critical thinking," "no tech days more frequently," and instruction on using AI appropriately rather than depending on it completely. Students across grade levels request expanded opportunities including more after-school clubs (STEM, art, science, yearbook), additional sports options, hands-on science experiments, leadership opportunities like student-led assemblies, career readiness programs, and electives that reflect diverse interests beyond traditional academic tracks. Staff identify specific programmatic needs including stronger vertical alignment K-12, coherent social-emotional curriculum throughout all grade levels, expanded career pathways for non-college-bound students with more robust connections beyond the career center, shop classes and vocational skills, arts and athletics facilities that match program ambitions, and clearly defined "Portrait of a Learner" or pillars (resilience, empathy, curiosity, critical thinking) that create a coherent K-12 vision of what Delaware graduates should embody. Parents emphasize that students need communication and interpersonal skills for "face-to-face" interaction, collaboration abilities, team-building experiences, conflict resolution training, and digital literacy including discerning credible sources from misinformation and understanding "what is real and what is fake" in online environments. The overarching message from all stakeholder groups is that Delaware must evolve beyond its current strengths to intentionally design comprehensive learning experiences

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

that develop independent thinkers, effective communicators, resilient problem-solvers, empathetic community members, and adaptable individuals who can navigate both technological advancement and fundamental human challenges—students who are prepared not just for college or career, but for the complexities of citizenship and life in an uncertain future.

Communication and Transparency: While parents consistently praise strong teacher-to-family communication and accessibility of building-level staff as a district strength, stakeholders across all groups identify significant gaps in district-wide communication, transparency, and information sharing that undermine trust and create confusion about priorities, decisions, and resource allocation. Staff express frustration with insufficient "top down" communication from central office, citing examples like the door lock situation at Carlisle as emblematic of broader patterns where important operational decisions are made without adequate staff input or timely notification. Teachers request more transparency with budget decisions, clearer explanations of how resources are allocated across buildings, and consistent communication about why some schools receive certain supports while others do not, particularly given the perception that "Schultz doesn't have that" compared to other elementaries. High school staff identify concerns about transparency within departments and a culture of "competing within departments" rather than collaborative decision-making, while elementary staff note inconsistencies in communication about professional development, curriculum implementation, and district initiatives that sometimes get started but never receive follow-through or second trainings. Parents express desire for greater transparency around initiatives, budget priorities, facilities planning, and long-term strategic decisions that will affect their children's educational experiences, emphasizing that communication should extend beyond immediate updates to include rationale for decisions and opportunities for meaningful community input. Students, particularly at the middle and high school levels, identify gaps in communication about available opportunities, requesting easily accessible directories of activities and clubs, better organization and explanation of CCP course options, clearer guidance on mastery grading systems that vary inconsistently across classes, and more transparent processes for how student voice influences school decisions. Staff note that communication challenges extend to coordination across grade levels and buildings, with teachers struggling to collaborate with colleagues at other schools due to structural differences in schedules, philosophical disconnects about best practices, and limited time for cross-building professional learning. The lack of consistent communication from preschool to kindergarten emerges as a specific concern, with elementary teachers reporting they often hear "this wasn't an issue in preschool" when behavioral problems arise, suggesting inadequate transition protocols and information sharing about student needs. High school students express confusion about expectations around mastery grading, noting that "only some classes use mastery grading—not consistent" and that the system "could be introduced earlier so it would be less confusing at high school," indicating that major instructional shifts lack adequate explanation and preparation across grade levels. Parents and staff both emphasize the need for proactive communication rather than reactive responses, transparent explanations of "why" behind decisions rather than just "what" is happening, and genuine two-way dialogue that incorporates stakeholder feedback into planning processes rather than presenting decisions as foregone conclusions. The overarching message is that while Delaware excels at building-level,

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

teacher-to-family communication that supports individual student success, the district must develop more robust systems for transparent, consistent, and comprehensive communication at the organizational level—including clear articulation of strategic priorities, honest acknowledgment of challenges and constraints, accessible explanation of decision-making processes, regular updates on progress toward goals, and authentic opportunities for staff, students, and families to provide input that genuinely shapes district direction rather than simply ratifying predetermined outcomes.

Technology: Stakeholders across all groups express a profound paradox regarding technology—recognizing that students must be technologically proficient and AI-literate to succeed in future careers while simultaneously expressing deep concern that current technology use can be excessive, developmentally inappropriate, and undermining critical thinking, social skills, and independent learning capabilities that define successful humans. Parents articulate this tension most directly, emphasizing that while students need "technology and AI" skills and "digital literacy" to navigate their futures, there is currently "less computers, more critical thinking" needed, with strong calls for "less screen time," "no tech days more frequently," and instruction on using AI appropriately rather than allowing it to replace thinking—one parent noting critically that "less computers, more critical thinking" because technology is eliminating the analytical work students need to practice. Staff reinforce these concerns from a developmental perspective, observing that "screens have replaced parents in a lot of ways," students have lost curiosity because technology provides immediate answers without exploration, and elementary children need "dramatic play" and hands-on manipulation of materials rather than structured screen time, with teachers advocating that students "need to focus on dramatic play" and learn "how to be bored" instead of constant digital stimulation. High school students themselves identify both the benefits and drawbacks, noting appreciation for the "no phones" policy at Dempsey because "people talk more," while simultaneously requesting courses on "how to appropriately use AI" and expressing concern that they need better preparation for the AI-driven workforce they will enter. Staff across all levels emphasize the critical need for students to develop "executive functioning" skills, problem-solving abilities, and capacity to "survive without technology," with Schultz teachers specifically noting students will be "an AI generation" who must learn both technological competency and the ability to function when technology fails or is unavailable. Parents express strong desire for media literacy education including ability to identify "what is real and what is fake," discern credible sources from misinformation, understand online safety protocols, and develop "heightened awareness" of digital risks, while also requesting that schools teach responsible website access and critical evaluation of information rather than passive consumption. Staff advocate for nuanced approaches including teaching the "4 Cs" (communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking) as foundational skills that transcend technology, providing explicit instruction in executive functioning and self-regulation in digital environments, and creating intentional "tech-free" learning experiences where students develop problem-solving skills without digital crutches. The urgent call from all stakeholder groups is for Delaware to develop a coherent, developmentally appropriate K-12 technology philosophy that prepares students to leverage digital tools strategically while preserving and strengthening the uniquely human

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

capacities—creativity, empathy, critical analysis, resilience, interpersonal communication, and independent thinking—that will differentiate successful individuals in an AI-saturated future, ensuring that technology serves learning rather than supplanting it and that students graduate as thoughtful users of technology rather than passive consumers dependent on it for basic cognitive and social functions.

Professional Development: Staff across all buildings identify significant gaps in professional development that undermine their capacity to effectively address evolving student needs, with particular concern about incomplete training cycles, insufficient onboarding for new roles, and lack of follow-through on district initiatives that leave teachers feeling unprepared and unsupported. Teachers describe patterns where "something gets started and then not the 2nd training" such as restorative practices that began but never continued, "not a formal Foundations training" despite curriculum adoption, and inadequate professional development for special education strategies despite serving increasingly complex student needs with specialized requirements. Staff in specialized roles report minimal onboarding, with one noting "not a lot of onboarding. It felt like I should know what I was supposed to do versus some training. More transition would have been helpful," indicating that the district assumes expertise rather than building capacity systematically. Elementary teachers express an urgent need for professional development in social-emotional learning strategies, noting "we have a lot of people who are really good at what they do but they don't have time to help train," suggesting that internal expertise exists but isn't leveraged effectively through structured learning opportunities. The lack of meaningful, sustained professional development contributes directly to the educator burnout that both staff and parents identify as a critical concern, with teachers articulating that "educator burnout is real" and "we have other outside demands. It's not possible in the contract day," while parents observe that staff dedication is exceptional but worry about sustainability of that commitment without systemic support. Staff describe unsustainable workload expectations including counselors who "wear 12 hats," principals who must focus on behaviors rather than instructional leadership, interventionists managing 104 students in math alone without the team approach that exists for literacy, and teachers juggling 25-student classes where 12 have IEPs and 13 have reading goals alongside multiple service provider schedules that become "overwhelming" despite "everyone trying really hard." Teachers at Hayes specifically note "fighting work-life balance with all that is asked and needed" and acknowledge "need more resources" without being able to specify what would help, suggesting that burnout has progressed to a point where staff can identify the problem but lack capacity to envision solutions. The challenge of providing high-quality professional development is further complicated by competing demands on limited collaborative time, with staff noting that grade-level meetings "used to do it more but then they got cancelled" and planning time "gets taken out" for coverage responsibilities, leaving little protected space for the job-embedded learning that research identifies as most effective for improving practice. Staff express desire for more opportunities to learn from colleagues across buildings, noting difficulty collaborating due to structural differences and "theoretical or best practice" disconnects, while also identifying need for district-wide consistency in approaches so that professional learning is coherent rather than building-specific or teacher-dependent. High school staff specifically advocate for vertical

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

alignment professional development from primary through secondary levels and deeper implementation support for Marzano's work across all grade bands, recognizing that isolated training without systematic follow-up and coaching produces minimal lasting impact on instruction. Parents implicitly call for professional development through their requests for parenting classes and stronger home-school partnerships, suggesting that educators need training not only in content and pedagogy but also in family engagement strategies, cultural competency, and communication approaches that honor diverse family structures and backgrounds. The collective message from staff and parents is that Delaware must shift from episodic, superficial professional development to a comprehensive learning system that provides adequate onboarding for all roles, sustained multi-year training cycles with coaching and feedback rather than one-time workshops, protected collaborative time where teachers can learn from each other without guilt about leaving classrooms uncovered, specialized training for emerging challenges like trauma-informed practices and neurodiversity-affirming approaches, and differentiated support that meets teachers where they are rather than assuming universal expertise. This professional learning system must explicitly address educator well-being, incorporating strategies to prevent and recover from burnout, removing unnecessary tasks from teacher plates rather than continually adding responsibilities, and creating sustainable workload expectations that allow staff to leverage their dedication and expertise without sacrificing their own mental health and personal lives—ultimately recognizing that investing in educator learning and well-being is inseparable from providing the high-quality, relationship-centered education that defines Delaware's identity and that families expect for their children.

Conclusion: Change/Strengthen

In summary, stakeholders across all groups identify six critical priorities that must anchor Delaware's strategic planning moving forward: **proactive planning for growth and facilities** that replaces reactive decision-making with strategic anticipation of enrollment, staffing, and infrastructure needs; **comprehensive behavioral and social-emotional support systems** that provide educators with adequate resources, personnel, and training to address increasingly complex student needs; **expanded and refined student experiences** that balance technology proficiency with essential human skills including critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and real-world preparation; **enhanced district-wide communication** and transparency that builds trust through clear explanations of decisions, resource allocation, and authentic opportunities for stakeholder input; **coherent K-12 technology integration** that develops strategic digital literacy while preserving creativity, curiosity, and independent thinking; and **sustainable professional development systems** that provide ongoing training, collaborative learning time, and explicit attention to educator well-being. These priorities represent not incremental improvements but fundamental shifts necessary to ensure that Delaware's exceptional strengths—caring relationships, community bonds, dedicated staff—are supported by equitable systems and proactive planning that enable all students to thrive and all educators to sustain their commitment without burnout.

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

Preparing for their future

Today's kindergarteners will graduate high school in 2038. With this in mind, what do our students need to experience or learn during their time in Delaware City Schools to be successfully prepared for THEIR future?

Staff Perspectives on Future Readiness: Staff across all grade levels emphasize that preparing current kindergartners for graduation in 2038 requires fundamental shifts in how students develop social-emotional competencies, executive functioning skills, and resilience before academic rigor can take hold. Elementary teachers consistently prioritize foundational skills including emotional regulation, social skills, problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and the capacity to handle adversity, with multiple staff noting that students must first learn basic life competencies like patience, sharing, "how to be bored," and waiting their turn before they can effectively engage in academic learning. Staff identify critical gaps in what previous generations developed naturally—stamina, grit, the understanding that "failure is okay," and productive struggle—attributes they observe declining in recent cohorts who arrive at school without experiences of being told "no" or managing disappointment. Teachers across buildings advocate for explicit instruction in the "4 Cs" (communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking), executive functioning skills, and social-emotional learning embedded throughout the school day rather than isolated monthly lessons. Staff express concern about technology's role, emphasizing that while students will be "an AI generation" who must understand and use technology appropriately, they simultaneously need to develop capacity to "survive without technology" through hands-on experiences, dramatic play, manipulatives, and unstructured time that builds curiosity and independent problem-solving. High school staff specifically identify needs for career readiness programs, expanded opportunities beyond college-prep tracks, life skills instruction, and vertical alignment K-12 so students experience coherent skill development rather than fragmented expectations. The overarching staff perspective is that academic content matters less than developing well-rounded individuals with **strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, resilience, work ethic, and the capacity for self-motivation and critical thinking**—foundational human capacities that will enable students to navigate whatever challenges and opportunities emerge in their post-graduation futures.

Parent Perspectives on Future Readiness: Parents consistently prioritize critical thinking and problem-solving skills as the most essential competencies for preparing current kindergartners for success after high school, emphasizing repeatedly that students need to "think outside the box," "decipher information," and develop analytical abilities independent of artificial intelligence rather than relying on technology to do their thinking. Real-life practical skills emerge as parents' second major priority, with strong calls for financial literacy including budgeting, money management, understanding credit, taxes, cooking, and vocational skills like shop classes—essentially "how to function" as independent adults in real-world situations. Parents express deep concern about technology balance, articulating a paradox where students must be digitally literate and AI-proficient while simultaneously receiving "less screen time," "no

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

tech days more frequently," and instruction on using technology responsibly rather than becoming dependent on it, with particular emphasis on media literacy skills to identify "what is real and what is fake" and discern credible sources from misinformation. Communication and interpersonal skills represent parents' third priority area, specifically "face-to-face" interaction abilities, "holding conversation that's not on a screen," conflict resolution, collaboration, and respectful dialogue—social competencies they observe eroding as screens replace human interaction. Parents emphasize character development including grit, stamina, resilience, emotional intelligence, empathy, and the understanding that "failure is okay," expressing concern that current students "do not have stamina, grit has gone away" and need explicit instruction in perseverance and handling adversity. Several parents advocate for clearly defined district values or **"Portrait of a Learner"** pillars that articulate what Delaware graduates should embody—resilience, empathy, curiosity, critical thinking—providing coherent K-12 vision rather than fragmented expectations. Parents also identify **executive functioning skills, work ethic including accountability for deadlines and quality, curiosity and love of learning, hands-on experiences, and community investment as essential preparation, ultimately envisioning graduates who are independent thinkers, effective communicators, resilient problem-solvers, and engaged citizens prepared not just for college or career but for the complexities of adult life in an uncertain, technology-saturated world.**

Student Perspectives on Future Readiness: Students across grade levels **express excitement about future opportunities** rather than anxiety about preparation, focusing primarily on expanded activities, choices, and experiences they anticipate as they progress through Delaware schools. Elementary students look forward to specific programs including **music and orchestra opportunities at Dempsey, sports teams, clubs, leadership roles** like kindergarten helpers for those wanting to be teachers, science experiments, and chances to "speak in front of others" that build confidence and skills. Middle school students emphasize their appreciation for abundant opportunities already available—multiple music classes, houses, sports, clubs, advanced academics, College Credit Plus options—while expressing eagerness for high school experiences including marching band, varsity sports teams, career programs, and "learning how to do taxes" as practical preparation. High school students identify gaps in their current preparation, specifically requesting better support for CCP course organization and navigation, college readiness counseling with more frequent check-ins, courses on appropriately using AI, research classes for freshmen and sophomores, and college prep classes in junior year to bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary expectations. **Students across all levels value choices and personalization, expressing appreciation for systems that allow them to "chart their own pathway," try new things, and explore diverse interests through electives, clubs, and varied course options.** Notably absent from student responses is significant discussion of specific skills or competencies—students focus instead on experiences, opportunities, and relationships they anticipate, suggesting they trust adults to design appropriate learning while they concentrate on engagement and exploration. The student perspective reveals confidence in Delaware's current offerings combined with practical requests for **better organization of existing programs, clearer guidance through complex options like CCP, and expanded**

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

opportunities in areas like clubs, leadership, and hands-on learning experiences that connect to their individual interests and career aspirations.

Implications

Mission:Delaware was designed to support relationship-building with stakeholders, develop a deeper understanding of school and community cultures, and gain insight into strengths, concerns, and desires related to preparing students for their future.

This summary of learnings provides insight from a broad range of stakeholder groups that can be used to inform the upcoming strategic planning process. Since strategic planning is a future-forward plan, leaning into the Summary of Learnings from the "Preparing for Their Future" section is a great place to start. Some areas to consider for framing the strategic planning process include authentic learning experiences, whole child development, academic foundation, communication and partnerships, and facilities and learning environments.

It is also important that the strategic planning inquiry teams use this data during the strategic planning process to guide their inquiry as they develop recommendations to frame the next strategic plan. The responses to the 'change/strengthen' and the 'prepared for their future' prompts will be foundational to the work of the inquiry teams. They will need to extrapolate the tensions in the data and dig deeper into the causes of these tensions, understand the related research and best practices, and harvest innovative solutions and strategies.

The district leaders can also use the Summary of Learnings to prioritize their focus for the second half of this school year by using the 'change/strengthen' and 'prepared for their future' responses to guide them. Here are a few suggestions to consider moving forward:

- **To address the urgent call for proactive planning for growth and facilities**, the district should accelerate the facilities master planning timeline and ensure comprehensive community engagement throughout the process. Research consistently demonstrates that well-maintained, adequately sized facilities positively impact student achievement and teacher retention. By developing a transparent, data-driven facilities plan that addresses overcrowding at buildings, infrastructure concerns at Hayes High School, and equitable resource distribution across all buildings, the district can maintain the family atmosphere and small-school feel that attracted families to Delaware while preparing for continued enrollment growth. The planning process should include strategic redistricting analysis, proactive staffing projections, and capital improvement priorities that align with the district's commitment to providing every student with a high-quality learning environment.
- **Recognizing the critical importance of behavioral and social-emotional support**, the district should develop a comprehensive, tiered support system that addresses the significant shift in student needs identified by staff across all grade levels. Studies indicate that systematic social-emotional learning programs improve academic performance, reduce

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

behavioral incidents, and enhance overall school climate. To address concerns that "behaviors take over so much" instructional time, the district should implement proactive social-emotional curriculum embedded throughout the school day, provide adequate staffing for supervision and intervention (including educational assistants in K-1), expand mental health resources beyond overwhelmed counselors, establish early intervention programs with consistent transition support, and develop parent education initiatives to partner with families in building foundational skills. This comprehensive approach will enable educators to focus on instruction while ensuring students develop the emotional regulation, resilience, and interpersonal skills necessary for success.

- **The call for expanded and refined student experiences** could prompt the district to develop a comprehensive K-12 vision articulated through a "Portrait of a Learner" or similar framework that defines essential competencies for Delaware graduates. Research supports the importance of clear learning outcomes that balance academic rigor with essential human skills. To prepare students graduating in 2038 for an AI-saturated, rapidly changing world, the district should prioritize critical thinking and problem-solving instruction independent of technology, practical life skills including financial literacy and career exploration beginning in elementary grades, communication and interpersonal skills for face-to-face interaction, balanced technology integration that preserves curiosity and hands-on learning, and expanded career pathways beyond traditional college-prep tracks. The district should also establish stronger vertical alignment K-12, social-emotional curriculum throughout all grades, and clearly defined pillars (resilience, empathy, curiosity, critical thinking) that create a unified vision of what Delaware graduates should embody.
- **To address concerns about district-wide communication and transparency**, the school district should prioritize developing robust systems for consistent, comprehensive communication at the organizational level. Research supports the positive impact of transparent decision-making processes on school culture and stakeholder trust. While Delaware excels at building-level, teacher-to-family communication, stakeholders identify significant gaps in communication about budget decisions, resource allocation across buildings, professional development initiatives, and strategic priorities. The district should establish clear protocols for proactive communication rather than reactive responses, transparent explanations of "why" behind decisions rather than just "what" is happening, consistent messaging about curriculum implementation and instructional shifts across grade levels, adequate transition support and information sharing (particularly preschool to kindergarten), and authentic opportunities for staff, students, and families to provide input that genuinely shapes district direction. Addressing communication challenges that extend to coordination across grade levels and buildings will support the collaborative, problem-solving culture that staff and families value.
- **Stakeholders' emphasis on preparing students for their future** reinforces the importance of the competencies Delaware City Schools must continue to develop through expanded authentic learning experiences and career education pathways. Research consistently

Mission:Delaware

Summary of Learnings-December 2025

demonstrates that hands-on, real-world learning experiences improve student engagement, retention, and career readiness. Increasing opportunities for authentic learning experiences, expanding career exploration and vocational pathways for students not pursuing traditional college-prep tracks, teaching the "4 Cs" (communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking) as foundational skills, developing coherent technology philosophy that leverages digital tools strategically while preserving uniquely human capacities, and providing structured opportunities for students to engage with diverse perspectives and community challenges will prepare Delaware graduates not just for college or career, but for the complexities of citizenship and life in an uncertain future. By strategically implementing career education alongside academic excellence, the district can provide students with a well-rounded education that prepares them for both traditional academic paths and diverse career opportunities.

- **To address the comprehensive professional development needs** identified by staff, the district must shift from episodic, superficial training to a comprehensive learning system that supports educator effectiveness and prevents burnout. Research identifies job-embedded, sustained professional development with coaching and feedback as most effective for improving practice and student outcomes. Staff across all buildings express concerns about incomplete training cycles (restorative practices, Foundations), insufficient onboarding for specialized roles, and lack of follow-through on district initiatives. The district should provide adequate onboarding for all roles, sustained multi-year training cycles with coaching rather than one-time workshops, protected collaborative time where teachers can learn from each other without coverage guilt, specialized training for emerging challenges like trauma-informed practices and neurodiversity-affirming approaches, and differentiated support that meets teachers where they are. This professional learning system must explicitly address educator well-being by removing unnecessary tasks, creating sustainable workload expectations, and recognizing that investing in educator learning and well-being is inseparable from providing the high-quality, relationship-centered education that defines Delaware's identity and that families expect for their children.

The school district can create a more supportive, transparent, and strategically focused educational environment by implementing these priorities—**proactive planning for growth and facilities, comprehensive behavioral and social-emotional support, expanded student experiences guided by a coherent K-12 vision, enhanced district-wide communication, authentic learning experiences and career pathways, and sustainable professional development systems**. These strategies address the primary trends identified across subgroups and align with research-based practices, ultimately enhancing the overall experience for students, staff, parents, and the community while ensuring that Delaware's exceptional strengths—**caring relationships, community bonds, dedicated staff**—are supported by equitable systems and proactive planning that enable all students to thrive and all educators to sustain their commitment without burnout.