



## Fall 2025 Community Survey Executive Summary

### Shaping the Future of Grand Rapids Area Schools

Beginning Fall 2025, the Grand Rapids Area School District has started a yearlong journey of conversation and collaboration that puts staff, students, parents, and the community at the center of our schools' future.

We are simply calling it, FORWARD.

Stakeholders had their first chance to make a difference by participating in an online community survey. From October 24-November 5, 833 residents responded to the survey via Thought Exchange in collaboration with DehlerPR; and 465 responded to all of the questions and even added their own comments. Additional opportunities to participate in the FORWARD movement will be shared with stakeholders regularly throughout the school year.

### Introduction

This report presents the findings from a recent survey conducted to assess community perspectives on various aspects of the Grand Rapids Area Schools (GRAS). The survey covered topics such as education quality, financial stewardship, trust in the administration, communication channels, and community engagement.

### Key Takeaways

#### Demographics and Community Engagement

- **Duration in School District:** A significant portion of respondents have lived in the district for over 30 years (31%). This indicates a stable, established community with deep roots in the area.
- **School-Age Children:** 66% of respondents have school-age children attending GRAS, highlighting the direct impact of school policies on a majority of survey participants.

#### Quality of Education and Extracurricular Activities

- **Quality of Education:** 49% of respondents rated the overall quality of education as "Good" and 21% as "Excellent," indicating a generally positive perception. However, there is room for improvement with 23% rating it as only "Fair."

- **Meeting Learning Needs:** 64% believe GRAS meets the learning needs of most students, though only 7% feel all students' needs are met, suggesting a need for inclusive strategies to support all learners.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** The majority, 49%, agreed that GRAS provides high-quality extracurricular activities, with 31% strongly agreeing, reflecting a strong positive sentiment.

### Financial Stewardship and Trust

- **Financial Stewardship:** Confidence in financial management is mixed, with 36% agreeing that the Board and Administration are good stewards, but a notable 21% disagree and 15% strongly disagree.
- **Trust in Administration:** Trust levels are moderate, with 33% somewhat trusting and 30% trusting the School Board and Administration. Efforts to build trust could focus on transparency and communication.

### Communication and Community Involvement

- **Satisfaction with Decision-Making and Communications:** Decision-making and communication satisfaction stand at 55% and 51% respectively. This suggests a relatively positive view, but significant numbers remain unsatisfied, with room for improvement.
- **Primary Information Sources:** Traditional communication methods seem less effective, with newsletters and local newspapers being less utilized. Digital communication and social media appear as important channels.

### Financial Awareness and Challenges

- **Funding and Budget Awareness:** A significant 66% do not believe GRAS is adequately funded. Awareness of past budget cuts and future challenges is high, at 66% and 90% respectively. These findings suggest financial concerns are top-of-mind for many respondents.

### Communication Perception

- **Descriptive Attributes:** District communications are perceived as consistent (41%) and clear (38%), but further efforts are needed to enhance transparency (22%) and accuracy (25%).

## Recommendations

1. **Enhance Communication and Transparency:** Focus on improving transparency and the accuracy of communications to build trust and stakeholder engagement.
2. **Broadening Engagement:** Utilize more effective digital and social media platforms for information dissemination to reach a wider audience.
3. **Address Financial Concerns:** Develop and communicate a clear financial strategy addressing budget concerns and potential impacts on educational services.

4. **Inclusive Education Strategies:** Expand initiatives to better meet the learning needs of all students, ensuring that no student is left behind.
5. **Leverage Community Stability:** Engage long-term residents in conversations about the school district's future, utilizing their insights and commitment to the community.

This report underscores the critical areas needing attention as GRAS moves forward with community engagement. Balancing financial constraints with the demands for educational excellence and meaningful collaboration is a key challenge that requires careful management and innovative solutions.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the survey provide a comprehensive overview of community perceptions and expectations. This is the foundation of a transparent, collaborative process aligned with our strategic directions. Thank you to all who participated. Your feedback will shape how we communicate, address challenges, and build a brighter future for every student.