



South Hadley Public Schools

Superintendent Report of Entry Findings



Table of Contents

Introduction

Entry Plan Process:

Timeline

Community Engagement

Surveys

Materials Reviewed

Observations

Analysis of Findings

Findings:

Theme 1: Educators, Relationships, & Student Connection

Theme 2: Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor & Readiness (PreK-12 Alignment)

Theme 3: Communication, Transparency, & Trust

Theme 4: Student Support Systems, MTSS, Tiered Intervention, & Family Support for Learning

Theme 5: Climate, Safety, Belonging, & Inclusion

Theme 6: Resource Allocation, Staffing Capacity, Organizational Support Structures, & Program Sustainability

Theme 7: Special Education Program Coherence, Compliance, & Capacity

Resources

Introduction

This Superintendent Entry Findings Report is submitted in alignment with the South Hadley Public Schools Superintendent Entry Plan and reflects the listening, learning, and review process conducted during the superintendent entry period. The purpose of this report is to provide the School Committee and the South Hadley community with an initial, evidence-based summary of district strengths, growth areas, and key themes that emerged through stakeholder engagement and district review activities.

As outlined in the Entry Plan, this process was designed to support a thoughtful leadership transition through a structured approach centered on three core methods: listening, observing, and analyzing. The entry process was intended not only to gather information, but also to build relationships, strengthen trust, and develop a deeper understanding of the district's current conditions, opportunities, and challenges across schools and stakeholder groups.

To inform these findings, the district engaged in a broad range of activities, including interviews, stakeholder listening sessions, student feedback processes, surveys, school visits, and the review of district documents and performance data. Input was gathered from students, families, caregivers, educators, support staff, administrators, community members, and local partners. In addition, the findings reflect review of school improvement plans, DESE review and monitoring documents, and district data sources related to student learning, school climate, operations, and organizational capacity.

The themes presented in this report represent initial draft findings based on patterns that emerged across multiple sources of evidence. They are intended to support School Committee discussion, leadership team reflection, and continued validation of the findings before finalization. These themes are not a final strategic plan; rather, they are a foundation for the next phase of work—identifying priorities, aligning resources, and developing short- and long-term improvement strategies.

This report is grounded in the district's mission, values, and commitment to students, and it reflects a continued focus on equity, instructional improvement, and a strong school culture. It is offered as part of a transparent process to help ensure that future planning is informed by stakeholder voice, district data, and a shared understanding of both the strengths we must preserve and the areas we must improve.

Entry Plan Process

Superintendent Entry Process Timeline

Phase 1

September - December 2025

Listening, Learning & Data Collection

- Conduct interviews, focus groups, and forums
- Visit all schools and classrooms
- Collect and review district data and key documents

COMPLETED

Phase 2

January - April 2026

Analysis & Reporting

- Identify trends, strengths, and opportunities for improvement
- Prepare and present a comprehensive Entry Findings Report to the School Committee.
- Share a public friendly version with all district staff and community

CURRENT

Phase 3

May - June 2026

Action Planning

- Work with the leadership team to align findings with the District Improvement Plan.
- Develop short-term and long-term strategies to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

UPCOMING

Entry Plan Process

Overview of Engagement and Data Collection

This report summarizes the findings from a comprehensive entry process designed to capture the diverse voices of the South Hadley Public School community. To gain a holistic understanding of the district's current state, we utilized a multi-dimensional approach that combined qualitative stakeholder engagement with rigorous quantitative data analysis.

Our engagement efforts were both broad and deep, ensuring that representatives from every facet of the school system and the wider community had an opportunity to contribute.

- **Stakeholder Engagement:** We conducted monthly Superintendent Community Conversations, monthly staff drop-in sessions at each of the schools and 3 Budget Task Force Forums. There were targeted focus groups and individual interviews with students, educators, support staff, administrative staff, School Committee members, union leadership, and key town partners.
- **Survey Data:** To capture broader community sentiment, we analyzed the Current Student Caregiver Survey, a Former Student Caregiver Survey (sent to families who left the district in the last three years), and FY24–FY25 Student Climate Surveys.
- **Document and Evidence Review:** Our analysis was an exhaustive review of both district and state level materials including:
 - District and School Improvement Plans
 - School and Staff Handbooks
 - School Committee Policy Manual
 - Enrollment Data & Reports
 - School and District Report Cards (DESE)
 - School Discipline Reports (DESE)
 - MCAS, AP, and SAT results
 - District Assessment Data (iReady, DIBELS)
 - Teacher & Administrator Evaluations
 - Special Education Program Evaluations
 - Collective Bargaining Agreements
 - Emergency Procedures & Safety Plans
 - Budget & Grant Documents
 - Capital Project Plans
 - DESE Program Review Documents
- **Direct Observation:** The entry process also included individual classroom visits and collaborative learning walks with the administrative team, providing a firsthand view of instructional coherence and school climate.

Theme 1:

Educators, Relationships, & Student Connection

Summary: Across stakeholder groups, South Hadley's strongest and most consistent asset is its human capital. Our educators and staff are not merely instructional leads; they are the architects of a caring environment. Students and caregivers alike point to these relationships as a primary driver for student belonging and engagement.

Strengths to build on:

- Caring, committed teachers and staff; strong student-adult relationships.
- Visual Leadership: Students specifically value the visibility and responsiveness of counselors and administrators.
- School routines and traditions that build community (e.g., Spirit Week, Tiger Times, Community Period).
- Enrichment, athletics, and extracurriculars that help students feel engaged beyond the traditional classroom

Challenges/Opportunities:

- The Sustainability Gap: Maintaining high-impact relationships is becoming increasingly difficult due to shifting class sizes, staffing shortages, and the rising complexity of student needs.
- The Consistency Variable: While the "highs" are very high, there is a noted variation in experience. Not every student or family feels the same level of connection, suggesting a need for more uniform relationship-building practices.
- Operationalizing Empathy: There is an opportunity to move from "pockets of excellence" in relationship-building to a district-wide standard that ensures every student has a supportive experience in every classroom.

Supporting details (what this includes):

- **Caregiver Perspective:** Parent survey data highlights a welcoming culture, particularly in early grades, and strong praise for teacher-level communication and support staff.
 - Exceptional educators and strong relationships (top theme)
 - Welcoming/supportive school culture (especially early grades)
 - Enrichment/extracurricular engagement
 - Secondary academic pathways and responsive communication (teacher level)
 - Emerging: athletics as belonging driver; strong SPED supports when well implemented



The visual synthesis of our caregiver survey data clearly illustrates that our community views our educators and the relationships they build as the cornerstone of the SHPS experience.

Theme 1:

Educators, Relationships, & Student Connection

Supporting details (what this includes) continued:

- **Student Voices:** Senior Interviews (25-26) - Direct Praise for guidance staff and individual teachers who acted as mentors
 - Student Leader Debriefs: High value placed on “visible support”, including the presence of administration and Superintendent at events.
 - Students highly value active engagement including Spirit Weeks, Tiger Times, Reading programs
 - Skala highlight: reading/book program
 - Mosier highlights: SRO, Spirit Week, counseling staff, teachers, safety practice routines
 - Middle School highlights: admin, vaping lesson
 - High School highlights: teachers, Tiger Times, Community Period, CTE, admin presence, superintendent attendance at events



- **Operational Insights:** Administrative team discussions confirm that when staff are empowered to engage rather than just manage, student connection rises significantly.
 - While our parents often focus on the 'What' (Academic Pathways and Special Education supports), our students are focusing on the 'How' (Admin presence, Spirit Week, and Safety routines). Together, these voices point to a district that prioritizes both high standards and high-touch relationships.

Theme 1:

Educators, Relationships, & Student Connection

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

To ensure that South Hadley remains a place where every student feels seen, supported, and challenged, we will prioritize the following:

1. **Operationalizing Empathy:** We will move from "pockets of excellence" to a district-wide standard for relationship-building. This includes embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices into our daily operations so that relationship-building is a core professional competency, not just a personal attribute.
2. **Sustainability & Staff Support:** To mitigate the impact of staffing and behavioral challenges, we will review our resource allocation to ensure teachers have the time and the professional development necessary to sustain high-quality student-adult relationships.
3. **Formalizing Mentorship Networks:** Building on the success of our current counseling and mentorship models, we will look to formalize "check-in" systems that ensure every student, particularly those at transition points (e.g., moving from middle to high school), has an identified adult champion.
4. **Aligning the "What" and the "How":**
We will reconcile the parent focus on academic pathways with the student focus on connection. By integrating high-standards (academic rigor) with high-touch (relationship-building), we create a learning environment where students feel safe enough to take the risks required for academic growth.

Strong relationships and connections are foundational conditions for engagement, attendance, and learning.

“Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be.”
- Rita F. Pierson (Educator/Ted Talk)

Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

Summary: South Hadley Public Schools is currently a district in transition. While our community is anchored in strong, supportive relationships between students and staff, we face a critical need to modernize our instructional approach. Our internal reviews, parent feedback, and state accountability data converge on a singular finding: we must move beyond the “silos” that currently separate our schools and grade levels. To ensure every student is prepared for postsecondary success, we must establish a unified PK-12 instructional focus, a shared definition of academic rigor, and a coherent curriculum that leaves no gaps as students transition through our district.

Strengths to build on:

- Secondary pathways are a visible asset: Honors/AP/CTE experiences are valued; Advanced Coursework earned 4/4 points at the high school level.
- Grade 10 Math is a notable strength (meeting/exceeding 52%, above the state average; Math growth earned 4/4 points).
- Improvement for the lowest-performing students in Grades 3–8 suggests targeted supports can move outcomes when implemented well.
- High school internal structures (department heads/learning cycles) support more consistent instructional cycles than in some other buildings.

Challenges/Opportunities:

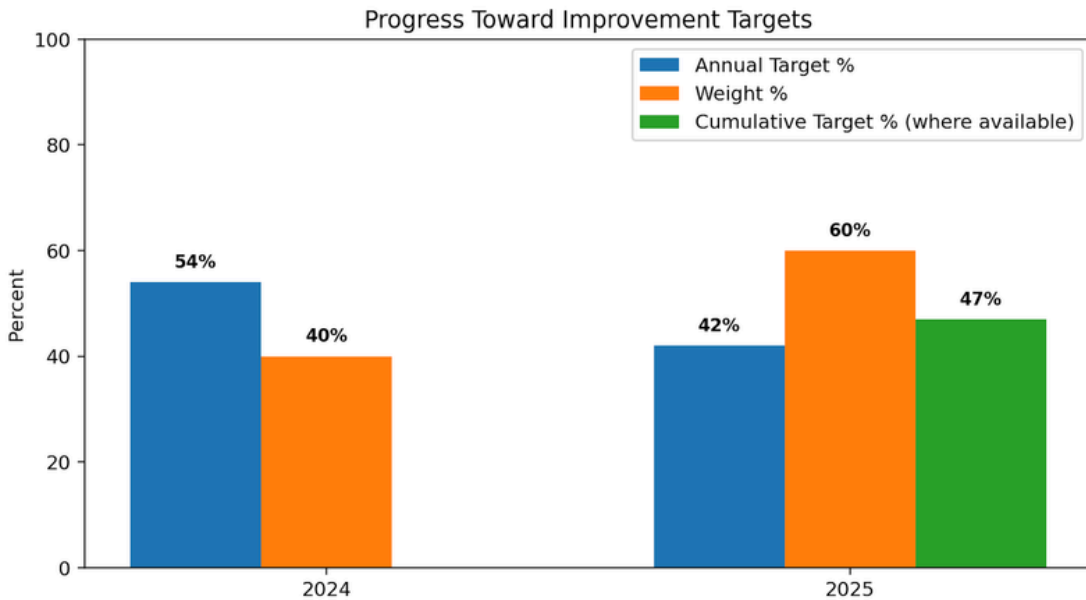
- Curriculum and instructional work remains uneven and “in silos,” including concerns that high school curriculum has not been fully reviewed for PK–12 continuity.
- Administrators report students reaching high school with foundational skill gaps (reading, writing, math) and question whether students are being progress monitored after exiting interventions/services.
- Grades 3–8 achievement points in Math and Science (0/4) signal the need for stronger Tier 1 instruction and aligned curriculum/assessment.
- Need a shared district definition of rigor and a PK–12 instructional focus that is supported with tools, time, and structures.
- Family requests for clearer expectations about learning and homework/assignment routines point to inconsistent instructional “signals” across classes/schools.
- Technology’s role needs clarity (where it supports learning vs. where over-reliance may reduce engagement and skill-building).

Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

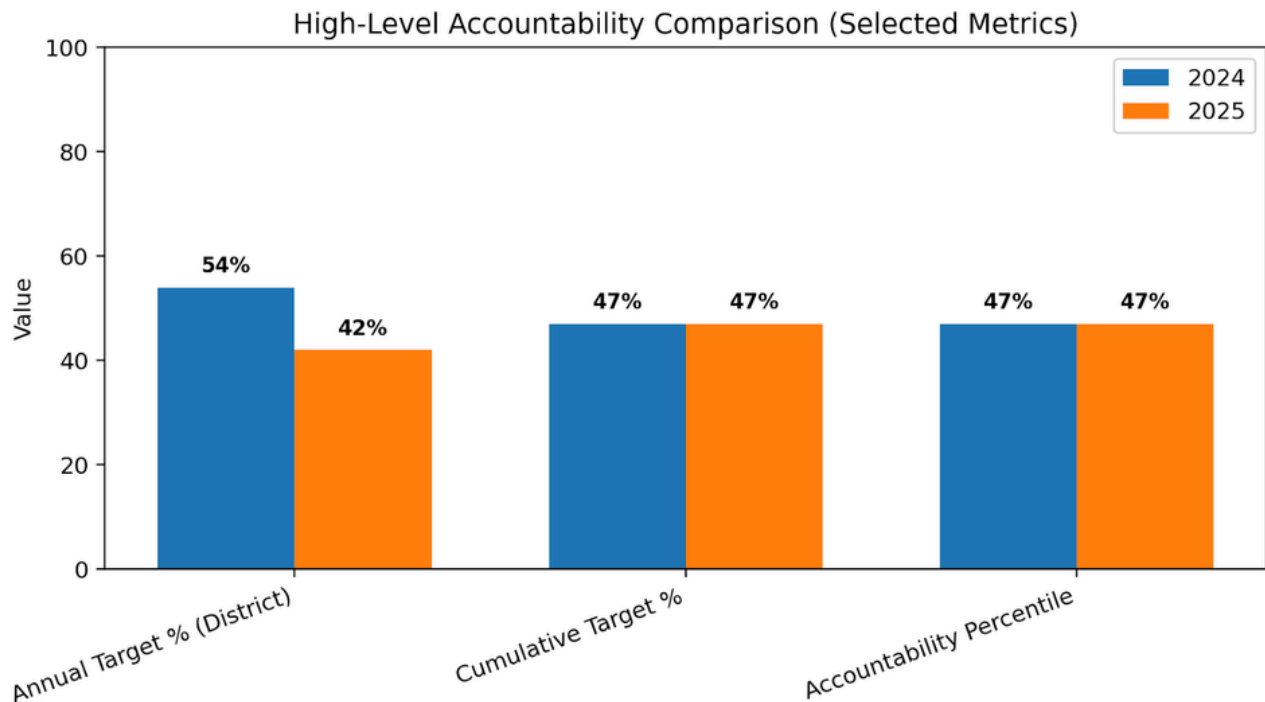
Supporting Details:

The 2024–2025 MCAS data for South Hadley Public Schools shows a district in transition, with a significant shift in performance between grade levels. Overall, the district is classified by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as "Not requiring assistance or intervention," making "Moderate Progress" towards its improvement targets.



High-Level Accountability Comparison:

While we maintain a stable 47th-percentile ranking relative to our peers, we are currently experiencing a "cooling" period in achievement that necessitates immediate focus.



Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

Key Data Points & Analysis

The district's performance is measured by how many "points" it earns toward state-set targets.

1. The High School vs. Elementary/Middle Divide

There is a stark contrast in performance between South Hadley High School and the non-high school grades (3–8).

- **Elementary/Middle (Grades 3–8):** This group struggled more with achievement targets in 2025 compared to 2024, particularly in Math and Science, where they earned 0 out of 4 possible points for achievement.
- **High School (Grade 10):** While the high school saw a drop in English Language Arts (ELA) achievement points (from 4 in 2024 to 0 in 2025), it showed extraordinary growth in Mathematics, earning a perfect 4/4 points for student growth.
- One of the district's bright spots is the progress of its lowest-performing students. In 2025, this subgroup in grades 3–8 earned **3/4 points in ELA achievement** and **2/4 points in Math achievement**, indicating that the district is successfully narrowing the achievement gap for those who need the most support.

Detailed Indicator Performance (2025)

This table reflects the points earned (out of 4) for "All Students" across different grade spans.

Indicator	Grades 3-8 (Points/Possible)	High School (Points/Possible)
ELA Achievement	2 / 4	0 / 4
Math Achievement	0 / 4	3 / 4
Science Achievement	0 / 4	0 / 4
ELA Growth (SGP)	3 / 4	3 / 4
Math Growth (SGP)	2 / 4	4 / 4
Chronic Absenteeism	0 / 4	2 / 4
4-Year Grad Rate	N/A	0 / 4
Annual Dropout Rate	N/A	0 / 4
Advanced Coursework	N/A	4 / 4

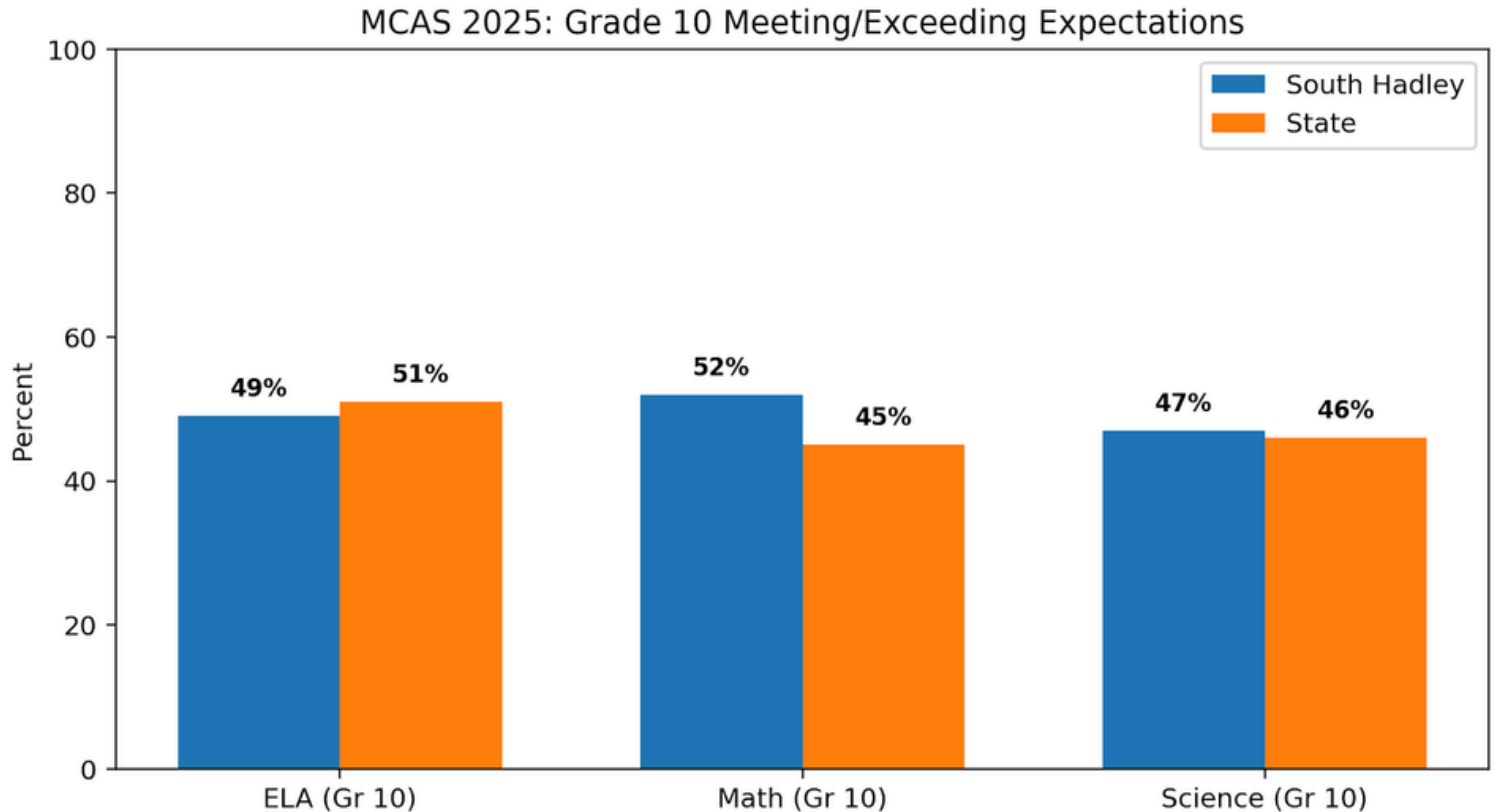
Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

2. Subject Area Performance (2025 Results)

The percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations at the High School level shows South Hadley is competitive with state averages:

- **ELA (Grade 10): 49% (State: 51%)**
- **Math (Grade 10): 52% (State: 45%) A notable area of strength.**
- **Science (Grade 10): 47% (State: 46%)**



3. Chronic Absenteeism

This remains a challenge for the district.

- In 2024, South Hadley received high marks (4/4 points) for managing absenteeism at the high school.
- In 2025, those points dropped significantly, signaling that more students are missing 10% or more of the school year, which often correlates with lower MCAS scores.

Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

4. Stakeholder Feedback/Data Analysis

There is a rare and powerful alignment between our families, our school leaders, and our state data. All three sources point to the same conclusion: while we have strong relationships, we must modernize our instructional practices and break down departmental silos to ensure every student is meeting—and exceeding—grade-level expectations.

What Caregivers Say	What Admin & Staff Say	What DESE & District Data Show
<p>Top Concern: Lack of academic rigor and readiness for the “next level” (post-secondary or next grade).</p>	<p>Instructional Legacy: “We are trying to educate like we did 10 years ago”, but the student profile has changed.</p>	<p>Achievement Gaps: Accountability trends and subgroup patterns indicate inconsistent readiness and alignment.</p>
<p>Request for Consistency: Parents want stronger vertical alignment and “One Change” to be more academic challenge.</p>	<p>Systemic Silos: High school curriculum remains “in silos” and has not fully reviewed for K-12 continuity.</p>	<p>Curriculum Audit: DESE reviews recommend a focus on curriculum alignment and increasing access to advanced coursework.</p>
<p>Skills Gaps: More focus on core ELA/Math/Writing, plus executive functioning and study skills.</p>	<p>Foundational Needs: Many HS students are unable to read, write, or do math at expected grade levels.</p>	<p>Growth Indicators: DART and MCAS show the need for a shared district definition of “rigor” to drive outcomes.</p>
<p>Communication: Stronger “home-school loop” with proactive updates on learning expectations and resources.</p>	<p>Professional Focus: Need a unified district focus on high-quality instruction and shared standards.</p>	<p>School Improvement: SIPs prioritize instructional shifts, yet lack of a unified K-12 metric for success.</p>

Theme 2:

Curriculum Consistency, Academic Rigor, & Readiness

Instructional Core + Equity – Coherent curriculum and shared rigor expectations are essential to equitable access to high-quality instruction and readiness.

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

To address these findings, our next steps will focus on:

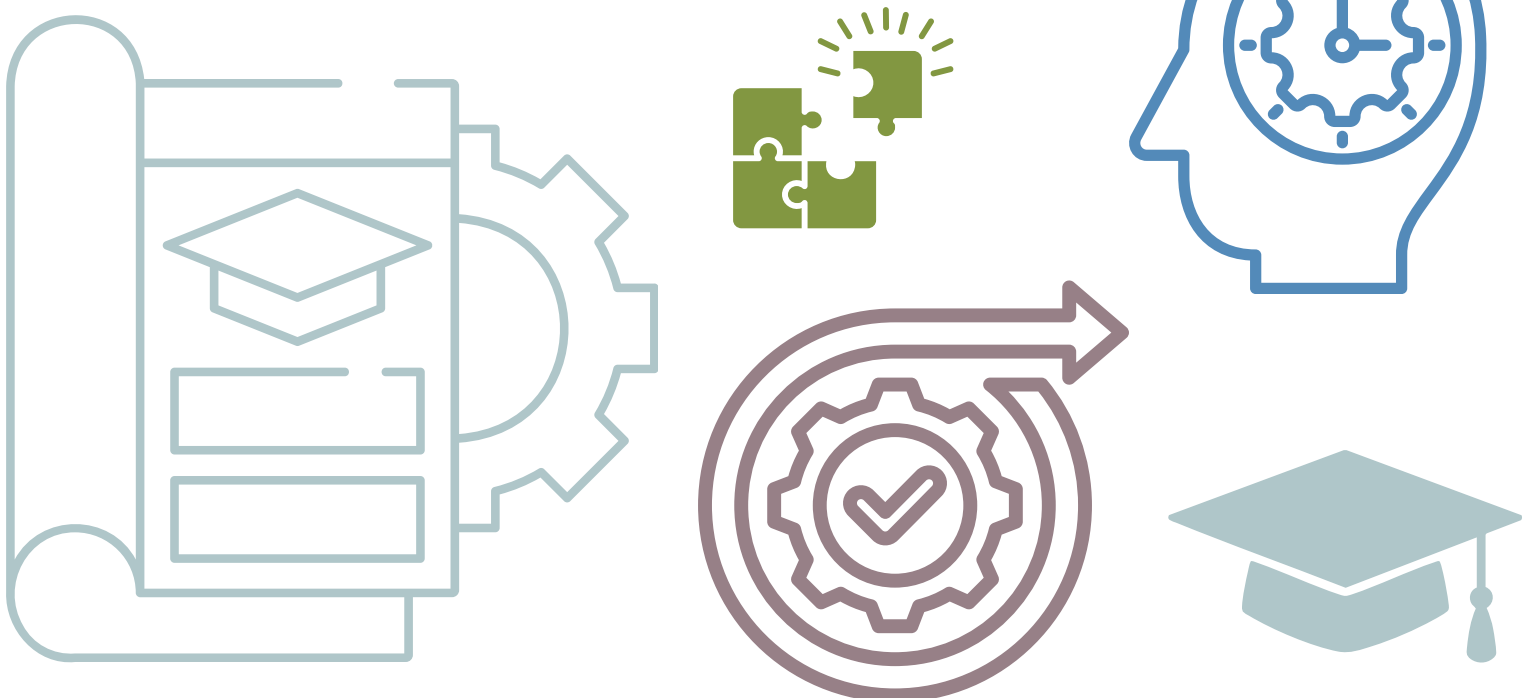
Unified Instructional Core: Establishing a shared, district-wide definition of what "rigor" looks like in a modern classroom.

Vertical Coherence: Breaking down departmental silos to ensure curriculum maps are aligned from PK through grade 12.

Proactive Communication: Strengthening the "home-school loop" by providing clear expectations for assignments, homework, and academic progress.

Supporting Evidence / Resources

- **Official Data:** [DESE South Hadley District Report Card](#)
- **Comparison Tool:** [DESE DART \(District Analysis and Review Tool\)](#)



Theme 3:

Communication, Transparency, & Trust

Summary: Communication remains a major growth area despite recognized improvements in some schools/classrooms. Trust is built on the foundation of consistent, transparent, and proactive communication. Caregivers and students want communication systems that are more consistent, proactive, transparent, and accessible along with clearer follow-through when concerns are reported. By standardizing our platforms and creating a predictable flow of information, we can move from merely disseminating data to fostering a partnership with every family and student in the district.

Strengths to build on:

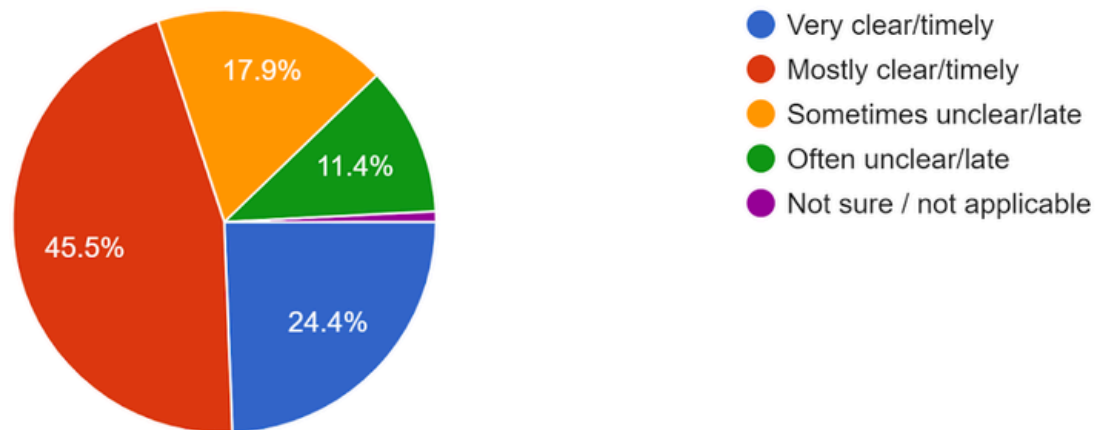
- Teacher-level communication is often cited as strong in specific settings.
- Student-facing communication structures exist and are valued
- District willingness to gather input (surveys, forums) is noticed and appreciated by some stakeholders.

Challenges/Opportunities:

- Need consistent districtwide communication norms and source of truth across schools.
- Need more proactive communication about learning, expectations, incidents, and follow-up.

How clear and timely is communication about your child's progress?

123 responses



- Need greater transparency and timeliness in grades/progress reporting (PowerSchool accuracy and timeliness).
- Students report not always knowing what is going on and some are hesitant to speak to adults due to fear of not being heard.
- Need onboarding supports for families (platform guides, key dates, transition supports) and communication designs that reduce overload and allow multiple caregivers.
- Need for stronger classroom-level communication about what students are learning and what is expected.

Theme 3:

Communication, Transparency, & Trust

Current vs Desired Communication Ecosystem (Source of Truth Model)

Feature	Current State (Fragmented)	Future State ("Source of Truth")
Platform Use	Multiple apps; inconsistent PowerSchool updates.	Unified Portal: One primary hub for grades/schedules.
Message Flow	High volume, duplicate messages; reactive.	Curated & proactive: scheduled digests; "Learning Look-Aheads."
Response Loop	Concerns reported, but follow-through is "invisible."	Transparent tracking: visible "You Said, We Did" updates.
Format	Heavily digital; assumes tech fluency.	Accessible design: digital + paper + multi-caregiver access.

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

To foster a culture of transparency and trust, we are committed to the following actions:

- Systemic Integration:** Auditing our current digital tools to consolidate information flow, reducing duplication, and ensuring PowerSchool is updated with timely, accurate academic progress.
- Proactive Engagement:** Launching "Learning Look-Aheads" to provide families with clear, consistent expectations for upcoming curriculum and classroom goals.
- Transparent Accountability:** Establishing a clear, visible process for reporting and resolving community concerns so that our stakeholders know their feedback leads to tangible action.
- Accessible Design:** Designing communication protocols that support all caregivers, including those who require non-digital formats or need assistance navigating our systems.

Culture + Equity – Communication quality shapes trust, access to information, and the district's ability to partner effectively with all families and students.

Theme 4:

Student Support Systems, MTSS, Tiered Intervention, & Family Support for Learning

Summary: A robust Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is the essential infrastructure that ensures every student, regardless of their starting point, can access high-quality core instruction. Stakeholders consistently identify gaps in the consistency, clarity, and capacity of tiered supports, interventions, and progress monitoring. While South Hadley possesses pockets or strength in interventions and targeted wellness initiatives, our current support systems are often reactive and soloed. To better serve our students, we must transition to a proactive, data-informed model that provides consistent, equitable intervention across all grade levels (PK-12) and creates a partnership loop between our classrooms and our families.

Strengths & Challenges

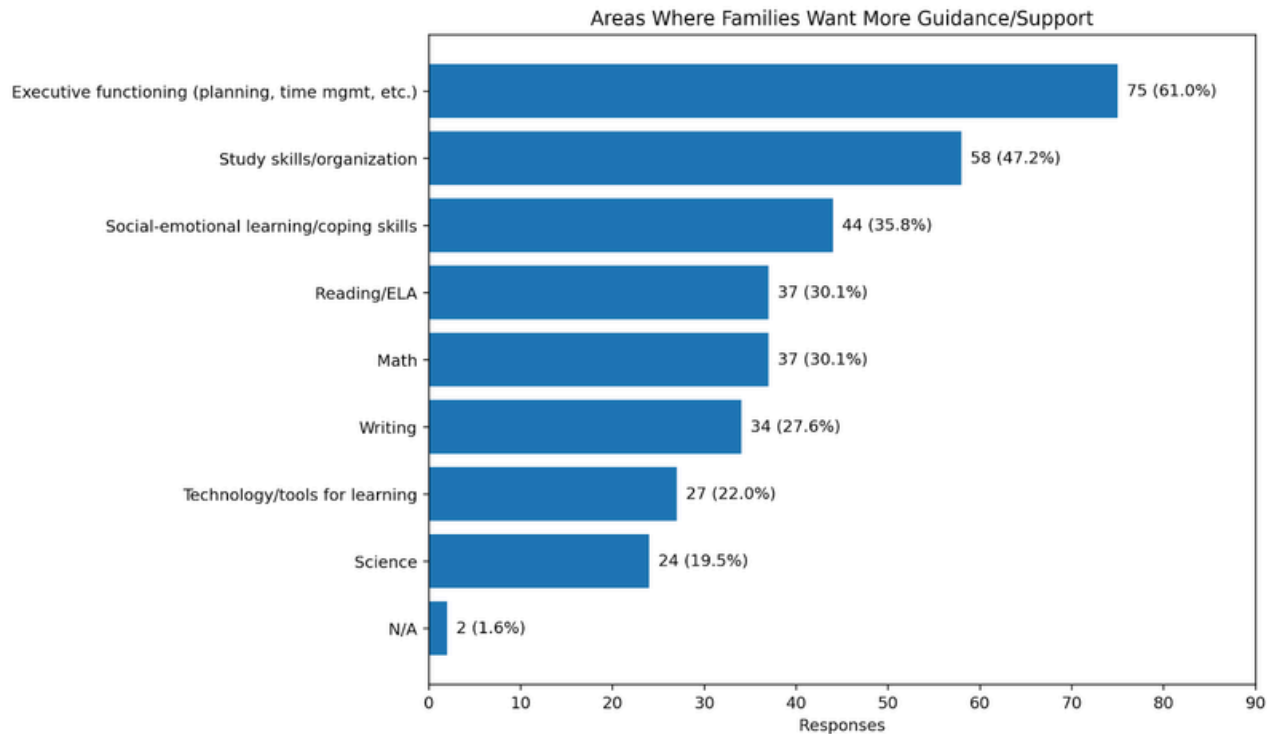
Feature	Current State (Fragmented)	Future State ("Source of Truth")
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Format	Heavily digital; assumes tech fluency.	Accessible design: digital + paper + multi-caregiver access.

Supporting Details

- Closing the PK-12 Gap: Our support systems are currently front-loaded in the elementary years. A critical finding is that students in middle and high school require just as much intentionality regarding executive functioning, study skills, and academic intervention as our younger learners.
- The Monitoring "Black Box": We lack a standardized, districtwide process for tracking student progress after they exit intervention services. To ensure true equity, we must move from a model of "providing a service" to "monitoring for long-term success."
- Technology as a Tool, Not a Crutch: Families expressed valid concerns regarding an over-reliance on digital programs like i-Ready. Our analytical focus must be on balancing high-quality, human-led instruction with digital tools that truly add value, rather than simply filling time.
- The "Bridge to Home" Partnership: The Caregiver Survey indicates that families are ready to move beyond passive recipients of district information. They are actively seeking a two-pronged support system that provides both academic content help (such as Reading, Math, Science) and skill-based guidance (including executive functioning, study skills, and social-emotional regulation).

Theme 4:

Student Support Systems, MTSS, Tiered Intervention, & Family Support for Learning



Supporting Details continued:

- **Student-Led Solutions:** Our students are already thinking about solutions. Ideas like training 8th-grade leaders to support younger peers demonstrate that our students are eager to contribute to a culture of wellness and mutual support.
- **DESE Review Recommendations:** Data use and RTI / intervention process recommendations
- **MCAS/AP/DESE accountability/DART Indicators:** performance patterns requiring targeted supports

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

1. **Establishing the "South Hadley Standard" for MTSS:** We will define a clear, PK-12 district expectation for MTSS that dictates consistent entry and exit criteria for academic and behavioral interventions.
2. **Standardizing Progress Monitoring:** We will implement a systematic review process for students exiting support services to ensure they continue to thrive in the core instructional environment.
3. **Enhancing Home-Learning Capacity:** We will provide families with a digital "resource toolkit"—including tutorials, assignment visibility protocols, and guidance on study skills to strengthen the bridge between classroom learning and home support.
4. **Prioritizing Human-Led Intervention:** Recognizing that families value teacher-led support, we will evaluate our staffing models to prioritize direct human interaction for intervention over purely digital platforms.

Equity + Instructional Core – Effective, equitable tiered supports are necessary to address learning gaps and ensure students can access core instruction successfully.

Theme 5:

Climate, Safety, Belonging, & Inclusion

Summary: A safe, inclusive, and predictable climate is the non-negotiable foundation for academic success. The findings reveal a district of two worlds: while many students and families describe a welcoming atmosphere, particularly in our early grades, there is significant, urgent feedback regarding bullying, disruptive behavior, and exclusionary practices. To move forward, we must have a unified, districtwide commitment to belonging. We must ensure that every student, regardless of their background or identity, feels safe, heard, and supported.

Category	Strengths to Build On	Challenges & Opportunities
Culture & Belonging	Early-grade environments are consistently described as welcoming and foundational for positive culture.	Significant reports of cliques, social exclusion, and rumors impacting middle and high school students.
Safety & Behavior	Established safety routines are valued when implemented with consistency and visibility.	Urgent concerns regarding bullying, cyberbullying, physical fighting, and bus safety.
Responsiveness	Strong individual student-adult relationships serve as a protective factor for many.	A "lack of follow-through" on reports of bullying or racism has eroded trust among many families and students.
Inclusion & Equity	Existing SEL efforts provide a platform for growth.	Explicit concerns about racism, use of slurs, and exclusionary grouping require immediate, systemic intervention.

Supporting details (what this includes)

- Repeated concerns about bullying, cyberbullying, threats/fighting, rumors, and disruptive behavior affecting student learning and emotional safety.
- Reports of inconsistent consequences and limited follow-through after concerns are reported.
- Explicit student concerns related to racism, racial grouping, and racial slurs, requiring stronger cultural responsiveness and inclusion work.
- Student/parent concerns about feeling unheard by adults and not seeing action after reporting.
- Whole-child concerns emerged (SEL, depression, social dynamics/cliques, recess/outdoor time, food, bus behavior/safety).
- Some schools/grade spans (especially early grades) are experienced as welcoming and supportive; this suggests variation in climate experience across the system.
- Student-generated ideas point toward belonging strategies (cross-group activities, leadership development, mixed-group interactions).

Supporting Evidence/Resources:

- Parent Survey Synthesis (biggest concern/one change):
 - Safety, bullying, and disruptive behavior (top concern)
 - Improve safety and climate (top "one change")
 - Emerging: equity/cultural responsiveness, SEL/social development, facilities/building safety, whole-child factors, and transitions

Theme 5:

Climate, Safety, Belonging, & Inclusion

Supporting Evidence/Resources continued:

- Parent Survey Synthesis (what is going well): welcoming/supportive school culture (especially early grades)
- Caregiver Survey (open-ended): bullying, safety, discipline, and inclusion concerns
- Student Leader Debrief (major source):
 - Mosier concerns: bullying, reporting/no action, racism (grouping by skin color, use of N-word), bus violence, fear adults won't listen, recess/gym-field access issues, lock-down drill crowding concerns
 - Middle School concerns: vaping, threats of violence, fighting, no consequences, cliques/rude behavior, cyberbullying, rumors, bullying involving special needs students, depression/SE wellbeing
 - High School concerns: racism, bullying
 - Student ideas: split classes for specials to broaden interaction; combine sports/theater events; teach 8th graders to be leaders
- Admin Team review notes: classroom engagement vs classroom management, students not ready to learn, need clearer SEL expectations (including Sown to Grow)
- DESE review recommendations: PBIS / districtwide safety and behavior consistency
- School Improvement Plans: SEL, trauma-sensitive environments, belonging supports

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

1. **Standardizing Behavioral Expectations:** We will implement a district-wide approach to school climate to ensure that consequences for bullying, fighting, and racism are clear, consistent, and communicated effectively.
2. **Closing the "Feedback Loop":** We will develop a protocol for reporting safety concerns that ensures students and families receive timely updates on how their reports were handled, demonstrating our commitment to accountability.
3. **Prioritizing Cultural Responsiveness:** We will initiate systemic training and curriculum reviews to address explicit concerns regarding racism, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive practices, ensuring every student sees themselves reflected and respected in our halls.
4. **Scaling Student Voice & Action:** We will expand the successful student-led feedback groups currently active at the high school to our middle and elementary schools. Critically, these groups will not just provide input; they will be integrated into a formalized "Action-Response" model. This ensures that student feedback is reviewed by leadership, transformed into a concrete plan of action, and communicated back to the student body, closing the loop between identifying a challenge and implementing a solution.

Culture + Equity – Safe, inclusive, and predictable school environments are essential for learning, belonging, and equitable student experience.

Theme 6:

Resource Allocation, Staffing Capacity, Organizational Support Structures, & Program Sustainability

Summary: The district's long-term success is fundamentally dependent on how we align our finite resources with our core instructional mission. For the past decade, South Hadley has faced a persistent trend of resource reduction, which has now culminated in a significant fiscal cliff. The reality of our current financial landscape is stark: the escalating cost of delivering a high-quality education to an increasingly diverse student body is no longer being matched by the level of funding that we receive. To shift from a reactive state to a sustainable, proactive one, we must synchronize our budget planning, staffing models, and facility maintenance with our strategic priorities. Moving forward, a robust unified advocacy strategy for adequate funding is not merely an operational goal; it is imperative to ensure every student in our district receives a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

Resource, Capacity, & Sustainability

Category	Strengths to Build On	Challenges & Opportunities
Budget & Fiscal Strategy	Transparent budget storytelling and proactive communication regarding fiscal planning.	Funding instability is a top concern; stakeholders fear that budget cuts will disproportionately impact student-facing supports.
Organizational Capacity	Strong internal structures at the high school (e.g., department heads, regular learning cycles).	Staff "burnout" due to capacity strain; many roles require wearing too many hats, limiting time for instructional leadership.
Programmatic Value	High-quality extracurriculars, CTE, arts, and athletics that drive student belonging.	Competition for resources ("Hunger Games" framing) threatens to dilute these essential programs.
Facilities & Environment	Community pride in local school routines and existing traditions.	Persistent concerns regarding facility conditions (cleanliness, accessibility, and equipment) impact the daily student experience.

Analytical Highlights: Infrastructure as the Foundation for Equity:

- **The Class Size Variable:** Administrative and family feedback converges on the impact of class sizes. Larger classes are perceived to be directly inflating behavioral demands, which in turn reduces the time educators have for personalized instruction and proactive intervention.
- **Instructional Support Structures:** We currently experience a lack of parity in support across schools. While the high school utilizes department heads and dedicated assessment cycles, our elementary and middle schools report a greater need for instructional specialists and protected time to unpack standards.

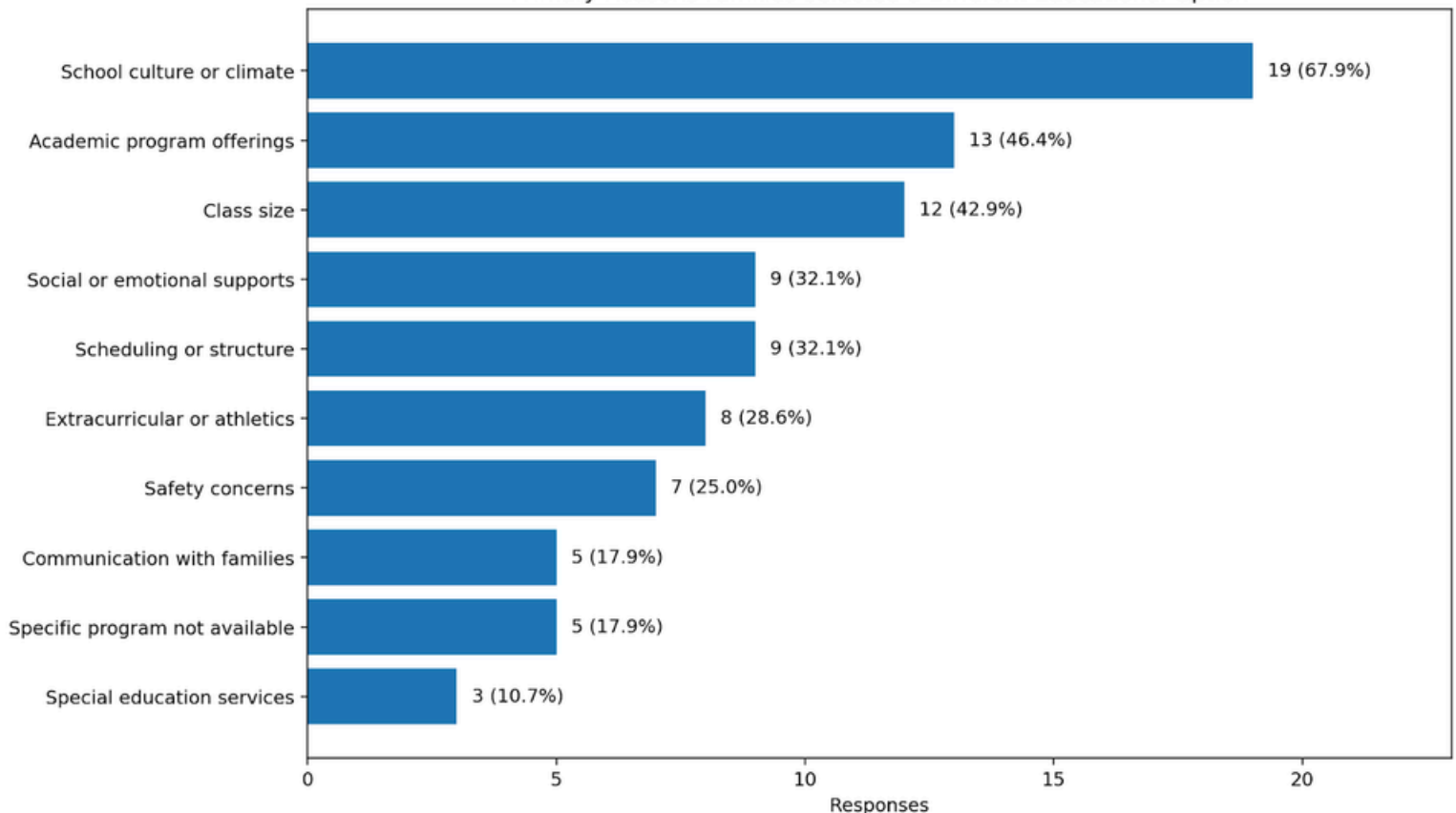
Theme 6:

Resource Allocation, Staffing Capacity, Organizational Support Structures, & Program Sustainability

Analytical Highlights: Infrastructure as the Foundation for Equity continued:

- **The "Sustainability Gap":** We are currently at risk of leadership and staff attrition. When roles are undefined or over-extended, institutional knowledge and continuity suffer. Sustainability requires that we define clear, manageable scopes of work for all staff members.
- **Facilities and Belonging:** Students have clearly communicated that facility conditions—ranging from clean bathrooms to functional gym equipment and accessible field time—directly impact their sense of pride and belonging. Improving these areas is an investment in student mental health and readiness to learn.
- **Retention and Sustainability:** Feedback from families who have left South Hadley indicates a clear connection between their decision and operational and budget-related pressures. Caregivers most often cite academic program offerings, class size, school culture or climate, and social-emotional supports. This can create a difficult cycle: declining enrollment further strains resources, which may place additional pressure on the very programs and supports families value most.

Primary Reasons Families Selected a Different Educational Option



Theme 6:

Resource Allocation, Staffing Capacity, Organizational Support Structures, & Program Sustainability

Analytical Highlights: Infrastructure as the Foundation for Equity continued:

The synthesized data reveals a district navigating a high-stakes environment where fiscal constraints are beginning to impact every facet of the educational experience. The feedback across all stakeholder groups indicates three primary areas of tension:

- Fiscal Anxiety vs. Programmatic Pride:** There is a profound fear that funding instability will dismantle the programs students and families value most specifically honors classes, sports, and extracurricular enrichments. Stakeholders describe a "Hunger Games" environment where different departments and schools feel they are competing for a shrinking pool of resources.
- Operational Strain and "The Human Cost":** Staff and administrators are reporting significant burnout, characterized by "wearing too many hats." The data suggests that without additional support, specifically instructional specialists and predictable staffing ratios; retention and morale are at risk.
- The Learning Environment Gap:** While instruction remains a priority, physical conditions (cleanliness, bathroom maintenance, and facility accessibility) are emerging as significant detractors from the student experience, particularly at the middle and high school levels.

District Synthesis: Stakeholder Concerns & Needs

FISCAL CONTEXT & FUNDING

- Funding instability and fear of cuts
- "Hunger Games" resource competition
- Deficit pressures (FY26/FY27)
- DESE accountability/finance profile

STAFFING & OPERATIONAL STRAIN

- People "wearing too many hats"
- Staff burnout, coverage, and morale
- Retention concerns for administrators
- Need for instructional specialists

STUDENT EXPERIENCE & FACILITIES

- Facility conditions (bathrooms, stairs)
- Gym/field/access issues
- Cleanliness concerns (Middle School)
- Threat to sports and honors classes

INSTRUCTIONAL INTEGRITY

- Class size impacts on engagement
- Decreased data with higher class size
- Limited intervention space/capacity
- Time needed for standards/assessments

Theme 6:

Resource Allocation, Staffing Capacity, Organizational Support Structures, & Program Sustainability

The "One Change" Consensus: Across almost all groups, the primary recommendation is to stabilize funding to guarantee smaller class sizes and protect the enrichment opportunities that foster student engagement and belonging.

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

1. **Unified Advocacy for FAPE:** We will launch a formal, data-driven advocacy campaign to bridge the gap between our current funding levels and the actual cost of providing a high-quality, free and appropriate public education. This will involve transparent reporting to stakeholders on the specific impact of the fiscal cliff on student services.
2. **Strategic Budget Alignment:** We will transition from reactive budget management to a "Priority-Based" model, ensuring that every dollar allocated—from staffing ratios to professional development is mapped directly to our identified PK–12 alignment and MTSS goals.
3. **Harmonizing Organizational Structures:** We will evaluate the instructional support models used at the high school and adapt these "best practices" (e.g., department leadership and data-cycle time) for implementation across the elementary and middle school levels to ensure parity in instructional oversight.
4. **Human Capital & Facility Capacity:** We will conduct a district-wide workload analysis to mitigate "burnout" and establish a multi-year facilities improvement plan that addresses safety, cleanliness, and accessibility concerns, treating our school buildings as essential tools for teaching and learning.

Instructional Core + Equity + Culture – Resource and staffing decisions shape class size, intervention access, program availability, and the district's ability to sustain improvement.

Theme 7:

Special Education Program Coherence, Compliance, & Capacity

Summary: A truly equitable district is measured by how well it serves its most vulnerable learners. While South Hadley has pockets of excellence where integrated services, therapies, and programs like Best Buddies thrive, our overall special education system is currently strained. Stakeholders have identified a critical need for greater coherence between our general education, MTSS, and special education systems. To build trust and ensure student growth, we must move toward a model defined by transparent communication, rigorous progress monitoring, and consistent, compliant implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

Category	Strengths to Build On	Challenges & Opportunities
Service Quality	When implemented effectively, families report high satisfaction with integrated therapies and inclusive programming.	Inconsistent IEP implementation and concerns regarding timelines and staffing capacity.
Communication	Dedicated staff commitment to students and a willingness to provide individualized care.	Significant "gaps" in communication when services are missed or modified, leading to family uncertainty.
System Alignment	Existing school-level SEL and inclusion goals within our current School Improvement Plans.	Need for clearer handoffs between MTSS and Special Education and better "post-exit" monitoring.
Culture & Trust	Recognition of bright spots where inclusion is working well.	Reports of bullying or exclusionary behavior involving students with disabilities, signaling a need for stronger school-wide inclusion.

Analytical Highlights: Building Coherence and Equity:

- **The MTSS-SPED Interface:** Our internal reviews suggest that students often move through intervention systems without clear, data-driven "on-ramps" or "off-ramps." We must establish a shared district understanding of how Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions interface with Special Education to prevent inequitable access to services.
- **Proactive Progress Monitoring:** We are seeing evidence of students being "moved along" without achieving consistent progress. We must implement rigorous, objective progress monitoring that occurs both during the delivery of services and after a student exits a program to ensure the support provided was actually effective.
- **Operationalizing Transparency:** Compliance is more than a legal requirement; it is a foundation for trust. Our families are asking for a system that proactively communicates service changes rather than reacting to complaints.

Theme 7:

Special Education Program Coherence, Compliance, & Capacity

Analytical Highlights: Building Coherence and Equity continued:

- **Inclusion as a District-Wide Value:** Inclusion is not solely the responsibility of the Special Education department. Ensuring our school climate is safe and welcoming for students with special needs—and that bullying of these students is addressed with immediate, visible follow-through—is a district-wide behavioral imperative.
- **Special Education & Civil Rights Monitoring 2024:** The 2024 Special Education & Civil Rights Monitoring Report identifies several compliance areas that require attention, including eligibility timelines, re-evaluations, timely placements, and related service delivery timelines. These findings should be reviewed through a root cause analysis to determine why gaps are occurring and to establish clear, sustainable solutions to ensure consistent compliance and service delivery.

Moving Forward: Superintendent's Priorities

1. **Unified SPED-MTSS Framework:** We will develop and implement a clear, district-wide procedural manual that standardizes how students are identified, monitored, and transitioned through tiered interventions and Special Education services, ensuring full compliance and equitable access.
2. **Standardized Progress Reporting:** We will establish a mandate for consistent, data-informed reporting to families regarding IEP goal progress, ensuring that "missed services" are tracked, reported, and recovered according to DESE standards.
3. **Strengthening Inclusion & Safety:** We will expand our focus on cultural responsiveness to include "disability inclusion," integrating specific anti-bullying strategies that protect students with special needs and ensure all staff are trained in proactive intervention.
4. **Caseload & Capacity Analysis:** To address staff burnout and service inconsistency, we will conduct a comprehensive audit of caseloads and delivery models to ensure that our specialized staff have the resources and time required to meet the individual needs of their students.

Equity + Instructional Core – A coherent, compliant, and adequately resourced special education system is essential for equitable access, progress, and student/family trust.

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