MERSD District Improvement Plan 2025–2028

Introduction

This District Improvement Plan (DIP) is the second in a three-cycle sequence designed to carry forward the Manchester Essex Regional School District's long-term Strategic Plan priorities. It outlines the work we will take on between 2025 and 2028 to strengthen teaching and learning, support student well-being, build an inclusive school culture, and maintain sustainable operations.



How Strategic Priorities 1, 2, and 3 Work Together to Improve Instruction and Student Achievement: MERSD's instructional work is intentionally braided across three priorities. Priority 1 centers on authentic learning—coherent PreK–12 curriculum, performance-based assessment, and the Vision of the Graduate—so classroom experiences are rigorous, engaging, and connected to the real world. Priority 2 integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensure students are ready to learn every day through consistent Tier 1 practices, targeted interventions, and partnerships with families. Priority 3 advances Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive practices so all students can access, participate, and demonstrate mastery in multiple ways. Together, these priorities form the conditions and practices of high-quality instruction: strong core teaching (Priority 1), supportive environments that build readiness and belonging (Priority 2), and universally designed lessons that remove barriers (Priority 3).

This integrated approach strengthens teacher practice and accelerates student learning. Authentic, performance-based tasks demand higher-order thinking; SEL/MTSS routines increase engagement and persistence; and UDL ensures access and challenge for diverse learners. As we build staff capacity through coaching, collaboration, and clear "look-fors," we expect to see higher engagement, more consistent growth across student groups, and measurable gains in academic performance.

Priority 1: Authentic Learning	Priority 2: SEL & MTSS	Priority 3: UDL & Inclusion
• Real-world, inquiry-based tasks • Performance-based assessment • Vision of the Graduate embedded • Teacher coaching & collaboration	• Tier 1 routines for regulation & relationships • Consistent SEL scope & sequence • Data routines for early intervention • Family partnerships	• Flexible design for access & challenge • Multiple means of engagement/representation/action • Model classrooms & peer observation • Coaching aligned to UDL look-fors

Integrated Impact: Strong core instruction + supportive conditions + universally designed lessons ⇒ Higher engagement, access for every learner, and measurable gains in achievement

How to Read This Document

Each section of the DIP is organized under one of the four Strategic Plan priorities. Within each priority, you will find:

- **Objective** – The specific aim or goal we are working toward.
- **Student Impact (if achieved)** – The difference this work will make for students in their daily learning experience.
- **Action Steps / Deliverables** – The concrete tasks, initiatives, or structures we will put in place to reach the objective. These are listed by fiscal year (FY26, FY27, FY28) to show how the work will progress over time.

How to Use This Plan

- Read by Priority to see how the work aligns to our long-term goals.
- Follow the Timeline to understand how initiatives move from foundation to pilot to full implementation.
- Note the Student Impact to see how each action connects back to the classroom experience.
- Use the Glossary as a reference when educational terms appear.

Frequently Used Terms

- **Authentic Learning –** Student-centered authentic learning is an approach to teaching and learning that engages students in inquiry-based experiences that have real-world applications guided by students' experiences, skills, and interests. Authentic learning is grounded in real world issues, problems, and applications. It encourages higher order thinking, empowers students with practical and useful life skills, and invites them to make a difference in their world.
- **Vision of the Graduate (VOG) –** A district-defined set of skills and competencies (e.g., communication, collaboration, critical thinking) that every student should demonstrate by graduation. These skills are embedded into curriculum and assessments across grade levels.
- **MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) –** A structured framework that provides different levels of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support. Tier 1 refers to practices all students receive, Tier 2 is targeted support for some, and Tier 3 is intensive support for individual students.
- **SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) –** The process of developing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
- **UDL (Universal Design for Learning) –** An instructional approach that ensures lessons are flexible and accessible so all students, regardless of learning style or need, can succeed.
- **Performance-Based Assessment –** An assessment that asks students to demonstrate their learning by doing something meaningful (e.g., creating a presentation, solving a real problem, conducting an experiment) rather than taking a traditional test.
- **Look-Fors –** Agreed-upon indicators that administrators and teachers use to recognize whether a desired practice (such as authentic learning or SEL integration) is happening during classroom visits.
- **FY26, FY27, FY28 –** Fiscal years (July 1 – June 30) that provide a timeline for when action steps will be launched, piloted, or fully implemented.
  This structure is designed to make the DIP both a practical guide for educators and an accessible resource for families and community members who want to understand the district's priorities and track progress over time.

Strategic Priority 1: Establish and foster an authentic PreK-12 learning environment.		
Objective	**Student Impact (if achieved)**	**Action Steps / Deliverables**
Strengthen instructional practice by embedding authentic learning experiences across PreK-12.	Students experience deeper engagement and higher-order thinking through authentic problem-solving opportunities across disciplines.	**FY26 – Expansion of Practices** • Define and articulate shared PreK–12 expectations for "authentic learning experiences." • Conduct an inventory of current practices by grade band and create school-level matrices of strengths and gaps. • Provide ongoing coaching, training, and resources for technology and AI integration to support authentic learning. • Structure professional learning to focus on authentic instruction and assessment practices. **FY27 – Embedding & Piloting** • Pilot expanded student opportunities such as projects, service learning, or capstones. • Strengthen supervision and evaluation routines with "look-fors" for authentic learning, engagement, and higher-order thinking. **FY28 – Implementation & Monitoring** • Scale authentic learning practices across PreK–12. • Memorialize student opportunities (performance, presentation, exhibitions, capstones, service learning, internships etc.) into scope and sequence. • Use observation data and student outcomes to monitor impact and refine practice. **Adopt high-quality inclusive curriculum resources that support real-world, authentic learning in alignment with the Curriculum Review Cycle.*
Align curriculum and assessment to reflect changes in instructional practices, ensuring coherence and consistency across PreK-12.	Students benefit from a coherent PreK-12 curriculum and authentic, performance-based assessments that allow multiple ways to demonstrate mastery in real-world contexts.	**FY 26 – Expansion of Practices** • Audit curriculum maps and assessments PreK–12. • Build shared understanding of authentic, performance-based assessments through professional learning. • Schedule regular routines of data analysis and action planning including formative and performance-based assessments. **FY 27 – Embedding & Piloting** • Design and pilot performance-based assessments. • Develop rubrics, exemplars, and scoring protocols to guide consistency. **FY28 – Implementation & Refinement** • Implement assessments across grades and subjects. • Embed authentic assessments into curriculum maps.

		• Use student work/data to monitor outcomes and refine practice.
Expand implementation of the Vision of the Graduate by defining developmentally appropriate competencies and embedding them throughout the PreK-12 curriculum.	Students develop competencies like collaboration, communication, and critical thinking through authentic learning opportunities and partnerships that extend beyond the classroom.	**FY 27 – Expansion of Practices** • Respond to NEASC recommendations by creating grade-level benchmarks that define a developmentally appropriate PreK–12 skills continuum. • Align the Vision of the Graduate with classroom opportunities and existing extracurricular/field experiences. **FY 28 – Development & Design** • Develop a matrix illustrating VOG competencies for each grade span. • Embed VOG competencies into curriculum maps and unit design by identifying explicit connections between academic content and VOG skills. • Collect data through observation and student work to monitor success of alignment and guide administrative support. • Provide professional learning to support teacher use of authentic learning strategies to support implementation of Vision of the Graduate. **FY 29 – Implementation & Partnerships** • Implement performance assessments aligned to VOG competencies matrix. • Strengthen partnerships with community organizations by building a district-wide partner network tied to VOG benchmarks.
Elevate student voice by fostering relevance, engagement, and regard for student perspectives in the classroom.	Students will experience learning that is meaningful and relevant, with their perspectives valued in the classroom. This will increase engagement, motivation, and ownership of their learning.	**FY 27 – Foundation** • Establish regular student feedback loops (e.g., surveys, advisory discussions, student-led forums) to inform instructional design and monitor the impact of authentic learning initiatives. • Collect and analyze data on student access, representation, and achievement to identify gaps.

Strategic Priority 2: Integrate social emotional learning into all aspects of the school day.

Objective	Student Impact (if achieved)	Action Steps / Deliverables
Develop and implement a district-wide Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model for SEL that supports mental health and wellness.	Students will experience consistent, tiered social-emotional and mental health supports that proactively meet their needs, resulting in increased well-being, improved readiness to learn, and stronger engagement in school.	**FY 26 – Expansion of Practice** • Convene a joint SEL/MTSS leadership team to define essential components of the model. • Audit current SEL and mental health practices across schools; identify strengths, gaps, and existing resources. • Build a foundation for a district-wide data system/process to identify and monitor students in need of SEL/mental health supports.

		• Strengthen access to mental health resources and partnerships with outside providers. **FY 27 – Development & Training** • Establish a district-wide data system/process to identify and monitor students in need of SEL/mental health supports. • Develop tiered supports (universal, targeted, intensive) with clear roles, protocols, and referral pathways. • Systematize tiered supports (universal, targeted, intensive) with clear roles, protocols, and referral pathways. • Targeted training to support SEL tiered supports. • Integrate consistent Tier One practices for emotional regulation and behavior supports across schools. **FY 28 – Implementation & Refinement** • Implement expanded MTSS model across PreK–12. • Establish progress-monitoring routines using student SEL data and well-being indicators. • Develop structured collaboration protocols for student support teams (teachers, counselors, specialists) to align Tier 1 and Tier 2 SEL practices across classrooms. • Refine practices based on evaluation data and stakeholder feedback.
Ensure students experience a consistent, vertically aligned SEL curriculum that builds self-regulation, relationships, and real-world application of SEL skills.	Students gain a foundation of SEL skills and can apply these competencies in school and beyond.	**FY 26 – Alignment & Expansion** • Review and expand existing elementary SEL work (RULER) to ensure alignment with CASEL and other frameworks as appropriate. • Begin developing a PreK–12 SEL scope and sequence (“integration plan”) that articulates tier 1 learning experiences and expectations across grade bands. • Utilize SEL “look-fors” to gather data to inform administrative team of trends, strengths, and areas for growth. **FY 27 – Curriculum & Practice Integration** • Embed SEL competencies into curriculum maps and unit design by identifying explicit connections between academic content and SEL skills. • Extend the K–8 SEL Leadership model to 9–12, with a focus on training staff in strategies that increase student availability for learning. • Launch consistent family engagement routines (e.g., annual SEL forums, ParentSquare updates, family workshops) to communicate SEL goals and strengthen school–home partnership in student well-being. **FY 28 – Implementation & Monitoring** • Finalize and implement the PreK–12 SEL scope and sequence.

		• Integrate SEL “look-fors” into administrative evaluation practices to ensure consistent attention to SEL in instruction. • Monitor student outcomes and refine SEL practices based on feedback and data.
Develop student leadership opportunities through establishing building-level programs that empower students to model and promote RULER Program/CASEL competencies.	Students will gain authentic leadership experiences that build confidence, deepen SEL competencies, and foster a positive school culture where peers model and promote healthy social and emotional behaviors.	**FY 27 – Program Design & Launch** • Establish building-level student leadership teams/programs (e.g., SEL Ambassadors, Peer Leaders, Student Voice Councils) to model RULER/CASEL competencies. • Provide training and mentoring for student leaders to develop facilitation, communication, and peer-support skills. **FY 28 – Student-Led Engagement & Partnerships** • Create opportunities for student leaders to design and lead SEL-focused activities such as school-wide assemblies, advisory sessions, or classroom workshops. • Partner with families and community organizations to host student-led showcases, SEL Family Nights, and collaborative events that reinforce SEL themes. **FY 29 – Expansion & Sustainability** • Formalize recurring structures for student leadership in SEL (e.g., annual leadership retreats, cross-grade mentoring, regular student-led forums). • Integrate leadership opportunities into curriculum and extracurricular programs to ensure equitable access across grade levels. • Monitor impact through student reflections, feedback from peers, and surveys of school culture and climate.
Strategic Priority 3: Celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of each learner.		
Objective (We will…)	**Student Impact (if achieved)**	**Action Steps / Deliverables**
Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices in all classrooms to create inclusive learning experiences that meet the needs of all students, including those with learning differences.	Students with varied learning profiles will experience instruction that is accessible, engaging, and challenging. All students, including those with learning differences, will be able to participate fully, demonstrate their strengths, and achieve at high levels within a supportive and inclusive classroom environment.	**FY 26 – Foundation & Training** • Establish UDL as a district-wide instructional expectation. • Assess current staff knowledge and training in UDL. • Provide differentiated professional development for staff at varying levels of familiarity with UDL. **FY 27 – Implementation & Support** • Integrate UDL practices into grade level and curriculum teamwork, with teachers sharing strategies and student outcomes. • Identify model classrooms as demonstration sites for UDL in practice.

		• Incorporate ongoing coaching and peer observation focused on UDL implementation. **FY 28 – Monitoring & Accountability** • Focus on UDL "look-fors" during administrative supervision and evaluation practices. • Monitor impact on student access, engagement, and performance through observation and student data. • Adjust training and coaching based on observation and feedback. • Develop family-friendly resources that explain classroom differentiation and UDL strategies, ensuring families understand how instructional practices support diverse learners.
Implement inclusive curriculum and instruction, including diverse voices, perspectives, and cultural experiences across all content areas.	Students will engage with a curriculum that reflects a wide range of experiences and perspectives, helping them feel seen and valued. This exposure fosters empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of the world, enriching their learning and preparing them for a diverse society.	**Ongoing - Curriculum Review & Equity Lens** • Evaluate instructional materials for bias and inequities to ensure inclusive student learning experiences. **Ongoing - Data & Instructional Practices** • Collect and analyze data on student access, representation, and achievement to identify gaps. • Provide professional learning to support inclusive instructional strategies across grade levels and content areas. **Ongoing - Policy & Systems Alignment** • Use an equity lens rubric to audit and revise school and district policies. **Adopt high-quality inclusive curriculum resources that support real-world, authentic learning in alignment with the Curriculum Review Cycle.*
Provide multilingual learners with high-quality, tailored instruction that supports academic growth and full participation in grade-level learning alongside their peers.	All students benefit from an inclusive learning environment where multilingual learners thrive, fostering stronger peer collaboration, cultural awareness, and a richer classroom experience for everyone.	**FY 26 – Foundations & Capacity** • Ensure all identified teachers are SEI-endorsed. • Adopt an evidence-based ESL/ELD curriculum (WIDA-aligned) that supports MLL students K-12. • Coaching for all teachers with MLL students supporting integration of SEI strategies into daily instruction. • Training for administrators to enhance understanding of SEI strategies **FY 27 – Integration & Implementation** • Implement the ESL/ELD curriculum and align MLL programming with content curriculum and district assessment routines. • Integrate Sheltered English Immersion strategies in all core classes. • Provide ongoing PD/coaching that strengthen teachers' ability to support deeper content understanding, relevance, and transfer of learning for MLL students. **FY 28 – Monitoring & Refinement**

		• Establish a data routine to monitor MLL progress (ACCESS growth, screeners, classroom assessments) and adjust supports. • Calibrate expectations and materials across grades; share exemplars; refine program structure based on results. • Formalize MLL family engagement methods in a regular and ongoing routine.

Standard 4: Maintain a sustainable multi-year operational budget and capital improvement plan.		
Objective (We will…)	**Student Impact (if achieved)**	**Action Steps / Deliverables**
Strengthen financial management systems and processes to support data-driven decision making, operational efficiency, and sustainable resource allocation.	Students benefit from stable, well-resourced schools where funding decisions are efficient, equitable, and aligned to instructional priorities, ensuring that resources directly support teaching, learning, and long-term program sustainability.	**Systems & Tools** • Restructure payroll system; invest in and implement software tools to link payroll and personnel functions, improving reporting and efficiency. **Forecasting & Budget Alignment** • Develop a projection model to assess the long-term impact of increasing numbers of high-needs preschoolers on special education programs and staffing. • Utilize a zero-based budgeting approach in special education to ensure budgets are student-need driven and restructured as required. **Review & Long-Term Planning** • Implement a cyclical review process to evaluate efficiency of major programs and staffing models, reallocating resources to highest-impact areas while identifying opportunities for innovation and cost savings. • Forecast both large-scale and small-scale operational and facilities capital needs. • Advance planning for major capital projects (e.g., High School/Middle School 2034 Renovation Planning).
Optimize organizational structures and resource allocation to increase efficiency, support evolving instructional priorities, and prepare for future growth and program needs.		**Analysis & Immediate Adjustments** • Analyze technology infrastructure for capacity to meet future instructional and operational needs. • Review personnel efficiencies to improve or adjust delivery of programs (carryforward action). • Study options for shared leadership models cross district and the middle/high school.

		Program Expansion & Restructuring • Plan and prepare for the establishment of universal preschool, including classroom space, location, supervisory structures, and staffing needs. • Move special education chairpersons into an administrative role, ensuring program analysis and revisions prioritize efficiency and sustainability. **Long-Term Alignment & Sustainability** • Reorganize professional stipend structure to better align funding with curriculum and instructional improvement goals. • Continue to refine organizational structures and staffing models to support evolving instructional priorities and program growth.
Expand funding opportunities and future-focused planning to ensure the district is well-positioned to address challenges and opportunities.		**Revenue Review** • Review and adjust existing tuition structures (e.g., preschool, specialized programs) for opportunities to increase revenue. • Conduct a fee structure analysis to identify areas for sustainable increases aligned with community capacity. **Expanded Funding Sources** • Seek grant opportunities and alternative funding streams that directly align with district strategic priorities and improvement goals. • Build internal systems for tracking, applying for, and managing grants to maximize impact. **Long-Term Partnerships & Collaboration** • Investigate and pursue opportunities for shared services and collaboration with area school districts to reduce costs and expand resources. • Establish a process for annual review of revenue opportunities, partnerships, and funding models to ensure sustainability.