GRAND RAPIDS
AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience ✦ Readiness ✦ Excellence

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

April 23, 2026

Why This Work?

- 2023: Failed referendum
- Ongoing financial and program pressures
- Question: “What do we do now?”
- Decision: Pause → Listen → Engage intentionally
  - Fall survey
  - First 2 Community Engagement sessions
  - 3/24: 3rd Community Engagement session
  - 4/23: 4th and Final session

Shift in Approach

- Instead of immediately returning to a referendum…
  - Committed to a year of intentional community engagement
  - Understand priorities
  - Build trust and transparency
  - Clarify future options

What Community Engagement Means (For Us)



Authentic listening and learning



Meaningful dialogue



Input that helps shape decisions



Not just informing — engaging

What We're Trying to Learn

- What does the community value most?
- What tradeoffs are acceptable?
- Support for funding vs. reductions?
- What does a sustainable future look like?

The Process



Community survey: over 800 engagements, over 400 completions.



Series of 4 facilitated meetings with community members, families, and staff.



Ongoing feedback loops



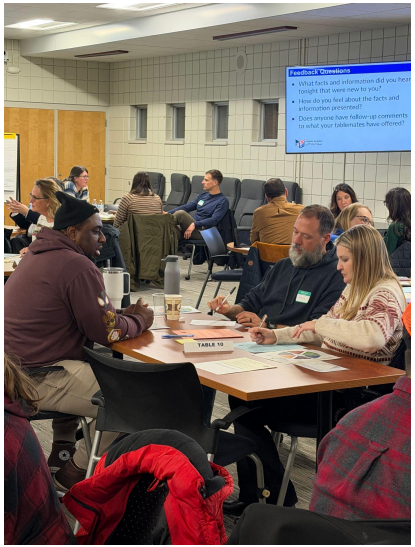
Staff engagement

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Community Advisory Committee

Charge:

- Examine the current situation within GRAS
- Provide feedback, from each individual's perspective, on Grand Rapids Area Schools' education priorities
- Discuss options for ensuring these priorities can be delivered, cost effectively, for the long-term benefit of all residents



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Community Advisory Committee Starting Point:

Community Survey, Fall 2025 Results

The foundation of our planning process, gathering insights from stakeholders across the district.

833
Total Responses

31%
Residents 30+ Years

Engagement & Outreach

- Survey ran for two weeks
- Multi-channel: Newspapers, Facebook, School & District Newsletters

Community Survey, Fall 2025 Results

Some Key Findings:

Community Tenure

31% of participants have lived in the district for over 30 years, indicating long-term community presence.

Quality

70% rate education quality as "Good" or "Excellent"; 79% indicate high-quality extracurriculars.

Financial Concerns

66% believe GRAS is underfunded; 80% are aware of budget cuts over the past six years.

Communication Sources

Informal discussions and district communications are preferred over traditional media.

Trust and Decision-Making

The work the School Board and Administration is doing to improve trust and confidence is the right work.

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Community Advisory Committee

Meeting 1 Recap:

- Group purpose and dynamics
- District information and community survey data
- Student academic data and opportunities
- Feedback
- Homework: “what should be our district’s priority?”

Meeting 2 Recap:

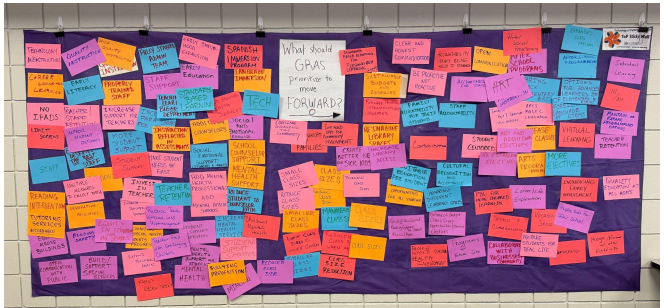
- Review homework findings
- School Finance in Minnesota
- School Finance in our district
- Homework: “how can we build trust?”

Meeting 3 Recap:

- Review data
- Budgeting exercise and dialogue
- Priorities workshop

Staff Meeting 3-23-26

- Feedback on the question: “What should be our district’s priority?”
- Review of the community feedback so far



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Staff Meeting 3-23-26

Grand Rapids Area Schools FORWARD Community Advisory Committee

Clear Shared Priorities Identified by Staff

- High-quality, equitable education for all students
- Recruit and retain strong staff
- Student well-being and safe environments
- Financial stability and strong community relationships
- Improve class sizes and learning conditions
- Expand opportunities for future readiness

Staff responses centered on ***student success supported by strong systems and people.***

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Staff Meeting 3-23-26

When asked to rank priorities from the Community Advisory Committee summary:

Results:

1. High-quality, equitable education (avg rank **2.0**, most top-choice votes)
2. Strong staffing (recruit, retain, support)
3. Student well-being and safe environments (tied) Financial stability & community relationships (tied)
4. Class size and learning conditions
5. Expanded electives & career pathways

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Staff Meeting 3-23-26

Grand Rapids Area Schools FORWARD Community Advisory Committee

What This Suggests About Staff Perspectives:

Staff responses emphasize:

1. Teaching and learning as the core mission
2. Staffing stability as the key lever for success
3. Student well-being as foundational, not secondary
4. Financial stability is important because it supports classrooms
5. Opportunities matter, but after core conditions are strongs

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Community Advisory Committee

Meeting 1: School District background and data
Meeting 2: School Finance in Minnesota and in Grand Rapids Area Schools
Meeting 3: District budgeting exercise; priorities exercise
Meeting 4: Determine priorities and prepare recommendation for the board.

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Community Advisory Committee: Meeting #4

Agenda:

- Review recent survey results
- Table workshop
- Priorities Reflection

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Summary of Community Survey

724

Participants | 89% Hit “Finish”

Survey Timeline:
April 17–22, 2026

Who Participated

Role	Respondents	% of Participants
Parent / Family	**460**	**65%**
Staff	268	38%
Community Member	99	14%
Other	24	3%
Student	13	2%

Priority Rankings *(# who chose each area as their top priority)*

	Focus Area	Top Votes	Share
#1	**Class Size and Staffing**	**287**	**44%**
#2	**Instructional Quality and Teacher Retention**	**143**	**22%**
#3	**Maintaining Financial Stability and Covering Operating Costs**	**100**	**15%**
#4	**Student Support Services (Especially Mental Health)**	**47**	**7%**
#5	Expanded Student Opportunities (Career Pathways, Arts, Secondary Programs)	47	7%
#6	Long-Range Vision Ideas (e.g., New High School Concept)	9	1%
#7	Early Childhood and Preschool Expansion	7	1%
#8	Facilities and Infrastructure	6	1%

FORWARD Community Advisory Committee

Summary of Community Survey

Consistent Top 4 Priorities

Identified across budgeting, consensus workshop, and survey results.

1. **Class Size and Staffing**
2. **Instructional Quality & Teacher Retention**
3. **Student Support Services (Mental Health)**
4. **Financial Stability & Operating Costs**

Conclusion

Unified message from the community: focus on people, programs, and fiscal foundation.

A clear signal across all methods:

Budgeting · Workshop · Survey

These priorities serve as the basis for long-term, cost-effective planning for the benefit of all district residents.

Next Steps

The FORWARD Committee will use results to:

- Finalize Focus Area recommendations
- Present findings to the School Board
- Guide long-term, cost-effective planning

FORWARD Recommendations: Focus Areas Activity

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

Around the World Workshop

Gather community perspectives and Committee data.

Your unique perspective is a vital data point.

Transforming information into actionable steps.

Note: We are building on existing knowledge, not starting from scratch.

INSTRUCTIONS

- **Time:** 35 minutes
- **Rounds:** 3 rounds of conversation
- **Setup:** Questions drawn from meeting themes at each table

YOUR TASK & GOAL

Name what's most important, explain why it matters, and suggest solutions.
Review previous comments and add your own as you rotate.

End Goal: Identify the community's top 5 focus areas for the school board.

FORWARD Recommendations: 3 Rounds/5 Questions

ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

- Start with your PERSONAL priorities
- We will prompt you to move throughout the activity
- We have time for 3 Rounds AND we have 5 Questions
- **If you have made your comments and want to move on, PLEASE DO SO!**

TABLE QUESTIONS

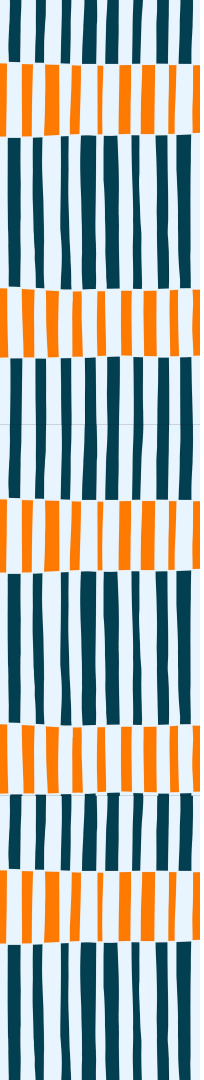
TABLE 1: What are the biggest barriers to student success we heard about?

TABLE 2: What equity or access gaps were most consistently raised?

TABLE 3: What did we hear about resources, staffing, or infrastructure/facilities?

TABLE 4: What community or family engagement themes emerged?

TABLE 5: What systemic or policy-level changes were suggested?



“

Because our words have power and direction, they always produce some kind of harvest.

- Tim Lane & Paul Tripp

FORWARD Priorities Reflection - Instructions

1. COMMITTEE WORK REFLECTION

Our collective goal for this reflection is to:

- Ensure we leave this meeting **aligned and grounded** in our decisions.
- Prepare members to present this important work **formally to the school board**.
- **Note:** We are NOT here to re-open previous decisions.

2. YOUR TASK

At your tables, please answer the provided questions.

- Some are for conversation only.
- Others require notes on the paper provided.

3. LOGISTICS

Small Group Reflection

Time is short: We will not have a large group share out today.

FORWARD Priorities Reflection - Questions

OBJECTIVE (FACTS)

What values are present in our recommendations?

One word

REFLECTIVE (FEELINGS)

Checking in with your head, heart, and gut — where do you land with the focus areas we're recommending?

What examples or stories need to be shared with the school board?

INTERPRETIVE (MEANING)

How will these recommendations positively impact all learners?

DECISIONAL (ACTION)

What advice do you have for the FORWARD Participants presenting to the school board?

What is most important for the school board to consider?

Life after FORWARD / Next Steps

Fantastic Community Engagement Work Completed:

- Deeply examined the current situation within the public school system
- Provided individual perspectives on Grand Rapids Area Schools priorities
- Discussed cost-effective options for long-term community benefit

Formal Report to the School Board

June 8 School Board Meeting

6:30 p.m.

Call to Action:

- Recruiting 3-5 Members to present (Slide deck and talking points support provided)
- ALL Members encouraged to attend for support and celebration

FORWARD means Forward

- Decisions are stronger when they reflect community voice
- Students benefit when priorities are clear
- Trust grows through transparency and engagement
- This work helps guide the district's next chapter

Thank you!