Creating a Strategic Plan for the Lawrence Township Public Schools

Session 1

Identifying Strengths & Challenges of the Lawrence Township Public Schools

On April 15, 2026, Lawrence Township Public Schools administrators, Board of Education members, staff, parents, students, and community members, sixty-eight (68) in all, came together to initiate strategic planning. The meeting began with a welcome and introduction by Michelle Bowes, Board President and Dr. Robyn Klim, Superintendent. Dr. Klim presented the current "State of the District" report. Mary Ann Friedman and Dr. Timothy Teehan from New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) were introduced and explained the strategic planning process.

We reviewed the consensus process utilized in strategic planning. The topic for the evening focused on identifying district strengths and challenges. Participants gathered in randomly assigned groups, eight (8) groups in all, and engaged in brainstorming the district's strengths and challenges. After group discussion, each group identified their consensus points, "Top 10" strengths and challenges. Each group reported their outcomes to the larger group. The large group then identified "Common Themes" that had occurred throughout the small group outcomes.

The information that follows is a summary of the work of the small groups. As discussed with the meeting participants, all consensus points are recorded and posted on the district website to share the group work during the strategic planning process.

Small Group Consensus: Strengths, Achievements & Challenges

Group #1:

Strengths	Challenges
Teachers and staff	Financial uncertainty
Diversity	AI, phone, tech – screen behaviors - ever evolving – parent education
Community – partnerships, balance of school & community supports	Nutritional challenges – access & food insecurity – healthy food
Value of the whole child	Changing world – polarizing politics – respect diverse perspectives, student lack of engagement skills
Communication tools	Unknown future careers – what are we preparing for
Academic rigor & opportunity	Mental/physical/social health
Commitment to facilities	Teacher education programs – prep & shortage
Preschool	
Co-curricular opportunities	
Security & safety plans	

Group #2:

Strengths	Challenges
Community and staff dedication – across all buildings and disciplines	Cultivating digitally aware and safe students
Inclusive practices, special education services	Differentiation in meeting learning styles of all students in a large class
Curriculum – wide variety of course selection in the high school	Balancing state mandates with student development
Collaboration between all stakeholders – community members, parents, and students	Meeting the needs of special education
Continued building of consistency and fidelity across grades and buildings	Mental health support consistently for everyone
Variety of extracurriculars	Expanding professional development
Connection to the LTEF and PTO	Shared resources across grade levels and buildings
Diversity	Acknowledging all forms of diversity while ensuring no one is inadvertently excluded
Good support systems and easy transitions between schools	
PEA! (refer to Preschool Education)	

Group #3:

Strengths	Challenges
Diversity	Budget
Preschool program	Technology
Transition programs	"Gap" kids
Student opportunities	Wellness (meals, health, menu, options)
Student body empathy	Teacher retention/diversity
Faculty/admin involvement	Safety/security
Academic support programs	Foreign language
Focus on necessary growth	Diversity (ESL)
Community partnerships	Student involvement
Student/staff relationship	Hard copy resources (books)

Group #4:

Strengths	Challenges
Teacher & Admin engagement/responsiveness, transparency & creativity	Inconsistency of communication through whole district
Diversity – inclusivity of technology – mattering	Overcoming barriers for community/guardian engagement – sustaining stakeholders
Academic supports – destinations – all learners	Explanation/clarity of grading rubrics K-5 – consistency of communication
Data-driven balanced with whole child	Conferences/opportunities for change before report cards – incorporate SEL
Student & staff voice in decisions – student leaders – opportunities	More opportunities for non-athletic extracurriculars at LMS & LHS
Engagement of community	6-day cycle/ communication for K-6
	Competing initiatives - balance

Group #5:

Strengths	Challenges
Diversity ☺	Hiring staff – certification
Strong district leadership	Transitions between buildings (LMS→LHS)
Student leaders	Family engagement – streamline, extended learning, communication, academic clarity
Student experiences and opportunities during the school day	Academic consistency – including rigor spanning grade levels/subject matter
Quality educators / Lifelong staff	Diversity representation among staff, admin, students in advanced placement curriculum
Commitment to students	Streamlined communication – translation services, building vs. district expectations (gradual release?)
Research based-instruction	
Calendar that recognizes diversity	
Support students beyond academics – whole child	

Group #6:

Strengths	Challenges
Communication – talking points, offering translation	Can always improve communication – varies from teacher to teacher – want to know more about classroom experience and academic expectations
Diversity	Bullying – counseling availability
Community, belonging	TECHNOLOGY – need a policy – clearly define purpose, rationale, time – impose time limit policy, *interfering with socialization *more information
Experiences offered	Be more purposeful about inclusion – clubs?
Social emotional learning (SEL)	Limited time and money
Expanding PreK program!!☺	MS/HS bus times
Limited homework	

Group #7:

Strengths	Challenges
Willingness to meet community where they are	Real-world application – up-to-date
Learning languages	Skills for jobs that don't exist yet
Support all learners	Develop and maintain accurate and truthful history/enhance our curriculum to meet the needs of **all** students
Outdoor learning opportunities	Balancing tech as a tool
IMSE – **Love** multi-sensory learning IMSE (Integrated MultiSystem Education)	SOP Keep growing inter-personal skills (soft skills**)
Increase in ways we communicate with families (ex. TPs)	Keeping the school-home connection strong
Focus on social skills	Language barriers
Variety of sports in PE	Keeping our families safe in this political climate
Concerts - fun and exciting	Addressing mental health of students and families
Teachers/staff – very caring of each other	Proactive preparing for big changes/unknown
Forward-thinking re: tech and STEM	Transportation/schedules nutrition – educating & options healthy /consistent
Diversity – yes!!	
Honoring differences/celebrating cultures	
Superintendent – Passionate attentive & highly skilled leader!	

Group #8:

Strengths	Challenges
Diversity	School safety & security
Dedicated teachers & staff	Teacher recruitment (diversity) & retention
Supportive & encouraging leadership	Facilities infrastructure (aging facilities)
Preschool	Transportation – costs & commute times
Mental health supports	Mental health challenges
Strong community	Family/parent engagement
Equitable practices	Growing pains
Retrospective & willingness to grow	Budget constraints
Rich extra-curricular opportunities	Healthy & diverse food options
Technology	Technology

Following each group reporting out their consensus points, the large group identified the following **common themes**:

Common Themes - Strengths	Common Themes - Challenges
Diversity	Technology
Family engagement	Wellness – meal options – food
Academic opportunities	Transportation
Social skills education	Family engagement
PEA (refers to PreSchool Education)	Diversity in staff
Student leadership	Language barriers
Whole child is valued	Financial uncertainty & Budget
Highly qualified staff	Mental health
Sense of belonging	Communication
Staff engagement	Teaching styles
Communication	Curriculum alignment & rigor
Teaching styles	State mandates
Community engagement	Safety & security
Forward thinking	Transitions
	Politics
	Teacher retention and ratio
	Unexpected crises
	Lacking soft skills

The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:

Wednesday, May 27, 2025, at 6:00 pm
Sign-in begins at 5:45 pm.
Lawrence High School Media Center

Meetings #2 and #3 are scheduled for 1.5 hours. Meetings start and end promptly.

During the May 27th meeting, participants will create a shared vision together for the future of the Lawrence Township Public Schools by creating a Portrait of a Learner.

Please join us. Bring a friend! Everyone is welcome! We look forward to seeing you!

Please RSVP using the form on the district website.