Creating a Strategic Plan for the Lawrence Township Public Schools

Session 2

Portrait of a Learner & Initiatives for Lawrence Township Public Schools

On May 27, 2026, Lawrence Township Public School District administrators, Board of Education members, staff, students, parents, and community members, seventy-seven (77) in all, came together to continue the strategic planning process. Mary Ann Friedman and Dr. Timothy Teehan from New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) were introduced and explained the strategic planning process.

The consensus process was reviewed for strategic planning. The topic for the evening focused on reviewing the strengths and challenges from Meeting #1 from the perspective of a Portrait of a Learner. Each group, 10 in total, brainstormed to identify the core skills that they believe should be the hallmark of every student who walks across their graduation stage and would prepare them for the future of their choosing. Each group was asked to come to consensus of an Essential core skill, create a list of "why" students do not currently possess the desired attribute, and develop initiatives, that when implemented, would enable the students to acquire those attributes. Each group reported their outcomes to the larger group. The large group then identified "Common Themes" that had occurred throughout the small group outcomes and ultimately developed four (4) broad strategic planning goal areas.

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 course of the strategic planning process.

Small Group Consensus: Essential(s) & Initiatives

Group #1:

Essential: The Critical Thinker

Why:

- Productive struggle
- Allowing discomfort
- Technology reliance
- Building crucial relationship (community, school, families, peers)
- Barriers for students and families
- Building resilience without experiencing adversity or challenges

Initiatives:

- Community partnerships with a focus on community conversations
- Professional development focused on resiliency and reducing tech reliance
- Focus on relationships (student to student)
- Inquiry-based instructional practices

Group #2:

Essential: Responsible Use of Technology

Why:

- Essential for success but can limit development of other skills (tactile, critical thinking, etc.) and lead to overdependence

Initiatives:

- Limiting use for younger learners
- Use technology as collaborative tool, social/communication skills still required
- Create understanding of fake vs. real
- Parent workshops
- Developing consistent phone and AI policy
- Can technology remove barriers in communication?

Essential: Build Financial Literacy

Initiatives:

- Real world problem solving
- Budgets, credit cards, taxes, etc.

Essential: Build Mental Health Skills

Why:

- All grade levels require coping skills & emotional regulation & resilience

Initiatives:

- Whole student focus
- Parent coaching tools and workshops
- More guidance counseling
- Develop skills for student to do independently
- Peer leadership across grades (freshman mentored by seniors)
- Build growth mindset
- Community outreach & volunteering

Group #3:

Essential: Social Skills

Initiatives:

- Empathy
- Awareness (Technology/AI, Global)
- Public speaking
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Time management
- Exposure to different languages
- Growth mindset/risk-taker
- Confidence

Essential: Logical Reasoning

Initiatives:

- Evidence-based reasoning
- Critical thinker
- Tenacity/grit/self-discipline
- Problem-solver/goal-setting
- Life skills (domestic, $)
- Academic endurance
- Accountability

Group #4:

Essential: Developing a strong sense of self while being a purposeful and intentional member of the community.

Essential: Thinking critically and intentionally when making decisions and choices.

Group #5:

Essential: Well Rounded Thinker (e.g. Critical think, reading)

Essential: Inter and Intrapersonal Skills

Initiatives:

- Communication
- Active listening
- Conflict resolution
- Teamwork
- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Adaptability
- Mindfulness
- Motivation

Essential: Love For Learning

Initiatives:

- Curiosity
- Motivation
- New knowledge

Group #6:
Essential: Critical Thinking

Initiatives:

- Attain knowledge
- Evaluate
- Synthesize
- Adaptability

Essential: Community Engagement Interpersonal

Initiatives:

- Involvement
- Civic responsibility / awareness
- Interpersonal
- Adaptability
- Self-efficacy

Group #7:

Essential: Social Skills

Why:

- Shift in parental involvement
- Lack of in-person engagement
- Focus on screen-time
- Safety concern

Initiatives:

- Role play for problem solving
- Partnering – community members with skills
- Older students
- Family activities that promote togetherness
- Low-tech activities
- Promote socialization & citizenship

Group #8:

Essential: Literacy (Critical thinking, Financial literacy, Media/digital literacy, Data literacy, Problem solving)

Why:

- Abstract concepts
- Needing role models
- Carving time out to "learn to learn"
- Ever-changing/evolving
- Still developing foundational proficiency

Initiatives:

- PBL – Real world experiences
- Adaptive curriculum practices
    - Cross-content
    - Stimulating
    - Relevant
- Effective modeling
    - Re: AI

Essential: SEL/Soft Skills

Initiatives:

- Patience
- Teamwork
- Perseverance
- Listening to learn
- Empathy
- Collaboration
- Critical thinking
- Communication/comprehension
- Adaptability
- Respect

Group #9:

Essential: Critical Thinking

Challenges:

- Phones
- AI
- 1:1 Devices
- Patience & perseverance

Initiatives:

- Teaching media literacy
- Teaching problem solving

Essential: Social Skills/Growth Mindset

Challenges:

- Societal changes
- Advancements in technology
- Limited opportunities to practice

Initiatives:

- Building resilience & perseverance
- Addressing mental health concerns
- Character education

Essential: Three R's

Group #10:

Essential: Strong Soft Skills

Initiatives:

- Continuation of Zones of Regulations grades K to 12
- Staff training with similar lingo/resources to support mental health →continuum
- Academic discussions/discourse in the classroom
- Counselor push-in at each grade level on topics such as relationships, communication, conflict resolution
- Train students to take on leadership roles / assist with mediations
- Take breaks from the computer – focus on writing too

<u>Essential</u>: Productive Citizens

Initiatives:

- Increase enrichment opportunities for students during and after school
  - Creative writing, tech, comm
  - Other opportunities for students to explore curiosities
- Continue to embed financial literacy, career & tech at elementary level
- Across the district have continued opportunities to expose students to different cultures & communities
- Diversity of district showcased within our school dining
- Building student capacity to be critical thinkers & problem solvers & independent thinkers

Following the small groups reporting out on their essentials and initiatives, the large group identified the following **common themes**:

Common Themes	
Critical thinkers	Community engagement
Responsible use of tech	*Building citizenship
*Soft skills	Abstract learning
Growth mindset	Financial literacy
Self-management	Problem solving skills
Adaptability	Media literacy
Mental health	Building leadership skills
Self-regulation	Empathy

The administrative team also ran all the small group outcomes through a coding program, and the list below indicates the common themes, 4 groups or more out of the 8 groups. This list is added for your information.

Top 10 Recurring Essentials & Initiatives Themes Across Groups:

1. **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**
    - Mentioned directly by Groups 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10.
    - By far the strongest and most consistent theme.
2. **Social and Interpersonal Skills**
    - Communication, collaboration, teamwork, conflict resolution, empathy, and relationship building appeared repeatedly.
3. **Responsible Technology and AI Use**
    - Digital citizenship, media literacy, AI awareness, and balancing technology with human interaction emerged frequently.
4. **Resilience, Grit, and Growth Mindset**
    - Productive struggle, perseverance, self-discipline, and academic endurance appeared throughout the discussions.
5. **Mental Health and Self-Regulation**
    - Emotional wellness, coping skills, self-management, and self-awareness were recurring priorities.
6. **Community Engagement and Citizenship**
    - Civic responsibility, service, leadership, and community partnerships were consistently identified.
7. **Future Readiness and Real-World Learning**
    - Financial literacy, career readiness, practical life skills, and authentic learning experiences appeared across several groups.
8. **Leadership Development**
    - Student leadership, peer mentoring, and developing agency were recurring concepts.
9. **Adaptability and Lifelong Learning**
    - Preparing students to navigate change, innovation, and evolving technologies emerged repeatedly.
10. **Academic Rigor Through Relevance**

*Participants did not simply ask for "harder work." They emphasized inquiry, project-based learning, real-world problem solving, discourse, and deeper learning experiences.

Following the large group's identification of common themes, they then identified the following emerging goal areas:

1. Health & Wellness, Safety & Security
2. Future Ready Academics
    a. Character
    b. Cognition
    c. Community
    d. Lifelong learners
    e. Academic rigor
    f. Future Ready – proactive
    g. Civic Mindedness
    h. Innovation, competitiveness, creativity
3. Community Engagement & Involvement
    a. Multi-lingual communication
4. School Culture & Climate

The third strategic planning session is scheduled for:
Monday, June 8, 2026, at 6:00 pm
Sign-in begins at 5:45 pm.
Lawrence High School Media Center

Meeting #3 is scheduled for 1.5 hours. Meetings start and end promptly.

During the June 8th meeting, participants will review the outcomes from meetings 1 and 2 and develop broad goal statements and objectives for the goal areas identified above. These strategic planning goals will guide the board and district over the next 3 – 5 years.

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

Please RSVP by *using the Google RSVP form on the district website.*