

Student Voices Project & New High School Update

June 25, 2026

Heather Tow-Yick, Superintendent

Jacqueline Downey, Assistant Superintendent

Sherri Kokx, Executive Director of Secondary Education

Julia Bamba, Principal

Krish Parashar, Liberty High School Student

Purpose

- Explore what students are sharing about school experiences
- Review key themes and opportunities from student voice
- Learn from the Pacific Cascade Middle School Design Sprint
- Preview how student ideas can shape the future

BLAST to the Future

A Student Voices Project

Reimagining Education



Project Fundamentals

Why this project exists:

To understand
how students
experience school

To gather honest
feedback about
what is working
and what is not

To reimagine what
school could look
like if students
helped design it

To make student
voice a real part
of decision-
making

Student Voice

Expected Results

What we expected to hear

- Longer lunches
- Later start times
- Less homework
- More freedom
- Better spaces
- More fun classes

What we actually heard

- More balance
- More connected to real life
- More supportive
- More flexible
- More meaningful

Stage 1: Focus Groups

How we gathered student input:

Focus groups across
all 4 high schools

30 Total Focus Groups

4-6 Students
per Focus Group

100+ Students Participated

Stage 1: Focus Groups

How we gathered student input:

Typical Focus
Group lasted
20-45 minutes

Longest Focus
Group was
60 minutes

Students were
randomly selected
to gather diverse
perspectives

*Recorded over **13+ Hours** of focus group input*

Focus Group Takeaways

What students talked about most

Future Readiness (110):

- Career Learning (34)
- Real World Relevance/Skills (44)
- Future Exploration (32)

Belonging & Inclusion (67):

- Relationships (28)
- School Community (30)
- Equity & Inclusion (9)

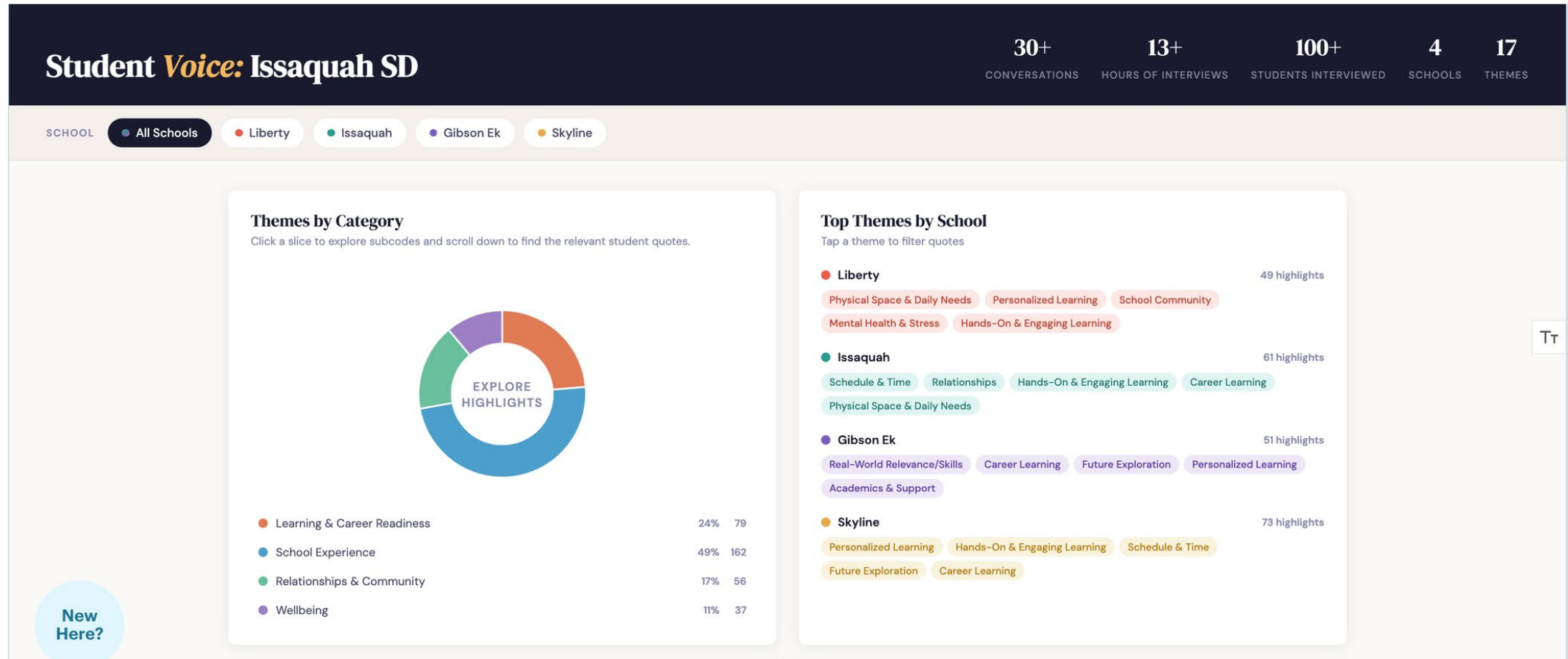
Wellness & Safety (38):

- Mental Health & Stress (25)
- Balance & Burnout (11)
- Health & Safety (2)

School Experiences (226):

- Hands-On & Engaging Learning (39)
- Personalized Learning (42)
- Grades & Mastery (25)
- Academics & Support (29)
- Workload (18)
- Schedule & Time (42)
- Physical Space & Daily Needs (25)
- Digital Tools & Organization (6)

Focus Group: Dashboard



Focus Group Takeaways

Powerful Quotes:

“I went to Lake Washington High School a few weeks ago, and they had a room where everyone in there was studying. There were rugs, bean bags, ambient lighting, and it was just really like, I wanted to go in there and do my work. **I wanted to go in there and do homework, and it wasn’t even my school.**”

- Student from Skyline High School

“I think 7 periods is too much. Maybe you could have about 4 or 5, but they could be longer classes than having 7... You have too many periods. You have too much work that you have to try to do, and **too many things you have to prioritize and remember.**”

- Student from Liberty High School

Focus Group Takeaways

Powerful Quotes:

“Maybe instead of having a test, they could do a **real-world problem from a real company** or anything and hands-on work. That way, you’re giving them a real-world problem and asking them to solve it in real time instead of having them do a 45-minute, 45-question test, which they may or may not forget in the future.”

- Student from Skyline High School

“Instead of just being casual with your peers, **you’re also learning how to talk to adults and send emails that are professional.** I didn’t learn about that in middle school besides in leadership because we had to send out emails.”

- Student from Gibson Ek High School

Stage 2: Workshops

Over 4 days:

Day 1

- Learned about the project
- Explored & designed what school could look like
- Reflected on their own goals, needs, and experiences

Day 2

- Listened to real student quotes
- Grouped sticky notes to find patterns

Day 3/4

- Wrote a narrative describing their ideal school day
- Created their own ideas for reimagining education within our district

Stage 2: Workshops



Why This Matters

Student voice can change the questions we ask

Who are we helping
students become as they
grow and learn?

What skills do students
need for real life?

What spaces help students
feel focused and
supported?

How should students
show they are ready for
what comes next?

What would school look
like if students helped
build it?

Next Steps

Implications of this project:

- Inform the design of a new high school
- Shape future programs, schedules, spaces, and learning models
- Help schools build stronger systems for gathering student voice
- Serve as an example for others to involve students in any design process
- Inspire broader change in how education is designed and understood

Support Across The District

- **Heather Tow-Yick**, *Superintendent*
- **Jacqueline Downey**, *Assistant Superintendent*
- **Sherri Kokx**, *Executive Director of Secondary Education*
- **Julia Bamba**, *Principal on Special Assignment*
- **Marcel Hauser**, *Senior Strategy & Advisor*
- **Mason Pashia**, *Getting Smart*
- **2025-2026 Student Representatives**
- **School Administration** at all High Schools
- **Teachers** allowing us to conduct focus group sessions with students
- **Ms. Fielden and 3rd Period ASB Class at PCMS**

Student Voices Project

Q & A

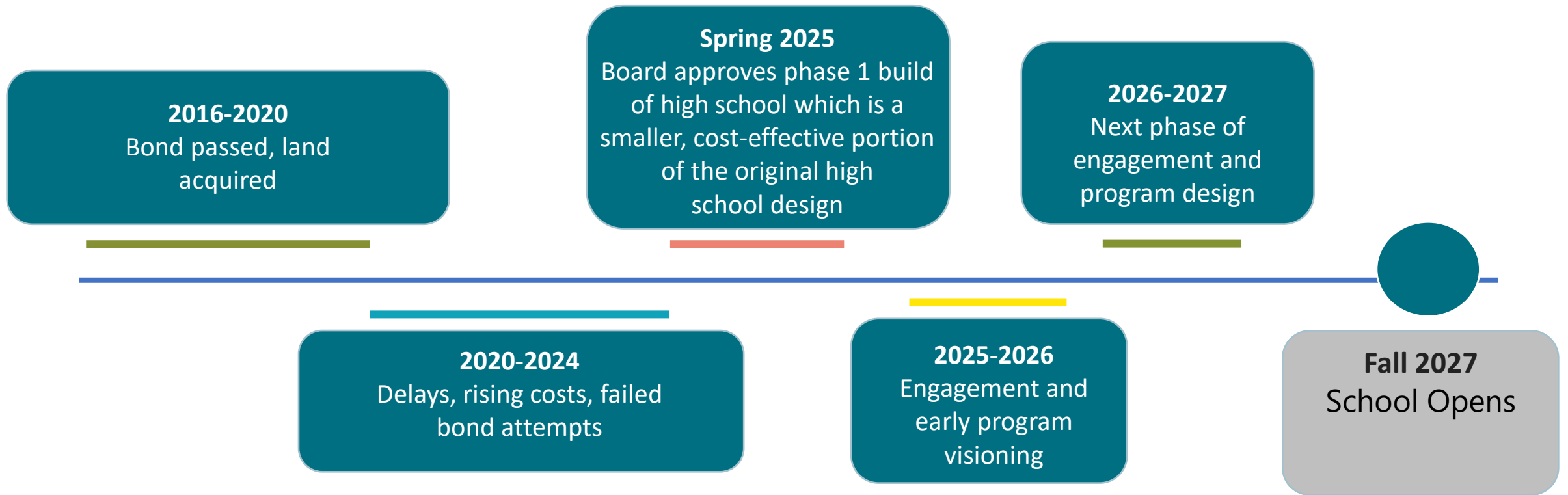


New High School Update

Where We've Been

A Decade in the Making

10+ Year Timeline



Timeline shared during January 29,
2026 Board Meeting

Where We Are Now

Key Decisions

Core Design Team | *Program & instructional design*

- Founding core team of educators selected
- First core team meeting June 16, 2026
- Pathways confirmed:
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Engineering & Robotics
 - Health Sciences (pilot for grades 11 and 12)

Advisory Team | *Community & industry voice*

- Advisory Team Coming Soon: team of students, families, community members, and industry partners from across the district will meet monthly, providing ongoing cycles of input and feedback as the school model takes shape
- Selection process for Advisory Team launches August 2026
- First meeting in September 2026

Operational | *Building, logistics & systems*

- Ground breaking ceremony (April 2026)
- Transportation confirmed, including midday shuttles
- Furniture testing and feedback during summer school (July)

Engagement & Enrollment | *Future students & community*

- Open enrollment confirmed with full-time and part-time options for grades 9-11 and part-time options for grade 12
- October Community event in planning
- Middle school Design Sprint, Student Voices Project, and student engagement continues to inform program design
- Recruitment and enrollment to open October 2026

The Year Ahead

Timeline to Opening, Fall 2027

	August – October 2026	November 2026 – March 2027	April – May 2027	June – August 2027
Core Team	Design the student journey: vision & mission, day in the life, pathway progressions, dual credit & college partner opportunities	Design curriculum: interdisciplinary, team teaching, CTE frameworks written and submitted for approval	Design learning and assessment: competencies, portfolios, transfer options, Portrait of a Graduate implementation	Design opening: final staffing complete; new staff training and onboarding Student and family engagement
Advisory Team	Core Advisory Team selected: students, families, community members and industry partners Advisory Team participates in Community event	Advisory Team provides input and insight on the student experience and curriculum design. Pathway partnership outreach & collaboration	Advisory Team provides input and insight on learning and assessment design Pathway partnership outreach & collaboration continues	Advisory shifts to opening-year support and guidance
Operational	School naming and branding process with community input and Board vote Technology integration designed	Construction continues, staffing preparation, transportation routes planned Special Services planning (IEP, MLL, 504)	Opening logistics planned: daily schedules, transportation, staffing, food services	Building prepares for opening; schedules and transportation shared with students and families, systems implemented, safety plans finalized
Engagement & Enrollment	Community event held in October Middle school visits City and Community Organization meetings Digital Advertising begins Meet the core team reels	Student recruitment and enrollment continues Students invited to tour new school site in Feb/March Digital Advertising and pop-up info sessions	Enrollment confirmed; School community building begins	Founding student and family welcome events, onboarding and engagement

New High School Update

Q & A



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