

2026



Wooster City Schools

Stakeholder Engagement EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 2026

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Page 4

Stakeholder Engagement Process

Page 5-6

Overall Themes

Page 7-13

SWOT Analysis: Leadership Team

Page 14-20

SWOT Analysis: Board of Education

Page 21-29

Staff Focus Groups

Page 30-34

Parent Focus Groups

Page 35-40

Student Focus Groups

Page 41-43

Community Leader Focus Groups

Page 44-45

Community Leader Interviews



Board of Education

Jody Starcher, President

Rik Goodright, Vice President

Clayton Deighan, Board Member

Joy Kleinhenz, Board Member

Bonnie Nair, Board Member

Leadership Team

Gabe Tudor, Superintendent

Brian Madigan, Assistant Superintendent

Sherri Prindle, Supervisor of District Facilities

Amy Welty, Treasurer

Molly Richard, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Diana McMillen, Director of Student Services

Alex Garey, Director of Technology

Eric Vizzo, Director of Transportation, Safety, and Special Projects

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS



The Impact Group partnered with Wooster City Schools to facilitate a comprehensive and inclusive engagement process to inform the district's new strategic plan. This process was intentionally designed to elevate diverse perspectives, reflect the shared priorities of the school community, and build upon the strong foundation of the district's existing strategic plan.

Input was gathered through 13 focus groups involving students, staff, parents, and community members, along with individual one-on-one interviews with community leaders. In addition, 594 parents and community members and 174 staff members participated in surveys, providing meaningful, data-informed insights.

A collaborative SWOT analysis with district administrators, principals, district leaders, and members of the Board of Education further aligned leadership around the district's strengths and future opportunities.

By integrating community voice with actionable data, Wooster City Schools developed a clear and well-rounded understanding of its priorities. This intentional and inclusive process ensures the strategic plan is grounded in shared values, builds on existing strengths, and is guided by a collective vision for the district's future.

Note: Some community members without children currently enrolled in the schools indicated that portions of the survey were not directly applicable to their experiences. Specifically, questions centered on school programming, student learning, and communication with families. As a result, these individuals expressed that the survey did not fully capture their perspectives and represented a missed opportunity to gather valuable insight from this segment of the community.

OVERALL THEMES



Commitment to Safe, Supportive Learning Environments

Ensuring student safety and well-being is a shared priority across the community. Stakeholders expressed a desire to strengthen consistent behavioral expectations, reduce disruptions, and expand access to mental health supports to create positive, focused learning environments for all students.

Focus on Future-Ready Skills and Real-World Preparation

There is strong support for preparing students for success beyond graduation through practical life skills, career exploration, and workforce readiness. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of offering multiple pathways, including college and career-focused opportunities, to meet the needs of all learners.

Sustaining Academic Excellence and Expanding Future-Ready Learning

While most stakeholders view the district as providing a high-quality education, feedback highlights an opportunity to further strengthen academic outcomes. The input reflects a desire to reinforce foundational skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics, while ensuring all students are appropriately challenged and supported. Stakeholders also reinforced the importance of more hands-on learning, reduced screen time, and increased opportunities for experiential and outdoor learning to foster curiosity and deeper engagement.

Pride in Extracurricular and Arts Opportunities, with Focus on Academic Growth

The district is widely recognized for strong performing arts, athletics, and extracurricular programming that enriches the student experience. At the same time, stakeholders shared an interest in continued emphasis on academic achievement and providing educators with the support needed to address diverse learning needs.

Strong Trust in Educators and Opportunity to Strengthen Transparency

Community feedback highlights deep trust in teachers and staff, who are seen as dedicated professionals with a valuable “boots on the ground” perspective. They are consistently described as “amazing” and recognized for creating a safe, supportive, and caring environment for students. Feedback also points to an opportunity to strengthen transparency and communication at the district and Board levels. Some stakeholders expressed a desire for clearer, more consistent communication, suggesting that continued focus in this area could further build trust across the system.

OVERALL THEMES



Opportunity to Modernize and Maintain Learning Facilities

Community feedback indicates a strong interest in ensuring that all school facilities are safe, healthy, and conducive to learning. While needs are most frequently noted at the elementary and middle school levels, there is broad agreement on the importance of long-term, sustainable facility planning.

Diverse Perspectives on Facility Solutions

There is strong support in the stakeholder engagement phase for addressing facility challenges while recognizing the range of perspectives on how best to do so. Some stakeholders support new construction to create updated learning environments, while others value preserving neighborhood schools, renovating the schools, and highlighting the importance of continued dialogue. Funding is seen as a significant barrier to addressing facilities.

Interest in Developmentally Appropriate School Structures

Stakeholders expressed interest in reviewing grade configurations to better align with students' academic, social, and developmental needs. Particular attention was paid to key transition years and to ensuring age-appropriate learning environments.

Desire for Transparent Communication and Fiscal Stewardship

The community places a high value on clear, consistent communication and responsible financial management. Stakeholders are seeking greater clarity around long-term planning, spending priorities, and how resources are aligned to student outcomes. Communicating the how and why of decision-making is essential to communication and trust.

Strength of the High School as a Community Asset, with Opportunities for Improvement

The high school is a source of community pride, serving as a modern, well-maintained facility and gathering place. Feedback also highlights opportunities to further enhance student safety and overall learning conditions within the building.

2020



Wooster City Schools

SWOT Analysis Summary

LEADERSHIP TEAM

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Where do you want to be in 3-5 years?
- What does success look like for Wooster City Schools?

- **Comprehensive Student Growth and Achievement:** Focus on academic progress, continuous learning for both students and staff, developing perseverance, and ensuring all students have the opportunity to meet or exceed their potential.
- **Whole-Child Well-being:** A commitment to meeting all student needs, promoting a sense of belonging, supporting physical and mental health, fostering positive relationships, and ensuring students feel safe at school.
- **Collaboration and Community Connection:** Emphasizing collaboration among staff, a collaborative approach to supporting students and families, strengthening community connections, and ensuring all parents and families feel a true connection to the school.
- **Engaged Learning Environment:** Prioritizing student engagement, high attendance rates, and creating environments where students are happy, engaged in learning, and grow as critical thinkers.
- **Positive School and Workplace Culture:** Developing a positive workplace for all employees, ensuring staff have the resources and support they need, and building a desired district that attracts and retains staff and families (high open enrollment).



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

- **Strong Alignment and Leadership:** Characterized by an aligned administrative team, aligned leadership, and vertical K-12 curriculum alignment, which facilitates collaboration.
- **Commitment to Student Achievement and Opportunity:** A focus on all learners, providing multiple pathways for success, fostering high student expectations for academic success, and offering diverse opportunities (academic, athletic, clubs, and leadership).
- **Support for the Whole Child:** Includes dedicated Mental Health Services, resources to support the whole child, and programs like "million acts of kindness," "best buddies," and "teammates."
- **Passionate and Evolving Staff:** The district benefits from great teaching staff, passionate and involved adults, and a culture that sets a high bar for continued learning.
- **Community and Resource Strength:** Supported by strong Partnerships with Community Resources, reliable Technology and Transportation, excellent auxiliary facilities (pool, Follis, Gault), and effective communication both from the District and externally (social media, Parent Square).



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the areas you wish to improve?
- What areas require deeper planning and/or resource allocation?

- **Operational and Internal System Deficiencies:** Challenges related to the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), including teaching practices, student and staff attendance, and providing adequate supports for students with disabilities.
- **Staffing and Workforce Challenges:** Concerns around the retention of current staff, a lack of new applicants, and a need to foster collective ownership of all students by all staff.
- **Community Engagement and Perception:** Difficulties in engaging and building trust with community members who do not have students in the schools, a varied community perception, and inconsistent "customer service" in how families and community members are greeted and how concerns are handled.
- **Financial and Infrastructure Concerns:** Issues stemming from increased funding challenges, a decreased cash balance, and the condition of facilities (e.g., Cornerstone).
- **Equity and Consistency:** The need to address the socioeconomic enrollment balance across elementary schools and the existing disparity at the middle school and high school levels.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Are there available resources that you don't currently leverage?
- Who is willing to help us?
- Where can we find community support?

- **Strategic Resource Management:** Focus on leveraging and consolidating human and capital resources (especially with new buildings), auditing professional development and curriculum resources, and strengthening operational processes for greater efficiency and functionality.
- **Enhanced Communication and Collaboration:** Prioritize increasing internal communication and strengthening partnerships with community businesses and resources to increase opportunities for collaboration.
- **Financial Prudence:** Continue to be creative and fiscally responsible with funding.
- **Expanded Engagement:** Enhance family engagement to educate them on supporting students and demonstrate to the broader community the benefits of new and updated facilities.
- **Capacity Building and Ownership:** Share expertise ("human genius") to grow staff capacity and foster collective ownership of all students.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the items Wooster City Schools need to prepare?
- What are the external events that could happen at any time?

- **Financial and Infrastructure Challenges:** Threats related to funding (including state/federal decisions, property tax, and levies) and the associated expense and maintenance of facilities.
- **Workforce and Capacity Concerns:** Issues surrounding workforce retention, the low number of new applicants, and specifically, staffing for special education supports.
- **Impact of External Factors on Students:** The potential impact of poverty and mental health on student engagement, as well as changes in the student population (growth or reduction).
- **Technology and Security Risks:** Threats posed by cybersecurity and the challenges of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI), including its ethical use for staff and students and its impact on learning.
- **Regulatory and Policy Environment:** Risks associated with ongoing changes in state requirements, state government funding decisions, and the effects of open enrollment policies.
- **Safety:** General concerns regarding safety.

At Wooster City Schools, we are...



CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS

- Passionate
- Driven
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- People-centered
- Committed
- Learners
- Growing
- Thoughtful
- Proactive
- Innovative
- Dynamic
- Compassionate
- Kind
- Reflective
- Fiscally responsible
- Loving
- Safety driven

At Wooster City Schools, we...

BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

- Try to do the right thing
- Put children first
- Show up
- Build relationships with students, staff, and parents
- Work together
- Eliminate barriers
- Participate in professional learning
- Partner with police and fire
- Have intentional community partnerships
- Ask
- Challenge one another
- Support one another
- Ask what happens
- Sincerely care about one another
- Have intentional decision making
- Find solutions
- Take safe risks
- Think outside the box
- Learn
- Respond to unique needs
- Value work-life balance for a healthy lifestyle
- Collaboratively solve problems

2020



Wooster City Schools

SWOT Analysis Summary

BOARD OF EDUCATION

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Where do you want to be in 3-5 years?
- What does success look like for Wooster City Schools?

The vision for Wooster City Schools is a commitment to achieving top-tier performance, modernizing infrastructure, and cultivating a student-centered, inclusive environment. These goals are underpinned by a focus on transparency, community trust, and instructional excellence to create a world-class educational system.

- **Excellent Educational Outcomes and Pathways:** The vision includes achieving academic excellence, aiming for the Top 25% in academic performance in Ohio, and becoming a top-tier educational system. This is paired with educating the whole child, supporting diverse pathways for students (college, military, employed), providing thriving CTE programs, and ensuring continued options for students to flourish.
- **Instructional and Staff Excellence:** The vision requires continued instructional growth aligned with practice, staff professional development, and improved, intentional, effective educational practice with positive outcomes for students.
- **Facilities Modernization:** A key part of the vision is ensuring sufficient funding and updating facilities, including updating facilities to meet 2030 standards.
- **Culture, Community, and Inclusivity:** The district aims for a Continued inclusive view, community unity, good school spirit and pride, and systems of support. This includes maintaining community trust with the administration and the Board and ensuring timely, transparent communication.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

Wooster Schools' success is built on a foundation of committed people, strong programs, and an ongoing dedication to operational excellence. These core strengths create a dynamic and supportive learning environment for all students.

- **Exceptional Staff and Leadership:** The district is defined by its committed, inspiring teachers and staff, supported by a strong central office and leadership team. This includes a concentration of expertise in curriculum and technology, and a commitment to thoughtful leadership and great leadership processes for efficiency.
- **Diverse and High-Quality Student Programs:** The district offers a wide range of opportunities, including a top-notch marching band, competitive and great extracurricular activities (like LAX), and diverse programs and organizations. Specific support programs like General's Academy and credit recovery are in place to set students up for success.
- **Operational Excellence and Integrity:** A strong strategic plan is naturally integrated into the district's actions. Strengths include high ethical standards (recognized by the Treasurers Audit Awards), a focus on research-based action, and a strong service coordination model.
- **Effective Communication and Community Connection:** The district is noted for its consistent, reliable, and transparent communication, both internally with staff and externally with the community. There is an active culture of giving to the community and fostering intentional communities.
- **Student-Centric Facilities:** Facilities and facilities goals, including the high school facilities, are focused on meeting the needs of students.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the areas you wish to improve?
- What areas require deeper planning and/or resource allocation?

The areas identified for improvement for Wooster City Schools involve addressing critical needs in infrastructure, workforce, and community connection. Focusing on these weaknesses will ensure a stronger, more stable foundation for the district's future growth and success.

- **Operational and Infrastructure Needs:** Elementary facilities require attention, and there is a need to build and ensure consistency among athletic programs.
- **Fiscal Concerns:** Maintaining fiscal stability is identified as an area for improvement, including addressing deficit spending.
- **Staffing and Workforce Issues:** Concerns include staff burnout, challenges related to the education employment market, and a lack of diversity among staff to reflect the student makeup.
- **Student Support and Inclusivity:** The district needs to improve how it meets the needs of its diverse student population and prevent students from "falling through the cracks."
- **Community Engagement:** There is a weakness in connecting with the aging community and non-parent citizens, as well as increasing staff professionalism when engaging with the community.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Are there available resources that you don't currently leverage?
- Who is willing to help us?
- Where can we find community support?

Wooster City Schools has significant opportunities to strengthen its connections with the community and leverage emerging resources to enhance student and staff support. These areas for growth focus on building strategic relationships and modernizing internal operations.

- **Enhanced Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Opportunities exist to better connect with non-parent citizens (aging community), increase the involvement of community leaders, highlight student activities to strengthen community ties, and build relationships with state representatives. There is also potential to leverage professional organizations (OSBA, BASA, OASBO), the BAC, and alumni.
- **Resource and Revenue Generation:** The schools can pursue grants and alternative revenue sources.
- **Operational and Instructional Innovation:** Opportunities include leveraging AI for efficiencies to free up time for student relationships and learning, as well as emphasizing the teaching of soft skills.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the items Wooster City Schools need to prepare?
- What are the external events that could happen at any time?

Threats facing Wooster City Schools are largely external, revolving around financial uncertainty, a challenging political and information landscape, and the need to maintain strong community ties. Preparing for these potential issues will be key to ensuring the long-term stability and success of the district.

- **Financial and Funding Concerns:** Threats to financial stability include issues related to school funding, specifically property tax instability and consequences, general taxes, and the impact of vouchers.
- **External Pressures and Political Climate:** The district faces risks from political divisiveness and the competition of public ed (public vs. private/charter schools), as well as dealing with burdensome state mandates.
- **Information and Communication Challenges:** The spread of misinformation and "versions of the truth" are threats, along with challenges related to Social media and broader communication issues.
- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Threats include an angry or distrustful community, negative community perceptions, and a lack of involvement of community leaders in our schools.
- **Student and Curriculum Challenges:** Concerns include managing student mental health challenges and addressing the impact of AI and soft skill development on student readiness.

At Wooster City Schools, we are...



CULTURAL ASPIRATIONS

- Generals
- Proud
- Kind
- Professional
- Accessible
- Respectful
- Rising Generals
- Strong, resilient problem solvers
- Trusting
- Aligned
- Open to new things
- Flexible
- Ethical
- Compassionate
- Understanding
- Hard working
- The best version of ourselves

At Wooster City Schools, we...

BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS

- Do best for kids
- Bleed Blue and Gold
- Demonstrate generosity of spirit
- Accept one another
- Have a strong work ethic
- Show fidelity
- Have a voice
- Advocate for self and others
- Grow, change, and learn
- Prepare children to be the community members and leaders of tomorrow
- Care for and help those who struggle
- Don't fear change

2020



Wooster City Schools

Focus Group Summary

STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

The Wooster Schools staff identify several key strengths that contribute to a positive learning environment and foster pride across the district. These strengths center around the dedicated staff, a culture of care, and a commitment to responsive academic offerings.

- **Dedicated and Collaborative Staff Culture:** The district is characterized by a "top notch" caliber of hard-working and passionate staff who demonstrate care for students and one another, fostering a "great culture" that "feels like a family". Key strengths include staff and community school spirit, flexibility, hiring local staff as an investment in the community, collaborative teacher teams, and a proactive approach to problem solving.
- **Commitment to Student and Family Needs:** The schools excel at meeting or making an effort to meet the needs of families and students by providing care and opportunities (like O' Huddle). The district is committed to the social-emotional well-being of students. There is a recognized strength in growing awareness for inclusive curriculum, improving communication for ML families, and providing proactive guidance counseling regarding behavior and self-esteem. Furthermore, the district ensures great educational opportunities for students, including community experiences and careful student placement.
- **Robust Academic Resources and Programs:** The district is proud of its strong curriculum, scope, and sequence, ensuring staff know what to teach and when. Strengths include having necessary resources for teaching (e.g., Eureka math, reading resources), collaborative teacher structures, continued support with new curriculum, and diverse advanced offerings such as CCP, AP, and expanded CTE on site.
- **Shared Leadership and External Support:** Strengths include administrative and teacher collaboration, a clear teacher voice in decision-making and making adjustments, strong community partners, and effective external communication. The district also maintains clear behavior expectations with good follow-through.



Staff input identified several new initiatives and changes the district should adopt to enhance operational effectiveness, staff support, and community connection. The suggestions primarily focus on increasing instructional consistency, improving resource allocation for staff and students, and strengthening internal and external communication.

Staffing and Resource Allocation: Focus on providing adequate support staff in every building and classroom.

- Place a principal and assistant principal in each building.
- Provide an intervention specialist for every grade level, including K-2 intervention.
- Ensure every classroom, especially kindergarten, has a paraprofessional.
- Utilize paraprofessionals fully and consider benefit changes.
- Address the need for support in the classroom, such as an aide.
- Provide dedicated space for all professionals, including private space for new mothers.

Professional Development and Staff Training: Systematically improve training to be more meaningful and applicable to each role.

- Implement ML training for all staff, along with more PD for teachers working with ML students.
- Ensure meaningful and systemic training for paraprofessionals, including safety training and access to Progress Book.
- Offer training for substitutes.
- The professional development mix should include both in-house training and outside speakers.
- Bring Flex time back.
- Continue to provide professional development for the pedagogical changes, especially with curricular changes in math and ELA.
- Provide PD on Progress Book, smart board, and Google Docs.

Academic and Operational Consistency: Enhance alignment and consistency across grade levels and systems.

- Implement vertical alignment across all grade levels and hold regular K-12 vertical meetings.
- Discuss departmentalization at earlier grades, such as 3rd grade.
- Increase the rigor of learning and address credit deficit students.
- Ensure consistent processes for Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Clever, Google Classroom, and the use of planners.
- Review GPA requirements for Athletics.
- Ensure "bubble kids" are noticed.
- Address MTSS and informing the next grade level.



Student Support and Safety: Focus on improving behavioral and academic support systems.

- Address student violent behavior, recognizing the impact on witnessing students, caring adults, and school climate.
- Address consistency in student behaviors and discipline.
- Establish a space within the school for suspensions/consequences to ensure the safety of other children.
- Implement Differentiated PBIS. (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports)
- Refine the RTI process with multilingual learners (ML) students in mind.
- Look at providing companion resources, such as tabletops, MLs, and Students with Disabilities (SWD) subgroups.
- Continue building school spirit and explore elementary mentorship programs connecting younger and older students.
- Consider a team approach for CPI.

Community and Central Office Engagement: Increase visibility and information sharing both internally and externally.

- Increase visibility from the central office and ensure the superintendent is more available in person, especially where student needs are the greatest.
- Build relationships with the community and find ways to connect with all families.
- Connect families on the cusp (making too much for assistance) with resources.
- Keep the community involved and informed, specifically ensuring senior citizens and non-parents know what goes on in the district.
- Improve communication about financials and elementary activities.
- Figure out Parent Square for student and advanced absence reporting and email return.
- Publish transcripts or closed captioning for “Tudor Talk”.
- Provide more communication regarding placement of Students with Disabilities (SWD).

Facilities and Technology: Urgently address physical resources.

- Make a final facility decision and move on, as research has been done.
- Provide updated elementary technology, rather than "hand me downs".
- Ensure furniture and materials are provided or replaced with matching items.
- Consider needs of students with special needs when making decisions regarding facilities.
- Address playground planning.

STOP DOING?



Staff feedback highlighted several practices and policies the district should discontinue to improve efficiency, instructional focus, and staff morale. These suggestions largely address issues of operational inconsistency, communication overload, and perceived imbalances in resource and attention allocation.

- **Inconsistent Resource and Staff Support:** Concerns were raised about not replacing staff lost through attrition, which requires more detailed analysis.
- **Operational and Scheduling Inefficiencies:** Staff suggested stopping practices that disrupt the school day or create logistical problems, including:
 - Teacher meetings during class time.
 - Pulling teachers out for Professional Development (PD) and instead finding alternative ways to deliver training.
 - Inconsistency in bussing and transportation.
 - Optimizing schedules at the Middle School to address the needs of the students.
- **Inconsistent Expectations and Leadership:** Staff recommended recognizing administrative changes, which could lead to inconsistent expectations, and ceasing the practice of pulling administrators out of buildings, as support should be kept in the building to build culture and relationships. In addition, the district should stop making decisions without teacher input.
- **Perceived Program Prioritization Issues:** Staff believe the schools should stop prioritizing the high school over other grade levels.
- **Inadequate Support for Specific Student Populations:** The district needs to comprehensively address Multilingual Learner (ML) intervention services, as conversations within the MTSS/RTI structure.
- **Behavioral and Special Education Practices:** Recommendations include stopping:
 - Class disruption for single student behavioral issues, such as removing the entire class.
 - The current approach to the placement of students with disabilities (cross-categorical).
 - Rethinking gifted programming and differentiation.

CHALLENGES TO PREPARE FOR



Strategic planning sessions identified several critical areas the Wooster City Schools must proactively address over the next three to five years to ensure continued success and stability. These priorities involve significant capital investments, adapting to changes in the educational and regulatory landscape, and focusing on student well-being and staff capacity.

- **Facilities and Capital Investment:** The district must finalize decisions regarding facilities, including addressing the poor physical condition of Cornerstone and its probable closure, planning for new building configurations (such as moving 5th grade out of the middle school), and athletic facilities, considering the use of modular units, and identifying a clear timeline for bond issues and operating levies. Facility planning must also be mindful of the needs of Multilingual Learner (ML) and other specialized services.
- **Financial Stability and External Factors:** Priorities include communicating clearly about school finances and funding needs, preparing for the ongoing challenges of Ohio's school funding structure, and managing the potential impact of enrollment projections, an influx of students, open enrollment, vouchers, and school choice.
- **Instructional and Technology Adaptation:** The district needs to strategically prepare for the ethical and effective use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by both students and staff, which is viewed as both exciting and worrisome. Additional focus is required on ELA intervention services, updating reading instruction models (RIMPS) for higher grades, and updating elementary technology and its corresponding network.
- **Student Behavior, Resilience, and Support:** A major challenge is addressing student behavioral issues, including seeking strategic behavioral consequences, improving placement of students in classrooms, and making parents more responsible. The district also needs to promote student resilience, self-advocacy, and individual motivation to counter learned helplessness.
- **Safety, Health, and Staff Capacity:** Maintaining the health and safety of staff and students, ensuring long-term safety solutions beyond "band aid" fixes, and maintaining secure entrances are high priorities. The district must also actively work to prevent teacher burnout and manage the impact of changes to staffing, higher class sizes, and the identification of students with disabilities.
- **Community and Communication:** Challenges include addressing misinformation spread through social media and securing necessary community financial support for new building projects. Logistical planning also needs to consider economic diversity and the impact of potential elementary start time changes.

2020



Wooster City Schools

Focus Group Summary

**STAFF FOCUS GROUP:
TRANSPORTATION**

PREPARED BY :

The Impact Group

STRENGTHS



The school's transportation department demonstrates several key strengths that contribute to its successful operations. These strengths are largely centered on dedicated personnel, effective leadership, and a commitment to maintaining quality resources and compensation.

- **Dedicated Team and Respected Leadership:** The department is supported by dedicated bus drivers and mechanics. Leadership is respected and well-liked and the superintendent is visible, communicating information effectively. Administration also engages in productive dialogue with the team.
- **Resource and Fleet Maintenance:** The department is committed to the repair and upkeep of the buses and has a dedicated bus wash.
- **Compensation and Professional Development:** Employees receive good pay and benefits, and special training for bus drivers has been offered.

CHALLENGES TO PREPARE FOR

To ensure the school system is ready for anticipated community changes, strategic planning over the next three to five years is focused on several key areas. These themes represent necessary preparations for managing growth and maintaining a safe, effective learning environment.

- **Enrollment and Growth Management:** Preparing for an increase in enrollment due to coming development and housing growth.
- **Transportation and Logistics:** Addressing challenges related to bussing and routing issues.
- **Infrastructure and Finance:** Developing a comprehensive capital plan.
- **Safety Measures:** Enhancing security measures, including defining what "beefing up" security will look like.

START DOING?



To further support the transportation department's operations and staff morale, the district has identified several key areas for improvement. These suggested actions focus on enhancing internal communication, upgrading facilities, and strengthening cross-departmental relationships.

- **Improving Internal Communication and Feedback:** The district should ensure better communication regarding any special training opportunities. It is also essential to share specific student medical and behavior concerns with the bus drivers, answer bus radios promptly when schools are called about late buses, and provide drivers with feedback on the resolution of student incidents. Strategies should also be put in place to mitigate the loss of institutional history during supervisor changes.
- **Enhancing Traffic Logistics:** At WHS, police assistance should be utilized to manage traffic logistics, especially in the evening. Additionally, efforts should be made to separate bus and car traffic as much as possible.
- **Investing in Facilities and Department Recognition:** Actions are needed to address the department's feeling of being the "forgotten department," including improving the dirty break room and paving the parking lot. Furthermore, principals should make an effort to get to know the transportation staff.

STOP DOING?

To improve operational consistency and fairness, the transportation department suggests several practices that schools should cease. These recommendations focus on addressing school attendance policies during severe weather, refining student disciplinary actions, and ensuring equitable staff treatment.

- **Adjusting School Attendance for Severe Weather:** Schools should stop having students come to school when the temperature is below zero.
- **Revisiting Disciplinary Transportation:** The practice of allowing suspended students to receive a van ride to school should be stopped.
- **Ensuring Fair Staff Discipline:** Schools should stop the practice of disciplining staff more than usual.

2020



Wooster City Schools

Focus Group Summary

PARENT/COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Where do you want to be in 3-5 years?
- What does success look like for Wooster City Schools?

The parent focus group provided a clear vision for the school district's direction over the next three to five years, emphasizing key areas essential for sustained success. This vision centers on educational excellence, responsible stewardship of resources, and a renewed commitment to transparency and staff support.

- **Student Success and Readiness:** Achieve high graduation rates and prepare students for multiple post-secondary paths, including both college and trades.
- **Responsible Facilities Management:** Maintain and update existing school properties rather than building new facilities, with an emphasis on sustainability and fiscal responsibility. The goal is to ensure safe, functional, and well-maintained buildings that reflect community pride.
- **Investment in Staff:** Invest in teachers through better pay, professional development, and empowerment. This includes providing high-quality training to strengthen morale and instructional quality.
- **Improved Transparency and Communication:** Commit to clearer communication of board decisions, detailing who is involved and how conclusions are reached. The group called for continuous, proactive transparency, increased community engagement, and improved communication with parents and the community.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

The parent focus groups highlighted numerous established strengths across the district, ranging from academic offerings and student support to community involvement and facility quality. These strengths demonstrate a solid foundation for student growth and well-being.

- **Academic and Career Readiness:** Strengths include the high school level math curriculum and the teaching of life skills. The district provides a wide variety of pathways, including the expansion of trade educational options, such as welding and pre-med nursing. Additionally, the Wayne County Career Center partnership offers valuable career exploration opportunities.
- **Positive School Culture and Character Development:** The district prioritizes character building in Kindergarten (including "1,000,000 acts of kindness") and throughout the student body via spirit weeks and the Lighthouse curriculum, which focuses on positive habits. This culture is formally recognized through a student recognition program at board meetings that promotes positive behavior and inclusivity.
- **Facilities and Student Support:** The quality and upkeep of the athletic facilities and the high school's interior were praised. Comprehensive student support systems, including medical, social-emotional, and food resources, were recognized as major assets.
- **Community Engagement and Activities:** The focus group appreciated the many extracurricular opportunities and the visibility of sports teams and clubs active in the community, citing the football team shoveling snow as an example. Informative "Tudor Talks" were also noted as being very appreciated.
- **Dedicated and Caring Staff:** Participants in the discussion emphasized that teachers, staff, and administrators are highly dedicated and genuinely care about students, which was described as "very evident".



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the areas you wish to improve?
- What areas require deeper planning and/or resource allocation?

While the focus groups recognized many strengths, participants also raised significant concerns regarding several key areas. These perceived weaknesses primarily revolve around issues of academic program availability, district transparency, and facilities management, contributing to a sense of community distrust.

- **Academic Program Deficiencies:** Gifted programs are perceived to have "fallen off," with the loss of the IB program, a drop in AP classes, and a lack of specific curriculum for gifted students. Additionally, there were concerns about limited after-school activities available for elementary students.
- **Lack of Transparency in Board Operations:** The Board is perceived as avoiding answering questions in public meetings, offering three minutes to speak but providing no subsequent communication. This behavior suggests a lack of transparency and a perception that decisions are made behind closed doors by the superintendent, with meetings often culminating in an unquestioned "call for a vote". Some participants expressed the feeling that their opinions are not respected or acted on.
- **Erosion of Community Trust and Facility Management:** A sense of distrust exists, fueled by the belief that a lack of maintenance for facilities like Cornerstone was intentional, rather than aging facilities, to bring about the building's demise.
- **Insufficient Community Communication and Engagement:** The community advocated for a more robust communication strategy, including a Quarterly newsletter mailed to every address and a "report card" to understand how each school is performing. Some participants that there is an over reliance on digital communication, which excludes some community members. They also requested full transparency regarding building deficiencies and upkeep, and better use of electronic signage and board meeting highlights.

CHALLENGES TO PREPARE FOR



The parent focus group provided valuable insight into key areas that the district must strategically address in the coming 3–5 years. These challenges focus on strengthening core operations, improving external relationships, and adapting to future demographic and funding realities.

- **Trust and Transparency:** A major issue is the breakdown in trust, as community members feel their input is not respected and past decisions did not align with what was communicated. Rebuilding trust requires greater transparency and responsiveness, including a commitment to maintaining neighborhood schools.
- **Communication and Community Engagement:** The district needs to address a lack of effective, two-way communication, noting an overreliance on digital methods that may exclude some families. More consistent engagement is needed, rather than just outreach during levy campaigns.
- **Financial Pressures and Facilities:** The district faces community resistance to repeated levies, or “levy fatigue,” which creates a challenge in balancing funding needs with community willingness and poses a risk to future operational funding. Additionally, school facilities were repeatedly identified as a major issue that must be addressed long-term.
- **Workforce and Enrollment:** The district must strategically prepare for two personnel-related issues:
 - Attracting and retaining quality educators through investment in teacher compensation.
 - Managing declining enrollment due to national birth rate trends.
- **Academic Opportunities and Programming:** The focus group mentioned academic offerings and opportunities as an area for improvement, which includes ensuring programs meet student needs and expectations going forward. There is also a need to avoid short-lived educational fads and focus on proven teaching methods.

2020



Wooster City Schools

Focus Group Summary

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- **What does success look like for students in Wooster City Schools?**

Based on feedback from Wooster Middle and High School students, the definition of success is holistic, extending beyond simple academic scores. For these students, success is defined by a combination of high academic performance, strong personal character, active community engagement, and a clear focus on future orientation.

- **Academic Excellence:** Students define success primarily through high scholastic achievement, which includes performing well academically, achieving high grades (A's or B's, or straight A's), doing well on assessments and tests, performing well in the academic curriculum, and maintaining good grades.
- **Character and Work Ethic:** Success is strongly tied to personal qualities, effort, and behavior. This involves being hard-working, doing your best, trying your hardest, focusing, and having good behavior and attendance. It also includes demonstrating positive character traits like being kind, communicating with others, and treating people and teachers well.
- **Future Planning and Personal Achievement:** Students connect success to forward-looking goals and personal pride. Key elements include setting and completing goals, accomplishing challenging tasks, and achieving future goals after high school, such as going to college. Success is also defined by actions that will benefit one's future and lead to a happy life.
- **Involvement and Community:** Success involves being an active member of the school and community. This is demonstrated by showing up to school, getting involved in school activities and after-school programs, participating in sports or academics, having friends, and helping others. It is also linked to living and growing in a safe and friendly environment.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

Students at Wooster Middle and High Schools express pride in the institution's commitment to safety, support, and providing diverse opportunities for academic and personal growth. The school's strengths are rooted in fostering an inclusive and positive environment that prepares students for the future.

- **Safety and Support:** The schools are valued for providing a safe and friendly environment, having good rules, and ensuring that there isn't much bullying. Students feel included and supported when they need it.
- **Opportunities and Engagement:** Students appreciate the variety of activities and different opportunities offered, noting that there is a club for everyone to express themselves and successful sports programs. The schools do a good job of getting people involved in clubs and sports.
- **Academic and Personal Development:** The schools teach life lessons, mentally challenge students, and prepare kids well for the future. They offer a variety of classes to choose from, give good tools to use and study with, and help kids be the best of themselves.
- **Positive Climate and Inclusivity:** Students feel welcomed and like they belong, noting that everyone is positive and kind to others. The schools are also praised for listening to students and respecting their right to have an opinion.
- **Logistics and Welfare:** The schools manage to keep students off their phones and provide free lunches for families in need.

START DOING?



Students at Wooster Middle and High Schools have identified several key areas where the administration could implement new policies and programs to enhance the school experience. These suggested initiatives primarily focus on improving academic programming, adjusting daily schedules, and increasing student support and involvement.

- **Academic and Program Enhancements:** Students suggest re-adding the one-year precalculus and Calculus AB class in high school, and evolving the gifted program model to be one year ahead instead of half a year, with a revised requirement. They also request starting an FFA program and implementing "Open Note" tests.
- **Scheduling and Time Management:** Students recommend starting the school day later and getting students home earlier. They also want more time in between classes and believe the schools shouldn't have so many tests in a year.
- **Student Support and Behavior:** Suggestions include helping students with disabilities more and increasing the "Best Buddies" program. They also propose a "Zero Tolerance policy" where students automatically get a detention after three punishments, with the count resetting each quarter. They also suggest having teachers check the bathrooms to stop kids from wasting time.
- **Engagement and Communication:** Students want more opportunities to go to the library and other spaces in the school, and for both middle and high school to have a Club day. They also want more variety of sports for all grades, more fun activities throughout the year, and more options at Club Zero. Additionally, they seek better communication with students, especially underclassmen, regarding coursework and opportunities, and clearer class expectations.
- **Logistics and Welfare:** Requests include giving less homework and providing more food choices at lunch. Students also request lunch seats closer together so they can talk to friends without the environment becoming too loud.

STOP DOING?



Students are asking for the elimination or modification of several existing policies and practices that they find restrictive, disruptive, or counterproductive. These concerns primarily revolve around school procedures, academic requirements, and classroom environments.

- **Restrictive Rules and Procedures:** Students want to stop restrictive policies such as making them do the Pacer test, limiting bathroom access by getting rid of hall passes, and limiting the number of hallway passes to three per semester. They also want to stop the strict hallway rules during classes.
- **Time and Schedule Constraints:** Students feel constrained by time and wish the schools would stop requiring them to get up super early for school. They also want to stop being given only five minutes between classes, requesting more hallway time. During lunch, they request the schools stop calling tables late and only giving them about five minutes to eat.
- **Academic and Program Removal:** Students urge the schools to stop removing classes, specifically mentioning gifted classes (which were turned to "plus") and other harder classes, asking for them to be kept.
- **Unfair Discipline and Monitoring:** Students want the school to stop punishing an entire group (like giving detention or silent lunch) just because one kid is loud at lunch.
- **Digital and Content Management:** Students suggest the school stop blocking game websites and stop playing music that kids recommend or isn't very appropriate.
- **Homework and Assignments:** Students want the school to stop requiring a lot of homework over the weekends and stop making them do IXL.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCE



Students offered candid feedback on their day-to-day school experiences, highlighting specific challenges and opportunities for improvement. The key concerns expressed by students relate to balancing academic demands with personal life, ensuring a safe and respectful social environment, and updating curriculum and logistics.

- **Academic Workload and Differentiation:** Students expressed that school is not always easy and mentioned the difficulty in balancing homework with time for after-school sports and clubs. They requested a balance in workload, asking for “a little less work or a decent amount of work”, while also desiring harder classes. They noted that teachers often treat all students the same despite differing learning styles.
- **Safety and Social Environment:** Students called for an end to bullying and drama, including problems with specific people and rudeness toward others with different interests. They also asked for foul language to stop at recess and stressed the need to feel safe on the bus. They suggested implementing a system to report and talk about these issues.
- **Curriculum and Equity:** A specific request was made to learn more about Black history beyond an announcement or the month of February, suggesting it should be incorporated more thoroughly into classes.
- **Facilities and Welfare:** Students requested a bigger place for indoor recess and more options for indoor recess activities. They also requested more options for Club Zero and asked school leaders to serve better food.
- **Overall Sentiment and Experience:** Reflections on the school experience acknowledged that there are ups and downs, and while it is hard at the start of a new grade, it gets easier.

2020



Wooster City Schools

Focus Group Summary

**COMMUNITY LEADER
FOCUS GROUP**

PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What do you do well?
- What is cause for celebration?
- What makes you proud?

Feedback from community leaders confirms that Wooster schools are excelling in several key areas, demonstrating a commitment to student achievement, student well-being, and holistic growth.

- **Academic Excellence and Diverse Opportunities:** There has been a growth in educational measures, with students seeming to do better. Educational opportunities exist for all kids, particularly through Career Tech programs in areas such as Welding and Medical Lab.
- **Dedicated and High-Quality Staff:** The schools have excellent, high-quality teachers who care a lot and go above and beyond for their students. This includes the teachers at Cornerstone, who are noted as being the best and understanding the tough backgrounds their students face.
- **Commitment to Student Well-being:** The administration is recognized for clearly caring about kids, even with high poverty levels in Wooster. This care is supported by the availability of more Behavior Health Support.
- **Exceptional Extracurricular Programs:** The district is known for having excellent arts and choir programs, a world-class speech and debate program, and successful sports. The district also does a nice job communicating about the drama program.



GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What are the areas you wish to improve?
- What areas require deeper planning and/or resource allocation?

The community feedback also highlighted several areas where the district can focus its efforts to better serve students and the community. These areas primarily revolve around enhancing communication, improving clarity on facility planning, and addressing specific academic and operational concerns.

- **Communication Strategy and Reach:** The community's ability to stay informed is limited by the loss of local media outlets, creating a situation where being on social media is necessary to be knowledgeable about the district. Suggestions for broader communication include a community-wide mailer, even though expensive, to share positive stories, and a simple billboard campaign.
- **Facility Planning, Levies, and Community Trust:** There is a demand for very clear and totally transparent communication regarding school facility issues, detailing the current status and actions taken. Many community members are still angry about the 1994 levy and perceived lies, which fuels current untrustworthiness. The district must clearly communicate the why for new schools, especially the shift to campus schools over neighborhood schools, and address the perception that the High School is a "palace," minimizing the perceived need at other schools.
- **Academic Programs and Resource Allocation:** Concerns include large class sizes and dismay over the loss of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. There is also a belief that resources intended for the highest performing students have been diverted to social services for the lowest performing students.
- **Community Engagement and Leadership Stability:** There is a need to rally the business community and foster a sense of community spirit ("Once a General - always a General"). Past volunteers and supporters for levy efforts have become exhausted and worn out. Furthermore, there is concern about the perceived increase in leadership turnover, citing the High School principal as an example.

2020



Wooster City Schools

Interview Summary

**COMMUNITY LEADER
INTERVIEWS**

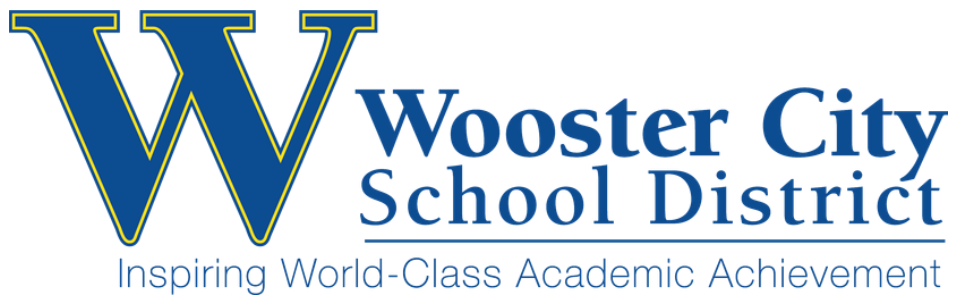
PREPARED BY :
The Impact Group

FEEDBACK SUMMARY



The following themes regarding Wooster City Schools were drawn from interviews with several key community stakeholders.

- **Diverse Academic and Extracurricular Opportunities:** The district is widely recognized for offering a broad range of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and student pathways. In particular, its ability to support high-achieving students and provide varied opportunities is viewed as a significant community asset that contributes to attracting and retaining professionals in the area.
- **Urgent Need for Facility Upgrades:** Stakeholders consistently identified aging facilities as a critical challenge, noting that some buildings are no longer conducive to modern learning environments. At the same time, strong community ties to existing schools and a sense of tradition present challenges in building consensus for new construction or major renovations.
- **Strategic Communication and Community Engagement:** There is a clear need for more concise, transparent, and proactive communication to address misinformation and better articulate the rationale behind key decisions, particularly related to facilities. Stakeholders also expressed interest in expanding opportunities for families to engage in the schools around academic experiences, in addition to extracurricular events.
- **Workforce Development and Educational Partnerships:** There is a strong push to deepen partnerships between the schools, local industries, and regional higher education institutions to develop and retain local talent. Part of this involves destigmatizing the trades and adjusting the "college-only" mindset to ensure students with different aptitudes are directed toward successful careers, such as utilizing the local career center and two-year degree programs.
- **Socioeconomic and Demographic Challenges:** The district is navigating shifting demographics, including a higher percentage of students requiring economic assistance. Meeting the needs of all students must remain a priority.
- **Embracing Future Technologies:** Looking forward, a major strategic challenge will be developing a core system of beliefs, policies, and teacher training programs regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence in the classroom.
- **Strong Support for Leadership:** The current superintendent is widely respected as a humble, caring leader whose heart is in the right place. However, some feedback suggested that district leadership needs to actively cultivate relationships with a newer generation of community "power players" to secure ongoing support for the district's strategic direction.



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