

SPPS 2033 STRATEGIC PLAN: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is critical for a successful strategic plan. SPPS has used the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) model for community engagement since 2018. For the development of SPPS 2033, an additional model for engagement was used, the accordion. Together the two models provided clarity for why the district was engaging with community as well as ensured the final plan was shaped throughout development. With the two models in place, stakeholders including the advisory taskforce's feedback could be fully utilized. Engagement was tailored to diverse groups to ensure authentic participation and meaningful feedback loops.

ACCORDION MODEL

The accordion is a two-phase model for engagement:

1. Expansion Phase- broad outreach to gather diverse perspectives through virtual meetings, district-wide surveys, and large-scale leadership sessions.
2. Compression Phase-collected data was synthesized by the Project Team and the Advisory Taskforce and/or strategy formation action teams to create, shape and revise their work.

EXPANSION #1

Expansion #1 occurred between February and March 2026. Originally designed as in-person engagements, the engagements were adjusted to virtual as the negative impact of federal ICE agents was evident across the region. Expansion #1 focused on gathering the positive and negative experiences of our stakeholders in the key areas.

Expansion #1 consisted of the following:

- Virtual Community Meetings- (February 2026)-Six sessions were held to present priority areas and gather initial input on community concerns.
- Leadership Engagement- (February -March 2026)-180 SPPS leaders (principals, directors, etc.) were consulted. They, in turn, facilitated their own focus groups reaching over 1,400 individuals.
- In-Person Community Meetings -(February -March 2026)- 115 participants reviewed draft strategy proposals to assess their feasibility and value.

In total 1,971 students, families, staff and partners shared their experiences. The data was analyzed into themes. Select results include the following:

- There is a movement toward making reading instruction a standard part of Tier 1 and teams have worked hard to fill gaps in dual language programs. However, many staff members emphasize that Tier 1 core classroom teaching is not consistently strong or effectively monitored across all classrooms. Additionally, there is concern that secondary educators are often "content experts" who lack the specific training to teach the mechanics of reading to students who are years behind and some staff worry that curriculum for English

Language Learners (ELL) is often "modified down" in rigor rather than being properly scaffolded to keep students challenged.

- There is an understanding that improvement requires "visible, systematic progress monitoring" where data is used for real-time adjustments in the classroom that both teachers and students can see.
- Literacy instruction is described as inconsistent. For example, grades 3-5 often have access to SIPPS (which staff call "awesome" and "phenomenal"), K-2 teachers report having nothing. Some staff report that teachers are "picking pieces of what to teach;" and dual language programs face a significant lack of vetted, reliable curriculum compared to English programs.
- Stakeholders note that belonging is incredibly critical to academic success and it is undermined when discipline is applied inconsistently based on a staff member's mood or racial bias (e.g., labeling Black students as "disruptive" for behaviors others call "chatty") and frequent suspensions are described as a "punishment" for families that exacerbates a student's lack of belonging and creates a "vicious cycle" of disengagement.
- Families have reported long wait times for live interpreters on the Language Line for specific languages like Karen. In some cases, parents have been told to "call back tomorrow" when a staff member who speaks their language is available. Further, some staff are reported as being "not diligent" in securing interpreters for critical meetings, such as IEP or 504 plan conferences. Last, parents who do not speak English fluently express anxiety about calling a school, fearing they will not be understood or will be "talked down to".
- Families often feel "shuffled around" or "passed around" through too many levels of navigation, leading them to choose charter schools where they feel "heard and supported" more quickly.

Results from expansion #1 were used to (1) supplement the S.O.A.R. analysis and (2) develop and refine the strategic challenges.

EXPANSION #2

Expansion #2 occurred in March. A survey was administered to families, staff and 9-12 students. The survey asked participants to share their perspectives about successful experiences they have had in SPPS, specifically around the topic areas. Nearly 900 students, families and staff provided feedback on key topics, emphasizing that education is most effective when children feel seen, heard, and valued.

A thematic analysis was conducted on the open-ended survey responses to identify and report recurring themes. Responses were categorized by stakeholder group and question, accounting for the slight variations in question based on group. Each response was reviewed within its respective

groups to understand the stakeholder's context and perspective. Select results include the following:

- Across all stakeholder groups, student dignity and belonging are rooted in the fundamental experience of being seen, heard, respected, and connected to the community. Students, parents/guardians, and staff alike emphasized that students thrive when they see their culture and identity reflected in their school environment. Central to this theme is the value of treating students as individuals and is demonstrated in small, personalized gestures, supportive relationships with an inclusive environment, and student choice.
- For staff, a sense of community and connection is anchored in their positive work experiences.
- For students specifically, success is defined by personal effort that leads to growth and support from their teachers, school staff, and families. They identify hard work, ongoing improvement/growth, and gaining self-confidence as components of achievement. To thrive, students emphasize the need for clear expectations from their teachers and acknowledgment of their hard work. They view ongoing encouragement from teachers and access to school resources as important to their success.

Results from expansion #2 were used to (1) develop strategies and objectives.

EXPANSION #3

Expansion #3 occurred in May 2026 and consisted of the following:

- Student Convening- (May 2026) - 51 high school students from across the district were brought together to provide feedback on strategy proposals using a modified consultancy protocol.
- In-Person Community Meetings (May 2026) -115 participants reviewed draft strategy proposals to assess their feasibility and value.

The convening transcriptions and the feedback from the community meeting were analyzed separately into themes. Selected results:

- We have identified the right strategic challenges, and most of our proposed strategies were well-received.
- Participants raised earnest questions about how practical strategies are, how quickly we can implement them, and who will be held accountable.
- While students liked the strategies, particularly discipline and belonging, they had substantial concerns about consistency. They noticed that the ideas are not applied the same way from school to school—or even by different adults within the same building.
- Strategies that received the most support as indicated by "green" stickers:
 - Use plain language in all communications from SPPS (n=36)
 - Provide professional development for staff on communicating with families (n=24)
 - Create learning paths for teachers (n=24)

- Utilize alternatives to suspension (n=23)
- Adopt a district wide language access plan (n=22)
- Identify successful reading teachers to mentor other teachers (n=21)
- Create a districtwide student group (n=21)
- Expand intentional recruitment efforts to attract a diverse workforce (n=21)
- Address staff mindset & beliefs (n=20)

Results were used to clarify and select final strategies for the plan.

Table. Engagement Summary

Expansion	Method	Participants	Number
1	Community Meeting	Families Staff Community members	314
	Leadership-facilitated	Families Staff Students Community members	1,657
2	Survey	9-12th students Families Staff	879
3	Community Meeting	Families Staff Community members	115
	Student Convening	9-12th grade SPPS students	51

LEADERSHIP-FACILITATED ENGAGEMENT

Leadership-facilitated engagement results reflect the following schools and departments:

Schools:

Adams
AGAPE
American Indian Magnet
Battle Creek Middle
Bridge View
Capitol Hill
Central High School
Chelsea Heights
Como Elementary
Como Sr
Creative Arts
E-STEM
Eastern Heights
Expo
Focus Beyond
Four Seasons
Frost Lake
Gateway To College
Gordon Parks
Harding
Hazel Park
The Heights
Hidden River
Highland Park Elementary
Highland Park Senior
Highwood Hills
Horace Mann
Jie Ming
Johnson
Murray
Nokomis Montessori South

Obama Middle
Obama Montessori
Online Elementary, Middle & High School
Open World Learning
Rivereast
Saint Anthony Park
Saint Paul Music Academy
Txuj Ci Lower
Txuj Ci Upper
Washington Middle
Wellstone

Departments/Offices:

Alternative Education
Communications
Community Education
Division of Schools – Assistant Superintendents
Equal Employment
Equity
Facilities
Federal Programs
Innovation
Multilingual Learning
Nutrition Services
Ombudsman and Title IX
Research Evaluation & Assessment
School Support
Security & Emergency Management
Specialized Services
Student Placement
Teaching & Learning
Transportation