



Darien
Public Schools

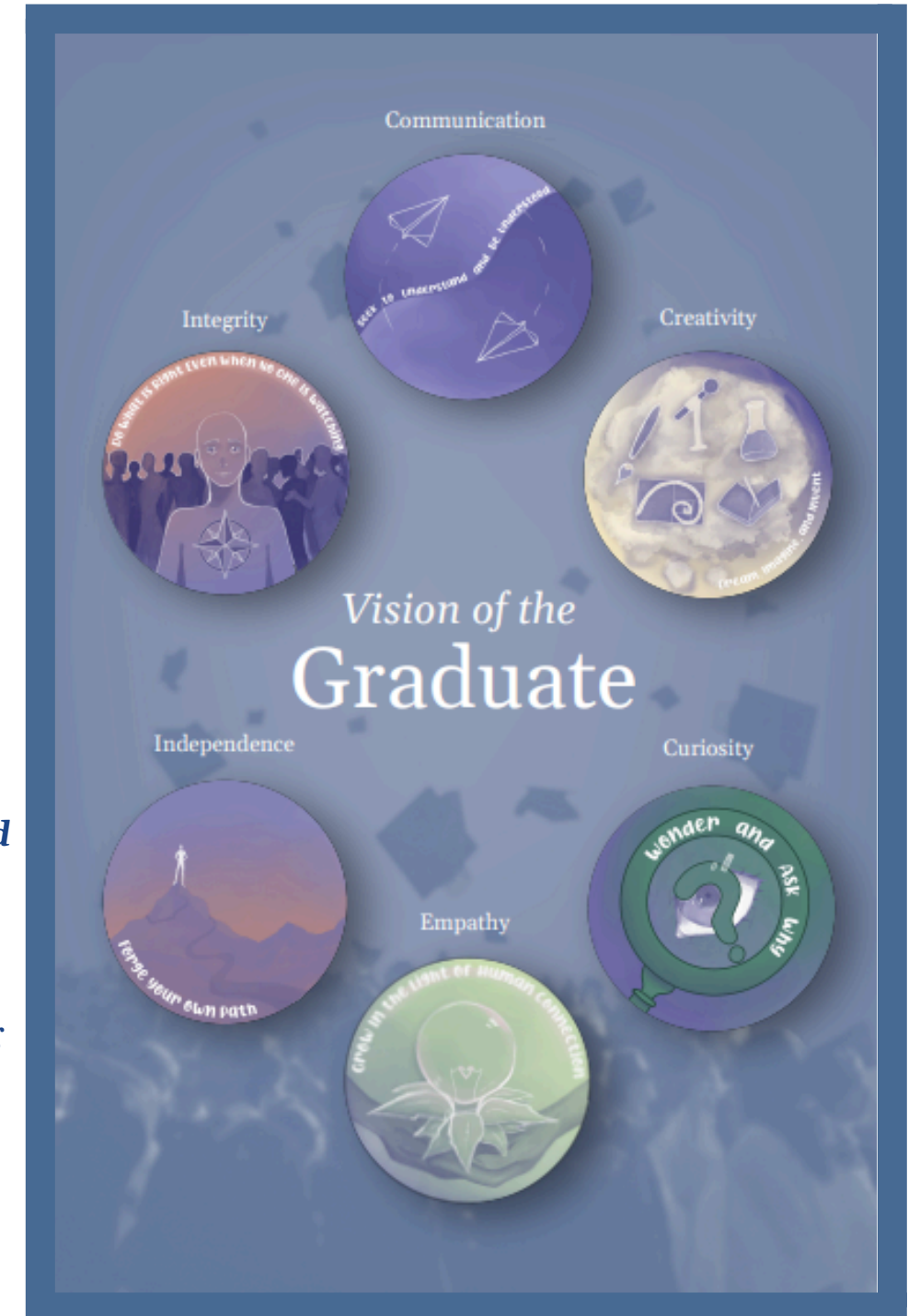
District Strategic Plan 2026-2031

Vision ~ Preparing all students today to thrive in a changing world tomorrow.

Mission ~ Inspiring a love of learning in all students so they develop as critical thinkers and innovative creators who contribute to the world with integrity and purpose beyond themselves.

Vision of the Graduate (VOG): We believe that our graduates will be forever shaped by the learning environments we provide within our school district. From these environments, our graduates will take with them an understanding that the successful pursuit of meaningful ideas requires:

Communication Creativity Curiosity Empathy Independence Integrity



Executive Summary

To guide the District’s strategic direction from 2026 through 2031, leadership engaged in an intentional process, throughout the spring of 2026, to refine and focus our Strategic Plan. Grounded in comprehensive stakeholder feedback and collaborative review, we have transitioned our framework from seven disparate goals into four cohesive Goal Areas. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the plan’s core components, governance alignment, performance metrics, strategic priorities, and notable operational considerations.

Core Architecture and Alignment

The revised Strategic Plan 2026-2031 serves as our operational compass, ensuring that every dollar, identified priority, and classroom practice moves us forward, and operationalizes our District Mission and Vision.

Vision ~ Preparing all students today to thrive in a changing world tomorrow.

Mission ~ Inspiring a love of learning in all students so they develop as critical thinkers and innovative creators who contribute to the world with integrity and purpose beyond themselves.

Integrated Design: Rather than treating our Vision of the Graduate, professional learning, and instructional technology priorities as standalone goals (as in the previous 7-goal model), they are now explicitly woven throughout all 4 goal areas to ensure systemic application.

Strategic Plan 2026-2031 Revised Goals Areas
Goal Area 1: Teaching and Learning for Student Growth, Achievement, and Well-being
Goal Area 2: Staff Recruitment and Retention Practices
Goal Area 3: Community Engagement and Communication
Goal Area 4: Strategic Fiscal Planning and Operational Efficiency

Strategic Plan Parameters

What the Strategic Plan IS	What the Strategic Plan is NOT
A Multi-Year Roadmap: Defines clear goals, measurable outcomes, and priority action areas.	NOT a list of all District activities: It targets high-priority strategic growth, not day-to-day operations.
A Systemic Alignment Framework: Aligns fiscal and operational resources to District priorities, identifies Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)/Objectives Key Results (OKRs), and guides annual school/department plans.	NOT a short-term initiative: Designed as a multi-year trajectory (2026–2031) to sustain long-term improvement.
A Living Document: Continuously monitored and adapted as District conditions and student needs evolve.	NOT a static document: It is actively reviewed and adjusted rather than sitting on a shelf.

Key Benefits for District Governance

- Provides Direction & Continuity: Sets a clear multi-year compass across Board and leadership transitions
- Aligns the System: Connects district-wide goals down to individual school/department improvement plans
- Promotes Transparency: Establishes explicit Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives Key Results (OKRs) to monitor and report progress publicly.

Why both KPIs and OKRs Matter

To effectively track our progress, each Goal Area includes both Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objectives Key Results (OKRs). While they sound similar, they serve two distinct and essential purposes:

Metric Type	Purpose	Why it matters for the Board	Example
Key Performance Indicator (KPI) (Quantifiable Metric)	Measures long-term health and baseline operational performance	Provides consistent, high-level governance oversight over time	Tier Distribution Rates: Track the baseline percentage of students requiring Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions annually across all schools
Objectives Key Results (OKRs) (Action-Oriented Strategy/Implementation)	Defines ambitious, time-bound outcomes for specific strategic shifts	Drives accountability for strategic execution and innovation	MTSS System Rollout: Objective: Build a unified PK-12 MTSS framework. Key Results: Achieve 100% staff training on intervention protocols; calibrate MTSS teams across all schools by Spring 2027

Strategic Priorities and Navigating Key Tensions

Translating the District’s Strategic Plan into action ultimately depends on how we navigate our top priorities alongside their inherent tensions and related considerations.

Top Priorities

- **Instructional Rigor & Personalization:** Deepen student engagement through flexible learning paths, targeted extension for on-track learners, and tailored scaffolded strategies for IEP and 504 plans, integrated alongside strategic classroom technology.
- **Classroom Calibration & Consistency:** Standardize grading practices, course syllabi, and IEP/504 accommodation implementations across same-grade teachers to ensure equitable classroom experiences.
- **Targeted Grade-Level Transitions:** Design structured academic, behavioral, social and personal learning bridges for critical transition points, specifically bridging the jump between Grades 5–6 and Grades 8–9.
- **Professional Growth Ecosystem:** Align staff professional development and coaching models directly with classroom implementation of the Vision of the Graduate.
- **Operational Excellence & Equity:** Ensure strategic resource allocation and staffing models directly support equitable goal attainment across all district schools.

Notable Tensions & Considerations

- **Rigor vs. Capacity:** Balancing high-ambition OKRs with sustainable staff workload and capacity.
- **Standardization vs. Flexibility:** Maintaining district-wide consistency in strategy while allowing individual schools the flexibility to meet unique student needs.

Moving from Strategy to Action

Navigating these priorities and operational considerations requires continuous alignment between Board oversight, administrative leadership, and classroom practice. Grounded in this framework, the following Strategic Plan details the comprehensive targets, performance metrics, and implementation timelines established for each of our four Goal Areas, offering a clear roadmap for sustainable success from 2026 through 2031.

Goal Area 1: Teaching and Learning for Student Growth, Achievement, and Well-being		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and resources to ensure coherence and responsive teaching	Review, Refine, and Communicate DPS Curriculum with Transparency: ● Align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and resources to ensure coherence and responsive teaching ● Review and refine curriculum, instruction, resources, and assessment practices using student performance data and feedback to maintain high-quality, responsive, standards-aligned curriculum ● Maintain curricular documents and public access using the EduPlanet21 platform Utilize Inclusive Instructional Frameworks: ● Design and adapt curriculum using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure access, engagement, and appropriate challenge for all learners ● Provide professional learning in the principles of UDL Implement Consistent Curriculum Alignment and Assessment Practices: ● Develop and implement vertically and horizontally aligned curriculum grounded in the Vision of the Graduate (VOG), using the Understanding by Design Framework (UbD) to advance content and practice standards across all subject areas ● Support the holistic development of all students by providing comprehensive arts education that promotes self-expression, creativity, and high engagement ● Establish and utilize common assessments with clear success criteria to ensure consistency, monitor progress, and inform instruction, supported through professional learning focused on assessment literacy ● Strengthen transitions across grade levels by introducing meaningful Capstone experiences in grades 5, 8, and 11 to celebrate student growth and readiness for the next academic stage ● Provide professional learning in the principles of UbD	● Observation of instruction; percent of courses/grade levels with documented and published standards and VOG aligned curriculum using UbD and UDL ● Evidence of effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) cycles; grade level and departmental teams using common formative assessments with shared success criteria ● Growth and proficiency trends on common and standardized assessments

Goal Area 1: Teaching and Learning for Student Growth, Achievement, and Well-being		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Strengthen instructional practices that develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving, preparing students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions outlined in our Vision of the Graduate (VOG)	Align Instructional Practices to a Shared Vision: ● Define and implement a shared vision for high-quality instruction emphasizing inquiry and authentic application aligned to the Vision of the Graduate (VOG) ● Calibrate expectations for instructional practices through shared "look fors" aligned to the VOG ● Strengthen instructional practices that develop critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving, preparing students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined in our Vision of the Graduate (VOG) Design Robust Experiences and Strategically Integrate Technology: ● Design robust, standards-aligned learning experiences that promote analysis, reasoning, and problem-solving ● Ensure strategic utilization of technology, including assistive technology and Artificial Intelligence, to enrich, support, and inspire teaching and learning ● Provide professional learning for evolving technology trends Cultivate Job-Embedded Learning and Professional Growth: ● Provide job-embedded professional learning, coaching cycles, and feedback aligned to District priority areas for teaching and learning ● Design robust, standards-aligned learning experiences that promote analysis, reasoning and problem-solving ● Ensure strategic utilization of technology, including assistive technology and Artificial Intelligence to enrich, support, and inspire teaching and learning; supported through professional learning for evolving technology trends ● Calibrate expectations for instructional practices through shared “look fors” aligned to VOG	● Evidence from walk-throughs, peer visits, and formal observations of practice; instructional rounds data ● Teachers engaged in job-embedded coaching cycles; evidence of high quality feedback through the Educator Growth & Support Plan ● Growth in student performance on common assessments; classroom observation data; student work
Strengthen literacy practices to develop students’ reading, writing and listening skills, fostering comprehension, critical thinking, and lifelong learning	Implement a Coherent Literacy Framework and Evidence-Based Instructional & Assessment Practices: ● Implement a coherent PK-12 literacy framework grounded in the Science of Reading and evidenced-based practices ● Provide high quality professional learning in the Science of Reading and evidenced-based literacy practices in the content areas; expand District Orton Gillingham Academy ● Design literacy tasks that integrate reading, writing and discussion to build comprehension, critical thinking, and communication skills ● Utilize common assessments and rubrics to monitor student progress and ensure instructional coherence ● Provide professional learning on high-leverage instructional strategies and assessment literacy	● Evidence of alignment in literacy priorities, practices, and expectations across grade levels; agendas, and meeting summaries ● Observations of instructional practice evidencing Science of Reading and evidence-based literacy practices, PLCs using common assessments to guide instruction; student growth trends in literacy performance

Goal Area 1: Teaching and Learning for Student Growth, Achievement, and Well-being		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Utilize a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework to provide coordinated and targeted academic, behavioral, and social and personal learning that supports all students' growth in the Vision of the Graduate	Build MTSS Infrastructure and Ensure Consistent Framework Implementation: ● Utilize a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework to provide coordinated and targeted academic, behavioral, social, and personal learning that supports all students' growth in the Vision of the Graduate ● Implement a consistent, District-wide MTSS framework with explicit structures, roles, and protocols to ensure consistency across schools ● Provide professional learning on the MTSS framework Leverage Data Cycles and Enhance Assessment Literacy: ● Implement a comprehensive data cycle (building and District level) using universal screeners and other assessment measures to identify needs, select responsive strategies, and monitor student progress ● Provide professional learning focused on assessment literacy and data analysis Provide Tiered Interventions and Monitor Progress: ● Provide tiered academic, behavioral, and social and personal learning supports aligned to student data and delivered through coordinated, collaborative team structures ● Provide professional learning on evidence-based interventions and differentiated instructional practices ● Monitor effectiveness of interventions and adjust supports based on demonstrated student progress through the use of the data platform, EduClimber ● Provide professional learning in the use of the data platform and progress monitoring practices	● Completed and systematically adopted District MTSS Handbook ● MTSS Agendas, document review ● Students screened within established windows and identified for Tier 2/Tier 3 supports ● Evidence of multiple data sources to select and adjust research-based interventions ● Students meeting growth targets within Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions ● Students successfully exiting or moving between tiers based on progress monitoring data

Goal Area 1: Teaching and Learning for Student Growth, Achievement, and Well-being		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Develop capacity to leverage data (data literacy). Implement systemic, structured PLCs that support calibration, collaborative problem-solving, and responsive teaching	Implement Systemic PLCs and Standardize Collaborative Protocols: ● Implement systemic, structured PLCs that support calibration, collaborative problem-solving, and responsive teaching ● Initiate structured PLC protocols focused on analyzing student work and multiple data sources to identify trends and inform instruction, supported through professional learning on PLC processes and data inquiry ● Use PLC time for responsive instructional planning, practice, calibration, and reflection Enhance Data Literacy and Responsive Teaching: ● Develop capacity to leverage and understand data (data literacy) ● Build educator capacity in data literacy and responsive instructional practices, through targeted professional learning in data analysis and instructional response ● Use common formative assessments to guide responsive instructional planning and intervention Strengthen Community and Family Engagement: ● Strengthen communication with families regarding student progress and learning goals	● Documentation of consistent structured PLC protocols to analyze student work and assessment data ● Evidence of consistency in performance expectations, calibrated scoring practices, and use of multiple data sources to inform instruction ● Evidence of increased communication with families about student progress ● Growth trends in student performance on common formative and summative assessments
Expand opportunities for student voice, choice and engagement through purposeful learning experiences that prepare students for college, career, and lifelong success	Cultivate Inquiry-Based Learning, Student Ownership, and Future Readiness: ● Design learning experiences that provide meaningful student choice in content, process, and demonstration of learning ● Integrate project and inquiry-based learning within curricula to deepen critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving ● Implement structures for student reflection, goal setting, and ownership of learning, supporting them in monitoring progress and growth over time ● Facilitate professional learning focused on student goal setting and self-assessment practices ● Provide authentic learning experiences through the implementation of Student Success Plans connected to college, career, and the Vision of the Graduate (e.g. industry recognized credits, internships) ● Enrich student engagement and choice through the intentional offering of inclusive co-curricular clubs and activities across all grades	● Evidence of courses implementing project/inquiry-based learning ● Completed Student Success Plans ● Growth trends in numbers of students participating in internship and community-based learning experiences

Goal Area 2: Staff Recruitment and Retention Practices		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Improve recruitment and retention practices	Build Strategic Recruitment and Robust Talent Pipelines: ● Communicate the District Mission/Vision/VOG in advertising, recruiting, and hiring process practices ● Attend and host job fairs and explore additional recruiting platforms to broaden and strengthen candidate pools ● Expand partnerships to grow internships and pipeline opportunities Implement Efficient and Standardized Hiring Systems: ● Increase standardization and rigor of hiring protocols, including screening criteria, interview structures, and timelines ● Explore emerging technologies and identify opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the hiring process Maximize Employee Retention and Ensure Onboarding Excellence: ● Strengthen onboarding procedures to ensure consistent and supportive entry experiences across departments/schools ● Implement credit-bearing in-service for professional learning and salary advancement ● Utilize insights from the Climate Survey to proactively improve staff morale and sense of belonging ● Continue to utilize exit interviews to gather information about areas for improvement Ensure Bargaining Unit Contracts are Strategically Aligned: ● Analyze impact of changes to the bargaining unit contracts and explore additional non-contract strategies ● Leadership Opportunities (teacher leader positions and leadership academy) ● Explore ways to recognize teacher growth and achievement	● Increase visibility of Mission/Vision/ VOG in hiring process ● Vacancy rates ● Percent/number of staff participating in credit-bearing professional learning for salary advancement ● Feedback re: professional learning offerings ● Attendance documentation, communications of District hosted job fair/off-site job fairs ● District Welcome & Orientation feedback ● Number of active partnerships (colleges, certification programs); District interns hired ● Staff Satisfaction- Climate Survey data ● Retention rates; review of turnover data (at 1, 3, and 5 years of service)

Goal Area 3: Community Engagement and Communication		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Enhance Community Engagement and Communication	Be available and generous with information: ● Establish clear, consistent, and accessible communication channels among all stakeholders ● Publish a weekly community newsletter, and monthly school spotlight (Darien Difference) to provide timely updates and highlights ● Host Superintendent Fireside Chats and Superintendent Book Clubs to foster dialogue and deeper engagement ● Ensure curriculum/student progress/assessment data are clearly communicated and accessible to families ● Deploy a multi-channel communication approach (e.g. guides, workshops) to provide transparent Eduplanet21 curriculum access, foster open communication, and strengthen parent partnerships ● Manage effective emergency communication systems that are timely, clear and actionable ● Offer Parent Universities to build understanding of curriculum, student development and District priorities ● Broadcast and archive Board of Education meetings to ensure transparency and accessibility Celebrate what make DPS unique: ● Highlight student and staff accomplishments at Board of Education meetings, through District communications, and social media ● Provide opportunities for students to share their learning with families and the broader community Listen and apply data learnings via (CSDE) required school climate survey: ● Share survey results and communicate responsive improvement strategies	● Families receiving District communication across platforms ● Website analytics ● Attendance at District-sponsored events ● Participation rates at student learning showcases ● Viewership for Board of Education meetings ● Communication artifacts regarding Eduplanet 21 access and updates ● Key District documents updated on website ● Climate Survey participation/growth trends in stakeholder satisfaction
Align District’s guiding documents and communications with its mission, vision, and the Vision of the Graduate (VOG) to foster coherence	Be consistent to foster clarity: ● Align District communications (website/publications/messaging) to reflect the Mission, Vision, and VOG ● Enhance and maintain the District website as a centralized, user-friendly hub for aligned information and resources ● Streamline how curriculum, instructional priorities, and District efforts are communicated across schools Institute communication protocols to ensure coherence and alignment across all schools/departments: ● Publish and maintain Board policies and key documents in accessible formats to support transparency and alignment	● Evidence of District communications reflecting the Mission/Vision/and/or VOG ● Growth trends indicating clear and consistent messaging ● Growth trends in staff reporting clarity/alignment between District priorities and their work
Build Inclusive and Responsive Partnerships	Listen, Connect, and Partner: ● Be accessible by establishing mechanisms to gather input from students, families, staff, and community members ● Establish a partner mindset by exploring opportunities with community organizations to expand engagement and learning opportunities/internships ● Be open-minded by inviting family and community engagement ● Be responsive and informed: monitor and analyze engagement data to identify gaps and inform responsive strategies	● Documented feedback/ participation rates ● Active partnerships with community organizations ● Climate survey data indicating positive trends in stakeholder engagement

Goal Area 4: Strategic Fiscal Planning and Operational Efficiency		
Key Focus Areas	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) /Objectives Key Results (OKRs)
Utilize Strategic Fiscal Planning and Resource Alignment	Execute Strategic Fiscal Planning and Advance Financial Transparency: ● Align annual budget development process to the District Strategic Plan, Mission/Vision/ VOG ● Monitor, review, and reallocate resources based on student needs, program effectiveness, and strategic priorities ● Ensure timely communication of budget priorities and development processes to stakeholders	● Explicit budget alignment to Strategic Plan (Operating Standards) ● Budget development communications
Strengthen Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness	Optimize Operational Efficiency and Strengthen Systems Management ● Monitor bus routing and scheduling ensuring services are aligned with student needs and programming ● Maintain reliable communication systems for families regarding transportation updates ● Provide high quality, nutritious, and accessible meal services, improving efficiency and operational consistency ● Optimize the Student Information System (SIS), Aspen, to improve data, accessibility, and decision-making ● Manage a secure, reliable, and dynamic technology infrastructure to support District operations ● Improve system uptime, security, and user support services	● Timely communications to families regarding bussing ● Student/family/staff satisfaction with operational systems (Transportation/Food Service/Technology) survey-based ● SIS (Aspen) data ● Improvement in department processes
Provide Safe, Secure, and Supportive Learning Environments	Safe, Secure, & Sustainable Environments ● Ensure the District facilities are safe, well-maintained environments that support teaching and learning ● Utilize facility condition study results to establish a long-term capital plan ● Develop and approve Educational Specifications for Middlesex Middle School Building Project ● Develop and implement long-term capital improvement and preventative maintenance planning ● Identify and implement best practices in emergency preparedness and safety planning	● Completed DHS Facility Conditions Study ● Completed 10 year facility study ● Educational Specifications Approved/MMS Committee ● Increased school security training (Altaris) ● Stakeholder perception of safety- survey
Ensure Responsible Resource Stewardship and Sustainability	Resource Stewardship & Financial Transparency ● Monitor cost effectiveness of programs, resources, and services ● Utilize strong internal controls, audit preparedness, and compliance with financial policies and regulations ● Maintain transparent financial reporting practices for the Board and community stakeholders ● Pursue grants, partnerships, and alternative funding sources to supplement District resources ● Identify and implement best practices in environmental compliance and sustainability	● Annual audit results ● Annual Budget process ● Monthly financial reports to Board of Education ● Grant awards

Strategic Plan Glossary and Reference Section

Core Frameworks & Visioning Terms	
District Mission	A District Mission Statement is a concise statement that explains why the school district exists and what it is committed to doing daily for all students. It describes the district’s purpose, core work, and commitments to learners and the community. The mission of the Darien Public School’s: <i>Inspiring a love of learning in all students so they develop as critical thinkers and innovative creators who contribute to the world with integrity and purpose beyond themselves.</i>
District Vision	A district Vision Statement is a clear, aspirational description of the future the school District is trying to create. The vision of the Darien Public Schools is <i>Preparing all students today to thrive in a changing world tomorrow.</i>
Educator Growth & Support Plan	The District Educator Growth & Support Plan is a formalized evaluation and professional development system approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and used to provide feedback, calibrate instructional expectations, and support educator performance.
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	Quantifiable metrics and data points are used to track progress, elevate success, and measure the effectiveness of the Strategic Plan’s actions and strategies applied over time. KPIs tell an organization how it is performing.
Objectives Key Results (OKRs)	Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) is a goal setting framework that helps organizations translate strategy into measurable action. OKRs tell what an organization is trying to accomplish and what needs to change.
Vision of the Graduate (VOG)	This Vision of the Graduate is a central framework outlining the core attributes, skills, and dispositions, such as Communication, Creativity, Curiosity, Empathy, Independence, and Integrity that the District strives to cultivate in every learner.

Curriculum & Instruction Terms	
Advanced Placement (AP)	A national program administered by the College Board that offers rigorous, college-level coursework and standardized exams to high school students, providing opportunities to earn college credit and advanced postsecondary standing.
Assessment Literacy	Assessment literacy refers to an educator's understanding of how to select, design, analyze, and use various assessment methods and assessment data to accurately measure and support student learning.
Capstone Experience	A culminating learning experience in which students apply the knowledge, skills, and disposition they've developed over time to solve a real world problem demonstrating mastery.
Common Formative Assessment (CFA)	A team-designed, frequent, and ungraded benchmark used by teachers during the learning process to check for understanding, monitor progress, and immediately adjust instruction.
English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS)	A set of academic standards that define what students should know and be able to do in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language from kindergarten through grade 12. They were developed to ensure students graduate ready for college, career, and civic life.

Mathematics Common Core State Standards	A consistent, aligned set of national academic benchmarks for kindergarten through 12th grade that define the specific mathematical skills and knowledge students must master in numbers, operations, algebra, geometry, and data analysis. These standards are designed to support students in developing strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The framework focuses on a logical progression of mathematical skills, including building strong foundational arithmetic skills in early elementary, analyzing complex equations across algebraic structures, reasoning with evidence-based problem-solving, and mastering the quantitative mechanics and collaborative critical thinking skills necessary for success in the 21st century.
Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)	A consistent, aligned set of national academic benchmarks for kindergarten through 12th grade that define the specific scientific skills and knowledge students must master in physical sciences, life sciences, earth and space sciences, and engineering design. The framework focuses on a logical progression of scientific skills, including building strong foundational observation skills in early elementary, analyzing complex systems across natural phenomena, arguing with evidence-based investigations, and mastering the technological mechanics and collaborative problem-solving skills necessary for success in the 21st century.
Orton-Gillingham (OG)	A highly structured, explicit, and multisensory approach to literacy instruction designed to teach the foundational connections between letters and sounds to support reading, writing, and spelling. The framework focuses on a logical, sequential progression of literacy skills, breaking language down into its smallest grammatical and phonetic units. By integrating multiple sensory modalities, visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic, the approach systematically builds phonemic awareness and decoding skills, making it an essential intervention tool for students with reading challenges such as dyslexia, as well as a highly effective baseline for all early learners.
Parent University	A district-sponsored informational workshop or learning session designed to help families understand the curriculum, student development milestones, and overarching District priorities.
Professional Development (PD)	Formal, scheduled events, such as workshops, seminars, or conferences, designed to deliver general knowledge, mandates, or new concepts to educators, typically taking place outside the active instructional setting.
Professional Learning (PL)/ Job-embedded Professional Learning (JEPL)	Ongoing learning that is integrated directly into teachers' daily classroom practice through collaborative, data-driven strategies, such as coaching, co-teaching, and PLCs, allowing educators to immediately apply and refine new skills in real time.
Professional Learning Community (PLCs)	A systemic, collaborative team of educators who regularly meet to review student data, analyze student work, share instructional strategies, and calibrate performance expectations to improve teaching and student learning outcomes.
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	A standardized College Board exam administered to all Connecticut public school 11th graders as the state-mandated assessment for English Language Arts and mathematics accountability.
Science of Reading (SOR)	A comprehensive body of multidisciplinary, evidence-based research that explains how children learn to read and identifies the most effective methods

	for explicit, systematic literacy instruction. The framework focuses on a logical progression of literacy skills, structured around the five essential pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. By explicitly connecting language comprehension and word recognition, this approach ensures all classrooms utilize proven instructional methods.
Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	An interdisciplinary educational approach that integrates science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to build real-world problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA)	Connecticut’s annual standardized assessment for grades 3–8 that measures student proficiency and growth in English Language Arts and mathematics aligned to state standards.
Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP)	A standardized, computer-adaptive test that measures real-world language proficiency in Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking to benchmark language acquisition and award Seals of Biliteracy.
Student Success Plans (SSPs)	A state-mandated, individualized, and student-driven framework required for all Connecticut public school students grades 6-12 to address their unique needs, interests, and postsecondary goals. A Student Success Plan is designed to promote holistic student growth, structured around three core pillars: Academic Development, Career Development, and Social, Personal, and Physical Development. The SSP integrates goal-setting, interest inventories, and Capstone experiences to help students design their educational pathways and stay connected to the school community.
Understanding by Design (UbD)	A backward design curriculum framework in which educators start by identifying the final learning goals (what students should know, understand and be able to do) and then work backward using the content and practice standards to design assessments and daily lessons.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	A teaching approach aimed at meeting the needs of every student, ensuring appropriate challenges and providing flexible ways for students to access material, engage with lessons, and demonstrate what they know.
Universal Screeners	A brief, standardized assessment administered to all students multiple times a year to proactively identify individuals who may need targeted academic or behavioral interventions.

Student & Staff Support Systems / Legal Terms	
Altaris	The specialized school safety and emergency preparedness consulting firm utilized by the district to train staff and audit facility security protocols.
Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)	A national educational research organization that created the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to design inclusive curricula and reduce learning barriers for students with diverse learning needs.
Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	A confidential, district-sponsored program offering professional counseling, resources, and support services to help employees manage personal, family, and workplace challenges.
Extended School Year (ESY)	Specialized instruction and related services provided to eligible students with disabilities beyond the normal school year at no cost to parents. Determined

	through the IEP process, ESY prevents severe skill regression during long breaks to help students maintain progress on their individual goals.
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)	A federal law protecting the privacy of student educational records by granting parents and eligible students access to records and restricting unauthorized third-party disclosures.
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	A legal framework granting the public access to records maintained by public bodies, ensuring transparency while protecting exempt or confidential information.
Idea	The instructional program designated for students who are identified as gifted through a formal District process.
Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	A legally binding, personalized learning plan developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that outlines specific special education services, accommodations, and specialized instruction a student requires to make meaningful academic progress. A collaborative team, including parents, teachers, and specialists creates an IEP, following a formal comprehensive evaluation. Unlike a 504 plan, which only provides accommodations to access the standard environment, an IEP modifies <i>what</i> or <i>how</i> the student is taught through specialized instruction. It establishes strictly measurable annual learning goals, outlines individual progress tracking, and determines necessary related services (such as speech, occupational, or physical therapy).
Mulit-lingual Learner (ML)	An asset-based CSDE term for students who speak or interact with languages in addition to English and receive specialized English language development support to achieve academic success and language proficiency.
Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	A comprehensive framework designed to provide all students equitable access to high-quality instruction. MTSS is how we ensure whole child development, academic, social and personal learning, behavioral health, and attendance, for all learners. MTSS aligns our district’s work and resources to support continuous growth and success for every student. The MTSS framework organizes support into three tiers: high-quality instruction for all learners, targeted support for some, and intensive support for a few. MTSS uses data in a collaborative problem-solving process to identify student needs, monitor progress, and adjust supports over time. By leveraging multiple sources of information, educators make informed, strategic decisions to ensure every student receives the right support at the right time.
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)	An independent regional accrediting organization that evaluates and certifies K–12 schools to ensure high standards of educational quality and continuous institutional improvement.
Planning and Placement Team (PPT)	A state-mandated team of educators, specialists, administrators, and parents responsible for determining special education eligibility and services in Connecticut schools. The PPT collaboratively designs, evaluates, and revises each eligible student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to support their academic and developmental progress.
Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC)	A statutory, collaborative committee of district educators and administrators charged by the CSDE with developing, implementing, and evaluating the district's educator evaluation system and annual professional learning plan.
Restorative Practices (RP)	Evidence-based strategies that address nonviolent behavioral infractions by

	repairing harm, maintaining accountability, and preserving student learning engagement, a framework statutorily required for all Connecticut public school districts pursuant to C.G.S. § 10-222jj.
Section 504 Accommodation Plan	A legally binding blueprint designed to provide students with documented physical or mental impairments equal access to the general education curriculum and school environment. Authorized under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, these plans eliminate environmental and learning barriers by providing specific accommodations (such as extended testing time, preferential seating, or health accommodations). Unlike an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a 504 plan provides accommodations within the regular classroom setting without altering the fundamental curriculum or requiring specialized instruction.
Self Assessment of MTSS (SAM)	A structured reflection tool used by school leadership teams to evaluate the fidelity of their Multi-Tiered System of Supports and guide data-driven action planning.
Special Education Teacher (SET)	A certified teacher who provides specialized instruction, adaptations, and support services to students with disabilities to ensure access to the general curriculum and progress toward Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

Technology and Data Platforms	
Aspen/ Student Information System (SIS)	The District’s core database that is used for managing operational student data including scheduling, attendance, grading, reporting and transportation designations.
Diligent Community	A cloud-based platform where the Board of Education publishes policies, agendas, meeting packets, and key public records to maintain structural transparency.
EduClimber	An interactive data platform utilized within the MTSS framework to track student performance data, screeners, and interventions, allowing educators to monitor student growth over time.
EduPlanet21	A centralized digital curriculum platform used by District educators to document, map, align, and publish curriculum guidelines for public transparency.

Local Government Bodies	
Board of Education (BOE)	The official governing body of a public school district, responsible for establishing local education policies, approving budgets, and hiring the superintendent to oversee district operations.
Board of Finance (BOF)	The municipal governing body responsible for setting tax rates and approving local operating and capital budgets, including the public school district's budget.
CSDE	The state agency that oversees public K–12 education in Connecticut by implementing educational policies, setting academic standards, and supporting local school districts.
Council of Darien School Parents (CDSP)	The district-wide umbrella leadership body for Darien’s school Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) that advocates for families and fosters collaboration between parents, school administrators, and the Board of Education.

DAEG	A non-profit parent organization dedicated to advocating for high-quality educational programming for gifted students while supporting educational excellence across all Darien Public Schools. DAEG collaborates with district leadership, school administrators, and families to support Darien's gifted education program (Idea) and enrich the district's broader academic environment.
Darien Administrators' Association (DAA)	The certified bargaining organization that represents school and district-level administrators in the Darien Public School system.
Darien Educators' Association (DEA)	The professional union that represents certified teachers and instructional specialists in the Darien Public Schools system.
Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC)	A regional public agency in Connecticut that provides shared, cost-effective educational programs, specialized student supports, and professional learning to local school districts.
Representative Town Meeting- Education (RTM-ED)	The standing legislative committee within Darien's RTM that reviews Board of Education budget proposals, capital projects, and educational initiatives to advise the full town meeting on appropriations.
Representative Town Meeting- Finance & Budget (RTM-F&B)	The standing RTM legislative committee responsible for reviewing town and Board of Education budgets, capital requests, and financial policies to advise the full town meeting on appropriations.
Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC)	A volunteer parent advisory group that collaborates with school and district leaders to support families, share information, and advocate for continuous improvement in district special education services.