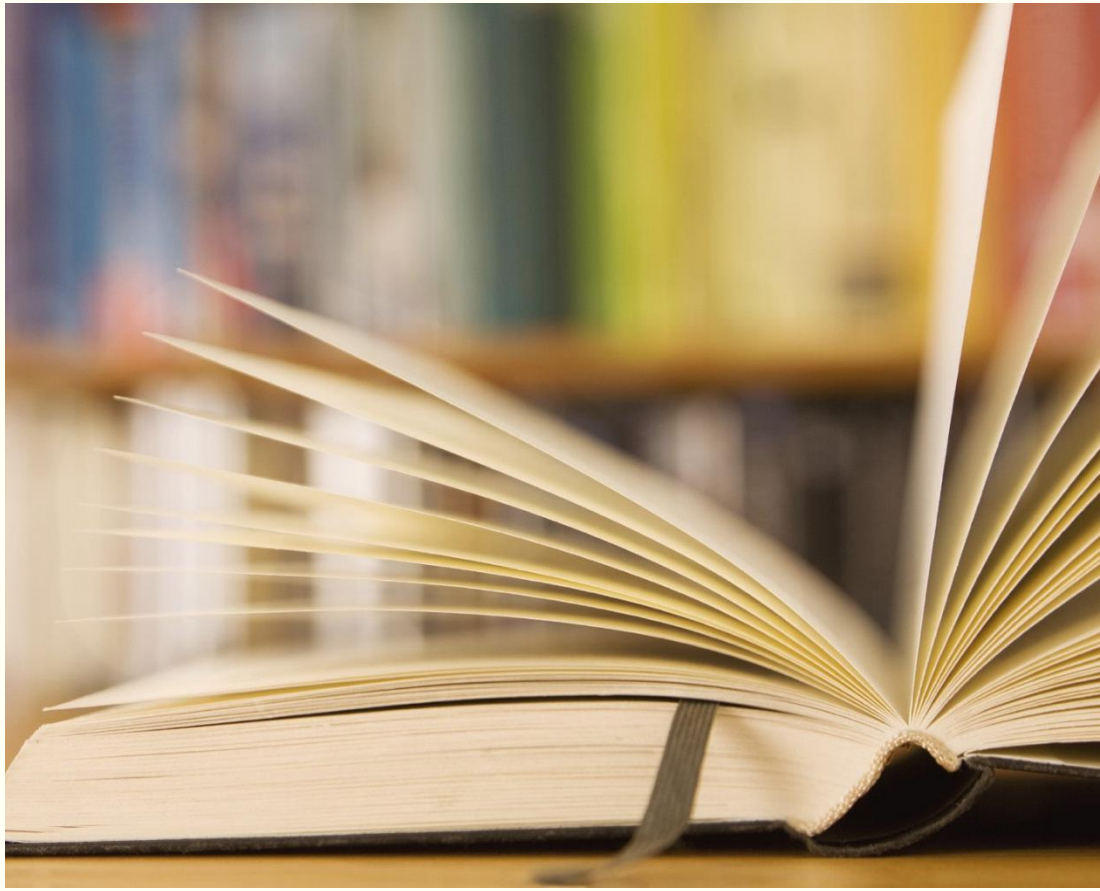
LAKEWOOD FORWARD:

A Five-Year Strategic Plan for Fiscal Sustainability, Responsible Governance, and Student Success

2026-2031

September 23, 2026 BOE Meeting



Executive Summary

The Lakewood School District operates within a unique demographic and financial structure unlike any other district in the State of New Jersey. A significant portion of the District's expenditures are mandated costs outside of local control, particularly in the areas of:

- Approximately 160+ Nonpublic Schools (Federal & State Grants)
- Transportation (Approximately 4,000 Public School Students & 55,000+ Nonpublic School Students)
- Special Education
- Charter School Tuition
- State Aid Loan Repayment

Major Cost Drivers

The Lakewood School District's financial structure is significantly affected by costs that are mandated by statute and regulation and are not subject to local control.

These mandated costs total approximately $192.5 million and contribute to a projected State aid advance of approximately $132.8 million for the 2026–2027 school year.

2026-2027 Budget Mandates	Projected Costs
Charter School	$13,699,830
State Aid Loan Repayment	$37,418,106
Nonpublic Transportation Public Transportation	$31,800,000 $15,038,842
Out-of-District Tuition & Settlements	$94,054,887
State Monitors (4)	$500,000.00
Total Mandated Costs	**$192,511,665**
Projected Loan for SY 2026-2027	**$132,817,491**

Source: Adopted Budget, April 29, 2026

Lakewood Public Schools serve a diverse student population with significant academic, linguistic, economic, and developmental needs, including:

- High levels of economic disadvantage
- Multilingual Learners
- Students requiring Special Education Services
- Students requiring intensive academic and behavioral supports.

Addressing these needs requires sustained instructional support, targeted interventions, and access to appropriate student services.



The Five-Year Plan outlines a collaborative pathway to:

- Stabilize District finances
- Expand high-quality in-district programs
- Improve student achievement
- Strengthen governance and operational oversight
- Reduce costs within the District's direct control

Approval Timeline

- April 29 and May 27, 2026: Approved by the Board of Education (Under Advisement by State Monitor)
- August 24, 2026: Approved by the State Monitor

The Five-Year Strategic Plan is a living document that will be reviewed regularly and updated as needed to reflect the District's evolving priorities, progress, and needs.

Strategic Priorities

- Strategic Priority 1 – Special Education Cost Management
- Strategic Priority 2 – Nonpublic Special Education and Supplemental Programs
- Strategic Priority 3 – Transportation Efficiency
- Strategic Priority 4 - Organizational Effectiveness and Administrative Reorganization
- Strategic Priority 5 – Improving Student Achievement
- Strategic Priority 6 – Legal Cost Containment

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Special Education Cost Management

Special Education Cost Management

Expanding In-District Programs to Manage Special Education Costs

More students can receive appropriate services in Lakewood Public Schools. The District has expanded its continuum of special education programs so students can learn in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their IEPs.

How this saves funds: When an in-district program meets a student's needs, the District can reduce its reliance on more costly out-of-district placements and associated transportation.

- **The District currently provides a continuum of in-district special education programs designed to address students' individual needs in the least restrictive environment, as determined by each student's IEP team.**
  - Preschool Disabled
  - In-Class Resource (ICR)
  - Resource Pullout
  - Team Teaching
  - Autism Programs
  - Multiple Disabilities Program (MD)
  - Learning & Language Disabilities Program (LLD)
  - Secondary Special Classes (SCP)

Programs are located at:

- Spruce Street School
- Oak Street School
- Clifton Avenue Grade School
- Lakewood Middle School
- Lakewood High School

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Strengthen Nonpublic Special Education Programs

Strengthening Nonpublic Special Education and Supplemental Programs

Lakewood serves one of the largest nonpublic school populations in the United States, which significantly impacts district operations.

Services provided to nonpublic school students are mandated under Federal and State law including, but not limited to:

Federally Funded Programs:

- IDEA Services
- Title I, II, III & IV Program Services

State Funded Programs:

- Chapter 192/193 Services
- NP Textbook Program
- NP Security Program
- NP Nursing Program
- NP Technology Program

Five Year Targets:

- Increase the number of eligible students served.
- Support a coordinated continuum of nonpublic special education services.
- Promote efficient use of federal funding.
- Ensure equitable access to services for eligible students.
- Increase appropriate access, fiscal accountability, and program oversight.

Nonpublic IDEA Programs for the 2026-2027 School Year

- **Nonpublic Supplemental Service Program -NPSSP (Stars)**
  - 9 Preschool Classes & 2 Full Day Kindergarten Classes
- **Center for Lakewood's Academic Supplemental Services (CLASS)**
  - 16 Classes
  - Grades 1-8 (Pending funding and student need)

Nonpublic IDEA Programs for the 2026-2027 School Year

- **In Class Resource Program (ICRP)**
  - **30 ICRP Classes**
- **MEKOR**
  - 15 Classes – Grades 1-12 (Pending funding and student need)

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Transportation Efficiency, Safety, and Fiscal Accountability

Transportation Efficiency, Safety, and Fiscal Accountability

Strengthen the timely collection, processing, and verification of B6T transportation forms to support accurate Aid-in-Lieu payments and compliance with State requirements.

Strategic Objectives:

- Improve the efficiency of public school transportation routes.
- Reduce transportation costs through route optimization
- Strengthen safety oversight and regulatory compliance
- Ensure timely collection and verification of Nonpublic B6T forms (March 15)
- Improve transportation data management and reporting.

Five-Year Targets:

- Annual review of 100% of the public school transportation routes.
- Document and validate transportation efficiencies and cost savings annually.
- Timely processing of 100% of completed B6T forms received within established deadlines.
- Eligibility and documentation verification for Aid-in-Lieu approvals.
- Annual verification of required safety and inspection records for 100% of vehicles serving public school routes.
- Monthly administrative and Board reporting beginning in September 2026.
- Updated transportation policies, procedures, and performance targets based on the five-year evaluation.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

Organizational Effectiveness – Administrative Reorganization Plan

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Administrative Reorganization: Reducing Costs While Supporting Schools

The District has streamlined its administrative structure to reduce costs, clarify responsibilities, and maintain instructional leadership, regulatory compliance, and essential student services.

Result: A leaner administrative structure focused on directing resources toward students and classrooms.

- Eliminated three central office administrative positions and four assistant principal positions.
- Reassigned curriculum supervisors to better align their responsibilities with school and District needs.
- Established a Director of Curriculum and Instruction to coordinate instructional leadership.
- Closed **Piner, Ella G. Clarke, and LECC** as of June 30, 2025, as part of the District's broader reorganization

Five-Year Targets:

- Align leadership and support structures with the District’s current footprint, compliance responsibilities, and instructional priorities.
- Maintain a structure that is fiscally sustainable and capable of effectively delivering, overseeing, and improving essential services.
- Consolidate responsibilities where appropriate.
- Align staffing with school configuration and operational needs.
- Protect instructional oversight and mandated services.
- Clarify roles, reporting relationships, and accountability.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – 5

Improving Student Achievement

Improving Student Achievement

Goal

Improve academic outcomes for all students through aligned curriculum, strong instructional practices, and data-informed decision-making.

Curriculum Alignment

Continue to ensure all curriculum is fully aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (**NJSLS**).

Formative Assessment Framework

Continue to implement districtwide universal screening and formative assessments every four to six weeks to monitor student progress.

Data-Informed Decision Making

Continue to strengthen Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on:

Student performance data
Targeted interventions
Differentiated instruction

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

- Continue to expand academic and behavioral intervention supports.

Five-Year Targets

- A cumulative increase of at least 10 percentage points in students meeting or exceeding District ELA and Mathematics benchmarks;
- A reduction of at least 20% in K–2 students performing below or well below foundational literacy benchmarks; Universal-screening participation of at least 95% of eligible students during each screening period;
- Documented progress monitoring and intervention for at least 95% of students identified as requiring additional support;

Five-Year Targets (Continued)

- Measurable academic growth for at least 80% of students participating in targeted interventions;
- At least 90% implementation fidelity for core curricular, assessment, and intervention programs;
- Monthly collaborative data meetings in 100% of schools;
- Documented intervention plans in EduClimber for at least 95% of students receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions;
- A reduction of at least 10% in identified achievement gaps for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and other student groups;
- Annual curriculum, assessment, and data-use professional development for at least 90% of applicable instructional staff; and
- Annual evaluation of major instructional and intervention programs using student outcomes, implementation fidelity, participation, and cost-effectiveness data.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY – 6

Legal Cost Containment

Legal Cost Containment

Goal

Reduce legal expenditures through proactive compliance, early problem-solving, and coordinated management of legal services while ensuring compliance with federal and State law and protecting students' educational rights.

Strategic Approach

Use a coordinated legal-services model to improve efficiency and reduce unnecessary reliance on outside counsel

Utilize in-house counsel to manage legal strategy and coordinate District legal matters

Engage outside counsel, in coordination with in-house counsel, for due process hearings, complex litigation, and specialized legal matters when necessary

The Five-Year Strategic Plan Aligns the District's Priorities with:

- 2026-2027 Superintendent's Goals
- 2026-2027 Board of Education Goals
- 2026-2027 NJQSAC District Improvement Plan (DIP)
- 2026-2027 District Professional Development Plan

This alignment establishes a unified Districtwide focus, supports measurable accountability, and promotes coordinated implementation of the District's strategic priorities.

Questions & Community Feedback

Your Voice Matters

A 5-Year Strategic Plan feedback survey will be shared with:

- Parents and guardians
- Students
- District staff
- Posted on the District Website

Survey Link: https://forms.gle/tJhW36pxYTVE68VS7

Your feedback will help guide the continued implementation and future updates of the Five-Year Strategic Plan.

We encourage everyone to participate and share their perspectives.


Thank you