



# Creating a Strategic Plan for the Upper Township School District

## Mission Statement

To prepare all learners for 21st Century challenges via comprehensive curricular and instructional programs, aligned with New Jersey Student Learning Standards, and to create an academic infrastructure which fosters and nurtures a love of learning; enabling each stakeholder to actualize his/her individual potential.

## Session 1

### What are the Strengths, Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities of the Upper Township School District?

On January 24, 2024, Upper Township School District administrators, Board of Education members, staff, parents, and community members, a total of twenty-two (22), came together to initiate the strategic planning for the school district. The meeting began with a welcome and introduction by Superintendent Ms. Allison Pessolano. Ms. Pessolano presented the current "State of the Schools" report, and Michelle Kennedy from the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) explained the strategic planning process.

We reviewed the consensus process utilized in strategic planning. The topic for the evening focused on identifying district strengths and challenges. Participants gathered in assigned groups, three (3) groups in total, and engaged in brainstorming the district's strengths and challenges. After group discussion, each group identified their consensus points of the "Top 10" strengths/achievements and challenges/opportunities. Each group's outcomes were shared with the entire group, while the group's spokesperson reported out. All participants participated in the reporting and then, as a large group, identified "Common Themes" that had occurred throughout the small group outcomes.

The following information is a summary of the work of the small groups. As discussed with the meeting participants, all consensus points are recorded and posted on the district website to share the group work during the strategic planning process.

## Small Group Consensus: Strengths/Achievements & Challenges/Opportunities

**Table 1**

Strengths	Challenges
Staff- high retention rate	S2 - loss of state aid
Students- active learners	Attendance - chronic absenteeism
Parents- engaged partners	Diversity- servicing ESL, economic diversity
Community that values education	Labor market
Board of Education ensures best interest of staff and students	Facility / classroom space
PTO works collaboratively	Maintaining reasonable class size
Extra curriculars- wide variety of activities	Ways to get parents more involved/engaged
Budget priority to maintain existing programs, and resources for our school community	Transportation- schedule issues, confined by tiered bussing, causes issues staff time
Priority to budget facility upkeep and maintenance	
Access to technology and committed to upgrades	

**Table 2**

Strengths	Challenges
High Expectations	Attendance - especially since COVID
Amazing staff	Detachment from parents
Family/community involvement	Lack of diversity
Family Activities	Budget
Summer Enrichment	Bussing
Resources and Technology	School hours
Lack of serious discipline	Competitive salaries/benefits
PTO is strong	
Our demographic	

**Table 3**

Strengths	Challenges
Dedicated staff	Lack of volunteers at PTO events
Staff professional development	Parents disconnect after curricular standard changes
School security	Are we all working towards the same purpose/goal? parent/staff/board
Family support/involvement	Low participation in MS activities/school spirit
Students do community service	Lack of diversity
Technology	Student attendance-chronic absenteeism
High academically achieving	Parent attendance at informational meetings
	Lack of vertical articulation between schools-big moment transitions
	Ability to provide time to staff to fulfill their contractual duties outside of instructional time
	Is our information getting out to the community? - bring in firefighters

Following each group reporting out on their consensus points, identifiable through the large group discussion were the following **common themes**:

<b>Common Theme Strengths</b>	<b>Common Theme Challenges</b>
Access to technology and committed to upgrades and resources	Ability to provide time to staff to fulfill their contractual duties outside of instructional time
Amazing and dedicated staff (high retention rate)	Budget/S2 – loss of state aid
Community that values education	Bussing- schedule issues, confined by tiered bussing, causes issues staff time
Community involvement	Competitive salaries/benefits
Family activities	Detachment from parents/attendance at informational meetings/ways to get them more involved/engaged
Family support/involvement	Getting information out to the community (bring in fire fighters)
PTO is strong and works collaboratively	Labor market
	Lack of Diversity (servicing ESL/economic)
	Lack of vertical articulation between schools – big moment transitions
	School hours
	Student attendance (chronic/especially since Covid)

**The second strategic planning session is scheduled for:  
Wednesday, February 21, 2024, at 6:30 pm,  
Upper Township Middle School Library**

Meetings #2 and #3 are scheduled for 1.5 hours. Meetings start and end promptly.

During the February 21 meeting, we will create a shared vision together for the future of the Upper Township School District. We will discuss our aspirations and expectations for our students and school district.

Please join us. Bring a friend! Everyone is welcome!  
We look forward to seeing you!

Please RSVP by visiting the districts website  
<https://www.upperschools.org/domain/410>  
*Walk-ins are welcome!*

*Thank you!*