

Lenox Public Schools Strategic Plan 2021-2026

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I. History (how we got here)

The Lenox Public Schools first went through a strategic planning process during the 1983-84 school year under the direction of Superintendent **Roland Miller**. This was in response to declining enrollment both in the district as well as in elective classes at the Lenox Memorial High School and a need to determine the direction the schools should take in the immediate future.

In 2012, the Lenox School Committee initiated the next strategic planning process at the urging of Committee member **Joanne Huntley Magee**. Her vision was to capture the elements that made Lenox a strong school district and consciously plan how to maintain and improve upon the district's strengths. The Committee engaged the services of PCG (Professional Consulting Group) in June of 2013 to assist in development of the plan. This process began under Superintendent **Edward Costa** in 2013 and concluded in 2015 with then-Superintendent **Tim Lee**. **Dr. Stephen Kutno** from PCG was the leader of the project. The development of the plan included surveys of students, faculty and staff, parents, community members, and business leaders as well as numerous focus groups. A voluminous amount of data was synthesized down to seventeen key areas. These were then reorganized into eight themes:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ● Academic diversity of program | ● Educational resources |
| ● Academic instruction | ● Financial stability |
| ● Character education/safe schools | ● Leadership |
| ● Communication | ● Professional development |

These eight themes were further reduced to the five that became the framework of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. They are *Leadership, School Finance, School Culture, Academic Excellence, and Professionalism*. Each of these areas was further fleshed out by local subcommittees and with Dr. Stephen Kutno's assistance, strategies and action steps, along with interim benchmarks, were developed for each area and this became the strategic plan.

The School Committee decided in the Spring of 2019 to begin work on a successor document that would become the Lenox Public Schools Strategic Plan 2021-2026. The process and milestones of this effort are what are described in the sections that follow.

II. Strategic Planning Committee

In the Spring of 2019, School Committee Chairman **Robert Vaughan** noted that the time had come to begin the planning process that would result in the successor strategic plan. Committee members **Molly Elliot** and **Christine Mauro** agreed to be on the School Committee Strategic Planning Subcommittee that would lead this effort. This subcommittee decided to follow generally the process used by PCG in their 2013-2015 work, recognizing that the most difficult aspect of the work would be the analysis of the responses as well as analyzing input from other documents. Initially the subcommittee consisted of the three School Committee members and then-Superintendent Kim Merrick. Four current parents and four townspeople were added in June, 2019, and then three faculty members were added when school started for the 2019-20 school year.

The Strategic Planning Committee included the following members:

School Committee	Community	Parents	Faculty
Molly Elliot	Tom Romeo	Oren Cass	Ben Weaver
Christine Mauro	Gigi Yablonsky	Robert Fuster	Mike Jackson
Bob Vaughan	Veronica Fenton	Kim Davis	Peter Starenko
	David Fisher	Erika Baluk-Shepardson	

III. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan Outcomes

The **Lenox Public Schools Strategic Plan 2015-2020** included five major goal areas and several strategies under each. They are:

Leadership - *Enact a respectful model of leadership that encourages broad participation of faculty, students, and community.*

- Communication Plan
- Leadership conduct and development program
- Team-building
- Leadership accountability and responsibility

Commentary: *Through the five years of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, the Lenox Public Schools have had three superintendents - one for four years (three during the five-years of the plan), one for a year plus, and an interim superintendent who finished out one year and is currently bridging the gap until the next superintendent is hired in SY20-21.*

The Morris Elementary School also had two principals during this time frame. While one principal established professional learning communities and empowered faculty involvement in decision-making, this dynamic changed to less-interactive faculty meeting where comments were largely dismissed. Very little team building took place over the final three years of the past strategic plan.

The Lenox Public Schools has implemented several methods for communicating with parents, students, and the larger community. For the past several years, an automated message system is used to relay important information via email as well as phone calls. Notwithstanding some criticism that this system was overused a couple of years ago, the system is proven an effective tool for distributing both emergency and informational messages in a timely fashion.

Additionally, Morris Elementary, Lenox Memorial Middle and High School and the district's administrative websites are continuously updated and enhanced to provide the most current information as well as portals to a variety of pertinent online resources, downloadable forms, and e-based educational programs and materials.

The Superintendent who completed the writing of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and administered its first three years did much to build a strong leadership team during his tenure, hiring two new elementary principals and building a strong administrative team, which included more leadership positions on that team.

Professionalism - Empower staff through professional growth opportunities.

- Create and maintain a positive professional learning environment
- Engender shared leadership and collective responsibility
- Consistently plan Professional Development aligned with school and staff needs
- Be an employer of choice

Commentary: *During the first years of the Strategic Plan, professional learning communities were established at the Morris School which gave teachers increased opportunity to interact with colleagues around important instructional matters. In the past three years much of the impetus for the PLCs was minimized by the school-level administration.*

The number of distributed leadership positions in the two contracts that were negotiated during this strategic plan grew to approximately 26 positions - this includes department heads, team leaders, head teacher, data coaches, athletic director, and several other positions.

The Lenox School Committee made a commitment to enhance the salaries of paraprofessionals during collective bargaining to be able to retain these employees; in recent years prior to these negotiations, several employees went to neighboring districts. As for the professional staff, the Lenox Public Schools has been viewed as a top employer in the Berkshires in recent years and has attracted an outstanding teaching staff as a result. As a result we have been able to retain a number of Unit C employees.

Academic Excellence - Provide an outstanding academic program that delivers strong foundational knowledge and the necessary supports for each student to explore his or her individual interests and talents.

- Maintain and improve academic performance
- Develop students' individual talents, interests, and goals
- Increase LPS enrollment

Commentary: *The success of the Lenox Public Schools has been widely publicized over the past five years - the Morris Elementary School was awarded National Blue Ribbon School status in*

2016 and Lenox Memorial Middle and High School have consistently been named a Gold Medal School by U.S. News and World Report. Academic outcomes as measured by Massachusetts DESE have placed Morris at the 85%ile (2019 testing) and LMMHS at the 92%ile (2019 testing). The Commonwealth's accountability system has changed several times during the duration of the Strategic Plan and will likely be on hold for 2020-21 due to the temporary cessation of MCAS testing because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools from March 16, 2020, until the remainder of the year.

The broad range of academic offerings, as well as clubs, robotics, quiz team, athletics, and a robust performing arts curriculum, has allowed students to pursue and develop their talents. Faculty are available to advise and assist students in all of these activities.

Enrollment has been steady, enhanced by the addition of students enrolled from other districts under the school choice program, and has exceeded the guideline of at least 735 students (90% of optimal K-12 capacity of 817). K-12 enrollment for each of the five years was 718, 753, 731, 733, and 750. Additionally, the number of students who have choiced out of Lenox has decreased from 54 in 2014-15 to 30 in 2018-19.

School Culture - *Cultivate an environment in which students have a sense of belonging and responsibility.*

- Build a positive learning environment
- Promote community and school service
- Convey pride

Commentary: *Lenox Memorial Middle and High School has spent much time highlighting the **Six Pillars of Character - Character Counts** program which emphasizes six important traits - **Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship** - that LMMHS would like its students to model. LMMHS had a number of students trained by the Anti-Defamation League in the "World of Difference" program who then did monthly lessons with 8th grade students to assist with understanding and appreciation regarding racism and other forms of diversity like LGBTQ+ individuals. Middle School meeting was implemented during the 2018-19 school year. The entire middle school met with the Assistant Principal, Principal and MS Guidance Counselor to talk weekly. Topics ranged from happiness and kindness to treating each other well and bullying. Each week an email went home to families with topics of the meeting so families could have follow-up discussions at home.*

Similarly, the Morris Elementary School has done work with the Responsive Classroom exemplified by morning and afternoon greetings, morning meetings to connect, build community, set the tone for the day, solve problems, and increase participation. There has also been a concentrated effort to build a growth mindset among the students, recognizing that the process of learning is different from child to child. The staff models behaviors by using positive words and tone to promote active learning, a sense of community and self-discipline to achieve goals. The Second Step curriculum is used throughout the year to promote social-emotional learning.

At LMMHS the Assistant Principal annually distributes an impressive list of activities undertaken by the National Honor Society and National Art Honor Society, various clubs and sports teams, and individual grades that are service-oriented aimed at helping with Kids' Place, the homeless, nursing homes, the food pantry, and other community-oriented organizations. Each athletic team tries to complete at least one community service project during their season including cleaning

the courts/fields, sock donations, canned food drives, police/fire celebration night, military appreciation night and cancer awareness activities.

Community service has been a long-standing endeavor of the schools; at Morris there is the Service Club which engages fourth- and fifth-grade students in assisting around the building and there are recognition ceremonies that honor our veterans and first responders as well as numerous special events throughout the school year.

Both schools have an ongoing commitment to instilling in the students the importance of giving of themselves, of giving back to the community. There are also numerous opportunities for recognition of outstanding accomplishments in athletics, academics, performing arts, and extracurricular activities.

Morris is characterized by much positive reinforcement and praise for all students for their individual strengths and showing their ability to progress at their own pace. The staff is creative and uses the beautiful environment to promote learning, connecting and pride, recognizes student accomplishments equally as well as acknowledging outside accomplishments, and offers kids opportunities to voice what they are proud of and what they are working towards.

However, the sense of belonging that is so important to all of our students has been elusive for our BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color) students; it was pointed out in the Spring of 2020 how many of our current and former students had experienced racism in one form or another, even as early as Kindergarten in one case. This is concerning and runs counter to a commitment to equity in education much less the goal of a community that is welcoming and supportive of diversity as an educational imperative. The events of Spring 2020 from which the Black Lives Matter movement rose to national profile only amplifies the need to prioritize the goals of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in education at all levels across the district.

Finance - *Provide consistent evidence of financial stewardship.*

- Deliver budgets that demonstrate value
- Increase enrollment
- Communicate finances

Commentary: *Over the five-year period, the LPS Superintendents and administrators have prepared zero-based budgets that have consistently met the guidelines established by the Town Manager and have provided the needed resources for the schools to operate effectively and efficiently with the needs of the students in mind.*

Enrollment has been steady, enhanced by the addition of students enrolled from other districts under the school choice program, and has exceeded the guideline of at least 735 students (90% of optimal K-12 capacity of 817). K-12 enrollment for each of the five years was 718, 753, 731, 733, and 750.

Financial transparency was a goal of the plan and in each year the Preliminary Budget was posted on the LPS website; all budget meetings were held in public session and a formal public Budget Hearing was held in March each year prior to the School Committee approval of the budget.

IV. Process and Tasks

The subcommittee established the following tasks and timetables:

Vision of Tasks and Timeline:

- Survey development (July/August to be ready for September)
- Forums - several (10-15 participants each - October)
- Analysis of data (through January)
- Identify themes and strategies (January-May)
- Completion (May 1)

This group reviewed the survey questions used in 2013 and made several edits and deletions as well as inserting some new questions. [The full survey appears in **Appendix A.**] This survey was ready for rollout in late September and was kept open for responses through November 21, 2019. Ultimately, 216 surveys were completed. [Survey results without the open-response questions are included in **Appendix B.**]

Throughout the Fall and early Winter, the LPS Strategic Planning Subcommittee determined that it would be useful to establish coherence between what the committee was attempting to accomplish along with several key documents – NEASC Self-Study (prepared for LMMHS accreditation visit in December, 2019), the Endicott Survey of faculty and students (Data used for the NEASC study), and later on the results of the NEASC visit, as well as the MA DESE Commissioner’s vision outlined in *Our Way Forward*.

When COVID-19 emerged as a major international problem and shut Massachusetts schools on March 16, 2020, strategic planning continued but became secondary to planning for how to deliver education both remotely and in hybrid fashion as it became obvious that schools were not going to be able to reopen in normal fashion in August, 2020. The strategic planning process continued through July, 2020, and then resumed in late October; of necessity, the original timetables had to be revised.

Strengths Identified through Survey

There were a number of strengths that were highlighted, often frequently, in the narrative comments from the survey. Most of these are areas which we should maintain or build on our strong current position.

Highlights include:

- high academic rigor and the fostering of critical thinking
- personalized instruction, including the ability to offer assistance to students who need additional support
- high levels of academic achievement
- exceptional educational program, offering a great diversity of classes and programs
- small class sizes that allow for individualized attention and the ability to look at children independently and help meet their social-emotional and educational needs in flexible and creative ways
- teachers and administrators really know the students
- happy and engaged students
- strong visual and performing arts programming
- the Shakespeare program
- trust put in teachers to provide a rich and meaningful curriculum

- a real balance provided with strong academics, outstanding arts, excellent athletic programs, and a wide variety of extracurricular opportunities
- opportunities for students to develop as whole person and pursue individual interests
- opportunities to be involved in social action activities
- a positive learning environment with high-quality teaching and support staff
- creating a school that kids want to come to
- personal, inclusive, and welcoming staff
- a safe and nurturing environment for the students
- making sure that every student has a strong connection with an adult or two in the building and that all students have a sense of belonging
- provides an inclusive environment that presents a lot of opportunities to learn across the spectrum
- making a real effort at making children feel respected and in having respect for each other
- we encourage kindness every day
- teachers seem very accessible to parents in terms of communication, problem solving, and supporting individual student needs
- for the vast majority of the teaching population, the system has quality educators that care and want to make a difference in students' lives
- educators who are truly invested in their students' growth
- the district's commitment to excellence and the hiring of great teachers who are interested and knowledgeable in their fields
- outstanding guidance department
- transparency in communication
- connection between faculty and students is amazing
- accepting school choice students
- parents value communication from teachers and the opportunity to know what the kids are doing in the classroom so they can support learning and engagement at home
- our teachers and our students - I am grateful for the passion that both groups bring to the school system
- taking the time to assess kids with learning difficulties and reinforce where they lack
- collaboration with local talent and groups develops a strong community and mentor youth toward their goals

V. Demographic Concerns

An important component of data gathering for the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan was the compilation of much financial, demographic, and achievement data in the Capacity Assessment. The Capacity Assessment is a tool created by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to assist districts in evaluating their ability to remain independent or pursue regionalization. In the Executive Summary of the Capacity Assessment, principal author Joanne Huntley Magee noted *“One capacity component - declining enrollment - clearly emerges as the biggest challenge facing the district.”* While Lenox has been able to maintain an enrollment in the 750 +/- range over the five years of that plan, stable enrollment continues to be a concern and, as such, deserves a separate section in this new plan.

The Strategic Planning Committee also studied the question of enrollment level. The town’s demographic trends have led to a declining school-age population and thus fewer resident students. From 2009 to 2019, K-12 resident student enrollment declined by 26% (from 605 to 447), with more than 90% of that decline occurring from 2009 to 2014. To offset this decline, choice enrollment rose from 24% to 40%, leading to an overall enrollment decline of only 6% (from 797 to 751), all of which occurred prior to 2014. From 2014 to 2019, overall enrollment increased by 6%. Encouragingly, recent declines in resident enrollment are not a result of declining incoming cohorts, but rather of large graduating cohorts that entered the system more than a decade ago. Incoming resident enrollment appears steady and, at its current level, with the addition of choice students, more than adequate to support an independent district.

The committee’s demographic analysis focused on resident students, whose enrollment level is driven by demographic factors, unlike choice students, whose enrollment level is driven by school committee policy.

- From 2010 to 2014, resident kindergarten enrollment averaged 31 students per year, but resident senior graduation averaged 54 students per year, for an annual end-point loss of 23 students. The district also experienced during this time period an average net loss of 6 students entering or exiting grades 1-12 through the year. As a result, the town lost approximately 150 resident students over the period.
- By comparison, from 2015 to 2019, resident kindergarten enrollment declined slightly to 28 students per year, while resident senior graduation declined to just 37 students per year, reducing the annual end-point loss of 9 students. Concurrently, the district experienced an average net gain of 8 students annually (those entering or exiting through the year in grades 1-12), mostly cancelling out the end-point losses. Thus, even though the number of incoming kindergartners was slightly lower during 2015–2019 than during 2010–2014, the town lost only 10 students rather than 150.

Unfortunately there is not an unlimited number of students to draw from. Many of the gains noted above were an encouraging but non-repeatable result of a greater percentage of town residents choosing to enroll in the district. Whereas 19% of resident students enrolled outside the district (*public school choice-out or private school*) in 2014 (105 students), that figure fell to just 12% in 2018 (60 students). From 2010-2015 the Lenox Public Schools enrolled on average 83.4% of all resident students; from 2015-2020, the LPS enrolled 86.3% of its students. The town should be proud that it has retained a greater percentage of students into its school system, but that trend cannot continue indefinitely—at some point, there would be no more students enrolled out-of-district to win back.

Looking ahead to the 2021–26 period, we already know roughly how many students will graduate each year because they are the students already enrolled in our 7th through 11th grades. Those are large

cohorts, with an average size of 40 resident students, reflecting the high kindergarten enrollment levels 8 to 12 years ago and the strong mid-point gains of recent years. Assuming continued but small mid-point gains, the district will see an enrollment decline as a result, even if kindergarten enrollment remains steady at its five-year average of 27 students (the district expects that number in Fall 2020).

With incoming cohorts in the 25 to 30 student range and small mid-point gains, the district's resident enrollment will stabilize near 400 students (as compared to 447 in 2019). The district's total enrollment would then depend on the percentage of choice students admitted; at the current 40% level, total enrollment would be approximately 660 students. While that figure is substantially below the average enrollment of approximately 820 from 2000 to 2009, it is important to be aware that those years actually represented a "baby boom" anomaly. By comparison, enrollment in the 1990s averaged 750 and in the 1980s (for years with data available, 1982–1989) averaged 680.

The committee draws several conclusions from this analysis:

1. There is little evidence of ongoing demographic decline or cause for concern in the coming five years about the district's sustainability
 - a. LPS saw a change in average incoming cohort from 2009 to 2014, whose effect will ripple through the enrollment data throughout the 2021–25 period, even with steady incoming enrollment
 - b. LPS has in part counteracted that effect by attracting and retaining a greater share of residents and should strive to continue doing so
 - c. Current enrollment and birth trends both point toward a steady-state with incoming resident K cohorts of 25 to 28 students rising to graduating classes of ~30
2. To monitor the situation for changes in trend and potential causes for concern, LPS should model enrollment based on annual mid-point (students entering or exiting grades 1-12 during a school year) and end-point changes
 - a. Rather than focus on annual enrollment fluctuations, which are partly dictated by cohorts that have already been in the system for years, analysis should focus on trends in incoming resident cohorts and mid-point gains and losses; the superintendent's annual report to the school committee should highlight these figures
 - b. Incoming kindergarten cohorts of 22 – 28 students (avg > 24) with no mid-point gains or losses will allow the district to maintain its existing model; causes for concern would be:
 - i. 3-year average Kindergarten enrollment of 24 or fewer resident students
 - ii. Consistent losses of students in grades 1-12 during a school year (which may be addressed with policy)
3. Assuming resident enrollment of 350–500, LPS can choose to have two-section grades with 10–20% choice or three-section grades with 35–45% choice
 - a. Survey data indicates residents are much less concerned about % choice than maintaining curricular variety and options, which would argue in favor of maintaining current choice levels

Source: Annual enrollment data as of October 1 for each school year per the Superintendent's Report to the School Committee. Data for 2010-11 is drawn from the preliminary FY12 budget (presented to the School Committee on January 24, 2011). The 2011-12 report does not separate Resident from Choice enrollment so this split is imputed from splits in the prior and following years.

VI. Emerging Themes

The Strategic Planning Subcommittee reviewed all of the written responses to the Lenox Public Schools Strategic Plan 2021-2025 Survey and articulated the following themes from that work:

EMERGING THEMES: REVIEW

- what stands out
- areas to maintain
 1. Strong academic focus w/ rigorous curriculum
 2. **High-quality teachers**
 3. Small class size
 4. **Academic independence**
 5. *Arts offerings*
 6. *Extra-curricular opportunities/enrichment and after-school programs*
 7. *Maintain independent district*
 8. *Maintain 40% cap on school-choice*
- areas to improve
 1. **More social-emotional supports: personnel and services**
 2. Additional licensed nurse
 3. More space, renovated spaces to fit the academic program and greatly reduce teacher room changes
 4. Upgrade facilities and expand space, including classrooms for all faculty and ADA/IDEA compliance in all aspects of the physical plant
 5. **Add early library hours @ LMMHS**
 6. *Market school and town to young families*
 7. **Improve discipline and increase student supervision**
 8. **Focus on conflict resolution – between students, staff, and students and staff**
 9. **Improve administrators' collaboration and transparency**
 10. **Seek superintendent tenure longevity**
 11. **Seek superintendent commitment to delivering LSC and community priorities**
 12. Implement initiatives and changes generated by students (doing more than just listening to student voices)
 13. **Increase staff influence over PD decisions, choices**
 14. **Allot more collaboration time for staff**
 15. **Standardize a more practical staff evaluation program**
 16. Implement state-approved civics curriculum
 17. Streamline, upgrade district computing technologies, esp. grading/grade reporting
 18. **Orientation of new students entering via choice or otherwise outside of traditional entry points - perhaps use Zoom or other technology**
 19. **Implement and create practices for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as cultural competence throughout the district (Administration, faculty, staff, students and parents/community). This should be a multi-year, multi-level practice with an accountability structure.**
- areas for further exploration

1. Formal student advisory program
2. Less disruptive scheduling of supplementary ELL instruction (MS)
3. **More heterogeneous HS grouping**
4. Later school-day start time at LMMHS
5. **Block scheduling at LMMHS**
6. Review and revision of school- & district-wide guiding principles, grading, and reporting practices
7. Emphasis on “deeper learning” and “authentic, independent” student work and activities
8. Skills and dispositions rather than just expertise
9. Apprenticeship model for learning
10. Alternative ways of delivering instruction in light of COVID-19 experience
11. Student engagement
12. **Access and equity**

VII. Organization and Strategies Developed

In reviewing the responses to the survey there are four major categories under which most of the themes from the survey fit.

Human Resources Development and Financial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Talent and Human Resources● Professional Development Opportunities● Financial Resources	Operations <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Governance and Leadership● Safety and Security● External Relations● Facilities● Information Resources and Technology● Crisis management for delivering instruction	Learning Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Social and Emotional Wellbeing● School Culture● Physical and Emotional Safety● Culture that cultivates best of everyone	Academic Journey <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Curriculum and Instruction● Measurement of Outcomes● Academic Supports● Array and Equity of Opportunities● Reaching all Learners
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The Strategic Planning Subcommittee divided into groups to develop strategies that might have the greatest impact in improving the educational and social-emotional experiences for all students and all participants in the educational journey.

COVID-19 Overriding Concerns

When the Strategic Plan development process began in Fall 2019 COVID-19 was unknown. Since COVID-19 first appeared in January of 2020 with schools mandated to close in Massachusetts and most of the country on March 16, 2020, educational settings, modes of instruction, and the necessity of conducting instruction daily through the use of technology in every home put significant pressures on all components of the system. As a result, the plan to complete the 2019-2020 school year via online remote learning was hurriedly prepared with varying degrees of success.

In June, 2020, preparations for the 2020-2021 school year focused on instructional improvements including intensive training for faculty and staff on the use of the instructional platform Canvas, and lengthy negotiations on what remote and hybrid modes of instruction might look like as well as the conditions necessary for a safe return to the school buildings in terms of air ventilation and appropriate spacing to maximize student and staff safety. To assist, the state DESE allowed schools to cut the instructional year by ten days so that staff received the professional development necessary to effectively engage in remote instruction. Additionally, attention was directed at getting technology into every home in an equitable fashion to ensure that all students would be able to access instruction. When hybrid instruction began on October 5, 2020, many families and students opted to stay fully remote; thus, in virtually every classroom in Lenox teachers were teaching synchronously to in-person learners as well as to remote learners.

As of Winter 2020-2021, several concerns have been raised both locally and nationally as to the major effects on students and families as a result of this disruption in learning to date and what will likely be at least sixteen months total before anything resembling normalcy returns.

Three major concerns have emerged that require responses:

1. How prevalent are learning gaps/delays that may have occurred during the COVID-19 period and how long will it take for students to recover from these gaps and delays and how can the schools assist in this recovery
 - Develop the plan for measuring extent of learning gaps and implementing actions for addressing it
2. To what degree have student, family, and faculty mental health issues been exacerbated during this pandemic in terms not limited to fear of contracting the virus, increased isolation from peers, intense amounts of screen time, loss of family income, increased food insecurities, and other stressors and what will be necessary at the school level to ameliorate these issues
 - Establish protocols, structures and actions so that the schools may deal with student, family, and faculty mental health difficulties
3. What will be necessary for a successful reintegration of students into full in-person learning
 - Assist in improving online and/or hybrid instruction, if it is determined they will continue

Additionally, however, we must recognize that out of this pandemic and the need to dramatically alter how instruction would take place there were positives as well:

- The entire instructional faculty as well as most support staff became adept in offering remote instruction as well as hybrid in-person instruction with synchronous remote learners
- Students' access to the technology necessary to be remote learners generally went smoothly
- The use of Canvas and Zoom platforms became second nature to most of the school community
- Some students found greater connections with peers through online learning
- Flexibility and adaptability to changes in modes of instruction often occurred with short notice and were largely successful

Strategies Developed

Human Resources Development and Financial Support

Professional Development

The ultimate goal of effective professional development is to deliver stronger outcomes for students, both academically and social-emotionally. However, there are natural tensions that exist in the process of delivering PD in the education setting because of the varying priorities of federal (DOE) and state (DESE) education departments, the local school committee and administrators, and the school staff itself. The priorities might center on PD required by DESE or mandated by the Commonwealth to address very specific topics usually done on the first day or two of in-service or at any early PD day during the year (e.g., restraint training); the requirement for every professional educator to accumulate an average of 30 Professional Development Points (PDPs) in their content area and/or pedagogy each year (rigorous graduate-level work or equivalent); the need to offer PD on new school- or district- driven curriculum, or social-emotional learning initiatives; and the need to address ad hoc issues as they arise (e.g., cultural sensitivity). Additionally, elementary and secondary teachers, teachers in specialized subject areas, and secondary teachers who may teach just one subject area also have divergent priorities. As a result, satisfying the myriad stakeholders and demands is not an easy task, as what is important to one entity does not always resonate with the others. Results from the 2019 Strategic Plan Survey to Faculty and Staff show that 55% of them strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement “Professional development offered by the Lenox Public Schools matches staff learning needs.” (28/51 respondents)

To assist in the management of these inherent tensions, the goal of the local School Committee and administration is to align its strategic plan or set of district goals with the annual School Improvement Plan (SIP) that is developed by each individual school in that district, at the same time taking into account all state and federal and ad-hoc priorities. Subsequently, as each teacher develops his/her professional growth and student growth goals for each year (in collaboration with his/her supervisor), they would either address a personal growth need for the teacher or align to one or more of the goals of the SIP. In this way, as PD is developed, there is coherence across the goals of the federal and state departments, district, individual schools, and the teaching staff, as well as connections to DESE’s requirement for ongoing rigorous PD that assists teachers in reaching their recertification needs. Lastly, there should be connections between all of these activities and the yearly teacher evaluation process, itself a rigorous and time-consuming enterprise.

Theory of Action

If professional development opportunities are collaboratively developed by a committee of faculty and administrators, with the dual goals of meeting district and school needs while providing differentiated professional development as appropriate to meet faculty needs, then PD will be meaningful and useful to teachers and there will be a coherence between district and school goals and the PD provided to meet them.

Strategy

Increase staff influence in professional development decisions by establishing a joint faculty-administration committee to evaluate district and school goals and plan annual PD in a manner that best meets both those goals as well as the ongoing needs of teachers for staying current with content and pedagogy.

Action Steps

- Establish professional development committee
- Evaluate district and school professional development needs
- Participate in county-wide PD as appropriate and be active in planning of this PD
- Determine how best to deliver and differentiate PD and with what frequency
- Establish PD calendar that includes both mandated as well as PD Committee-determined offerings
- Deliver PD and continually evaluate its impact
- Revisit topics

[N.B. – It is often better to offer one or two topics in depth for a year or more if they have emerged as critical to the mission rather than having something different for each PD day]

Operations

Leadership

During the data collection phase of the previous Strategic Plan (2013) much criticism was expressed of leadership, especially that it was top-down and acted in isolation, and little attempt was ever made to implement ideas and proposals generated by other stakeholders. The reproach was levelled at all levels of administration, though the top-most leadership was singled-out.

Regrettably, the negative judgments persist. Employees continue to express the opinions that top levels of administrators fail to exhibit sincere interest in their input or consider it seriously when important decisions are made. Specifically, on subcommittees established by previous leadership, rulings were made by supervisors and the purportedly collaborative process had little or no bearing on those decisions.

On the 2019 Strategic Plan Survey for faculty and staff, nearly a quarter (22.4%) of faculty and staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “The leadership of my school is accessible and available to hear ideas and concerns.” And over a third (38%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that “Staff has a voice in the collaborative leadership of my school.”

Additionally, there is concern that the decade-long pattern of leadership turnover is a significant obstacle to present-day stability as well as future innovation. In the past eleven years (since 2008-2009) the district employed five superintendents, two of them interims.

In response, there is a strong sense that LPS needs to next hire a superintendent who has a strong commitment to the community, regularly attends student and school events beyond school hours, and is a strong advocate of the independent school system itself. One suggestion floated recently is that the district include a residency requirement for its top administrator.

A sample of narrative comments that accompanied these responses:

- Feels very top-down. No discussion at Leadership Meetings -- only directives. No real conversation or chance to discuss issues during the few faculty meetings we've had.
- Current trend is to disregard the staff voice- lots of committees BUT the agenda is set and there is no real interest in listening.
- Staff members have no voice in the leadership of the school. This does not seem to be of concern to the administration.
- Some staff are heard, others ignored and not respected as having any expertise. definitely not collaborative
- Why bother as the school committee and superintendent will override what the leadership decides is best for the school.

Meetings and Collaboration

While a number of regularly scheduled meetings are held either weekly or monthly, typically they either address a specific purpose (e.g., behavior, support) or school population subgroup. (See chart below.) And while the district supports numerous Distributive Leadership positions, their duties address discrete programs and student-directed interests and therefore are inherently non-collaborative. At first glance, there does not appear to be overarching **instructional leadership teams** at both schools, although the duties listed under LMMHS Department Heads and Morris Principal/Head Teacher seem to come the closest.

The current schedule of meetings held each year throughout the district:

	Morris	LMMHS	SPED	District
Faculty meetings/all SPED Dept.	1/mo	1/mo	1/mo	
District Administration Team				2/mo
Building-based Support Team	1/2 wks	1/wk		
Principal/Head Teacher	1/wk			
Department Chairs		1/mo		
Middle School Teams (grade level)		2/wk		
SPED Teams by building	1/wk	1/wk		
SPED meeting w/Team Leader	1/wk			
Grade-level PLCs	1/wk			
Principal and paraprofessionals	1/qtr			
Behavioral Support Team	as needed			
School Council/SPED PAC	1/mo	1/mo	1/mo	

Theory of Action

If each building had a democratically-selected Instructional Leadership Team with clearly defined duties and powers to assess and make decisions – in concert with administrators – regarding instructional, behavioral, and social-emotional issues affecting students then truly collaborative efforts would determine school policies, academic programs and daily operations.

Strategy

Empower an elected Instructional Leadership Team to meet regularly and often with administrators to identify and study pedagogical issues and enact policies, programs and priorities that best address student needs. By doing so, an increase in cooperation and buy-in are collateral byproducts.

Action Steps

- Define duties and powers of Instructional Leadership Team for each building
- Assign one Lenox School Committee (LSC) member as liaison to Team
- Elect Instructional Leadership Team for each building
- LSC continuously monitors levels of collaboration, productivity and efficacy of the Team in consultation with representatives of the Lenox Education Association (LEA)

Facilities

LPS has historically taken great pride in its facilities, both Morris Elementary School and Lenox Memorial Middle and High School. These school buildings have served as the literal cornerstone of sustained student growth and achievement and as symbols of LPS's identity as an independent school district. Thoughtful oversight by the Lenox School Committee and prudent support by the Town of Lenox have allowed LPS to address facilities needs in a timely manner, including renovations of both Morris and LMMHS, not to mention countless other modifications over the years to address modifications in instruction.

However, as recent Town Reports and the 2019 LMMHS NEASC self-study note, a number of major facilities concerns must be addressed if LPS hopes to maintain its position as an educational leader in both the region and the state. While some of these concerns have arisen through the usual and expected lifetime of building construction (roofs of both schools need replacing; science classrooms at LMMHS date to 1966 and are not ADA-compliant, etc.), others reflect the mission of LPS to provide all of its students with an exceptional educational experience. So, for example, while changes in the last ten years to the curriculum and the schedule at LMMHS have resulted in notable academic achievement, these innovations have also pushed up to and beyond the limits of the facilities. As the NEASC self-study most pointedly states, there is significant concern among the staff that the limitations of the physical building interfere with their ability to maintain the high quality of their work and to innovate as educators.

Although some preliminary steps have been taken to consider how best to address both long-standing and emerging facilities demands, this current strategic plan is an optimal time to coordinate such steps and to study them. Moreover, such a process is ideally timed as it would allow current and incoming LPS leadership (among the staff, administration, and School Committee), to coordinate likely capital projects in ways that would maximize town and state support while continuing to serve the best interests of the LPS community.

Finally, as noted on pp.12-13 above regarding overriding COVID-19 concerns, decisions regarding facilities will have to reflect the impact of the pandemic on Lenox Public Schools. First, LPS will possibly face some financial uncertainty brought on by COVID-19 that will need to be stabilized before investment in facilities can move forward. Second, decisions regarding facilities will need to take into consideration efforts to address both the short term concern of learning gaps while also weighing potential long term emergency management concerns.

Theory of Action

If LPS facilities are thoughtfully maintained and developed through a collaborative process of planning both long-standing and emerging capital projects, then both the design of learning spaces as well as the appropriate equipment for those spaces will afford students the opportunity to benefit from high-quality, innovative instruction.

Strategy

Develop and prioritize a plan for future capital projects that will ensure that LPS facilities can meet the demands of an exceptional and innovative instructional program.

Action Steps

- Gather information regarding all impending and prospective facilities projects.
- Use outgoing 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, 2019 NEASC Self-Study, Endicott Survey, 2020-2025 Strategic Plan Survey, and input of shared leadership (School Committee, admin team, department chairs, team leaders, et al.) to prioritize facilities projects.
- Evaluate facilities priorities in light of available Town and State financial support.
- Establish feasible calendar for facilities projects.
- Evaluate the impact of improved facilities on LPS students, faculty, and staff.

Technology

Given the interwoven nature of modern educational facilities and technology, an interconnection made all the more acute during the combination of remote and hybrid instruction necessitated since the spring of 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic, a strategic plan to address building concerns should do so in conjunction with a thoughtful consideration of what technology would best support the students, faculty, and staff of LPS. The Technology Department of LPS has a longstanding commitment to offering, within reasonable budgetary constraints, whatever tools (software, hardware, technical support) faculty have deemed necessary to achieve high-quality instruction. Indeed, the flexible and independent implementation of technology correlates with the LPS mission to empower faculty innovation and foster student engagement through individualized instruction.

Nevertheless, the rapid pace of technology development, coupled with both the increased demands of state data collection and the exigencies of remote learning that are likely to be in place for the foreseeable future, threatens this flexibility and independence. Several district-wide resources overlap while the number of more specialized tools has increased exponentially in recent years, both potentially resulting in technology resources complicating rather than clarifying instruction, not to mention overburdening the Technology Department staff.

Moreover, the rapidly shifting role technology plays in education is often driven by private interests, interests that may diverge from both the mission of LPS and DESE standards, as well as undermine the educational experience of LPS students and the efforts by the school community to support that experience. The current strategic planning process, therefore, provides a timely opportunity to assess, prioritize, coordinate, and implement the technology needs of LPS. Indeed, LPS's vision of how technology can support the district's educational mission can be thoughtfully shaped in conjunction with the strategic plan's assessment of many areas of the school to which technology is essential (from potential improvement of facilities, to tools that could improve professional development, to curricular innovation that engenders deeper learning and authentic, independent student achievement).

Finally, as noted in the recommendations regarding facilities above, planning regarding technology will be significantly impacted by the experience of education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, technology planning must address the learning gaps and delays wrought by the changes to instruction during the pandemic. In the long-term, planning will benefit both from research into both the positive and negative impacts of specific technology resources during the pandemic and from a prudent assessment of the role technology might play in addressing future emergency management concerns.

Theory of Action

If LPS employs technology (software, hardware, technical support) in a thoughtful, collaborative, and prudent manner, then this technology will allow the LPS school community (students, families, faculty, staff, et al.) the independence necessary for high-quality education while mitigating the potential negative impact wrought by the overabundance of technological resources, as well as their rapidly changing nature.

Strategy

In a climate of rapid technological change, stringent state reporting demands, and potential disruptions of in-person classroom learning, clarify the resources that best support the LPS instructional program and assist students, faculty, staff, and the wider school community in mastering these resources.

Action Steps

- Evaluate both short-term and long-term district and school technology needs.
- Conduct a survey of the entire school community regarding technology currently being employed.
- Develop a calendar of technology improvements and expenses that balances LPS priorities and likely town and state support (both organizational and financial).
- Add, remove, or adjust technology resources in accordance with this calendar.
- Supplement ongoing technical support with additional professional development and other transition assistance in light of changes to technology resources.
- Evaluate impact of additions, subtractions, or adjustments to technology resources

Finance

With respect to the finances of the school department, the goal of the Lenox School Committee is to provide fiduciary responsibility and advocacy for a budget that supports the educational and infrastructure needs of the school department and falls within the town's ability to pay.

It is important to understand that the School Committee is the **sole public entity** responsible for approving the budget prepared by the school administration, **a financial plan** it believes will provide the best education for **Lenox Public School** students.. **In doing so**, the Committee **annually** works within **fiscal** guidelines proposed by the Town Manager, **determined** to earn the support of both the Board of Selectmen **and** Finance Committee. **However, regardless of the approvals of those other groups, as an elected, independent body, the Committee is empowered** to move forward for Town Meeting support with the budget it believes is necessary for the operation of the School Department.

While this strategic plan was being prepared during the Spring of 2020, the town and schools had to switch to operating in a virtual environment due to the COVID-19 crisis. This continued throughout the 2020-2021 school year with remote and hybrid instruction as well as synchronous instruction for both in-person students as well as those participating remotely. This reality presented unique challenges which demand budgetary creativity and flexibility; however, a five-year strategic plan must be mindful of the longer-term prognosis and aspirations of the district.

In the immediate future, there are many unknowns for the economy of Lenox and the Berkshires as most cultural institutions closed for Summer 2020 and perhaps Summer 2021 or operate with much-reduced programming which will have a major impact on revenues generated through housing and meals taxes. While the expectation of school and town leaders is that the budget prepared for FY21 will not be affected, there is much uncertainty for the FY22 budget.

What we know at this time, with schools operating on a remote basis, is that there was a greater amount of unspent funds in FY20 due to lack of need for substitutes, reduced busing costs, no Spring sports, savings on less-used building systems, etc., that was returned to the town. Additionally, money typically allocated by the town for capital expenditures for the school department will be held back to prepare for anticipated revenue shortfalls in FY21. On the opposite side of the ledger were increased costs for very specific health and safety supplies required and necessary to operate in the current COVID-19 environment for the 2020-2021 school year. Federal and state grant money was provided to districts to help defray many of the costs associated with the pandemic.

Long term, the Lenox School Committee will continue to ensure the independence of the district, respond to the ever-evolving landscape of teaching and learning, and provide the resources necessary for maintaining and enhancing Lenox Public School's historically outstanding outcomes. by changes

Theory of Action

If the Lenox School Committee develops and approves the delivery of responsible annual school budgets that the town can support within its financial capabilities, then educators will have the necessary means to provide top-quality instruction for their students, a valuable asset for town residents, and an essential resource for attracting a diverse population of future taxpayers.

Strategy

The Lenox School Committee will develop and approve annual budgets that deliver excellent educational outcomes while working closely with the Town Manager to acknowledge year-to-year fiscal reality.

Action Steps

- The Superintendent will prepare a budget calendar by the end of October/early November.
- The Superintendent and/or the School Committee chairman will meet with the Town Manager to establish mutual expectations for budget planning.
- The Superintendent and administrative team will prepare a budget to be presented to the full School Committee by the end of January.
- The Superintendent and Finance Subcommittee of the School Committee will meet with the Town Finance Committee in March to answer any outstanding questions the FinCom might have and will seek the support of the FinCom prior to the Annual Town Meeting.

Academic Journey

Curriculum and Instruction

For LPS, fostering and enhancing a rigorous, adaptable, inclusive, and innovative curriculum in all subject areas supported by the highest quality of instruction lies at the foundation of providing for the most important goal of our district: to educate each student academically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. The members of LPS will continue to cultivate and implement an independently-designed, responsibly-grounded curricula that continually seeks to provide students with deeper understanding, critical and creative thinking skills, authentic learning experiences, varied and equitable opportunities, individual choices, and an informed and ethical education, while adhering to state and federal educational standards and accountability.

Ensuring the highest level of instruction throughout the LPS is dependent upon a number of factors: It must take place in safe and comfortable surroundings, respond to individual student needs at each grade level, be grounded in the district's core values, beliefs, and learning expectations, be supported by current research and best practices, and flourish in a collaborative atmosphere at all levels within the district. It necessitates directed and relevant professional development programs that address, deepen, and inform the needs of students and teachers alike. It requires exceptional classroom spaces, materials, and technologies, all within classrooms of limited numbers of students. It responds to the needs of all students and prepares them equally in their choices after high school to pursue careers, post-secondary education, the military, or service. Finally, it ensures that the arts in all their forms (from woodworking to fine arts, CAD, music, and drama) remain central to the identity of the schools.

Of course, without well-supported and high-quality instruction the LPS curriculum goals and environment for students would be impossible. The enhancement of the LPS curricula and instruction at all levels depends on adequate and increased funding at the local, state, and federal levels and on the hiring and retention of highly qualified teachers who are given the freedom to collaborate with colleagues and administration to develop curricula and instruction that meet the academic and social/emotional needs of all students.

While Lenox Public Schools have been successful in creating an array of opportunities for its students, with small class size and personalized instruction a feature of district classrooms, when it comes to diversity, inclusivity and equity of opportunity of all students and faculty alike, LPS is in need of improvement in its curriculum, instruction, and school culture.

Diversity comes in many forms, including race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, language, culture, national origin, religious commitments, age, (dis)ability status and political perspective. Ensuring our schools are places where differences are welcomed, different perspectives are respectfully heard, and every student and staff feels a sense of belonging is inclusion. Equity is actively challenging and responding appropriately to discrimination, bias and harassment, while ensuring equal opportunity for all students and staff.

When it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion in curriculum and instruction, LPS can improve by helping its current students grapple and become familiar with diverse values, priorities, and perspectives through activities and curricula featuring manifold voices, and through a program of ongoing, relevant professional development to support and engage teachers in this work.

The path toward greater equity in education starts early, in the elementary grades, where inclusive teaching styles, authentic assessment, diverse curricula, and work to eliminate implicit bias in the classroom work together to support an equitable path for all students moving forward. Yet, that work cannot be left only to the lower grades; it must continue at all district levels in order for equity in education to persist.

Through the development of a diverse, integrated K-12 curriculum, instruction that is inclusive and equitable, and a school culture focused on inclusion and respect, we will move our district schools beyond a beginning interest in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and towards a concrete program supporting DEI as key to the district's educational mission. Such a program will better engage all LPS students and prepare them for the futures they pursue.

Theory of Action

If LPS provides all students with a diverse and highly-qualified faculty, inclusive curriculum, instruction that fosters respect for, and understanding of, diverse viewpoints and ways of knowing, along with the academic supports needed to achieve an equity of academic opportunities and maximum student engagement, then the district will enable students to excel academically and be exceptionally prepared to pursue the future goals of their choice.

Strategy

LPS will provide all students with a diverse and highly-qualified faculty, inclusive curriculum, instruction that fosters respect for, and understanding of, diverse viewpoints and ways of knowing, and the academic supports needed to achieve equity of academic opportunities and maximum student engagement, enabling each student to excel academically, and thus be exceptionally prepared to pursue the future goals of their choice.

Action Steps

- Ensure that Lenox Public Schools provides a vertically and horizontally integrated, inclusive, engaging, and age-appropriate K-12 curriculum that explores diverse perspectives of people from a variety of backgrounds
- Establish a committee to re-evaluate the current curriculum and best practices for a diverse and inclusive educational experience
- Attract and hire a more diverse faculty of excellence
- Provide teachers with a program of ongoing professional development that supports equitable inclusion and diverse classrooms
- Re-assess equitable translation, outreach, and other needs of LEP families at all levels
- Review and use relevant data to inform a plan to improve the diversity (socioeconomic and otherwise) of LPS honors and advanced placement classes
- Revisit homework policies, adequacy of rest/play/outside time, engagement of advanced students at the elementary level, and school start times to maximize student engagement and contentment

Learning Environment

Inclusivity

A positive learning environment must be at once welcoming and challenging. All students deserve to be included, welcomed, and valued for who they are and what they believe, and the school can have zero tolerance for behavior that would leave a student feeling otherwise. This requires pushing each student to not only accept but value discourse and disagreement, seek out and learn from differences of opinion and culture, and appreciate diverse perspectives. These life skills are vital for success in American society, and to the health of that society itself. They are not lessons to be taught in special assemblies; they are ways of thinking and learning that should be embedded in the curriculum and pedagogy of all classrooms at age-appropriate levels.

Inclusivity can often be a challenge in a small homogeneous community. It can be less tolerant of diversity and more difficult for students to find and have access to their 'niche' and support because they 'stick out' more than at a larger more diverse school.

Too often, these and other types of social-emotional learning are celebrated in principle but then ignored in practice, consigned to the bottom of the priority list, or checked off with the inclusion of a guest speaker. To ensure that they are placed at the center of the learning experience, the school should measure progress and teachers and administrators should be held accountable for good outcomes.

Theory of Action

If a tone for inclusiveness is set and the ongoing message from teachers and administrators is that instilling these values and the ability to think critically and from different perspectives are core elements of an effective education, then LPS will develop into an inclusive learning environment that actively teaches and models diverse perspectives and fosters a sense of belonging in each of its students as well a positive working environment for our staff and faculty.

Doing this in age-appropriate ways requires a tailoring of strategy for elementary, middle, and high school students.

Strategies

Establish clear expectations for inclusivity in the school culture and disagreement and debate in the curriculum, attached to concrete changes in tracking and measuring that ensure accountability.

Ensure that students have a forum for deliberation, identifying and addressing challenges, and formalizing recommendations for the administration's consideration and response.

Action Steps

- Establish strong and consistent leadership for the district and each school, with clear expectations for results
- Create greater separation between middle and high school, with dedicated administration accountable for the middle-school

- Provide leadership training on issues of bias, diversity, equity, and inclusion with an emphasis on addressing incidents and accountability
- Offer professional development opportunities on eliminating bias and valuing diverse perspectives.
- Expand mentorship program to bring students into contact with more—and more varied—members of the community
- Improve tracking of, communication about, and accountability for incidents that occur. Failure to properly report and/or document incidents will result in accountability measures. When there is an incident of harmful actions, speech or behavior, there will be a community wide response when appropriate.
- Introduce age-appropriate emphasis on debate and respect for diverse perspectives into the curriculum and as a component of assessment.
- Emphasize age-appropriate forums for modeling democratic deliberation, for instance “student councils” for upper-elementary and above, or a student-led process for addressing incidents that are harmful to students and the school community.
- Track and report long-term outcomes for graduates—college completion rates, jobs, locations, etc.
- Seek opportunities to hire from diverse communities and incorporate diverse viewpoints. Included in this process is an examination of the Lenox School Community to ensure that our culture is a welcoming one.
- Promote and strengthen family engagement, collaboration, and partnership through established personnel and systems, while expanding and building upon systems. Included in engagement should be community conversations around important issues such as equity and inclusion and other important topics. Speakers, book readings and other shared experiences will allow for increased opportunities for engagement and community building.
- Follow up with families of students who have left the district to get a clear understanding of why the student has left.

Mental Health

There are many factors that affect students' mental health - certainly, all students want to feel a part of a social circle and get that from participation in clubs, athletics, performing arts, connections with faculty and staff, and shared academic pursuits. In a district known for high-performance there are often internal struggles that students experience in their desire to succeed at high levels. But there are always some students who do not feel the sense of belonging and some of these are students who do not feel accepted for many of the reasons noted in the section on inclusivity. Additionally, as the economy has struggled and the past year of COVID-19 has exacerbated, many families have experienced food insecurities, jobs have been lost, online learning has not been optimal, and other stressors have contributed to mental health issues among our students.

Mental health and student well-being go hand in hand. A culturally responsive, safe and supportive learning environment is critical and essential to positive student outcomes. In order for students to understand and value mental health, policy and practice must prioritize the impact of this area of student development on academic outcomes. To destigmatize mental health goes beyond social-emotional curriculums and periodic professional development. Destigmatizing mental health involves utilizing licensed mental health professionals as staff and as collaborative partners. It involves open dialogues and partnerships with families on how to best support students in the school learning environment and in the wrap around network within the home and community.

As noted previously under Covid- 19 overriding concerns, it will be critical to continue identifying and addressing mental health challenges triggered or exacerbated by the 2020 pandemic school closure and extended period of remote/hybrid instruction model. Current protocols and structures should be assessed, with staff, parent and student surveys utilized to determine the full extent of additional supports and action plans that may be necessary to adequately support the re-engagement of students returning to full-time in-person instruction.

Theory of Action:

If LPS improves student access to mental health supports, moving it from a place of stigma to a core component of student well-being, the educational outcomes and learning environment of all LPS students will be enhanced, both in the larger school climate and via individual outcomes of behavior and emotional well-being. Promoting social and emotional competency will build resilience in students that directly and indirectly impacts academic outcomes.

Strategy:

The LPS will enhance social and emotional competencies, through inclusive instruction, by integrating social and emotional learning into classroom instruction, and through multi-tiered systems of support.

Potential Action Steps:

- Consistent use of multi-tiered systems of student support, from universal school-wide instruction (e.g., Second Step) for all students to special consideration of historically marginalized populations, including students of color, and students identifying as members of the LGBTQ community.
- Reinstatement of the district Social Emotional Task Force with representation from LPS Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) fields: school counselors, school psychologist,

school adjustment counselors, and school nurse; also include or with regular feedback or input from teachers, parents, students, and other stakeholders.

- Expand partnership opportunities with families through current platforms such as the PTO and SEPAC, including offering additional opportunities to welcome students and families entering at non-traditional points of entry (ex: transferring, middle school).
- Regularly and systematically evaluate school climate for mental health specific and diversity, equity, and inclusion specific concerns and needs, which will inform additional action steps to be taken by the district.
- Gather data on current social-emotional support practices and curriculum use to inform program updates (ex: pre and post test on knowledge learned through Second Step or other curriculums).
- Gather data on current use of mental health supports at both schools.
- Use of surveys to understand student/family/teacher changing needs for support and services.
- Annual (Fall) update/reminder posted for families on protocols to access School Adjustment Counselor and general overview of resources available to support students (Ex: Guidance for A services, SAC for B services and School Psychologist for C services); identify any gaps or redundancies in services.
- Social-emotional and mental health links accessible from LPS web page under Student Services.
- School Adjustment Counselor webpage with links to social-emotional resources for students and families, including social-emotional learning curriculum links and local resources.
- Utilize universal mental health screening tools, also available on School Adjustment Counselor page with clear contact info for SAC and/or community mental health links.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion link on LPS web page for students, staff and families.
- Review current policies and procedures for supporting students, that protects their rights and emotional well-being.
- Establishment of DEI task force
- Professional development for staff on cultural proficiency.
- Professional development for staff on supporting students' mental health, particularly as related to Covid-19 factors, like anxiety, depression and trauma.
- Evaluate expansion of social-emotional personnel and resources, including collaboration with outside resources, persons or agencies; funded through grants or third party billing.
- Regularly evaluate school climate through school climate surveys, and use results to build upon strengths and to follow-up on areas of concern with actionable plans

Appendix A:

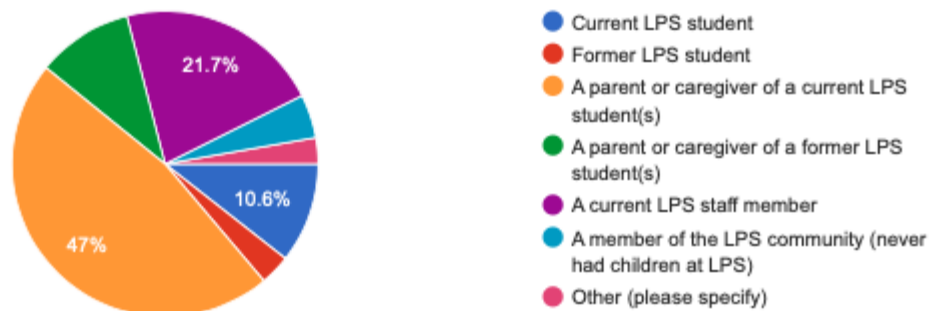
[Strategic Plan Survey](#)

Appendix B:

Survey Responses

Please select the one answer that best describes you:

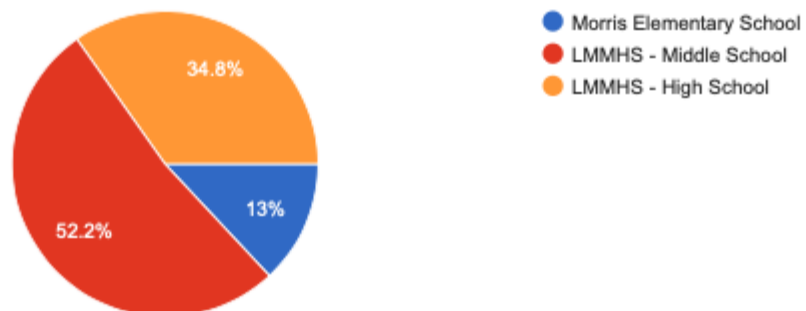
217 responses



Current school

Please select the one answer that best describes your current school:

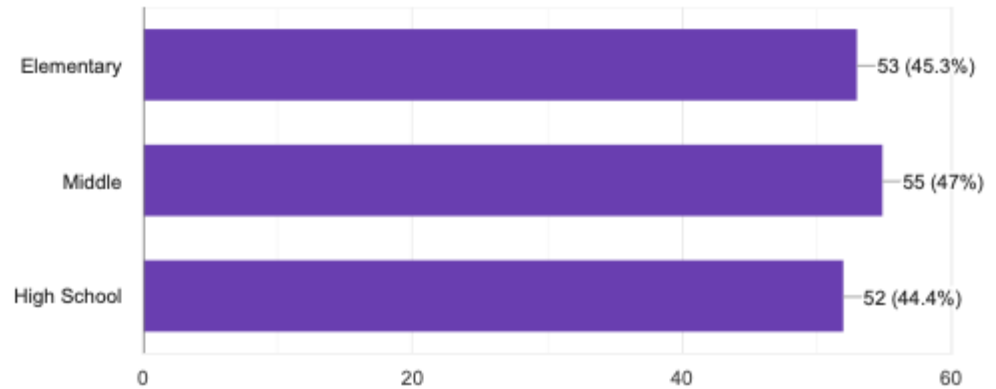
23 responses



School(s) your children attend

Please select the current schools of your children: (choose all that apply)

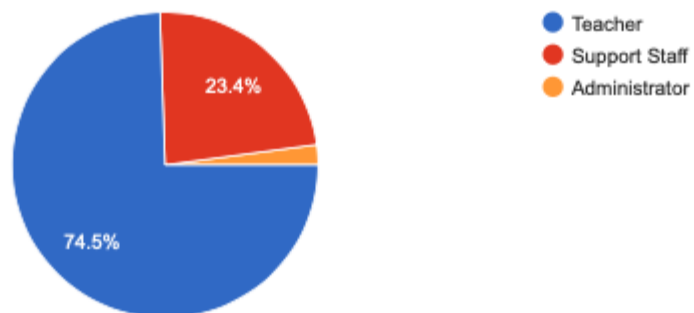
117 responses



Current Role in Schools

Please select your current role with the LPS

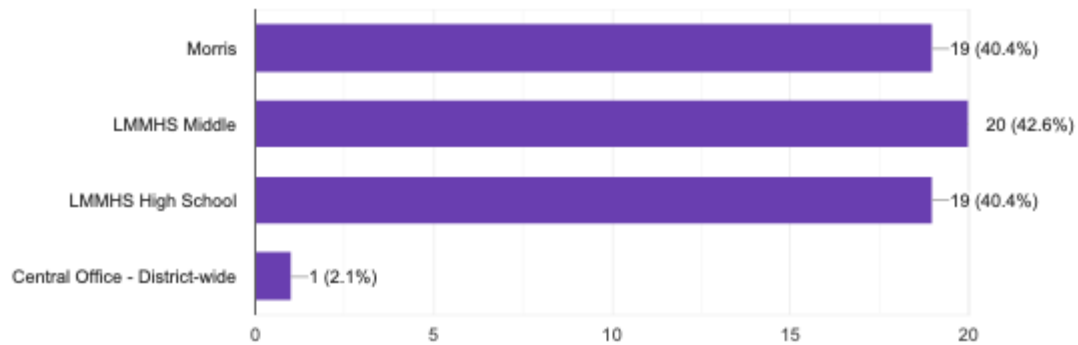
47 responses



Your work location

Please select the current location(s) in which you work. (If you are in more than one location, please choose all the locations that apply)

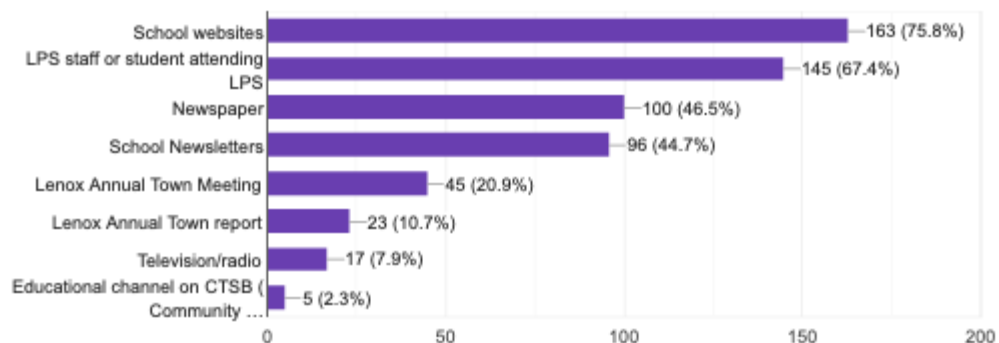
47 responses



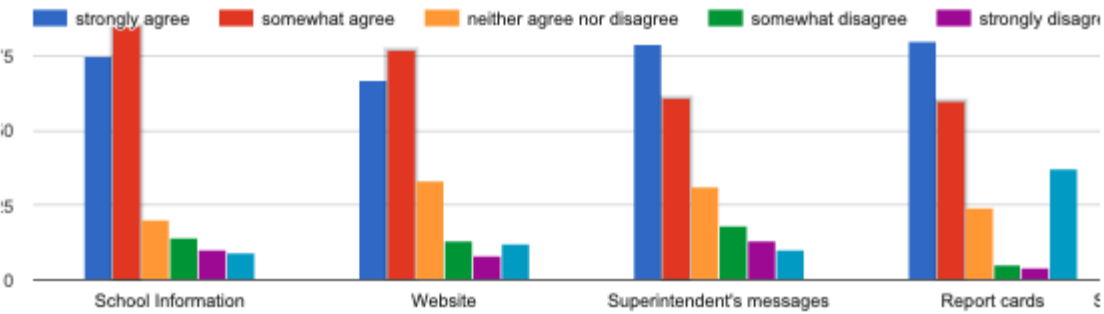
Communication from Lenox Public Schools

Please select the communications method/source that you use to obtain information regarding the Lenox Public Schools educational system. (choose all that apply)

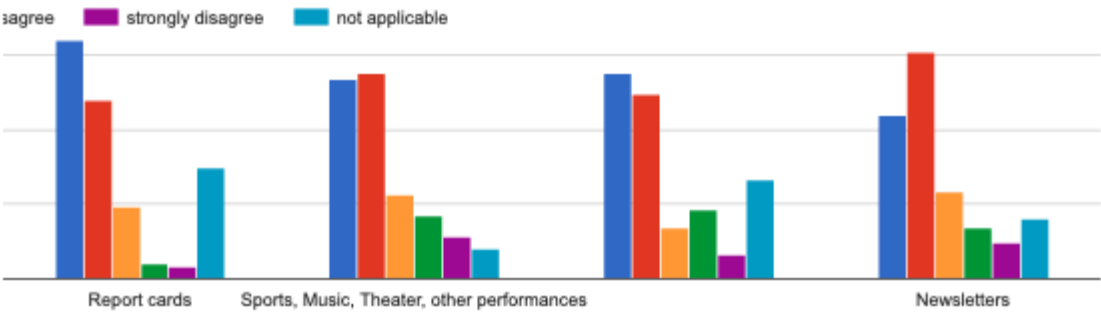
215 responses



I believe that communication from the Lenox Public Schools allows me to be well-informed about:



I believe that communication from the Lenox Public Schools allows me to be well-informed about:



Greatest challenges to provide a quality education to all students

What are the greatest challenges or issues that the Lenox Public School system has to address to provide a quality education to all students (please choose only your highest four (4) priorities from the list)

- ☐ Hiring and retaining quality educators 109
- ☐ Adapting curriculum to provide students opportunities to develop the skills and dispositions needed in our increasingly changing world 105
- ☐ Meeting the academic and social needs of a diverse student population 87
- ☐ Meeting the mental health issues of students 75
- ☐ Maintaining a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning 75
- ☐ Maintaining the physical facilities as buildings age 64
- ☐ Keeping up to date with technology hardware, software, applications, and support 60
- ☐ Providing consistent student programs and services 52
- ☐ Addressing outside stressors on families that impact parental support and quality of student work and behavior 47
- ☐ Meeting the needs of special needs students 29
- ☐ Continuing to meet the yearly progress goals established by the department of education 28
- ☐ Responding to state and national economic conditions that affect the levels of financial support the district receives 17
- ☐ Meeting the educational needs of second language learners 9
- ☐ allowing free time for children to process what they have learned
- ☐ The physical security of the school

Each other comment was noted 1 time

- ☐ Addressing the Emotional needs (stress) on staff.
- ☐ Attracting young families to Lenox
- ☐ Starting the school day later to mitigate the impaired learning of adolescents early in the morning
- ☐ Increasing resident student enrollment - hold choice at 40% - MARKET!
- ☐ Giving gifted students more opportunities for advanced learning
- ☐ Offer more elective courses and expanding and modernizing the building.

- ☐ Stop using various "portals" for classroom assignments, etc. Switch to something like PowerSchool and become efficient. The haphazard use of google docs, google classroom, Rediker, Moodle, etc. is frustrating and inefficient
- ☐ Supporting students on multiple career/college pathways
- ☐ Encouraging students to have and express their own opinions
- ☐ Hire administrators that are qualified, share the same vision and goal expectations as the LPS
- ☐ Filling Staff positions with qualified individuals-

The grade portal is not efficient, they are very rarely updated by teachers this is not helpful for students wishing to see their updated grades for the quarter. I think it should be updated weekly so kids/parents are well informed about school progress. Or possibly make the switch to power school which updates grades automatically when a teacher inputs grades. It would be easier for teachers to keep up with grading and make students/parents happier, and well-informed.

- ☐ STOP bringing in out of town students. It's destructive to the County.
- ☐ Lazy educators and unqualified administrators
- ☐ LPS exceeds our expectations concerning quality education.
- ☐ Creating and maintaining a positive climate with the frequent change of superintendant
- ☐ Engaging, supporting and celebrating students of all academic abilities.
- ☐ Sufficiently funding athletics as a component of the academic experience.
- ☐ An enforced disciplinary system
- ☐ Frequent leadership changes
- ☐ encouraging a diverse student body and adequate volume of students
- ☐ Developing an environment and curriculum that support healthy mental and physical development of children

- ☐ Educating the whole child, not just academics
- ☐ Need to consider mergers with other districts.
- ☐ Implementing a gifted program for advanced students
- ☐ Vocational Education options
- ☐ Make sure students aren't bullied by other students or staff 42
- ☐ Engaging the whole community in the life and importance of our schools
- ☐ Regionalize and consolidate with Lee
- ☐ merging with other local school boards, to alleviate the tax burden
- ☐ Retaining superintendents
- ☐ not enough listening
- ☐ too much yielding to the last person heard (often a parent)

Most important skills and abilities for a successful future

Recognizing that Lenox is committed to teaching all the core instructional subjects, what do you believe are the most important skills and abilities students must master to be prepared for a successful future? (please choose only your highest four (4) priorities from the list)

- ☐ Communication skills, inclusive of writing, speaking, and listening 174
 - ☐ Critical thinking 136
 - ☐ The ability to collaborate and work productively with others and resolve conflicts when they arise 118
 - ☐ The ability to organize, prioritize, set goals, and manage time 108
 - ☐ Creative and innovative thinking 86
 - ☐ Civic Responsibility 67
 - ☐ Consumer and financial skills 51
 - ☐ The ability to locate information and use it appropriately 33
 - ☐ The ability to use computer technology to extend learning and master subjects 32
 - ☐ Cultural competencies 26
 - ☐ Content mastery 14
 - ☐ Self-regulation and resiliency
 - ☐ Basic human kindness
 - ☐ Understanding of environmental issues
 - ☐ Entrepreneurial thinking and good manners
- All remaining responses were noted once each

- ☐ Most important is RELAXATION & COPING SKILLS. Adding in 15 -20 minutes yoga in the morning everyday.
- ☐ Problem solving, Creativity, Technological.
- ☐ Cursive writing is important.
- ☐ Fine Arts (for example - Music, drama, Art)
- ☐ Utilize Taconic and Monument for vocational classes that could be used immediately graduating.
- ☐ Respect and kindness toward all. Always do the right thing.

Quality of education/Financial priorities

What evidence should Lenox Public Schools use to evaluate the quality of education in the district (please select your highest five (5) choices from the list)

- ☐ Level of student engagement 113
- ☐ How well district students perform in high school (graduation rates and ACT/SAT scores) 101
- ☐ Student satisfaction with their school experience 102
- ☐ The number of students in each class per teacher (class size) 101
- ☐ The number and quality of special programs available to meet student needs 96
- ☐ Comparisons to the results other districts achieve 82
- ☐ Test scores and other state or national tests 70
- ☐ Amount of community involvement in school and student activities 68
- ☐ The awards and recognition the district, schools, teachers, or students receive 50
- ☐ The number of extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, and so on) that are offered 50
- ☐ The student standards-based report card 40
- ☐ Numbers of discipline problems/issues 37
- ☐ Your perception and satisfaction with district schools 33
- ☐ Teachers' opinions of their effectiveness.

Amount of participation in innovative programming; robotics, Girls who Code, intern and mentorship, business building programming, movie making, arts and nature programming, environmental initiatives.. are these kids critical thinkers, innovators and initiators? I would like to see more participation come out the way PHS and other programs participate in local cultural activities, for example having the band and Orchestra students play at Tanglewood and partner with different cultural organizations

- ☐ Survey of students living healthy, productive lives, 2-5-10 years after graduation
- ☐ Holding students to higher standards
- ☐ Analysis of post graduate activity (college, trades, military, work)

- ☐ Follow student paths 1 or 2 years post graduation.
- ☐ Cost per student benchmarks in Berks county, statewide
- ☐ Rate of Continuing Higher Education
- ☐ Type of colleges admitted. Also, % of graduates that complete program or drop out
- ☐ How do graduates perform-4-10 years after graduation?
- ☐ Data from intervention programs like dibels II
- ☐ Utilization of recommended approaches and models of education programs at the state and national level.
- ☐ The quality of the individual students being educated through your system
- ☐ Real world accomplishments and contributions
- ☐ Teacher satisfaction / building morale
- ☐ Level of professional team work
- ☐ Percentage of teachers highly qualified in their discipline - Master's or PhD in their subject matter AND Master's in teaching.
- ☐ Student Growth Profile by class/teacher - our students are primed to be high-achieving, so: are we running our schools in a way to lift them faster than other schools do?
- ☐ Teacher job satisfaction and level of feelings of burn out among staff
- ☐ Civic responsibility, cultural competency

What should the future financial priorities be for the Lenox Public Schools?
(please choose only your highest four (4) priorities from the list)

- ☐ Keep salaries and benefits competitive in order to attract and retain quality staff
- ☐ Maintain low class sizes 98 132
- ☐ Expand career and technical education opportunities (i.e., culinary arts, bio-tech, computer animation, etc.) 92
- ☐ Maintain clean, well-repaired, secure buildings 89
- ☐ Keeping Lenox as an independent school district 82
- ☐ Expand, restore, improve, and maintain instructional programs 66 65
- ☐ Provide training and development opportunities to keep staff skilled and competent
- ☐ Make sure that students have quality educational books/materials in the classroom and library 52
- ☐ Invest in the acquisition and implementation of up-to-date instructional and communication technologies 50
- ☐ Offer learning experiences and opportunities that increase cultural diversity 41
- ☐ Expand foreign language programs in the elementary, middle and high schools
- ☐ Be a good steward of taxpayer money 27 33
- ☐ Maintain quality instruction while being a good steward of the Lenox taxpayer money.
- ☐ Look into shared service opportunities All other responses were individual
- ☐ Expand classes showing us how to pay taxes and maintaining a job creating a good work ethic
- ☐ Access to the arts, creativity, play
- ☐ Less tests, more projects for students

☐ Regionalize and consolidate with Lee

☐ STOP screwing taxpayers with 400 school choice kids. \$6M extra/yr!

☐ Provide parents with workshops about emotional and mental health and how to raise kids to be kind, caring human beings. This kind of education should not be placed entirely on teaching staff.

☐ Voice against unfunded federal/state mandates

☐ Integrate our learning here with global opportunities, on line and other ways.

☐ Stop taking over 50% of our taxes for the school department, police and fire are as important if not more important

☐ Please note, spending on schools as a percentage of overall budget has decreased significantly in recent years. Our schools are one of our two main sources of competitive advantage -- invest in them! Start with: GREAT LEADERSHIP and of course, the best teachers we can find.

☐ Merge with other local school board to alleviate tax burden in Lenox

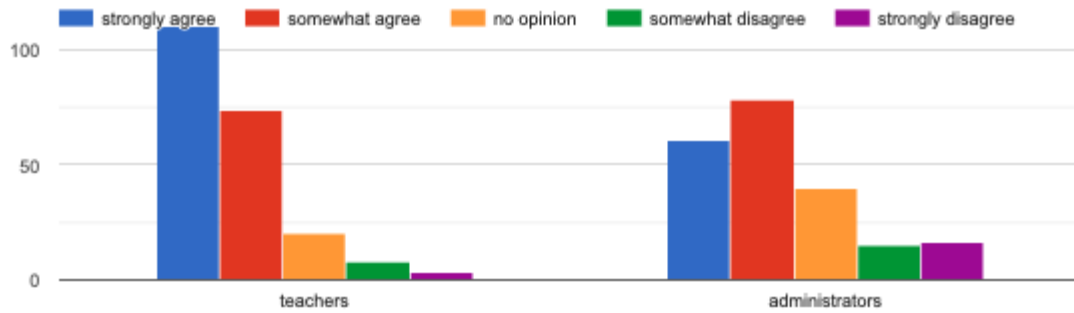
☐ Opening up to more school choices options and more accommodations for students who are school choice.

☐ Increase enrollment

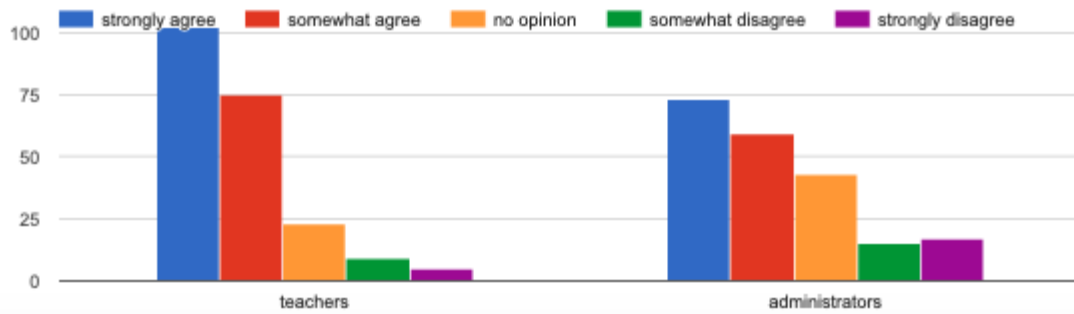
☐ Its impossible to "diverse" the school being so small without consent badgering. Regionalize the school so students of diverse background can naturally coexist, not forced by the staffs personal views. Best fit is Lee. They already have the Lacrosse, baseball & football combined. The soccer in Lenox should extend the good will to Lee SOCCER players

Spirit of Innovation and collaboration

I believe that Lenox Public Schools teachers and/or administrators exhibit a spirit of innovation that is aimed at meeting the needs of students.

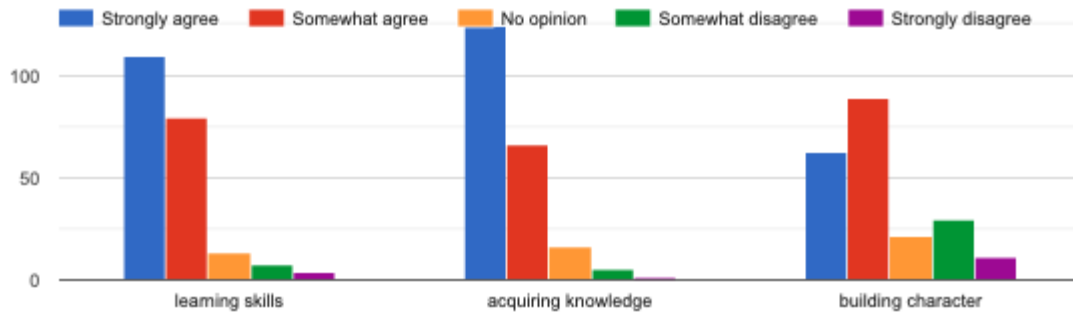


I believe that Lenox Public Schools' teachers and/or administrators exhibit a spirit of collaboration that is aimed at meeting the needs of students.

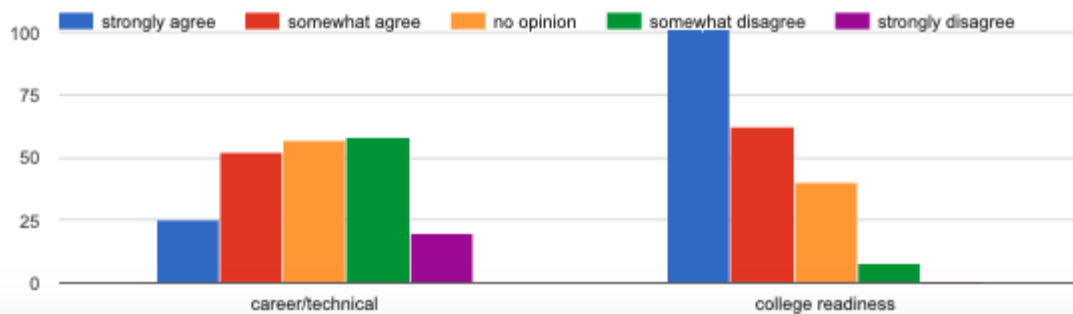


Striking the right balance

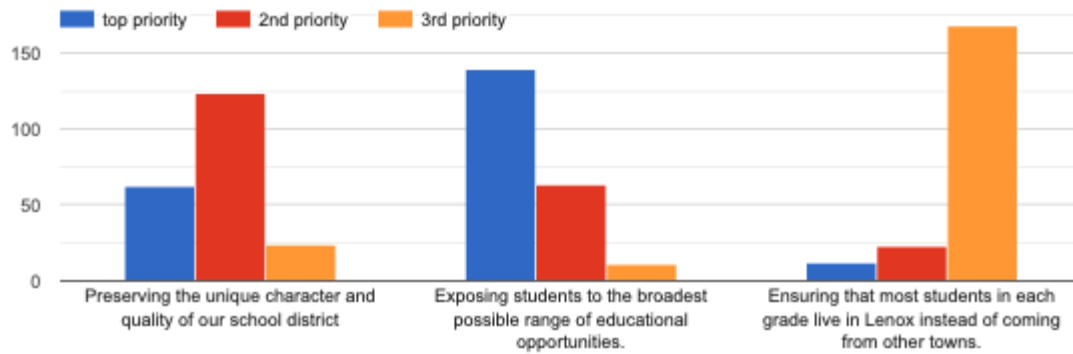
The Lenox Public Schools strive to strike a balance between learning skills, acquiring knowledge, and building character. How well are we meeting these objectives?



The Lenox Public Schools also strive to strike a balance of career/technical and college readiness opportunities for students.



Lenox strives to preserve the character and commitment to excellence of our small, independent school district while still exposing our students to the broadest possible range of educational opportunities. Sometimes we face tradeoffs between these goals. In thinking about those tradeoffs, please prioritize these three:

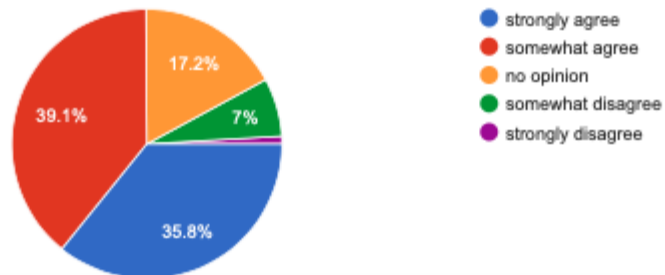


I believe that Lenox Public Schools' graduates are prepared for success in the next step in their lives.

215 responses



Copy chart



Characteristics of excellent educators

Please rank the following characteristics of an excellent teacher by choosing the six (6) most important ones from the list.

- ☐ Has subject matter knowledge 125
- ☐ Differentiates instruction to meet individual student needs 126
- ☐ Communicates clearly 123
- ☐ Exhibits enthusiasm 114
- ☐ Holds high expectations for students 105
- ☐ Teaches actively 90
- ☐ Creates a pleasant classroom atmosphere 86
- ☐ Establishes successful classroom management 83
- ☐ Shows a good attitude 73
- ☐ Shows flexibility 64
- ☐ Builds success into each class 61
- ☐ Collaborates with colleagues 53
- ☐ Maintains good people skills 48
- ☐ Is organized 42
- ☐ Questions students effectively 39
- ☐ Paces instruction 22

Please select the four (4) most important qualities of an excellent educational leader (Administrator) from the list.

- ☐ Is trustworthy and straight with students, staff, and community 134
- ☐ Develops strong teachers; cultivates good teaching practice 100
- ☐ Is a role model for students, staff, and the community 91
- ☐ Clearly states goals and expectations for students, staff, and parents 89
- ☐ Is visible - gets out of the office; is seen all over the school or district 84
- ☐ Has a stated vision for the school and a plan to achieve that vision 74
- ☐ Shows that he or she is not in charge alone; involves others 64
- ☐ Engages with and utilizes resources within the broader Lenox community 53
- ☐ Offers meaningful kindnesses and kudos to staff and students 51
- ☐ Helps develop leadership skills in others 50
- ☐ Has a sense of humor 42

Top qualities of an excellent education system

The list below was compiled by looking at the most common responses to the 2013-2014 Strategic Plan survey. We realize there are quite a few and that choices may be difficult. We felt that it would be most useful to us to have already outlined the most common responses as it will easier to tally than the previous survey's open response to this question. And you may always add your own at the bottom.

Teaching and Curriculum: The five (5) most important qualities of an excellent education system are

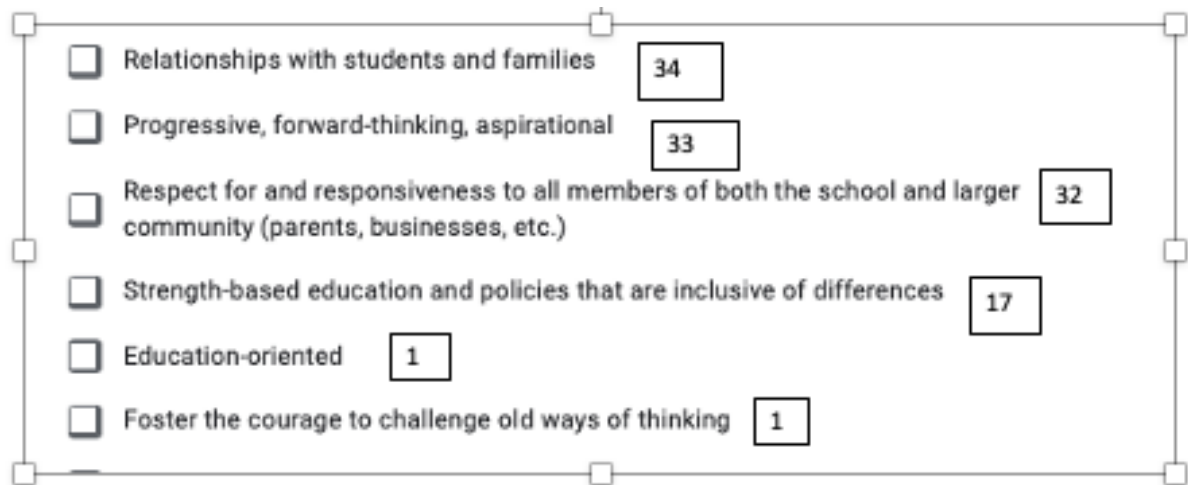
- ☐ High-quality and enthusiastic teachers and educators 93
- ☐ Teaching students to be flexible, creative thinkers, and able to consider global perspectives 88
- ☐ High level of student engagement and motivation 76 63
- ☐ Push each child to reach full potential in an environment where each child is valued
- ☐ Kindness toward and caring for students, personal connections with students 61
- ☐ A balance between meeting/exceeding rigorous academic benchmarks and fostering innovation/new approaches 61
- ☐ Strong curriculum and academic excellence 57
- ☐ Commitment to high-quality instruction and excellent, rigorous education at all levels
- ☐ Spreads joy and creates a love of learning 50 55
- ☐ High expectations for student achievement 50
- ☐ Meets a range of student educational needs and offering flexibility 51
- ☐ Enthusiastic desire to put ALL students first and meet ALL students' needs 44
- ☐ Variety of classwork and options for students of varying abilities 43

- ☐ Expansive course offerings and diverse programming 40
- ☐ Teaches the basics that students need to live well in our society 32
- ☐ Experiential learning opportunities 31
- ☐ Awareness of best educational practices and developing trends 29
- ☐ A contemporary and relevant curriculum 23
- ☐ Abundant extracurricular options 20
- ☐ High expectations for teachers 15
- ☐ Comprehensive high quality offerings, developing students to be good citizens, cost effective
- ☐ Teaching students about resilience, especially when accountability and consequences may not be easy or comfortable
- ☐ Values its teachers, who are the ones who make all the other things on this list work
- ☐ Fully utilizes community resources - employers, library, Shakespeare & Company, Historical Society, town elders, town government, natural resources, etc.
- ☐ Teaching life skills, cooking, organization, doing taxes, building resumes, job interviews
- ☐ Offering of AP courses and other types of courses preferred by college admission counselors

All responses below
were individual

Environment and Outcomes: The seven (7) most important qualities of an excellent education system are

- ☐ High level of academic curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking 101
- ☐ Builds great character, resilience, and self-esteem 96
- ☐ Positive school culture and atmosphere 95
- ☐ Creating an environment where students develop to their full potential 85
- ☐ Educating the whole child including socially and emotionally 83
- ☐ Graduating students who are honest, hard-working, responsible citizens 80
- ☐ Safe school environment that is accepting of individual differences 77
- ☐ Students feel welcome, safe, and validated in a community-oriented setting 70
- ☐ Transferable knowledge and skills for the real world 68
- ☐ Excellent communication (constructive, positive, and regular) with all constituents 67
- ☐ Giving students a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their skills 62
- ☐ Honesty and straightforwardness with students, parents, and community 57
- ☐ Creates a student who leads with kindness and compassion 52
- ☐ Responsible and collaborative administrators who have clear vision 51
- ☐ Rates student successes on career path, not necessarily on college acceptance 43
- ☐ Transparent and consistent discipline system, with clear expectations 41
- ☐ Fosters a sense of community 37
- ☐ The ability and willingness to partner with parents as contributing members in the education of their child(ren) 35
- ☐ Top-notch resources, technology 34



Your recommendation

How likely would you be to recommend the Lenox Public Schools to another parent/student?

213 responses

