Strategic Planning Focus Areas

Columbia PUBLIC SCHOOLS™

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INTRODUCTION

This comprehensive vision uses narrative to describe how Columbia Public Schools continues to evolve as a system that ***empowers every student to thrive in college, career, and life****. Grounded in the voices of students, families, staff members, and community members, it reflects a shared commitment to improving learning, supporting the people who make it possible, and ensuring the district continues to meet the needs of a changing world.*

The vision defines the "what and why" for the district, while the "how" will be addressed in the strategic plan.

The narratives below expand on the following core elements and values at the heart of our work:

The CPS Experience: We provide high-quality, responsive service to all students, families, staff, and community members.

Personalized Approaches: We ensure each learner has access to opportunities that meet their unique needs, strengths, and goals.

Safe and Supportive Environments: We prioritize safety, security, and overall wellness in every school and workspace.

Drive and Purpose: We foster environments where all are engaged, motivated, and connected to their work.

Growth for All: We support continuous academic and professional development for all.

Relationships and Community: We build strong relationships and address challenges through understanding, accountability, and community.

Stewardship: We make fiscally responsible and proactive decisions while thoughtfully investing in our people, facilities, and programs to honor the needs of our community and ensure Columbia Public Schools remains strong for generations to come.

PORTRAIT OF A SUCCESS-READY CPS GRADUATE

The accompanying Portrait of a CPS Graduate represents the ultimate outcome of our comprehensive vision. These skills and dispositions reflect our community's shared belief that, when developed, they empower learners to thrive in their chosen paths and contribute meaningfully to the future.



CRITICAL THINKING

Analyze and evaluate evidence and apply logical reasoning to make informed decisions and innovate in an ever-changing world.



AGENCY

Seek opportunities to advocate, lead, and create positive change while taking ownership of learning, goals, and future.



COMMUNICATION

Articulate and exchange thoughts and ideas in a variety of forms and contexts. Actively listen to understand meaning, values, and intentions.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Understand and regulate emotions while recognizing and respecting the perspectives, values, and feelings of others.



CURIOSITY

Embody an open mind and a passion for lifelong learning and growth. Explore, question, and seek a deeper understanding of the ever-changing world.



PERSEVERANCE

Sustain commitment and effort over time to pursue goals. Build resilience in the face of challenges and setbacks. Foster adaptability and willingness to ask for support when needed.



CITIZENSHIP

Promote the well-being of others through integrity, ethics, and cultural awareness while serving local and global communities.



ACADEMIC PROFICIENCY

Learn and apply essential knowledge and skills across disciplines to create a foundation for continued success in college, career, and life.

LEARNING

In an ever-evolving world, learning must extend beyond basic academic knowledge to develop the skills and dispositions that expand opportunity.

Learning in Columbia Public Schools will reflect both the aspirations of our students and the realities of the world they are entering. Learners will not simply receive knowledge; they will develop agency, critical thinking, and perseverance to navigate complexity, contribute meaningfully to their community, and continue learning throughout their lives.

LEARNER-CENTERED BY DESIGN

Students across CPS will play an active role in shaping their learning experiences, with regular opportunities to provide meaningful input on their environment, schedules, and classroom and school practices.

Curiosity, agency, and joy will be developed through opportunities to explore, question, and apply learning in meaningful ways.

CONNECTED TO LIFE

Personalized approaches will ensure learners receive what they need, while guaranteeing equitable access to high-quality curriculum, effective instruction, technology, and opportunities within and beyond the classroom. Learners will continue to engage in strong foundational learning and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts that reflect the demands and opportunities of the modern workforce.

Learning will remain grounded in human interaction, with technology serving as a tool to expand access and provide support. Students will be challenged with rigorous work and have regular opportunities to receive feedback, reflect, and engage in discourse about their performance.

RELATIONSHIPS AND WELL-BEING

Strong relationships will be the foundation of every experience. Each learner will be connected to a trusted adult who serves as an advocate and advisor, ensuring no student moves through school without being seen and supported — fostering an understanding of themselves and others, along with habits that support long-term success.













TEACHING

Columbia Public Schools recognizes that success is closely tied to the growth and support of its educators and staff members. To this end, we will foster a passion for the profession through the celebration of both the art and science of teaching. Educator voice will play a central role in the design of our systems, recognizing the expertise and mindset needed to ensure every learner experiences success each day.

ALIGNED SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT

A clear instructional framework will guide teaching across the district while honoring professional expertise and personalized approaches. Aligned expectations and resources will create cohesion while empowering educators to make decisions and adjust instruction based on student needs.

We will provide access to materials aligned to our core beliefs, along with dedicated time for planning and collaboration. This time will enable educators to develop common assessments, examine student work, share effective practices, and refine their work.

Work across schools, content areas, and grade levels will support consistency and strengthen instruction, while assessment and grading will be aligned to reflect a clear picture of each learner's proficiency and needs, including their growth in the core competencies outlined in our Portrait of a Graduate.

Common, user-friendly data systems and structures will support in monitoring progress, informing decisions, and responding to needs. A multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral support, backed by the resources needed for effective implementation, will ensure a proactive approach to intervention and enrichment. Disaggregated data will be used to identify gaps, guide targeted supports such as tutoring and mentoring, and inform ongoing refinement of curriculum and instructional materials to reflect diverse perspectives and experiences.

EMPOWERING INNOVATION

We will cultivate the conditions where innovation can thrive, enabling new strategies to take hold and effective practices to grow and spread. Common structures will provide consistency in process, flexibility in approach, and tailored support for our educators and staff members — empowering them to engage their students and inspire their colleagues.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership in Columbia Public Schools is not just a label — it is actions and behaviors that ignite passion and unity among individuals, inspiring and empowering them to reach their full potential.

A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION AND COHERENCE

Leaders across the district will work in partnership to ensure that systems, resources, and structures are aligned to support the vision. From classrooms to central office, consistent processes will reduce fragmentation and bring clarity.

Collaboration between district and school-based teams will be intentional and ongoing. Our employees, students, and families will be valued designers of solutions and implementation strategies, ensuring initiatives are informed by those closest to the work and remain responsive over time. Equitable practices will be embedded across policies, structures, and daily practice, creating an environment where every student can thrive and reach their full potential.

DEVELOPING PEOPLE AND PATHWAYS

Columbia Public Schools will develop leadership capacity at all levels. Personalized development opportunities will support both current and aspiring leaders through mentorship and professional learning designed to build confidence and strengthen practice over time. Leaders will have access to non-evaluative coaching that provides thought partnership and feedback, creating opportunities to reflect, refine, and grow.

Professional learning communities will be structured to connect leaders across roles and settings, strengthening shared understanding and consistency throughout the district.

RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND WELL-BEING

The strength of the district depends on its people. Columbia Public Schools will be intentional in recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality staff members and leaders who are aligned with its vision and committed to continuous growth.

Our practices will focus on attracting and retaining individuals who bring both expertise and a passion for the profession. As employees grow, the district will create opportunities to align their evolving strengths and expertise with our strategic priorities, enabling individuals and teams to thrive while maximizing their impact on students.



The district will foster a professional environment where individuals feel valued, connected, supported, and able to grow in their roles. Recognition, meaningful incentives, and a focus on safe and healthy environments will contribute to a positive workplace and reinforce Columbia Public Schools as a best place to work and learn.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A focused and sustained investment in our employees is central to continued success in Columbia Public Schools. This investment is most impactful when every member of our team feels supported in refining their expertise through personalized, collaborative, and sustained learning experiences.

Opportunities for learning will be available to all employees, recognizing that every role contributes to student success. Professional learning will be responsive to individual readiness, enabling employees to engage at the level that best supports their development, while strengthening the capacity of staff to implement culturally responsive and inclusive practices.

EMBEDDED SUPPORT FOR GROWTH

Professional learning will move beyond isolated sessions into experiences embedded in daily work. Staff members will engage in ongoing cycles of learning, application, and reflection, with time provided to implement new strategies in meaningful ways.

Embedded, non-evaluative coaching will ensure our staff members have sustained access to learning at the point of need. New employees will experience in-depth onboarding with ongoing mentorship, building confidence and strengthening practice over time.

TIME AND CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The district will regularly assess priorities and capacity to make sure new initiatives are introduced with focus and clarity. This approach will allow employees to engage deeply in the work rather than navigate competing demands.

Time will be intentionally built into schedules to support collaboration and planning. These opportunities will enable employees to learn from one another, share expertise, and put new approaches into practice.

With a focus on personalized and sustained professional growth, our employees will be empowered to hone their skills and realize personal and organizational success that establishes them as leaders in the region and state.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Columbia Public Schools will continue to strengthen its role as a cornerstone of the community by building trust and deepening connections with those it serves. Relationships will remain at the center of this work, ensuring schools are welcoming, responsive, and connected to the community.



CONSISTENT AND WELCOMING EXPERIENCES

Every interaction with students, families, employees, and community members will reflect a commitment to responsiveness and care. From welcoming stakeholders into our schools and offices to ongoing communication, the district will provide a consistent, high-quality experience.

Timely responses and a commitment to finding mutually beneficial solutions whenever possible will guide our interactions. When decisions are made, we will ensure that processes are clear and understood, building trust through transparency and consistency.

Communication will be clear, accessible, and tailored to the needs of different audiences. Multiple methods of communication and engagement will create a culture of transparency where stakeholders feel informed and connected to the work of the district.

PARTNERSHIPS THAT EXPAND OPPORTUNITY

We will strengthen and maintain existing Partner In Education relationships and expand workforce development partnerships with local organizations, businesses, universities, and community groups to expand opportunities for all, extending learning beyond the classroom and ensuring students engage with diverse perspectives and experiences that prepare them for success.

The district will foster clear pathways of support, drawing on community expertise to provide academic, social, and emotional resources. Coordinated wraparound services will connect families with the supports they need to succeed.

SHARED OWNERSHIP OF SUCCESS

Families and community members will be active partners in the work of the district. Schools will create meaningful opportunities for engagement and input, ensuring the vision is understood, supported, and sustained over time.

Regular engagements will invite stakeholders to share feedback, contribute ideas, and help shape priorities, while providing insight into the experiences of students and employees. Through this shared ownership, Columbia Public Schools will continue to strengthen its connection to the community and ensure its work reflects the needs and strengths of those it serves.

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Operational systems in Columbia Public Schools will be designed to support learning, reduce barriers, and bring greater consistency across the district. Behind the scenes, these systems will work together to create a reliable and responsive foundation for students, staff members, and families.

Fiscal responsibility will be central to our efforts. Columbia Public Schools will make proactive, transparent, and sustainable decisions about how financial, human, and physical resources are used. Resources will be aligned to the district's highest priorities, continually evaluated for impact, and thoughtfully invested in ways that support learning, strengthen the employee experience, maintain community trust, and ensure the long-term success of the district.

CLARITY AND COHERENCE

Clear processes and shared expectations will guide how work is done. Processes will be clearly stated, accessible, and applied with consistency, ensuring employees have the guidance they need to navigate challenges and make informed decisions.

DESIGNED TO SUPPORT LEARNING

Operations—including transportation, food service, and scheduling—will be intentionally aligned to enhance learning by expanding access to opportunities and removing barriers to participation from PreK–21.

ENVIRONMENTS THAT INSPIRE

Facilities and their daily operations will reflect a commitment to quality, care, and equity. Schools and workspaces will be safe, well-maintained, and designed to foster learning and collaboration.

The district will prioritize equitable access to learning and work environments that foster innovative approaches while ensuring everyone benefits from spaces that meet their needs. Classrooms and shared spaces will provide the flexibility to support a range of experiences, from collaboration to focused, independent work.

Ongoing investment in maintenance and improvement will ensure that facilities remain functional, welcoming, and aligned with the district's vision.



HOW THIS VISION WAS DEVELOPED

This vision was developed through a comprehensive engagement process designed to elevate the voices of the Columbia Public Schools community.



OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDED:

COMMUNITY SURVEY

(3,151 responses)

- 1,925 parents/guardians
- 1,150 district employees
- 76 community members without children in CPS

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

(218 participants)

- 49 high school students
- 65 parents/guardians
- 94 district employees
- The Board of Education
- 5 community members without children in CPS

In addition to these engagement efforts, the development process incorporated analysis of existing district data, including climate and culture surveys, workplace conditions data, and community perception data, to ensure alignment between stakeholder experiences and system-level trends.

Visits across early childhood, elementary, and middle school settings also provided a direct view into the daily experiences of students and staff.

These perspectives informed a two-day vision development workshop with 26 attendees, including representatives from the Board of Education, district office, principals, and school-based educators.